

# Ashes

some memories from

Billy Lee Harman

Ashes  
some memories

©2015  
by  
Billy Lee Harman  
(All rights reserved.)

HI  
[www.hitrt.com](http://www.hitrt.com)  
1233 Esplanade Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70116

Publisher  
KDP

ISBN  
978-1-522-93429-5

For my sister Peggy,  
part of the sky of China,  
and for my son Patterson.  
For every child left behind.

### Primer

This kid got so dirty  
Playing in the ashes.  
When they called him home,  
When they yelled his name over the ashes,  
It was a lump of ashes that answered.  
Little lump of ashes, they said,  
Here's another lump of ashes for dinner,  
To make you sleepy,  
And make you grow.

Charles Simic

# Contents

Chapter 1	Emerging	Page 5
Chapter 2	Laddie	Page 23
Chapter 3	Challenges	Page 41
Chapter 4	Achievement	Page 58
Chapter 5	Hay	Page 78
Chapter 6	Psychology	Page 97
Chapter 7	Popularity	Page 116
Chapter 8	Possibilities	Page 133
Chapter 9	Pizza	Page 148
Chapter 10	Standards	Page 167
Chapter 11	Woodstock	Page 187
Chapter 12	Vietnam	Page 205
Chapter 13	Transposition	Page 224
Chapter 14	Sagebrush	Page 242
Chapter 15	Vertigo	Page 260
Chapter 16	Loser	Page 278
Chapter 17	Lifer	Page 296
Chapter 18	Banderilleros	Page 314
Chapter 19	Sociability	Page 331
Chapter 20	Diplomacy	Page 347
Chapter 21	Tourism	Page 363
Chapter 22	Pants	Page 379
Chapter 23	Nontraditional	Page 394
Chapter 24	Culmination	Page 415
Chapter 25	Sobriety	Page 432
Chapter 26	Regression	Page 452
Chapter 27	History	Page 474
Chapter 28	Receivership	Page 496
Chapter 29	Acquiescence	Page 520
Chapter 30	Transactions	Page 543
Chapter 31	Transitions	Page 564

Addendum

## Chapter 1

### Emerging

I lay on my back in my crib. The sun shined through a dingy yellow shade on a window across the room from the foot of the crib, but it was dim. It was brighter around the shade's edges, but feared I might never see clear light again.

Another day my mother left a side of the crib down. I climbed over it, hung by one hand from its top rail, and stretched a leg toward its bottom rail. I feared what might happen to me if I released the rail to drop to the floor. My mother returned to the room, threw me back into the crib, and slammed the rail back up.

“Get back in there, you little bugger,” she said.

We lived in Ionia. The house was brown-shingled. It had two apartments, one on each side. On our side of the house a concrete walk ran from the bottom of the steps to our apartment to the sidewalk along the street. A wire fence surrounded our yard. The walk at the bottom of our steps led to its gate. Sitting at the bottom of the steps, I felt a burning in the back of my pants. Shrieking and slapping the stinging, I struggled up the steps and into the house.

“What's wrong with you?” said my mother.

She pulled down my pants.

“You've got ants in your pants,” she said, laughing.

My father set my sister Peggy and me on his lap to read the Sunday funnies to us. Denny Dimwit had big ears and a pointed head. My father put his hands together to make a shadow on our living room wall in the shape of Denny Dimwit's head. He wiggled thumbs to wiggle the shadow's ears.

He bounced me on a knee and sang.

“There was an old man,” he sang. “He had a wooden leg. A ride he couldn't buy, and a ride he couldn't beg. So he got four spools and an old tin can, and made himself a Ford, and, the damndest thing, it ran.”

His voice was high and tinny when he sang.

Gramma Hogan lived in a blue-shingled house on the other side of the fence. She wasn't our grandmother, but she was old enough to be, and she was nice to us. She attached four thread spools to a soup can and tied a string to it for me to pull it.

My father tickled me. I begged him to stop. He told me it didn't hurt, but it did. Soon he stopped, but I feared he might do it again.

Peggy had a jigsaw puzzle of the tortoise and the hare.

"Slow and steady wins the race," she said. "That's the moral of the story."

She also had a rocking chair with black cloth upholstery. I had a rocking wooden seat with sides in the shape of ducks' profiles. Paint on them made them look more like ducks. The sides fell from the seat. We threw the seat away but kept the sides.

My father took us to the Shrine Circus to see Clyde Beatty tame lions. Peggy told me the lions would be scary. But the performance was in an auditorium, the stage was too far from our seats for me to see that the lions were lions. So they didn't scare me. But a little dog a few seats from us did. I couldn't stop shrieking. We had to go.

Gramma Yankey was my mother's mother. She lived in Grand Rapids. So did Aunt Hazel, Uncle Wally, and Cousin Leonard. Aunt Hazel was one of my mother's sisters. She'd had polio. Her brace clumped when she walked. Her long black hair and hooked nose made her look like a witch. But she laughed at everything. We all loved her.

"Do you want to take something to bed with you?" she asked me.

She was babysitting and had put me in my crib.

"A car?" I said.

"You want to take a car to bed with you?" she asked, laughing.

She brought me a cast metal toy firetruck I had.

"That's a truck," I said.

"It's a car," she said. "Go to sleep."

I also had a rubber toy firetruck with Donald Duck's head protruding from its top and some tin toy cars with friction motors. Peggy told me words on the bottoms of the cars said they were made in Taiwan. She said Taiwan and Formosa were the same place.

Our parents went out for New Year's Eve. They brought us noisemakers and paper hats. For Christmas a man gave my father a wide yellow and blue necktie. My mother said it was hand-painted.

While our parents and Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally talked in our living room, Peggy and I played on the floor in the hallway. Our father, in the dark

blue serge suit he wore to work, came into the hallway to our bathroom and bedrooms. A glint was in his gray eyes.

Cousin Leonard was older than Peggy, but he played hide and seek with us in the hallway. One night, in the hallway, when Leonard wasn't there, Grampa Yankey showed Peggy and me a quarter, put his hands behind his back, closes them, and showed them to us. He told us we could have the quarter if we could tell him in which was the quarter. He showed us that the one we selected was empty, but he didn't open the other hand. He did that several times.

"He was probably putting it in one of his back pocket," said Peggy after he returned to the adults.

Our mother told us he was a Spanish American War veteran. She said Gramma Yankey met him at a Daughters of the American Revolution picnic after my Grampa Bruner died. She said that, when Gramma Yankey asked him his name, he sang "Yankee Doodle Dandy".

Our mother took us to Grand Rapids on a train. The conductor turned a seat over for Peggy and me to face our mother. I put my forehead against the window and said my first and middle names again and again. The accent on the first syllable shifted to its second syllable. I feared I might never be able to shift it back.

Gramma Yankey had a little dog. Its name was Tippy. It peed on her living room carpet. She rubbed his nose in the pee. My mother said she did that to teach Tippy a lesson.

Grampa Yankey had a black satchel he used to carry empty beer bottles to a grocery store to buy full ones. Our mother told us he was a barber before he retired. She said he'd carried his barber tools in the satchel. Peggy and I carried some empty beer bottles in it to the store to buy cigarettes for Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally. My parents didn't smoke, but my father gave me beer in little plastic cups. Peggy said she didn't like its taste.

A field was behind our backyard. Railroad tracks were on the other side of the field. Peggy and I stood in our backyard and pulled imaginary cords above our heads. Engineers pulled cords above their heads to blow their steam whistles. They grinned and waved. So did we.

My mother said that, during the Depression, hoboes rode the trains. She said they knocked on backdoors and ask for food and that her mother always gave them something. She said she sometimes gave them pie and that she thought they could see it while it cooled on the kitchen window sill. I wanted to be a hobo but not for the food. I wanted to ride the trains.

Peggy took me to school. At recess we played drop the handkerchief. A girl dropped the handkerchief behind me, but I couldn't catch her. All the kids were Peggy's age. When we returned inside, Peggy took a hand of mine.

Some girls lived down the street from our house. Peggy took me to their house to play with them. One of them was about my age. She had long curly brown hair and big green eyes. I couldn't stop staring at her.

"Billy's got a girlfriend," chanted Peggy and the other girls.

I wished she were my girlfriend and wondered why they thought that was funny. The girls' mother came out onto their front porch and sent them to the neighborhood grocery store. Peggy went with them, but they left me there.

"I can't be responsible for him if I can't see him," said their mother.

They brought back groceries and a rubber squirt gun for each girl but didn't bring a squirt gun for me.

Thinking squirt guns were for boys, I thought that wasn't fair.

In the girls' backyard, we played hide and seek.

"Bushel of wheat, bushel of rye," I shouted. "Who's not ready, holler 'I',"

I was it but couldn't count. They'd told me to close my eyes, put my face against a big tree in the yard, and shout that when all the girls had hollered "ready". I did, and no one hollered "I". So I opened my eyes and turned my face from the tree.

The yard had little grass. At the back of it was a big wooden box with a door in one end of it. I heard a thumping in the box. A small piece of wood held the door shut. Thinking one of the girls may have been hiding the box, I turned the piece of wood. Two dogs, one white with black spots and one gray with black spots, leaped from the box and onto me. With them barking and licking my face, I struggled to the street and turned toward home. My mother had told me not to go into the street. As I walked past Gramma Hogan's house with one foot on the curb and the other in the gutter, she stepped out to her small front porch. I thought she might save me.

"They won't hurt you," she said, and she turned back into her house.

I struggled on to our gate. I managed to open it only enough for me to squeeze through it, but still I was too afraid to run. So I walked up the steps and went into the house. But I was also too afraid to shriek or talk. So I said nothing to my mother. But, a few minutes later, Peggy came home and told my mother what had happened, and that the girls' father said I could play there anymore.

"He'd better stay home for a while anyway," said my mother.



“They can open the gate with their noses,” said Peggy quietly to me as my mother returned to our kitchen.

We had a black plastic AM table radio. Our father bought a larger brown plastic AM/FM table radio with a roof antenna. He said it was a good one. We called him Daddy. Peggy told me that, in the year two thousand, I’d be same age as he.

We had an icebox on our back porch. Frank Kishman lived with his wife in the apartment on the other side of the house. He walked with a cane. With the cane between his knees. A garage was behind the house. He sat for hours on an old gray nail keg at the corner of it. I could see him from the windows of the back porch. Our mother told is not to talk to him.

“He’s a dirty old man,” she said, and Peggy agreed.

A car hit Peggy in front of our house. She ran into the street and straddled the car’s front bumper. She received stitches in her vagina. The man who hit her brought flowers to our house several times.

“I saw mom kissing him,” Peggy told me.

We didn’t have a car. Sometimes my mother took us places in Checker Superba taxis. Little round stools swung out from the backs of their front seats.

My father’s name was Clifford. The taxi driver called me little Cliff. My mother said some people called my father Curly. She said that was because he combed his straight black hair straight back. She said that was a pompadour.

When I was three my sister Nancy Kay was born. My father’s job was accounting for the Ionia State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He left that job, parked cars at the Ionia State Free, and managed Ionia’s hotel. He wore a pith helmet to park cars. My mother took us to see him at both jobs. She pushed Nancy to the hotel in her stroller as Peggy and I walked beside them.

“Look, Mommy,” I said. “There’s a nigger.

An African American man was leaning against a storefront.

“Negro, son,” said the man. “Negro.”

My mother took a hand of mine and pushed the stroller more quickly.

Peggy took my other hand.

At the hotel’s front desk my father drew a pig on a receipt book. He showed us the image the carbon paper made beneath the drawing. He took us to the lounge in the hotel’s basement. No one else was there. Peggy and I swiveled on chairs at the hotel’s low bar. Our father gave us Coca Cola and peanuts.

He went to Coldwater to look for a job. I knew he’d returned before I saw him. I looked out our front window and saw him walking up the walk in his blue serge suit. His big old leather suitcase was in one of his hands. A

small rocking chair with red leatherette upholstery was in his other hand. The chair was for me.

We moved to Coldwater. Our first home there was a small but new white clapboard house on a new street. Some friends of my father's welcomed us there.

"There's a park down the street," said one. "They can't miss it."

Peggy and I walked down the street looking for it, came to a house abuilding, and stopped and turned to look at it.

"Maybe that's the park," said Peggy.

I could smell the sawdust and the new wood.

"We'd better go back," she said.

A small desk was in our living room. A stapler was in its center drawer. No staples were in the drawer, but I played with the stapler. My father planted potatoes in a slope sloping down from the back of our backyard. A girl lived next door to us. She told me her name was Tommie and showed me a scratch on one of her arms. She told me she'd cut herself

"That's not a cut," I said. "It's a scratch."

Dennis Ryder lived across the street. He packed a rock into a snowball and threw it at me. It hit the back of my head. On the other side of our house was a vacant lot. A yellow house was on the other side of it. The man who lived there had a son older than Peggy and electric model trains on a big plywood table in his basement. He and his wife showed the trains to my mother and Peggy and me but didn't turn them on. My mother said the trains were his hobby and that he didn't let his son play with them.

On my fourth birthday, I hung by my butt upside down from an arm of our sofa. I couldn't do it again. My father gave me two cap pistols in holsters on a belt. He called that a two-gun holster set. It was so heavy I could hardly keep the belt at my waist.

My grandmother Harman came to live with us. She slept on the sofa and urinated on the living room floor on her way to the bathroom. She went to a convalescent home. It was a big white clapboard house in Athens with a screen porch with white wicker rocking chairs across the front of its second floor.

She died there, but the funeral was in Battle Creek. My Aunt Ruth and Uncle Albert lived there. Aunt Ruth was my father's sister. They owned a Grocery store there. After the funeral, we went to their house. Pies were on a counter between their kitchen and their garage.

We also went to Uncle Nelt's funeral. I don't know whose uncle he was, but his casket was in Aunt Ruth's and Uncle Albert's living room. His eyes were open. They were pale blue. My mother said they weren't open.

We moved to the second floor of an old green-shingled house. Our landlady lived on the first floor. My mother told us she said we were bringing her house down on her head and that we'd have to stay away from her flowers. Some sunflowers were in the front yard, but most of what grew in the yard was weeds. We called her Old Lady Havens.

Among the weeds in the backyard, Peggy and I found an old wooden and canvas lawn chair with stripes of various colors. The colors had faded nearly beyond recognition. But Peggy picked it up and looked at it.

"It's like Joseph's coat of many colors," she said.

I had a red wagon. We kept it on the house's big roofless concrete front porch. Its bed rusted around the bolt that held its front wheels' frame to its bed. A friend of my father's tried to repair it with a new nut and bolt and a large washer. It fell apart again. I never saw the friend or knew any friends of my father's to come to any of our homes after those who welcomed us to Coldwater. But we kept the wagon.

On my fifth Easter, instead of Easter baskets, my parents hid in our apartment tin buckets with tin shovels. Candy eggs, jelly beans, and cellophane grass were also in the buckets. But, after eating some of the candy, Peggy and I removed the grass and the remaining candy from the buckets, took the buckets and shovels to the backyard, and began digging in sands around where Old Lady Havens' adult son burned trash. As we began digging, I dug into some blue paper, slowing my digging, and I felt the frustration. But Peggy didn't.

"Maybe it's part of the sky of China," she said.

Someone gave my mother a sailor suit for me. She sent me to kindergarten in it. I felt silly.

"Can you dance a jig?" asked Miss Wilcox, my teacher.

I took one of my cap pistols to school and pretended to shoot some of my classmates.

"Don't do that," said Miss Wilcox.

"It doesn't have any caps," I said.

"Don't do it anyway," she said.

I stopped. But then I made shooting noises with my mouth. She took the cap gun from me until the end of that school day anyway, but, during naptime, I lay my nap rug beside the slide projector she used to show slides. I looked up her dress. I thought her nylons made her seem old. I also thought her singing sounded shrill, but I also told her she sang beautifully.

"Well, thank you, Billy," she said.

"Kiss your sister goodbye," my mother as I was leaving the apartment to walk to kindergarten.

Nancy looked up at me when she said that, but I didn't kiss her.

Our house was at the corner of Pearl and Jackson Streets. Jim Barber's house was on the other side of Jackson Street. His father raked leaves into a big pile in their yard.

"Don't jump in them," my mother said. "There might be something in them."

I didn't, but I played with Jim in his yard.

For my sixth birthday, my father gave me a cap pistol with no holster or belt. My mother told me letters on it said "trooper". I took it to Jim's yard. I pretended to shoot him with it, but he didn't pretend to die.

"You missed," he said.

"You're supposed to take your deads," I said.

"I don't care," he said.

"He's a spoiled rich kid," said my mother.

Weekends Peggy and I climbed the school's fire escape. It was a steel tube from the second floor of the old brick building down a side of it to the ground. My arms were hardly long enough for me to reach both sides of the tube at once, but both of us climbed to the top. We tried the door so see if we could go inside. We couldn't, but we did that again and again.

Suzanne Myers' house was on our way to the school. She was in my kindergarten class. She showed me her younger brother's electric train set. It was in a guest house behind their house. Norma Macklin stopped at my house and asked my mother whether I'd like to walk to school with her. I told my mother I didn't. I walked to Suzanne's house alone to walk with her. But we didn't play with her brother's electric trains.

Miss Wilcox selected me to play Wee Willy Winkie in the school's Christmas program. My costume was to be a bathrobe she borrowed from a daughter of Peggy's teacher's. The performance would be on a stage in front of the whole school. I was afraid I'd feel silly.

Miss Wilcox came to the audience to take me backstage to dress.

"What's wrong with him," she asked my mother.

"I don't know," said my mother, looking down at me.

"He looks like he has a rash or something," said Miss Wilcox. "I think maybe you should take him home."

At home my mother put a thermometer in my mouth.

"107," she said. "We'd better get Dr. Socia."

"Scarlet fever," said Dr. Socia when Peggy brought him from his office in his house a few blocks away.

I stopped hearing from my left ear.

To hear my mother, I leaned my head to my left and turned my head to my right.

“Straighten up,” she said slapping the left side of my head. “There’s nothing wrong with you.”

Doctor Socia didn’t come again, but, at the end of Christmas vacation, able again to hear from both ears, I returned to school.

On my father’s workdays he ate breakfast alone. He ate a bowl of Wheaties and half of a grapefruit with sugar on it. When he went to work, he reset our alarm clock for my mother to ready us for school. One morning he set it an hour too early.

“Look,” said Peggy looking at the shadows of the trees on the snow in the moon light. “The shadows are blue.”

So I looked. But the school was dark. So we returned home.

“We’d better go back,” she said.

A chain link fence went up around the schoolyard. Before the links went up, a wire went across the ground between the posts. Day after day, until the links went up, I tripped over the wire. My ankles bled through my socks, but each day I forgot until I tripped and felt the pain. In dismay, I tried to think how to remember, but I couldn’t. Ordinarily I didn’t walk to school with Peggy. I don’t know why I did the day my father set the alarm early.

A milkman left our milk on the front porch. In the winter, if we didn’t bring it inside soon enough, the milk froze and pushed the lids from the bottles. I didn’t like the cream that floated to the top.

We bought our groceries at a grocery store on Chicago Street a block north of our apartment. Chicago street was parallel to Pearl Street. My mother sent me to the store with a list. I took it up Jackson Street and through an alley to the back door of the store. Inside I gave the list to the old man who owned the store. He gathered the groceries, listed them in a receipt book, and put them into a brown paper bag. We had an account there.

“Hahman?” he asked each time.

“Harman,” I answered each time.

“He’s Polish,” said my mother.

Sometimes other old men were in the store.

“Do you want a bottle of pop?” one asked me.

I nodded.

“What kind?” he asked.

“Cherry,” I replied.

He looked down into the cooler.

“No cherry,” he said. “How about strawberry?”

To my nodding again, he took a bottle from the cooler, opened it, and handed it to me.

“Want a fight?” another of the old men asked me, but, not answering, I drank the soda and carried our groceries home.

I composed a song about Cowboy Bill. I asked my mother to write it down. She was peeling potatoes but laid the paring knife on the kitchen counter, took a brown paper bag from a drawer, and picked up a pencil. I picked up the knife. She dropped the pencil and grabbed the knife but grabbed its blade while I held its handle. She wrapped a dishrag around the hand, but some of her blood dripped to the floor, before she could stop it. That afternoon my Aunt Bertha drove from Detroit to visit us. She was my mother’s other sister.

“What happened to you?” she asked my mother.

“Billy did it,” said my mother. “He didn’t mean to.”

“I wrote a song,” I said as my Aunt Bertha glared at me.

I picked up the bag from the counter and handed it to her.

“This is just scribbling,” she said throwing it back onto the counter.

I didn’t like most of what we ate. Excepting Sundays, my mother boiled potatoes for supper every night. Sundays, either my father or my mother mashed them. I preferred mashed potatoes to potatoes no one mashed and preferred that my father mashed them. My mother left too many lumps.

One night I couldn’t force make myself to eat my carrots. My father told me I’d sit there until I did. I dropped some to the floor. My father slapped me, but still I couldn’t eat them, and he relented before bedtime, and the slap wasn’t hard enough to hurt.

My favorite, of all my mother cooked, was what she called goulash. It was macaroni, hamburger, and tomato she cooked together. But I couldn’t make myself eat the pieces of tomato in it if they were large enough for me to be able see what they were. Peggy put catsup on carrots, but it made me think of blood.

My brother Dewey Ray’s birth was while we lived on Pearl Street. My mother stood in our kitchen and sucked milk from her breasts with a thing I thought looked like a bicycle horn. She offered me some, but I didn’t like seeing her big bare breasts. I didn’t accept the offer.

Dewey had no right forearm, and his right wrist and elbow were the same joint and didn’t bend much. Also, his right hand had but two fingers and a thumb, and its two fingers weren’t separate. and he couldn’t turn his left palm completely face up. Someone separated the fingers, and my mother said a doctor told her to set Dewey on a chair and twist his left arm to turn the hand upward. But Dewey screamed when she twisted the arm. So soon she stopped.

“I don’t think this is doing him any good,” she said.

We moved to an apartment in an old brick house.

Again our landlady lived beneath us, but our apartment in that house was on the first floor, while hers was in the basement, and her husband and daughter Gloria lived with her, and they didn't complain about our noise.

"She's a little bitch," my mother said of Gloria, and Peggy agreed with my mother, but Peggy played with Gloria.

Peggy found a toad in the back yard. She cut open its belly, sewed up the cut, and turned the toad loose. We found it again. A blue scar was on its belly. We turned it loose again and never saw it again. We also found a turtle in the yard. Peggy and Gloria cut it apart to watch its heart beat. Peggy said she wanted to be a surgeon. But she didn't sew the turtle back together. We watched its heart beat until the turtle died.

Excepting my mother's Bible and dictionary and Peggy's comic books, no books were in our home. The dictionary and the Bible were black and about the same size, but the Bible's last few pages were colored maps. So I preferred the Bible. Several nights, Peggy read me bedtime stories from her comic books, until she said didn't feel like it.

"Read to him," said my mother. "It won't hurt you."

She did that night but not again.

"I have to read him bedtime stories," said Peggy to Gloria as we entered the schoolyard the next day.

"Kindergarten baby," chanted Gloria. "Stick your head in the gravy."

"I'm not in kindergarten," I said. "I'm in first grade."

When we moved we changed schools. Franklin was my school for kindergarten. Edison was my school for first grade. It was brick but one story and newer than Franklin. That day at school I paid close attention to everything the teacher said about reading and spent most of my other time working through the reading book.

"Look, Jane," said Dick. "See Spot. See Spot jump."

That evening, lying on our dirty linoleum living room floor, I read one of Peggy's comic books. Our apartment had a fireplace. It didn't work, and a metal cover was over, but my parents played cards at a card table they kept in front of it.

"What are you doing?" asked my father looking down at me from the table.

"Reading," I replied.

"You can't read," he said.

"Yes, I can," I told him.

"Show me," he said.

So, with none of the faltering I'd heard from my classmates, I read one of the balloons, stopped, and looked up at him again. He was grinning down at me with the glint in his eyes I'd seen in them in our hallway in Ionia. He said nothing, but he turned the grin to my mother, and he kept the grin as they resumed their playing cards.

Carroll Knapp owned the grocery store nearest to that house. He lived in a brick house around the corner toward the school. His son Larry was in my class and once came to my house. Once I went to his. It had wall-to-wall carpeting, and I thought his mother was pretty. But he didn't come inside my house.

"Did you hear about that monster that killed those people?" he asked as we stood beside my house. "It was an avalanche or something like that!"

I knew what an avalanche was but didn't tell him.

Kenny Brewster was also in our class. He lived in a big white house across the street from our house but in the next block north. His living room also had wall-to-wall carpeting. We played marbles on it with his marbles. I beat him, and he let me keep my winnings. Those were my first marbles.

Two apartments were on the first floor of our house. The Hedgelands, Margie and Curly and their two sons and two daughters, lived in the other one. Both apartments opened to the front porch of the house, but the Hedgelands' was the front one. Margie was a nurse. She cut the head from a chicken and let it run around the backyard squawking.

Madge, the youngest of her two daughters, was a little older and a little taller than Peggy. Once, as I lay on the linoleum floor of their living room watching Tom Corbett Space Cadet on their television, she walked by in jeans and looked down at me. I liked her thinness and her blonde hair and freckles.

Her sister was older, somewhat larger in all dimensions, and had red hair. I don't remember her name. Their brother Tom was also older than Madge and also had blond hair. Their brother Gene was a little younger than Peggy and had red hair and freckles. Both Margie and Curly had black or dark brown hair.

The house was on Marshall Street. Marshall Street divided the west side of Coldwater's north side from its east side. Tom told me I could get free maps from the gas station between our house and Chicago Street. He showed me the symbol for airports on the maps and told me I could write to the airports for information. My mother always had paper and envelopes and postage stamps. I received much information but few pictures. I read little of it and understood little of what I read. But I kept it.

One Christmas vacation I had mumps. I dreamed the knob of the door to the bedroom where our parents slept was in my mouth and growing. I ran



about the apartment screaming. My mother sent Peggy to Margie for help. Margie woke me up and took me back to my bed. My mother told me I could lose my testicles if I didn't stay in bed while I had the mumps.

I also had measles, chicken pox, and strep throat. I don't remember where I had measles or chicken pox, but a doctor came to our apartment when I had strep throat. Doctors seldom treated us for anything. My mother had two little ceramic mugs in the shape of pirates' head. She gave us 7-Up in them when we were sick.

"Have you had your tonsils out?" asked the doctor.

"I don't think so," I said.

"Good thing," he replied. "The doctor did a poor job if you did."

My mother told me Hank Williams died. An advertisement for GMC panel trucks was on the radio when she told me that. I thought he'd died in a panel truck accident.

Parkhurst Park, the park Peggy and I failed to find from our first house in Coldwater, was across the street beside the school where I learned to read. Gloria and Peggy and I played tag on picnic tables in piles in the park's picnic shelter. Peggy and I tried to climb to the roof of the shelter, but we couldn't. We climbed into a big green birdbath at the back of the park, but I had to stand on its base and reach up to its rim to pull myself up, and sometimes I couldn't.

Coldwater's airfield was behind the park. We climbed over the fence and played in some of the small planes. Peggy told me the round green thorny things along the fence were hedge apples. She also told me the red berries on small trees bordering a walk between the birdbath and the park's restrooms were currents or Chinaberries. She said one or the other of those kinds of berries was poisonous. But she said she didn't remember which.

She said she had a friend on Circle Drive and that Circle Drive was near Clark Avenue. Clark Avenue was the street of our first home in Coldwater. She said rich people lived on Circle Drive. I never met that friend.

Sometimes I went to the park alone. My mother drew pictures of clocks on envelopes for me to know when to come home. She told me to compare them to the clock on the school.

I walked the log rail fence across the front of the park. Balancing on the rails was easier for me than making my way around the trees that were between the ends of some of the rails, but stepping onto the brick posts between the ends of most of the rails was a welcome relief. I thought of a girl in my class. Her name was Sheila. She had black hair on her forearms and short black hair on her head. I liked her appearance but never spoke to her. Jumping from the fence after returning to the gate to the park, I saw that I'd lost my shoe laces.

“How could you lose your shoelaces?” my mother asked.

Peggy had tried to teach me to tie my shoes. I couldn't remember all the little motions of her fingers, but I could tie knots, and, the next time I went to the park alone, my mother tied the loops together. I saw that I could make loops and tie them together in a knot and not need to do what Peggy tried to teach me, what my mother did before tying the loops together. So I did that for years, and no one told me it was wrong.

“I never get to see my mother anymore,” said my mother to my father.

She was weeping. A few days later, she packed his old leather suitcase. He carried it across the street and hailed Greyhound bus for her. Peggy babysat for me and Nancy and Dewey while he was at work while she was away.

Gramma Yankey moved to a convalescent home. We all went there to visit her. She was in a hospital bed propping her higher than I was tall. She called me Leonard. My mother told her I was Billy, but she kept calling me Leonard. She died. My parents went to Grand Rapids for the funeral. They took Nancy and Dewey with them but left Peggy and me at home.

“You wouldn't understand what it's about,” my mother told us.

While they were in Grand Rapids, Peggy and I dressed in our swimming suits to play in our bathtub. I played with my teddy bear in it. For my mother not to know that, I hid it wet beside two small United States flags in the back of a closet. Peggy and I waved the flags at parades and played with them all day before putting them away. In the closet they beneath my father's American Legion uniform jacket and two wide leather belts. Before marrying my mother, he was a Commander in the Legion. I remember thinking he spanked us with the belts. I don't remember him doing that, but I sometimes thought he might. My mother found the teddy bear, told me it me it would mold, and threw it in the trash. Then I thought he might spank me with one of the belts, but she didn't tell him, and neither did she spank me for that.

Peggy and Gloria found a board loose in a side of a barn behind a house next door to ours. We pulled an end of the board away from the barn far enough for us to squeeze behind it into the barn. Inside we found some furniture and paint and painted the furniture. My mother said the woman who lived in the house told her she thought we did it. I told my mother we didn't. She set two of our dining table chairs face to face, told me to sit in one, sat in the other, and lectured me about lying, until I wept and confessed. But neither did spank me for that or told my father. She blamed Gloria. I don't remember whose idea it was, but I thought we all did that together. So I didn't understand that.

My mother dressed me in snow leggings for school. On my way home I walked in the deepest snow I could find. I thought that was their purpose.

“What did you do,” asked my mother “walk in the deepest snow you could find?”

The leggings were too narrow for me to pull them over my shoes. I spent recesses sitting on the floor of the hallway trying to do that. My teacher came into the hallway while I was doing that. We didn’t have a telephone, but, the next day, my mother threw the leggings in the trash. But I also wore dress pants to school.

“Look at that kid’s pants,” said an older kid to another as they walked past me on the playground as my pants flapped in wind after my mother threw away the leggings

“I think he should wear jeans to school like the other boys,” said my mother to my father at home, and, from then on, I did.

A flower bed was between the park’s maintenance shed and a cinder drive past it. Peggy and I sat in it. She suggested that we take off our clothes.

“Nobody can see us,” she said.

We did, and the flowers were higher than our heads, I didn’t know why we did that.

We started trick or treating two nights before Halloween.

“It isn’t Halloween yet,” some people said.

One of those early nights night Gloria went with us. Then we talked about tricking them. But we didn’t do it, and Peggy and I filled at least one grocery bag each night we went out. One night I fell from a porch into a rose bush. My mask blocked my peripheral vision. I cut my left hand between its knuckles of ts ring and little fingers. Peggy said I cut it on a thorn. My mother tried to heal it with Vaseline. It hurt more each day until the scab fell from it. It left a scar.

“He blames me for that,” said my mother many years later.

For a Halloween parade, I dressed as a hobo. I put a pillow my shirt to look fat. The pillow slid into one of my trouser legs. I won a Hopalong Cassidy flashlight for the costume and also a ride in a covered wagon to Butters’ Buffalo Farm. The flashlight’s batteries leaked and corroded its switch. So it stopped working.

Saturdays our father gave Peggy and me a quarter to go to the movies at the Tibbits Theatre. Admission was twelve cents for each of us. We discussed what candy to buy with the penny. Some candy was two for a penny. Some boxes of pieces of candy were a penny. One Saturday, in a drawing of ticket stubs, I won a box of China doll dishes with straw packing.

“Give them to Peggy,” said my father at home. “You can keep the straw, in case I get you a pony.”

Before the feature films were cartoons and episodes of a Superman serial. Kryptonite made Superman invisible. Later episodes showed typewriter keys moving with no one visibly typing. I wanted to see Superman. Soon the serial ended.

I liked a feature film showing Bing Crosby's and Bob Hope's heads but not their bodies turning on a sort of shelf in a haunted house.

Another film showed a man's bloody neck after Randolph Scott blew his head from his body with a shotgun. That troubled me a little but horrify me, but how Ralph Cramden treated his wife and Ed Norton on the Hedgelands' TV troubled me more. I also feared for Tweety Bird's life at the paws of Sylvester.

At school during recess the boys divided into gangs. Peggy taught me to imitate riding a horse by trotting while holding my hands in front of me as though I were holding reins. The other boys jogged. I thought what I was doing was more authentic, but neither gang chose me for membership.

A member of one of the gangs suggested that I be a double agent spy. Then I jogged back and forth between the gangs. But none of them told me any secrets or otherwise spoke to me.

I stole a screwdriver from Ralph Kimble's desk. He sat beside me in class. It was small screwdriver with a white plastic handle saying "God is love." He asked me whether I'd seen it. I told him I hadn't. Ashamed of both the lie and the theft, I wished to give it back. But I was too ashamed both to admit either.

"This is the church," said Peggy. "This is the steeple. Open the doors, and see all the people."

As she said that she interlaced her fingers, pointed her index fingers upward to represent the steeple, opened her hands, turned them over, and wiggled her other fingers, to represent the people.

My mother took us to Sunday school at Coldwater's First Methodist Church. But it had no steeple. Walking to it down Marshall Street, we passed the Presbyterian Church. It had tall white steeple. I felt that our church wasn't quite what a church should be.

But Marcia Enos was in my Sunday school class. With her plaid pleated skirt, knee sox and penny loafers, and her bright cheeks and raven ringlets, she seemed to me to be exactly what girls should be. But I never spoke to her.

I also felt that the choir's performing the Doxology in the auditorium after Sunday school class was how music should sound. I also enjoyed singing it with the choir and the congregation. But I also preferred the auditorium's

stage, slanting aisles, and fold-up seats to the pulpit and pews and flat aisles in the sanctuary,

In our neighborhood the children ran free until their mothers called them home for supper and then again ran free until the street lights came on.

A barn was behind a boy's house around a corner from our house. The boy called his sister Sister, but a junk car was in front of the barn, and the boy and I jumped from the barn's haymow onto the roof of the car. My mother told me Cousin Leonard broke a leg pretending to fly like Superman with a towel around his neck. But we didn't use towels.

As some kids gathered on the sidewalk in front of that kid's house, a little blonde girl stepped onto the walk from the driveway of the next house.

I stared at her and couldn't stop.

"Billy's got a girlfriend," the other children chanted, but still I couldn't stop staring.

She bowed her head, but she looked up at me from her bright blue eyes, and she and I left the other children and walked up her driveway into her backyard. An Irish setter was in a pen beside a garage there. Still I was afraid of dogs, but that didn't keep me from following her into the pen to climb with her to the roof of the doghouse. She moved with the dog as though they were one, and, on the roof of the dog house, we sat talking and gazing across the grass of the yard and at the flowers around it.

I think her name may have been Laura or Marcia. I'm not sure which or whether either was, but I think of her every time I think of the sonnets Petrarch wrote to Laura. She told me she lived in Marshall and that summers her parents sometimes left her in Coldwater with her grandparents for a few weeks. She asked me whether I wanted a Popsicle. Feeling that being there with her was already more happiness than I ever had known or deserved, I didn't answer. But she didn't require an answer.

"My grandma makes them for me," she said, "I'll get us some."

She slid from the roof, walked with the dog to the gate, easily slid through it while not letting the dog out, and walked across the yard to the side door of the blue-shingled house. Seeing her in her little blue shorts and little white blouse go into the house, I thought the possibility of her returning was too much for me to hope. But she did return, with a Kool-Aid ice cube on a Popsicle stick in each of her hands.

But, the next day, she returned to Marshall. So I returned to playing with the other kids, But I hoped she'd return, and she did.

"Who's not ready," I shouted after counting by fives to a hundred, "holler 'I!'"

The goal was a rusty oil drum in our back yard. We also used it to burn trash. Turning my face from it I saw her on the walk at the end of the fence along that side of our yard. Morning glories were climbing the fence. Her eyes were that color. But she was looking at me. I left the game to go to her.

“Can you come to my grandma’s house and play?” she asked. “My grandma doesn’t know I’m here.”

But I didn’t go with her.

“I’m playing hide and seek with the other kids,” I said. “And I’m it.”

Watching her little blond head drop as she turned from me, I felt the shame and loss, but I let her go and never saw her again.

Jim Shray, in the hallway outside our second-grade classroom, punched one of my arms. So I punched one of his. We did that several times. Neither of us spoke.

“Why do you limp?” I asked Werner Helfer as we walked down that hallway on our way out of the school to go home.

“I used to limp,” he said, “because I had a hernia operation. I used to talk like a German too. But I don’t anymore.”

I wondered how he didn’t know the reason I asked him about the limp was that I could see it and how he didn’t know his way of speaking wasn’t like that of the other kids in our class. But I didn’t ask him. We were walking past my first-grade class room. My first-grade teacher stepped out of it.

“Hello, Billy,” she said. “How’s your reading going?”

“Fine,” I said.

“Come show me,” she said.

Werner and I followed her to her desk.

“Can you read this?” she asked opening a book on her desk.

I began reading the paragraph she indicated.

But I stopped at the word “ocean”.

“Sound it out,” she said.

I was already trying to sound it out in my mind.

“Oken,” I then blurted.

“It’s ‘ocean,’” she said. “The ‘c’ sounds like an ‘s’ there.”

To me, it sounded like “sh”, but I thought of something else to say.

## Chapter 2

### Laddie

“We’re moving to a lake,” I told her.

“That’s nice,” she said. “What lake?”

“Marble,” I told her.

“Are you sure it isn’t Marrow?” she asked. “All the lakes around here have a lot of marrow in them. They make concrete out of it.”

It was Marble Lake. But I thought I may have misunderstood what my father said. So I didn’t tell her that.

“You can have a dog there,” said my father.

The house was a cottage with no inside plumbing. Instead of a bathroom it had an outhouse beside a garage between the cottage and the road. We pumped our water from a well with a hand pump outside the kitchen door. Peggy and I took turns pumping water for the kitchen and carrying the slop jars to the outhouse.

Our first day there Peggy and I wandered up the road in front of the cottage to a swamp on the side the road away from the lake. Peggy caught a garter snake. She held it while I cut it in half with a sharp stone. I wished the stone were sharper or the snake less bony.

“Snakes have six hearts,” said Peggy, but we didn’t look for them.

We kids slept upstairs in two beds. Peggy’s and Nancy’s was on one side of a folding screen. Dewey’s and mine was on the other side. We kept the upstairs slop jar on Peggy’s and Nancy’s side.

The only heat for the cottage was a big brown propane space heater downstairs. The upstairs heat came from the heater’s chimney pipe, through two grates in the floor, and up the stairway. I stood on a chair beside the heater for my mother to bathe me. I shivered. But I don’t remember doing that more than once.

Our father kept his word regarding the dog. He brought home a small brown one. He said was a mongrel. It ran up the stairs but wouldn’t run down. He took it away, but he replaced it with a smaller black one he said was part

springer. I don't know why we didn't keep that one, but my father replaced it with one he said was part border collie and part German shepherd. Peggy named him Laddie for Lassie on TV. We kept him.

We chained him to a wire clothesline between two trees beside the cottage. A clip on one end of the chain let him run back and forth along the line. Once he ran past one of the trees, jerked the clothesline from the tree and the clip from the clothesline, and attacked the Irish setter next door.

Our father and the setter's owner hollered at them. They didn't stop fighting until my father pumped a bucket of water and poured it onto them. By then, Laddie had ripped a slit in one of the setter's ears. My father chained Laddie to a corner of the garage. We left him there through the winters.

The nearest town to the lake was Quincy. It was about six miles east of Coldwater. Our school was Mudge. It was a white clapboard building with two classrooms and a belfry about a mile east of the lake and about two miles south of Quincy. The first through third grades were in one of the rooms. The fourth through sixth were in the other. So my class was in one room while Peggy's was in the other.

For Peggy's birthday the year we moved there, she hosted a birthday party. She planned it to be a beach party. But her birthday was in May, and May's too cold for swimming in Michigan lakes. So no one swam at her party.

My mother said the side of the cottage facing the lake was its front. A porch the width of the house was on that side. A swing was on the porch. Patty and Phyllis, my father's daughters from another marriage, came to visit us. They sat on the porch swing. I sat beside one of them. The other said their mother had false teeth. They never visited us again. They also had a brother. His name was Clifford, but we called him Brother Budd. He never visited us.

Our yard sloped down to between two channels for mooring boats. Our landlady left two row boats at the cottage, a steel one in the garage and a wooden one in our channel. My father used the wooden one for fishing. He taught Peggy and me to row it.

To keep his job in Coldwater, he bought a black 1949 Buick Special. To fish, in winter, he drove it onto the lake to fish with short steel poles. From the boat, he fished with long cane poles, ordinarily two, to have two lines in the water. Some days he caught more than the legal limit of fifty fish. Most of the fish were bluegills, sunfish, or perch. To fry them for us for supper, he cleaned them on a board someone had nailed to a beech tree at an end of the clothesline. Peggy liked the eggs. Once he gathered beech nuts from beneath the beech tree and baked them with salt on cookie sheets.



I dug up some turtle eggs between the channels and threw them at the beech tree. The eggs splattered onto clothes my mother had hung on the line to dry. She didn't tell my father, but she whipped me herself.

"That's worse than Dad's belts," said Peggy of the narrow patent leather belt my mother took from her housedress to whip me. "It stings. Dad folds his double. So they won't hurt."

Peggy rowed across the lake. She met Diane Frump there and brought her back. While I sat on the bed Dewey and I shared, they changed into their swim suits on the other side of the screen. After they changed, Peggy pulled the top of Diane's suit down, to show me one of Diane's breasts. Diane was extremely overweight. The breast Peggy showed me was large with a big brown nipple. Peggy laughed, but Diane didn't. She looked at me and pulled up her suit.

In winter Peggy and I walked across the ice to an island she called Treasure Island. On the island was a cottage. We peered into its windows but didn't try to go inside. In woods near the island on the side of the lake away from our cottage we found a hunters shack. We went inside it and found a Victrola and bunks with binder twine for ticking.

Our father left the boat in the channel all winter. The ice cracked one side of it from its bow to its stern. He stopped letting Peggy and me use it without him. But he kept using it for fishing. He used a coffee can for bailing.

I had nightmares. My mother awakened me from them. I had erections. She took me to the slop jar to pee.

Peggy showed me a huge hollow tree she found in the woods. Inside the tree were boards for climbing to an opening where its limbs began to spread. A cow mooed on the other side of a fence nearby. Peggy suggested that we take off our clothes. Again, though I didn't know why, we did. I had an erection.

"Do you know what that means?" Peggy asked.

"It means I have to pee," I told her, but I didn't pee.

Nancy Johnson was in the first grade. Phil Boughman and I were in the second. Peggy's friend Carolyn Hard's sister Joyce was the only girl in Phil's and my class. She had dark hair and was overweight. Nancy was blonde and slim. Peggy said Nancy's older sister Patty was a bitch, but at recess Phil and I took turns kissing Nancy. I didn't open my mouth to do that, but, lying in grass on the bank of the ditch where the school bus stopped, we kissed long kisses like what I'd seen in movies.

Phil stole Camel cigarettes and Red Man tobacco from his father. We sat among the limbs of a tree that had fallen in the swamp, smoked the

cigarettes, and chewed the tobacco. I didn't inhale the smoke, but I accidentally swallowed some tobacco. I gagged and didn't try it again.

"Do you know where babies come from?" asked Phil.

"From their mothers' bellies," I said.

My mother had told me that.

"Yeah," said Phil. "But how?"

"From kissing," I said.

My mother had also told me that.

"You kissed Nancy Johnson," said Phil, "and she's not pregnant."

"OK," I said. "How?"

"They have a hole between their legs," said Phil. "You have to stick your peeder in it and pee. I tried it with Nancy Johnson on that big limb that hangs over the lake. But I couldn't pee."

Nancy's brother Jimmy had an electric train set. They lived on the lake but in a big white house with red trim in a neighborhood beyond the woods across the road from our house. Once, as I walked through the woods to play with Jimmy and his train set, Nancy was walking through them toward my neighborhood.

"I'll show you mine," she said, "if you show me yours."

"OK," I said.

"You go first," she said.

I doubted that I could trust her, but I pulled out my penis

She looked at it a few seconds and walked on past me.

"Show me yours," I said turning around.

"No," she said, not stopping or looking back.

A woman in the neighborhood drove us with her kids to Sunday school at the Methodist Church in Quincy. On the way, the neighbor said we could win a Bible if we memorized the names of the books of the Old Testament. I won one by using my mother's Bible to memorize them on the way.

I also memorized the hundredth psalm. But I didn't think going to hell no matter what else I did if I didn't accept Christ as my personal savior was fair. So I stopped going to Sunday school. But sometimes my father drove us to Sunday school. Then I sat outside in the Buick with him.

"That's a nice-looking woman," he said.

A woman was walking past us on the side walk. Her hair was gray. I wondered how he could think a woman that old was nice-looking.

All those diseases I had were before my ninth birthday. During my eighth year, my teeth were so rotten I could feel the cavities with my tongue. Many nights I cried myself to sleep from the aching. One night, as I cried, I

became angry, decided not to be sick anymore, and quit crying. My teeth immediately stopped hurting. I never had another toothache, and many years passed before I again suffered any disease other than a runny nose. My first dental examination was for a college admission requirement. The dentist found but two cavities. They were so small he filled them with no anesthesia. But, thought I didn't always stay away from churches, neither did I then think of that as faith.

The East Alganssee Baptist Church sent a school bus to the lake to take kids to summer Bible school. During the general assembly after the separate classes, the pastor drew seat numbers from a basket to determine who would receive a prize for being in the quiet seat. One morning he drew mine. I knew he would before he did. I wasn't sure I was quiet enough to win the prize, but he called me forward to select a prize. The prizes were in another basket. I selected a small white cross that glowed in the dark. My reason wasn't that it was a cross but that it glowed in the dark. It was also translucent white like the handle of Ralph Kimble's screwdriver, but Ralph's screwdriver didn't glow in the dark.

Also at that Bible school I learned to recognize the Arabic alphabet. I found, among some of what people there call tracts, one that translated John 3:16 into more than a half dozen languages. So, instead of listening to my teacher, I studied the tract in hope of finding a pattern for translating languages into one another. In the general assembly, the pastor showed a slide of another quotation in Arabic and asked whether anyone knew what language it was. Two other kids raised their hands before I did. But they guessed Chinese and Japanese. So I raised a hand.

"It's . . . ," said the pastor as I raised the hand.

But he interrupted himself to call on me.

"Arabic?" I said.

I pronounced it "Ararybic", and the preacher, after looking at me with what seemed to me an expression of both doubt and surprise, corrected my pronunciation. But he said I was correct, and, because that was the last day of that Bible school for that summer, my mother was sitting beside me, and she also gave me a look that seemed to me to express both doubt and surprise. But her look also seemed to me to show pride.

Sometimes my father took Peggy and me to work. His title was Attendant Nurse. His job was caring for patients at Coldwater's State Home and Training School. The reason he didn't drive us to Sunday school every Sunday was that the patients needed attending every day. So, instead of weekends, the attendant nurses' days off were every seventh and eighth days. But another

result of that was that some of his paydays were also his days off. So sometimes he took Peggy and me with him to pick up his paycheck.

“He can play anything,” my father said of a patient sitting in a wheelchair while holding an accordion. “Ask him to play something.”

The man was drooling with his head lolling on the back of the chair, but I named my favorite song, “On Top of Old Smokey”. The man neither lifted his head nor stopped drooling. But he played the song.

“If you don’t behave,” said my father, stopping to pick up a couple of buckeyes from beneath a chestnut tree as we walked back to our Buick, “I’ll leave you here.”

But at home Peggy told me he didn’t mean it, and my mother told me he carried buckeyes in his pockets because they were good for rheumatism. He also carried a rabbit’s foot for good luck and he kept old buckeyes and rabbits’ feet in one of the top two drawers of a dresser he shared with my mother. We called that Dad’s drawer, and he also kept other things in it.

The other things were some old coins, two small plastic Scottish terriers we called scotty dogs, a small black horsehair chain, and a hollow brown tin thumb. Sometimes Peggy and I asked to play with the things in Dad’s drawer. Most often we played with the scotty dogs. They had magnetic bases. Our father showed us how to place one on each side of a piece of paper with one’s head opposite the other’s tail and release one to let it spin around to face in the direction in which the other was facing.

Once he brought a young female patient home to play with Peggy. She and Peggy played dress-up in the steel rowboat in the garage. They hung a blanket on a rope over the boat to keep me from seeing them change. The girl was thin and pale. Her hair was short and nearly white. I thought of peeking but didn’t.

Parkhurst Park had no play equipment. But Waterworks Park, on the south side of Coldwater, between its water purification plant and the shallow creek we called the Coldwater River, had swings, rings, trapezes, and teetertotters. So the State Home had annual Picnics there for its employees, their families, and some of the patients. Also in the park was a dam was across the creek. Peggy and I walked two narrow rails across the top of it. No other children did that.

The card game our parents ordinarily played at home was Canasta. But, on some of our father’s days off, he drove to Coldwater to play euchre at the Stag Café. He played for five-cent and ten-cent paper chits people there called checks. People there called them checks. They were good in trade there at face value. My father won much more than he lost and used them to buy beer

until the state of Michigan outlawed that. Then he spent them on candy bars he brought home in beer cases for us kids.

So each night at 8:00 p.m. was candy time. Then each of us kids selected one candy bar from the beer case. We ate them while listening to Gene Autry tell a story on our radio. The program began with the sound of clumping, presumably the sound of Gene Autry's bootheels on a boardwalk.

"Well, sir," he said, when the sound stopped, to begin the story.

The program was a half hour. It ended at our bedtime.

My father rose early, whether or not he had to go to work. He rose at 5:00 a.m. to go fishing. Sometimes he asked me to go with him. Sometimes I went. But I had no desire to rise in the pre-dawn cold, and I didn't enjoy fishing at any time. I thought waiting for the fish to bite was doing nothing, and I felt that managing those heavy poles to pull one in was doing too much, and sometimes I swung my line around my father's. Once, as we stood in the boat while he untangled the lines, he lifted a hand to do that. So I ducked.

"Did you think I was going to hit you?" he asked.

I did and was ashamed of my mistake. But I felt I had reason for my mistake. So I said nothing.

One evening he took our family to a farm. The farmer was an old man with whom he played cards at the Stag. In his barn he showed us a mule. In his kitchen he showed us a dog he said could talk. He held dog biscuits over the dog's mouth. It made sounds resembling "mama" and "I'm hungry". When we left his wife gave us some butter she made. I thought it tasted like sour milk. I preferred oleo. That's what we called margarine.

We all ate supper together at the same time every night. My father often told jokes. In one a kid farts at the supper table. His mother tells him not to do that. He asks her what he should do when he needs to fart. She tells him just to let it slide out. One night he sticks his hand down the back of pants, pulls it out, and shows it to his mother.

"Hey Ma," he says. "Here's one of your slide-outs."

One night at supper my mother told a sort of joke. She asked why parents told kids to eat what's set before them and keep their mouths shut. She asked how anyone could eat with his mouth shut. She also told us she didn't like the sound of the word "ma". We called her mom.

The Stag was on the west side of South Monroe Street between Chicago Street and Pearl Street. North of it, on the same side of that block, were two more bars. The fire station and City Hall were across the street. The police station was in the back of City Hall. Mitch's Barber Shop was between City Hall and Coldwater's only office supplies store. Herm's Barber Shop was next

door to the Stag, but my father took me to Mitch's for haircuts, for both of us. Mitch's was bigger than Herm's and had mirrors on the walls both in front of the chairs and behind them. Once I began to try to count the reflections of the reflections. But I didn't see how I could.

Firemen sat in chairs in front of the fire station. My father greeted them each time we passed them on our way from Mitch's the Stag. One day, during that walk, he told me a joke.

"Do you know why rape is impossible?" he asked.

I shook my head. I didn't know what rape was. But I knew he was telling me something he thought was a joke.

"Because," he said, "a woman can run faster with her skirt up than a man can with his pants down."

Neither he nor I laughed. He'd said people shouldn't laugh at their own jokes. But then I told him the only joke I remember telling him.

"I know a joke," I said.

I told him a kid asked his father why the sky was blue and some other questions, that the father replied to each question that he didn't know, and that the kid asked the father whether he minded his asking so many question.

"Of course not," I said the father replied. "How else are you going to learn anything?"

My father grinned down at me with one of those glints in his eyes.

The tables at the Stag were large round wooden ones. The players, as they played their cards, knocked their knuckles on them. Cuspidors were on the floor between the chairs. So, when I sat beside my father, one was between my feet. Once my father took his tin thumb there. He didn't smoke, but he borrowed a cigarette one of the men who was smoking. He took a puff from it and stuffed it into the thumb. Then he stuffed into the thumb a clean white handkerchief he also had with him that day, pulled both the cigarette and the handkerchief from the thumb, and showed that the cigarette had neither burned nor smudged the handkerchief. The men grinned and resumed playing cards.

M father's payday was every two weeks. My allowance was a dime each payday. While my father played cards on the days he took me there, I walked the half block to Chicago Street to spend the dime. Coldwater had three dime stores. All three were on the south side of Chicago Street. Newberry's and Murphy's were in the block west of Monroe Street. Tribolet's was in the block east of Monroe Street. I shopped the toy department of each. Murphy's was the largest. It was about half of its basement. But Newberry's manager accepted my dime for things he priced at twelve cents.

We ordinarily rode a school bus to school. But sometimes some of us walked home for the fun of it. When we saw my father driving home from work, we jumped in the ditch beside the road, to keep him from seeing us and giving us a ride.

Neither did Peggy enjoy fishing with our father. But once, in our channel, she and I tried using string and safety pins to fish from wooden doors we found in the garage. We could see the fish. But we didn't catch any.

Once Peggy and I and some friends of hers floated on the doors in the channel but weren't trying to fish. I fell from mine. I hadn't yet learned to swim. I sank to the bottom, bounced myself back to the top, gasp for breath, and sank again. I did that several times. Each time, I saw that Peggy was laughing. But I made my way out of channel with no help.

Bob Trana's grandparents owned the neighborhood's grocery store and public beach. He was in my class and gave me an automobile tire innertube. I used it to paddle from our channel to the beach's diving raft. The raft was beyond the drop-off. My father told me not to do that.

"What if it goes flat?" he asked.

After that I walked to the public beach, waded to the drop-off, and held my breath while I paddled and kicked my way to the raft.

"Can you swim?" a man asked me as I waded toward the drop off.

"A little bit," I replied.

"Show me," he said.

I lay down and flapped my arms in the shallow water.

"Yup," he said. "That's a little bit."

Once Peggy went to the raft with me and took Laddie on his chain. Another time she went with me, she shit beneath the water. The shit floated.

I spent more time in the woods than in the lake. Peggy and I found a low hut of tree limbs in the woods across the road from our cottage, but it was too low for us to stand in it. My main use for the woods was to climb trees. I also swung in birches between our garage and the road, but my mother saw me over the roof of the garage and told my father.

"What if the bow breaks?" he asked me.

To climb a somewhat larger tree between the garage and the road, I stood on a dead tree at the foot of the live tree's trunk. But the limb I was using to pull myself to the higher limbs was also a dead stub, and, after I did that several times, it broke. So I fell on my back with the stub of the dead tree between my right arm and my right ribs. I was grateful both that the stub of the dead tree didn't impale me and that my mother didn't see that.

Once my father drove us to visit Uncle Alvie. I don't know whose uncle he was, but he and his family lived on a farm with two horses, a palomino and a pinto. My father rode the palomino. The stirrups held his knees higher than the saddle. Peggy sat on the pinto. Her feet didn't reach the stirrups. My mother told me I was too small for that. Uncle Alvie and his wife gave us two kittens, one for Peggy and one for me. Peggy's was black and white. Mine was a gray tiger. On our way home we stopped at a small stone house to see Uncle Laverne. My father said he was his youngest brother and was a stone mason, but no one was at home. Aunt Ruth and Uncle Albert were and his sister Myrtle only sibling of my father's I met, and I seldom saw them. I named my kitten Cuddles. Sitting on my bed with him in my lap, I told him no one else loved me. Cleaning fish, my father threw fish heads and guts to the kittens. Soon Peggy's kitten disappeared. Soon after that, so did Cuddles.

Several summers my father drove us to Grand Rapids. Battle Creek was on the way. I smelled the cereal toasting as he drove us past the Post and Kellogg plants. All of us stayed with Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally for a week. After the others returned home, Peggy and I stayed another week.

We did that at several of their homes. One was so much like the house next door to it that I went into the house next door by mistake. A woman in its living room stood silently looking at me until I silently turned and went outside. I didn't know my mistake until I looked at both houses from outside.

Cousin Leonard was in prison while Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally lived in that house. Some of his belongings were in its basement. Among them were a bullwhip and a New Testament. Uncle Wally taught me how to crack the whip, but he didn't teach me how to keep it from lashing back at me. I stood for hours on the sidewalk in front of the house trying to dodge the lash while cracking the whip. Aunt Hazel gave me the New Testament but not the whip.

Another of their homes was an apartment at the top of an outside stairway to a dirt parking lot behind the building. In a puddle at the bottom of the stairs was a rubber Donald Duck firetruck like mine. I don't remember what happened to mine. The one I found was dirty. I left it there.

Another of their homes was a cottage at Grass Lake. In some tall grass Peggy and I found a head of a duck decoy. But most of my memories of their homes are of a big blue house in Grand Rapids. They had two parakeets there. Their cage was on a window seat in the kitchen. Their names were Pat and Mike. Uncle Wally had a pellet pistol. To show us how powerful it was, he folded a newspaper four ways, leaned it against the screen of the window, and shot a pellet through the paper. I don't remember whether it went through screen.



Also while Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally lived there, they took Peggy and me to Muskegon State Park. As Uncle Wally drove, they drank Frankenmuth Ale. They gave us about the last half inch of each bottle.

“We won’t be able to see all the way across the lake,” said Peggy. “It’s because the Earth’s round, and the other side of the lake is further away than the horizon. But you can’t get to the horizon. It’s always as far away as you can see.”

Barefoot in the dunes, I didn’t like the feeling of some black stuff beneath the sand, but I liked going into a log blockhouse there and looking from its second floor glassless windows.

In Grand Rapids they took us to an amusement park. They took us on a spook house ride. A goblin or ghost or some other sort of monster rose up in front of our car. I couldn’t stop shrieking until the ride ended. Next they put me on a horse on a merry-go-round.

“That won’t scare you,” said Peggy.

They also took us to John Ball Park. Peggy and I sat in the lap of a bronze statue of John Ball at the bottom of a hill. We also climbed wooden stairs to the top of a hill. But Aunt Hazel and Uncle Wally waited at the bottom.

“My heart can’t handle it,” said Aunt Hazel.

In that big blue house of theirs Peggy and I stole cigarette butts from ashtrays in their living room and smoked them in the basement behind some kitchen cabinets someone had stored there.

“I wish you’d save the long ones for me,” laughed Aunt Hazel when she noticed we were doing that.

Uncle Wally took us fishing with rods and reels at a dam on the Grand River. After many minutes of tugging while wondering at what I was tugging, I landed a carp. It was the biggest fish I’d ever seen. But Uncle Wally let it go.

“They’re not good eating,” he said.

Also at the big blue house I played with a neighborhood boy. In bushes beside the house, he threw dirt on me and laughed. I did the same to him. Aunt Hazel also laughed at that. But she made me take a bath.

Also in that house I found a pith helmet with a badge on it. Aunt Hazel said Uncle Wally had worn it while he was a security guard. I wore it the remainder of the week and asked for it. Uncle Wally refused.

“What do you need it for?” Aunt Hazel asked him.

“Well, he can’t have the badge,” he said.

But Phil Boughman gave me a brass insignia from an Army service cap, and my father gave me the jacket from his American Legion commander uniform. The jacket, of course, was too big for me, and the screw holding the

insignia to the pith helmet dug into my forehead. But I wandered the neighborhood in both for weeks.

Peggy joined the Brownies. They met in Peggy's friend Colleen Wilmarth's big yellow house between our school and Quincy. Peggy also joined 4-H. Her friend Carolyn Hard invited her. Caroline and Joyce lived on a farm on the other side of the school from the lake. Once Peggy and I walked there. Joyce and I threw dry corncobs at each other in the corn crib. That was her idea.

I finished my schoolwork more quickly than did my classmates. I talked to them while they were doing theirs. My teacher, Mrs. Pomranka, was extremely overweight. She picked me up by my trapezius muscles and shook me.

"If you finish your work early," she said dropping me back into my seat, "don't bother the other students."

The next time I finished early I went to the table where the toys were, took the Legos back to my desk, and began building a little red and white house. Mrs. Pomranka told me to take them back. She told me just to sit and be quiet.

For the third grade, my parents bought me a fourth grade phonics book. Mrs. Pomranka taught me from it while she taught the others in the class from their third grade books. At the next parent-teacher conference, she told my mother I could skip to the fourth grade if my mother wished. My mother told me that, but she also told me Mrs. Pomranka also told her a factor to consider was that I wouldn't be with kids my age, and that she agreed with Mrs. Pomranka that I should stay with my friends. I didn't know how to tell my mother how few friends I had of any age or how much I wished to finish school. I went upstairs and sat on my bed feeling as I had cuddling cuddles.

But I continued doing my schoolwork well. Excepting two A minuses, my next report card was all A's. My mother showed it to my father.

"That's good," he said. "Get all A's, and I'll give you a dollar."

My next two reports were one with one A- and one with all A's.

"Show it to your dad when he gets home," said my mother.

I went upstairs and sat on my bed to wait for him to come home. I heard him drive into the yard and come into the house. But I didn't go downstairs.

"Go upstairs," said my mother. "Billy's got something to show you."

He did, but I waited for him to come to the bed before I handed it to him, and I didn't rise to do that.

"That's good," he said, but, handing it back to me, he turned back to the stairs.

“What about my dollar?” I asked, nearly in tears.

“You’ll get your dollar,” he said.

He turned only his head back to say that, but, after work the next day, he came upstairs again and gave me the dollar, and that day wasn’t a payday.

Miss Pomranka organized field trips. My mother went with us. Twice we went to Greenfield Village. We saw old cars and a full-size model of the Spirit of St. Louis hanging from a ceiling. Once we went to a fire station.

“Watch,” said my mother standing behind while we waited to see a fireman slide down a pole. “You’ll miss it.”

Turning to look at her, I missed it.

Some Saturday afternoons, on Bob Trana’s TV, on the show *Movie Matinee*, I watched cowboys break chairs over each others’ backs in saloons and throw each other through windows. My father bought me a BB gun for Christmas. Other boys had Red Ryder BB guns with wooden handles. Mine had a plastic handle, and no name was on it. But it had a telescopic sight. All of my family stood in our yard to watch me try it.

“Can you hit that?” asked my father, pointing at a tiny silhouette in a tree across the road.

Neither could I see more of it than its silhouette through the sight, but I aimed and pulled the trigger and saw it fall to the ground. I ran across the road and nearly immediately found it among leaves on the ground. I picked it up with one hand and lay it on my other palm. I felt it warm and limp but dead. It was a yellow warbler. I carried it across the road and showed it to my father. He nodded, but none of them spoke. They left me there and silently returned to the cottage.

But Phil and I tried to shoot starlings living in a birdhouse in front of another cottage. A man came out of the cottage and told us to stop. I thought such was the purpose of BB guns. But, on the gravel path leading to the store between the lake and some of the cottages on cottages, we removed the scope from the gun, and I shot out its lens. Later, bracing a foot against the stock to cock the gun, I broke its plastic stock. But I didn’t do that intentionally. I taped the stock back together with what we called adhesive tape. It was medical tape. We always had it.

BB’s were a dime a pack. So I seldom had any. But my father gave me some with the gun. I set the last empty package on a low limb for Bob Trana to shoot it. I drew an imaginary line with a finger from the pack to the end of the barrel. Bob pulled the trigger before I removed the finger from it. But the finger neither bled much nor hurt much.

Phil took me to the home of a young man who lived near Jimmy Johnson. He lived in the basement of the house. Muskrat skins hung on lines across the basement's ceiling. The man took us into a swamp in the woods to check his traps. Before we checked any, I stepped over a log and broke through the ice. My other leg hadn't crossed the log. So the log kept the rest of me from falling through the ice. But the guy told me I should go home and get some dry socks, to avoid frostbite. I went home, but I didn't change my socks. I also wondered what anyone would do with muskrat skins. But I didn't much care.

Phil and I walked across the ice to Treasure Island. We found that no one had locked the front door of the cottage there. We went inside. We found in its kitchen a hunting knife and a .22 caliber rifle. We talked of stealing them.

"Where could we put them?" asked Phil.

So we didn't steal them. But, on a screen porch of a cottage on our side of the lake, unable to turn the outside knob of its inside door, we broke a pane of the door's window and turned its inside knob. We stole some paring knives from that cottage's kitchen. We could hide them, but, leaving that cottage, I used one of them to cut a porch screen, and, seeing how easily it cut between the strands of wire, I cut more, and we did more in more cottages.

Phil kicked through a window of another cottage's entrance door. Finding fedora hats in a bedroom closet of that cottage, we trounced on the bed the hats. Sliding down that house's banister, I accidentally kicked and broke a chandelier hanging near it. A television was in that cottage's living room. We tried to pull it away from the wall to see its inside. But we pulled too high. So it fell on its face on the floor. Its picture tube broke.

We also broke into the summer cottage of a friend of Peggy's. Her name was Margo. We found in an upstairs bedroom some Winston cigarettes and books of matches. Playing with the matches, we set afire some bedroom curtains. That was also unintentional, but we pulled the curtains from the window to stomp them out. I wondered whether Margo slept in that bedroom and how she'd feel about what we were doing.

We did all that in two days. We entered the cottage on Treasure Island and two of the others the first day and Margo's the second. We entered the first two on our side of the lake through screen porches. So we thought no one would see us. I don't remember how we entered Margo's, but, the next day, police came to our cottage and told my mother neighbors had seen us.

With one exception, I didn't lie to the police. The exception was that I denied stealing the paring knives. I hid them beneath the propane tank that fueled our space heater. I knew how my mother felt about lying, but I thought stealing was worse than lying or vandalism, and my mother supported my lie.

“I asked them why you’d steal paring knives and not steal that hunting knife or the rifle,” she told me.

My sentence was a year of probation and, excepting to go to school or church or places with my parents, restriction to our home. So I spent much of that year at our dining table, drinking coffee with milk and sugar, eating Crestix, and talking with my mother. Excepting the talk, and that no others were there, that was an extension of breakfast.

Crestix, excepting that they weren’t round and didn’t have holes, were like donuts. They came in two sorts. Crushed nuts covering one kind. Powdered sugar covering the other sort. We called them brown Crestix and white Crestix. I often ate them for breakfast instead of cereal. I liked cold cereal before the milk made it soggy. I liked oatmeal if I stirred a lot of sugar into it. I liked Malt-O-Meal after it floated with the sugar to the top of the milk. So dunking the Crestix in coffee with sugar was easier than any of that and took less time, and I thought they were a little like candy. I preferred the nuts to the powdered sugar. But also ate the white ones, occasionally. We also always had both whole wheat bread and white bread and called the whole wheat bread brown bread. My father always ate whole wheat. The other others of us ordinarily ate white. But I occasionally ate whole wheat.

As I dunked the white or brown Crestix into my coffee, my mother told me about my father. He nearly never talked to me. Neither, ordinarily, did she often talk with me for more than a few minutes. But then we talked for hours.

She told me my father been a fireman and shoveled coal in the Navy in World War I. I thought those were two different jobs. She told me he joined the Navy because the Army rejected him for medical reasons and that the Navy discharged him after six months because of arthritis from shoveling coal on a ship on its way to France. She told me he quit high school to enlist but received his high school diploma after his discharg. She told me he was the only member of his family to graduate from high school and that he took a correspondence course in accounting and won election to be County Clerk of St. Joseph County.

She told me his first wife died, that his second wife divorced him for falling asleep during an opera, and that he died twice. She said he bought a brand new 1932 Chevrolet and drove it beneath a moving train, that doctors brought him back to life, once by electric shock and once by adrenalin, and that he told her that then he heard beautiful music. She told me doctors told him he had but six more months to live. But she was telling me that about two decades later. I remember considering that, but I don’t remember considering that I’d never known him to listen to music.

She also told me she met him at a bus stop in Grand Rapids, that he had a big diamond ring on a finger then and showed it to her, and that he told her he might get her one like it.

“But he pawned it,” she said, showing me her engagement ring with its tiny diamond, “and bought me this.”

She also told me he was an accountant for a hospital in Grand Rapids then and that Peggy’s birth was in Grand Rapids but at a different hospital and that, because my father told her he wouldn’t buy a car without taking it for a test drive, she wasn’t a virgin when she married him, and, also about herself, she told me she dropped out of school after three efforts to pass the ninth grade, that the reason was that she had a nervous breakdown, and that a teacher tried to help her.

But, more about me, while I was on probation, Mudge School closed for that summer never to reopen. So, for the fourth grade, I went to a big new elementary school on the south side of Quincy while Peggy went to the older junior high school nearer to Quincy’s main street, and the school buses took a different route. Instead of continuing to the end of our neighborhood and circling past Margo’s house for the return trip as had the bus to Mudge, the bus from the town schools stopped in front of Bob Trana’s grandparents’ grocery store, and, one afternoon, as I walked the rest of the way, through the scattering of trees between Bob’s and Phil’s houses and the road, I heard Bob and Phil shouting my name from Phil’s yard. I didn’t turn, but I stopped and waited until they caught up with me. Then, from each side of me, they punched my face.

“You fucking snitch,” they said, and I began to run.

“Mommy,” I shrieked as I ran the rest of my way home.

“You’re not hurt,” my mother said. “What are you screaming about?”

I didn’t know. But I knew doing that was shameful beyond being cowardly. So, while neither did I have friends in the school in town, I was glad that neither Phil nor Bob was in my class there.

But my father, beyond rowing and fishing and cards and jokes, taught me nothing. So during recess, while most of the boys played baseball, I played in the back of the playground with some of the few other boys who didn’t. One of them gave me a first-baseman’s mitt, but I had no more use for it than he. So I traded it for a Hoyalong Cassady jackknife.

Our main occupation at the back of the schoolyard was taking turns rolling down an embankment in a 55 gallon cardboard tar barrel we found there. That made my clothes smell of tar, and a reason I didn’t change my socks after stepping through the ice was that my mother seldom washed our clothes, but we

didn't do that long. My teacher said the Principal directed that all boys play baseball during recess.

My first problem with that was that I was the last anyone selected for a team. Next was not knowing what to do. My first time at bat, I swung at nothing and walked, and then, from first base, I chased a line drive. Laverne, the most popular kid in my class, had a suggestion.

"He can be umpire," he said.

No one disagreed, and he gave me some instructions. But he didn't tell me I had any responsibilities beyond home plate. So my next problem was that Laverne slid into third base. Everyone looked at me. I wondered why.

"Come on, Bill," said Laverne after the third baseman asked me for a decision. "Say I'm safe. I'm your friend."

"Okay," I said, having no other basis for a decision. "You're safe."

"What?" shouted Laverne, along with the others on both teams.

So, after that, I stayed in the classroom during recess.

I played checkers with Shirley Rogers. Her brothers, Roy and Johnny, were friends of Peggy's. Peggy said she liked Roy because of his name but that she thought Johnny was more interesting.

I didn't know how Johnny interested her more. But, excepting my shame from easily beating Shirley in every game, I enjoyed playing checkers with her. My shame was in seeing her shame in her blue eyes as she looked up at me as she bowed her little blonde head as I jumped her men.

I also spent some of that time drawing. I couldn't draw faces other than from the front or in profile, and I did no shading and drew horses with no joints in their leg. I knew I needed to learn to shade, but I thought I could draw and tried to learn to shade, and Kenny Ferguson, a classmate of mine who lived on a farm, showed me how to draw the joints of horses' back legs.

Peggy told me she and her friends walked downtown during lunch hour and shoplifted. She offered to take me with them and teach me how to do it, but I'd had enough of crime for then, and soon the principle rescinded his baseball policy. So then, during recess, I played on the playground equipment. My favorite was the giant stride. It was a steel post with chains hanging from it with handles at their lower ends.

But once, to show my courage, I picked a fight with the biggest kid in my class. I thought he was too fat and stupid to defend himself. But he hit me once and gave me a black eye. So I quit.

"What happened to you?" my teacher asked me after recess.

"Nothing," I said.

“Your teacher says you’re brave,” my mother told me after her next parent/teacher conference, “for not telling her what that guy did to you.”

But I befriended Todd Ellis. He was much like the kid who’d punched me, but his father was a doctor, and his family had a summer cottage near Margo’s, and my probation officer lifted my restriction early. So I went to Todd’s cottage. It had a tin roof and a garage with a flat roof about a yard from the roof and a little lower. So Todd and I slid down the roof of the cottage to fly about two yards to the roof of his garage.

But we also set the woods afire. A new road went through the woods to the Johnsons’ neighborhood. Beside the road were piles of gravel from the construction. Todd and I lit plastic beanshooters, left them on the side of the gravel toward the woods, and went away. When I returned home, my mother and some of our neighbors were standing in their yards watching the woods burn. We watched firetrucks scream past us to turn around in front of Margo’s and Todd’s cottages to return to put out the fire.

“Were you playing with matches?” my mother asked me.

I lied again.

I also befriended Chesty Blackman. He moved into the house the people who’d driven us to Sunday school had left. He showed me an old aerial bomb in his garage. He and I also decided to buy a Turn-A-Craft. Turn-A-Crafts were small plywood speedboats a man whose name was Turner and some employees built in a pole barn at a new landing on Chesty’s side of the store. We planned to save the money. We never saved any. Chesty moved away.



## Chapter 3

### Challenges

My next friend was Chuck Fitzgerald. He moved into a relatively new white clapboard house on a short road parallel to the new road and between it and the road to the Mudge schoolhouse. His father's company had assigned his father to manage a small factory between the schoolhouse and Quincy.

Chuck called trees challenges and called climbing them conquering them. The trunk of one of the challenges we conquered was much too wide for shinnying, and we could reach where its lowest limbs grew from its trunk. But we conquered it by jumping from the ground to an end of a low-hanging limb.

Chuck also built ships. His father had a workshop in their basement. Chuck sawed the corners from ends of two-by-fours, used a plane to round the corners of the corners he cut, nailed a square piece of one-by-two to each end, and called the result freighters. We floated them on the lake.

But, after we floated them, he drilled holes in them, put an explosive rivet into each hole, built a bonfire in his driveway, and put the freighter in the fire, for us to watch the rivets splinter it. Then he built another.

He also killed frogs with a slingshot. That year large wooden slingshots with thick rubber tubes powering a leather pocket were popular at the lake. Each boy there who had enough money for one had one. Chuck's mother boiled the frogs' leg in saltwater for him to eat them. He asked me whether I wished to try one. Thinking of the frogs alive, I didn't.

His father's car was a light blue 1952 Buick Roadmaster with portholes in its hood. Our 1949 Buick Special had chrome strips on the sides of its hood instead of portholes. The only time Chuck came to my yard he told me his father's car was bigger than my father's. He said that, if I crouched in front of my father's car and looked at it and then did the same in front of his father's car, I'd be able to see that. But, before we left my yard for me to do that, my father came out of our house and asked me whether I wanted a beer.

"What's the matter?" he asked when I looked at him and shook my head. "Don't want to drink beer in front of your churchy friends?"

My mother had stopped going to church, and I didn't know whether Chuck did, but I went to his house and looked at his father's car and saw that he was correct, and my father wrecked our Buick.

I don't know how he wrecked it, but he bought an older Dodge and drove our family in it to a reunion of past American Legion Commanders. The reunion was in a white clapboard grange hall with a belfry. The belfry made me think it had been a church or a school. Standing in front of it, my father and some of the other men drank Four Roses whiskey from a pint bottle. I stood with them.

On our way home, my father also wrecked the Dodge. It spun on an icy bridge between Quincy and the Mudge schoolhouse and flipped upside down in the ditch between the road and a cornfield. I flew out of the car and over the fence between the ditch and the cornfield. Only my mother stayed in the car. When I climbed back over the fence, she was lying on the inside of its roof with its backseat on top of her. Only she went to the hospital. A farm house was on the other side of the road. The farmer called an ambulance. We kids sat in his living room while we waited for it. I don't remember how we made our way home.

My mother went to the hospital twice more while we lived at the lake. The stairway in our cottage had no railing. She fell drunk from it onto the sofa beside it, bounced from the sofa onto the coffee table, and then onto the floor. The other time was to give birth to my sister Sally Sue.

Chuck invited me to spend a night with him in a pup tent in his backyard. His mother didn't let us. She said the radio forecasted rain for that night. I asked Chuck whether that wasn't the purpose of tents. He raised that question with his mother. She didn't change her mind, but she told him we could sleep in sleeping bags on his bedroom floor. Chuck slept in pajamas, but I didn't take my ragged dirty pajamas with me. I thought we'd sleep outside in our clothes. I slept in my underpants but removed my other clothes.

"I've seen toes like that," said Chuck as we climbed into the sleeping bags. "They're going to fall off."

My toes were red and raw. I seldom bathed, but I supposed my not having a week's change of socks and my mother's seldom using her washer was why my toes were red and raw. I most generally blamed my problems on poverty.

An advertisement on the back of a comic book promised prizes for selling White Cloverine Salve. I filled out the form and mailed it. But I dreaded knocking on doors. I didn't expect anyone to do anything for me. I knocked on few doors, sold no salve, and quit trying.

The company wrote to my parents and asked for payment for the salve. My father sent it but didn't reprimand me. The prize I selected was a bow and arrows. They weren't what I expected. They were a narrow stick with a string and three target arrows. The arrows bounced from our garage door. I lost one of them by shooting it into a squirrel's nest in the beech tree. I don't remember what became of the other two.

A woman in the neighborhood hired me and Peggy to remove screws from water heater switches. The factory Chuck's father managed paid her to wire the switches at home. My mother said her pay depended on how many switches she wired. No one told me how much the factory paid her. I shopped comic book advertisements. I showed Chuck the advertisements for the things I hoped to buy. Some were knives and rifles.

We did the work at a card table in the woman's garage. Peggy and I took turns. My thoughts wandered. Once I thought I saw, in my peripheral vision, someone else in the garage. But, when I turned my head to look, no one was there. That added fright to the tedium. I began leaving some of the screws in the switches. My mother told us the woman told her we weren't removing all the screws. She fired both of us. Neither Peggy nor my mother told me they blamed me for that. But I was sorry and felt the shame and guilt.

From the comic book advertisements I bought only an ankle odometer I couldn't make work. I spent the rest of the money the woman paid me at the store, on Coca Cola and frozen Milkshake candy bars with popsicle sticks in them, and playing the jukebox. I sat on the swings behind the store to eat and drink and listen to the music through the store's outside speakers. As I spent the money Bob's grandfather looked at me in a way that made me think he wondered why I was doing that.

We had all the milk we wished to drink, all the peanut butter, apple butter, and grape jelly we wished to eat, and plenty of food I didn't wish to eat, and, beyond our dime allowance, we received a dollar for each birthday, but, like the Methodist church with no steeple, nothing we had seemed to me to measure up to what I thought was ordinary, and Christmas gifts were no exception.

Each year we received several small Christmas gifts and one we called our big present. When our parents asked us what we wanted for Christmas, they were asking what we'd like the big present to be. One Christmas I asked for an electric train. I hoped its locomotive would be like a diesel like Jimmy Johnson's, but the locomotive my father bought me was like a steam engine, and it wasn't Lionel. It was a cheaper Marx with the smallest number of track one needed to make a circle. My father exchanged that for a set with an engine like

a locomotive, and two pieces of straight track making the circle an oval, and an automatic coupler. But that was because neither I nor my father could make the connection from the transformer to the track work, and the new set was also far cheaper than Jimmy Johnson's. I also had the connection problem with that one. But I figured it out and didn't tell my father.

I asked for a set of Lincoln Logs. I received American Logs. Peggy asked for figure skates. She received black ones. But smaller gifts I enjoyed also disappointed me. I enjoyed watching a slinky slink down our steps, but I tangled it unusable in less than a week. I enjoyed watching a toy bulldozer climb over things, but I wished I didn't have to wind it up.

Once my father took me to the basement toy department of Quincy's only dime store. He asked me whether I'd like a model airplane for Christmas. He suggested a model of a B-29 bomber. I mustered the courage to tell him I preferred a jet. He bought the model of a B-47 bomber I selected, but he told me I'd have to wait until Christmas to have it, and, when I assembled it, I left out some parts and glued it sloppily.

But I had that problem with many things. My mother made fudge, both chocolate and peanut butter. I preferred the chocolate, but I also liked the peanut butter, and I also liked the peanut butter cookies she made. But she let us eat but one cookie or piece of fudge per night, and she never made both kinds of fudge at the same time.

The people with the Irish setter left the cottage next door to our. A woman and her husband moved into it. They were older than my parents. Their car was also older than our Dodge. It was a black Chevrolet coup. I never talked to them, but I was grateful for some mistakes the woman made. She tried to make peach or apricot jelly. The mistake was that it was more solid than jelly. She gave it to us. We licked it from spoons.

Chuck's parents took both him and me to a picnic for his father's company. Rain poured down. Chuck and I ran in it. The others there sat in the shelter. I took Laddie on his chain to Chuck's front yard. Laddie rolled over on his back and waved his legs to scratch his back. Chuck's mother was outside. She watched that and scowled. I never again felt welcome there.

My father bought Peggy a bicycle. It was middle-sized but wasn't cheap. It was blue and white, what people called two-tone. It had a light on its front fender and a horn in a cowl between its crossbars. Batteries operated both. She tried to teach me to ride it. I couldn't learn that from her, but a kid younger than I moved into a cottage near ours, and he had a smaller bicycle.

He and I made what we called machineguns. We made them of broomsticks and wire spools from the factor Chuck's father managed. But we

also discovered that I could keep my balance on his bicycle if I straddled it and started it down the slope from our cottage to the lake before picking up my feet.

Chuck had full-size bicycle. He kept it in his garage and never rode it. I asked him to start me on it by giving me. I road it up and down the road between Margo's cottage and the store. With the loop past Margo's cottage and the space for parking at the store, I didn't need to stop. I did that for hours on several consecutive days. But, coming home from school at the beginning of the next schoolyear, I found a big hole beside our cottage.

My mother told me our landlady had sold the house and that the hole was to be a septic tank for indoor plumbing for the new owners.

But, before we moved, the hole gave me a use for my American logs.

Many frogs were in the hole. I built a house for them on the pile of dirt from it. I'd saved the popsicle sticks from my frozen Milkshake bars. I stuck them in the dirt and use some of my mother's sewing thread to tether frogs to them. I tied the thread around their bellies near their back legs. But it turned the legs of an especially small one blue and killed it. So I cut all of them loose and disassembled the house. That's my last memory of living at the lake.

We moved back to Coldwater, into a big old gray stucco house on West Washington Street. Washington Street was a block south of Pearl Street. Our house was a half block west of Monroe Street. The house was about two blocks from the Stag. Our landlady at the lake had inherited it. She left in it not only the decedents furniture but also their cooking utensils, dinnerware, and much else. In its parlor were a Victrola with records and a bookcase with books. Behind a storeroom behind the kitchen was a workshop with a workbench with a vice, some hammers, and some black and white photographs of lightning. The photographs were in frames above the windows above the workbench.

The house had four bedrooms. Sally slept in her crib in the downstairs bedroom where our parents slept. Nancy and Peggy shared one of the three upstairs bedrooms. Dewey and I shared another. The other had no bed, but a picture of Jane Russell was on the door to its closet. In it she was lying in a haystack. Much of her large breasts were visible. I threw darts at the picture but tried not to hit Jane Russell. I don't remember how I acquired the darts.

The victrola required constant cranking and changed its speed with the speed of the cranking. I used the records as frisbees in the back yard and left them there. They broke when I threw them and melted in the summer sun.

Fruit trees were in the back and side yards. Behind the workshop was an apple tree. A plum tree and a cherry tree were in the side yard. The kitchen opened to the side yard. In brush behind the backyard was a pear tree. Also, at the corner of the backyard nearest the pear tree, was a butternut tree, and

grapevines were at the back of the yard between the pear tree and the apple tree and along the fence on the side of the yard on the other side of the apple tree. But the apples were crab, and the plums were yellow, and the grapes and cherries were sour. So my main interest in the trees was in climbing them.

But my mother stewed rhubarb she picked from the backyard on the east side of ours, and my father suggested that I plant a garden beside the grapevines on the west side of our yard. He bought some seeds. I planted them, but I never weeded the garden. I harvested nothing other than a few small carrots and spent more time in the backyards across the street than in ours. Many children lived on that block, and no fences were between the yards. So the children on that side of the street treated those yards as one, and so did I.

Shirley and Verle Tabor lived directly across the street from us. Shirley was about a year older than Peggy. Verle was about a year younger. Connie Cornell and her brothers, Donnie and Ronnie, lived in the next house east of the Tabors'. Connie was a year younger than I. Donnie was about a year older. Ronnie was about Peggy's age. Audrey, Mary, and Carol Johnson lived in the next house east of Connie's. They were between Peggy's age and Sally's. Audrey was the oldest. Carol the youngest. Their house was a duplex. Martha Goebel and her mother lived in the east side of it, but Martha was an adult. The Graces lived in the next house east. David was about my age. His sister Carolyn was about Peggy's age, and his sister Nancy was about Nancy's age. Their sister Linda was older than Peggy. Their brother Eddie was in the Navy. David immediately became my friend.

But I also spent a lot of time alone in the workshop. That Christmas my father bought me a claw hammer, a crosscut saw, and a plane. The hammer was more modern than those I found in the workshop. I had no money for building materials, but Larry Knapp's father delivered our groceries and gave me some orange crates, and David and I wandered all over Coldwater and found scraps of balsa behind Coldwater's bobber factory. I built a guitar. I used some of the balsa as its neck, a cigar box my father brought home from the Stag as its body, and some of my father's nylon fishing line as its strings.

David and I formed a club, in an attic over the workshop. The house had a garage sharing a wall with the workshop. A ladder on the garage side of the wall gave us access to the attic. A small wooden table and two small wooden chairs in the attic straddled the workshops ceiling beams. A light, a bare lightbulb hung over the table. Perhaps because the house was mine, we agreed that I should be President. We made David Treasurer. But we had no money. So I guess that was because we knew of no other title. But we had some wealth we shared.

“What do you think it is?” asked David as I showed him a post I found in the house.

It was about as long as baseball bats and tapered to a nub on its narrow end, but it flared a little at the other end, was a little narrower than a bat, and flared a little at its wide end.

“Maybe it’s a bedpost,” I said. “It’s straighter than a baseball bat and not as wide.

“We can still use it like a bat,” said David.

So we called it the bedpost but used it as a bat. We had neither a baseball bat nor a baseball. But we hit rocks across the backyards.

On Pearl Street, behind the brush behind our backyard, was the back of Coldwater’s A&P store. Across a fence along an alley on the west side of the store was Bob McNall’s house. My father knew his father from when he was County Clerk of St. Joseph County. When we lived on Pearl Street my mother took me to their house. Bob was a year younger than I and then hid behind his mother’s skirt. But, when I lived on Washington Street, I went to his house alone and knocked on the front door of his house, and he and I became friends.

His mother’s parents lived most of the first floor of the house. His parents’ living room and kitchen were in most of the northeastern part of the first floor, but their bedrooms and a big room Bob used as a playroom were upstairs on that side of the house. The other side of the second floor was an apartment. Bob’s mother’s mother was a realtor and rented it to tenants. She owned the house and used a room in the front of the side of the east side of it as her office. Bob’s father was a tax account and used a room on the west side of their living room and kitchen as his office. Both of their offices opened to their living rooms, but Bob’s grandmother’s office also opened to a walk to the street, and behind it was a yard with a fence around it for Bob’s miniature collie, Lassie. Both living rooms opened to the stairs and a hallway to the front porch.

My mother told me Bob’s father’s brother had done something that earned my father’s contempt. But she said my father didn’t think that was a reason to dislike Bob’s father, and she didn’t say what the uncle did. Bob had a desk in an end of his father’s office and a big electric train set in his upstairs playroom. But I spent more time with David.

My father replaced the Dodge with a green 1953 Buick Special with three portholes in its hood. David’s father had a 1956 Chevrolet the colors of Peggy’s bicycle, and the Graces owned their home. My father said only Cadillacs were better than Buicks, that only Fords were cheaper than Chevies, that owning a house was too much trouble, and that property taxes and maintenance made owning a house more expensive than renting one. Also

David's house was smaller than ours. But David and I never talked of any of that.

Once my father and David's went fishing together at Marble Lake. They went in our Buick and rented a row boat at Bob Trana's grandparents' landing. David and I rode along to go swimming.

"Don't go over your titties," shouted David's father as David and I waded toward the raft as my father rowed them past us from the channel.

David tried to kick his way to the raft. But he panicked and flapped his arms. I tried to help him.

"Stand up," shouted a man on the raft.

We'd struggled our way back to water not much higher than our waists.

Once David's father took David and me fishing. They fished from among trees on a shore of another lake, and their cane poles were smaller than my father's. I don't remember catching any fish with them. But I enjoyed that more than I ever enjoyed fishing with my father.

Next door to David's house was a vacant house. David said his friend Joe Weibel had lived there. David and I crawled into the crawlspace beneath the house. We found there a can of beer and a screwdriver. We used the screwdriver to punch a hole in the top of the can. The beer sprayed the floor joists above us.

A small roof was over a door to that house on its side toward David's house. David and I pretended to hang me from one of its supports. I don't remember how we acquired the rope, but we tied one end of it into a noose and threw it over the support. I put my head through the noose and pulled myself up by the support. David pulled the end of the rope to take up the slack. The rope wedged into the angle where the support met the side of the house. David lifted me for me for me to remove my neck from the noose. For many years, we joked that I'd saved David from drowning and that he'd saved me from hanging. I tied both ends of the rope to the apple tree in my back yard, notched the ends of a board, and put a board in the loop from that to use it as a swing.

Our school for the fifth grade was Lincoln Elementary. It was behind Roosevelt Junior High School. Roosevelt faced Washington Street two blocks east of our block. In the lot beside Roosevelt, where kids played Baseball, Danny Parker put me in a headlock and shook his other fist in my face. But he didn't hit me.

David told me he thought the reason Danny was a bully was that he had a glass eye. He said he'd thrown a knife at a tree while he was riding past it on his bicycle and that the knife bounced back into his eye. But others bullied us, and we didn't discuss why Danny bullied us more.



Once, as David and I walked across Waterworks Park after watching the Fourth of July fireworks display over the river from the Branch County Fairgrounds, I walked between Terry Ward and a little girl with whom he was walking hand in hand. Terry said he should kick my ass. But Tom Ward, Terry's twin brother, told him I didn't do that intentionally. Both of the Ward twins had a reputation for bullying. But that told me Tom wasn't as much of a bully as Terry was.

Bob McNall never came to my house on Washington Street. But he shared his desk with me in his house. David came to my backyard and garage, but, though I occasionally was in his house, neither was he ever in mine there.

Peggy told me people could smoke grapevines. David and I crawled beneath the vines arching from the fence along the west side of my backyard and tried smoking the dead ones on the ground there. In our clubhouse we smoked Winston cigarettes David stole from his father.

The grapevines burned my tongue. I choked trying to inhale the cigarette smoke. A storeroom was between our kitchen and the workshop. A window was between our clubhouse and the storeroom. My mother saw the smoke. She didn't spank me for that, but she told my father. Two big chairs were in the parlor. He nearly never went into the parlor. He and my mother played cards in the living room. Neither did he spank me, but he the two chairs face-to-face near the Victrola and lectured me.

"What if you'd burned the house down?" he asked.

David and I swung on vines hanging from trees over the part of the Coldwater River behind Coldwater's sewage disposal plant. Eddie, David's brother, sent him a sailor cap. He came home and bought a 22. caliber rifle. Ostensibly to shoot squirrels, he took the rifle and us to where we swung on the vines. He shot at one squirrel and missed. He said bullets were too expensive for David or me to try.

David and I played in the railroad switchyard along Park Avenue at the end of Monroe Street two blocks south of Washington. The loading dock on the freight terminal had a ramp at one end. To fly over the ramp we began running at the other end.

An engineer gave us a ride on a locomotive. It was a diesel but had a fireman. While the fireman did the engineer's job, the engineer took us out to a walkway along a side of the engine. He showed us some gauges and told us the railroad was trying to get rid of firemen because the diesel engines didn't burn coal. He talked about featherbedding and said the firemen had to check the gauges. I didn't understand what he was saying, but neither was I happy when

he said he was moving on and that we'd have to get down. David and I grinned the rest of the afternoon.

We also climbing ladders to walkways far above the ground between gas company buildings further down the tracks. We also stared at a stuffed owl and other things in a big display case in the main hallway of the Branch County courthouse. We wandered anywhere we could.

"Do you know who lives there?" David asked, stopping in front of a house on North Clay Street.

"No," I said looking at the screen porch across the front of the house.

"Linda Sours," said David as we walked on. "She's beautiful."

He told me she was in our grade but went to Franklin Elementary School because her house was on the side of Clay Street away from our neighborhood. That wasn't the Franklin Elementary School on Pearl Street where I went to Kindergarten. It was a new one a block south of Pearl Street at the end of Fremont Street. The city had torn down the old one. The new one was also brick, but it was one story. So it had no fire escape.

Peggy's first boyfriend in Coldwater was Don Smith. The first girl I thought might be my girlfriend after our return to Coldwater was Don's sister Joyce. She was in my fifth grade class at Lincoln Elementary School. Harold Siler was also in our class. He had a crush on Judy Bowditch. She was also in that class. Her father was the Paster of Coldwater's Baptist Church.

"I love Judy," chanted Harold. "You love Joyce."

When our class drew names for Christmas gifts that year, Harold found a way to swap names for us to have Joyce's and Judy's names. I wanted to give Joyce one of the glass and chrome engagement rings I saw in dime stores. But my father took all of our family to do that shopping and told me I didn't want to give her a cheap ring. He suggested that instead I buy her a jigsaw puzzle picturing a mill on a stream. I did and was ashamed to speak to her from then on.

Another kid in my class suggested that I join his Cub Scout pack. At a meeting I attended the members drilled holes in logs. They called the result birdfeeders. I did that and hung the result over the concrete porch outside our kitchen. But the holes were for suet, and I had no money for suet, or for the weekly dues. So I went to no more Cub Scout meetings.

That kid also had a paper route and asked me to go to the office of the *Coldwater Daily Reporter* to helped him fold papers, and I did, but, having no bicycle, I couldn't help him deliver them, and, though that kid was about as friendless as I, I thought no one would give me a job there if I did have a bicycle.

Kids, telling other kids they had cooties, blew or brushed imaginary bugs from themselves. Kids they said had cooties were kids they thought were stupid or ugly or fat or poor. But unpopularity for any reason was enough.

Karen Brabent and her friend Wilma were larger than the other girls in my class. They weren't obese, but I never knew them to talk with anyone other than one another. I heard Wilma accuse Karen of stealing her wallet. Karen denied that, but it ended their friendship. I never heard anyone tell them they had cooties, and I never heard anyone say I had cooties. But I felt sorry for them and dreaded the possibility of anyone saying that of me.

The Coldwater Public Library was on Chicago Street a block from the school. I walked there during lunch, borrowed as many books as it let one borrow at once, and carried them back to school. That limit was three. Peggy told me the Branch County Library had no limit. It was in the basement of the courthouse between the city library and the school. I borrowed as many as I could carry to school. I stacked them on the floor beside my desk. But I didn't read them.

Peggy read many books. She read the Bobbsey Twins books and recommended the Hardy Boys books to me, but she also read *Little Women* and *Wuthering Heights*. Wishing I could go birdwatching, I checked out Audubon's *Birds of America*. But I had no binoculars. I also checked out *Gray's Anatomy*. I looked at the pictures in *Birds of America*, but I seldom opened *Gray's Anatomy*. Another reason I checked out those books was that they were big, and the city library didn't permit checking out what it called oversized books.

But I didn't do that the next schoolyear. After Lincoln Elementary closed at the end of that schoolyear, it never reopened. So, for the sixth grade, David and I went to the new Franklin school. It was too far from the libraries for me to walk to either during lunch.

An old man helped kids from Franklin cross Pearl Street. He carved little wooden boats and gave them to kids. But he gave none to David or me. Sixth grade boys patrolled the other intersections around the school. Mrs. Tupilek, our teacher, never selected David for that. Her husband owned Coldwater's Lincoln and Mercury dealership. She selected me for Safety Patrol once but not for long. I couldn't clean my white safety patrol belt to her standards. My mother tried to help me. We tried laundry soap, dish soap, and bath soap. The laundry soap and dish soap left it dingy. We couldn't rinse it enough. The orange Lifebuoy bath soap my family used left it orange.

Mrs. Tupalek asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. A picture of the Parthenon was in our history book. I learned to distinguish the three basic orders of Greek Architecture. I also thought I'd like to build houses I'd enjoy

more than the houses in which I'd lived. So I told her I wanted to be an architect.

"Oh," she said looking down at me. "There are too many architects. How about a civil engineer? Do you like bridges?"

Linda Sours was in our class. I agreed with David that she was pretty. During recess, he and I took turns stealing kisses from her. One day, with no warning, as I stood near the recess entrance to the school, he punched me in my solar plexus. As I gasped for breath, Mrs. Tupalek came out of school. She pounded my back. She didn't ask me why I was gasping.

She asked me to write a report on Janus for the Christmas assembly. She suggested that I put the report in a book and hold the book open in front of me to read the report. I told her I'd memorized it. She suggested that I do it anyway, to be sure. I didn't take her advice. As I recited it, I saw Linda sitting with the other kids in front of me on the floor of the gym. I forgot the rest of the report.

"What's that smell?" asked Jim Shray sitting beside me on the floor during another assembly.

He looked down at the bottom of my shoe nearest to him.

"Oh," he said, and he returned his attention to the assembly.

The soles of my shoes had worn through. I was folding paper and putting it in them to keep my socks from wearing through. The paper wore through quickly. My father bought our shoes at Waters' Shoe Store. I enjoyed that process, seeing the new shoes in the little mirrors standing on the floor and the salesman feeling the toes of the shoes to be sure they fit, but my father took all of us kids there periodically. He didn't take us there whenever we needed new shoes. But then, though I didn't tell my mother the problem, I let her see it.

"Look at his shoes," my mother said to my father.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked, but I didn't know how to tell him the reason was that I knew how little money we had.

David's father gave him a new green full-size bicycle as fancy as Peggy's. But he couldn't ride it with me on its handlebars. I tried giving him a ride on it and found that I could. Riding into a driveway, I saw some change in its gravel. I jumped from the bicycle. David wobbled on his handlebars until the bicycle fell on its side. The change was about 75 cents. We took David's bicycle to his house and walked downtown to Newberry's dime store to buy a baseball. We knew Newberry's sold them for 69 cents and that the minimum price at the other stores was 98 cents.

Instead of taking the ball directly home to try it with the bedpost, we decided to take it to the ball diamond at Waterworks Park. But we walked

across the street before deciding that. So we walked past the park across Chicago Street from the Coldwater Public Library. I saw that the bore of one of the old cannons there was about the diameter of the ball. I tried the fit. My fingers slipped. The ball rolled down into the cannon. We never saw it again.

Danny Parker stopped bullying me. He tried to teach me to mount his bicycle on the run. Running beside it while pushing it by its handlebars, he set one foot on a pedal and swung his other leg over the seat. I couldn't do that, but, also that day, though I don't remember how he knew I had an electric train, he offered to trade me his bicycle for it. His bicycle was middle-weight and had no headlight or horn, but it was full-size, and my electric train didn't work. To see how it worked, I'd removed the motor from it and squirted 3-in one oil into its armature. The oil insulated the brushes from the armature.

But, after I showed it to him in my room, we went downstairs and asked my father's permission. He said no, and he didn't say why, and I didn't understand that. But that year, for Christmas, he gave me a bicycle.

"I know you snuck a peak," he said Christmas morning.

Before Christmas, he hid it beneath a quilt in the storage room. I looked beneath the quilt but didn't turn on the light. So I couldn't see what color it was. It was red and middle weight. But, though cold and drizzly, that wasn't a white Christmas. So I rode it all that day.

Another day I gave David a ride on its handlebars to Holbrook's Wood Products Company. Holbrook's was small factory near the end of Monroe Street across Park Avenue from the switchyard. We climbed to its roof to jump from it into a pile of sawdust and scraps of wood. One of the scraps was an Indian club. The company hadn't removed the square end that had attached it to the lathe. Falling on it, David cut his head. Afraid of being on probation again, I refused to give him a ride home. After thinking about that at home, I walked across the street and told David's father the truth, but David already had lied. So his father punished him for lying, presumably by spanking him. So David walked across the street and, beneath the apple tree in my backyard, asked me why I did that. I told him he shouldn't lie.

"You're going to hell for swearing," he said.

But we rode our bicycles to Marble Lake.

We found Chuck hanging out with Phil and Bob. Near the tree Chuck and I had conquered by way of its low-hanging bow, Chuck and Phil and Bob compared their pubic hair. David and I didn't join in that.

"Are you ashamed of me?" Chuck asked me behind the store while the others were in the store.

No," I said.

Chuck went into the store. I vomited beneath the swings. Another time I rode to the lake, I spent the night on Chuck's sofa. His mother didn't give me a pillow or a blanket. The night was cold. I spent it wishing for dawn and wondering why she didn't.

In our backyard I asked Nancy to pitch a baseball to me for me to hit it with the bedpost. I don't remember how I acquired the ball. I hit it into her belly. I hoped it didn't hurt her, but more I feared what might happen to me if it did.

Susan Stetler came to visit her. Susan lived on a farm between the lake and Mudge School. Sheep grazed between her house and the road. I knew of no friends of Nancy's other than Nancy Grace and Susan. As I stood at the foot of the bed where Peggy and Nancy slept, Nancy and Susan sat on it talking of dildos. Susan said she used carrots. I thought of Susan using me for that. But she'd gained weight since we left the lake. So I also thought I shouldn't think of that.

In our wandering, David and I saw Sharon Hook walking along Walnut street behind our school. David picked up a handful of gravel from a driveway, threw it at her, and told me to do the same. I thought most kids would say she had cooties. But I didn't do it. I also wondered why David did. But I didn't ask him.

On our way to Grand Rapids, my father let me drive his 1953 Buick. I could operate its automatic transmission and accelerator pedal, but I couldn't keep it in its lane. After less than a half hour of our drifting back and forth between the other lane and the shoulder, my father took back the wheel.

In Grand Rapids, walking with Uncle Wally, I told him the make and model year of nearly every car we passed. Bob and David and I learned that by looking at cars and comparing them. I read some of the model names from the letters on the cars. But I didn't tell Uncle Wally that.

"He told me the make of every car we saw," he told Aunt Hazel.

Uncle Bob collected plastic models of old cars. He was Aunt Hazel's husband before she married Uncle Wally, but the four were friends. He let me play with the models on the carpeting of his and his wife's apartment.

"I wouldn't let anyone else play with them," he told me.

Aunt Hazel died of a heart attack. None of us kids went to the funeral, but our parents took all of us to Grand Rapids for them to go to it. We slept in the big blue house. Cousin Leonard was home from prison. I shared a bed with him and Uncle Wally. I felt someone's hand inside the front of my underpants. I was afraid to say anything.

Rolland Travelbee was Peggy's second boyfriend in Coldwater. People called him Buzz. In a black cowboy hat, black cowboy boots, and jeans he kept low on his hips, he played guitar, did lariat tricks, and stuck knives in things by throwing them. I liked him, and he treated me as Peggy did. He had a switchblade with a wooden handle and tried to teach me to stick it in the trunk of the apple tree in our backyard. I had peeled some of the bark from it. The knife hit the bare space sideways and fell to the ground in pieces. I felt both fear of how Buzz might react and shame for doing that to him

He picked up the pieces with one hand. laid them on the palm of his other hand, and touched the pieces with the index finger of the hand with which he'd picked them up.

"Maybe I can fix it," he said.

Then I felt shame and gratitude.

Peggy tried to elope with him. They, a friend of Buzz's, and Peggy's friend Eve Sellers, whose brother Chris was in my class, pitched pup tents in woods behind a cornfield across Sprague Street from Branch County 'sfairgrounds. Police found them by a report of the fire they built.

"The police complained about getting their shoes muddy walking across the cornfield," my mother told me.

Buzz was eighteen. Peggy was fourteen. Buzz went to prison for two years for statutory rape. Peggy went to reform school for two weeks.

"The judge said it's to teach her a lesson," my mother told me.

On the weekend between the two weeks, our father drove the rest of our family there. But we kids waited in the car. Looking up at the wire mesh covering the windows of the second story of the brick building, I saw her waving to us from one and tried to smile. But I could neither smile nor wave.

"Uncle Wally screwed me in Grands Rapids when we were living at the lake," she told me after her release, as we stood in our front yard shuffling our feet among the dead leaves there. "He told me not to tell anyone. I didn't, then. but I told the psychologist at the reform school."

"I'm glad Hazel didn't live to know about that," said our Mother.

"Nothing we can do about it now," said our father.

But I can't place in time a memory of Buzz.

Peggy took me to a farm where he was working.

"Want to see me pitch itslich?" he asked.

He took us into a barn and pitched it with a pitchfork from the silo into the cows' feeding trough. He told us it was alfalfa with some chemicals in it. My memory tells me he was working there as part of his parole from prison, but

my memory also tells me I never saw him after he went to prison, and neither can I place in time another memory of Peggy.

“I’m the third biggest whore in Coldwater,” she said. “Verle Taber’s the biggest. Doris Elkin’s the third.”

I don’t remember whether she told me that before or after Buzz was her boyfriend. So I don’t know what to do with that memory, and Doris lived in another neighborhood. But once I saw Verle barefoot in a bathrobe walking with Peggy across the street from Verle’s house to ours. I was sitting on the studio couch in our living room.

“Should I show him?” asked Verle, standing in front of me with her hands on the lapels of her robe.

“Yes! Yes!” I said in my mind, leaning back against the wall, but Peggy said no, and she didn’t

Peggy told me a boy showed her a spaceship he had in his garage. She said he told her he’d been to Mars in it and that he offered her a ride there in it. But I don’t remember if she said she accepted the ride.

David’s sister Linda married Chuck Spaulding. Linda and Chuck moved into a ramshackle little blue-shingled shotgun sort of house at one of the lakes north of Coldwater. David and I rode there with them in pouring down rain. As we made the last left turn before reaching the house, we collided with a car coming from the opposite direction. Buzz Travelbee’s parents and his younger brother Rodney were in the other car. Rodney had also been a friend of Peggy’s.

Once or twice David and I used my wagon for a paper drive. I don’t remember how I repaired the wagon. On Marshall Street the pile we collected fell over several times in one block. A woman came out of her house and gave us a spool of pink wrapping paper ribbon. She said we might be able to use it to tie the load to the wagon.

“From now on,” said David, “Pink’s my favorite color.”

It helped enough for us to bring the whole pile to my house. My father drove us to a junkyard with the pile in the trunk of our Buick. Part of the collection was a set of encyclopedias. The man at the Junkyard said he couldn’t take them with the covers on them. My father waited as David and I removed the covers. The man gave us less than a dollar for the whole pile.

Twice David and I snuck into Coldwater’s drive-in movie theatre. The first time, we walked there across a cow pasture. David stepped in a pile of cow manure. We sat on the ground between cars of paying people. The second time, we rode with others in the trunk of a car. I discovered that I was claustrophobic, but I kept myself from shrieking or pounding on the trunk lid.



David passed to the seventh grade on the condition. The condition was that he return to the sixth grade if his performance during his first seventh grade marking period didn't meet seventh grade standards. David told me his mother asked school officials to put us in no classes together.

"She said you're a bad influence on me," he said.

A little gray-shingled Assembly of God church was on the northwestern corner of Washington and Monroe Streets. Its pastor was my seventh grade math teacher. His name was Alfred J. Hamlin. He had a little mustache resembling Hitler's. His students referred to him as Little Hitler. I couldn't pay close enough attention to him to learn much. I told David I didn't understand fractions. We were sitting on my front steps. He explained them to me, but, at the end of the marking period, he returned to the sixth grade.

Bob and Larry Long, their parents, and a girl whose name I don't remember, moved into an old brown-shingled house on the southwest corner of Washington and Monroe Streets. They didn't play in the yards where the other kids of the block played. But once I walked home from school with the girl.

"Eat me, son," she said, "Eat me."

I don't remember why she said that or how my father knew I was talking with her, but he told me she'd eat me alive. Bob Long was older than Larry and was in the eighth grade. But he asked me to be his locker partner.

Wishing to build things, I took shop that year. But the first marking period was drafting class. Dale Otis was in my drafting class. People called him Daily Odor. He also asked me to be his locker partner. I felt sorry for him. So I moved from Bob's locker to Dale's.

"Did I do something wrong?" asked Bob.

I told him he didn't, but then I felt sorry for him.

My math book disappeared. Hoping to find it, and because of my family's poverty, I waited weeks before telling my parents. They bought me another, but, a few weeks later that one disappeared. I never told them that. So I had no math book the remainder of that year.

But, thanks to David, I didn't need one, and I excelled in drafting class.

## Chapter 4

### Camp

Charlie McGee, the shop and drafting teacher, drew two views of three-dimensional shapes on the chalkboard and asked us to draw the third view. He did that every day of drafting class. No student other than Jim Barber and I could draw the third view of one, and Jim's was different from mine. Mr. McGee asked us to make models of our drawings.

"Use anything you want," he said. "Paper, cardboard, whatever. You can bring them to me tomorrow."

I used cardboard from the back of a writing table. I used a ruler and a ballpoint pen to draw the sides on the cardboard and a razor blade my father had discarded to cut along the lines. The razor blades came in a plastic box with one side for the new ones and the other side for those he'd used. I kept some boxes with no new ones and used them many purposes. I used Scotch tape to join the sides of my model, and, excepting two edges of a triangular side, I put all the tape inside. I kept the triangular side open to put the other tape inside.

Both my solution and Jim's were correct, but Jim used notebook paper and Scotch tape, put all of the tape outside, and omitted one side. Mr. McGee asked me whether he could put mine in a display case in the classroom with other examples of what he was trying to teach, and he also gave me one of the pieces of Masonite the class used as drawing boards. He said it was extra and that I could take it home, and, the next marking period, when we moved into the shop, he asked me to share his work bench with him. Two students shared each of the other workbenches.

Doug Hoopengartner, my geography teacher, also taught chorus and directed the choir for the Methodist Church. Afternoons after school, he and Mr. McGee worked on a cabinet for his stereo equipment. I stayed after school to help. I didn't help much, but they called each other by their first names, and Mr. McGee smoked. I enjoyed hearing and seeing that.

Mr. Hoopengartner also appointed me business manager of the school newspaper. He founded it that year. Other students sold the papers for a nickel

each. So did I, but I also collected the others' receipts from them. Jim Barber asked me whether he could have his nickel back if he didn't like what he read. I told him he could. He said didn't like what he read. I refunded his nickel.

"We have people buy our papers back," said Mr. Hoopengartner to my geography class.

I resigned in embarrassment.

Bob McNall had a set of handicraft books on some bookshelves in his living room. He said his father asked him whether he rather have the books or a bicycle. He said his father told him he could learn more from the books than from the bicycle. But later his father also gave him a big fancy black and white Schwinn bicycle. I don't know what Bob learned from the books, but I found in one of the books instructions for building a model of a sailing sloop. I borrowed the book, took it to school, and asked Mr. McGee whether it could be my shop project for the year. He said he wouldn't approve it for any other student. But he approved it for me.

The model would be more than two feet long and nearly a yard tall. Building its hull required cutting strips of wood and gluing them together. The method of gluing them was to build a frame, put glue on the edges of the strips, and tack them to frame. I built the frame, cutting three strips, put the glue on them, and tacked them to the frame. But I spent most of the remainder of my shop class time that year talking with other students.

Mrs. Butts, my English teacher, lived next door to John Wilson, one of my classmates. He invited me to his house. We talked with Mrs. Butts there but on the sidewalk where the two yards met. In his basement he showed me a Ham radio and some model airplanes. He said the radio was his father's but that he built the planes. Gasoline engines powered them. He said the material over the frames of their wings was silk span. He pushed me against a wall of the basement and told me to be the girl while he was the boy. I didn't, and neither did I ever returned to that house.

Mrs. Butts asked some of my English class the amounts of our allowances. Steve Wettle said his was ten dollars a week. He said he had to buy clothing from that but that his father also gave him a half share of General Motors stock. I dreaded the possibility of her asking me that question.

But she didn't, and she quit teaching to keep books for Woodward and Pollock Lumber Company, one of Coldwater's two lumber yards, and Nancy McGee, Charlie McGee's wife, tried to replace her. Mr. McGee's students referred to him as Charlie and expected her to be as informal as he was. She wasn't. One, Junior Zabonick, shook a fist in her face. She sent him to the Principal's office and sent others there for lesser reasons. I was one of them.

“Mrs. McGee?” asked the Principal’s secretary.

I nodded.

“Study hall,” she said, and that was my only punishment.

I felt sorry for Mrs. McGee. I thought she was a little overweight, but, with her black curly hair and blue eyes, I liked her appearance generally. She sent me to study hall only for talking with others while she tried to teach. She quit. John Wilson told me she swore never to teach again.

Oscar Renshaw taught high school sociology and economics. His wife paid Peggy to clean there house. She gave Peggy a box of things her adult sons used for scientific experiments when they were children. Peggy gave it to me. One of the things was a telephone generator. Mr. Cooper, my science teacher, connected some wires to one in class, put the other ends of the wires into a big beaker of saltwater, called me to the front of the class, asked me to put a hand into the beaker, and turned the generator’s crank.

“Son of a bitch!” I said, jerking my hand out of the water and splashing some of the water onto him.

My father gave me a jackknife for Christmas. It was smaller than his, but its handle was the same color, and he said it was a good one. I didn’t ask for it, but I was grateful for it and proud of it. Mr. Cooper borrowed it from me in class. I never saw it again. I asked him whether he still had it.

“I didn’t steal your knife,” he said.

His wife was my next English teacher and taught the remainder of the year. I preferred her appearance to Mrs. McGee’s in some ways but not in others. Her skin wasn’t a clear, and her hair and eyes were brown, but she was thinner. I remember nothing else about her.

At the beginning of the last marking period that year, Mr. McGee told me I had to complete a project, if I were to pass the course. I used some scrap plywood in the shop to build some bookshelves. I thought that was easy. Jim Barber said their dado joints were nice. I passed with a B.

Jim Barber held my feet while I did six hundred pushups in one gym period. I ran a lap around the gym after each hundred. Coach Van Meter, the gym teacher, told my class to walk through some athletes foot power in a box at the entrance to showers. I had bleeding ingrown toenails and seldom showered.

“Should I go through it with toes like this?” I asked him.

“No,” he said.

Changing out of my gym clothes, back to back with Harold Siler on a bench, he and I bumped several times.

“What’s your problem?” I asked, standing up and turning around.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Harold of the others there.

They looked at me and didn't answer.

Once I skipped gym class. Bob and Danny Waite were about the ages of Bob and Larry Long. They lived on East Washington Street east of the school. During gym class I walked with them and others to their house. We smoked cigarettes. Bob talked about screwing animals at the stockyards. He said the difference between screwing sheep and screwing pigs was that pigs' vaginas had a left-handed twang.

One morning, walking to school, I reached the corner where the ball diamond was at the same time Richard Linsky did. So we walked and talked the rest of the way to the entrance to the school together. I told him I knew karate. He sneered. In gym class he picked a fight with me. Coach Van Meter handed us boxing gloves and told the others students to form a ring around us. We stared at each other until Coach Van Meter took the gloves back.

Coach Van Meter, was also a study hall monitor. He had a 1x4 board about four feet long for punishing students. About three feet of it had holes in it to make it sting. He used the other foot as a handle. Once, for talking, he ordered me out to the hallway, told me to bend over, and used it on me. But he hit me but once, and the hit didn't hurt.

Donnie Cornell was in the eighth grade. He had a little Allstate motorcycle. He gave me a ride to school on it. The next few mornings I waited in front of my house for him to leave his for school. He never gave me another ride on it, but Jim, Shirley Tabor's boyfriend, gave me a ride on his Harley Davidson.

"I had it up to eighty," said Jim to Shirley after the ride.

"With him on the back?" asked Shirley.

"You can't tell me he isn't getting some of that," said my father looking from one of our living room window as he and my mother played cards as Jim sat on the front edge of the Tabors' front porch with his hands clasped behind Shirley's butt while she stood in front of him.

Opening the hood of our Buick, I saw that it had a straight eight engine. Removing the air cleaner, I saw that its carburetor had a one-barrel carburetor. But its barrel was more than two inches in diameter.

"Why don't you show him what it'll do?" my mother asked my father in our living room.

My father often fished at Byers' landing at a lake north of town. On a curve between it and Coldwater was a junkyard. In front of the junkyard was a bridge with concrete guard rails. People called the curve dead man's curve.

I hadn't completely stopped fishing with my father. The first time I did that after my mother asked him that, he took that curve at about ninety miles an

hour. Summers, for the breeze, he turned the wind vents at the fronts of the car's front windows as far back as he could. So I could hardly open my eyes. But I opened them wide enough to see the speedometer. But I wasn't afraid.

My father paid me a quarter to wax the Buick. He told me several times that I'd left streaks of wax on it. I never removed all of them.

The Tabors had a pear tree in their backyard behind the end of their driveway. It was visible from our card table. Because it was a tree, not because of the pears, I climbed it. My father saw me.

"I don't want you stealing those pears," he said.

"I was just climbing the tree," I replied.

"Don't tell me that," he said as I stood weeping.

Richard Johnson was an adult. I don't know his relationship with the other Johnsons, but he lived with them. He was always in a blue baseball cap. He also always had whiskers, but he never had a beard.

"Shake hands with Richard," said David on the Johnson's front porch.

The Johnson spent a lot of time in the shade of the roof of their wide concrete front porch. I didn't shake hands with Richard, but David did. Richard shook him all over the porch.

"Are you going to marry that girl?" the Johnson girls' father asked Ronnie Cornell one afternoon as he stepped from the Cornells' front door.

"Not unless the rubber's has a hole in it," said Ronnie.

"Have you ever thought about Connie?" David asked me as we stood at the border of the Johnsons' backyard and the Cornells' as Connie stepped from her backdoor.

"What about her?" I asked.

"Blond hair," said David, "blue eyes, and . . ."

He waved his hands in the shape of a Coca Cola bottle.

"Yeah," I said. "Blue eyes, dirty blonde hair, and . . ."

I waved my hands in the shape of a fence post.

But I thought about what he said, and he organized a game of spin the bottle in the Johnsons' backyard with her and the Johnson girls and his sister Nancy and a game of post office with them in his basement, and I cheated all I could for kisses from Connie, and she invented a kissing game and invited only me to play it with her.

Her rules were that I'd win a kiss from her for each of her hula hoop tricks I matched. I didn't have the 69 or 98 cents, the price of a hula hoop. But she let me use hers, and, despite my lack of practice, I matched her tricks.

She refused the kisses.

"If you couldn't do it," she said, "I wouldn't win anything."

But, sitting on her bicycle in her front yard, she leaned toward me and kissed me, and it wasn't a movie kiss or what we'd done playing spin the bottle or post office. It wasn't long, but it was warm and wet. So I thought it should disgust me, but it didn't, and I knew it changed my life.

But our lives didn't match. Her father owned a truck he used to haul Lincolns and Thunderbirds for Ford Motor Company. Her house was the biggest and nicest on our block. She won that bicycle in a drawing at the county fair. She also won a Dalmatian from the Fire Department in a coloring contest at school. Donnie flew model airplanes with gasoline engines in their backyard. Ronnie flew real airplanes at Coldwater's airfield.

They had a spider monkey. Summers they kept it on the clothesline behind their house. I tried to untangle its leash. It scratched and bit me. They also had a parrot. It sat in its cage in their front yard and made the sound of a wolf whistle when girls walked past their house. They called it Jack.

"Hello, Jack," it said.

Connie walked across the street to my house twice. The first time we played spin the bottle on my back porch. Bill Griffith was also there. I don't know why he was there, but he was in my class and also was wealthier than I. That troubled me, but, as far as I know, he never returned to our neighborhood. The second time Connie came to that house, she played chess with me in our parlor. Bob McNall had taught me to play chess. I don't remember who won.

But Connie and I rode our bicycles together. As she rode in front of me after rain, I found beautiful the backs of her knees between her knee socks and her pleated skirt. I also remember the maple seeds on the wet street that day.

I bought her a gold-plated charm bracelet. The charm was in the shape of a heart. I ordered it by mail, paying five Bazooka bubblegum wrappers and 25 cents. That was my bi-weekly allowance then. The company scratched her initials in it. I crossed the street and knocked on her door.

"You expect me to wear something you bought with bubblegum wrappers?" she asked.

I received a wood burner for Christmas and burned a heart shape on a piece of wood.

"BH + CC," I burned inside the heart shape.

"Ladies first," said Connie.

She didn't accept my reasoning that the plus sign meant "loves".

I tried selling Christmas cards through a comic book advertisement.

I fared no better at that than I had trying to sell salve.

"Do you want to buy some Christmas cards?" I asked.

I knocked on Joyce Smith's door. She had moved from a big ramshackle house on Cutter Avenue to a house on Monroe Street about two blocks from my house. I didn't know that. Neither of us indicated recognizing the other. To my pitch, she silently shook her head. I silently turned away. My father again paid for my failure.

I shoplifted with Donny Shellenbarger. He lived on the east side of the north end of the block of Clay Street between Pearl and Washington Streets. Clay Street was a half block west of Bob McNall's house and mine. He was about a year younger than Bob and was already a thief. On paydays, coming home drunk after Donny's mother went to bed, Donny's father passed out in a chair in their living room. Donny stole cash from his wallet.

He and I stole mostly cheap things from the dime stores, phonograph records from the basement of the Music Mart, and girly magazines from Roby's drugstore. I don't remember whose idea was the shoplifting or what we did with the phonograph records, but we also stole cases of Coca Cola from trucks behind the A&P store. As the driver unloaded them from the side of the truck facing the back of the store, we unloaded some from the other side and carried them into the weeds behind my backyard. We also stole a big cardboard box from behind store to sit in it to drink the Coca Cola. But it was warm. So we didn't drink much of it.

We also broke into the Coca Cola warehouse across Sprague Street from the fairgrounds. We climbed onto the heating oil tank behind the warehouse and broke the window above it. But we decided the cases of Coca Cola were too heavy to carry home. We looked for cash but found none. So we stole nothing there.

Bob also joined my shoplifting, and he also already was a thief. His father gave his mother a twenty-dollars bill every week to buy groceries. But she had an illness that kept her from walking next door to the A&P store. So she kept the twenties in a wallet in a small desk in their living room. So Bob occasionally stole one. But I didn't understand why he would steal. He had plenty of money, and his home life was otherwise more rich than mine. The first color television I saw was in his living room. He and I watched the map burn red and yellow on Bonanza before my father bought us a black and white TV. My father put ours TV in our parlor and seldom watched it. He left me to turn its knobs when it lost its horizontal or vertical hold. As I watched news of the Sputnik, my father came into the parlor, stood beside the chair where I was sitting, and asked me whether I believed it. I looked at him but didn't answer. I didn't understand how he couldn't. He turned and left the room. Bob's father



taught him to play chess and kibitzed while Bob and I played. My father taught me nothing other than jokes and how to fish and play cards.

But once, as Bob's father kibitzed as Bob and I played in their living room, I decided to shrink my castle to two pawns to swap the third one for a queen. Bob's father told him to move his knight to the space the pawn vacated. That left his queen open for one of my bishops to take his Queen.

"That's stupid!" I said.

"That's checkmate," said Bob's father.

But such was ordinary for me.

One winter Bob and I decided to ride our bicycles to Marble Lake. As we crossed the railroad tracks at Quincy's western village limits, his father caught up with us. He took us back to Coldwater with our bicycles protruding from the trunk of his black and white 1956 Ford sedan.

Bob's father gave also him a 500 power microscope. I asked my father for a microscope for Christmas. He gave me a 150-power microscope. He also gave me a light he said I needed to use the microscope. Christmas evening I broke its bulb. Telling him, I wept.

"What are you crying about?" he said.

Hamsters were a fad in Coldwater then. Bob bought a white one. I bought a less expensive brown one. Bob built a big cage for his in his grandfather's workshop in the back of their garage. In my workshop I build a little one of some scrap lumber and window screen. I took no more care of my hamster than we'd taken of Laddie. It died.

But I stole more methodically than did Bob. We hid car magazines beneath our coats, but, to steal smaller but more expensive things, I sewed a pocket inside a Navy pea jacket someone had given my mother for me. I also stole a copy of *Moby Dick* from the Coldwater Public Library, hollowed it with a razor blade of my father's, and used it for stealing small things. Among them were dime store engagement rings. But I didn't offer one to Connie.

Neither did I recruit David into my thievery, but he and I climbed over the wire fence separating the gas company from the woods behind it and drove one of the company's cars, until a man working there that Saturday saw us.

"There's a guy looking out the window," said David, and we ran.

But the fence was about five feet high with a strand of barbed wire above it. David jumped between the barbed wire and the top of the fence and ran into the woods. But I stopped at the fence.

So the man caught up with me. But he only told me to go home and not come back. So I climbed slowly through the gap and found David hiding behind a tree in the woods.

“I saw that guy talking to you,” said David. “Why didn’t you run?”

“I don’t know,” I said, but I knew the reason was that owning up seemed to me to be less of a risk of probation than trying to escape.

“I was afraid to come back,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

I felt that I didn’t deserve such a friend.

Terry Knowles was about Peggy’s age but worked at the bus station. He accused Bob and me of stealing magazines there. We stole the magazines at Roby’s Drugstore but took them to the bus station to steal more magazines there. We didn’t steal any there, but Terry stopped us as we were leaving.

“Are you going to pay for those magazines?” he asked.

“We didn’t get them here,” I told him.

“Where did you get them?” he asked.

“Roby’s,” I answered.

“I’ll call him,” he replied,

He dialed the telephone on the counter.

“He said he stamps the date in all his magazines when they come in,” he said after hanging up the telephone. “Mind if I take a look at those?”

We put them on the counter.

“I don’t see any dates,” he said flipping through them. “Do you want me to call your parents?”

“No,” Bob and I said together.

My parents had no telephone, but we left the magazines on the counter. We walked slowly out of the bus station, but, after turning the nearest corner, we ran. We ran the block past the Tibbits theatre and didn’t stop until after we turned the next corner and were in the block across the street from Bob’s house.

But we didn’t stop stealing, and, though the magazines we took to the bus station weren’t girly magazines, Bob learned of some nudist magazines we didn’t need to steal to see. Dewey Harris’ father operated a heating repair company from the back of his house. Dewey was a class ahead of me and had a stash of nudist magazines beneath the porch of a house next door to his. We pulled a piece of lattice away from an end of the porch and crawled beneath it. I thought the pubic hair was ugly. But I didn’t feel it was.

The girly magazines Donny and I stole didn’t show pubic hair, and we were stashing them in an attic at an end of the hallway outside his bedroom and had taped some of them to its rafters, and I had taped some to a wall of the bedroom I was sharing with my brother Dewey, but Bob and I didn’t steal Dewey Harris’s nudist magazines..

For Christmas Donny received an HO gauge electric train set. His mother helped him set it up on their living room floor while I was there. She did

it on her knees in a short blue nightgown that revealed much of her large breasts. My mother met her in the home of friends of hers who lived in the house next door to theirs on the corner of Clay and Pearl Streets.

“She swears like a sailor,” she told me.

To expand Donny’s train set, we expanded our crime spree. The Golden Rule Shops were two stores. The main one sold products for infants from a store facing Chicago Street. The other sold products for older children from a store facing the back of that store from across the alley behind it. It sold HO gauge trains and accessories. Donny and I decided to steal some from it. Our plan was to cut a hole in the store’s front plate glass window.

So, on a Sunday, we climbed over the fence around Legg Lumber Company, stole two of the little glass-cutters people use for scratching window glass to break it for it to fit windows, and snuck out of our houses at midnight.

Both my bedroom window and Donny’s attic window opened to a back roof with trees along it. So we climbed from the windows, crossed the roofs, slid down the trees, and met in the alley. We quickly learned that we couldn’t cut a hole in the window with those little glass-scratchers, but we wandered Coldwater’s alleys looking for a way to steal something else. While we were in the alley behind Newsberry’s dime store, a police car turned into it. Donny ran. I stopped.

The police didn’t arrest me. But, before telling me to go home, they asked me where I lived, and I told them the truth. The next morning police were at my house. My parents let them search my room. They said nothing of the pictures of naked women, and neither did my parents, then or earlier, but, as soon as the police left, I took them down.

The next day they came to my house again and drove me to the police station, took me into a small room behind the main one, and introduced me to a man in civilian clothes. They said he was a detective from Lansing. He interrogated me. I told him all of that crime spree I remembered, from shoplifting to trying to break into the Golden Rule Shop.

“How about Sweeny’s?” asked the detective.

Sweeny’s Buick and Pontiac show room faced Monroe Street south of the Stag. Its garage faced the alley where the police found me, but it was around the corner from where I stopped. The last time I saw Donny before I stopped, he was running around that corner. Bob McNall and I had decided a new white 1960 Pontiac convertible with blue Naugahyde upholstery in Sweeny’s showroom was the nicest car we’d ever seen, and Sweeny’s garage was the only place in town I knew to sell bottles of Coca Cola for a nickel. Bob and I killed the battery of a car in Sweeny’s used car lot between the Tibbits’ and a

laundromat across Pearl Street from Bob's house by driving it on its starter motor. But that was the only crime I thought a may have committed against Sweeny's, and the detective interrupted my thoughts before I replied.

"You didn't break in and steal anything there?" he asked.

"No," I said, but he said he didn't believe me, and I began to weep.

"If you're telling the truth," he asked me next, "why are you crying?"

"Because you're accusing me of something I didn't do," I sniveled.

"I think it's because you have a guilty conscience?" he said.

The Probate Judge ordered my parents to take me to Battle Creek for psychiatric evaluation. There, while my parents waited in a large reception room, a woman interviewed me. She asked me to draw pictures of a man and a woman.

"Why doesn't the woman have breasts?" she asked.

The reason was that I was afraid of what she'd think of me if I did. But I was also afraid of what she'd think if I told her that. So I again began to weep.

"Why are you so unhappy?" she asked me.

"I don't know," I said.

"The psychiatrist recommended that you go to a foster home," my mother told me. "But the judge said kids should be with their parents."

I thought I might be happier in a foster home. But I didn't tell her that. The judge gave me the sentence I received for breaking into the cottages but for two years. He didn't send me to a foster home, but he ordered my father to take me to the stores I'd robbed, to return what I'd stolen.

"He seemed like a nice kid," said the manager of Newberry's who'd let me buy twelve-cent toys for a dime, and I wept still more.

"Donny's parents took him and moved away," my mother told me.

"The judge said he wouldn't prosecute him if they did."

I used the church exception to my probation restriction to attend Sunday school with Bob at Little Hitler's church. Martha Goebel, the young woman who lived with her mother in the east side of the duplex in which the Johnsons lived, also went to that church. Harold, her boyfriend, went to church with her. But Bob had a crush on her.

"My dad says I've got the bug," he'd told me before that restriction, as he and I sat at his desk in his father's office, drawing pictures of cars we imagined.

But in Church, as Bob sat on one side of Theresa Bennett while I sat on the other, we shoved our hands up Theresa's skirt, and, at school dances, before my restriction, while I was in the seventh grade while Connie was in the sixth, I took turns with John Cochrane dancing with Sharon Casey. But, beyond asking

her to dance, I never spoke to her. I thought she was cute, but my hand sweated, and I was afraid of what she might think of that, and neither school dances nor walking across the street to see Connie was an exception to the restriction.

But I found other things to do.

Buzz had left some *Hit Parade* magazines at our house. So I spent much of my restriction singing songs from the magazines while sitting on the swing I'd hung from the apple tree. But I had to make up melodies for some of the songs I sang. Though our father gave Peggy a 45 r.p.m. record player for Christmas with a record of Elvis Presley singing "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You", I seldom listened to music.

I shot a sparrow with my BB gun from one of the birches behind the workshop. I shot it perhaps a dozen more times as it lay on the ground. It didn't stop moving. I left it there alive. That winter a freeze followed a thaw after a heavy snow. I borrowed Peggy's black figure skates and skated for hours around our cherry tree. I did that several days. A blonde girl moved into the big black stucco house on the corner of Clay and Washington streets. Bob told me her name was Marsha Forbes. I thought she might have been the little blonde girl from Marshall I remembered from Marshall Street. But I saw her only by climbing our apple tree, and she didn't live there long.

The next family living in that house was the Kurts. They included two sons and a daughter younger than I. I found Dewey and the Kurt boys beneath the pear tree in the weeds behind our backyard. One of the Kurt boys was holding a yellow tiger cat while Dewey threw pears at it. The one holding it saw me and let it go.

"I told you to hold it!" said Dewey.

I stretched a bicycle tire tube between two limbs of the apple tree and used it as a slingshot to shoot apples at the Kurt boys while they played in their backyard two yards from ours.

But an exception to the restriction was my mother telling me one afternoon after school that I had to go my probation officer's house to talk with him. He had an arm like Dewey's right arm. Kids called him the one-armed bandit. My grade point average was between B and C, but he told me that was good and said he had a set of electronics encyclopedia I could have. He didn't give them to me, but he released me from restriction early.

As soon as I heard of the release I went across the street to see Connie. Her father had bought a green fiberglass cabin cruiser and parked it in their backyard. Sparky, her Dalmatian, had grown. He was on a chain at the back of her yard. He jumped on one of my legs.

"Do you know what he's doing?" asked Connie.

Mr. Carlisle, the owner of the bobber factory, had no sons and took me to a Rotary Club banquet for fathers and sons. The after-dinner entertainment at the banquet was a film of a baseball game. I had nothing to say of that and nearly noting to say of anything else at the banquet or after it as Mr. Carlisle drove me home. Neither did Mr. Carlisle have much to say to me.

Each year, the week before the paying kids began going to Camp Kimball, the Kiwanis Club sent poor kids there. A representative came to our house to invite me. He talked with my parents as I sat on the sofa flipping the propellor of a model airplane engine I stole from Otto's Sporting Goods on the east edge of town. I don't know why I didn't return it, but my father took me only to dime stores.

"What's that you've got there?" asked the Kiwanis club representative.

I held it up for him to see it. I didn't tell him what it was, but my most basic reason for stealing it was why he sent me to camp. Hoping to use it for a model airplane I hoped to build of scrap balsa from behind the bobber factory, I lacked the money to buy either it or the wood, and such was also why I was showing it off. It was like my fear of anyone saying I had cooties, and the Kiwanis club sent me to camp three years, and excepting the swimming, I enjoyed it.

The camp was on Long Lake and had no showers. So Mr. Mr. Kimble scheduled a half hour of swimming every day and made it mandatory. A kid told me the Kiwanis Club sent us there to warm the water for the rich kids.

But no one enforced that rule, and another requirement was that each camper have at least three dollars to spend at the camp store, and my father complied with that. The store collected the cash and gave the campers cards it punched when we bought anything. Other kids bought candy and soda, but I didn't. Each year I spent it on a leather link belt I had to assemble and a lanyard I had to braid. I finished both before the end of the week and at the end of the week took home them and what remained of the three dollars home, and the lanyard and belt earned me some pride. But my industry also earned me some pride.

"He has more guts than any of you," said my counselor to my cabinmates one year as I sat on my bunk either braiding or linking.

I didn't understand that, but I appreciated it, and I also liked the food.

At breakfast, with the scrambled eggs, I ate several pieces of dry toast with jelly, and, at each meal, I made the runs from my cabin's table to the stainless steel milk dispenser in the kitchen to refill our stainless steel milk pitcher with the cold fresh milk, and I also liked singing in the dining hall.

Leading the singing was a female counselor with short black hair reminding me of the Sheila about whom I was thinking when I lost my shoelaces.

“Little red caboose, chug, chug, chug,” we sang, and I also remembered my favorite kindergarten story, the story of the little engine that could.

I also enjoyed playing on the giant stride with a girl whose name was Carol. Another kindergarten story I liked was of Little Black Sambo turning a tiger to butter by outrunning it as it chased him around a tree. But Carol didn’t remind me of that. She was a little younger than I and had long brown curly hair and big green eyes reminding me of the girl whose father owned the dogs that chased me home in Ionia. I also liked running in the woods playing capture the flag. That reminded me of pretending to be a spy when I was in the second grade. But some kids didn’t like camp. Snot was always visible in Jimmy Meisch’s nose. He ran away from camp. I later heard he killed himself.

Goosing, pulling other kids’ testicles was a fad there one year, but that hurt too much for me either to do it or laugh at it.

“Don’t,” I begged a kid about to do that to me. “I think I’ve got something wrong with my nuts.”

But one year I had a best friend for the week. He asked me my name. I told him it was Heathcliff, not of *Wuthering Heights* but of Red Skelton’s seagulls. I called the other kid Seymour.

“Hey, Heathcliff!” Skelton said on TV as he flapped his elbows with his fists in his armpits.

“Yeah, Seymour?” He said, pronouncing it “theemore”, as he did the same while facing in the other direction.

For the remainder of that week, everyone called me Heathcliff, but, excepting me, no one called the other kid Seymour, and another difference in treatment between him and me was that our counselor loaned him a Nazi helmet for that week. Another counselor loaned me one, but the other kid’s had a shiny varnish finish. Mine had a bullet hole in it and no varnish, and the bullet had bent the steel into the front of the helmet. So the steel rubbed my forehead raw.

But I bore it, as I had the U. S. Army insignia I’d put on the front of the pith helmet at Marble Lake, and my weeks at camp seemed to me to be longer than a week.

“She’s grown,” I said of Sally when I returned home one year.

“You’ve only been gone a week,” said my father.

I thought that was because of the variety of activities.

After my release from probation, I sang for Connie. During my probation her father enclosed their front porch with louvered glass. As she

leaned against the louvers, I sang songs I'd learned from Buzz's *Hit Parade* magazines. She said I was her second-favorite singer.

"Who's your favorite?" I asked her.

"Pat Boone," she said.

The Rudy family moved into the house across Washington Street from the Johnsons' house. The house was beside the driveway from Washington Street to the A&P store parking lot where Connie's father parked his truck when he was at home. It was on the far side of the drive from ours.

Terry Rudy was younger than Donny Shellenbarger. His sister Sharon was about my age. Their sister Billie was about a year younger than I. I thought Billie was prettier than Sharon, but I preferred Sharon. Billie was larger than Sharon in every dimension, but Sharon's hair was nearer to blonde.

Connie said she thought I liked Sharon more than I liked her. That may have been true. I knew my relationship with Connie wasn't making me happy.

Once, when the soles of my shoes had worn through again, my mother told me Connie's mother had a new pair of sneakers I could have if they fit me. She said she said she bought them for Donnie but they didn't fit him. I walked across the street with my mother and tried them on. They fit. I tried them out by running up the driveway to the A&P parking lot. I was grateful for the freedom. But I feared I might be a beggar in Connie's eyes.

Her mother also gave my mother two pair of jeans for me. My mother said Connie's mother said she'd bought them for Donnie but that, because they weren't the color of most jeans, Donnie didn't like them. One pair was light blue, the other light beige. I liked that they were extraordinary. But I used some of my mother's sewing thread to peg them. Pegging pants was popular then.

Connie told me people said Donnie was a swamp. I used some of Peggy's lipstick to write "swamp" on the back of a jacket Reverend Hamlin's wife gave me. Mrs. Hamlin often gave me clothing her adult son gave her for church members needing it. But I was wrong in how Connie felt about calling Donnie a swamp.

"It's not something to be proud of," she said when I showed her the back of the jacket.

But Donnie took his girlfriend and Connie and me and the cabin cruiser to Marble Lake. He pulled the boat with his father's car and launched it at the landing near where Chesty Blackman had lived. Donnie's girlfriend's name was Sharon. The Cornells' car was a pink 1957 Cadillac.

Donnie took the boat to the middle of the lake and anchored it there. He and Sharon stayed in the cabin while Connie and I lay on its roof in our



swimsuits. People stared at us from boats all around us. The cabin cruiser was the biggest boat on the lake.

Two dwarfs' operated a bicycle shop on Walnut Street behind the new Franklin School. They rode to movies at the Main Theatre on tricycles they'd made of bicycle parts and powered with electric motors and car batteries. The Tibbits theatre had closed. The dwarfs lived with their father in a green-shingled house next door to their shop. He wasn't a dwarf. Dolph the Tailor also had an electric cart. He parked it on the sidewalk in front of Jewel's Drugstore on the corner of Chicago and Monroe. He sold pencils from it for a nickel. But Dolph didn't build his cart, and my father gave him nickels and told him to keep the pencil. But my father also threw pennies into the street, while a dime was what the dwarfs charged for replacing a bicycle chain link, including the part and the labor. Occasionally I paid them the dime. But ordinarily I did that myself when my chain broke, and I always patched my own leaking tire tubes.

Eventually I stopped bothering to repair my bicycle, but that wasn't because of its chain or its tires. Some boys turned their handlebars upside down for racing. I was one of them. But that required leaning on them, and that stripped the grooves in them to keep them in place. So, after that, I seldom rode my bicycle. I don't remember what eventually happened to it, but, during the summer between my seventh and eighth grades, we moved again, and I don't remember having a bicycle after the seventh grade.

Our landlady had an interest in the A&P store. My mother said we had to move for the A&P's parking lot to extend to Washington Street. But we had another reason to move. The house had a coal furnace. It was falling apart and blackening snow all over the neighborhood.

Our entire family looked at one house. My mother said the prospective landlady said she wasn't sure she wished to have children living in her house. The furnishings included an old wooden console radio with many bands.

"It's short wave," I said.

She rejected us, but the previous owner or tenant of the house into which we moved had recently renovated it, and I learned that in school.

"It's a nice house," said Mark Putnam. "You'd better not fuck it up."

His father owned and operated Coldwater's largest funeral home. We were standing in line in the balcony over the gym waiting to swing on a climbing rope to drop onto wrestling mats on the gym floor. He said his friend Sam Dodd had lived in the house.

The house had no furniture. But, for five hundred dollars, our landlady sold us everything in the house on Washington Street. So that house was also our first home with our own furniture.

But we didn't move far. It was across South Monroe Street from Holbrook Wood Products Company. Gene Hedgeland borrowed a pickup truck to help us move. He was still a friend of Peggy's.

The house was blue-shingled and nearly as big as the gray-stuccoed house on Washington Street, excepting that it had no workshop or store room and that its front porch was but a small concrete one with steps. Its back porch was nothing other than steps. Again our parents shared a downstairs bedroom while Dewey and I shared one upstairs. But Nancy and Sally shared an upstairs bedroom while Peggy had her own upstairs room overlooking the street.

But the yard was smaller.

I unbraided the rope from the swing I'd hung from a limb of the apple tree on Washington Street for enough length to hang a pipe from a higher limb of a walnut tree in our side yard to use the pipe as a trapeze. A bar, the Commercial Inn, was also on that side of the house. Smitty, our landlord, also owned the bar. Swinging upside down on the pipe, I could touch both the eave over our dining room window and a lilac bush growing against the bar's bathroom windows.

Our garage was on the other side of the house. It was separate from the house but was less than two yards from our bathroom window. So our bathroom window had no shade or curtains. Striking wooden kitchen matches on the shingles of the house by shooting them from my BB gun, I wandered between the garage and the window while Peggy was taking a bath. I saw her pubic hair as she emerged from the bathtub. I also watched as she preened at the mirror over the sink but not long. I was afraid she'd see me in the mirror.

The next schoolyear, with Connie in the seventh grade while I was in the eighth, we were in the same school again. But, because of the move, I saw her less. Her family took the cabin cruiser to Florida for Christmas vacation. She returned with a tan and many more freckles. I thought that ugly. I tried to think it wasn't. But I couldn't.

Bob was also in my school again, and, before the demolition of the house on Washington Street, we played hooky to read muscle building and car magazines there. We sat in the room with the picture of Jane Russell. But, with no heat in the house, we changed our minds and went to school a few minutes after classes began for that day. No one asked us why we were late.

Homer Foundry burned. It was on the other side of the railroad tracks and several blocks from our house, but we could see the smoke and flames from

our front yard. My family and our neighbors stood in our front yards to watch. A few days later David and I explored the ruins. We looked for money in some vending machines. We found none, and the candy bars in the machines had melted, but we drove electric scooters until sand on the floor bogged them down. Then we climbed to the roof and peered through broken windows at the floor far below.

Our landlord tended his bar. My parents were customers of his. The Grant Hotel was across the street from our landlord's bar, next door to the wood products company. It also had a bar. Old Man Grant owned it and also tended its bar. The reason his hotel was there was that Coldwater's railroad passenger terminal was in front of the freight terminal on the other side of Park Avenue. But the terminal no longer served passengers. So the hotel had become a rooming house for old men. So, because the old men were most of the bar's customers, my parents seldom went there.

The fire didn't hurt the hotel. But a storm blew a maple tree from in front of the wood products company onto the roof that spanned the front of the hotel. So Old Man Grant closed the bar and never reopened it.

Ending my probation didn't end my going to church. I went most Sunday mornings and evenings. Bob and I played poker during Reverend Hamlin's Sunday school classes, but Reverend Hamlin said nothing of that. At a church picnic at Parkhurst Park, Bob and I grabbed Sandy Bird's breasts as she was returning to the picnic from the restrooms. She called me Horny Harman.

"Bill has a tattoo," said Bob to Mrs. Hamlin at the parsonage.

I'd used one of my father's razorblades to cut my initials in one of my arms. I wished I had some India ink to make it permanent. I showed her, and she said nothing of it, but then I was glad it would heal. She gave me an old record player and loaned me a collection of classical music records. Once I went to the altar during a service and tried to give my heart to God, But I couldn't make myself think I was talking with God.

The Hamlins moved their church to Perkins Street. It was four blocks further from my house, but I went there also. The church was larger and newer and had a belfry and a balcony. They also moved to a larger parsonage next door to the church. They also gave me a piano.

They bought a new one for the new church, moved the one from the old church to the new parsonage, and brought the piano from the old parsonage to our house. But it was out of tune, and I neither tried to tune it nor tried to play it. I also rang the church bell for services at the new church. But, while I was doing that, I also used the bell and bell rope somewhat as David had used

Richard Johnson's hand. Mrs. Hamlin also gave me a paperback copy of John Stuart Mill's essay *Utilitarianism*. But neither did I read that.

In the eighth grade, I enrolled in shop again. But Mr. McGee had left with his wife, and Mr. Reeg, Charlie's replacement, was no Charlie McGee. So, at the end of the first marking period, I switched to Mr. Hoopengartner's chorus class. I couldn't make my voice match the pitches on the paper, and I had no white shirt for performances. But in class I sat in the front row beside Chris Sellers, the brother of the girl of the other couple in Peggy's attempt to elope with Buzz, and Mrs. Hamlin had given me a shirt that was nearly white. It had black stripes, but the stripes had faded to nearly white.

I also briefly had another friend. The brevity was because he called me Harny. For that, as we sat in the balcony during a basketball game in the school gym, I put him in a headlock. Some other boys talked us into taking the fight to the nearest boys' bathroom. I took a swing at the kid. He leaned back, and the swing fell short, but that ended both the fight and the friendship.

Boys there that year punched each other's arms for fun. But, when I did that to Larry Camp, he asked me what was wrong with me. So I also stopped doing that, and I also quit chorus before the end of the year.

During the last marking period, Mrs. Stefaniak, the Latin teacher, taught a course in comparative languages. It was an introduction to several modern European languages. I quit chorus for that. But, understanding nearly nothing of Mrs. Stefaniak said at the beginning of the course, I paid nearly no attention to her during the remainder of it.

I also did nearly no homework for any of my classes. In Mrs. Hawley's math, I didn't lose my book. So, doing in my head in class the homework she assigned, I wrote the answers in my workbook. But she gave me C's for not showing my work. I did two of her homework assignments, but I didn't see how they were mathematical.

One was to make something of toothpicks. The other was to draw a picture of my house. I made a pencil sketch of the front of our house, from the point of view of a low limb of the maple tree in front of the wood products company. So my memory of it's falling on the hotel must have been later than my memory otherwise says it was. I'm certain that I drew that picture from it and that I couldn't make its linear perspective accurate and that, though my toothpick project was an effort to make something resembling a dragster with toothpicks protruding from its sides to resemble exhaust pipes, it hardly resembled anything.

I don't remember whether Mrs. Hawley said anything of either of my projects, but I remember what she said of Ron Glant's picture of his house. It

was an oil painting, and she hung it on a wall of the classroom. But she said it didn't look as nice up close. I looked closely at it and saw that the lines for the edges of the clapboard siding were jagged ink lines. But still I thought it better than my faulty perspective, and one of the students made a toothpick bridge I couldn't not admire, and neither do I remember her saying anything of that.

But I proved myself in another way. Taking some achievement tests at the end of the year, I thought I must have been stupid. I finished none of the tests and saw that most of the other students put down their pencils before the proctor said time was up. But, despite also flipping back to answer questions before continuing on to the next test, I outscored all the others.

"Billy's been holding out on me," said Mrs. Hawley to my math class. "He scored at twelfth grade level in math and twelve plus in reading."

So, when the Principal called the ten top scorers to the stage and called me first, I guessed that the other students must have guessed on the tests, and, as the ten stood side by side on the stage, Mrs. Hawley pinned a carnation onto each of us, but she struggled with mine.

"I don't know if this stuff will hold the pin," she said trying to pinned it onto the sheer material of a shirt Mrs. Hamlin had giving me.

I don't remember whether Jim Boyer was one of the ten, but our classmates called him the professor, and, at the eighth-grade graduation party the school board sponsored at Coldwater's Masonic Temple, he offered a corsage to Suzanne Myers. Suzanne, the girl who showed me her brother's electric train set when we were in kindergarten, sat silent in a folding chair near the top of the stairs leading from the foyer to the ballroom. The Professor stood in front of her silently holding the corsage out to her.

Watching that, I felt the embarrassment of both of them. I felt as though it was happening to me. But I didn't yet call that compassion.

## Chapter 5

### Hay

David failed the sixth grade again. But another reason I didn't see him much after I moved to Monroe Street was that he moved to a big beige clapboard house on Marshall Street north of the brick house where I lived when I learned to read. But the next summer I went to see him. In a barn behind his house we found a bicycle so old that it didn't have brakes or a coaster axle. We also found some old golf clubs. We used them to hit rocks in his backyard.

In our wanderings that summer, we found some condoms beside U.S. 12 west of town.

"Maybe you shit in them," I said, reading what the package said of sanitation, but each of us inflated one.

David said he wanted a drink of water. We carried the condoms we'd inflated into a filling station. Several men were talking there. They stopped talking and stared at us. They didn't laugh.

David's sister Nancy went with us to Parkhurst Park. We climbed over the fence behind the bird bath. Some houses were under construction there. Coldwater's airfield was then west of town. A new high school was behind the housing construction. I don't know where the old high school was.

"Girls have three holes," David told me in one of the houses. "Nancy'll show you if you want."

Nancy looked at me and silently bowed her head.

"No," I said. "That's OK."

Also that summer I befriended Billy Kling. He was about as much younger than I as Donny Shellenbarger was when I befriended him. He and I agreed to save our money to buy a Turn-a-Craft. Planning to save the money for it by picking strawberries at a fruit farm north of town for a nickel per quart, we opened a joint savings account at the Southern Michigan National Bank. But the farmer showed me some of the strawberries I picked, told me I'd bruised them, and refused to pay me for some of the quarts I picked. So, partly because of that

but mostly because we preferred to do other things with our summer vacation, we quit picking with less than two dollars in the account.

Billy had a Weimaraner. His parents had a cottage at Rose Lake. His parents took us to the cottage in the family's old gray Plymouth. On the way the Weimaraner vomited something I thought resembled a large yellow turd.

Billy and I rowed his family's rowboat across the lake. His mother said that was too dangerous. We didn't do it again. Professor Boyer lived in a cottage next door to the Klings'. He had an electric guitar. He showed me some of what he was learning on it.

Connie invited me to her birthday party. Her father rented Coldwater's roller rink for it. I could hardly roller skate. Sherry Beers was there. She skated about as poorly as I and also was a poor kid. I skated with her instead of Connie through the whole party. But she was also in the in Connie's grade. So, that autumn, I left both of them in junior high to begin high school.

Peggy didn't return to school that year. She married Jack Bussing. He was about a decade older than she and had impregnated her. He was a gaunt guy with green teeth. They rented a one-room brown-shingled house on Fremont Street across a fence from the front of the high school.

"Billy can eat lunch at our house," Peggy told our mother, and I did.

Other kids walked past her house to a little store further down Fremont street to buy lunch and other things with money I didn't have.

My parents had a Montgomery Ward account. I saw in the catalog a light beige coat with a black false fur collar. The false fur extended to its lapels, but otherwise it reminded me of a coat I'd seen on the character Buzz in the TV show Route 66. I showed the picture to my mother. Excepting perhaps a vinyl motorcycle jacket, I don't remember having any new coat before that, and I don't remember how I acquired the motorcycle jacket. She ordered the Buzz coat for me. It replaced a silver-colored autumn-weight coat Mrs. Hamlin gave me. On a cold autumn day, in the silver coat and a black straw cowboy hat I'd bought for 98 cents, as I waited with Bob for a light to change on Chicago Street. A man asked me whether the weather was warm enough for my hat.

My civics teacher was the school's head football coach. He told my civics class that everyone who wasn't out for sports should join the Pep Club to show school spirit. I joined it and, at the home of the club's President, helped decorate the float for the Halloween parade. We used cardboard to make something resembling the car flying on flubber in the movie *The Absent Minded Professor*. The float was a trailer a tractor pulled. The Pep Club President asked me to ride in it and spray CO<sub>2</sub> from a fire extinguisher through a gap

between the back of the cardboard and the trailer. I did that in my cowboy hat and Buzz coat. That was my last participation in the Pep Club.

Twice I also went trick-or-treating in my cowboy hat and Buzz coat. Once was with Bob McNall for Mrs. Hamlin for UNICEF the night before Halloween, The other time was with David for candy on Halloween.

“He still goes trick-or-treating,” said Doug Fee seeing me in my Buzz coat in a hallway at school.

But I also produced the Christmas pageant for Mrs. Hamlin’s church. It involved reading the nativity story from the balcony over the sanctuary as church members portraying wise men and shepherds walked up one of the aisles to the manger scene. I also designed and helped build the mostly cardboard manger scene. I asked Mrs. Hamlin where the story was in the Bible.

“How about if Bob reads it,” she said showing me Luke’s version. “He has such a nice deep voice.”

“I was thinking I’d read it,” I said.

She looked at Bob. Bob showed no reaction. I read it, but my production also called for no light on the procession other than from a flashlight in the balcony. So Bob sat beside me to shine the light.

David imitated Elvis Presley’s singing and movements. Bob’s father said Frank Sinatra couldn’t carry a tune but that rock and roll was only noise and that Elvis Presley would lose his voice before he was thirty. I told David what Bob’s dad said of Elvis Presley and rock and roll, but Bob bought a copy of a biography of Elvis Presley, and I borrowed it and read it. I also memorized the diagram of the Lindy hop in *Betty White’s Teenage Dance Book*. Bob also bought a copy of that.

“Bill can do the Lindy hop,” Bob said to his father as his father passed through their living room on his way to his office.

“Oh yeah?” replied his father.

“Show him,” Bob said to me,

I did. His father laughed and continued to his office. Bob also told Mrs. Hamlin Elvis Presley was a member of the Assembly of God Church. She said he was a backslider.

Carol Knapp tore down his grocery store and replaced it with a Dog & Suds drive-in restaurant. So, after we moved to Monroe Street, we charged our groceries at Marsh’s Market. It didn’t deliver, but it was nearer to our house.

Tom Ward worked there parttime, but my mother charged Wild Root Cream-Oil there for me. Advertisements for it promised difficulty keeping girls away. To emulate Sal Mineo, I parted my hair on both sides and combed the top to the middle for it to hang down over the middle my forehead. I used the



oil to keep it that way. As with my vinyl motorcycle jacket, I was still trying to be a swamp.

Professor Boyer built what he called a matchbox computer for playing tic-tac-toe. It was a cardboard frame with little matchboxes on which he wrote each possible move and in which he wrote the most auspicious response to each. But, apparently, the professor didn't recognize the symmetry of the tic-tac-toe diagram. He used many times more boxes than necessary. I drew every possible move on one side of one sheet of a wide-ruled writing tablet. I used the lines of tablet for the horizontal lines and used a ruler to draw vertical lines the same distance apart. I showed it to the Professor. He nodded but said nothing.

David's parents bought a new little house on West Chicago Street. David, talking about that, used the terms "ten" and "ten-five" to express thousands of dollars. Paul Raymond, Billy Kling, and I went to see David's new house. Paul was bigger and older than I but was in a lower grade. No one was at home. We waited for David in some trees behind his backyard. Paul suggested to Billy that they sodomize each other.

"First you be the girl," he said. Then I'll be the girl. We'll pretend our assholes are cunts."

They tried it with Billy on his hands and knees with his pants down to his knees.

"It won't fit," said Paul turning to me. "Let me try you."

"Nah," I told him.

"You sure?" he asked. "It doesn't hurt."

"Nah," I said again.

My only failing grade in any school was from my Mrs. Hayes, my ninth grade English teacher Mrs. Hayes, for my second ninth grade marking period.

"If you don't do the homework," she said scowling, "I can't pass you."

I understood. But I didn't understand why she'd think she needed to tell me that, and neither did I understand why I received B's in Latin while paying nearly no attention, doing no homework, and passing no tests, and, though I didn't start doing homework for Mrs. Hayes' class, she never failed me again, and suggested that I enter a literary contest. She said I could win a pen.

I wrote a few paragraphs about people enjoying stereo systems because they enjoyed turning knobs and talking about woofers and tweeters. I didn't win the pen, but Mrs. Hayes took my contribution to the *Coldwater Daily Reporter*. An acquaintance of my mother's clipped it out of the paper and gave it to my mother. She showed it to me and put it in a glass box on her dresser. The box

had contained a collection of Evening of Paris toilet water my father had given to her before my birth. We called it the glass box.

My football coach civics teacher told his students to read *Animal Farm*. I didn't. Bob McNall and I came across him in Bermuda shorts in front of the Gambles store. Gambles was where my father charged my electric train and bicycle and most of our other relatively expensive Christmas gifts. I laughed and pointed at the teacher's shorts. I asked him what they were.

"Bermuda shorts," he said frowning.

He turned away and went into the store.

Learning algebra in the ninth grade, I forgot how I'd done arithmetic in my head in the eighth grade. Also in the ninth grade, I took shop again. That shop teacher was also a football coach. He collected donations from my shop class to buy me a haircut. I took the cash to Carl Stempien's barbershop in the basement of the Branch County Savings Bank. Crew cuts were then in fashion, and that shop was then the most popular barber shop in Coldwater. So my Sal Mineo swamp cut became a crew cut.

"Don't you have any pride?" Jim Barber asked me. "I wouldn't have taken the money, and I wouldn't let anyone tell me how to cut my hair."

Carl lived on the road where Chuck Fitzgerald had lived but further away from the lake. His son Kenny had been a friend of Peggy's. Chuck had moved to Brighten. We exchanged a few letters. I received no reply to my last letter to him.

My shop project for that year was a small box with a chess board on top and drawers in it for the pieces. I bought the materials at the lumber company where Mrs. Butts worked. My plan was to make the box of some thin plywood, cut a black asphalt tile and a white one into pieces for the squares, and use contact cement to glue the squares to the wood. A sales clerk at the store recommended the contact cement. Other students built larger objects of hardwood available in the shop, but that cost far more than the plywood, and neither did I finish that project. I didn't see Mrs. Butts at the lumber company.

To pass shop that year I used the shop's lathe to make a scrap piece of mahogany resemble a chess bishop. I called it a lamp but didn't buy the lamp hardware, and neither did I cut the slit to make its top resemble a miter. But I took it home and kept it.

Peggy named her son John for Jack but called him Johnnie. They moved out of the little brown house and into Jack's parents' house on Clay Street behind the wood products company. Jack beat Peggy. She left him and returned home, but our father drove her back around the block. My mother and I rode with them.

“I love him,” said Peggy weeping, talking with our father in Jack’s parents’ living room, and he left her there.

Outside we found that someone had driven around the corner from Race Street and smashed into the back of our Buick. My father bought a blue and white 1954 Chevrolet sedan from the junkyard at dead man’s curve where a wrecker took the Buick. It was the cheapest Chevrolet model and had a dent in its right rear fender beside its right taillight slanting the taillight inward.

Jack and his parents and Peggy played pinochle with our parents and me at our dining table. Jack had a guitar, a cheap Stella model I’d seen Elvis Presley hold as he sang in a movie. He let me hold it as I sat in a chair in his family’s living room. He told me to be careful with it.

He asked me to help his family move. He paid me with things his family didn’t want. He told me I could sell them for cash at the junkyard near the gas company. I took most of them there in my wagon. But I kept some.

The man there paid me 27 cents. Walking with Jack down Pearl Street, struggling a little to keep up with his long strides, I told him that. He paid me fifty cents.

“I thought it would be more than that,” he said.

The things I kept were speakers I removed from a television and a console radio before I took them to the junkyard. My intention was to combine them with the record player Mrs. Hamlin gave me and the bookshelves I built for Charlie McGee’s class to make a stereo system. But the radio was so old that its speaker wasn’t permanent but electromagnetic.

So I added but one speaker to my system. But I called it a woofer and called the one in the record player a tweeter, and, for years, I found uses for the copper wire from the radio’s speaker’s magnet.

When Peggy moved out, I moved into her room. I ran a cord from the ceiling light fixture to the curtain rod over the window at the head of my bed and down to an old card table my father had given me. The bed was the studio couch from our living room on Washington Street. The cord was from an old vacuum cleaner we brought from there. I couldn’t find it to work well, but I don’t know whether my mother ever tried to use it. Our only carpeting in any house was in the parlor on Washington street and was thin and worn. My room on Monroe street had an electrical outlet on the wall opposite the studio couch, but I used it for the outlet for the record player and used the cord for everything else. I used the vacuum cleaner cord for everything else.

My father gave me a small AM table radio for Christmas. I kept that on the card table. I salvaged a light bulb socket from a broken lamp, put it in the

bishop lamp I made in ninth grade shop, and also put that on the card table. So I read while I listened to the radio while lying on the studio couch.

Still I read little, but at school I improved my grades. The reason I hadn't done homework wasn't that I didn't wish to learn. It was that I took too many courses to have a study hall and found other things to do when I wasn't at school. But, in the tenth grade, I left a period open for a study hall. So, using that time for homework, I returned my grades from mostly C's to mostly A's.

But another change for me that year was that Connie was in the ninth grade, and another change was that she'd moved from Washington Street to a house across Division Street from White Chevrolet's used car lot. Then all that was between her house and ours was the car lot. So, walking home from school, instead of walking down Monroe Street, I walked down Division Street, past her house, and through the car lot. Doing that I wore down the fence between my backyard and the car lot and felt people were watching me, but she never came out of her house, and neither did she speak we speak to one another the first few time I saw her in hallways at high school. But she did at a school dance.

I didn't go to football games. But occasionally I went to the dances following them, and, after the one at which we talked, her mother gave me a ride to their house in her blue 1959 Buick. We didn't dance at the dance, but, on our way to her house, I put an arm across the top of the back seat and her shoulders, and I left it there until we reached her house. She was in a new tweed coat, and I didn't go into her house that night, but I soon made a habit of going into her house. As her mother napped in a reclining chair on the other side of their living room, Connie and I hugged and kissed on her sofa warmly enough for me to sweat through my shirt.

I don't know what happened to Sparky, but she had a acquired a smaller dog, and it shared her sofa with us.

"He has halitosis," she said.

I seldom brushed my teeth, and the dog's name was Tippy, like my Grandma Yankey's.

They no longer had the green and white fiberglass cabin cruiser. But a bigger older wooden one was in her side yard between the house and the Perkins Street sidewalk. Connie told me her father had sold the other boat and planned to restore the older one. But she also said he wasn't working on it much.

She also, at school, wrote notes to me.

"More that yesterday," she wrote. "Less than tomorrow."

And she invited me to go with her and Donnie and Sharon to Lansing to visit relatives. Donny had bought a red 1961 Ford Galaxy convertible with funds from a chain link fence company he was forming with his father. In

Lansing he let me drive it with its top down. I drove past the relatives' driveway and backed up to it instead of turning around. I hardly spoke to the relatives.

On our way out of Lansing, Donnie stopped at a MacDonald's. He asked us what we wanted. I'd never heard of MacDonald's. I didn't answer. Connie told him we each wanted a hamburger and fries and a Coke.

"You want to go in and get it?" he asked me.

I neither answered nor moved.

"He doesn't have any money," said Connie.

Donnie went in. Then all MacDonalds hamburgers had catchup on them. I still found catsup difficult to bear, but then I forced myself to eat it.

At school keeping shirttails out became a fad. The Principal ordered tucking them in. He said we should dress nice at school. Many boys rebelled. They tucked their shirts in, but, to mock the Principal, they also wore wide old gawdy ties they borrowed from their fathers. I neither left my shirttail out nor borrowed a tie of my father's.

"At least untuck your shirt," said Jim Barber.

"This shirt's supposed to be in," I told him.

It was a pink one Mrs. Hamlin had given me.

I took geometry that year. I thought it was the study of shapes. I thought of drafting and the Parthenon. In the beginning, having to learn theorems irritated me, but I also excelled at that and thought the Pythagorean theorem was useful algebra, and I liked the order of the proof system Mrs. Trebilcock taught. I also liked the shape of her legs and the style of her shoes, but she had gray hair and chains on her glasses.

And I also excelled at English grammar. Mr. Mejia, my English teacher, was Mexican. But I quickly understood from what he said that English grammar is as systematic as mathematics, and once, when he wrote a gerund on the chalkboard and called it a participle, I corrected him. But I didn't always pay attention to him.

Coldwater 's government had big machines to sweep the streets. But it also paid a man people called Mort the street cleaner to sweep the gutters with a wooden cart and a broom. I heard the owners of the City Restaurant, a small casual restaurant next door to the bus station, didn't charge Mort for meals there, that he complained to the county's health department that he found a bug in his soup, and that then they stopped letting him eat there at no charge. So, thinking of that in Mr. Mejia's English class, I wrote it with a few more details, and, as I wrote it, Mr. Mejia came to my desk, picked up my notebook and read it.

"You have a latent literary ability,"

"What do you mean, 'latent'?" I said.

“‘Latent’ means . . . ,” he began to reply.

“I know what ‘latent’ means,” I said.

He didn’t reply to that. He silently laid the notebook on my desk and continued his explanation of grammar. I wished both that he knew I knew that and that I hadn’t been so offensive.

Several mornings our old Chevy wouldn’t start. So my father walked to work. While he was at work David pushed the car for me to start it and drive around the block to charge its battery. But I didn’t know how not to grind the gears while downshifting a manual transmission. So I made the turn into our driveway less sharp by swinging through the wood products company’s parking spaces. Then I slammed on the breaks to keep from crashing into the garage.

That evening, when I returned home after my day of wandering with David, my father asked me to try to fix the car’s starter. He was playing cards with my mother and handed me all of his tools. They were a pair of pliers and a flathead screwdriver with a chip in its blade. I crawled beneath the car, pried loose a metal strap around the starter motor, and stuck the screwdriver into a hole the strap had covered. But sparks flew. So I quit trying, left the strap loose, and returned the tool to my father, saying nothing of the strap.

“I couldn’t fix it,” I said.

He silently accepted the return of the tools.

I took driver training that year. Mr. Lopez, the driver training teacher, suggested to me that I draw cartoons about driver training for the school newspaper. I hadn’t quit trying to draw.

With a pen and India ink and paper belonging to the school, I drew a picture of a car with its front end through the front window of the Alamo Drive-In. The Alamo was a restaurant at the west end of town. Kids with cars turned around there as they drove back and forth through town. Two people were in the car. A sign on top of the car said it was for driver training.

“The sign said, ‘Drive in restaurant,’” said the cartoon’s caption.

Watching people read it, I saw no one laugh. I drew no more cartoons.

I also joined the chess club. I played in a match in Battle Creek. My opponent played quickly. I tried to play as quickly. I quickly lost. I also quit the chess club.

I don’t know who repaired our Chevy, but, after I received my learner’s driving permit, my father let me drive it to Marble lake with all the family in it for what people then called a Sunday drive. But the driver training car had an automatic transmission. So still I didn’t know how to keep from grinding the gears while downshifting a manual transmission. So, turning the corner at Mudge School, I swung into the left lane. But a hill was in front of me, and

Kenny Stempien was driving over it a black Plymouth Valiant. So I continued the turn into the ditch on the right side of the road and into the cornfield on the other side of it.

“Oh, no!” screamed my mother as we entered the ditch. “Another wreck!”

“You’ll never drive this car again,” said my father when the car stalled in the cornfield.

“I’m glad you didn’t try to stay on the road,” said my mother, as my father drove us across the cornfield to the farmer’s driveway. “We would have turned over in the ditch.”

Kenny stopped, but, saying nothing to us, he drove on as my father did.

I befriended Tiger Stout. His name was Larry Shaw, but his foster parents’ name was Stout, and people called him Tiger because he was short. He was older than I and stouter but shorter. We played Old Maid and Slap Jack on the floor of his bedroom. He told me he wanted to be an Army chaplain but that he was too short. He had his class ring. It was the biggest one available.

Once he and drank beer in Jack’s and Peggy’s apartment. They had moved into what had been the Johnsons’ home on Washington Street. From there Tiger and I walked to Marble Lake. We tried to sleep in the bathhouse at the beach at the landing from which Donnie had launched the cabin cruiser. But the night was cold. So we didn’t sleep. At dawn we launched some of the wooden picnic tables into the lake. My mother told me she read in the *Reporter* that someone did that. But she didn’t ask me whether Tiger and I did it.

The Goody Shop was a pastry shop on Hanchett Street on the other side of Chicago street from the Tibbits. Tom Button was what people then called deaf and dumb. He made doughnuts at the Goody Shop nights after it closed. He sold them for 25 cents per dozen to anyone who went there while he was working. Other boys went there for other reasons. They called him Blow Boy Button. Tiger took me there but only to buy doughnuts. We took them to the City Restaurant. Tiger had told me of Mort, but new owners had bought it, changed its name to Ma’s Café. They were a husband and wife. The wife told us to call her Ma. They also had installed a pool table, let us shoot the cue ball around it, and didn’t complain that spent no money there.

Tiger and I tried to make some money by stealing a carburetor for someone one might call a swamp. Tiger took me to his home. Sometimes he called himself Leonard Colvin, but sometimes he called himself Leonard Murray. He told us Roy Rogers’ real name was Leonard Sly. He was about Peggy’s age. Peggy told me she knew him. She said Murray was his father’s name while Colvin was his mother’s, or the other way around.

“I was in love with your sister Peggy,” he told me. “But she liked Buzz more.”

He was living with his mother, but he had a 1953 Oldsmobile in her yard. He said he was rebuilding it. He told Tiger and me a car like it was in Way Oldsmobile’s used car lot. He said he’d pay us five dollars for its carburetor. He loaned us a pair of plyers, an adjustable wrench, and a flathead screwdriver. We used the plyers to bend the fuel line until it broke, but the wrench and screwdriver did nothing for us. We quit trying.

“Let’s not do anything like that again,” said Tiger. “That was stupid.”

After that he found legal ways for us to make money. The first was bailing hay. I stood on the front of a trailer behind the bailing machine, grabbed bails by their bailing wire as they came out of the machine, and threw them onto the trailer. We ate with the other workers in the farmer’s dining room at a long table with an oilcloth on it. I had never been hungrier, but neither had I ever seen so much food in any one place outside a grocery store, and no one there seemed to me to think I was eating too much.

But that was for but one day. The next job Tiger found for us helping to remodel a house. A minister of a church in Angola retired and bought a small house in Coldwater. He paid Tiger and me 75 cents each per hour. He asked us to strip plaster from walls, rip lathing from the studs, and tear down the house’s brick chimney. We removed bricks from bottom of the chimney until it fell through the two floors into the basement. Tiger and I stood staring at it as it crashed in a cloud of dust. But next he asked me to paint the house’s metal roof, and that was in August.

“You should ask him for more money for that,” said Tiger.

Afraid he’d fire us, if I did that, I didn’t. But, after I painted the roof, he said we’d done all we could for him. So he fired us anyway.

But the Branch County Fair was the next week. So, the day before the fair opened, we went to the fairgrounds and asked people setting up rides and games whether they needed any help. Thinking of carnival travel as I thought of hobo travel, I desired that work. I didn’t expect anyone to hire us. But one did.

“Yes,” said Bob Bradburn.

We helped him set up some games, and, when he paid us, I mustered the courage to ask him whether he needed help the rest of the week.

“You can blow up balloons for Ruth if you want,” he said. “She’ll pay you six dollars a day and fifty cents for eats.”

I felt that I’d suddenly come to life.

Ruth was Bob’s wife. I’d helped set up her dart game. I quickly learned from Ruth that carnies called carnival games joints and called joints like



hers balloon-darts. I also soon learned that carnies call customers marks, but she didn't tell me carnies called people they hire from the towns they played sucker help. So I enjoyed every minute of those twelve-hour workdays.

The dart boards were three four-foot by eight-foot sheets of fiberboard in wooden frames. They swiveled on pins in two-by-fours at the top and bottom of the frames while the balloons hung on hooks on the boards. My job was behind the boards. I filled empty plush boxes with balloons I inflated, and, when Ruth swiveled the boards around, I hung the balloons on any empty hooks. Plush was what carnies called stuffed animals.

But, when few marks were on the midway, I sat on the counter and talked with Ruth, and Nancy and Ricky, Ruth's and Bob's children, often joined me in the back of the joint and asked me about myself. They also helped me fill the boxes and could blow up balloons more quickly with their mouths than I could with the little hand pump Ruth gave me. But soon so could I. By the end of that week, I could inflate each balloon with one breath and tie it about as quickly as I could inflate it with the pump. I did that to about ten thousand balloons that week.

My lunch each day that week was blueberry pie alamide. I bought and ate it a 4-H concession. Ruth said carnies called such concessions committee joints. But, by eating at that committee joint, I saved half of my fifty cents for eats, and mornings, before the show opened, I spent nearly all of what she paid me. At the Penney Store I bought four white broadcloth shirts with button-down collars, three pair of black gabardine trousers and one pair of olive green ones, and four pair of white socks. That, for me, was more than a week's supply of socks, and, at Luedders' shoe store, two door east of Penney's, I bought a pair of loafers. But, at the end the week, the day before we were to tear down the joints, what carnies call striking them, Ruth offered me a much larger gift.

"Do you want to go to Marshall with us?" she asked. "You can sleep in the back of the REO. We have a rollaway bed you can use."

"Yes," I said, grinning at the thought of going on the road.

"Will it be alright with your parents?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said again, with no doubt in my mind.

"You'd better ask them anyway," she said.

She told me that, after we struck the joints, if my parents gave me permission, I could go home and get some sleep and meet them at about 10:00 at Bell's restaurant.

Bell's was another restaurant on Chicago Street. and my parent gave me more than permission.

My father loaned me his old leather suitcase and gave me a ride to Bell's. My mother rode with us and kissed me when I opened the car door in front of the restaurant. But my father didn't kiss me.

When I leaned across my mother to kiss him, he instead held out his right hand, and that was the only time he ever shook hands with me.

Less than an hour later I was on the fairgrounds in Marshall. I rode with the Bradburns in the old GMC panel truck they used to pull the camper trailer that was their home on the road. Marshall wasn't much more than twenty miles from Coldwater and was smaller than Coldwater, and I didn't remember having been there. I may have ridden through it on the way to Lansing with Connie, but not having been there was its main attraction to me, and, after Bob parked the camper trailer, he asked me whether I wanted to go downtown.

"We're going to Schuler's for dinner," he said. "We go there every year."

I remembered my father saying Win Schuler's was the finest restaurant between Detroit and Chicago. I thought Bob was going to ask me to go with them. But he didn't

"There's a movie theatre down the street," he said. "If you need something to do."

*The Manchurian Candidate* was playing at the theatre. I thought it was psychologically profound, and, after the movie, I found a men's clothing store, bought an olive green trench coat with a removable liner, and walked back to the lot. Carnies called any place they set up the lot.

On that lot, across the midway from Ruth's joint, a man standing on a platform on the back of a semi-truck trailer sold people chances to win major appliances for a dollar. I asked her how he could afford to do that. She didn't answer, but she told Bob I was pretty quick, and, at the end of that week, she surprised me with a gift much bigger than taking me to Marshall.

"Do you have a drivers' license?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, having acquired mine that year.

"We're jumping south after this spot," she said. "The guy who was going to drive the REO quit. So, if we pull our camper trailer with the REO, can you drive the panel truck to Alabama? You can stop and ask your parents on our way through Coldwater."

I'd never been south of Angola, and Angola wasn't as far south of Coldwater as Marshall was north of it, and Huntsville, the spot in Alabama they were to play next, was more than five hundred miles south of Coldwater.

So I felt that my life had exploded into freedom.

After teardown we stopped for breakfast at a truck stop where I-94 crossed U.S. 27. Ruth and Bob and Nancy and Ricky ordered country ham and eggs. So did I.

“Have you ever had country ham?” Ruth asked me.

“No,” I said.

“It’s salty,” she said. “You might not like it.”

“I’ll try it,” I said.

I didn’t like it much, but I enjoyed the new experience. I also enjoyed standing behind her and Bob in line at the cash register. But Bob paid for my breakfast.

“I’ll get yours,” he said.

I held up the cash I had in hand ready for payment, but Ruth also had an answer to that.,

“Whenever anyone offers you something for nothing,” she said, “take it, even if you don’t want it. You might be able to sell it to somebody.”

U.S. 27 was Division Street in Coldwater. While I drove the panel truck down Monroe street to ask my parents, the others waited for me in a vacant lot across Division Street from the car lot behind my house. It was where Connie’s father then parked his truck when he was at home.

I had to ring our doorbell. That was the first time I knew anyone to lock our front door. My mother came to the door in her bathrobe rubbing an eye with a fist. Dawn was just then breaking.

“I’m driving one of the trucks to Alabama,” I said. “I’ll be back in a few days.”

She nodded and closed the door. I watched through the window as she went into our living room and turned toward her bedroom. Then I returned to the truck, joined the others, and headed south.

Lester and Ricky and Nancy rode with me. Lester set cats in Bob’s six-cat, a joint where marks threw balls at things resembling cats, hoping to win plush by knocking the cats from the shelf where Lester set them. He seemed to me to be older than Bob, but Ruth told me the reason he didn’t drive the panel truck was that he didn’t have a drivers license. He and Ricky and Nancy slept much of the way to Huntsville.

In Indianapolis the brakes on the panel truck stopped working. Bob and Ruth were leading our way in the REO. So I had no way to tell them that. But, since driving my family into the cornfield, I’d thought about how manual transmissions work. So, though I ran the last red light before crossing the Ohio River into Louisville, I had little trouble following Bob and didn’t need to kill

the truck's engine to stop when he stopped for fuel. But I was grateful that he'd stopped.

"There's something wrong with the brakes," I told him.

I was afraid he might blame me for that, but he gave me no indication that he did.

"I wondered why you ran that red light back there," he said.

A few minutes later, after a mechanic put the truck on a lift and adjusted the brakes, we were on the road again. After Nashville, I nodded often, as my passengers slept, but Ruth told me the road south of Louisville was the Dixie Highway. So I memorized every turn of the trip all the way down. I remembered Nashville by the neoclassical mansions along our route.

But, when we arrived in Huntsville, I couldn't sleep. The reason carnies called their games joints was that the frames of most of them then were two-by-fours they joined together with hinges. So my bed while the others slept was the lumber of the joints I'd hauled in the panel truck. The joints in the REO blocked my way to the rollaway.

So, after about an hour, I quit trying to sleep and stood outside the panel truck on the red clay that gives Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal its name, until Bob came out of his camper trailer and paid me for the trip.

"Is that enough?" he asked after counting four five-dollar bills and handing them to me.

I thought it was, but Ruth had told me they'd pay my bus fair back to Coldwater, and I didn't know whether Bob knew that. So, not knowing what to say, I said nothing. So Bob counted out two more fives.

"Is that enough?" he said again, and still I didn't answer.

So he counted out two more fives.

"That's enough," he said. "Willard'll drive you to the bus station."

Willard operated a side of Bob's six-cat. Carnies called it a six-cat because most six-cats had but six cats, but Bob's had sixteen cats. Willard worked the eight on one side of the joint while another agent worked the eight on the other side. The reason Willard hadn't driven the panel truck to Huntsville was that he drove his new air-conditioned Chevrolet Impala hardtop. But he drove me to the bus station in it. He also went inside with me and bought the ticket. But, on his way out, he turned back.

"See you next year," he said, and then he turned again and walked on out.

While I waited for the bus, two African American kids asked me whether I'd like them to shine my new shoes.

"Which one?" asked one of them.

“Both,” I said, wondering why he asked.

“How can we both shine your shoes?” asked the other.

“One can shine each,” I said, and I gave each a dollar.

On the bus a young woman with sandy hair and in a gray wool dress with dart seams over the points of her breasts sat beside me. She fell asleep and leaned her head on the shoulder of mine nearest to her. I didn’t sleep until after she awoke and left the bus.

“Sorry,” she said when she awoke, someplace in Tennessee.

“That’s alright,” I said, and I slept most of the way from there to Coldwater.

On the first day of school, though the weather was dry and not cold, I wore my new coat.

“Nice raincoat,” said Jim Barber.

“It’s an all-weather coat,” I said.

But I also started a new job that week. Mr. Dennis, the Principal, arranged for me to work on the school’s cafeteria line. Chris Sellars worked beside me, but I felt ridiculous in the paper hat. So I quit the same day and told Mr. Dennis I wanted to take Chemistry instead.

“I was trying to do you a favor!” he said. “Get out of here!”

He also slammed his office door behind me. But he let me take chemistry, and, either way, I had no study hall that year. So my grades dropped from mostly A’s back to mostly C’s. But that didn’t change my life much. Mrs. Watson, my algebra teacher, asked her students to write on the chalkboard their solutions to homework problems, and she selected me every day. So that limited my amount of time for doing homework in class. But I listened in class, took the book to the board with me, did the problems correctly, and aced the tests. But one day I couldn’t do the problem on the board.

Occasionally, for a few minutes, though my peripheral vision operated as it ordinarily did, if I looked directly at something, I could hardly see it, and neither could I concentrate.

“There’s something wrong with my eyes,” I told Mrs. Watson during one of those times, when she asked me to go to the board.

“Yeah,” she responded. “You just didn’t do your homework.”

Sitting beside me in history class was a guy who said he was there to finish high school after dropping out to enlist in the Army. He asked the class to call him Sarge. One Friday he told me he was thinking of going to the dance after the football game to try to meet some girls. He asked me whether I wanted to go with him. He said he was living at the Ritz Hotel and suggested that I meet him there.

The Ritz was a big black stucco neoclassical rooming house on Chicago Street at the west end of Coldwater's business district. Shirley Tabor's boyfriend Jim also lived there for awhile. I knew that because he owned a yellow 1954 Corvette then and came out of the rooming house while Bob McNall and I stood looking at the car.

When I arrived, Sarge was eating fish with the owners of the hotel. When he finished, he showed me in his room a book with pictures of things Nazis had done. The caption of one of the pictures said it was of a lampshade of Jews' skin.

On the way to the school, we stopped at the little store on Fremont Street, for him to buy two bottles of beer. We drank them under the bleachers behind the Edison Elementary School's playground. But, at the dance, some seniors asked him to buy some beer for them.

They drove us to the Topper Tavern. It was one of the two Coldwater bars my father said were cocktail lounges. They dropped Sarge at its front door for him to go in to buy the beer. But they asked me to wait there and tell Sarge they went to park the car. After a few minutes of wondering why Sarge was taking so long, I walked home. The bar also had a parking lot entrance. The next week, my history teacher asked me whether I knew what happened to Sarge. But I never saw him again.

I also drank coffee in the kitchen of a woman who moved into the back apartment of the old brick house on the other side of Holbrook Wood Products Company from the Grant Hotel.

"She has kids so she can collect Aid for Dependent Children," said my mother.

"Are you getting any of that?" asked my father.

I think I may have considered that possibility.

But I'm not sure and didn't answer, and that was the first year Coldwater High School offered a college preparatory English course, and my tenth-grade grades earned me entrance into it, and I immediately liked the teacher.

His name was James Elwood McLellan. He was blind and had but one eye. The eye had a milky cornea. He had a glass eye for the socket where his other eye had been, but he wore dark glasses the first day of school. So then I didn't see the glass eye or the cornea. But, though the first day of the school that year was the only time I saw the dark glasses, I never saw the glass eye. I know of it only because he told the class he had one. Also his nose leaned to one side. He told my class someone poured acid onto his face when he was a baby and that he broke his nose falling because he couldn't see.

He also told us he worked his way through college by playing piano in bars. He said he once went to a bar in a cellar to audition for a gig and that no one told him the bar was in a cellar. He said he could hear doorways but not stairways, that he fell all the way down the stairs and through swinging doors into the bar, and that the bartender threw him out thinking he was drunk.

He also let us call him Woody. But not the least of his attraction to me was that, beyond grammar, he taught semantics and style. He taught poetic rhythm and figures of speech, the didactic function of fiction, and avoid ambiguity and redundancy and other waste of words.

No one had mentioned any of that to me, and he also welcomed any of his students to his home, and I occasionally when there with no invitation. I hadn't felt I was learning so much from school since the day I learned to read. Most students who ordinarily received A's ordinarily received B's from him, but most of us accepted his reasons for our grades, and he gave me mostly B pluses.

But David was in no grade in any school that year. After failing the sixth grade again, he failed the seventh grade, and then the eighth. So his father's gift for his seventeenth birthday that November was permission to enlist in the Army.

But my relationship with Connie hadn't changed much. Her mother let no one wear shoes on the new carpeting in their house. Snow in the winter soaked through my new shoes, turning my new white socks blue.

"My shoes do that sometimes," said Donnie.

Also my new trousers were too short, and he wasn't as polite in that regard.

"Are those high water pants?" he asked, and he also befriended Danny Parker.

"Are you getting any of that?" Danny asked me of Connie beside her house. "She's skinny, but the meat's sweetest closest to the bone."

I didn't answer or grin. But sometimes Connie and I walked to a railroad trestle over the Coldwater River between my house and what remained of Homer Foundry, and once one of her feet slipped between two of the ties. I laughed and didn't help her.

"You're laughing at me?" she asked looking up at me before pulling the foot from between the ties.

I stopped laughing but didn't help her. The tie scraped through her nylon stocking. She was bleeding a little. I expressed no sympathy.

But she introduced me to a friend of hers. The friend's name was Cynthia. She lived on Perkins street a half block from Connie's house in the house in which Peggy's friend Doris Elkin lived when we lived on Washington

Street. Cynthia's boyfriend was Don Smith, Peggy's first boyfriend in Coldwater. She was an Elvis Presley fan. Connie became one and told me "Teddy Bear" was her favorite song. Once, as she sat on my lap in an armchair in Cynthia's living room, Cynthia's father came home.

"Are you holding hands with yourself?" he asked.

I'd clasped my hands behind Connie's back.

"He's a Cootie," Connie told me after he passed on through the room.

"That's some kind of big deal in the Masons or something."

I thought he was fat and that his house wasn't much nicer than mine.

But Connie moved again. So both of us stopped going there.



## Chapter 6

### Psychology

Connie's father sold his truck. He bought a farm on Snow Prairie Road nearly ten miles southeast of Coldwater. The farm was in the Bronson school district, but her father paid tuition for her to continue going to school in Coldwater, and my father helped with my seeing her outside of school.

"Look out front," he said on my arrival home from school one afternoon.

A red and white 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air hardtop was at the curb.

"Is that ours?" I asked him.

"It is now," he answered.

He'd traded his blue and white 1954 Chevrolet Club Coup sedan for it.

"It's a hardtop!" I exclaimed.

"What did you think it would be," he asked. "A convertible?"

"No middle roof supports," I tried to explain. "It isn't a sedan."

He frowned and turned away. But a few days or weeks later I mustered the courage to ask him let me drive it to see Connie, and he said nothing of my driving the other Chevy into the cornfield. I drove ninety miles per hour through the lake neighborhoods along the way.

The farm had plenty of places to walk and talk and kiss. One was at a tree that had fallen near the furthest edge of the farm from the house. As we leaned against the tree hugging and kissing, I had an erection. When we rose to go, my embarrassment kept me from adjusting it. Connie looked at the protrusion, but neither of us spoke.

A rope hung from a rafter of the barn. I swung from the haymow as I'd swung from the balcony in the junior high school gym. Connie neither smiled nor spoke.

Her father asked me to disc the main field. I tried, pulling the disks behind his old rusty tractor as Connie stood behind me on its hitch, but I stuck the tractor in muck. Her father and Donnie dug it out with spades.

"If you were a farmer," said her father, "you could smell muck."

For her birthday I gave her a bottle of Ambush perfume. I don't remember how I acquired the money, but she'd told me she liked it. I wrapped it and put it in the Bel Air's glove compartment. As she sat beside me, I kicked the glove compartment's latch button to open it.

"Is that for me?" she said. "Thank you!"

Her father gave her a car for that birthday. It was a yellow and white two-passenger Nash Metropolitan with a three-speed manual transmission. He asked me to take her into the field beside their house and teach her to drive it. Each time she engaged the clutch, the engine died. I told her several times to do it slowly. She wept.

I don't know how she learned to drive it, but she drove it to school. Mark Hebner suggested that we see how many people could fit in it. Behind the school, its student parking lot, three squeezed into its two-person front seat. One squeezed into the space behind it. One sat on each back fender with each's feet in its trunk. Mark sat on the back of the trunk with his feet also in the trunk. He was the biggest of us. The car's real axle bounced on its frame. Connie stopped after a few yards.

But, that year, Connie and I began going steady. I used the last of my carnival money to make the down payment on my class ring. It was the smallest one available for boys. I would have bought the next smaller one, if the sales lady at Zales jewelry store hadn't told me it was for girls. I don't know how I paid the remainder, but, when I did, Connie accepted it and followed the fashion of wrapping angora yarn around it for it to fit her ring finger.

I also asked her to a movie. But I knew I didn't know how I'd find the money for that. My father spent a lot of time sleeping on our sofa. The night of the date, I sat in our living room watching him sleep. I didn't have the cash and hadn't asked him for the car. As I sat trying to muster the courage to awaken him, the doorbell rang. The time for the movie to begin had passed.

"Nobody stands me up," said Connie, standing on our little concrete front porch while her mother stood on a step behind her looking at me and seeming to me to be no more happy than Connie, for either of us.

Connie had removed the angora from the ring and was holding it out to me. I accepted it and watched as she turned around to follow her mother back to their Buick. But I closed the door and turned away before they reached it.

At school the next week, I didn't speak to her, and, when I looked at her, she looked away. But, the following week, she began driving past my house and turning past the bar each day before driving home from school. So, the third time I saw her driving past the front of our house, I ran from our front door to our backdoor, through the bar's parking lot, and into the street. As I ran

into the street, she stopped in front of me. I walked around her car, opened the passenger door, and climbed in beside her. Weeping, she returned my hugs and kisses, and again accepted the class ring. But neither of us said we were sorry, and she also accepted my invitation to the junior prom.

Neither did I know how I could manage that. But my mother ordered through the Montgomery Ward catalog the least expensive suit I found in it and scraped together enough cash for a corsage and a little more. My father also let me use the car, but I didn't drive it to the prom. Mark Hebner suggested that we double with him and his girlfriend, that we meet at the school before the prom, and that, after the prom, we go in his Ford Falcon to the Toll House Restaurant, a restaurant serving the intersection of the U.S. 27 and the Indiana Toll Road. I drove the Bel Air to the farm to pick up Connie and planned to drive her home from the school after we ate. But her mother changed that plan.

"There's no reason for you to drive all the way out here again," she said. "You can take your car home, in case your family needs it."

So Connie drove herself to my house for me to drive her to the prom in her car. I drove when we went anywhere together in her car, but her mother also pinned the corsage to her dress. She volunteered as I wondered how to do it.

The suit was black, and my mother also bought me some black socks at Marsh's, but Connie questioned that.

"I thought you said you'd never wear any socks that weren't white," she said as she took her coat off at her locker, where Mark and his girlfriend were waiting for us.

"Not with a suit," I said.

Neither we nor Mark and his girlfriend danced, and none of us spoke much. Most of what we said was about the decorations. At the restaurant, I searched the menu for something the little cash I had could buy. I selected fish sticks. The others waited for me and ordered the same.

After we ate, Mark drove us to Connie's car. We'd left it in the school's student parking lot. At my house, I parked it in our driveway. We sat in it hugging and kissing. But my father's car wasn't there. That was the only time I knew my father to go out alone at night.

When he returned, he tried to drive between her car and the bushes between the driveway and our front yard, but he scraped a side of Connie's car with his back bumper. Then he parked in the garage and walked past us with neither a word nor a look. Neither had I ever known him to park in the garage.

"What's my father going to say?" said Connie sobbing. "He gave me this car!"

Neither did I speak to my father when I went into the house, but, the next afternoon, while he was playing cards with my mother, Connie's father brought her to our house, and I answered the doorbell.

"What are we going to do about this?" he asked my father.

My father took a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet and held it out to Connie's father. He looked at it, shook his head, and, saying nothing more, turned and left our house with Connie behind him. She'd glanced at me when they came in, but she didn't as they left, and neither of us spoke during any of it, or about it, ever.

Her only other time inside that house was also while my parents were playing cards. My father had a beer belly. The sofa was older than sofas with cushions. His sleeping on it had caved in its springs. She said nothing of that as we lay on it kissing as we did at her house. But she lifted the back of my shirt to rubbed my back, and black dirt rolled up beneath her fingers.

"Donnie's back does that too," she said, "when I rub his back."

Still I seldom bathed. But I bathed more often than did my father. My mother said one of his employee reviews said he had poor hygiene. She said she didn't understand why. On hot summer days he sat on our front steps in only his boxer shorts. I could smell him when I left the house. His teeth were also green. But I regularly brushed mine. Dr. McConnell was the father of twin classmates of mine. He was a dentist and took the twins to Europe. They returned with an Austin Healy Sprite for them share. Speaking to my class, he recommended Crest toothpaste for the stannous fluoride in it. I asked my mother to buy it. She charged it with our groceries.

She also charged, on our Montgomery Ward account, matching shirts for Connie and me. But their print pattern was lighter inside the shirts than on their outsides, and that was visible when I rolled my sleeves up. So I thought they looked cheap. I gave Connie hers, but we never wore them.

Woody McClellan also became a problem for us.

"What's your favorite book?" I asked her as we stood in her farmyard.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe *To Kill a Mockingbird*."

"Woody says it's sentimental," I said, though I hadn't read it.

"I think you love Woody more than you love me," she replied.

My mother ordered some magazine subscriptions from a door-to-door salesman, She ordered *Popular Mechanics* for me, I didn't read that, but she also ordered the *Saturday Evening Post*, and in that I read an article saying Eisenhower went to West Point because he couldn't afford to go to a civilian college, and that was the first year our high school had a guidance counselor. He was Mr. Houston, my junior high school Principal. His office at the high

school was a tiny room with a door and window to the study hall and a window to the library. He interviewed the students individually with their parents. He interviewed me with only my mother.

“What do you want to do after you graduate?” he asked as she sat beside me as he sat at his desk in that little office.

Before then, the school’s only career guidance was busing students to annual career days at Tri State College in Angola. I went to those, but, since Mrs. Tupalek advised me against being an Architect, no one had asked me that question. I’d thought of following in Woody’s footsteps, but I didn’t know how I could. So my answer was more how I thought I might be able to.

“I think I’d like to go to West Point,” I said.

“Your scores say you can,” he said, “But why?”

I knew I didn’t know whether one could major in English at West Point. But I didn’t think of that when I answered the question, and then I was afraid one couldn’t and that Mr. Houston knew that. So my reply to that question was to dodge seeming silly.

“I’ve always wanted to be a soldier,” I said.

My mother stared at me. My previous thoughts of the Army hadn’t gone beyond some little plastic toy soldiers I had at the lake the lake, the Army insignia on my pith helmet, and the Nazi helmets at summer camp, and the smell of the plastic soldiers irritated me. But Mr. Houston advised me to ask the librarian to help me research the admission process, and my mother told me I should tell my father, and I did. I told him in our living room. He was standing with his back to the card table. I was standing with my back to the sofa.

“You graduate from high school,” he replied “And, after that, I don’t give a damn what you do.”

But I took Mr. Houston’s advice, and the Librarian’s. I wrote to Michigan’s United States Senator Philip A. Hart. He arranged for me to take the Civil Service Examinations at City Hall and sent me a telegraph telling me I’d received a principal nomination to attend the Academy. I heard, though I don’t remember where, that I’d be the first person from Coldwater to graduate from West Point.

I also went out for wrestling that year. Before then, my most substantial effort to learn sports was asking my father for a basketball and goal for Christmas. What he gave me was much smaller than regulation size. I nailed the goal over the garage door, but my main use for the ball was to lie on by bed while bouncing it over the vacuum cleaner cord as I sang or listened to my radio or phonograph records. I also considered track. That was because I

could outrun nearly every student in my gym classes. But I thought I'd have to participate in all the track events, and I didn't think I'd do well with a shotput.

Another reason I hadn't gone out for other sports was that I thought I'd have to buy equipment. I learned, after going out for wrestling, that wrestlers ordinarily wrestle in wrestling shoes. But Coach Kellogg, the wrestling coach and gym teacher, let me wear the tennis shoes my parents bought to meet my gym requirement as cheaply as they could. He taped them to my feet for matches. He also gave me sweat clothes a wrestler had left in the locker room when he graduated.

But I was no good at it. I didn't make varsity, and I pinned myself in the only junior varsity meet my parents attended, and I did it with a West Point ride. I heard the coach shouting for me to get my shoulders up, but instead I continued trying to get my opponents shoulders down. So, when the referee slapped the mat, I thought he was giving me the win. So, when the referee raised my opponent's hand, I looked at him with my jaw agape. Also Coach Kellogg argued with the referee that I'd had control of my opponent. But the referee stood by his decision, and Jack easily pinned me on our dirty linoleum kitchen floor.

But I wrestled in one varsity meet. My weight class was 120 pounds, and our varsity wrestler in that class couldn't make weight for the regional tournament in Battle Creek, and I also drove to that meet. The coach said no school bus was available and asked for volunteers. But I didn't need to. Not knowing whether my father would let me use our car, I didn't volunteer until I drove to the school to leave for the meet, and the coach said he had enough volunteer, But he said Duane Palmateer could ride with me. So, thinking Duane was about as popular as I, I thought the coach thought no one wished to ride with either of us, and, on ice on a curve between Coldwater and Union City, the Bel Air's left rear tire blew out.

The car spun around and rolled backward to a stop between two trees in a barnyard. The rest of the team stopped to wait for Duane and me to change the tire. I saw that the tire was bald. I hoped no one else did, but the farmer helped. He used forks on the front of his tractor to lift the back of the car. So we arrived in Battle Creek in time for the meet and early enough to lose some cash by flipping coins with an African American kid in a hallway outside the gym. He was doing something with one of his thumbs. My teammates told each other he might have been cheating. But I couldn't see how.

I lost my match, after again trying a West Point ride, but my opponent pinned me with no help from that.

That December, my mother gave birth to my brother Jerry Dee, and Peggy gave birth to her son Donald. My mother said she and my father couldn't think of any other name rhyming with Lee. Before Jerry, I was her only child with no sibling with a rhyming middle name. She said my father knew someone whose name was Dee and that she and my father couldn't think of any other name rhyming with Lee. Peggy didn't follow that pattern, but she called John and Donald Johnnie and Donnie.

That winter my grades improved again. Wrestling excused me from gym class. So I had a study hall, and, in the spring, I went out for cross country. But, though I could sprint, the two miles tired me. So, on our runs to the Coldwater Country Club during practice, I walked much of the way.

Once I stopped to talk with Harold Colvin. He had married Martha Goebel and worked at a wood products factory on Union City Road about halfway between Coldwater and the Country Club. I talked with him while he was on break on the factory's loading dock.

I didn't finish the cross country season. The coach told runners not varsity to practice while the varsity team was at a meet. Nearly none did. The coach removed all who didn't from the team. So my grades dropped again.

For Christmas that year I'd asked my father for a Guitar. I hoped for an f-hole arched-top guitar I'd seen in the Montgomery Ward Catalog. He ordered a cheap Kay round-hole flat-top guitar like Jack's Stella. It came with a book telling how to tune the strings relative to one another, but I knew nothing of harmonics. So, in tune or not, my piano couldn't help me with that.

But once I played it in Church. The music at the church services wasn't only Mrs. Hamlin's piano. All the members of a family belonging to the church played musical instruments and played during every service. The church had a railing around a place for a choir. They played there. But I played alone in front of Reverend Hamlin's pulpit.

I played "The Old Rugged Cross" one pitch at a time. I knew that didn't measure up to that family, but, thought the only boy of the three children of that family was several years younger than I, I befriended the only boy of the three children of that family, and once, while one of his sisters accompanies me on their piano in their home, I sang Bobby Daren's song "Somewhere Beyond the Sea" from sheet music, and their brother gave me some trumpet lessons. The sheet music was mine, but I don't remember how I acquired it, and I couldn't follow the trumpet instructions. I also once ate supper at their house, and I also shot arrows with them at targets in their backyard, but that friendship didn't last long.

Jack's sister Ruthann and some friends of hers decided to open a dance hall in a ballroom above the office supplies store next door to City Hall. They did it to make money, but they didn't charge Billy Kling or me for admission, and I met the leader of the band they hired. His name was Esi Guillermo, but he called himself and his band Big Ace and the Ambassadors. I offered to tune his electric guitar for him. When I began to tune it by the instructions that came with my guitar, he scowled and took his guitar back.

Billy and I sat at a table to listen. Billy wagged his head back and forth to the rhythm and indicated that I should. I did, but few others were there, and fewer danced. So Ruthann's endeavor lasted but a few weeks.

Jack's sister Maryann lived with her husband in a house on the northeast corner of Pearl and Clay Streets. Bob told me her husband was a cousin of his father's. We went to see her once.

Bob began collecting model cars. I bought a model of the model of Pontiac we said was the nicest car we'd ever seen. No Ferraris were in the custom car magazines we read, but I also bought a model of a Ferrari and used my wood burner to customize it. Bob showed it to his father, but my models were cheaper than Bob's, and Bob's interest in muscle-building also went beyond reading magazines.

His father bought him some weights, and his grandmother let him use a room in her part of her house as a gym. He also bought high protein tablets and learned what foods had the most protein. I lifted weights with him and made high protein drinks of eggs, milk, bananas, and peanut butter. I mixed it with my mother's eggbeater. I beat the egg whites first to make it thicker.

During wrestling season I used staying in my weight class to excuse myself from eating supper with my family. Mainly I ate peanut butter and grape jelly on toast for supper alone in our kitchen. I stirred the jelly into the peanut butter and baked it in our oven. I continued that after wrestling season.

To make a barbell I took apart a lawn mower we brought from Washington Street. I slid its solid steel wheels onto the ends of a piece of pipe. Once I tried to use that mower to mow our grass, but I couldn't. I don't know who mowed our lawn anywhere we lived.

Once, trying to clean and jerk my wrestling body weight, I cleaned it but jerked it over my head and into the wall behind me. I put three holes in the drywall, two for the weights on the ends of the barbell and one for my head. The next day Bob told me his father wanted me to pay for the damage. But, of course, I couldn't, and his father didn't insist that I did.

Bob made some friends who had more money than I had and perhaps more than he had. They were Richard and Chris Lyon, the two oldest sons of



the owner of Lyon's Pharmacy, a drugstore in a new shopping center on the north side of town. Coldwater's Mayor was their uncle. Bob had no car, but Richard had an old Dodge. So Bob helped him work on it in his garage.

One night at a school dance, I saw a tall dark-haired girl I'd never seen before. I thought she fit the ordinary notion of perfectly pretty. I talked to her and learned that her name was Erlene Erskine and that she lived in Marshall. The football game that night was between Marshall and Coldwater. She gave me her address, and the next weekend I hitchhiked to Marshall.

She showed me an oil painting she said she'd painted. I had nothing to say of the painting, but we went for a walk in a park. She asked me whether I could come back with a friend for a friend of hers. The next weekend Richard drive drove us to Marshall in his Dodge. Earline's friend seemed to me to be too far overweight to be perfectly pretty, but, after that, Earline was Richard's girlfriend.

Bob's father's parents lived on a farm. He told me they had had a 1938 Ford on their farm no one was driving. He said they'd promised it to give it to him when he could drive but that it didn't run. He told me I could have it for thirty dollars. I don't remember how I acquired the thirty dollars, but the parents of the Kurt boys had remained friends of my mother's. Bob Kurt, the boys' father, tried to pull the car to our house by a rope behind his car, but one of its wheel fell from it on the way. So we left it on the gravel road where the wheel fell. I asked Bob McNall to ask his father to refund the cash, and his father did. I don't remember how I acquired the thirty dollars or how my father fit into this possibility, I don't know how that fits into this part of this pile of ashes, and neither do I know how it could in any other part of it. But, like all the other missing conjunctions among these ashes or missing ashes among the conjunctions, there it is.

After school, the last day of my junior year, I drove Connie in her Metropolitan to a bridge across the Coldwater River near where David and I had swung on vines.

"I'm not going to school in Coldwater next year," she said as we lay in the grass beside a bridge as I gazed at the sunlight on the pebbles beneath the rippling shallow water thinking I was feeling natural beauty I should have felt but never had. "You know my father has to pay tuition. And I don't know how things are going between us. So I think I should give this back to you."

She was unwinding the yarn from the class ring, but I thought of how things were going between us and how things had always gone, and then I thought of how things might go for me in the future.

“I’ll see you in ten years,” I said accepting the ring. “When I get my PhD.”

But, thinking of how I felt, I didn’t look to see her reaction.

I felt that suddenly a load may have lifted from me, and that summer Woody taught a course in creative writing, and my mother talked my father into paying my tuition for it, and I began to make friends of whom I felt proud.

Before class one afternoon, at the Coldwater Public Library, I came across some of my classmates. They invited me to ride to class with them. As I descended the steps on the way to their car, Connie was ascending the steps. She stopped, turned to me, and leaned back on the railing. So I stopped and turned to her.

“Don’t you love me anymore, Bill?” she asked.

“No,” I said, and I continued down the steps.

But I looked back through the car’s back window. She hadn’t left the railing to continue up the steps. She’d bowed her head toward the steps in front of her. She was weeping.

But, in Woody’s classes, I learned more than writing. He talked of the difference between predestination and determinism and how that was relevant to Christianity and Daoism. I lacked the patience to go with the flow of my understanding of Daoism, but determinism seemed reasonable to me.

I also looked for books on Buddhism at the Coldwater Public Library, but that wasn’t because Woody mentioned it but because he mentioned *Catcher in the Rye*. I read that and each of the other books Salinger published. So I became aware of Buddhism through *Franny and Zooey*. I found no books on Buddhism through the library’s card catalog, but I asked the librarian whether she knew of any. Neither did she find any in the library, but, a few days later, she gave me a paperback copy of D. T. Suzuki’s *The Way of Zen*. She said her husband was a psychologist and gave it to her for me.

I also met him. But, if determinism isn’t valid, that wasn’t because of Buddhism. I found myself standing behind him and his wife in line to see a movie at the Main Theatre. While talking with them with my admission in hand, I folded the dollar into a tiny square.

“What does that mean?” I asked him.

“It means you’re trying to impress someone,” he said, but I didn’t read the book he gave me, and neither did I impress Woody as much as I wished to.

He asked his students to write an allegory. He said what I wrote wasn’t an allegory. My overt subject was the carnival business. I intended it to symbolize various ethical concerns. Woody said the symbolism wasn’t overt enough. I thought he said it shouldn’t be overt.

But, by my understanding of allegory, I might have called *Of Mice and Men* and allegory, and I wrote a book report on it accordingly and expected and A and praise from Woody. My report said the two killings in the book were moral and amoral while killing in general was immoral. But Woody gave me a B+ for it and said nothing of it. But I kept trying.

At his house, after my separation from Connie, I told him I thought romantic love was a sympathetic understanding mixed with a sex interest and that I was asexual.

“That won’t last long,” he said, and I knew I was wrong in one effort.

Lying on my bed reading one night, I thought of the darkness outside the window and thought my thinking of my inability to change that was unique. So I also told that to Woody at his house. I wasn’t thinking of his blindness when I thought of that. But I did as soon as I said it.

“Yeah?” he said of that, and nothing more.

Ordinarily when I went to his house, he was sitting in a chair near his front door reading in brail. Once, as I sat down in a chair between that chair and the door, he pointed to a painting above his head on the wall behind him. He said its subject was *Wuthering Heights* and asked me whether I thought it expressed the passion of the book. Again I had nothing to say.

I read all of Salinger’s books in about a week. I liked Holden Caulfield’s calling people phonies and his saying the, even if you had a million years, you couldn’t rub out half the “fuck you” signs in the world. But, also liking his and saying “goddamned”, I theorized that profanity was more directly expressive than precise diction, and still I didn’t read much. Still reading was more of an ambition for me than something I had reason to do.

But I read an article Jack suggested that I read. It was about Italian race car driver Tazio Nuvelari. Jack loaned me the magazine. Once, in Connie’s car, I tried what the article called a four-wheel drift. I told her why I did it, but she asked me not to do that again.

Jack and Peggy and Johnnie and Donnie moved to the second floor of a house beside the car lot across Division street from what was Connie’s house. I often went there to see Peggy. She was often in a full flowery skirt she said she liked. But she was always barefoot, and her feet were always dirty, and she told me as we played Scrabble that that Jack threw her down the stairs and threw the alarm clock after her. She said he did that when she tried to get him up to go to work. She said he stayed home from work for anything.

His job was at the Texaco Station across Marshall street from the new shopping center. She said that once he hurt one of his hands changing a tire and

stayed home for a week. But some of what she said of him seemed to me to be more perverse if not more cruel.

“He says Johnnie’s yours,” she said. “And he tries to stick it in every hole I’ve got.”

A reason the TV show the Honeymooners troubled me was that I thought my parents argued a lot. But the nearest to fighting I remember between them was in our dining room on Monroe Street, and it was neither a fight nor an argument. My father mocked my mother for a habit she developed of frequently using the word “definitely”.

“Oh, definitely, definitely!” he said.

She wept, and, excepting her telling him she didn’t get to see her mother anymore, that’s my earliest memory of my mother weeping, and, though he didn’t apologize, I thought he may have been sorry.

The Kurts moved to an old brick schoolhouse that had closed. They asked Peggy to take care of their kids while they went on vacation. She said she couldn’t and suggested that I do it. She didn’t tell me why, and I didn’t ask. Welcoming the opportunity to make some money, I spent about a week feeding the Kurts kids and looking through a Spiegel catalog I found there for clothes to buy with my earnings. But they didn’t pay me enough to buy any of it.

Also at about that time I met the Hamlins’ son who donated the clothes she gave me. His name was Jimmy. I met him in the living room of the parsonage. His sister, Joyce, was also there. He was tall and blond and slim and lisped. She was nearly as tall, but she wasn’t as slim, and her hair was red. Neither laughed while I was there, and they said nearly nothing to me.

Among the clothes Jimmy gave Mrs. Hamlin were a two-button gray tweed sport jacket and a brown leather fleece-lined bomber jacket. I wore the sports jacket to every Sunday morning or evening church service I attended at the Hamlins’ church after that. But I cut the lining out of the bomber jacket to wear it as a vest. It was too big for me wasn’t black like the motorcycle jackets swamps wore. I also tried to use a worn out sheet to make a white sport coat, but, after cutting out some of the pieces, I hung them in the back of my room’s walk-in closet and left them there. Once an evangelist visiting an evening service was in a sport jacket I liked. It reminded me of some I’d seen in the Spiegel catalogue. I asked him how much he’d paid for it.

“I don’t remember,” he said.

“About thirty dollars?” I asked.

“Something like that,” he said.

My father’s work clothes at the State Home were white trousers and white T-shirts. He retired from there and worked part time checking tables at

one of the bars on Monroe Street. I think the bar may have been the Alibi, but it wasn't the Stag. Its card room was behind the bar room. Then he wore white T-shirts and jeans both at home and at work. But he didn't work there long.

That summer, he bought a new pair of loafers. I wore out the black loafers I bought in Marshall. My father gave me his new ones. They were too big for me, but I wore them. I don't remember what he wore then.

He developed an infection in one of his feet, quit his job checking cards, and went to the V.A. hospital in Ann Arbor for treatment. Doctors there also told him he was diabetic and that, if he didn't quit drinking beer, he'd die in six months. He occasionally had done what he called going in the wagon. But he didn't then.

"If I can't drink beer," he said, "I don't want to live."

One afternoon, as I came into the house after my creative writing class, he fell into my arms in our foyer. When I caught him, he looked into my eyes. What I saw then wasn't a glint but fear and wonder. I remembered the first time I didn't cry when he spanked me. We were also in that foyer then. The spanking was because I came home late for supper. He didn't bother with a belt but wrapped one arm around my back to bend over to hit my butt with his other hand. I began to cry but stopped myself. He stopped hitting me and stood up. His look then also seemed to be from wonder and fear. But then I didn't see as much fear, and I thought the fear was from regret of losing control of me and shame of not knowing he had.

The VA also gave him some false teeth. Both his teeth and my mother's teeth were visibly bad, but neither of them ever before had false teeth. He asked me to drive him to Ann Arbor to pick up his. On our way back to Coldwater, we stopped at a diner for hamburgers. We sat at the counter. He took his new teeth out to eat his hamburger. He never put them back in.

"Let's go to Lansing," he said.

His second wife and her children lived in Lansing. His and her son owned a dry-cleaning service there. We went to their house. It was modern ranch style house in a suburb. His wife answered the doorbell. She said nothing until my father spoke. After my father introduced us to her, she remained silent for a few more seconds.

"He's at the shop," she said then. "Come in. I'll call him."

She offered us seats at a colonial style dining set in her kitchen. A telephone was on a wall of the kitchen. She used it to make a few calls.

"He isn't at the shop," she said. "They're looking for him. Would you like something to drink? Some coffee? Coca Cola?"

She looked at me when she offered the Coca Cola. I'd never seen my father drink either. I looked at him.

"Coke would be fine," he said.

She brought three bottles of it to the table and sat with us. Before she spoke again, a boy younger than I came into the kitchen. He looked at us but didn't speak.

"This is Kip," she said, "Clifford H. Harman, III."

He sat with us at the table, but still he said nothing. Neither did we say anything to him. She was silent for several more minutes. Then she made another call.

"I'm sorry," she said hanging up. "They still haven't found him."

"That's alright," said my father. "Tell him we stopped by."

"I will," she said, and she walked us to her door.

The next week, coming home from Woody's class, I found my father standing at the card table looking at things in a cardboard box. I stood beside him and looked into the box. He took from it a double-exposure photograph. He showed it to me and told me he'd done it. Next he took from it a portrait of a woman in pencil on Manila paper.

"Isn't she beautiful?" he asked.

He looked at me with his gray eyes glistening. I understood that it was of his wife who'd died before he married Budd's mother and that he'd drawn the portrait. But I thought her appearance was old fashion. So I neither answered him nor asked how or from whom he'd received the box. He returned the picture to the box, and I went to my room. A few days later, he had a stroke and went to Ann Arbor in an ambulance. I wasn't at home. My mother rode with him in an ambulance from Coldwater's hospital. She rode back alone.

"He's paralyzed from the neck down," she told me, "and he can't talk."

A few days after that, I drove my mother to the hospital, but I waited in a hallway while she visited him. On our way back to Coldwater, I drove I-94 at about ninety miles per hour until the engine began to clatter and stopped running. I don't remember how anyone knew we were there, but a wrecker came and took us to a garage. A mechanic repaired the car's rocker shaft.

"I'll have to send you the money," said my mother. "It's the best we can do."

I don't know how she could, but he accepted her promise. I suppose that was because he had no choice. But I have no doubt that she kept her promise.

During all that, Woody's creative writing course ended. I'd written to Bob and Ruth to ask where I could return to working for them. I also suggested

using the six-cat for marks to break phonograph records. I told them that would be more psychologically appealing than knocking cats from shelves. Ruth replied. She said nothing of my suggestion, but she said they'd be playing the Cass County fair the next week. So, the next week, I hitchhiked the sixty miles to Cassopolis. A few days later, Returning to Ruth's balloon dart from eating blueberry pie à la mode at a Cass County committee joint, I heard my name over the fair's public address system calling me to the Fair Secretary's office.

"Did you hear that?" asked Ruth as I passed her counter.

"Yes," I said walking on.

"Are you Bill Harman?" a man asked me in front of the building.

"Yes," I said, thinking the call was from him.

"I think your dad's dead," he said, and he walked on past me.

"You need to call this number," said a woman behind the counter inside, handing me a slip of paper and setting a telephone on the counter. "She said to call collect."

"Commercial," said Smitty, answering the telephone in his bar.

The operator asked him whether he'd accept the charges.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "I'll have someone go get her."

"Your dad's dead," said my mother. "Can you come home?"

"Is Sunday soon enough?" I asked. "We tear down Saturday."

"That's alright," she said. "Bertha's here. The funeral isn't until Tuesday. The last time I could go see him, I told him you were working. He couldn't talk, but his eyes lit up."

I walked past Ruth and on to the REO. I sat on the rollaway for a few minutes. I tried to weep but couldn't. I returned to the joint and, still trying to find a way to react, sat on its counter with my feet on it and my back against the frame of its sidewall. Ruth looked at me briefly but said nothing. She returned her attention to the midway.

"My dad's dead," I said with something between a cry and a groan.

She again briefly looked at me and again silently returned her attention to the midway.

"I feel like he's still alive somewhere," I said, and I did feel that.

"I know what you mean," she said. "We'll buy you a bus ticket."

"If it's alright with you," I said, "I'll work the rest of the week."

That Sunday Bob drove me to the bus station in the panel truck.

"You don't have to come back," he said.

"I will," I said "if it's alright with you."

"It's alright with me," he said. "You can work the basketball in La Porte. Ruth and I won't be there, but Willard will be there with the six-cat."

He also bought me a ticket from Coldwater to La Porte, but, much more than the ticket, I appreciated the promotion from town mark sucker help to concession agent, and my father's death didn't diminish that appreciation.

In Coldwater my Uncle Jim, Bertha's husband, drove me to the funeral parlor to see my father's body. It was at Gillespie's, on Division Street, behind the park across Division Street from the park where I'd lost the baseball in the cannon. The one the father of the kid who told me not to fuck up our house owned was on Chicago Street beside the one with the cannon. I thought of the mess we'd made of the house. The formica was coming loose from the kitchen counters. Roaches scurried beneath it when I turned on the light for a snack at night. My mother never waxed the oak floors. Gillespie's funerals were for people who couldn't afford Putnam's funerals.

Jim left me alone beside the coffin. That changed my thoughts. My father was in his blue serge suit. Excepting for funerals, I didn't remember seeing him in it after we left Ionia, and Jim and Bertha had bought him a new white shirt and a narrow polyester tie. I felt that what I saw there wasn't my father. I leaned forward to look more closely. As I did that, Jim returned to the room. Feeling I was doing something wrong, I jumped back, and Jim's look at me made me feel more as though I was.

But Peggy helped me through the funeral. We giggled through it. Reverend Hamlin delivered the eulogy. I don't think he ever met my father. I remembered that I never could pay much attention to him, either in math class or in church. We sat in a pew behind my father's children by his second wife. They looked back at us. We tried not to giggle at that. But we did.

But I didn't giggle at the cemetery. It was in Athens. Peggy and I rode there in a black Cadillac. I don't remember who rode with us, but a United States flag draped the coffin, and an American Legion honor guard gave my father a 21-gun salute. Other legionnaires folded the flag, and one of them handed it to my mother as she sat in a folding chair. Her head dropped in tears. That was how I learned she loved him. I hung the flag over the side window of my room, the window I didn't use to read. But the next day I was on a bus heading for La Porte.

I had a layover of several hours in Michigan City. I'd never spent that much time in a city that large alone. I found a men's store and bought a shirt with green pinstripes and a snap tab collar.

In La Porte I walked to the fairgrounds. Willard and Lester and the other six-cat agent had already set up both the six-cat and the basketball joint. I walked around the midway. It was an oval with two Ferris wheels at the center of each side. Willard told me it was a mile around.



The show wouldn't open until the next day. Willard took me downtown to a cigar store, but not to buy cigars. He nodded to the man behind the counter but walked past him into a backroom where men were playing poker at several tables. He stood and watched for a few minutes. But he didn't play.

"Come on," he said to me, and, saying nothing to anyone else in the store, he turned and walked outside.

"It's a tough house," he said outside. "I wouldn't get in it."

"I run a poker game in my apartment in Phenix City," he said as he drove us back to the lot. "I serve steaks after the game. Phenix City used to be wide open gambling until somebody killed the Alabama Attorney General for trying to clean it up. I quit school and ran away from home when I was thirteen. A guy put me to work dealing blackjack in one of the casinos. It's still pretty wide open but not like it was. There's a movie about it. *The Phenix City Story*."

That night, as he and I sat on the counter of the six-cat as Lester stood reading one of his Louis L'Amour paperback novels while leaning against the front rail of the canvas trough into which the cats fell, Willard pulled a new deck of cards from a pocket and handed it to me.

"Open that," he said, and he told me to shuffle it, show him the cards one at a time, and turn them face down on the counter, but not show him the last one.

"It's the jack of clubs," he correctly said of the last card.

So he could count cards, and his clothes accorded with current fashion, and he had about a dozen pair of shoes in the trunk of his car. He told me he never paid less than sixteen dollars for a pair of shoes, that the best shoes had leather soles but rubber heels, and that wearing same pair of shoes two days in a row was bad for one's feet. But I couldn't do my new job.

I could hand the marks the balls, take their quarters, and make change. But I couldn't make myself call in the marks. It was too much like selling salve or Christmas Cards. But I also gave away money. I let three marks steal stock.

While one of them played, another talked to me, while the other stole, and I didn't know that until after they left. Then, by the number of pieces of plush remaining, I saw that the thief must have made several trips. So my net for that night was a debt to Bob. My pay was 25 percent of my receipts after deducting the cost of the stock and the price we paid the ride company for the privilege of operating the joint on the lot the ride company booked. But, when I told Willard what I'd done, he only showed me how to give the neck ribbons an extra twist around the nails from which I hung the plush.

"It won't be as easy to steal them that way," he said.

I followed his instructions. But I thought he should have told me I should have paid more attention. So I didn't know whether I should have been grateful for his not being quite honest with me. I also forced myself to pay more attention, but still I couldn't make myself call in the marks. So my end for that spot was far less than Ruth had paid me to blow up balloons, and, for the next spot, it wasn't much more. But Bob let me keep the job, and Willard educated me in other ways.

When the REO was at spots Bob and Ruth played without us, I shared motel rooms with him. At one spot, in the front seat of his Impala, we drank some Manischewitz he bought. At a spot in Mississippi, he took me to a pool hall. He let me break every game, but, after my second miss, he ran all his balls from the table. He quit after three games.

"I feel like I'm playing with myself," he said.

But, checking into one motel, he said we didn't need to spend the extra money for two beds, and, that night, while I thought he was asleep, he moved against me. I moved away, but he did it again, and again. So, the third time, reaching the edge of the bed, I walked around to the other side and lay down again. He didn't do it again, but, the next day, I mentioned that to Bob while I was talking with him and Willard, and I also told Bob how Willard announced winners while working the six-cat.

"Here goes I winner here," I said he said.

Bob laughed at that, but I didn't know why he laughed, and next I asked him how much he thought I'd paid for the shirt I was in, one of the white button-down-collar shirts I'd bought at Penney's.

"A dollar ninety-eight," he said.

"Ninety-eight cents," I said. "It's worth more than that. I paid four bucks for my snap-tab. I bet you paid more than that for that shirt, and it doesn't look as nice."

"Willard gave me this shirt for my birthday," said Bob.

It was a white short-sleeve shirt with a white pattern in the weaving. I later learned that was a fashion particular to carnies. They called it white-on-white. But my main feeling in that was that I didn't wish to offend Bob.

So then I didn't know what to think, and Willard also told me assholes were cleaner than vaginas, and at one spot he went to a doctor and told me the doctor told him to masturbate, and, between spots in Tennessee, he told me he had something to do in Nashville, and that he'd be there for a couple of days.

"Can I go?" I asked.

"No," he replied, and, in the next spot, while helping set up the six-cat, I saw a steel rod protruding from one side of each end of each of two of its

sidewall 2x4, and I also saw by grooves in the paint that the 2x4's weren't 2x4's but pairs of 1x4's.

"What are those?" I asked Bob.

"Those are accessories," he replied.

"What did he ask?" asked Willard.

"What those are." Bob answered.

"They're necessities," said Willard.

In a spot where we set up the basketball joint beside the six-cat, a mark called me a thief and said he was going to kick my ass.

I leaned around the six-cat's sidewall.

"Hey, Rube," I said, hardly audibly.

"What?" asked the agent.

Willard was working the other side.

"Hey Rube," I said a little more loudly.

Then the mark stepped to the net that returned the balls to me from the baskets. He grabbed a ball and threw it over the back of the joint, but then he walked away. So I said nothing more of that to that agent and nothing to Willard. I retrieved the ball and went back to work.

A blonde girl asked me about myself and asked me for some free shots. I liked her appearance and gave her the free shots. But I took that conversation no further.

"What happened to your girlfriend?" asked Willard after the show closed, and neither did I take that conversation further.

## Chapter 7

### Popularity

At home, at the end of the summer, I found that my family had become wealthier than I'd ever known it to be. The Veterans Administration, during my father's treatment in Ann Arbor, had increased his disability rating far beyond what it had been since World War I. That, with my father's Social Security payments going to my mother for being his widow, made her income more than my father's last total income before his retirement.

But my mother never learned to drive. So I became the only member of my household with a drivers license, and my mother let me drive the Bel Air all I wished. She let me charge it at the Sinclair station beside the lot where Connie's father had parked his truck. My father had an account there, and she asked no questions. So many nights I drove back forth between the Alamo and Cooley's truck stop at the east of town. But I didn't drive my mother to pay her bills.

Ralph Kimble, the kid whose screwdriver I stole in the first grade, regularly made that circuit, and both of us did that alone, but he did it in his in his own red Oldsmobile 442 with a TV in it and a TV antenna on its roof, and I don't remember speaking to him after the first grade.

Also while I was on the road that year, Peggy left Jack and left Johnnie and Donnie with him, and no one gave me any indication that anyone knew where she went and a new men's clothing store opened in Coldwater, and also that summer a new men's clothing store opened in Coldwater.

Al Reyburn, the new store's owner, moved to Coldwater from Kalamazoo. His store was between the Penney's store and Luedders' shoe store. Coldwater's only other men's store was Cory's Best. It was in the next block east on the other side of Chicago Street. Al stocked the current fashions and hired Glen Sites, one of my class mates, to work part time for him. Cory's son worked for his father and was also a classmate of mine. But Best, Cory's partner, was an old man, and they didn't update their fashions to keep up with

Reyburn's. So Cory's quickly became the store where old men shopped, and the high school kids called Al by his first name.

"Check out these new belts," Said Glen spinning a rack of them the first time I went to Reyburn's.

I went there from curiosity, and I thought the belts were too wide. But soon I and others at school adopted the new fashions. So I spent most of my carnival money there that year, and Glen didn't stop his salesmanship at showing me the belts.

"I heard you're pretty good in McClellan's class," he said. "Can you help me with a book report on *The Catcher in the Rye*?"

"I don't know," I said shrugging. "I could tell you what I think about it,"

I knew I'd acquired a reputation for being good in McClellan's classes, but I didn't know anyone knew I'd read any of Salinger books.

"How about in my office tomorrow night?" he asked.

Al was letting him use a desk in the back room of the store, and had given him a key to the door opening to the alley, and I drove there, but we didn't talk much about *The Catcher in the Rye*.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Not a steady one."

"Can you get a date?" he asked. "I'm thinking you might double with Marcia and me some night."

Marcia was Marcia Enos, the girl with raven ringlets I'd thought was the ideal girl at the Methodist Church when I was seven. She'd become a cheerleader and was going steady with Glen, and Glen also drove 1955 Chevy. It was black and white sedan, not a hardtop. But it was his.

"Sure," I said. "I guess so."

So I asked Skip Bobier. Her father managed the lumber company from which Donny Shellenbarger and I had stolen the glasscutters. She was also a cheerleader, but she may also have been the most popular girl in the school. I often saw her in the school's hallways with Terry Ward, and Terry had become a varsity jock in both football and basketball. But a conversation I heard between them encouraged me.

"At least I have two eyebrows," she said.

Terry's eyebrows grew together above his nose, and Woody assigned a speech for delivery in class, on any subject we chose. So I decided to make a speech on popularity and use it as an excuse to talk to Skip. I told her the subject and asked her whether I could interview her in the school library.

"I don't know if I'm that popular," she said. "But I'll help if I can."

But I quickly went through my short list of questions and turned to my main question.

“Glen Sites asked me to get a date to double with him and Marcia,” I said. “So I thought I’d ask you.”

“I’m sort of going steady with Terry Ward,” she said after a brief glance at me. “But thanks for asking me.”

“Did you find a date?” Glen asked me in a hallway a few days later.

“Nah,” I said. “I asked Skip Bobier, but she said she’s going steady with Terry Ward.”

“Skip Bobier!” Glen exclaimed. “She’s the most popular girl in the school! Why didn’t you ask somebody like Drenda Houston?”

Drenda was Mr. Houston’s daughter, and Chris Sellars had told me he screwed her. She was a little overweight in junior high school, but I liked her blonde hair and freckles, and she had thinned down. But I neither told Glen that nor asked Drenda, and neither did I ever speak to Glen again outside the store. I gave the speech, but, not to need to interview anyone else, I changed its purpose. I saw Christ Quick standing at his locker with his head back and a wooden penis in hand as he performed fellatio on it.

“Chris Quick is one of the most popular kids in the school,” I told my English class. “And I saw him in front of his locker with a wooden penis in his mouth.”

“That’s enough, Mr. Harman,” said Woody. “I think you’d better sit down.”

And I did, but he somewhat apologized, a few days later.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have stopped you,” he said at his house.

A few weeks later Chris died in an automobile accident. Mr. Dennis gave all the students the choice of sitting in homeroom during his funeral or going to the funeral. I sat in my homeroom.

“I didn’t like him when he was alive,” I told Larry Neitzert as we sat together in our nearly empty homeroom. “I don’t know why I’d go to his funeral.”

“I didn’t like him either,” said Larry. “I don’t think anybody did. But they wanted to get out of school.”

Once Woody, also at his house, told me of a conversation between him and another student there.

“Snyder said he knows you have a high IQ but that his is higher,” he said sitting beneath the *Wuthering Heights* painting. “Skip Bobier’s is higher than his.”

Oscar Renshaw told my sociology class the school had a policy of not telling student's their IQ's but that he'd find out for any student who asked him to. I asked him to, but he didn't. I reminded him, but he said it was high but that he didn't remember how high. I thought I made two friend because it was high, but I also thought my Reburns clothing may have been part of the reason. Neither was in Woody's class, but both tried to be intellectual and were less athletic than I, and neither cared for sports.

One was Dick Atkinson. His father worked at the State Home but also had been in business with his brother in Columbia. They'd patented and tried to market what they called eagle claw tether stakes. They were aluminum stakes with swiveling tops with three prongs that dug them deeper into the ground when a dog pulled on the tether by which one tied the dog to the stake. Dick had one of the stakes and some Eagle Claw Tether Stake Company stationery. They were on a table he cluttered as I cluttered my card table.

He lived in a big old house across Grand Street from Parkhurst Park. Arthur, his older brother, was majoring in special education at Wabash College. The house had two upstairs bedroom. Dick used the one that had been his brother's as a party room. Wally, Dick's father, gave him full permission to drink alcohol. The table he cluttered was in his party room.

Bob Kubiak, my other new friend, was also a friend of Atkinson's. Both drank in Dick's party room. Once I drove Atkinson to Kubiak's house to give Kubiak a ride to Atkinson's house. His house was in Kinderhook, about ten miles north of Coldwater. It was a tidy relatively small white clapboard house, but Kubiak refused talk about his parents.

I also befriended Dave Norton. He was younger than I and lived in a house on Monroe Street between mine and Washington Street. He bought a pair of wingtip shoes because I did. The shoes had short wings and were a burgundy color. I bought them for their low price before I learned that long wings and cordovan were the current fashion. But I didn't tell Dave that.

My mother told me Dave's mother was single but was in a relationship with an attorney whose office was in a gray-shingled house across Monroe Street from what had been Reverend Hamlin's gray-shingled church. Once I raked the attorney's leaves. I had to do it several times for him to pay me the dollar he promised. He pointed out pieces of leaves I was leaving.

I also spent some time with a kid in my neighborhood who was younger than Dave. He lived between Dave's house and mine. I used the wheels from my wagon to build a sort of wooden go cart. He and I took turns pushing each other on it on the sidewalk between our houses.

I don't remember his name, but a guy whose name was Harold lived between that kid's house and Dave's. He was older than I but lived with his parents. At least one afternoon, while his parents weren't at home, we drank beer at their house. But I spent much more time with Atkinson and Kubiak than I spent with with him or Dave or that younger kid.

Kubiak and Atkinson called themselves nonconformists. Atkinson told me about his brother's Volvo, Simon and Garfunkel, and Jack Kerouac. Kubiak sneered at popular kids, especially girls.

"He spins her on the end of his dick like a pinwheel," said Kubiak of Phil Teeter and Chris Culy.

Chris was Phil's girlfriend. She was a cheerleader of ordinary size. Phil was an extraordinarily large varsity football player. Chris's father owned Culy's. Culy's was Coldwater's only jewelry store other than Zales, the one where I bought my class ring. I don't know what Phil's father did for his money, but he bought Phil a new Volvo P1800 sports car.

But Kubiak's and Atkinson's main nonconformity was drinking beer. One night I drove them to the Alamo to buy hamburgers to take them back to his party room. I took a bottle of beer with me. To go inside with them to pick up the hamburgers, I untucked my shirt and tucked the bottle of beer behind my belt. The owner asked me what I had under my shirt. I pulled up my shirt to show him.

"Get out of here," he said. "And don't come back."

I knew that was illegal. But I was thinking of it as mainly nonconformist and funny. So I didn't understand his reaction.

Woody moved into one of the county's old brick school houses. He told me there that he was harboring an Air Force deserter in his garage. I also thought of that as mainly nonconformist.

"Don't tell anyone," he said. "I could be in a lot of trouble."

I wrote to Senator Hart and told him I'd rather be a nonconformist than a soldier. Woody told me Mr. Dennis suggested to him that my decision might be Woody's fault. I understood that, but he also told me I might reconsider my decision. He said I might be passing up the chance of a lifetime. I understood that also, but I wasn't sure I understood Woody's saying it, and the deserter wasn't my main reason for that decision, and neither was conforming with Atkinson's or Kubiak's nonconformity. My main motives were that I didn't know how I'd acquire the 117 dollars I'd need to pay for the West Point uniforms and that I was afraid I couldn't handle the discipline, and, generally I wasn't much of a nonconformist. My dressing in fashion put my sincerity in



question, and so did my efforts to keep my grades up, and my history teacher further scewed my notion of nonconformity.

His name was Bosnack, and he was German, but he also dressed in fashion. So, partly from curiosity, I sat in the front row of his class. Once, in his class, I drew a picture of a fighter jet. He looked down and told me Hitler was an artist, but my the most nonconformist deed of mine in his class was to erase the rock from the picture of Rodin's "The Thinker" in my history book to replace it with a toilet, and I also earned extra credit in his class.

He offered it for any report any student wished to present orally to the class. I gave one on Wagner. I borrowed a record player from the library and played his prelude to Lohengrin. It was with the collection of classical albums Mrs. Hamlin loaned me. But I also did the same with a 45 r.p.m. record of Andy Griffith performing a comedy routine, and Mr. Bosnack was going the second marking period, and Kubiak's reaction to that further confused all of that.

Describing how Judy Pennington crossed her legs in class, he said the reason for Mr. Bosnack's departure was something he did with her. She sat immediately behind me in his class, and the way she crossed her legs in class attracted me, but, if it attracted Mr. Bosnack, I saw no indication of that, and I thought she was a little over weight, and Kubiak didn't say what Mr. Bosnack did. So I gave Kubiak no credibility in that regard, and his replacement added more questions to the history of my tenth grade history class. Al Reyburn's wife replaced him, and, though no one did to her what some of the boys did to Nancy McGee, she lacked the congeniality I might have expected of Al's wife, and, though her face didn't disappoint me, I thought her ankles were extraordinarily thick. But, one night that November, Atkinson and Kubiak and I demonstrated what I still think was somewhat extreme nonconformity.

"Did you hear somebody shot the President?" Jim Parks asked me in the school library. "Didn't kill him though. Just winged him."

In my next class, I learned Kennedy was dead. The class was Physics The classroom was also for chemistry. Mr. Terdal, my physics teacher, sat in front of the class behind a Bunsen burner. His eyes weren't open. So I supposed he was praying. But I and others of his students silently went into the classroom's storeroom for laboratory equipment and chemicals. We closed the door to whisper as we ordinarily did in class.

But he had given me an A for the first marking period and told my class that was the first A he'd given anyone. Seeing no purpose for more theoretical physics, my performance diminished when we moved on from basic machines. I saw no use for that. But that wasn't neither that nor whispering in the storeroom was my extreme nonconformity.

Kubiak wasn't Irish, but he suggested that we have a wake for Kennedy in Atkinson's party room. He said he'd bring hard cider if Atkinson would provide Bourbon. He said we could mix the two into what he called stone fences. I spent much of the day off from school for mourning watching the funeral on TV. But I had to try to feel mournful, and I asked my mother to buy me a case of beer for the wake. We invited every student who talked to us. No one accepted our invitation, but Dick's father bought him a pint of bourbon. He spent that evening at the Elk's club, but Dick's mother stayed at home.

"Dickie!" she shouted from downstairs. "What are you doing up there?"

"Oh, shut up!" shouted Dickie. "You old bag!"

They repeated that several times, until we heard her on the stairs.

"Oh shit!" said Kubiak. "Here she comes!"

He began pushing furniture against the door to the stairway landing.

"Come on!" he said. "Give me a hand!"

Then, after Dick and I helped him move a chest of drawers against the door, he pulled me out to the roof of the living room's bay window.

"Get back!" he said, nearly pushing me from it. "She'll see you!"

Dick pulled a chair to the chest of drawers, opened a drawer, and sat in the chair with his feet on the front of the drawer.

"Don't let her in!" said Kubiak, but I left the roof.

Standing beside Atkinson, I saw the doorknob turn. Then, as the chest of drawers began to move as the door began to open, I saw through the opening that Dick's mother was sitting on a clothes hamper. She was in a shorty nightgown with her back and the hamper against the wall on the other side of the landing while she pushed the door with her feet. I hoped my mother would never be that old and drunk. But then Kubiak left the roof and pushed the chest of drawer to reclose the door, and Dick's mother went back downstairs, and we resumed our wake, until Kubiak interrupted it to say he was hungry.

"Do you think she passed out yet?" he asked Dick.

"I don't know," said Dick. "I don't hear anything."

"I'll go see," said Kubiak.

He pulled the chest of drawers away from the door, went downstairs, returned with a can of corned beef hash and a fork, ate all of the hash, vomited all over the room, and passed out on the party room floor. Atkinson passed out on the party room sofa. I passed out on a double bed in the other upstairs room. It also had a twin bed, and I considered it. But I thought it was too far to walk.

In the morning I awakening to the smell of Kubiak's puke. We agreed that we needed to go to a laundromat. We loaded into to the trunk of the Bel Air

everything launderable we saw to have vomit on it. I drove us to the nearest of Coldwater's two laundromats.

As we entered the parking lot, an old man drove into one of the Bel Air's rear fenders. The Bel Air's horn wasn't working as it should. So I'd removed its horn rim to be able to short it to make it work. But I couldn't do that quickly enough, and the old man was looking behind him. A lawnmower handle was protruding from the trunk of his car.

"Why didn't you honk your horn?" he asked.

While I tried to think of an answer, Kubiak asked the old man for his drivers license and insurance information. His drivers license had expired, and he had no insurance documentation with him. Kubiak asked him whether the address on his drivers license was his. The old man said it was. Kubiak told him we'd go there that afternoon. We did the laundry, took it to Atkinsons house, and went to the address. It was a brick house on Chicago Street. It was one of a few Coldwater houses whose design I especially appreciated. In its kitchen, the old man gave us his insurance information. I gave him my address. His insurance company sent my mother a check, but she didn't use it to repair the car. So, from then on, it had a slit in its right rear fender. But that wasn't the only damage I did to it.

I auditioned for the lead part in the school play. Miss Gaviglio, the high school's drama teacher, selected the son of the minister of the First Methodist Church I'd attended. The character was a juvenile delinquent. Atkinson said Miss Gaviglio said her reason for not selecting me was that I didn't look enough like a juvenile delinquent. Kubiak laughed and said Miss Gaviglio hadn't married but had gone with her boyfriend for years. But the school also had a hootenanny that winter, and I also auditioned for that.

I nearly didn't. The auditions for the play were in a classroom, but the hootenanny auditions were in the gym, and many more students auditioned. So, deciding not to audition before so many people, I began to drive home. But I drove back and successfully auditioned from a book of folks songs I had.

I don't remember how I acquired the book, but, after that acceptance, I didn't drive directly home. Snow was falling, but I drove aimlessly in it singing to myself, until, not seeing the stop sign at the north end of Fremont Street, I drove past it and into the chain link behind the football field.

Then, in the snow, I couldn't back up. But a man driving by stopped and gave the car enough of a push to return it to the street. Then I saw that the fence had cut the Bel Air's right front fender over its headlight. But the man who helped me, looking at the fence, advised me not to tell anyone, and said he

wouldn't, and then I saw that I'd done more damage to the fence than to the car. So, excepting my mother, I didn't tell anyone. I couldn't not tell her.

"What were you doing?" she asked. "Singing?"

So then I had to ask myself whether that or the snow was why I didn't see the stop sign soon enough, but that didn't keep me out of the hootenanny.

Woody knew, from my allegory, of my carnival travel. He told me Cecelia Miller's parents were carnies. He suggested that she and I sing a duet of "Lemon Tree" for the hootenanny. She and I agreed to that, and I bought the sheet music, but she attended no rehearsals. At the third, the faculty organizer told me she had to hear something before the performance. I sang the song alone and *a capella*, but the advisor accepted it, and Atkinson told me he heard I could sing. Cecelia showed up for the hootenanny, but still we had no accompaniment. So, a few minutes before the performance, I gave Professor Boyer the sheet music and asked him to accompany us on his guitar.

"I might be able to strum some of the chords," he replied.

But I didn't hear his chords. All I heard was my voice and Cecelia's. They weren't in harmony, and Cecelia didn't come to school the next day, or ever again, at least not to that school.

So much of my embarrassment was shame for hers. But my shame wasn't enough to keep me from talking my mother into trading my father's car for a gray 1951 Austin of England four-door sedan I saw in White's used car lot, the lot behind my house. But It didn't run well, and it swayed on its suspension, and Kubiak laughed at it. He told me the swaying was because it no shock absorbers. He also laughed at its turn signals' swinging out of the roof supports. He said they were mox nix sticks. He also told me Gayle Richardson had traded it in. She was one of our classmates. He said it wasn't good enough for her.

But he also arranged for us to work on it in the school's auto shop, and he did more work than on it than I did and rode with me in it to a foreign car dealership in Battle Creek to buy a crank for it. But I also obtained the money for the crank from my mother, and all we tried failed. So I asked my mother to trade it for a turquoise 1961 Corvair station wagon I also saw in White's lot. The Corvair ran well, but, giving my mother a ride in it, I spun it for fun on snow in the parking lot behind Coldwater's state employment office. She didn't find that fun, and, in the school's student parking lot, Kubiak stopped me from doing it in reverse. He said the car might flip over.

But I took him and Atkinson in it to the toboggan slide at Pokagon, the Indiana state park between the Indiana Toll Road and Angola, and I also took them to the ski runs on Tamarack Mountain, across U.S. 27 from the park.

Tamarack Mountain was dirt some developers had piled on lower hills that year. Mr. Terdal organized a ski club and arranged for the club to ski there once each month at no cost to its members for skiing or lifts or lessons or equipment rental or lifts. Atkinson and Kubiak and I joined it.

My first time there, with not lesson, I tried the advanced slope.

On that attempt, I didn't fall, but I had to sit down to keep from sliding on ice into the lodge, and, on my second try, my right leg skied over a pile of snow in the middle of the slope while my left leg didn't, and, as I tumbled in snow, both of my skies came loose.

"Are you alright?" asked an instructor, looking down at me after I rolled to a stop dragging my skis by their safety straps.

"Yeah," I said, but I took a lesson before trying again.

So I learned to snowplow to turn and stop. I did that to keep from doing anymore tumbling. But that took the fun out of skiing for me, and the club didn't last long.

Gene Nutt was in my class and also joined the club. Vene Nutt, Gene's brother, graduated from high school a year or two before I did. So he wasn't a member, but he came to the club's third outing drunk, took some skis from the rack, and skied with no boots. So the schoolboard disbanded the club.

Woody told my English class a rich man had come to town and was organizing a project to restore the Tibbits Theatre, and not to make it a movie theatre, but to use it for live performances. Originally the Tibbits was an opera house in the Second French Empire style of architecture a rich man whose name was Tibbits built for that purpose in 1889. Then it made Coldwater a main stopping place for traffic between Detroit

The name of the richman organization the restoration was Stilson, and he also bought the biggest house in Coldwater, a red and white Victorian house at the corner of Walnut and Pearl Streets. My classmate Jim Van Why lived there before his parents divorced. Then his father took him to Los Angeles. Jim's father, Jim Senior, had owned the Arlington Inn, Coldwater's only hotel, but Jim Junior was congenial with me. Once I told him I was thinking of becoming President of the United States. He looked at me as though I were crazy. But he didn't stop talking with me.

After school, the day Woody told us of the project, I went there to see how it was progressing. George Vaughn Lowther, a tall thin man with somewhat long red hair and a goatee, was its theatrical director. He introduced himself to me and became my friend. I became the project's first volunteer.

Vaughn told me Stilson had recruited him from the Fort Wayne Civic Theater, and, a few weeks later, Peggy returned to Coldwater and told me her

escape was to Fort Wayne. She told me she found a room at the Keenan hotel there and a job as a waitress at the Lucky Shoe Tavern. She didn't tell me how she funded that transition, but, in Coldwater, she quickly found a waitress job at the Arlington. A room there was part of her pay, and the hotel was a half block from the Tibbits. It was on the northwest corner of Chicago and Hanchett Streets, and she and Vaughn also became friends.

Vaughn also told me he was on probation for forging checks. He told me Stilson knew that, but that no one else in Coldwater did, and he asked me not to tell anyone. But, in my mind, none of that was negative, and my having been on probation twice was the least of my considerations. His confidence and friendship and the connection with the theatre far outweighed that, and he also told me he'd be directing a production of the play *Life With Father*, suggested that I audition for the lead, and selected me for the part.

And I appreciated that for several reasons. Also auditioning was the older brother of Todd Ellis, the kid with whom I'd set the woods afire at the lake. So he was not only older than I but also a doctor's son. But more important to me than that was that Charlotte Button would play my girlfriend.

Charlotte was the daughter of Tom Button, the Goody Shop night baker. I remembered her being a pudgy little tow-headed girl when we were in elementary school. But, while still quite blonde, she'd become less pudgy than Judy Pennington. So I enjoyed having her on my lap during rehearsals and asked her to spend New Years Eve with me in Atkinson's party room.

I don't remember who else was there, other than Kubiak and Atkinson, but Charlotte was the only girl. I asked my mother to buy me a pint of sloe gin to take there for her. Atkinson had a big armchair in his party room. She sat on my lap in it. We kissed as she drank, but her kissing was more like Nancy Johnson's than Connie's. I asked her to open her mouth and use her tongue, and she did. But still her kissing wasn't as warm or wet or soft as Connie's, and the play didn't open.

Early in the rehearsals, Vaughn replaced the person he'd selected to play my father. The replacement had recently moved to Coldwater and said didn't feel welcome in Coldwater. He said a bartender at the VFW told him he'd heard his wife was going out on him. He invited the cast to his home.

"I have some suits I don't wear anymore," he said to me. "Do you think you might be able to use them?"

I said I might, and he said he'd take a look and see what he had, but he said that in a way that told me he was joking about how much bigger around he was than I. So I didn't expect to hear any more about that, and I didn't. But neither did I see him again after that week.

The reason the play didn't open was that none of us learned our lines. Stilson asked Miss Gaviglio to attend a rehearsal and tell him how she thought we were doing. Vaughn told me she said we weren't nearly where we needed to be. But that didn't end my friendship with Vaughn or my friendship with Charlotte.

Vaughn said he was a hypnotist. He gave a demonstration to Charlotte and me and another volunteer in a dressing room. Dick Bowerman, the other volunteer, played flugel horn and had his horn with him. Vaughn hypnotized him and told him he could see no one in the room other than himself and Vaughn. Then he took the horn from him and handed it to Charlotte.

"Don't drop it!" said Dick.

Vaughn also tried to hypnotize Charlotte and me, but not as dramatically. He put a hand on each of our backs and told us we'd fall backward when he removed the hand. Charlotte began to fall but quickly caught herself. The effort had no effect on me. Vaughn said the reason was that I didn't believe in hypnotism.

I also drew a profile of Vaughn. I used a ballpoint pen and drew it on a page of a spiral notebook in his office. Bowerman was also there and also tried to do that. Vaughn taped my drawing to the inside of a window of his office. The window faced the street, but he taped the page facing inward. I don't know what happened to Bowerman's effort.

Vaughn literally taught me the ropes. The theatre still had its manual fly from before it was a movie theatre. Vaughn taught me how to raise and lower curtains and backdrops and secure the ropes to the belaying pins.

Still I was trying to be literary, but I responded assigning writing a report on *Moby Dick* by writing why I didn't read it. Some of my classmates were saying no one could think up all the symbolism Woody said was in it, but I said in my report that science fiction was more important because it presented ideas for the future and that I was reading Dostevsky's *The Idiot* because it was psychologically important. More honest would have been saying I preferred not to buy a copy of *Moby Dick* and that *The Idiot*'s title suggest to me that it might be satire. But Woody said that, if I wrote a report on *The Idiot*, he'd give me a grade for that and a B+ for extra credit for my report on why I didn't read *Moby Dick*. But I found concentrating on *The Idiot* difficult. I struggled through it. I read part of it while operating the fly for a performance at the Tibbits. But I somewhat plagiarized the translator's introduction. I said it was a story of society's destruction of a truly beautiful. Woody gave me a B for that. He also

assigned *The Scarlett Letter* and *Huckleberry Finn* that year, but I don't remember whether I read them.

I also operated the follow spot for Jose Molina and his Flamenco dance company. The follow spot was in what was the projection booth when the Tibbits was a movie theatre. Vaughn showed me how to operate it, wrote the cues on a legal pad, and gave me a flashlight for reading them. I didn't ask him why he didn't turn on the lights in the booth, but I guessed they may have distracted the audience, and I had no problem until, while the spot was the only light on the stage, I looked down to read my next cue. Then the only dancer on the stage danced out of the light, and she was in a black dress. Unable to see anything on the stage the follow spot didn't light, I moved it in the wrong direction before jerking it back and found her. I had no more problems during that effort, but Vaughn told me before the performance that the costumes were worth a quarter of a million dollars. So that one error made me dread facing Vaughn after the show, and, when I went back stage, he was talking with Jose Molina.

"This was your follow spot operator," said Vaughn.

"Excellent," said Molina.

So I didn't know whether they hadn't see what I did or were being extraordinarily kind. Later I asked Vaughn whether he didn't see it. He said I did fine, and I didn't argue. But still I don't know, and Vaughn made a mistake that made me feel not quite so bad, and he told me about that.

The Tibbits had what people call perfect acoustics. With no amplification anywhere, the volume of any sound on the stage was nearly the same at any seat as it was on the stage. So, while the Wayne King Orchestra performed there, Vaughn snuck into the orchestra pit and turned down the amplification for the vocalist. But the reason for the amplifier was that the vocalist didn't sing as loudly as others of the orchestra played their instruments. So, after the concert, Wayne King told Vaughn that and said the others had to compensate by not performing as well as they could, and Vaughn told me King was angry.

But he also introduced me to the Fort Wayne theatre crowd. We went there either in the Corvaire or in his older black Simca, and, whichever we took, I drove. The Simca had a four-speed manual transmission with its shift lever on the steering column. Vaughn said he didn't like to drive and that shifting the Simca's gears was too much trouble.

One night, returning from Fort Wayne at about midnight, we stopped at the hotel. Kay Winding was to perform at the Tibbits the next evening, and



Vaughn asked the desk clerk whether he had checked in. She said he had and gave Vaughn his room number. So we went to his room.

I heard talking through the door. Vaughn knocked on it. Winding opened it. Other members of the band were sitting around a table playing cards. Vaughn introduced himself and asked Winding whether he had everything he needed. He said he did, but he didn't seem to me to welcome the inquiry.

After the performance, I asked the drummer whether he need any help. Pointing to his drum cases, he told me I could carry them out, turned around, and walked away. So I carried them out. When I returned, he asked me where his drum cases were. I told him they were in the truck. He told me he hadn't yet put the drums in them. I carried them back and didn't carry them out again.

Joseph Cotton performed a monologue at the Tibbits. Vaughn told me Cotton was a head, that he asked him whether he could find him some marijuana, and that he found him some. He also told me a theatre tradition was to place a single rose in a leading man's dressing room on opening night. He said he did that for Cotton.

In Fort Wayne Vaughn took me to the home of Philo T. Farnsworth and introduced me to Philo T. Farnsworth, Jr. He told me the senior Philo invented the camera scanner system that made television possible but that he was still suing for a patent. He said he was in Fort Wayne for General Electric. The house was a big Cape Cod. Across the street from it were brick buildings like the buildings at the Coldwater State Home. Vaughn told me it was a psychiatric hospital.

I never saw the senior Philo, but the junior Philo drove a Mercedes Gullwing lived in the basement of the house with a tall Hispanic women. Her name was Diana. Their bed was twin-size, and all of the basement was a mess, but over the bed was a mirror in gold-colored frame about the size of the Bed. In a room separate from the big room with the bed was a messy workbench, Vaughn pointed to a piece of equipment he said was an color oscilloscope. He said the Junior Philo watched music on it.

We entered the house through a small kitchen with crumbs on a counter. I wondered why rich people would have crumbs on their kitchen counter, but, on the way to the basement we passed an open doorway to a large immaculate room with wall to wall carpeting and a grand piano. The junior Philo's mother and younger brother passed through the kitchen while we were in it, but they didn't speak to us.

Sometimes Peggy went to Fort Wayne with us. She asked me to take her to the Lucky Shoe. She told me the only reason it needed a waitress was that Indiana law proscribed customers from carrying their drinks from the bar to the

tables. She also introduced me to friends of hers in an apartment. But I offended the only one of them who spoke with me after the introduction.

“I dress sharp to fit into society,” I said to him as we stood behind the Corvair waiting for Peggy to come down.

He sneered, and I also smoked pipes. So did Atkinson and Kubiak, to seem intellectual, and so did Vaughn. In Fort Wayne Vaughn asked me to take him to a tobacco shop, and, though I had several pipes, I bought one there, and some Cherry Blend tobacco, and some Regals Little Havana cigarillos. I shared the cigarillos with Atkinson and Kubiak. I don’t remember how I had that cash at that time.

Vaughn and Peggy and I went to a party in the apartment of the choreographer for the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre. His name was Charlie Allen. Vaughn said he was gay. He cooked beans and cheese for the party. He burned them, but everyone ate them and praised them. Some men there talked about a woman discovering her husband sucking the penis of another man in Charlie’s bathroom during another of Charlie’s parties. I don’t remember whether I knew whether either of the two men was in that conversation or at that party.

As the crowd dwindled, Vaughn and Peggy and I talked about where we’d sleep that night. Peggy said she’d be sleeping with a guest at the party whose apartment was on the other the other side of that building. Vaughn said he’d be sleeping in the apartment of another friend of his.

“You can sleep on Charlie’s couch,” he said to me. “He won’t bother you.”

“I have some of my work on the sofa,” said Charlie after the others left. “But you can sleep with me. I won’t bother you.”

But he bothered me by tossing and turned much of the night.

“You’d be nervous too,” he said, “if you were in bed with a beautiful young girl.”

He stopped tossing and turning. So I supposed he went to sleep. But still I couldn’t. So, at dawn, I arose and descended his stairs to the street, ascended the stairs to the other side of the building, and knocked on the door at the top of them. Peggy answered.

“Couldn’t sleep with Charlie?” she asked. “You can sleep with us.”

Like Charlie’s bed, the one in that apartment was in an alcove of the living room. The man was still in it, and Peggy removed her bathrobe and lay down beside him. I lay down beside her, but, a few minutes later, he awoke and removed her bra. So I left the bed, went to the kitchen, and tried to sleep with my head on the kitchen table. But, a few minutes later, Peggy came to the kitchen.

“You should have stayed,” she said, joining me at the table. “I wanted to show you how it’s done.”

His name was Lyle. A friend of his stopped by on his way to work to lend him his car. The friend’s name was Jay. His car was an Austin Healy Sprite. Lyle asked me to drive Jay to work to save him that trouble. Peggy went with us. The job was at an animal shelter. He invited us in.

“Want to see me kill a cat?” he asked.

Neither Peggy nor I replied. He led us into a hallway with cages along one side of it, pulled a cat the color of Cuddles by its tail from one of the cages, carried it that way to a room with a machine in it resembling a laundromat dryer, threw the cat into it, closed the door, and pushed two buttons. When he pushed the first button, a light came on inside the machine. When he pushed the second, a sound began.

“That sound’s a vacuum pump,” he said. “It’s sucking the air out.”

A round window was in the door of the machine. As I watched through it, the cat’s chest heaved a few times, and then stopped moving. Then Jay pushed another button.

“Now it’ll burn it,” he said, but we didn’t watch that.

Also that weekend we took Lyle to a park. He ran around in a big circle and said he did that to see how dogs felt when they did it. Also, in that park, I saw the Civic Theatre perform *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *The Fantastics*. For both performances, Vaughn and Peggy and others were with me, but I don’t remember whether Lyle was.

“Lyle called me and told me he and Jay both have the clap,” Peggy told me in Coldwater. “He asked me to have myself checked out to see if they got it from me. I had myself checked out, and I don’t have it. Those assholes.”

The Tibbits’ restoration committee organized a concert to raise funds. But it wasn’t in the opera house, and it wasn’t an opera. It was the Chad Mitchell Trio and in the high school gym. The reason it was in the gym was that the opera house seated little more than six hundred people. It was the Chad Mitchell Trio for two reasons. One was the reason the hootenanny was in the gym, that Folk music was popular then. The other reason was price.

“They wanted to get Peter, Paul and Mary,” Woody told my English class. “But they wanted ten thousand dollars. The Chad Mitchell Trio was about half that.”

But Atkinson and Kubiak and I paid nothing to see it. For that we volunteered to be ushers, and it also gained us admission to a reception after the performance, in the hotel’s banquet room. Harold Stukeley, a gravel contractor, provided gravel for construction of I-69 past the east side of Coldwater, bought

the hotel from the senior Jim Van Why, papered its banquet room with red flocked wallpaper like what the restoration committee selected for the Tibbits, and called it the Tibbits Room.

As Chad Mitchell and the other members of his trio ate hors d'oeuvres at a table, Kubiak and Atkinson and I asked him for his autograph, but we didn't offer him anything to sign.

“What do you want me to sign?” he asked.

We gave him our Ski Club membership cards. He autographed mine to Bob and Kubiak's to Bill. We talked of swapping cards. But we didn't.

“Chad Mitchell said he liked the lighting,” said Vaughn to me at the opera house the next day. “I told him I was sorry I couldn't do some of what the sheets they sent me asked for. But he said no one else ever tried.”

## Chapter 8

### Possibilities

Vaughn drank Constant Comment tea. He kept some of it and a tea ball in the hotel's kitchen to drink it in the hotel's coffee shop. Once I went with him for that. Peggy brought it to him, took a break, and joined us in a banquetette beside the entrance to the kitchen. As we talked another young woman emerged from the kitchen and walked through the coffee shop to the main dining room.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Sandy," said Peggy. "Do you want to meet her?"

"Sure," I said. "I guess so."

"Why don't you take your break and join us?" Peggy said to her as she passed us on her way back to the kitchen, and she did.

"Let's have a beach party," said Vaughn.

"It's February," said Sandy.

"That's why we need one," said Vaughn.

"I don't have a *lei*," said Sandy.

"Bill can help you with that," said Vaughn.

All of us laughed and agreed to have the beach party that evening in Vaughn's apartment.

His apartment was in the gray-shingled house with the office of the attorney with whom my mother said Dave Norton's mother was having a relationship. Vaughn and Peggy left Sandy and me on a blanket on the kitchen floor, went into the bedroom, and closed the door. Sandy and I lay on the blanket and kissed. I came nearer to thanking God than I ever did in Mr. Hamlin's church or had anywhere else.

Between kisses I looked into her big green eyes and at her wild black hair and silently told her she was perfect. I moved my mouth but didn't use my vocal chords. Excepting perhaps when Ruth launched me into carnival travel, I don't remember being so grateful since sitting on the doghouse roof with the little blonde girl from Marshall. Though Peggy's eyes and hair were brown, I thought of her. But mainly I thought of what might be next, and, though

Sandy's kisses were at least as warm and wet as Connie's, I didn't think of Connie.

After about an hour of that, Vaughn and Peggy came out of Vaughn's bedroom, and that interruption was what one might call graceless.

"Get your tongue out of her mouth," said Vaughn. "It's time to go."

But, to me, that reference to actuality felt like acceptance and promise.

Sandy was a sixteen-year-old high school dropout and also worked checkout at one of Coldwater's three supermarkets, but she also read a translation of Plato's *Dialogues*. She told me she quit school because it bored her and that Peggy told her I was an intellectual. But I didn't know Plato wrote any dialogues.

I went out for wrestling that year but quit. One reason was that I was having difficulty keeping my weight down to 120 pounds. I felt weak all the time, and Coach Kellogg made that worse by having me practice with Chris Sellars. Chris wrestled 133 and threw me around about as easily as I'd thrown hay bales. I could have wrestled 127, but I was hoping to wrestle varsity, and my junior year performance at 120 told me I'd have little chance of making varsity at 127. So all keeping me from quitting was thinking it weak, and meeting Sandy far outweighed that consideration.

But the weight problem was the reason I gave Coach Kellogg.

"You were going to be one of my powers," he said, in the locker, when I told him I'd decided to quit.

"I'm having a tough time making weight," I replied. "And I feel weak all the time."

"I was thinking of having you wrestle 127," he said.

"Well," I said, "I still think I need to quit."

"Alright," he said shrugging.

So, though I felt I was being both cowardly and unfair to the coach, that ended that conversation.

But Peggy gave me not only another reason to quit wrestling but also a way both to spend more time with Sandy and to have some cash to help me keep things going as well as they were. She talked the hotel's manager into hiring me to bus tables after school and on weekends. But she also warned me concerning Sandy.

"If you fuck her," she said not smiling, "I'll cut your balls off."

But all that did was make me consider the possibility.

Hope was everywhere, and Peggy tried to help me learn my job. She told me I should balance trays over my left shoulder with only my left hand. I couldn't, and, compromising by resting them on my left shoulder while

steadying them with my right hand, I felt I was disappointing her. But I also already had the white shirts and black trousers the job required. So, though I preferred not to revert to them from my current fashion, I was happy that I didn't need to buy them or depend on Mrs. Hamlin for them, and I didn't need to be afraid of what Sandy might think of how I dressed. So the positives far outweighed the negatives, and the only criticism of my performance at that job was from a customer, and, though it was somewhat extremely embarrassing for me, it was also extremely polite.

Making coffee was part of my job. Never having done that, I decide to save the hotel some money by not changing the grounds every time I made it. Walking home from school in the eighth grade, I saw a snow shovel on the porch of a house with snow on its walk. So I stopped, rang the doorbell, and asked the old lady who came to the door whether she'd like me to shovel her walk. She accepted the offer and paid me a quarter, and I did that several times, and she came to Sunday brunch at the hotel, with a son of hers and his wife and children, and she recognized me.

"He's a good boy," she said, introducing me to her son.

"Who makes the coffee?" the son asked me.

"The busboys," I said in my pride in my new job.

"It's good," he said smiling. "It's the strongest I've ever had."

But I didn't make that mistake again, and I felt at home at work.

Sandy's mother was also a waitress there, and the chef became Peggy's boyfriend. Sandy smoked Viceroy cigarettes and parked them in an ashtray in the kitchen for drags between deliveries of food. I shared them with her. My only problem with working with Sandy was that part of the busboys' pay was a share of the waitresses' tips. I accepted them from Sandy but only because I didn't know what to say not to.

But I didn't take her to the senior prom. I had decided proms were phony, and Peggy told me Lyle was having a party in his apartment the night of the prom. So I took Sandy there instead. I bought a madras sport jacket at Reyburn's for that, and Sandy bought a nearly white polyester skirt and matching blouse. But my social graces hadn't improved. On the way to Fort Wayne, she dropped a cigarette on her new skirt and burned a hole in it. I laughed.

"Yeah?" said Lyle, answering my knock on his door.

He hadn't invited us to the party.

"We heard you were having a party," I said.

"Oh," he said.

He left the door open and walked away, and I closed the door behind us and led Sandy to a vacant place on the floor against a wall, but one spoke to us.

“You ready to go?” I asked a few minutes later.

She nodded, and we left, and I also took her to see the film *Twelve Angry Men*. I’d heard it was intellectual. But I found it boring. So I also asked her to leave that early. But she complained of none of that.

One afternoon Peggy, the chef, and nearly every other employee of the hotel’s lost their jobs. That afternoon, driving to the hotel after school to pick up Sandy from work, I found her drunk. She told me the headwaitress’ mother had broken her pelvis, that the headwaitress had taken the day off, that the chef had responded by sharing cooking wine with all the staff, and that, when they’d drunk all the wine, he shifted them to vodka from the bar.

“What’s a pelvis?” slurred Sandy.

I drove her home, but I didn’t stay as long as I ordinarily did. I returned to the hotel and found only the front desk clerk working. She told me that, nearly immediately after I left with Sandy, Stukey came in, closed the restaurant, and fired everyone then working in it. So Sandy and I, the head waitress, and Sandy’s mother became the entire restaurant staff. Sandy’s mother had that day off.

But Peggy and the chef left Coldwater, rented a mobile home in Battle Creek, and found jobs there. The chef’s name was Robert Wojciechowski. Peggy told me she didn’t know his name was Wojciechowski until after they moved in together. She said she thought his name was Murphy.

“Oh shit,” she told me a policeman said to him, looking at his drivers license after stopping him for driving drunk in Battle Creek before he came to Coldwater for the job at the Arlington. “Just change your name to Murphy and get out of town.”

Stukey, soon after that firing, changed the name of the hotel to Stukey’s Inn. He said he did it for people to think it was part of the Stuckey pecan business. But he also replaced the hotel’s manager.

“What’s that smell?” I asked the new manager

I was standing in the lounge across the bar from him.

“It’s my depilatory,” he said.

Carrying a tray of water goblets through the swinging door between the kitchen and the Tibbits room as he was coming into the kitchen through it, I dropped the tray, breaking all the glasses.

“I’ll get someone else to clean that up,” he said. “How about going out to Tempo and getting some candles for the function tonight. Get two dozen ten-inch red ones. You can take my car. It’s out back.”



He handed me some cash and his car keys. His car was a new gray Ford Galaxy convertible. Its top was down.

Once, while Sandy was on my lap as we kissed in a big armchair in her living room, her parents came home. The chair was against a window to the porch. I saw that her father saw us before they came into the house. The next time I saw Sandy she told me her mother told her that her father told her not to let us be in their house alone anymore. But that didn't stop us from doing that for hours in the Corvaire at the curb in front of her house.

We also found a drive like a tractor path into the woods downstream from the bridge where Connie returned my class ring the second time. Once, while Sandy and I were there, a police car cruised the road with its spotlight shining into the trees. But it didn't stop.

One afternoon, as Sandy and I crossed Chicago Street on our way from the hotel to the opera house, Connie walked past on the sidewalk in front of us. She didn't speak, but she looked at me and kept her face toward us until she'd passed. Sandy asked me who she was. I said I used to go with her.

But then I looked at Sandy. I hadn't given Sandy my class ring, but I wondered what Connie might have thought of her. She was in a pair of short white boots I thought made her look cheap. At the Tibbits, I told her I didn't think they were in style. I never saw them again.

One evening, as we sat in the Corvaire beneath the streetlight in front of her house kissing with a hand of mine beneath her blouse at the bottom of her bra, I felt something small and harder than her belly. I thought it might be a nipple. The next night I pushing her bra above it. She didn't resist. The next few nights she wordlessly let me fondler her breasts.

One night, as we stood kissing outside the Corvaire in front of her house after a rain, I unclipped her bra and washed her breasts with water from the top of the car. The next time we were in the woods, I unbuttoned her slacks and tried to push them down.

"What if something happens?" she asked, stopping me with a hand.

"I'll marry you," I said.

She stopped resisting. I removed her blouse and bra, opened the drivers door, walked around to her side of the car, opened the front passenger door, pulled her from the car, and removed the remainder of her clothing. Then I opened the back door on that side, laid her down on the back seat, removed my clothing, climbed in between her legs, and felt with my fingers the inside of her vagina. I felt ridges inside it, But I had no erection and couldn't insert my penis into it. She was panting and grabbed my penis and tried to stuff it into it. But neither could she.

Wordlessly, we dressed. Neither did we speak as I drove her home. She farted. Neither did either of us give any indication of hearing that. A few nights later, we tried again in my dirty little bed in my messy bedroom. Though that was more was more successful, it was also awkward, and I wasn't sure I ejaculated, and neither had I ever before that. But we continued trying, and my mother said nothing of the time Sandy spent with me in my room.

One night when we went to my house for that, we found that she'd locked both the front door and the back door, and I heard Jerry crying. We walked around to the living room window and looked in. I saw some motion in the bedroom. Jerry's crib was still there. I drove Sandy home.

Returning to my home, I found that my mother had unlocked the front door. A rug was in front of our sofa. A man was lying on his back on it asleep. I supposed my mother was in her bed. The man's hair was black and straight like my father's. A tattoo was on each of his forearms. My father had a big one from the Navy on one of his forearms, but those of man on the rug were smaller, and he didn't have a beer belly. I went up to my room and never mentioned that to anyone. I never saw him again and never again had reason to suspect my mother of having any sexual relationship with any man.

Eugene Cecie, a friend of Vaughn's, owned a coffee house in Fort Wayne. He called it the Fourth Shadow. People went there to listen to folk music and drink expresso from *demi tasses*. On each table was a red candle in a red glass.

"Red is a warm color," said Vaughn.

He also told me Gene was an efficiency expert for General Electric, and, in Vaughn's apartment, he and Vaughn and I drank some white powder Vaughn called leaper. We drank it with orange juice. Vaughn said it was an amphetamine and that he'd obtained from Philo. We were up all night.

Vaughn showed me how to make music by rubbing a finger on the rim of a wine glass. I wrote a few pages that made sense to me then and seemed to me to make sense to Vaughn and Gene when I read it to them then, but later it seemed to me to be gibberish. Cecie showed me how, because the two syllables of his name rhymed with "see", he wrote it with two C's with a dot in the middle of each, to resemble eyes.

In the morning we walked up Monroe Street to Jewel's Drugstore to buy the Sunday *Detroit Free Press*. To be hip I bought a pair of sunglasses. Doug Fee, my classmate who ridiculed me for trick-or-treating with David in my Buzz coat, was working the cash register. He stared at me but didn't speak to me. Neither did I to him.

When I returned home, I was miserable and could neither eat nor sleep. That afternoon at the Tibbits Vaughn told me the misery was a normal effect of coming down from leaper. But I also preferred the sun to the sunglasses.

Kubiac said he had relatives in Detroit and that he knew of a coffee house there. I drove us first to his relatives' house and then to the coffee house. We didn't stay at the relatives' house long enough to sit down

Before we finished our espresso, the coffee house changed into a jazz joint. The folk music stopped, and African Americans began playing jazz. Soon, excepting us, no one there was European American. We stayed to listen, but no one came to our table to take another order from us, and no one spoke to us after we ordered one round of espressos.

I suggested to Atkinson that, after graduation, to emulate Kerouac, we hitchhike to California. We planned to stay with Jim Van Why and his father in the apartment they shared in Beverly Hills. For Atkinson's funds for the trip I talked the hotel's manager into hiring him to bus tables with me.

"How can you work with those cigarettes in your mouths?" the manager asked us as we vacuumed the carpeting in the Tibbits Room.

I also requested admission to Wayne State University. To look at the campus, I drove to Detroit and spent a night at my Aunt Bertha's house in Lincoln Park. Also during that trip I bought a birthday gift for Mr. Terdal. He played banjo and used a paperclip as a tie tack. I collected cash from my classmates to buy him a tie tack in the shape of a banjo. My Aunt Bertha took me to a mall and left me there for an hour to do that. While I looked for one, a man solicited me for sex, and I couldn't find a tie tack in the shape of a banjo. I bought one in the shape of a violin.

My Aunt Bertha also took me to the Detroit Museum of Art and also left me there for an hour. The Diego Rivera mural in the lobby impressed me. A Greek marble bust reminded me of Linda Hosek. Linda was a cheerleader and Skip Bobier's close friend. In junior high school, one of the twin sons of the owner of the shoe factory in Coldwater hit her in an eye with a bean he shot from a bean shooter. The factory made my short wing wingtips. The bean left a gap in the iris, but the bust had no irises. I gave Mr. Terdal the tie tack behind the Bunsen burner in front of the class. He plainly didn't appreciate it, and the students didn't laugh, but dental appointment in which the dentist found but two cavities, was for admission to Wayne State. My mother paid for it, and the dentist was Dr. McConnell.

Coldwater High School's senior trip that year was to Warren Dunes on Lake Michigan. The one the year before was to New York City. Mr. Dennis said no one who didn't go on the trip would graduate. But, instead, Atkinson

and Kubiak and I loaded a case of beer into the trunk of the Corvaire and went to the beach at Pokagon State Park instead.

Also that spring I took Sandy there. She was in a one-piece swimsuit, not a bikini. She'd told me that, when she was younger, she wore shoes too small for her. On the beach I thought her toes made that evident. In bed I'd seen that she had stretch marks on her breasts. She told me in bed the reason was that she was fat when she was a younger. The stretch marks and her toes made me think she wasn't a perfect as I thought she was on the blanket in Vaughn's apartment. Also in bed she told me she'd had sex with an uncle when she was younger but that it didn't mean anything. As we lay on a blanket at Pokagon, I told her I'd never had sex with anyone before her.

"I thought you said you did with Connie," she replied, and I did but had forgotten that.

As we lay there kissing, someone threw pebbles at us. I looked around and saw some guys on a nearby blanket. But none of them were looking at us.

She also told me she wanted to buy Jay's Austin Healy Sprite. But, after telling me that, she told me her father wouldn't let her buy a foreign car. She also paid a photographer to take pictures of her. She gave me four wallet size prints and one that was larger than 8x10. But her hair in the pictures wasn't wild as it ordinarily was. It was in tight curls like her mother's. I told her I preferred her hair the way it ordinarily was. She had the photographer try again. To me the second set was beautiful.

Mr. Dennis let Kubiak and Atkinson and me graduate. I gave my five tickets to the ceremony to Sandy, Peggy, my Mother, Vaughn, and Cecie. I asked Vaughn to obtain some leaper for after the ceremony. My plan was for him and Cecie and me and Sandy to gather in his apartment for that.

"I have a graduation present for you," said Cecie a few weeks before the ceremony.

He and Vaughn and I were sitting in his living room in Ft. Wayne smoking cigars. Cecie's wife, walking through the living room, said she couldn't stand the smell. She sat in the next room. Cecie went to another room and returned with some loose-leaf document protectors with pictures of a nude woman with short blonde hair in various gymnastic contortions. I said nothing.

"I'll give you your real present later," said Cecie.

I don't remember how he knew I had a suit, but he offered to trade a pair of slacks for the suit my mother bought me for the Junior prom. He said the slacks were stretch slacks, but I couldn't discern that they stretched, and they were black. I'd stopped wearing black slacks. All my slacks from Reyburns were gray or olive or blue dress slacks. He said my suit was the only suit he'd

found to fit him, and he didn't give me anything else for graduation. I wore my madras sport jacket under my gown and never wore the black slacks.

But Sandy gave me a watch. A few weeks before graduation, my mother asked me what kind of watch I'd buy if I bought one. I told her it would be stainless steel with a black leather band. That's what Sandy gave me. When she gave it to me, she also told me she'd asked my mother to find out what kind I'd like but that I could take it back to Zale's if I didn't like it.

Vaughn told me he couldn't acquire any leaper for us. He said Philo told him people were watching him. So, instead of taking Sandy to Vaughn's apartment after the ceremony, I took her to the reception at the Masonic temple, and, instead of dancing with Sandy, I played poker with Atkinson and Kubiak and others at a poker table outside the ballroom. She stood behind me watching.

After a few hands, I quit to take her home to my dirty little bed. Pulling her pink angora sweater over her head, I caught the winding stem of the watch in its yarn and pulled it out. I tried to keep her from knowing that. The next day I took it to Zale's. The saleslady loaned me a similar but cheaper one to wear while I waited for the repair. But it didn't fool Sandy.

"That's not the watch I gave you is it?" she asked.

I didn't tell her how the stem came out, but I told her of my interaction with the saleslady at Zale's.

I didn't try to keep my California plans from her, but Atkinson's father suggested changing them.

"Wally said we can use the DeSoto," said Atkinson. "He doesn't think we should hitchhike. He said he'd help pay for the gas."

He'd bought a relatively new white Plymouth to replace his rusty blue 1956 DeSoto.

"That wouldn't be like Kerouac," I said. "And doesn't the DeSoto burn more oil than gas. I mean all that black smoke coming out of its tail pipe."

He accepted my reasoning, but he also accepted some of my reasoning that wasn't like Kerouac. I told him people would be more likely to pick us up if we dressed nicely and that police were more likely than other people to pick us up on interstate highways. So he bought a madras sport jacket, and, in neckties and our madras jackets, we headed south on US 27. Our plan was to take it and other U. S. highways to Route 66 south of Kansas City and take Route 66 the rest of the way to L.A.

A Missouri highway patrolman picked us up, but he helped us.

"I figured anyone in jackets like that couldn't be all bad," he said, and he took us to the Kansas state line south of Kansas City, where a man picked us

up in an orange and white 1958 Chevrolet station wagon and drove us the rest of the way to Route 66, but that was a tense ride.

“Quiet down, Charles,” said the man many times to a young boy sitting silent in the back seat while Atkinson and I rode in the front seat with the driver.

“Poor kid,” said Atkinson when the man dropped us off. “I think that guy was a mulatto.”

Our next ride was to Tulsa in a car with air conditioning. Stepping out of the car in Tulsa seemed to me to be like stepping into an oven. But we didn’t stand there long. Our next ride was in a new white Plymouth Fury sedan. Its driver told us he could us he could take us all the way. I thought he was in his twenties. We drove part of the way.

“Can you drive?” the man asked Atkinson in New Mexico. “I need to get some sleep.”

But Atkinson drove about five mile per hour under the speed limit. So, after a few miles in the back seat, the man asked me if I’d like to take a turn. He’d been driving about ten miles over the speed limit. I drove about five miles per hour over the speed limit. He slept most of the rest of the way to California.

Crossing the Continental Divide, I thought I never had seen scenery more beautiful. Rain fell as we crossed it, but it stopped as we descended into the Arizona desert. Wildflowers opened their blossoms as far as I could see.

When the man awoke and said he could drive, I forgot the car had a manual transmission and killed the engine by not disengaging the clutch to stop, but the owner seemed to me to be grateful nonetheless.

“Sorry,” I said sliding aside from the driver seat.

“That’s alright,” the man said. “Nice job of driving.”

Everything after Missouri seemed to me like another country. At the California state line a man in a uniform asked the driver whether we had any produce. I thought Needles was an appropriate name for a town among cacti.

The man, true to his word, drove us to the Van Whys’ home. We thanked him. He bade us farewell. We walked to the front door of the Van Whys’ apartment building on a walk dividing a lawn with palm trees along each side of the lawn. The building was three stories. The Van Whys’ apartment was on the second floor. Both Van Whys welcomed us cheerfully.

Jim, in his little black Plymouth Valiant, took us to Hollywood and Vine, the Walk of Fame, Muscle Beach, Malibu State Surfing Beach, and San Clemente Beach. The undertow caught me at San Clemente. I thought I was going to drown, but I thrashed my way out of it. Van Why said a house high on the cliff behind the beach might be Richard Nixon’s. At Malibu I asked a guy to

rent me his surfboard. He charged me five dollars. I spent less than an hour failing to stand up on it. The five dollars was for an hour. I returned it early .

Van Why also took us to the first Cinerama movie theatre We saw Jimmy Durante's nose in front of us and on both sides of us, as he kicked the bucket in *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*.

We talked little with the senior Jim during that visit, but he told us the other businessmen men of Coldwater had resented him because he was the only person on Chicago Street making more than ten thousand dollars per year.

The junior Jim also took us to Tijuana. On the way, we ate hamburgers in a diner in San Diego where sailors played a pinball machine. Also on the way, Jim told us of a bar in Tijuana. He said the name it was the Blue Fox and that its entertainment was a donkey screwing a women in a pit while men stood around the pit trying to urinate on the woman. He said the men's beer was free if they could do that but that, because most had erections, few could.

We didn't find the bar, and Jim said he'd never been able to find it, but we found a bar where a woman pushed a hand down the front of my pants as soon as I entered. We rejected her solicitations, but we sat at a table and ordered the first beer I drank legally, and Atkinson disappeared for about a half hour while Van Why and I watched women I thought were ugly dance in G-strings. Atkinson refused to tell what he'd done while he was gone.

On the street a guy sold switchblades from an attaché case. Thinking of Buzz's, I and bought one. But the handle wasn't wood like Buzz's. It was tin with plastic resembling pearl over it. Atkinson looked at bongo drums in an outdoor market but decided they were too big to carry hitchhiking. A small boy on the street offered to sell us bubble gum.

"They usually try to sell you their sister," said Van Why.

But back in Beverly Hills he told us Nancy Wilson would be performing at the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel. That was the year she dethroned Ella Fitzgerald's long reign of the *Playboy* Jazz Poll. I'd heard a recording of her in Lyle's apartment. We went to see her. We sat a table and ordered beer, but the waiter asked to see our identification.

"He's not 21!" he exclaimed looking at my drivers license.

So we drank Coca Cola, and I needed to urinate during most of the performance. But she didn't disappoint me. She was in a long white sequin dress with Les Brown and his Band Renown behind her, and her long clear blue notes were what I remembered from the album I'd heard. I'd heard of blue notes, and she defined them for me, but, the next day, Atkinson and I left to return to Coldwater. I didn't think our trip was much like Kerouac, but I didn't think the Van Why's could have done better for us.

Jim was in junior college and had classes that morning, but his father drove us to Pasadena and dropped us on a U.S. highway heading east. We'd decided to take a more northern route home to see more of the country. We also decided to do it in cut-off jeans and short-sleeve sweat shirts, to be more comfortable. We also expected the northern route to be cooler, but still we had to make our way across Nevada again.

"How can you smoke in this heat?" Atkinson asked me between rides in the Nevada desert.

We didn't stop in Las Vegas long enough to see a casino, but we went into a drugstore to see a slot machine, and still I felt as though we were in another country. The driver who took us into Utah pointed to cars rusting in yards beside small ramshackle houses and told us Indians bought cars, drove them until they ran out of oil, left them like that, and bought other old cars to replace them. The driver who picked us up where that man dropped us was on his way hunting with a passenger. In a mountain gorge near Provo, he pointed out an eagle flying along trees on a cliff high above us. I thought that might be another instance of seeing beauty, but, also in that car, I also lit a cigarette.

"Put that out," said the passenger.

I put it out in the ashtray on the back of the front seat.

"That ashtray has never had an ash in it," said the driver.

"It's illegal to hitchhike in Colorado," said a Colorado highway patrolman.

"It's a long walk to Michigan," I said.

"The pioneers never thought about catching a ride," drawled the patrolman.

So we walked to a filling station, begged a ride to a bus station in Denver, bought tickets to the Kansas state line, and stood there most of a morning before a Turkish air force sergeant picked us up in a 1960 green Chevrolet Biscayne sedan and drove us all the way across Kansas at about 45 miles per hour. I don't remember our rides from there to Indianapolis, but there a car full of African Americans stopping for us.

"There's no room for us," said Atkinson.

"We'll make room," said the driver.

"That's alright," said Atkinson. "Thanks."

We hitchhiked to L.A. in 59 hours. Our return trip took most of five days. So the first thing I did upon returning home was to sleep more than twelve hours. But then I drove to Sandy's house, and from there I took her to Battle Creek, to the trailer Peggy and Bob were renting.



No one was there. But they hadn't locked the front door. So we walked through the trailer looking into the bedrooms to see if they were sleeping. Still finding no one there, I considered the possibility of Sandy and me using one of the beds, but I thought that would be too much like doing it with Peggy. So instead we returned to Coldwater to my dirty little bed.

"Did you use our bed?" Peggy asked me the next time I saw her.

"Nah," I said. "We just drove back to Coldwater."

"You should have," she replied.

So, apparently, she'd decided not to cut my balls off, and I had no qualms about taking Sandy into other beds.

Atkinson's brother had graduated from Wabash that spring and would enroll in Temple University that fall for graduate work. So his parents were in Philadelphia celebrating that. So Atkinson invited everyone who talked to him to a party using the whole house, and Atkinson and Kubiak and I began drinking before noon, before the others arrived.

Among the earliest were Fred Davenport and John Hicks. They also traveled to California that summer, but they drove there in John's 1957 Chevrolet sedan. Fred's father owned a gravel pit. John's father owned an automobile repair shop. John had restored his car in his father's shop.

But Fred arrived at the party before John did, and, when John arrived, Fred left his chair in the living room, walked through dining room and out to the driveway, and punched John square in the face, knocking him down.

Then, as John picked himself up from driveway and drove away, Fred returned to his chair and resumed drinking, saying nothing.

Later in the afternoon, I picked up Sandy from work and took her into Atkinson's parents' bedroom. It opened to their living room. When we finished doing in their bed what we ordinarily did in my dirty little bed, I put her bra on over my shirt and returned to the living room. She waited in the bedroom until I returned her bra to her.

I didn't keep it long, but that evening I also took her to bed in the double bed in Atkinson's room. While we did that, Larry Camp sat with another girl on the twin bed at the other end of the room. I don't remember whether any other girls were at the party. Later at the party, Camp told me he'd though I was lying to him about Sandy. In physics class, telling him I was taking Elsa Martinelli to bed, I'd shown him the picture of Sandy I kept in my wallet. Elsa Martinelli was a movie star then. Her hair was auburn, but her eyes were green, and I liked her appearance and thought she otherwise resembled Sandy.

Still later at the party I took Sandy across the street to the park. I intended to take her to the flower bed where Peggy and I had removed our

clothes when I was in the first grade. But Mark Hebner was at the party with an old pickup he had then, and it had a spot light on it. So he drove it through the park on the drive past the flowerbed to see what we were doing. So we didn't do what I intended to do there. As soon as he passed we returned to the house.

Atkinson said we were running out of beer. His father had given him the DeSoto. He and others went for a beer run in it. Sandy went with them. I didn't.

"Culy was kissing her," Atkinson told me when they returned.

Culy was Chris Culy's brother Fred. As Atkinson said that, he came from the dining room into the living room. The door to the dining room was behind the sofa. Atkinson and I were standing in front of the sofa. I swung a fist over it at Culy. He ran through the dining room and out the side door. I chased him down the driveway and across the street to the park. When we reached the rail fence, I ran out of wind and stopped. So did Fred. But, after a few deep breaths with my hands on my knees, I began chasing him again. But he reached his car far enough ahead of me to climb into it and drive away.

"She wasn't exactly resisting," said Atkinson when I returned to the house, but, he said all he said to me of that quietly, and I never mentioned it to Sandy.

Atkinson had lost his virginity to Alice Harris. She was the daughter of Coldwater's City Clerk. My father knew him when my father was County Clerk of St. Joseph County. Kubiak said Alice was also screwing Steve Wettle. Wettle was my seventh grade classmate whose father gave him a half share of General Motors. They owned a kennel north of town near the Country Club.

Kubiak also said Alice had screwed Sandy Stockwell. He also said Sandy was African American but said he was Puerto Rican. I never either heard Sandy say anything or heard anyone other than Kubiak say anything about him. Kubiak also called Alice Harris Alice Coldwater. If Sandy was African American, he was the Coldwater High School's only African American student.

Atkinson's parents returned before the party ended. Wally, asking only that we take it upstairs. He drove to the Elks Club while Esther went to bed. Later we heard Esther scream.

"Everybody has to leave," said Atkinson returning from going downstairs to see why. "Someone tried to rape my mother."

But, in the driveway, some of us discussed the situation.

"Probably Fairchild," said Kubiak. "He's screwing his girlfriend."

Al Fairchild was at the party earlier but not with his girlfriend. I thought his girlfriend bleached her hair. People then generally said women who bleacher their hair were cheap and stupid. But my only thoughts of Fairchild's

girlfriend were that she seemed to me to be somewhat pretty but also unhappy, and I wondered what Kubiak thought my relationship with Sandy made of me.

Vaughn asked me to paint the Tibbits' inside lobby doors. He gave me a brush and a small can of gold leaf paint. I used no drop cloth. Stilson came into the theater while I was doing that.

"No drop cloth," he said. "Are you testing your artistic temperament?"

A Sarasota, Florida, summer stock company came to the Tibbits for the summer, and Bob Newhart performed there that summer.

"You need a haircut," said Stilson to me as he sat beside me during a rehearsal of the company's performance of the *Solid Gold Cadillac*.

"Stilson says we're letting too many people in without paying," said Vaughn in reply to my asking for free admission for Sandy and me to see Bob Newhart.

A former Walt Disney artist volunteered to paint a mural on the wall of the lobby over Vaughn's office door. He'd retired to Colder and bought motel with cabins between Coldwater and I-69. The mural included a portrait of Bob Newhart.

"Little Bobby Newhart came to our house to play," said a caption.

The artist's name was Al Parks. Peggy had told me she knew his daughter and asked me to drive her to the motel to see her. When we arrived, she was working the front desk. Peggy introduced her to me. She said her name was Melinda. But she neither asked us to sit down nor otherwise spoke to me.

Vaughn asked me to drive some members of the summer stock company to the Club 105, the other of Coldwater's two bars my father called cocktail lounges.

"Have ever been a valet parking attendant?" asked one of the summer stock company members as I parallel parked in front of the bar.

He also said the Corvair smelled like it had a gas leak.

Later I found that it did, and its engine began to make a small clattering sound. The guy who owned the Sinclair station where I charged gasoline said a faulty rocker shaft was causing both problems. Of course my mother paid for a new one as she'd paid for the repair of the Bel Air's rocker arms.

At Reyburns I bought a pair of red plaid boxer shorts. I thought they were too large for me. I took them back. Al told me they were that big to give me freedom of movement. I kept them.

I left for another carnival season.

## Chapter 9

### Pizza

“We’re not going to set up the basketball here,” said Willard, in Hartford, Michigan. “Why don’t you set cats for me. You’ll make more money than you did working the basketball. I’ll pay you a sawbuck a day.”

Sawbucks were what carnies called ten-dollar bills. Willard didn’t pay me for cats, but still it was \$3.50 more per day than Ruth had paid me, and I didn’t need to call in marks. So I readily accepted his offer and didn’t ask what happened to Lester.

One afternoon in Hartford Sandy came to the joint. The midway was nearly empty. But I didn’t recognize her until she spoke.

“Don’t you remember me?” she asked. “You’ve been gone less than a week!”

She was in shorts. The month was July. The day was hot. I never before had seen her either in shorts or sweating. But I remembered her voice and then her green eyes.

“Yeah,” I said, but still I hardly could believe she was there, and another reason I didn’t recognize her was that another girl was with her.

I’d never known Sandy to have a female friend, and Lee Treat, the girl with her, was a daughter of the owner of Treat’s Auto Parts. The bus station had moved to Cooley’s Truck Stop, and Treat’s had moved into the space the bus station vacated, making it the newest of Coldwater’s two auto parts stores. But Lee didn’t speak to me.

“I’ll catch you later,” she said to Sandy, and she walked off down the midway, but I told Willard I’d be right back, climbed over the counter, and took Sandy for a ride on the sky wheel.

“I’m with it,” I told the man loading the sky wheel, scratching my head as Ruth had told me to do when I said that.

“What?” asked the man, but he let us ride free anyway.

After the ride, I took Sandy to the REO. But, feeling the heat when I opened the door, I decided against using the rollaway for what I intended. So, after only telling her I slept there, I closed the doors.

"I've got a blanket you can use," said a man in the cab of a truck beside the REO.

"No," I said. "That's alright. Thanks."

"You sure?" asked the man.

"Yeah," I said. "But thanks anyway."

I don't remember what else Sandy and I did that afternoon, how she decided when to leave, or how Lee Treat found her again, but I remember what Willard said when I returned to the six-cat without her.

"She's too old for you," he said.

"She's seventeen," I said, though I don't remember giving her a birthday gift, and I'm not sure I didn't say she was sixteen."

"She's too old for you anyway," he said, and he didn't grin.

I hadn't stopped traveling with my father's old suitcase. I packed my biggest picture of Sandy in it. It wasn't in it at the next spot, but neither was a pair of Jarman wingtips I'd bought that year. So I supposed I'd left both in Hartford.

Tiger Stout worked for Bob in Marshall that year. One night, after the show closed, I borrowed Bob's panel truck for Tiger and me to find a place to eat. Returning the truck, I backed it into the hitch of Bob's camper trailer. I killed the truck's engine and couldn't restart it. As Tiger and I walked away, I looked back and saw Bob come out. He also tried but failed to start it. Billy Kling also worked for Bob or Willard. I don't remember which or where,

Dick, the other agent in the six-cat that year, did Willard's tax returns in Phenix City. He traveled with a white German shepherd he called Misty. In a small restaurant, He and Willard sent their steaks back to the kitchen several times, telling the restaurant's owner they were too rare or too well done. In another small restaurant, they asked that their spaghetti be *al dente* and sent it back several times. The first owner gave us our choice of deserts. The second charged us nothing. I appreciated my hot fudge sundae.

I don't remember where they sent back the spaghetti, but the restaurant where they sent back the steaks was in Charlotte, Michigan, and I think the reason I remember that is that Charlotte was also where I learned the purpose of what Willard called necessities after Bob called them accessories.

"Who's in charge?" a policeman asked Dick, walking up to the six-cat with another policeman.

"Mind if we look around?" the other policeman asked Willard, after Dick pointed to him.

“Not at all,” replied Willard.

“Where’s the door?” one of the policemen then asked.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to climb over the counter,” Willard replied.

As both policemen climbed into the joint, Dick climbed out of it and pulled the nail from the bottom hinge of the brace supporting his end of the awning.

“Want to get the other end?” he said to me.

After we lowered the awning, I climbed back into the joint, but Dick didn’t, and Willard left with the policemen.

“We’re closed for the night,” he said to me. “I have to go downtown for a while.”

He didn’t return until after the show closed.

“Why didn’t you go with Dick?” he asked, finding me waiting in the joint with the awning still down but the lights on.

“I didn’t know he was leaving,” I answered.

About an hour later Dick returned with Bob.

“They said we can operate it if we take out the G,” Willard told them.

They weren’t smiling when they returned, but then they laughed.

“Yeah, right,” said Bob, and, before dawn, we had the joint in the truck and were on the road.

“What’s a G?” I asked Willard as I rode with him out of town.

“The gaff,” he answered. “There are three kinds of carnival joints. Hanky-pankies are like Ruth’s balloon dart and your basketball. Anybody can win who’s good enough. Nobody can beat a flat store. The six-cat’s an alibi.”

“You can control it to decide whether the mark wins. You pull the gaff to keep them from winning. But, if you if you want to throw some stock to make other marks think they can win, you don’t pull it. But you have to tell the mark he did something different when he won than what he was doing when he didn’t. That’s the alibi. ‘Gaff’ is another word for ‘alibi’. We’re lucky they didn’t throw both of our asses in the can.”

So that explained some things I’d heard but hadn’t understood. One was Ruth’s telling Bob I was quick when I asked her in Marshall how the guy could sell chances to win appliances for a dollar. Another was her telling me I could flat the basketball joint by kicking its two-by-four foul line while a mark was shooting. Another was Willard’s telling me not to let anyone play when he left the six-cat to go to the restroom.

“They call that getting your joint sloughed,” Ruth told me the next time I saw her, after we jumped to Indiana to get away from the police instead of

playing the last spot we'd booked in Michigan, and then she also told me one could spot a flat store by the size of the prized.

The spot in Indiana to which we jumped then was Columbia. When we set up the six-cat there, I looked more closely at the rods in the 2x4's. They connected what Willard called a cradle to a 1x2 behind the cats. So pulling the bottom of the cradle pulled the top of it to pull the rod to lift the 1x2 to keep cats from falling completely from the shelf. The whole mechanism was the G.

Also in Columbia, the day before the show opened but after we set up the six-cat, I saw Gene Cecie walking down the midway. He owned a log cabin on a lake near the town and invited me to spend the night there. He drove to the lot in a teal-colored 1962 Oldsmobile F-85 convertible, invited me to the cabin for the night, and let me drive the F-85 there. He had his son with him and said his wife was divorcing him and was letting his son spend a few days with him. He said that, knowing I worked carnival, he came to the lot thinking I might be there. We snorkeled in the lake. I saw a pike.

I don't remember how or when, but some time during that season I stopped in Coldwater and left some cash with my mother. I intended to use it for Wayne State, but, before graduation a professional photographer sent cards to the graduates asking them to go to the hotel for photographs. The card said that was part of the process. It wasn't part of the official process, but the photographer had me dress in a cap and gown and went to my house while I was on the road. I don't remember whether I told her my intention for the cash when I left it with her, but, when I returned home at the end of the season, learned she'd used most of it for that. Then I told her my purpose for it.

As soon as I said it, I thought how that must have made her feel and was sorry I said it. But I don't remember recognizing then how little that cash was in comparison to the amount I'd need to register, and, the same day, another disappointment led to my spending the rest of my cash and more. Sandy was in Florida.

Her mother told me that when I went looking for her. She said she was visiting an aunt and an uncle of hers. The uncle was in the Air Force at Tindall Air Force Base at Panama City. But Vaughn, on his only visit to that home of mine, suggested a solution.

"Do you want to go see Sandy?" he asked when I answered the doorbell.

"Yeah," I said, wondering how he new of her return before I did. But he didn't.

“I have a new job in Florida,” he said next, “at the opera house in Sarasota, and I need a ride. We can split the gas, if you have the time before you register at Wayne State.”

“I have the time,” I said. “Registration isn’t for three more weeks.”

I wasn’t sure I had enough cash for the gas or for whatever I’d do in Florida. But I knew Bob would be playing Columbia, Tennessee, that week, and it was on our way. So we stopped there for me to borrow twenty dollars from him. I told him I’d work for him in the next spot to pay him back. He looked at Vaughn for a second or more, but he gave me the double sawbuck.

So we drove on, into Hurricane Dora. It was on its way west from Jacksonville and not only blew tree limbs across the road in front of us but also blew the Corvair from side to side across the road, and I was already too sleepy to drive. I asked Vaughn to drive awhile, but his complaining about the wind kept me awake. So, in less than a half hour, I resumed driving.

In Tallahassee, he paid for a motel room for us for the night and told me he’d fly to Sarasota from there, but he paid for but one bed. So, as with Charlie Allen and Willard, I couldn’t sleep, and the storm didn’t weaken much during the night. In Panama City, calling Sandy from a telephone booth at a public beach to ask her for directions to her aunt’s house, I had to sit on the booth’s bench with my feet against its folding door to keep the wind from blowing it open,

Her aunt and uncle and their baby lived in a one-story cinderblock house on the air base. That evening, as Sandy and I sat on the sofa while her uncle sat in a chair watching television while her aunt sat in another chair with their baby, I watched a huge roach or water beetle walk across the living room floor. The others ignored it, but the aunt distracted my attention from it.

“Where’s he going to sleep?” she asked.

“With me,” said Sandy, and no one disagreed.

So I slept with her the remaining nights of that week, but I kept my promise to Bob. That Sunday I drove to Pulaski, Tennessee, to set cats for Willard to pay Bob the twenty dollars. But another expense arose.

The the Corvair’s solenoid hadn’t worked properly since before I went on the road. Occasionally, turning the key didn’t start the starter motor, and those occasions were becoming more frequent. Kubiak told me how to start the car by crawling under it to short the solenoid with a screwdriver. But once, in front of Sandy’s house, I started it while it was in drive. So it rolled into a telephone pole before I could stop it. But in Pulaski the solenoid completely stopped working. So I borrowed twenty dollars from Willard for the repair.



At the end of the week, I paid Bob with no question. But I thought Willard might not require me to pay him. So I asked him.

“Sure,” he said. “You borrowed it from me?”

So I gave him back a double sawbuck from what he paid me.

Then I headed north. But, before getting into the car, I saw that its tires were bald. So I had to doubt that I had enough cash to make my way to Michigan, and, after a few more miles, I admitted to myself that I had no way to pay for Wayne State. So I decided to join the Marines and to do that in Panama City. So I turned around.

I found no one in the house on base. Her Aunt and Uncle had moved off base. But they’d transferred their telephone number, and Sandy answered my call and gave me their new address. So I drove to their new home, a big old clapboard house, and Sandy ran out of it to greet me with a big grin and a long kiss.

“I thought you had to go to Detroit to register for college,” she said.

“I decided to join the Marines instead,” I said.

“I like their uniforms,” she said.

So next morning I drove to Panama City’s Marine recruiting office.

It wasn’t open, but Army recruiting office was on the same side of the street in the same block, and it was open with a sergeant sitting at a desk inside.

“I’m thinking of joining the Army,” I told him.

He took me into a backroom and asked me to answer the hundred questions of the Armed Forces Qualification Test.

“You only missed one question,” he said after scoring it with an answer key he laid over my answer sheet. “I’ve never seen anyone do that well.”

“Which question did I miss?” I asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’d have to look”

But he didn’t. Next he asked me my age, and next he asked whether I’d graduated from high school. I answered both questions, but next he asked for proof of both. I gave him my drivers license and a wallet-size laminated card I’d received with my diploma. The card had my grades for each of my high school courses. He accepted that as proof that I’d graduated, but he said my drivers license wasn’t enough proof of my age. He said he could write to Michigan for my birth certificate but that receiving it would take about a week. So I spent another week with Sandy.

She slept in the room where the baby slept. So we tried to make love quietly when we were in bed, but she had an orgasm on a beach below a restaurant. We were kissing with one of my knees between her legs. We also tried to make love in sand where a dunes hid us from the beach, but I found the

sand too firm. So we tried it in the water. But I felt something like an electric shock in one of my feet I thought might have been from an electric eel.

One night that week some of her Uncle's Air Force friends came to the house. Her uncle asked me to drive them to buy some pizza and beer. At the pizza place he asked me to pay for the pizza. That took most of my remaining cash, and Sandy drank perhaps too much of the beer.

"Pizzanya," she said, again and again, laughing.

To make love while the baby was with the others, we went to bed while the others kept drinking. One of her uncle's friends came into the room. He said he needed to get a diaper for the baby

"Pizzanya," I said laughing.

Sandy also laughed, but he didn't.

"What?" he said turning from the dresser.

"Pizzanya," I said laughing again.

"I'm going to kick your ass," he said.

"You can try," I said. "I'll be outside in a minute."

"You'd better be," he said. "I'll give you one minute. If you're not, I'll come back in here and drag your ass out of that bed."

"I'll be back right." I said to Sandy. "After I kick his ass."

But she followed me out to the front yard.

"We don't have to do this," I began to say, but, as my upper incisors touched my lower lip to say the "v" in "have", a fist of the guy's hit my mouth, and my upper incisors went completely through my lower lip.

"Don't hit me again," I begged, dropping to my knees as he pounded on my head.

He stopped hitting me and went into the house. So Sandy led me to the bathroom to try to stop the bleeding, and then her aunt came in and asked me whether I wanted to go to the hospital for some stitches. I said I didn't and that I was alright. But my shame was part of my reason for that, and, that night, to keep from bleeding more, I didn't make love to Sandy.

Two days later, at the recruiting office, I and other recruits boarded a Greyhound bus to the Army's Recruiting Main Station in Montgomery, Alabama. I left the Corvair and my switchblade in Florida. Sandy's uncle told me the Army wouldn't let me have the switchblade. Sandy rode with me to the recruiting office and drove the Corvair back to the house, by still lip hadn't nearly healed. So our goodbye kiss wasn't much of a kiss.

My only remaining cash was a Kennedy half dollar I'd received from a mark, and I'd lost my comb. So I spent most of that fifty cents on a comb and a pack of cigarettes. But the Army provided all else I needed there.

My first training for the Army was from my bunkmate at recruiting main station. He'd left the Marines to join the Army. He showed me how to make my bunk with hospital corners and how to use one of the two blankets I received as a dust cover for the pillow.

During several days of physical and mental examinations, a corporal took some of us recruits into a room with chairs along three sides of it and a desk in one corner. The recruits sat in the chairs. A sergeant sat at the desk. On the desk was a pile of brown folders.

"I hope they don't send us to Vietnam," said a man sitting beside me.

"Where's Vietnam?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard about the shit that's going on over there?" he replied, but the sergeant distracted me from answering.

"Who wants to go to Europe?" he asked, and my right hand shot into the air above my head, and it was the only hand that rose.

But, whatever the others thought of Vietnam, my reason was that Europe was further from Coldwater than Angola or anywhere I'd worked carnival, or California or Mexico.

The sergeant told me to sit in the chair beside the desk, asked me my name, and shuffled through the pile of brown folders. He pulled one from it, opened it, flipped through some paper a couple of metal fasteners held inside it, stopped at one, and looked at it for a few seconds. Then he looked up.

"Good thing," he said. "We don't have a quota for heavy equipment."

The sergeant at the recruiting office in Panama City had asked me what wanted to do in the Army. I had no answer, but, remembering my wind-up bulldozer and having heard that heavy equipment operator wages were high, that's what I told him. But I also thought of an answer to the sergeant's reply to my volunteering to go to Europe.

"How about tanks?" I asked the sergeant. "They're heavy."

"Armor in Europe," said the sergeant grinning at me, and he wrote something on another piece of paper, put it in the folder, closed the folder and threw it onto the desk, starting a second stack. "You got it."

A few days later, after making my enlistment official by swearing with a roomful of other enlistees to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, I rode with others on another Greyhound bus to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

The bus stopped in front of a one-story beige clapboard building with a front porch as wide as the building and a sign on the porch's roof nearly as wide as the porch.

"Welcome to the United States Army," said the sign.

But, as we stood smoking and talking, a corporal stepped out of the building and put his hands on the porch railing.

“I don’t want to see any goddamned cigarette butts on the ground!” he shouted.

“It’s nice that someone knows his sizes,” a person said smiling at me the next day as he and others issued us uniforms.

But I didn’t recognize his rank, and, at the end of that line, a sergeant stenciling our service numbers onto our new duffle bags, into which we’d stuffed our new uniforms, didn’t smile.

“What’s your service number?” he asked me.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I haven’t memorized it yet.

“You haven’t memorized it?” shouted the sergeant. “Do you call yourself a soldier?”

Haircuts were also part of the processing.

“How would like it?” asked someone about to cut my hair.

He seemed to me to be too young to be a barber, and the room plainly wasn’t a commercial barber shop, and I’d stood in line there enough to see that all the haircuts were the same. So I didn’t answer, and he didn’t wait for an answer. He smiled and ended my use for my new comb. But my uniform issue required a decision from me.

The uniforms included four T-shirts, four pair of boxer shorts, and eight pair of socks, four for boots and four for shoes. Before then I’d changed my under once per week at most. But the Army also provided weekly laundry service and returned the laundry the day after it collected it. So decided to change my socks and underwear every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, leaving me one set to wear while the other three were in the laundry.

The Army also provided clean sheets and two clean towels each week and required us trainees to turn in the dirty sheets and towels when we turned in our dirty laundry and to pick up the clean ones with our clean socks and underwear, and fatigues. The Army also gave us four sets of fatigues and some more formal uniforms. I turned in the fatigues with my underwear and socks and didn’t dirty the more formal uniforms during basic training.

But I took things as they came and willingly accepted most of them, and, though what was in my room at home was wherever I’d last used it, that included the Army’s specifying a particular place for everything, shining my boots and brass, and, excepting the lack of sleep, the regimentation of our time, but I didn’t enjoy all we did.

“Two minutes!” shouted my Platoon Sergeant, looking at his watch.

We were standing in front of the barracks in what the Army called ranks in what the Army called a formation.

“Not good enough!”, he shouted. “Let’s try it again! Fall out!”

We were in that formation because, presumably two minutes earlier, the sergeant had blown a whistle for us to fall out of the barracks to begin that day of training, but then we ran back into the barracks to wait for the whistle again.

“That’s better,” shouted the platoon sergeant, after we ran onto the barrack, waited for the whistle, and fell out again. “One and a half minutes. “But still not good enough. You should be able to do it with your footlockers in a minute and a half. So let’s try it with your footlockers.”

So we ran back into the barracks, shouldered our foot lockers we’d carefully arranged to accord with previous training, and waited for the whistle. When he blew it again, we carried the footlockers out to the street and stood at attention again with the footlockers on our shoulders. By then I was nearly weeping, but my reasons went beyond my bunk being on the second floor and the time I’d spent arranging my footlocker. My main reason was the fear of the possibility of eight more weeks of such. That was our second day of training.

But nothing else the platoon sergeant required of us that day or through the remainder of the eight weeks seemed to me to be as crazy as that.

“Very good!” he shouted. “A minute and a half! Let’s try it again without the footlockers!”

“One minute!” shouted the sergeant, again glancing at his watch, after we carried our footlockers back to our bunks, waited for the whistle again, and returned to the street. “Good enough for today. Right face. Double time. March!”

So we ran off down the street, happy that we’d passed that test, but not knowing what would befall us next.

I befriended an Alabama boy who’d ridden with me on the bus from Montgomery. His body mass index was higher than most of the others. So he found the running more troublesome than most of us found it, and our squad leader decided both that and my befriending him was unacceptable. The Alabama Boy’s name was Michaels.

Kimball, the Squad Leader, was also a trainee, but the Army had given him an armband with corporal stripes on it giving him authority to give orders to a dozen of us it called a squad. So the rest of us called him a candy-striper, but he took that authority seriously.

“His dad’s a lieutenant colonel,” Michaels told me. “I guess he’s trying to prove something to him, or to himself.”

“You two,” he said to Michaels and me one evening after chow. “Out in the company street.”

“I think you’re a couple of duds,” said Kimball standing in front us but nearly nose to nose with Michaels as we stood in the street, what we called the company street, with the snake pit behind us. “Do you know what a dud is?”

“A stupid bullet?” said Michaels.

But the candy-striper didn’t reply to that.

“When I give you the command to double time,” he said next, “you start running around the snake pit. If I catch up with you before I tell you to stop, I’m going to kick your asses.”

‘The snake pit’ was what our leader called a field of sand about the size of a football field and about six feet below the street at the bottom of some log steps. We used it for the calisthenics the Army called the Army Dozen. Kimball didn’t catch up with me, but he ran behind Michaels, literally kicking his butt every time he caught up with him.

“Halt!” he shouted when we returned to where we began running. “Into the snake pit!”

We ran down the steps.

“Do you know what a duck is?” he asked the Michaels, after forming us at attention again with our backs to the steps.

“I think so,” said Michaels as the candy-striper glared at him.

“You don’t know?” the candy-striper shouted into his face. “Do you know how a duck walks? I’ll show you how ducks walk! They walk like this!”

He waddled in a circle in the sand in front of us as I struggled not to sneer at him, but he stood up and told us he wanted us to walk like a duck to the other side of the snake pit and back.

“The first one back can go back to the barracks,” he said.

I was the first one back. But I couldn’t walk back up the steps. I crawled up them. Then, at their top, I pushed myself to my feet with my hands, and in the barracks, I pulled myself up the stairs by their banister, limped to my bunk, and sat on it to wait for Michaels. I could have seen the snake pit from the foot of my bunk, but I didn’t feel like looking.

So I didn’t. But Michaels’ bunk was beside mine. So I couldn’t not look as he limped to it from the stairs.

“Fuck him,” he quietly said, slowly sitting on his bunk, and, next morning, he did a little more than speak.

“Wait a minute,” he said as I turned from my bunk to fall out for the morning training formation, and, when all of the others had left the squad bay, he went to the candy-striper’s bunk, put a hand on the toe of each of the boots

the candy-striper had spit-shined and displayed on top of his footlocker, and pointed to the middle of the candy-striper's bunk tight for inspection.

"Grab the middle of that blanket," he said, "and give it a yank."

I did, and we did that and were outside and in formation before our Platoon Sergeant called our platoon to attention, and, that evening, while the rest of us rested a little from the day's training, the candy-striper was cleaning the grease trap behind the mess hall, and we had a new squad leader.

But, my remaining time in basic training, I limped and needed banisters to climb stairs. So I was also one of the trainees doing pushups in a puddle with Michaels. Because he ordinarily couldn't keep with the others, such was ordinary for him, but, but that was our bivouac night, the night we slept in the woods in pup tents, and rain fell all night. So, thinking of Chuck Fitzgerald's mother's not letting us sleep in his backyard in the rain, I might otherwise have enjoyed that.

But I also misjudged the new squad leader. He was older than the other trainees in our platoon and knelt and prayed beside his bunk each night before getting into it. So I expected some compassion and gentleness from him.

"I'm glad you're the squad leader," I told him his first evening in that position.

"Get a brush and a bucket of soapy water," he replied, "and clean the stairway."

But we didn't train Saturday afternoons. So, after our third Saturday morning of training, our trainers turned us loose to go anywhere on post we wished to go, and the Post Exchange snack bar on post sold beer pitcher to anyone older than eighteen years. So, because the post federal government property, state law didn't apply, that was the second time I drank alcohol legally.

But that was also my first my first opportunity to associate closely with African Americans.

One, whose name was Jennings, slept in the bunk above mine.

"Maybe we can go downtown together when we get a pass," he said to me as we stood at the head of our bunks, when we returned from the snack bar.

"Yeah," I said, "OK."

But I tried to take him up on that.

The next Saturday we had evening passes to go anywhere, and by then we'd also received our first pay. So I changed into my dress greens and joined the line outside the orderly room to sign out. I was thinking of going to downtown Columbia with Jennings.

"What's your fifth General Order," asked a Staff Sergeant sitting at a desk in the orderly room as I stood at attention before him.

By then I'd memorized not only my service number but also our General Orders and the Code of Conduct.

"You sure about that?" the sergeant asked after I easily quoted it.

"Yes, sergeant," I said, nearly certain.

"Would you bet your life on it?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, sergeant," I said, less certainly.

"I'm not sure I would," said the sergeant, looking at me.

But he handed me my pass, and I signed out and returned to the barracks, to find Jennings.

"Ready?" I asked him, finding him at our bunks.

"Ready for what?" he asked.

"To go downtown," I answered.

"Oh," he said after looking at me silently for a few seconds. "OK, yeah, come on."

So I limped down the stairs behind him, up the stairs of the barracks beside ours, and into a small room at the end of its second floor squad bay. Those rooms were for single low-ranking members of the company who weren't trainees, and one of the cooks slept in that one, and about a half dozen other African Americans were in it, sitting and standing and talking and laughing. But, as soon as I entered, all of them looked at me and stopped talking, and Jennings didn't introduce me.

After about a minute, they resumed talking. But they didn't talk to me. So, after a few minutes of standing silent beside the door, I quietly, slunk out, returned to our barracks, where some white boys were gathering there to go downtown. So I joined them.

We took a Greyhound bus from the Ft. Jackson bus station into Columbia and found a bar with a round table big enough for all of us. The drinking age off-post in South Carolina was 21, but one of my fellow trainees loaned me his drivers' license. He showed the waitress his Army ID card.

"You two guys have the same name," she said grinning, and she brought us what we ordered.

But we had to sign back in by midnight. So we didn't drink much that night, and I didn't go downtown again or to the snackbar. I felt I needed to concentrate on my training, and, after my first squad leader lost his job, that resulted in my only interaction with him. Beside the mess hall, above the walk where we stood in line for chow, was a horizontal ladder. So, in some of my discretionary time, I practiced on it for the physical training test.

"I was wrong about you," said Kimball, walking by in the street. "I thought you were a dud."



Of course I thought of what we'd done to each other. But I welcomed the praise. So I smiled at him but said nothing.

I also preferred C-rations to my mother's cooking and hung a P-38 on my dog tag chain. Michaels had pointed out to me that some of our trainers had did that. They were little can-openers that came in each box of C-rations.

But, also, for me, crawling through mud on the infiltration course beneath barbed wire while tracer rounds flew above our heads was another highlight, and, as a hand grenade I threw over a concrete wall bounced on top of the wall, I felt more excitement than fear.

But that wasn't true of a Staff Sergeant standing behind me.

"Holy shit!" he said.

But a drains were at the bottom of the wall for the grenades to roll into them if they fell on our side of the wall. So I looked at the drain and then at the sergeant and stepped to the periscope there for us to see the damage we did to the dirt on the other side of the wall. But the grenade fell too close to the wall for me to see it explode So I saw only dust from the explosion, and that disappointed me.

But I liked Sergeant Kelly, our Platoon Sergeant. He seemed to me to need dental work, and he led us in singing as we marched, but he seemed to me to be more of a soldier than the others training us. The lyrics of the songs seemed to me to be nonsense, but I understood that their rhythm was to keep the march steady, and some of the songs had other training purposes.

One of them, because our company was E company, was "The Echo Company Boogie", and I understood that to be for esprit de corps, and, though the subject of another was a person whose name was Jody staying at home to seduce our girlfriends while we were in the Army, that song also helped us march.

"Jody was home when you left," sang the sergeant as our left feet hit the ground.

"You're right," we sang as our right feet hit the ground.

But a Sergeant, not a Platoon Sergeant or a Staff Sergeant but the lowest rank of sergeant, seemed to me to be goofy. Beside the barracks was a place I thought must have been for coal when coal heated the barracks, and butt cans hung on posts at the end of our bunks. But a low concrete wall bordered that area. So many of us sat on it to smoke, and once, walking by while we did that, the sergeant I thought was goofy removed his helmet liner, threw it into the enclosure, retrieved it, and continued on past the barracks, and he seemed to me to show his goofiness in another way.

We also had a company clown. He joked about Vic Morrow, the star of the TV show Combat. But he was from Cuba. So he called him Bic Morrow, and the sergeant I thought was goofy asked whether anyone thought he could karate chop through an end of a wooden ammunition case, and the Cuban kid was the first to try. But, though the wood was less than a quarter of an inch thick, he couldn't, and neither could the sergeant. But I did.

"Are you a karate man," the sergeant asked me.

But I didn't answer, and I didn't think our smoking was the reason the sergeant threw his helmet. The PX sold cartons of cigarettes for \$1.70, and the sergeants gave us a ten-minute smoke break about every hour. The Army encouraged smoking.

"Break," said our trainers. "Ten minutes. Smoke 'em if you got 'em."

But, after spending about six of those minutes smoking a cigarette, I spent the remainder of them on my back beneath a tree, trying to sleep, and I also learned why the corporal on the porch at Fort Jackson said he didn't "want to see any goddamned cigarette butts on the ground." One of our duties was what the Army called police call. It was lining up side-by-side to walk across grass to pick up cigarette butts.

"All I want to see is assholes and elbows," said the sergeants.

We also learned to do to our cigarettes what we called field-stripping. That was emptying the tobacco from them and shredding their filters, to minimize the number the number of butts we had to pick up, and I didn't enjoy all the training. Sergeants, as they stood on a platform to direct us in performing the Army dozen, occasionally interrupted it for a thirteenth exercise.

"Dying cockroach position!" shouted the sergeant. "Move!"

That was lying on our backs to extend our hand and feet in four directions while keeping them and our heads above the ground.

Also, the hand-to-hand combat training seemed to me to be ineffectual.

But the bayonet training seem to me to be perhaps too effectual.

"What's the spirit of the bayonet?" the sergeant shouted.

"To kill!" we learned to shout in reply.

But I enjoyed rifle training, and I also excelled at it. Michaels told me he'd hunted all his life and would easily qualify Expert, with expert highest of the three levels of weapon qualification, sharpshooter next, and marxman lowest. But Michaels qualified Marksman while I qualified Expert. But I thought that was because, not thinking I was and expert, I followed instructions, and, one afternoon at the rifle range, a sergeant sent me on a wild goose chase.

As I awaited my turn to shoot as many silhouettes of human torsos as I could, he told me to go to the next range and ask for some firing line. White

lines were on the ground on the range for the trainees to know which targets were theirs and not shoot others' targets. So, thinking the sergeant said "firing lime", I walked to the next range and asked a lieutenant for some.

"Do you mean firing line?" he asked, and a sergeant standing beside him laughed, and then so did I, but the lieutenant only shook his head.

So I returned to the other range and found the sergeant who'd sent me.

"I know what a firing line is," I told him. "I thought you wanted lime for marking the firing lines."

But he scowled and walked away, and my difficulty in running motivated me to violate an axiom Michaels told me was a military tradition, never to volunteer for anything. Tired of hobbling as the others ran, I volunteered for laundry detail. But I was glad I did.

That afternoon, lying in a pile of sheets in the back of a truck, I watched my platoon running back for evening chow, and that was the only time Sergeant Kelly directed my platoon to run with its rifles over its heads.

But I regretted another result of my difficulty running.

I expected my lowest score on the physical training test to be the hand grenade throw. It was throwing steel objects resembling hand grenades fifty yards to a bullseye target on the ground. But I put each of them in the bull's eye, and I also scored the maximum on the parallel ladder, and that was more difficult than I expected it to be. The day of the test was so cold that, when I reached the count of rungs I needed for the maximum score, I couldn't straighten my fingers. So I hung there until a sergeant saw my problem and hurried to me and wrapped his arms around my legs to lift me to unhook me.

"Thanks," I said as he grinned and gave me a pat on my back, and I easily achieved the maximum score on two of the other three of the five components of the test, leaving only the mile run between me and the maximum score of five hundred.

Ordinarily, before that waddle across the pit, that maximum score would have been easy for me. So I thought I could do it by the momentum of swinging my legs in front of me and locking my knees. But I fell short, and the Company Commander had promised to give the trainee with the highest score a ride back to the barrack in his new Buick Riviera. So I had to watch two trainees who'd scored 498 climb into his car, making a Greyhound bus ride to Fort Knox, Kentucky, the Army's Armor Training Center, my next motor vehicle ride.

But we stopped for lunch in North Carolina. So I went for a walk. I stopped in a jewelry store to buy a Christmas gift for Sandy. Peggy had written to me that she was home from Florida.

“What town is this?” I asked a saleslady.

“Asheville,” she said.

“Nashville?” I asked.

“Asheville,” she said.

But, thinking she’d repeated “Nashville”, I thought I was in Tennessee.

I asked her whether she had any charm bracelets. She showed me a card full of them. I selected a silver one and asked her whether she had any charms in the shape of a tank. Telling me she was sorry she didn’t, she showed me one in the shape of a rifle. So I thought of Mr. Terdal’s tie tack. But I bought both the bracelet and the charm.

Fort Knox was colder than Fort Jackson. Fidgeting with my Army ID card as we stood in line for bedding outside the supply room the night we arrived, I cracked its plastic lamination. Next morning I had a chance to volunteer again but didn’t.

A sergeant asked us in our first morning formation there whether any of us wished to go to jump school. I thought I’d like to jump out of airplanes, but I’d heard that airborne training required a lot of running. So, not yet ready for that, that time I didn’t raise a hand. But neither did I begin armor training then.

The Army sent all of us home on a thirty-day leave for Christmas. So that afternoon at the PX I bought a carton of Kools for Peggy for Christmas and an instamatic camera and a Morocco leather wallet for myself, and the next morning I was on a Greyhound bus on my way back to Coldwater.

I don’t remember if I bought anyone else anything for Christmas that year, but my mother had acquired our family’s first telephone. So I used it to call Sandy. Her mother answered and let me talk to her. Sandy told me her father had forbidden her to see me, but she did. We agreed to meet on the corner between her house and mine that was nearest hers, and from there we walked back to my house and had coitus again in my dirty little bed.

Then I walked her back to the corner.

“Something happened in Florida I can’t tell you about,” she said when we reached the corner.

“Why can’t you tell me?” I asked.

“I just can’t,” she said.

“We’ve never kept secrets from each other,” I argued.

“I can’t,” she said again.

I felt we’d never again be whatever we’d been together.

I kissed her once more, but I never saw her again.

My mother told me the bank had taken the Corvair. She said a banker told her its tires were bald, that someone had stolen its radio, and that, because

of that, she owed more for it than it was worth. She said that, because of that, she was still paying for it.

But, despite my shame, I was proud of my uniform. I dressed in my greens and went to the Alibi or Walkup's. Through the years, changes of owners change the names of Monroe Street's bars, and I lost track of some of them. But my mother had told me she was going to whichever it was, and, when I arrived, she was sitting with Howard and Teresa, friends of hers she knew from the Commercial. But Sandy's father was also there, with others at a table two tables past the one where my mother was sitting.

"There's a punk," he said, looking at me, before I sat with my mother and her friends to drink a bottle of Coca Cola, and Peggy responded appropriately to the carton of Kools.

"What kind of Christmas present is a carton of cigarettes," she asked.

But she and Bob took me to Battle Creek to see Charlotte Button.

She was living in an apartment while working on an associate's degree at Kellogg Community College and came to the door in a flowery pink flannel nightgown. Peggy and Bob left me there for a few hours, and I suspected that no clothing was beneath the nightgown. So I tried to muster the courage to try to see. But I didn't.

"Did you get any of that?" Bob asked me as I climbed back into the back seat of his car when they picked me up.

"That's none of your business," I replied.

"That means you didn't," he said.

The drive back to Coldwater was through a blizzard. His car was a big white relatively new Oldsmobile convertible. It slid from the road into a guardrail. He drove on, but he seemed to me to blame me for that, and I felt both the shame and that I deserved it.

Atkinson and Kubiak took me to Coldwater's first pizza parlor. It was in a tiny brick building on the south side of the draft board office on the south side of opera house. It was a barbershop before I enlisted. I could hardly eat the pizza. Tomato still reminded me of blood.

Gary Labelle entered to pick up a takeout order. To me his sister Sue was the most attractive girl in my class at Coldwater High School. Gary kept his hair short, and his head seemed to me to be unusually large, but then he was a West Point cadet while John Cochrane was an Annapolis Cadet. John had competed for the West Point nomination I won and, the same year, after losing the West Point appointment, he won his Annapolis appointment. I don't remember how Gary's appointment fit into that sequence, but I learned in the

Army that, by attending Officer Candidate School, one could become an Army lieutenant in six months, and I considered that. But hadn't decided to try it.

"I'll be an officer before you are," I said to Gary.

"OK," he said, and, saying nothing more to me, he picked up his pizza and left.

Atkinson hosted a New Year's Eve party in his party room. I sewed an armor patch on my greens and wore them to the party. Jim Barber was there.

"Why are you wearing that patch?" he asked. "You're not in a permanent party unit. You're still a trainee."

"It just means I'm in armor," I said. "It doesn't have a division number on it."

But I knew he was correct, and I became extremely drunk at the party.

"Fuck you, Sergeant Kelly," I screamed from the street in front of my mother's house after walking home.

Our next door neighbors stared at me from their screen porch.

"You might need this," said my mother, setting a bucket beside my bed.

I needed it less than a minute after I lay down.

## Chapter 10

### Standards

I hitchhiked back to Fort Knox. In a formation before I began training there, I learned of another delay in my armor training. A sergeant told my company some of us would attend a two-week leadership preparation course at the Fort Knox Noncommissioned Officers Academy. He called my name.

The purpose of the course was to select candy-strippers, but, before that training of mine began, my class for it participated in a measurement of what we'd learned in basic training. One of the tests required simulating reporting for guard duty. I remembered that the only occasion officially requiring stating the purpose for reporting was when one reported for pay. Every person ahead of me in line said he was reporting for guard duty.

“Sergeant,” I said saluting. “Private Harman reports.”

The sergeant didn't immediately return the salute. Neither did one salute sergeants, but that was part of the simulation. So I thought he may not have know what I'd learned that. But no one told us how we performed. So I couldn't be sure, and I passed the leadership course, and, in my first formation after my return to my armor company, the platoon sergeant called the names of its candy strippers, and mine was one.

So, after the formation, I carried my duffle bag into the barracks and threw it onto a top bunk at the end of one my platoon's two rows of bunks. I knew from basic training that the bunks at that ends of the rows furthest from the doors or stairs were for the squad leaders. But, before I unpacked, another candy-striper threw my duffle bag on the floor and threw his on the top bunk.

“The top bunk's mine,” he said.

But I threw his duffle bag on the floor and replaced it with mine.

“My duffle bag was there first,” I said.

He picked up his duffle bag and threw it onto the bottom bunk. But he gave no other indication of agreement with what I did, and the friendship one might have expected to develop from our being bunkmates and fellow squad leaders didn't develop. My first friend there wasn't a candy-striper but a guy in my squad from Riverside, California.

His last name was Francis. On our first weekend pass from Fort Knox he and I hitchhiked to Coldwater together. I don't remember his first name, and I don't know how we could have had time for that nearly seven-hundred-mile trip between our Saturday morning training and our Monday training. But I remember my brother Jerry called him Frankthith and that we walked to Atkinson's house Saturday night.

"It's Saturday," I said. "I thought you'd be having a party."

"I don't have parties anymore," said Atkinson. "After what happened to my mother."

I didn't remind him of New Years Eve, and Francis and I didn't hitchhike back to Fort Knox together.

"I'll race you," I said. "It's easier to get a ride alone."

Three men picked me up a few miles north of Louisville and gave me a ride to the Louisville Greyhound station. All three were in the front seat when they stopped, but one of them moved to the back seat with me. All of them laughed when he did that.

"Are you theatre people?" I asked.

They seemed to me to sound like Charlie Allen and how Willard announced winners.

"Yeah, we're theatre people," said the man beside me, laughing.

The others laughed with him, and then he grabbed my crotch.

"Ooh!" he said. "He's got a big one."

"You can drop me here," I said, seeing the bus station.

"We can take you to Fort Knox," said one of the other men.

"That's alright," I said. "The buses run every few minutes."

My first additional duty at Fort Knox was CQ Runner. CQ's, charges of quarters, were people who stayed up all night to be responsible while the higher ranking leadership was off duty for the night. CQ runners ran errands for the CQ's. My only additional duty during basic training was KP. But KP, kitchen police, was helping to clean mess halls, and being a candy-striper exempted me from that.

But we had no emergencies that night. So I and the corporal who was CQ spent most of the night taking turns sleeping on a cot in a hallway between the orderly room and the supply room. I dreamed of Sandy.

"Do you need to go back to the barracks for anything?" the corporal asked me as, after the dream, I sat behind a desk across the room from him with semen in my boxer shorts.

"No," I said.

"You sure?" he asked.



“Yeah,” I said, but I wasn’t sure of what he might have suspected.

I never before had either had a wet dream or masturbated, and never with Sandy was I sure I ejaculated.

My favorite part of training was driving the tanks. I learned that M-60 tanks could climb a 60 degree incline and over a meter-high vertical obstacle. But I also learned that steering 51 tons of steel could be difficult. My first time driving one, the sergeant in the tank commander’s hatch told me to drive it into a rock gorge. I did, but the tank began sliding sideways.

“What the hell are you doing?” shouted the sergeant.

But I could do nothing until the tank slid to the bottom of the gorge and stopped with its sides parallel to the sides of the gorge. Then I could turn it and drive it up the other side. But the other trainee in the tank had worse luck. Hitting a tree. He bent a fender. He was also a candy striper, but his sense of humor was more in line with mine than with the sergeant’s. So he also became a friend of mine. His name was Harrell.

“Did you see the sergeant at the motor pool after we came back yesterday,” he asked me the next morning. “He was trying to straighten the fender with a tankers bar.”

My second favorite training was firing the guns. The tanks we drove were M-60’s and M-48A3’s. Their main guns were 105 millimeter howitzers on the M-60’s and 90 millimeter howitzers on the M-48’s. I earned my tank weapons qualification on one of the newer M-60’s.

The targets were white sheets about eight feet wide between 2x4 stakes in the ground. I blew away all the sheets and began blowing the stakes out of the ground, and I did that with the solid steel nonexplosive rounds the Army called shot rounds. So I added a tank weapons bar to the rifle bar on my badge for expert weaponry.

But I didn’t enjoy the weather that that Kentucky winter. My gloves hardly helped me use a tankers bar to change track blocks, and disassembling and reassembling the howitzers’ breach blocks require removing the gloves, and I did both on my nineteenth birthday. Tankers bars were five-foot steel bars like the ice spuds my father used to chop holes in the ice to fish on the Michigan lakes.

But, on the day of my graduation from advanced individual armor training, came my first airplane trip, my first visit to New York City, and my time on a ship. The plane was propeller-driven, and the ride from the airport to the ship at Brooklyn Army Terminal was by bus past cars with wheels missing rusting at curbs. But the airline was civilian with stewardesses, and I thought of the ride through Brooklyn as an adventure, and, though I’d seen pictures of

ships, I'd never imagined them to be as big as that troop ship, and, that afternoon, I began my first sea voyage. It would take me to Europe.

But the bunks weren't big. They were hammocks on steel frames in stacks of five, and hundreds of troops slept in each compartment, and thousands were on the ship, and, though they were orange, the ship and nearly everything else on it was grey. Nearly all else on the ship was grey.

Before we left port, an ensign came to my compartment and told me and my hundreds of compartment mates some rules.

"Any questions?" he asked when he finished reading his list.

"Yeah," said one of my compartment mates. "How long are we going to be on this boat?"

"It isn't a boat," said the ensign. "It's a ship."

"You're right," said a sergeant when the ensign left the compartment. "It's a fucking boat."

One of the rules was for showering. Each of the shower stalls had a saltwater faucet for washing and a freshwater faucet for rinsing. That night, while I was following that rule, I looked from the porthole in the shower stall and saw the Statue of Liberty. That was my first time seeing it. But I wasn't happy seeing it then. We'd left port hours earlier.

One of my Army shipmates said the reason was that an officer was traveling with his wife in one of the private compartments above the troop compartments and that she'd gone into labor. But my concern was that the answer to the question of how long we'd be on that ship was about nine days. So that added those hours back and out again to that, and I was already sick of the ship. So the next question was how to deal with that.

Much of the spaghetti and meatballs we had for supper that evening literally hit the deck. Using our thumbs to anchor our steel trays to the long steel tables in the galley as we ate wasn't one of the ensign's rules. So, the first time the ship rolled while we ate, many meals slid to the floor, and seasickness was another problem.

Our leaders, to keep us busy during the nine days, gave us jobs. One of the jobs was placing barf bags side-by-side behind railings along the hallways the Navy called gangways. The bags were out by 8:00 each morning and gone less than two hours later. But neither Harrell nor I barfed.

I don't know what happened to Francis. But he wasn't on the ship. So Harrell was my closest friend on it. We snickered at our shipmates standing guard with barf bags in their pistol belts. But, because our candy-stripe rank ended when we left Fort Knox, we reverted to the private rank we received on graduated from basic training. It was the second of the three paygrades for

privates, the lowest before we received any rank insignia. So we were open to any assignment, and ours was KP. So we spent hours eyeing potatoes, and the mess steward told us we shouldn't smoke while we did that. But we learned something. We learned where the ship's garbage went. Dumping it down a chute, I saw that its destination was the open sea.

But our KP was but a few hours each morning. So we spent a lot of time seeing the sea and exploring the ship. So, looking at waves chopping as far as we could see, we grinned into the spray in our faces, and, at the front of the ship, on what the Navy called ladder wells, we found we could somewhat fly. When the bow dipped, we couldn't climb the steps as fast as they fell.

The ship docked at Bremerhaven. From there a troop train took us to Frankfurt. The flush tanks of the toilets on the strain were several feet above the toilets. Flushing them required pulling a chain. A kid from Coldwater was in our compartment. I'd played chess with him in our living room on Monroe Street. His name was Atwater. I'd easily beaten him. He never returned to our house. Our conversation on the train was brief. I never saw him again.

"You should have let him win sometimes," said my mother after he left our house.

In Frankfurt, an Army bus took Harrell and me and others but not Atwater from the city's main train station to the 21<sup>st</sup> Replacement Battalion. The 21<sup>st</sup> Replacement Battalion sent Harrell and me and others to the 3d Armored Division's replacement detachment, at the division's headquarters, at Drake Kaserne, also in Frankfurt.

While the division's personnel management specialists decided what to do with us, they billeted us on the top floor of the four-story building its Adjutant General used for offices. We'd carried our 201 files with us on the ship. DA Forms 201 were the brown folders like the ones on the sergeant's desk in Alabama when I volunteered to go to Europe. Before the personnel management specialists came to our room to collect them, Harrell and I and the others compared our GT scores. The GT score, general technical score, was the Army's equivalent of an IQ. It was the mean of our verbal and arithmetic scores on the Army Classification Battery. Mine was highest. Harrell's was second.

"Why are you in Armor," one of the others asked me, "with scores like that?"

"I joined the Army to be a soldier," I said, remembering Mr. Houston.

The next morning, the specialist four who collected them returned and called my name.

"The chief wants to see you," he said.

Specialists four had the enlisted pay grade of a corporal but not the command authority of the corporal rank. He took me downstairs for an interview with a chief warrant officer. Warrant officers had paygrades and ranks higher than enlisted paygrades and ranks but lower than commissioned officer paygrades and ranks.

“Can you type?” he asked, looking at my Form 20.

DA Forms 20 were Personnel Data Records, large beige cards with data personnel management specialists frequently used, including the army classification battery scores.

I told him the truth, that I’d taken a year of typing in high school but finished the course typing but twelve words per minute.

“Well,” he said, “you wouldn’t have to do that much typing. Do you think you might want to work here?”

I thought of what I’d said of wishing to be a soldier, but I also thought of the weather at Fort Knox.

“Yes, sir,” I replied.

“What was that about?” asked Harrell on my return upstairs.

“They want me to work here,” I said.

“Are you going to?” he asked.

I shrugged.

He and the others looked at me and looked away. The next day they boarded buses to go to units outside Frankfurt, what troops there called the boonies. I carried my duffle bag to my bunk in a room on the third floor of the barracks, the building next door to the building next door the building where we slept, where the warrant office interviewed me, where I’d work.

My job was monitoring morning reports from the division’s 3d Brigade. Morning reports were reports of changes in personnel data unit clerks submitted daily to division headquarters. Harrell’s armor battalion was in that brigade. That brigade was also Elvis Presley’s assignment, but I don’t know whether Presley’s assignment was to an armor battalion.

My company was the 503d Administration Company Adjutant General. But its approximately five hundred members called it the 503d AG. I shared my room in the barracks with five clerks. I shared my office in the AG building with five other clerks. All the clerks in my office served the 3d Brigade.

Only I and my team chief monitored morning reports. Three desks were on each side of the office. The control clerk occupied the other desk on our side. I never learned what he controlled, and I never asked, but he was a member of the division headquarters’ drill team. They marched with their rifles, especially elaborately, at military ceremonies. Personnel actions clerks

occupied two of desks on the other side of the office. I remember nothing of the clerk who occupied the other desk on that side.

My monitoring of the morning reports was inspecting them to be sure they accorded with Army regulations, especially AR 335-60. Morning Reports was the title of AR 335.60, but another regulation especially relevant to morning reports was AR 310-50. Its title was Abbreviations and Brevity Codes. The Army standardized all it could. Abbreviations were no exception.

An example was that, while troops generally called Specialists Four spec. fours, AR 310-50 called them SP4's. It abbreviated every Army rank with three capital letters or numbers with no punctuation. No abbreviation in AR 310-50 had a period at its end or any other punctuation. Pay grades were a letter and a number with no hyphen between them. Enlisted pay grades began with an E. Warrant office pay grades began with a W. Commissioned officer pay grades began with an O. I began my job there as a PV2 E2.

But standardization wasn't my reason for volunteering to go to Europe. So the evening of my first duty day there I went downtown with some of my roommates and learned that neither were regulations a primary concern for them. For us to go downtown, regulations required us to request a pass, sign out in the orderly room, and leave the post through a gate military police guarded. But, behind the barracks, a post was missing in a section of the fence around the *kaserne*, and a city bus stopped at the curb of the street immediately outside the fence. So we simply left the barracks through the door nearest to our room, walked around that end of the barracks, stepped through the gap, and caught the bus. On the way we had to leave the bus to take a trolley, but the trolley took us to the Hauptwalche, Frankfurt's main square.

A few weeks after my arrival, I also took a trip to the boonies, to Friedberg. But my boss, SP5 Bortz, the chief of my two-man team, drove us there in a jeep from the Drake Kaserne motor pool. We went there to inspect the 3d Brigade's morning report operations. Its headquarters was there. But during our lunch break I went looking for Harrell. I found him at his double bunk in a barracks room bigger than the platoon bays at Fort Knox.

"Hey, Harrell," I said.

"Hey," he replied. "How's it going?"

"I'm here for an inspection," I said.

He nodded and pulled on his field jacket.

"I gotta go," he said, turning away, and both of us returned to work, I to a desk in a warm office, he to a tank in a snowy field.

Back in Frankfurt my roommates showed me the strip joints on the *Kaiserstrasse*, the street that ended at Frankfurt's *Hauptbahnhof*, its main train

station. Once some of us went to the House of Three Colors, a brothel near the *Hauptbahnhof*. On its ground floor women stood beside juke boxes offering themselves. When men selected them, they took them to their rooms upstairs.

Once I selected one. She didn't remove her clothing. She pulled her skirt up only far enough to straddle me. She lifted her blouse but only far enough to pull her bra above her breasts. I wondered why I was doing that. I didn't go there again.

In the hallway outside our room, I dropped the watch Sandy gave me. Its crystal cracked on the hallway's ceramic tile floor. I never had anyone repair it. I was writing to her, but she wasn't writing to me. I wrote to Peggy and asked her whether she knew what happened to her. She replied that she was working as a waitress at Bell's restaurant. I asked her to ask her to write to me. She said she asked her to and that she said she would. But, in the next few weeks, I received nothing from her. I wrote to Peggy again. She replied that she couldn't make her write to me if she didn't want to.

But, after a few more weeks, she did. She said she was in modeling school in Chicago, that she was balancing books on her head and working off her baby fat, and that she had a friend who reminded her of me. Neither my reply nor her reply to my reply mentioned the friend. But, in her reply to my reply, she told me she had a growth under heart. She said she wasn't pregnant and that I shouldn't worry about that but that the growth was too near her heart for an operation, and she said a doctor told her she had but six months to live.

"Will you spend the rest of my life with me?" she asked.

"I'd spend the rest of anyone's life with you," I replied.

Then I asked one of the members of the personnel actions team in my office whether I could take an emergency leave for that. He told me that, for the Army to pay for an emergency leave, the emergency had to involve a family member. But he recommended that I ask a JAG officer. So I walked to the division's Judge Advocate General's office at the other end of the *kaserne* and showed a lieutenant Sandy's letter.

"Nothing I can do," he said handing it back to me. "Try the Chaplain."

I thought I heard him snort as he turned away. I wrote to Sandy several more times. I never heard from her again.

John Lewis Benson, one of my roommates, occasionally called himself Jean Louee Benzone. But he laughed doing that, and the rest of us called him Benny. He was learning German and found the *Jazz Keller*. It was a bar in a cellar below *Kleinebockenheimerstrasse*, a one-block pedestrian street a block from the *Hauptwache*. Jazz trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf played on the stage beneath the cellar's stone arches. One evening I met a Jewish girl there.

She was blonde, but a gold star of David was on a gold chain around her neck. The night I met her I walked her to her trolley stop. The night was cool. She was in sleeveless dress. I was in a new sport jacket I bought at Frankfurt's main PX. I didn't offer her my jacket or ask her for her telephone number. But the next weekend I returned to the *Jazz Keller* to try again.

"I'm looking for a pretty blonde girl," I told the bartender.

"Aren't we all," he replied, laughing at me.

Another evening at the *Jazz Keller* I sat at a table with a girl who said her name was Ulrike Reich. She gave me a photograph of herself, but neither did I ever see her again. During a fireworks display the Heidelberg Castle, Benny mocked a girl. She was using a flash to photograph the fireworks.

"*Schoen*," she sighed each time she snapped the camera's shutter.

"She'll feel stupid," said Benny, "when she sees her pictures."

He worked in personnel management. He said he was from Denton, Texas, and that his father went to prison for counterfeiting. He said he dropped out of high school at seventeen to join the Army and that he once slept in a dryer in a Laundromat and woke up with "queers" staring into it at him. He wasn't much taller than Tiger Stout. He also told me he did Tasmanian devil acts. He said that was hiding in trunks, jumping out of them at filling stations, and running off down the street shrieking.

He also told me I could request three-day passes. Those were weekend passes with also a Monday or Friday. I took one to Basel, Switzerland, mainly to add Switzerland to the list of countries I'd visited. It was the city outside Germany nearest to Frankfurt. I went there on a train, spent two nights in a guesthouse, and I wondered at people on the streets wishing me *Guten Morgen*. I also walked to the ruins of a castle on a hill above the city. People were picnicking on blankets outside the castle.

Benny also told me I didn't need to buy tickets to fly on United States Air Force planes from Frankfurt's Rhein-Main Airbase to more distant places.

So, on another three-day pass, I flew to Paris in an Air Force cargo plane. I thought Paris was for tourists, but, when I arrived at Rhein-Main, the next available flight was to Paris the next morning. So, after a night in the air base's transit barracks, I flew to Evreux Air Base and checked into a small hotel on the *Champs-Élysées*.

Returning to the street, I saw the *Arc de Triomphe* about two blocks to my left and the Eiffel Tower about a mile to my right. After walking to *Arc de Triomphe* and looking at the traffic swarming around it, I walked to the Eiffel Tower and rode its slanting elevator to its middle observation level. I didn't find an elevator to its top.

From there I walked to the cathedral *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and, from the cathedral, I walked back along the Seine to the *Louvre*. I spent less than ten minutes in the cathedral but more than two hours in the Louvre. I saw the *Venus de Milo* and the *Mona Lisa*. But what held my attention more than anything else was the *Nike of Samothrace*. She was standing alone on her stone ship at the top of a stairway at the far end of a long hallway. Walking to her along that hallway I looked at nothing else.

I drank a glass of beer in a small modern bar near my hotel.

The bartender didn't bring me my change.

"Chanjay," I said, hoping it was French for "change".

He looked at me but didn't reply. I told my roommates the French didn't like Americans. I also told them of the traffic confusion at the Arc of Triumph.

But I tried to learn German. In a morning work formation, our company's first sergeant told us anyone wishing to learn German could take a conversational German course, at no cost to the students. I volunteered again.

The classes were at Edwards Kaserne. Edwards was across the street from Drake. Logistical units, dependent housing, and a service club were there. The lessons were at the service club. They were all afternoon each workday for two weeks. So they gave me two weeks of afternoons off from work.

The teacher told the class her husband was an opera singer. She said they came to Germany because opera singers can't make money in the United States. She wore turtleneck sweaters to class. I suspected that she did that to hide age wrinkles in her neck. But still I liked the way she looked.

"You could scar your retinae doing that," she said to me while I was rubbing my eyes in class.

Near the end of the course, in the hallway outside the classroom, she told me and another student that she needed to select an honor graduate. She said she'd narrowed her choice to me and the other student. But she didn't mention that to me again. So I supposed she selected the other student. But I used what I learned from her to drink beer in guesthouses.

My only complaint against my job was having to work Saturday mornings. The warrant officer was wrong in saying my job would require little typing, but, doing it increased my speed, and I also quickly learned the regulations, and, a few months after I arrived in German, the Army ended its policy of making working Saturday mornings routine. So then I had no complaints, and, because my legs healed at Fort Knox, I didn't need to wait in line long for breakfast.



Upon dismissal from the morning formations, I and most of my roommates ran to the mess hall. So we were nearly always near the front of the line. But one of my roommates never attended morning work formations.

He was an SP4, while Benny and another of my roommates were SP5's, while they weren't exempt from that requirement. So I didn't understand how he was. But I knew why he preferred not to attend them.

Every evening after work, he changed from his fatigues into a sport jacket, tie, and dress slacks, and we didn't see him from then until after work the next evening, and we never saw him on weekends.

But I had one interaction with him. Entering the room as he was leaving, I nearly collided with him. I'd bought a Ronson cigarette lighter at the PX and was about to light a cigarette. I shifted the flame from my cigarette to his shin. He looked at me for a few seconds, knocked my hand aside, and asked me what in hell I thought I was doing. Then, not waiting for an answer, he walked around me and out the door.

But Benny may have been less conformist than I.

"Do you know what the carpenter said to Jesus when he was nailing him to the cross?" he asked. "Would you mind crossing your feet? I only have one nail left."

Then, standing as though he were on a cross, he leaned forward as though he were pulling his hands from the nails and falling headfirst. Once he told me another of our roommates had received a letter from his girlfriend. He told the other inmate to show me. The other roommate held the open end of an envelope beneath my nose.

"Whoa," I said stepping back.

"He knows," said Benny as we all laughed.

At the bottom of the envelope was some dried squid.

But conformity is situational, and I liked our first sergeant. His name was Twyford. First sergeant was the highest enlisted rank at company level. So they they were the highest enlisted link in each enlisted person's chain of command outside of work. But 1SG Twyford was literally closer to his troops than were most 1SG's. Nearly every enlisted person above the lowest sergeant rank lived either with his family or in one of the efficiency apartments the Army called bachelor noncommissioned officer quarters. But he lived in a small room in the barracks.

"That cocksucker," he shouted in a Monday morning work formation, "who broke that window in the barracks this weekend, is lower than snake shit in a wagon track! He'd climb over sixty Ziegfeld beauties to fuck his dying mother!"

All of my company was exempt from KP but not from guard duty. It began with the guards' standing in a formation while the Officer of the Day inspected them to decide which of them would be supernumerary. The inspection was of such as how shiny were our boots and brass, whether we knew our general orders and Code of Conduct, and how well we knew our manual of arms. The manual of arms was regulations directing such as how to position our persons and rifles in respond to various commands. Supernumerary's only duty was to remain in the barracks to be available were one of the other guards to become unable to guard. So that was a reward. But another was a three-day pass, and a reward for being supernumerary three times was exemption from all additional duties for three months. My first three turns at guard duty were in Germany, and I was supernumerary on each of those occasions. So my main interest in it was that it exempted me from three months of KP.

But part of the reason I liked 1SG Twyford was that my performance in a practice for a parade nearly cost me my second supernumerary three-day pass.

"Rest," said the a staff sergeant, SSG E6, drilling us for the parade. "Smoke 'em if you got 'em."

So I tipped back my steel helmet, lit a cigarette, and didn't hear him call us to attention. When I saw the others in the formation come to attention, I stubbed out my cigarette, pocketed it, straightened my helmet, and came to attention. But the company's executive officer saw my delay and told me to report to the first sergeant after the practice.

There, Twyford took me into the company commander's office. The executive officer was already there, standing beside the commanding officer's desk. Captain Gates, the commander, sat behind it.

I, standing at attention in front of it and saluting, formally reported.

"I didn't hear the command," I said after the captain returned my salute.

"Two weeks extra duty," said the captain.

The difference between additional duty and extra duty was that extra duty was intentionally punishment. My extra duty was cleaning the latrine at my end of my floor in the barracks every night for those two weeks. I cleaned it the first of those two nights, but the second night was my second supernumerary selection. So the next morning I returned 1SG Twyford's office.

"Top," I said, "Top" being short for "top kick", Army slang for "first sergeant", "I made super again on guard duty. Does that extra duty mean I can't take my three-day pass?"

"Why don't you forget that extra duty shit," said 1SG Twyford.

"Thank you, First Sergeant," I said.

But 1SG Twyford went on to another assignment, and my first interaction with his replacement wasn't quite as auspicious. I also outscored everyone in my company on our annual rifle requalification that year. But I wasn't sure that score was correct.

"Took care of you, didn't I," said the company's supply clerk

I was in the supply room to clean my rifle.

"I scored you," he said.

But, the next morning, the new first sergeant called me to the front of the morning work formation and handed me a shoebox with an ashtray and a Zippo cigarette lighter in it. He said I might qualify for the USAREUR rifle team. "USAREUR" was the Army's acronym for "United States Army Europe", and both the lighter and the ashtray had the division's insignia on them, and, after the formation, Benny said I might be a sniper next. But, before going to work, I took the box with its contents to the first sergeant's office, told him that, because of what the supply clerk told me, I wasn't sure of my score, and set the shoe box on his desk.

"Well," he said, "leave it there if you don't want it."

I did want it. But I didn't know what to say. So, saying nothing, I left it on his desk and turned and left his office, and ordinarily my uniforms didn't quite meet Army standards.

"Where did you get that hat?" asked a Staff Sergeant while inspecting a morning work formation, referring to my ball cap.

I'd worn it nearly every duty day since my initial issue of uniforms.

"Fort Jackson, South Carolina," I replied.

"Well," said the SSG, "you'd better get one in Frankfurt, Germany."

I did, but the one I bought wasn't regulation, and I made it less so. An SP4 in the division's headquarters company was augmenting his Army pay by selling caps the troops preferred to standard issue. They were about the same color, but they had a bigger bill and a button on top, and we modified them further by pushing pieces of coat hangers wire between seams of the bills to give the bills shapes we preferred.

But, by way of another violation of the tradition not to volunteer, I made myself appear to be what draftees and most first-term enlistees pejoratively called lifers.

By then I'd received my second and final automatic promotion, to private first class, PFC E3. Neither PV1's nor PV2's wore stripes. PFC's wore one. But I wanted more money. E1 pay was 78 dollars per month. E3 pay was 93 dollars per month. E4 pay was 116 dollars per month, and I heard a PFC had

earned promotion to SP4 by graduating from the division's Noncommissioned Officers Academy. So I decided to give that a try.

Ordinarily admission to the NCO Academy required already holding a rank at least as high as SP4. But I heard that the other PFC received a waiver by saying he thought it might help him prepare for entrance into Officer Candidate School. I also heard that that many people fail to finish the course, that I'd have to buy some new uniforms to finish it, and that the other PFC was Distinguished Graduate of his class. But I thought the return on investment was worth the risk, and, to me, my supernumerary performances suggested reasonable odds.

So I went to the First Sergeant's office and made the request. But I didn't say I was thinking of going to OCS. Hoping to be a warrant officer flying helicopters, Benny was requesting admission to the Army's Flight School. So I told our First Sergeant I wished to go to the NCO Academy to prepare for that. The major general commanding the division was also officially the commandant of the academy. But the first sergeant also told me he'd been an instructor at the academy. So I don't know whether that had any relationship to either his approval or the general's. But he made the request, and it succeeded.

So I bought some new fatigues and boots and a compact iron and replaced my Ronson lighter with a butane Ronson lighter. I heard I'd need all of that to graduate at any level. The lighter was to melt the polish on my boots before I spitshined them. SP4 Hendricks, one of my roommates, offered me a bottle of some white stuff he said would make my boots glossier. But I also heard that the main instruction at the Academy was to follow instructions and that an instruction was to shine one's shoes and boots with nothing other than Kiwi shoe polish. So, though Hendricks said the stuff was undetectable, I ignored his offer.

The Academy was in Kirchgoens, the home of the division's First Brigade. The First Sergeant drove me there in a jeep from the motor pool. An SP4 from the division's headquarters military police company also rode with us. I was the lowest-ranking student in our class, but my student number was seventy, the highest in my class, and the MP SP4 quickly proved the irrelevance of rank among students there. I also heard he had a reputation for being gung ho, but he confirmed the validity of my ignoring Hendricks.

Our first class was from my tactical sergeant, the platoon sergeant (PSG E7) responsible for my platoon of the two comprising the student company. That class was instructions for setting up our wall lockers and footlockers for inspection. They included rolling a spare trouser belt in a rubber band for display in our footlocker locker trays. The tac told us to fray the buckle end to be able to roll the belt tightly enough not to see through the hole in the

center of the roll. That evening the MP came to my bunk and showed me the hole in the center of his. He told me he couldn't roll it tight enough. I unrolled it, frayed the end, rerolled it, and handed it back to him.

"I can't display it frayed like that," he said.

He walked away unrolling the belt.

For failing to follow instructions, the tac's issued little pink slips of paper they called fifis. With each fifi came five demerits. By the end of the first week the gung ho MP SP4 had received too many demerits to be there the second week. But the second weekend I received a weekend pass for being in the top ten percent of my class.

So I called 503d's orderly room and asked to talk to Benny, and he borrowed a jeep from the motor pool to drive me back to Frankfurt for the weekend, and, as I walked to noon chow that Saturday, the SP4 personnel actions clerk who advised me regarding Sandy was returning from chow and stopped to talk.

"I expected that gung ho MP to wash out," he said. "But I didn't expect you back so soon."

"I'm not back," I said. "I'm on a weekend pass for being in the top ten percent of my class."

He walked on with neither a smile nor another word. but I supposed that was because he was a draftee, and the next weekend I was also in the top ten percent. I also called Benny for another ride, but he told me the motor sergeant said the motor pool wasn't a taxi service. So I hitchhiked.

I stood at the gate of the *kaserne* until a lieutenant picked me up. A problem was that I couldn't decide whether I should salute him before I climbed into the car. One ordinarily saluted officers when one met one outside. But he was inside. So, unable to decide, I didn't salute.

He didn't complain, but I also failed to follow instructions during my call to Benny. The instruction was to call the academy the Noncommissioned Officers Academy and not the NCO Academy. But the problem was that a Tac was in the orderly room when I failed to follow it.

"Whoops," I said looking at him and grinning.

He scowled but didn't give me a fifi. The next week I fell from the top ten percent. But that wasn't the reason. The students took turns as candy-strippers in class leadership positions, and that week I was a candy-stripe SSG squad leader. But some of the members of my student squad were SSG's every day, and part of my job in that position was supervising cleaning the hallway outside our squad room,

"Did you get the top of it?" I asked a SGT E5 I asked to clean ceiling light fixture.

“They’re not going to look at the top,” he said, stepping from the ladder.

“God damn it, Miller,” I said. “Just clean the fucking thing!”

As I said that, our Tac came up the stairway below the light fixture, and I didn’t see him until I turned away from SGT Miller. A leadership instruction was to lead with regard for the dignity of one’s subordinates, and the instructor instructing that specifically proscribed profanity, and SGT Miller had been in the Army so long that he’d died his boots black. The Army issued brown boots when he enlisted. Younger soldiers called the Army of that time the brown boot army. So, when I saw the Tac, I turned away again, went into our squad room, and sat on my bunk with my head in my hands.

But, a few minutes later, SGT Miller came into the squad room, came directly to my bunk, and taught me that lesson I hadn’t learned in class.

“It’s alright,” he said. “I told him you were just kidding around.”

“Thank you, Sergeant Miller,” I said.

So I didn’t go the way of the MP, but my score for that leadership position was far below average, and I also received a fifi for a more deliberate decision of mine.

Lights went out at midnight and came on again at 4:00 a.m. Others stayed up later, using flashlights to finish preparing their lockers and uniforms for the next day’s inspections. I decided that, to be attentive in class, I needed to sleep those four hours and that, if I couldn’t finish following all those instructions by midnight, that wasn’t my scheduling error but the academy’s leadership’s. So, though I thought I shined my boots each night as well as I thought anyone reasonably could expect me to, I received demerits each day for “boots not shined, boots improperly shined.” But the fifi wasn’t for that.

The only space we had for items the Tac’s didn’t inspect was the back half of the space below our footlocker trays. By instructions, we covered that space with a piece of cardboard and covered the cardboard with a towel. The Tac’s inspected the covering but not what was beneath it. So we had two sets of toilet articles, the one we displayed and the one we used. The one we used and all else we didn’t display, ranging from cigarettes to my iron, was below the covering. So many of my classmates received fifis for such as keeping things in the hollow space beneath their wall lockers or above the ceiling tiles.

But an exception was our dirty laundry. We kept that in our laundry bags we displayed on an end of each bunk. So my fifi was for keeping a shoeshine rag in my laundry bag. It was a towel I used to shine my boots. So my reasoning was that it was a towel and was dirty.

But, returning from classes one afternoon, I found my laundry on my bunk, my laundry bag on top of the laundry, the towel on top of the bag, and a fifi on top of the towel.

“Shoeshine rag in laundry bag,” it said. “Failure to follow instructions. Five demerits.”

So I took my rationalization to my tac.

“Come in, Student Number Seventy,” he said when I knocked on the frame of his open office door.

“Sergeant,” I said at attention at his desk. “Student Number Seventy. That was a towel, and it was dirty.”

“You know better than that, Student Number Seventy,” said the tac, and I did and left his office, with no other word.

But the next morning he gave me both some shame and some pride.

“Even Student Number Seventy now has more than a hundred demerits,” he said to my platoon.

I don’t know how the others in my platoon responded to that reprimand, but I received no other fifi, and I was the only student who didn’t during the only formation in which the tac’s inspected the belt buckles we didn’t display in our footlockers. The tac’s asked each student to lift his field jacket.

“Belt buckle not shined,” said a tac to each of us other than me. “Failure to follow instructions. Five demerits.”

My Tac began to say that to me, but he didn’t finish.

“Belt buckle . . . ,” he said, but then he stared at my belt buckle for a few seconds and turned to the next student, and my score as my class’s candy-stripe first sergeant far exceeded my score as a squad leader.

After my first morning formation in that position, my Tac told me my command voice wasn’t loud enough.

“Posts!” I shouted, during the next formation, nearly spitting on myself to command the candy-stripe platoon sergeants to take their positions for the candy-stripe company commander to march the class to class.

Then, after turning the formation over to the candy-stripe company commander, I took my post behind the student at the left end of the rear squad of the second platoon, but then my tac came to me and told me my post was behind the first platoon.

“Sergeant,” I said. “Student Number Seventy. Field Manual 22-5 says the First Sergeant takes his post behind the rear rank of the second platoon.”

I’d read that part of that field manual, Drill and Ceremonies, the night before, to be sure didn’t make any mistakes in that leadership position.

“That’s because most companies have three platoons,” the Tac replied after a pause. “Ours has two. So it looks better if you stand behind the first platoon. You’ll be closer to the center.”

But, though he said nothing more to me during my week in that position and gave me a high score for it, he continued to test me.

“Student Number Seventy,” I heard him say as we marched to class one morning. “You have ropes all over your field jacket.”

An instruction was to have no loose threads on our uniforms. So, between classes that morning, I inspected my field jacket for them and used my new cigarette lighter to burn what I found. But I missed some.

“Student Number Seventy,” said the tac as we marched to lunch. “You still have ropes all over your field jacket.”

After lunch I found another and burned it. But the tac said it again as we marched back to classes. So I spent nearly every minute between classes that afternoon looking for ropes.

“He’s fucking with you,” said SGT Miller, watching me at the coat hooks, but I found tiny end of a thread loose behind a cuff button and burned it off as I had the others.

“That’s much better, Student Number Seventy,” said the tac as we marched to supper.

But, while we were in a field with compasses practicing what we’d learned in classes for reading maps, he tested me once more.

“Find this creek,” he said.

He pointing to a blue line on the map I was using. So I compared the map’s colors and contour lines to our surroundings and used my compass to know in what direction to look. But I saw no creek.

“It’s supposed to be 37 meters that way,” I said. “But I don’t see it.”

“Pace it off,” said the tac, and, on my 37<sup>th</sup> stride, I stepped into it.

I heard the boot splash water, but still the grass hid it from my sight, and I failed the night compass course.

The difficulty of that was that failing to find one point in the darkness made finding the remaining points nearly impossible, and I missed the third of the five.

But, by following one instruction, I easily excelled in classroom classes. At the beginning of nearly every class, the instructor gave the students forms saying nearly everything the instructor would say, and most of the exceptions were words or short phrases, and spaces on the forms with lines beneath them were in place of most of the exceptions. So the instruction was to fill in the blank as the instructor instructed.



The instructors issued no fifis for failing to follow that instruction. But the tacs also told us at the beginning of the course that half of our total score for it would depend on our performance in classes. So, while some of the students filled in none of the blanks while, I filled in all of them students filled in no blanks while I filled in all of them. So the only classroom test on which I scored less than 95% was for a class in which the instructor didn't use that method, and that wasn't the only mnemonic devise the academy used.

Another was acronyms. I still remember the fourteen traits of military leadership. They're bearing, integrity, tact, endurance, loyalty, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, decisiveness, initiative, enthusiasm, dependability, judgment, and justice. The acronym is BITE, LUCK, DIED, JJ.

But I didn't do so well in commandant's Inspection. The week before graduation the division's commanding general inspected the class as we stood in greens at attention beside our footlockers. I couldn't answer the second of the two questions he asked me.

"What's your job?" he asked me.

"Monitoring morning reports for the 3d Brigade, sir," I replied.

"What's the criterion for AWOL on the morning report?" he asked me next.

Of course a criterion was to be absent without leave. But I thought that was too obvious to be what the general had in mind. So I asked for clarification.

"What do you mean by 'criterion', sir?" I asked.

"It's 24 hours," he said, frowning and moving on to the next student.

I considered telling him the criterion was that one be absent overnight and that overnight could be any fraction of any amount of time including midnight. But I knew I'd already made several mistakes. Protocol, while requiring calling other officers sir, required calling generals general, and it required saying either at the beginning of what one said, not at the end, and I'd also heard that replying to a question by asking a question is rude anyway.

So I was neither distinguished graduate nor first or second honor graduate, and, by graduation, the promotion wasn't my on reason for wishing to be distinguished graduate. I wanted one of the riding crops the tac's carried. I'd come to appreciate both the tac's and the training, and those small riding crops the academy called swagger sticks to me had become a symbol of that, and each of the top three graduates received one. But I felt better after the graduation ceremony.

As I sat in my greens in the academy's auditorium, after watching the three top graduates received their diplomas, swagger sticks, and promotions, I

saw that some of the others also received new rank insignia with their diplomas, and, when my turn came, my first sergeant preceded me onto the stage.

So I looked at his hands to see whether either held SP4 insignia.

One did, and I grinned, and, on the stage, he pinned one of them on one of my sleeves, as my Tac pinned the other on my other sleeve.

“I saw that grin,” said the first sergeant, also grinning, at the bottom of the steps after leaving the stage with me. “Your tac told me you were six tenths of a point short of distinguished graduate. He said you’d have made it if you hadn’t stashed that shoeshine rag in your laundry bag. It was that close.”

Still I regretted not receiving one of those small riding crops. But I was happy to be an E4 after little more than a year in the Army. So, back in Frankfurt, the first thing I did after carrying my duffle bag up to my room was to walk across the street to the PX and buy enough SP4 insignia for all my uniforms, and next I carried the uniforms to the tailor shop across the street from the bus stop outside the gap in the fence. I also asked him to sew them on the greens I was wearing and the fatigues I’d wear to work the next day while I waited, but Benny had more information for me. Part his job in the division’s Personnel Management office was processing promotions.

“The first sergeant ran all over post looking for an allocation for that promotion,” he said. “He found one, but he didn’t have it in time to get the orders cut before the graduation ceremony. That’s why you don’t have the orders yet. But the promotion will be retroactive to today.”

But my favorite congratulations came at work the next day.

“Look at the ‘cruit Spec. 4,” said the personnel actions draftee.

But I didn’t complete the process of requesting admission to flight school. Benny’s request failed because his physical examination revealed that he was using one too many prism diopters of focusing power in one of his eyes. I withdrew mine because I’d had enough of extra discipline for a while.

“How’s that warrant officer shit coming, Harman?” the first sergeant asked me in front of the barracks one afternoon as I walked to evening chow.

“I decided not to go,” I told him with no explanation.

I had no explanation I thought he’d accept.

“I thought you were slipping the slick dick to me,” he said with a grin, and he walked on into the barracks.

## Chapter 11

### Woodstock

Bortz' father died. He took a thirty-day emergency leave to go home, to Gary, Indiana. In those thirty days I reorganized our operation..

We were using a rifle crate as a file cabinet. I moved it from against the wall behind our desks to between our desks. I put Bortz' typewriter on the floor against the wall on the other side of my desk and moved his chair to beside his typewriter. That let me file while rolling on my chair's wheels back and forth between his desk and mine, use his desk for reading and sorting paper, and use mine for typing discrepancy notices. A result was that I easily could do both his job and mine in our ordinary eight-hour day.

"Jesus," said Bortz when he returned from Gary. "I go away for a month, and you change the whole place around."

But the only change he made was to move his chair back to his desk. From then on he read and marked discrepancies while I typed and filed. So then we were a team, and, having increased my typing speed to sixty words per minute, my job was easy. So I also looked for and found more discrepancies.

"You know," he said to me a few weeks later. "They were going to ship you out to the boonies when you first got here. They didn't like all those three-day passes you were taking or those afternoons off you took to learn German. But I told them to give you a little time."

I used some of my new wealth to buy at the PX a Sony stereo tape recorder and a Girard record changer I used for recording other peoples' record albums. The PX didn't have a manual turntable. But I banked my pay increase and more. I wrote to the Southern Michigan National Bank in Coldwater to open a savings account. Then I went to the division's Pay team at the other end of the *kaserne* to arranged for a Class S allotment to send most of my pay directly to the savings account. So I welcomed an offer from the Personnel Actions draftee.

"I'll give you ten bucks to take my guard duty," he said. "It won't be a problem for you. You always make super."

But, that time, I didn't make super. I expected my NCO Academy training to make it easier. But I found myself on Edwards Kaserne walking back and forth in the dark at right shoulder arms between the back of some barracks and the fence across the front of that *kaserne*.

"Halt!" I said in accordance with my training, seeing someone come around a corner of the barracks and walk toward me. "Who goes there?"

"Officer of the Day," said the approaching person after halting.

"Advance to be recognized," I told him.

I shifted my rifle to port arms, waited until he was close enough for me to recognize him, and shifted it to present arms.

"Everything quiet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"No problems?" he asked.

"No, sir," I said.

"Good," he said, and he turned away, but he turned back.

"Aren't you going to salute me," he asked.

"Sir," I told the lieutenant, "this is present arms."

"Oh," he said, looking at my rifle.

Then he returned the salute and walked away. But that told me no one after basic training walked guard according to regulation. So I shifted my rifle to sling arms.

My three months of exemption from additional duties ended while I was at the NCO Academy, and, soon after I graduated, the division's commanding general decided that all the division's units should pull KP. So my first performance of any additional duty in a permanent party company was after my promotion to SP4.

But, my first time on KP after crossing the Atlantic, I arrived early enough to have my choice of jobs. So, expecting the easiest job to be Dining Room Orderly in the NCO dining room, that's what I selected. But what I expected to be the worst part of that job was worse than I expected. I'd never mopped a floor. So I put too much water on it.

"It's almost lunch time," said the Mess Sergeant as I mopped water I'd put on the floor as soon after breakfast as no diners were in it.

Another of my additional duties was CQ runner, but that wasn't for my company but for the division's adjutant general operation, and, my only turn at that, Bortz was the CQ, and the only errand I ran was to the other end of the *kaserne* to the basement of the administrative services building to use a mimeograph machine to publish orders for an emergency leave.

“Don’t lol,” said Bortz, and I didn’t figure out that he meant “lollygag” until thinking about it on my way back with the orders.

I didn’t much mind that duty, but I decided to complain about my company having to pull KP. So I asked the Personnel Actions drafter what form to use for that complaint and to whom to send it. He gave me a blank DA Form 1049, Request for Personnel Actions, and suggested that I send it to the division’s Inspector General.

“Wow!” he said reading it before I sent it. “You can write.”

The IG called me to his office. But my argument was that the AG company performed services for the division while the combat units only trained. So the IG told me the combat units were why we were there, and I lacked the courage to argue with a lieutenant colonel. So that effort failed.

But I had better luck arguing with a first lieutenant.

My dog tags said my religious preference was “no preference”. I decided to go to the AG operation’s administrative services division and ask for new ones saying “agnostic”. The SP4 whose job included replacing dog tags said agnosticism wasn’t on the list of religions in the relevant Army regulation. I asked to see his boss. He didn’t argue.

“Agnosticism isn’t a religion,” said the lieutenant.

“But,” I argued, “It’s my religious preference.”

His name was Antonelli. I was again trying to be intellectual. He seemed to me to be trying to do the same and argued with me for about a half hour. But, though he didn’t quite agree with me, he told the SP4 to make the dog tags I requested, and another effort of mine to be intellectual there was to check out *Moby Dick* from the post library and read it.

I was also writing to Charlotte Button. I asked her for a picture. She sent me a photograph of her standing on the Tibbits’ stage beside its proscenium arch. Still thinking I could draw, I bought some oil paint, brushes, and canvas board at the PX and tried to learn to paint by using the photograph of Charlotte as a model. I had my wallet size picture of Sandy, but it was black and white.

That effort went no further than some general shapes and approximate colors, but Benny taught me some guitar. He borrowed a guitar from a friend of his outside our room and taught me some harmonics and guitar mechanics far beyond relative standard tuning. He taught me the major, minor, and seventh whole tone open chords, the chromatic scale, the major, minor, seventh, augmented, and diminished intervals, and how to bar for transposition. So I found a music store downtown and bought a guitar.

Partly because my Class S allotment restricted my budget, and partly because I didn’t know the difference between a classical guitar and any other

guitar, I bought a cheap classical guitar. Benny told me it was a classical guitar and pointed out that one could remove its neck to pack it for travel, but he also invited me to take it with him to the room of the person from whom he'd borrowed the guitar he'd used to begin teaching me to play. Then I learned I had much to learn, but I continued trying and established a repertoire of a few folk songs.

The SP5 who was our room commander left. That made Benny our room commander. Benny was less commanding. A sort of fad in the barracks was waxing the floors of rooms with a sort of red wax. Benny's room commander predecessor had had paid for wax to do that and had done most of the waxing. But, after he left, no one in our room did either.

George Gates took the bunk the waxer vacated. He was a younger brother of Captain Gates, the company commander who gave me extra duty, but his brother had left the company for a staff assignment on Edwards Kaserne, and, despite his brother's being an officer, George fit in well with us. So he and I did some guest house hopping together.

Once went to the Henninger Tower, a tower the Henninger brewing company built across the Main river from Frankfurt, in Sachsenhausen, rode the elevator to the top of the tower, spit through an open skylight of a restaurant on its ground floor, and laughed as we watched as a man at the table beneath the skylight looked up.

From there we walked to a large old guesthouse Benny had shown me. We sat with others on a bench of one of its long wooden table, sang "Ein Zwei Zuffa", and drank *appelwoi*. Sachsenhausen is famous for it. But from there we found a modern guesthouse selling hamburgers. The man who served us our beer and hamburgers at its bar said he owned the guesthouse. He said his name was Lutz and that he called his hamburgers Lutzburgers. He said that was because they were better than hamburgers.

Another night, in another guesthouse, we got drunk *pro스팅* each other's scores at table *fussball*. Another night, at guesthouse with Benny and some of our other roommates, one of the others tried to steal an ashtray. He hid it in a coat sleeve. The owner followed us outside.

"*Wo ist mein Aschenbecher?*" he demanded.

George spread his arms, opened his hands, and dropped his jaw, to indicate that he didn't know what the man was saying. Our roommate who stole them did the same. So the ashtray fell from the sleeve and shattered on the sidewalk. He paid for it.

At another guesthouse I stole a barstool. I took it from the bar to a little slot machine on a wall beside the door. I was in the trench coat I bought in

Marshall. I sat on the stool with the coat hanging behind it, put ten pfennigs in the machine, slid backward from the stool, put my hands in my pockets, wrapped the coat around the stool, carried the stool out the door, ran down the street with it, and stashed it beneath a stairway. Then I returned to the guesthouse, paid my bill as my roommates paid theirs, left with them, and retrieved the stool.

From there we went to the Gasthof zur John. It was a guesthouse a half block from the main gate to the *kaserne*. It sold ham and cheese sandwiches on thick white bread with chewy crust. The stool was too tall for the tables, but I sat on it to eat one.

George also took me to a New Year's Eve party in the quarters of a son of the adjutant general. He asked me to meet him at his brother's quarters for us to walk to the party from there. His brother answered the door. I'd never spoken to a Captain off duty. I called him sir to tell him why I was there. He called George to the door but said nothing to me.

The AG's son was an SP5, but he lived with his wife in the dependent housing on Edwards Kaserne, as did Captain Gates. His younger sister, a thin girl with red hair I thought was younger than George or I, was the only other person at the party. At midnight George and I took turns kissing her. She said she thought I was sexier than George. I thought her red hair made her appear to be cheap.

But also in Germany I learned to masturbate. I was having wet dreams, and one night I tried to masturbate by rubbing the end of my penis on the bottom sheet on my bunk. I'd gone to bed early. So the lights were on. While I was doing that, Benny came into the room. I didn't stop, but I tried to keep my eyes open wide enough to see whether Benny saw what I was doing, but not wide enough for him to see I was watching. He sat on his bunk, looked in my direction several times, and rose and left the room.

I also tried to quit smoking in Germany. When I set up my Class S allotment I didn't consider how much I was spending on cigarettes and beer. But I didn't quit for long.

No one locked the offices in the AG building. So evenings I was using my typewriter there to write letters, and some evening I wandered the building looking for cigarettes in others' desks in my office and others'. So I tried another way to be able to afford cigarettes and beer.

Johnson was accelerating his escalation of the situation in Vietnam. A result of that was that promotions were coming so quickly that promotion to SP4 with little more than a year in the Army became ordinary. So I asked Bortz to recommend me for promotion to SP5.

“Write a recommendation,” he said. “I’ll sign it.”

So I wrote another 1049. I cited my NCO Academy graduation and said I’d graduated second in the conversational German course. Bortz signed it and took it to the captain in charge of the division’s personnel records and reports teams.

“I have no record that you graduated second in that German course,” said the captain to me the next time I was in his office.

I told him what the teacher told me and the other guy. He endorsed the 1049 to the next higher level of my chain of command. A few weeks later I stood before a promotion board. The sergeant major, SGM E9, presiding over the board asked me what I’d do if I were in charge of a detail raking leaves if one of the men on the detail refused to rake. I told him I’d take him aside and counsel him to learn the reason for his refusal.

“Why would you take him aside?” asked the SGM.

I told him I’d learned that at the NCO Academy.

“I’m asking you what you think,” he said.

“I think I should follow those instructions,” I replied.

So my board score was too low for me to expect the promotion any time in the next few months, and the company commander who replaced Captain Gates tried to intimidate us into class B allotments to buy a savings bond every month.

I complied, but he also ordered PT on the parade field every morning after the morning work formation, and many of us used that as a protest against the bond intimidation.

“One, two, stop your bonds!” we shouted as we ran around the parade field, and he also made a change I didn’t appreciate, though it was a sort of promotion with no pay.

He also made me and other SP4’s squad leaders and ordered that the squad leaders not share rooms with members of their squad.

So I move to the two-man room next door to our six-man room.

My roommate was an SGT who replaced the SP5 control clerk in my office. His name was Pedro Meno Bayona. He was from Guam and had on a forearm a tattoo of a number he received in a concentration camp when he was a child during World War II. He also had an Army Commendation Medal. I didn’t know what that was, but Benny told me a ribbon on his uniform meant he had one, and Benny’s mentioning that told me it might be important.

He invited me to go with him to see a performance of *Carmen* at the Frankfurter Schauspiel. Benny and other former roommates of mine said they



thought he may have been homosexual. But I accepted the invitation and somewhat enjoyed the performance.

“*Carmen, ich liebe dich,*” I remember hearing and understanding.

Also, awakening one night, I found someone in an overcoat liner kneeling beside my bunk with his head to the floor as though he was praying, and, when I turned over to see what he was doing, he rose and left the room, and SGT Bayona wasn't in his bunk. But SGT Bayona occasionally spoke of Christianity, and didn't seem to me to be that creepy, and my former roommates also told me they also thought the PFC who took my bunk in their room was homosexual, and he seemed me to be perhaps that creepy. So I suspected him more than I suspected SGT Bayona.

But I didn't much worry about it either way, and another change was that the 1SG who promoted me also left, and, during a ceremony on the parade field to announce that change, the 1SG who was leaving reminded me of 1SG Twyford. In the Army a differences between being at attention and being at ease were that at attention one had one's feet together and one's hands at one's sides while at ease one had one's feet apart and one's hands behind one's back. But neither permitted talking.

“At ease,” shouted our outgoing 1SG.

We shifted our feet and hands but muttered to one another as the 1SG's talked to one another.

“At ease!” he shouted again, but we didn't stop muttering.

“At ease!” he shouted again, and still we muttered.

“God damn it!” he shouted, “When I say at ease, I want you to shut your cock-sucking mouths!”

So we chuckled and shut up, and much continued as it had.

After I moved in with SGT Bayona, Benny introduced me to a guitarist he'd met while processing replacements for the division, but, as I sat on my bunk as he and Benny sat on Sergeant Bayona's playing and talking, while I again recognized that I had much to learn, and Benny also told me a replacement he processes was a son of Roy Rogers'.

“Actor, TV commercials,” said Benny, “That's what he listed as his civilian occupation.”

But Benny didn't introduce me to him. In his bunk, before receiving his assignment, after chugging zombies at the Drake Kaserne enlisted men's club, he drowned in his vomit. Benny also told me that, but the most personal part of my job was keeping track of whether the unit clerks corrected the discrepancies I pointed out on my discrepancy reports.

For that I maintained what the Army called a suspense file. It was 31 manila file folders, one for each day of most months. If the clerk didn't make the correction within two weeks, I sent a reminder discrepancy notice. But, though the captain in charge of the records and reports teams signed the notices, many went months with no correction. So I took a pile of copies of them up to the CPT.

"Don't worry about it," he said.

"Don't worry about the regulations?" I asked.

He shook his head and returned to work.

But one result of all that hodgepodge of repetition and variation along with my general enjoyment of travel was that I volunteered to go to Vietnam. Still I had no notion where Vietnam was, but, with Johnson's escalation, I knew all I had to do to go there was to volunteer, and Hendricks had already volunteered. He was using the handicraft shop at the service club on Edwards Kaserne to make a big knife to take with him.

Benny and I had used the service club only to use a phonograph there to listen to recordings of Barbra Streisand before I bought my tape recorder and turntable to record those recordings. Peggy sent me Bob Dylan's *Bringing it All Back Home* album for Christmas, and I enjoyed it. But I didn't understand it well enough to know it protested the war. To me it was only some nonconformity. So neither Hendricks nor Dylan influenced me either way.

"Are you out of your mind?" asked Benny. "Hendricks is a gung ho idiot! But what's your excuse?"

Just too much shit going on here lately," I said. "And I want to broaden my experience."

"That's as good a reason as any," said Benny. "I guess."

"Are you suicidal?" asked the CPT in charge of the division's records and reports team, when I took him my 1049 for that.

I didn't answer him. But he couldn't defy the commander in chief. So he also endorsed that request.

But months passed before the final approval. During those months Hendricks left for Vietnam, and the SGT in charge of the records team across the hall from my office tried to hook me up with his sister-in-law. She was visiting from the States. He invited me to his family's quarters on Edwards Kaserne to meet her. I asked him whether she liked Barbra Streisand. He said she might. I took my tape recorder and my Barbara Streisand tapes with me. But the SGT, saying he didn't want to disturb the neighbors, asked me several times to turn down the volume, and the sister seemed to me to care neither for

listening to Barbra Streisand nor for talking with me. So the SGT tried again with an SP4 in his office whose first name was Sal.

“Sal’s a worthless amoeba,” said an SP4 in their office.

His name was Bennett. He also asked me whether I bowled. I told him I’d never tried. He asked me whether I’d like to learn. I told him I thought I might. He told me a bowling alley was near the Henninger Tower. I figured that anyone calling anyone an amoeba couldn’t be all bad. So I accepted the that invitation also.

“I better sign out first,” I said. “I might break my leg or something.”

Being a squad leader gave me a permanent overnight pass. But using it required going to the orderly room to pick it up and signing out. So, until that night, I’d continued to sneak out through the gap in the fence. But the night I said that to Bennett, we walked to the orderly room at the other end of the barracks for me to sign out, walked to the gate on the other side of the division’s headquarters building, and took the bus from the bus stop there. But, from the Hauptwache, we could see the Henninger Tower. So we walked as directly toward it as we could, and that took us into a dead end alley.

But at the end of the alley was a garage, and beside the garage door was a shed low enough for me to climb onto it and high enough for me to climb from its roof onto the roof of the garage. So I did and saw that the other side of the garage was at the level of the tower’s parking lot. But, as I walked across the roof, I heard a sound I thought walking on tin might make, and then I found myself hanging by my fingers below a skylight.

It wasn’t tin but glass, and I remembered how far below Homer Foundry’s roof its floor was when David and I looked down through its skylights. Then my fingers slipped. Then I felt my right heel hit something. Then I found myself lying on the floor of the garage in front of a Volkswagen. The heel had hit its front bumper.

I couldn’t stand. But, as I lay there wondering what I was going to do, Bennett came into the garage. So he let me use him as a crutch to hop out of the alley on my left foot.

“I’ll go get us a taxi,” he said, helping me lie down on the grass beside the sidewalk there.

As I lay there leaning on an elbow waiting for Bennett to return, a man and woman walking past stopped and looked down at me.

“*Mein bind is gebrochen,*” I said.

“*Ya,*” said the man. “*Du bist getrunken.*”

So, after that use of the informal second person pronoun, they walked on, and, when Bennett returned in a taxi and stepped from its back seat, the driver looked at me and drove away with the taxi's back door still open.

"I guess I'll have to call the MP's," then said Bennett.

"What happened?" asked the MP who picked us up.

Bennett looked at me. I couldn't think of an answer that wouldn't create trouble for both of us. So neither of us answered.

"How about this?" said the MP. "You were running across the street dodging the rad and tripped over the curb."

"Rad", short for "comrade", was U. S. Army slang for "German".

"Sounds good to me," I said.

He drove us to Frankfurt's 97<sup>th</sup> General Army Hospital.

"Is it broken?" I asked a medic.

"Oh, yeah!" he replied grinning. "It's broken alright."

I wasn't *getrunken* enough not to ask whether the cast he put on it should have been as hot as it was. But, after he replaced the cast with a cooler one, a nurse gave me an injection. So then I fell asleep and didn't awaken until the next morning.

By then, a surgeon had screwed and pinned my ankle back together. The spinal anesthesia for the surgery kept me from feeling either of my legs. To see what was happening to the leg, I reached below the hospital gown and pulled up the knee with the cast below it. As I tried to push it back down, a nurse I thought was pretty entered the room.

"Can't get it back down," she said smiling. "Can you."

She returned the leg and gown to where I'd found them.

"You split your tibia," said the German surgeon showing me an X-ray in the ward to which some medics pushed me next on the bed in which I awoke. "And you also fractured your fibula. So we put a pin and a screw in the tibia. The fibula will take care of itself. How did you do it?"

I told him the MP's story. But, though I didn't use the phrase "the rad", he frowned. So I tried to make the story more credible.

"Will I be able to run when it heals?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said, "you'll be able to run."

"I mean really run," I said to be more dramatic, but he scowled again and left the room with no other reply.

My next visitor was the 503d's supply sergeant. He was conducting what the Army called a line of duty investigation. The purpose of the investigation was to discover whether I was doing anything unlawful when I broke my leg. So again I repeated the MP's story.

The sergeant also scowled, but, whatever he thought, and whatever Bennett may have told anyone, the official decision was that that the injury was in the line of duty, and I knew that, if I hadn't signed out, my doing anything in Sachsenhausen wouldn't have been in the line of duty.

My next visitor was Benny. He asked me whether I needed anything. I asked him to bring me my tape recorder and tapes. He did, but, when he brought them, I asked him to bring me my guitar. He didn't, and neither did he visit me again, and I was there two weeks.

Four patients were in my ward. One was German. He had worked for the United States Army in a railroad yard. He lost his legs by falling beneath a moving train. Another was the United States' Deputy Chief of Mission to the Sudan. He broke an upper arm there by stepping in front of a car a tourist from the United States was driving. Neither seemed to me to enjoy my Barbra Streisand tapes. But neither said that. I remember nothing of the other patient.

The DCM's doctor was experimenting on him. He was keeping his broken arm in traction over his head in hope of the bones growing back together. So the DCM couldn't leave his bed. But the German could, in a wheelchair, and so could I. So he and I raced down the hall to the mess hall. He won every race.

The DCM was patient with my Barbra Streisand tapes but not with his doctor. He told me the doctor was also experimenting on a Lieutenant, a 1LT. He told me the 1LT drove a Volkswagen head-on into a semi-truck and broke much more than an arm. He suggested that I visit him. The doctor had him hanging in so many ropes he resembled a fly in a spider web.

No one visited any of my wardmates while I was there. At the end of my two weeks there, Benny borrowed a jeep from the motor pool to drive me back to the barracks. I was on crutches. So climbing to my third-floor room was a little difficult. But that night I went out drinking with Benny and some of my other former roommates. We started by taking a bus and a trolley to a guesthouse one of them had recently discovered. We finished at the Gasthof Zur John. I laid my broken lower leg on the table for the others to sign the cast.

Next morning I also had to climb stairs to return to work. In my absence I'd become chief of the reports team for the 2d Brigade. The office for that team was on the second floor of the AG building. Bortz told me the reason for that change was that, while I was in the hospital, nearly half our company left for Vietnam. He said the CPT who asked me whether I was suicidal decided to let him work alone while I supervised a new arrival to the other team.

"I'm going to keep my bicycle in the office," said my new teammate, pointing to a racing bike behind his desk, after I climbed the stairs to meet him, but before I sat at my new desk.

So I thought working with him would be hardly sufferable. But that afternoon I received my orders for Vietnam. So I never had to work with him.

Benny acquired a footlocker for my belongings I couldn't carry with me. I don't know how he acquired it, but he painted it white to make it appear as though it didn't belong to the Army. I filled it with things I didn't think I could take to Vietnam. I put my tape recorder, record changer, and tapes in it and disassembled the barstool to make it fit. But I decided not to try to disassemble my guitar, and George told me I couldn't take it on the plane and offered to send it to me. So I left it with him.

Benny borrowed a jeep from the motor pool to drive me to Rhein Main Airbase for my flight. He and George carried my footlocker downstairs.

"We'll go get the jeep," said Benny as they left my room with the footlocker. "We'll leave this outside the orderly room. Wait for us there."

But, when I reached the bottom of the stairs, the footlocker wasn't there.

"Did you see a footlocker out there?" I asked the company clerk.

"It's in the first sergeant's office," he said. "He wants to see you."

"Is that your footlocker?" asked the new 1SG as I stood beside it in front of his desk.

"Yes, First Sergeant," I told him.

"It looks like it's the Army's," he said.

"Apparently it isn't," I told him.

"Apparently, my ass," he said, but then he looked at my crutches.

"Get it out of here," he said.

"Thank you, First Sergeant," I said, and I was sorry that was my only encounter with him.

When Benny returned with the jeep, he and George transferred the footlocker from the first sergeant's office to the jeep. George rode along as Benny drove me to the airbase. So did SGT Bayona. He'd also received orders for Vietnam. After dropping the footlocker at the shipping office on Edwards Kaserne, Benny dropped him and me at the airbase.

That was my first time on a jet passenger plane. SGT Bayona guided me through JFK airport and into Manhattan. We took a bus to Port Authority.

"We can get a room at the Y," he said. "If you want to."

"I don't know if I have enough cash for that and a bus ticket," I said.

He loaned me twenty dollars, told me I could send it to him, and gave me his address. So I welcomed the chance to spend a night in New York City, and SGT Bayona paid the whole price of the room. He said I might need the twenty dollars. But he didn't drink alcohol. So I didn't take advantage of the

New York's drinking age being eighteen. So all my tourism that night was walking about Times Square, and next morning I took a bus to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

My new company, the 518<sup>th</sup> Personnel Service Company, wasn't yet in Vietnam. It was forming about a hundred yards across a field of grass from the Fort Dix bus station. So, with my duffle bag hanging from one of my shoulders, I crutched my way to it and signed in.

But the Company Clerk told me that neither did the company yet have any duties, that neither did he know when it would be going to Vietnam, and that officially neither did he know it was going there.

"Why don't you take a leave and go home or something?" he suggested. "Most of the company isn't even here yet. You've got plenty of time."

So I filled out a form requesting a thirty-day leave. The clerk took it through a door behind his desk and returned with a 1LT's signature on it. I signed out, used the padlock on my duffle bag to lock some of my belongings in a locker in the barracks, and hitchhiked to Coldwater.

Hitchhiking on crutches with the cast and duffle bag was difficult but quick. Seeing the drive-in movie screen on U. S. 27 on the south side of Coldwater, I felt that I was arriving at home, but my mother had moved from the house on Monroe Street to a smaller and shabbier one across Park Street from the railroad tracks east of Division Street. Smitty had decided to demolish the house on Monroe Street to use the lot for parking. But my mother still had her telephone. So I tried to call Sandy.

"I'm an old friend of Sandy's," I said. "Is she at home?"

"She doesn't live here anymore," her mother replied.

"Do you know where she does live?" I asked her.

"No," her mother replied. "She didn't tell me."

I decided to buy a car. I hobbled to the Southern Michigan National Bank to withdraw some of my savings. Then I telephoned David. The Army had given him an honorable discharge as a PFC with a Good Conduct Medal. I asked him whether he had a car he could use to help me in my search for a car. He did, and an advertisement in the *Coldwater Daily Reporter* offered a 1961 Studebaker Lark for sale for 400 dollars. He took me and my sister Nancy to look at it. I told Nancy that, when I went to Vietnam, she could have whatever I bought.

It was a shiny little red car with black Naugahyde upholstery. We took it for a test drive. I asked Nancy whether she liked it. She said she did. I heard a small knock in its engine.

“Valves,” said the seller. “These little six-cylinder flatheads do that.”

I doubted his honesty, and I doubted that the engine was its original engine. I didn’t think cars that new had flathead engines. But I didn’t know about Studebakers, and I preferred not to spend my leave shopping for a car. So I bought it.

David drove off in his car. I drove Nancy in mine to our mother’s house. From there I drove to Charlotte’s parents’ house. Charlotte came to the door with a big smile. I spent most of that leave with her.

She invited me to dinner with her parents. I had little to say to them. I ate the lettuce in the salad but left the tomatoes. The Army hadn’t ended my antipathy for tomatoes.

“You don’t like tomatoes?” her mother asked me.

“Hello,” her father said to me and said nothing else.

In the Lark after dinner I told Charlotte of Tiger and I buying doughnuts from him.

“Sometimes he wakes up in the night screaming,” said Charlotte.

“They used to take him outside town and leave him naked in the woods. He had to walk home that way.”

I often had seen him on his bicycle. Both he and Charlotte’s mother rode bicycles wherever they went. They had no car, but each of their old bicycles had a big wire basket hanging in front of its handlebars. They always seemed to me to be serene as they rode. I always smiled and waved at her father as he passed me.

“Hello,” he always replied with a smile each time.

I took Charlotte to Fort Wayne to see Peggy. She and Bob had moved there from Battle Creek. On the way Charlotte sang along with Barbra Streisand on the radio. That irritated me, but we spent that night in Peggy’s living room on a big black Naugahyde sofa. She said it was extraordinarily comfortable, but I didn’t find it comfortable, and we didn’t sleep much.

Charlotte had a flannel nightgown. I undressed to my Army-issue boxer shorts. We talked and kissed all night. She let me remove her bra and fondle her breasts, but she didn’t let me touch her vagina.

“Why did you let me take off your bra?” I asked her.

“I wanted you to have them,” she replied. “But I tell my mother everything I do. I’d be ashamed to tell her if I let you do more.”

“Bob said that’s the last time you two are staying here,” said Peggy in the morning while Charlotte was in their bathroom. “He couldn’t sleep with you talking all night.”



I didn't reply to that. But she also told me her and Bob's 1958 Ford Police Interceptor wouldn't last much longer. So I told her she could have the Lark instead of Nancy.

I didn't stop trying to touch more of Charlotte. Once, in the Lark, in front of her house, I tried to stick a hand up her skirt. She was in a strawberry print outfit I especially liked. Still she didn't let me. But I kept trying.

As we lay kissing on my mother's sofa with no one else in the house I asked her to go upstairs with me. I told her coitus was beautiful and that I wouldn't ejaculate while inside her. She said her vagina was too small for Tampax. I said I could try, and, after more arguments, I found one that succeeded. I reminded her that I was going to Vietnam.

"I don't know if I'll come back," I said.

"Let's go upstairs," she said after a few more kisses.

Upstairs, in Nancy's bedroom, I laid my crutches on the floor to block the door. I removed all my clothing and watched from between Nancy's dirty sheets as Charlotte finished undressing. The shape of her body reminded me of the *Venus de Milo*. But she was correct in regard to the size of her vagina.

As I ejaculated trying to push my penis into it, I heard my crutches sliding across the floor. Nancy opened the door, leaned in, looked, leaned out, and closed the door. Charlotte and I dressed and returned downstairs. I drove her home and kissed her goodbye.

The next morning David and I were in the Lark on our way to Fort Dix. I told him I'd give him cash for food and fuel and a bus ticket from Fort Wayne to Coldwater. I gave him Peggy's address and asked him to drop the Lark there. But I decided to save some cash by driving through Canada on the Queen's Highway One from Windsor to Niagara.

"I wonder why people honeymoon here," I said as we stood staring at the falls.

"Yeah," said David as a breeze blew spray into our faces. "It stinks."

In New York we stopped to see Benny. He was in Brooklyn at Fort Hamilton helping to process other troops out of the Army. He'd returned from Germany a few weeks before his separation date. He arranged for a double bunk for David and me for that night in the big bay for the returnees. We went to Greenwich Village to drink some beer. But the bartender in the first bar we entered there said we were too young.

"I thought the drinking age here was eighteen," I said as we left.

"Maybe the old fart just wants to be extra careful," said Benny.

We found an O'Henry's, drank mugs of beer, and added some peanut shucks to the others in the sawdust on the floor.

The next morning, as David and I found our way out of the city, a policeman stopped me for speeding. Also, my drivers license had also expired, but the policeman looked at my Army ID card and my crutches and cast, told me to slow down and be careful, and let us go with no ticket. About 1½ hours later, David left me at my company.

The barracks, like my barracks in basic and armor training, were two-story wooden buildings with open bays of double bunks. The Army called them temporary wooden barracks, but they'd been temporary since the Army built them for the troop buildup for World War II with a plan to tear them down after the war. After throwing my duffle bag onto the bunk beside the wall locker in which I put some of my belongs before hitchhiking to Coldwater, I talked with some of my new barracks mates. Like the Company Clerk, they told me they didn't know how long we'd be there and that officially we didn't know we were going to Vietnam.

But they also told me that, because they had no duties, they spent much of their time drinking beer at the PX snack bar behind the bus station and that we could take a three-day pass every weekend if we wished, and I had a use for three-day passes. Vaughn wrote to me that he'd left Sarasota to be Stage Manager for the Turnau Opera, a summer stock company performing in a barn on Byrdcliffe Mountain above Woodstock, New York, and he invited me to visit him there. So I used some three-day passes to hitchhike the 170 miles to Woodstock.

The first time I did that, I lost my way and found myself in Connecticut. But I was happy to add another state to my list, and hitchhiking on crutches with no duffle bag was not only easier than hitchhiking with one but also much quicker. So I reached the gravel road from Woodstock up to the barn before dark.

That evening I dined with the opera company in their dining room in a ramshackle house beside the barn. That weekend I slept in room in a ramshackle one-story wing of the house resembling a motel. I found little to say to the professionals, but some young interns were there, and one of them had helped Vaughn at the Tibbits while I was working Carnival. After dinner, he and I talked on the front steps of the house. He told me Bob Dylan had a house further up the mountain.

"I saw him once and hollered at him," he said. "I asked him if he was a rolling stone. But he didn't answer."

He laughed, but I didn't get the joke and didn't.

"Are you a rolling stone?" he shouted, laughing again.

But also among the interns were two young women.

One of them had long red hair. I thought she was what people might call pretty. But I didn't feel she was. The other was smaller, and I thought she was what one might call mousy and a little dumpy. But she was more attractive to me than was the other, and we necked on a bench in the yard between the house and the road. Her name was Juliet.

Her kissing was wet and warm and receptive, but, when I placed a hand on her chest below her breasts, she pushed it away and backed away.

"I'm not that kind of girl," she said, but, by the end of the weekend, I was fondling her breasts beneath her bra, and she told me her mother had a given her a diaphragm for such occasions.

She promised to have her send it if I'd be back the next weekend.

"Oh, sorry," said one of the singers, leaning from the front door of the house as we also necked on the porch on a settee beside the door.

He leaned back in and closed the door.

Also that weekend was the first time I smoked marijuana. Vaughn, his young assistant, and I stood smoking it on the wide porch of the wing where the interns slept. I tried to feel something and told Vaughn and his assistant I did. But I didn't.

Back at Fort Dix medics replaced my cast with one with a rubber heel. The German surgeon had told me that, after my ankle healed, he'd remove the screw and pin from it. But no one at Fort Dix mentioned the possibility of that, and I didn't ask about it.

Hitchhiking was slower with no crutches. But I didn't go to Connecticut on my way to Woodstock the next weekend. In Trenton a man picked me up and told me he was going a few miles north of the city but that he had to stop at his apartment first. He invited me in and showed me some magazines with pictures of naked men and women doing various things together. But he didn't say why he showed them to me or ask me what I thought of them.

In Woodstock, Juliet and I walked up the road in front of the barn, off the road, and further up the mountain, until we came to a rock large enough for both of us to sit on it. There, hoping she had her diaphragm, I tried to unbutton her jeans. But she didn't let me.

In the evening I went with her and Vaughn and others to Woodstock's town hall to see Fellini's film *Juliet of the Spirits*. As we stood in line at the box office, I tried to decide whether Juliet expected me to pay her admission, but I couldn't decide. So she paid her own.

But, after film, after the others went to their various beds, we lay on a small sofa in the house, also near its front door. She let me touch every part of

her. With several of my fingers in her vagina and one of my legs between hers, I ejaculated.

“I’ll go get my diaphragm,” she said then.

“That’s OK,” I replied, suddenly not wanting what I’d wanted.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I replied

She returned to the room she shared with the other girl. Vaughn had told me that weekend that he had to pay the company for me to be there. I slept on the sofa that night and made no more trips to Byrdcliffe Mountain.

## Chapter 12

### Vietnam

One of my barracks mates was an SP4 who'd been in the Army more than twice as long as I. His name was Ken Harmon. Because of our names, we became friends.. We hitchhiked together to Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

In a bar in Philadelphia, we sat at a table and watched a person I thought was a woman swaying on a stage. No one waited on us. After a few minutes, we agreed that she wasn't a woman and that the bar was a gay bar. So we left.

We didn't take enough cash to Atlantic city to do any barhopping, but we walked the boardwalk and a street with many bars. On the street a man with tattoos on his arms invited us up to his room. He pointed up to a window above the street. Another man was peering from behind a curtain. We declined the invitation. We tried to sleep on the beach but couldn't.

Vaughn sent me a note saying the barn had closed for the summer and that he was renting an apartment on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. The first weekend after my next payday I took a bus to New York City. Ralph Poisson, another barracks mate of mine, went with me. We walked the nearly thirty blocks from Port Authority Bus Terminal to the apartment. The man who apologized for interrupting Juliet and me owned the house with another of company's male singers and also lived on its main floor. We found Vaughn in their apartment. The one who had interrupted Juliet and I asked the other what he thought of dress shirts they'd received from a laundry. Vaughn's apartment was an efficiency apartment in the basement.

The afternoon we arrived, he took us to the Guggenheim Museum. That evening he cooked some ham steaks with pineapple sauce with oregano. He said it was his own recipe. The apartment's only bed was a sleeper sofa. But we didn't sleep that night.

"Have you ever tried acid?" he asked us.

The apartment opened to the backyard. The owners were turning it into a garden but hadn't yet planted anything in it. As I sat on a table outside

Vaughn's back door, the dirt that was to be the garden seemed to me to become a field of naked dead bodies. I decided I was hallucinating it because I was going to Vietnam. I also thought the whole thing was a chemical effect on my brain. But I also tried to dramatize it.

"It's mine," I said to Vaughn, thinking I was taking responsibility in terms of Freud or Timothy Leary.

Vaughn encouraged such. He didn't use it with us. He said he was staying down to be our guide. So next I asked him for permission to go for a walk on the street.

"You'll be alright," he said.

I expected the lights to seem to me to be brighter. They didn't, but, when I waved one of my hands, it and its forearm seemed to me to be like a fan made of many hands and forearms. I reasoned that I always saw that but ordinarily wasn't so attentive. I thought that, like a movie camera, my brain took series' of pictures.

The next day, while Vaughn was out of the apartment, I stole some of his acid. It was pink powder in tinfoil. I also stole some tinfoil. I shared it with Ken, in a bar in Wrightstown, a tiny town immediately outside the main gate to Fort Dix. Vaughn mixed it with orange juice. Ken and I mixed it with beer. Ken said he didn't care about drugs one way or another and that it didn't do anything for him. Neither did it do anything to me then.

Curious to know whether any of the members of my company smoked marijuana, I mentioned it to some of them. About a half dozen of them seemed to me to talk as though they did. One of them went AWOL and was gone more than thirty days, long enough to meet the Army's official criterion for desertion. But he was an SP5 when he left and remained one after he returned, and he left again before we went to Vietnam. So some of us speculated that he was military intelligence undercover to check on us.

Our only preparation for Vietnam was to die our underwear green and fire some rifles in some of woods. We bought our own die, and the woods were no kind of jungle, and, excepting that the rifles were automatic and had a pistol grip in front of their magazine, they were like our M-14's, and no one told us that any of that was because we were going to Vietnam. But an obvious clue that I wasn't the only person there as a result of volunteering to go to Vietnam. So the notion that we didn't know we were going to Vietnam was a joke among us until the only time our leaders gathered all of us together in one room.

"We don't know where we're going," said a sergeant first class, SFC E7, who was acting as our first sergeant, grinning at us. "But we're going

somewhere soon. So I suggest you take a thirty day leave. It's your last chance."

So I hitchhiked back to Coldwater. I learned that David had driven the Lark back to Coldwater instead of to Fort Wayne and that Nancy had driven it until she learned that the knocking I heard the day I bought the car was a loose rod. So the car was in pieces beside our mother's house while a friend of Nancy's tried to repair it. The rod had gone through the cylinder wall.

But the friend loaned me alternative transportation. It was a 305 c.c. Honda Super Hawk motorcycle with scrambler pipes. He showed me how to ride it and told me I could use it throughout my leave. The next day I rode it to Ft. Wayne. Rain on the way felt to me like gravel hitting my face. The friend loaned me a helmet but no face shield.

"I made an appointment to have it fixed," said Peggy.

I told her of the knock when I told her she could have the car.

But the next day I rode the bike back to Coldwater in no rain, and, after that, I didn't care about the car. I rode the Honda aimlessly about Coldwater for several days before deciding to find something else to do with my leave. Then I rode it to Charlotte's house.

I had little desire to see her, and didn't think she wished to see me. But I watched her breasts bounce in a sweatshirt as she ran to her driveway from her back yard. Her mother and others were standing around a grill there. I also thought I saw a smile on her face and light in her eyes as she ran. But what she said changed that thought.

"I've found someone else, Bill," she said looking at me with no smile or light. "I'm sorry."

"That's OK," I said, and, to me, it was.

Of more concern to me was that I couldn't yet turn the bike around on its own power in a space as narrow as Charlotte's driveway. So, as she ran back to the others, I backed it around. Then I started it and rode it to Alice Harris' house.

I was thinking of Kubiak's calling her Alice Coldwater, but, though she answered the doorbell grinning with a light in her eyes and bounced down her steps to see the motorcycle, what she said then made wonder why my visit delighted her.

"Connie's in Detroit," she said. "Her father sold the farm. He's hauling cars again."

Then she went back into her house and brought me a slip of paper with Connie's address on it. So I didn't give her a ride on the Honda. I rode it back to my mother's house, wrapped some clothes into a bundle, tied the bundle to

the back of the bike, and rode to Detroit. Numbness from the vibration of that little motorcycle on that hundred-mile ride caused me to stop more often than had the rain on the ride to Fort Wayne. But, by early afternoon, I found my Aunt Bertha painting a small dresser blue in the backyard of her house in Lincoln Park.

She told me she had my footlocker. When I left Germany, I wasn't sure where my mother would be. So I had Benny send it there. But I couldn't carry the footlocker on the bike, and I was there only to ask her whether I could sleep at her house that night after seeing Connie. My mother had also told me Uncle Jim had died of cancer that year, but neither did I offer Aunt Bertha consolation for that. Immediately after looking at the footlocker in her garage, I stashed my bundle in an upstairs bedroom and rode to the address Alice gave me.

The house was smaller than either of Connie's homes in Coldwater or the farmhouse, but a red Buick Skylark convertible was in its driveway, and Connie said her father had given it to her. She also told me she was studying at a business college to be a secretary, and she also had a ring with a big diamond in it on her left ring finger. In her living room, she showed me a big console stereo system and told me her fiancé had given it to her. She said she'd met him at a roller rink, in Elkhart, Indiana. I took her for a ride on the Honda, but I stalled it on a busy street near her house and needed to kick it many times to restart it, as she stood on the sidewalk watching.

"My dad doesn't let me ride on motorcycles since Donnie's accident," she said. "He says it's too dangerous."

I neither knew of nor asked her about Donnie's accident. But, after more kicks started the engine, I took her directly home and left the bike behind her house for us to walk back to the busy street. In a store near where I'd stalled the Honda, I bought her a Frank Sinatra album. It was his first after his fiftieth birthday. He'd said it was his last.

Back at her house she played it on the stereo system. But, as it played we hugged and kissed on her sofa, and her father came home with some friends of his and some beer. One of the friends asked her father whether I wanted a beer. But her father told him I wasn't old enough. So Connie and I went outside and sat on her front steps and talked. I told her I'd like to have kids someday but that I'd like them to call me by my first name.

"I think they should respect you," she said.

Still I hadn't read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. So I didn't ask her how that accorded with her telling me on the farm that it was her favorite book. She was in shorts and had left her shoes in the house. I remembered the backs of her



knees as she rode her bicycle in front of me after a rain. But, in Detroit, I also thought her toes were stubby. That evening she let me drive her Skylark to a place she said was a lovers' lane. As we hugged and kissed, I unfastened her bra, touched one of her breasts, and felt its small hard nipple. But she pushed me away and refastened the bra.

"Respect me, Bill," she said, and then a huge red ball trailing fire behind it fell from the sky in front of us.

She locked the car's passenger side door, reached across me, locked the driver side door, sat straight up, and looked out at the sky where the ball had been.

"What was that?" she asked, looking at me.

"I don't know," I answered, thinking it might have been a meteor.

"I'm afraid," she said. "Let's go."

We'd decided I'd sleep in her mother's sewing room that night. So, to pick up my bundle, I drove us to my Aunt Bertha's house and introduced her to her. She gave us chocolate layer cake and vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup on it. I didn't think of the bundle again until we were back in the car. Then I went back inside to retrieve it. Connie waited in the car.

"I'm going to stay at her house tonight," I told my aunt.

She frowned and said nothing. I guessed at her reason for frowning, and, while wishing it were true, I thought she was both unreasonable and unfair to Connie. But I said nothing of that.

"I was going to go home and leave you here," said Connie when I returned to her car. "No one has ever touched me before."

But we returned to her house and spent most of the night kissing on her living room sofa with my hand in the back of her blouse but not in its front.

"You're the only person who's ever turned me on," she said, and I asked her to marry me.

She said she couldn't, but I persisted. By about 3:00 a.m., she had acceded, and I was glad. Then she told me she had a parttime secretarial job and had to go to work in the morning. After a few hours on a rollaway bed in her mother's sewing room, I found her in her living room in a flowery dress with a full skirt. Then, remembering thinking I was leaving her behind the last time she returned my class ring, I felt she already had left me behind. But, especially in the face of that diamond ring, the time for class rings for us was past.

In Coldwater, I resumed spending most of my time riding the Honda. One night I rode with Duane Swaney into the woods behind the sewage disposal plant. He was on a 305 c.c. Honda Scrambler and was much more agile on it

than I was on the Super Hawk with Scrambler pipes. So I couldn't keep up with him through the woods either on or off the path.

But I could keep up with Atkinson drinking. One night I found him drinking in his party room with Larry Neitzert, our classmate who sat in homeroom with me during Chris Quick's funeral. I told them I was a poor kid and knew the underbelly of Coldwater. I offered to show it to them.

"Just park in front of the Bluebird any night," I said.

So, in his DeSoto, Atkinson drove us downtown.

The Bluebird and Harry's faced each other across Chicago Street. They were soda shops. Coldwater had no others. Harry's was the main hangout for Coldwater's high school kids. Parents took their younger kids to the Bluebird. It was older. Poor kids went to neither, but they walked the streets evenings looking for things to do, and Bluebird closed earlier than Harry's. So they sometimes loitered in front of it. As we stepped onto the sidewalk in front of the Bluebird, two girls passed.

"Do you want to go to a party?" I asked them.

One of them said she did, and both went with us. In Atkinson's DeSoto the one who answered told me knew my sister Nancy and that she'd always liked me. At his house I gave her a can of beer and took her into his bedroom. We undressed and tried coitus, but I couldn't ejaculate. After several minutes of trying, I got out of bed, dressed, and returned to Atkinson's party room. But I told her to wait where she was.

"It's your turn," I said to Neitzert.

"No thanks," he said.

Atkinson went into his bedroom but spent less time alone with her than I did.

"She was crying," he said when he returned.

The other girl said nothing while they were there. When her friend came out of the bedroom, we took them back where we found them. The next day I hitchhiked back to Fort Dix. A few days later my pubic area began to itch. I mentioned that to Ken.

"Probably crabs," he said. "I've got something that might help."

He gave me an olive drab can of DDT powder.

"I had 'em once," he said. I got this from the dispensary."

I'd never had crabs and didn't know I did then. But I tried the powder and next morning found tiny dead bugs on my bottom sheet. They resembled crabs, and, after a few mornings of that, the itching stopped.

A few days after that, my company went through the final processing in its preparation for overseas redeployment, what the Army called POR. A step

in that was handing our 201 files to an SP4 standing behind a counter flipping through them. He was looking for any reason we shouldn't redeploy.

"You're not getting out of it that easy," he said.

He was looking at my PULHES on my Form 20. PULHES was an acronym for parts of the body. In pencil beneath each letter of it was a number ranging from one to three. Mine had a three under the L for lower extremities. The SP4 erased the three and entered a one. But, instead of telling him either that I'd broken my leg or that I'd volunteered for Vietnam, I considered thanking him. So he turned to the next in line, and I moved on to the next step in the process, and a few days later the company flew to San Francisco.

The flight was commercial, but no passengers were on it other than my company, and we were in fatigues. An Army bus took us, our duffle bags, and our M-14 rifles from the plane to Oakland Army Terminal. There we boarded a ship like the one that had taken me to Germany, stashed our duffle bags beneath the bottom hammocks, and hung our rifles by their slings from the hammocks' frames.

The trip was 27 days, but the Pacific is more pacific than the Atlantic. So few of us were seasick. One of the few was a PFC who was a high school history teacher before his induction. We who weren't seasick laughed at him as he stood guard with a barf bag in his pistol belt.

But Dramamine pills were available to anyone at no cost. Some of us popped them hoping for an amphetamine high. I tried crushing some and smoking them in a cigarette, but the only effect I felt was like how I felt drinking tea, literally a sort sound of buzzing in my head. I didn't do it twice.

SP4's had no jobs on the ship, but one of the SP4's gave us something to do. He was one of the company's marijuana smokers and said he'd dealt blackjack in Las Vegas before his induction. He had several decks of cards with him and taught the game to anyone who wished to learn.

We played on a landing of a ladder well to keep wind from blowing the cards overboard. I proved good at it. I won most of the time and kept a tally of who owed me what, to collect it in Vietnam, and soon I learned of another increase in my funds.

An SFC called me into a little office near our compartment and asked me whether I'd like to work for the company's administrative services division. I didn't ask what my job would be, but, appreciating the invitation and thinking anything administrative wasn't likely to be much trouble, I said I would. And, a few days later, I had reason to be glad I did.

Sergeant Green, the SFC who extended the invitation, called me into that little office again and told me, with no mention of a recommendation or a promotion board, that I'd become an SP5.

He simply congratulated me and handed me the orders.

I also learned the Army paid combat pay to everyone in any job in a combat zone. I also saved some cash on the ship by the cigarettes being duty free on it. They were \$1.11 per carton.

Hearing we were passing Hawaii, I looked across the rolling sea. I saw no land then, but the ship docked in Okinawa. The Army let us off for about eight hours. Most of us walked to a huge night club less than a mile from the ship and spent nearly all of the eight hours getting drunk. Returning to the ship, many of us boarded it from its dock side, walked across the deck, and jumped from the other side into the water. I drank but didn't jump.

The ship made several stops along the coast of Vietnam to drop off troops. I heard that the first unit to land was an artillery battalion and that the entire battalion died on the beach. But, not sure that was anything more than a rumor, I had no qualms when SFC Green asked me to be a member of a party of about a half dozen to go ashore in Da Nang to find some of our equipment the Navy accidentally unloaded there. That made me the second member of my company to hit the beach in Vietnam. The SSG leading the party was the first.

We went ashore on a landing craft like those at Normandy, but the Navy didn't lower the ramp. The drop from it to the beach was about six feet, and the sand was wet. The SSG fell on his face. I nearly did, but seeing him warned me enough for me to wave my arms to keep my balance.

If anyone found our equipment, no one told me. The company's assistant supply sergeant was with us. Seeing someone he knew, he asked him where the nearest warehouse was. Then he, the assistant supply sergeant, took us to an old French Villa and left us there all afternoon while he and the SSG went to look for the equipment. One or two of us used house's primary service. But I and the others only drank beer there.

The next day we arrived at Cam Ranh Bay. That was our destination. There, with our steel helmets, pistol belts, backpacks, and rifles, we climbed down netting on the side of the ship to board a landing craft. That time the Navy lowered the ramp for us to hit the beach as the troops did at Normandy. But buses with air-conditioning took us from the beach to our company area.

Our company wasn't the first personnel service company there. The 516<sup>th</sup> Personnel Service Company had already begun to settle in. The two together would build and operate the Cam Ranh Bay Personnel Service Center,

but, before we arrived, the 516<sup>th</sup> set up both their company area and the squad tents that would serve as our barracks there.

I never saw their company area, but, thanks to them, the first item on our agenda was to stand in line outside our orderly tent for pay, and the next item on my agenda was to stand outside the orderly tent to collect blackjack debts from my fellow soldiers, and the next for me and many others was to find our way to the Cam Ranh Bay Class VI store.

Class VI was the Army's ration classification for alcoholic beverages. The Class VI store at Cam Ranh Bay sold cases of beer and quarts and fifths of whiskey and other alcoholic beverages for \$2.50 each. The Army officially rationed it to three cases of beer and three bottles of the other alcoholic beverages per month. But no one enforced that policy. Vietnamese girls worked the cash registers and, instead of marking our ration cards once per item, marked them once per purchase.

For the administrative services division, making our way to the Class VI store was easy. One of its members was our company's mail clerk. So he had full access to the mail truck. So, beginning by driving us to the Class VI store, he used it as a taxi for us.

We had no refrigerators, but the Class VI store also sold bags of ice. So we bought some and, most of Cam Ranh Peninsula was sand. So, back in our company area, we dug a hole in sand beneath an end flap of our tent, made a cooler of half of a 55 gallon oil drum and Styrofoam from a typewriter case, and put it in the hole. It wasn't big enough for enough beer, but I didn't buy any beer that day. Considering that we didn't have a refrigerator, I bought a quart of rum and a case of Squirt, and, using the cooler to cool one can of Squirt at time, I poured the Rum into it as I drank.

We slept on canvas cots with thin mattresses, sheets, pillows, and pillow cases, but no blankets. Because of the heat, we had no use for blankets. The pillows had plastic covers to keep our sweat from soaking them. So, my first few mornings there, I awoke with an ear in a puddle of sweat in the indentation of my head in the plastic cover.

Also, that first week, one of us nearly died of heat stroke. So the Army sent him home. But, by the second week, I'd adapted to the heat enough for my ears to be relatively dry when I awoke mornings, and, before beginning to build the Personnel Service Center, we further improved our living quarters.

But the Army gave us no building materials for that. So our assistant supply sergeant, the SGT who found the whorehouse for us in Danang, organized a midnight raid for building materials. He and others of our company

took two 2 ½ ton trucks, what the Army called deuce-and-a-halves, to the Navy yard and stole lumber we used to floor and frame our tents.

But the Army gave us sandbags. So, to keep the wind from blowing the sand across our floors, we stacked sandbags several feet high around them, and soon we had refrigerators. The Army gave our company an electric generator, and the Cam Ranh Bay PX sold small refrigerators and much else we could use to feel more at home. So we bought several refrigerators for our tent, a folding lawn chairs for each of us, and civilian clothing, and soon the Army gave us building materials. So, before we built our work site, we built a mess hall, showers, latrines, and a wooden house for the lieutenant colonel, LTC O5, who would command the PSC. So we had plenty of lumber for a carpentry job SFC Green assigned to me.

“The colonel says our bulletin board is unsightly,” he told me. “Can you take some of your men and build him a sightly one?”

What he called my men were my tent mates, all the members of the administrative services division below the rank of SP5. I was somewhat officially the tent commander. So I began the project with a conference with SP4’s Strickland from Detroit and Reinke from Iowa. But I didn’t need to do any commanding.

“How about something with a roof to keep us out of the rain while we read the bulletins?” I asked them. “And it’s supposed to tell us stuff. So how about if we make it look like a schoolhouse. We could paint the outside to look like bricks.”

But the others extended that plan, and so did SFC Green. We added a belfry with a jet’s afterburner in it. SP4 Taylor, the mail clerk, found the afterburner on one of his runs and said it looked like a bell. Sergeant Green gave us a roll of acetate and suggested that we use it to keep the bulletins from blowing away. So we made frames of 2x2’s for the acetate, hung them on hinges, and used screen door hooks and eyes to hook them to a 2x4 beneath the roof while the company clerk posted the bulletins. We obtained the hardware and the red and white paint to make the outside resemble bricks, and also some green paint for the roof, from the supply sergeant. SFC Green asked him to give us anything we needed.

We built it on legs behind our tent, but we made the legs long enough for us to dig them into the sand for it to straddle solidly the boardwalk others had built to keep our feet out of the sand as we walked between our two rows of tents and from them to the orderly tent, and we set it where we’d have to go through it on our way from our tents to the orderly tent.

“Now that’s a sightly bulletin board,” Said SFC Green when we finished, and the LTC ordered others to hang on its side most visible from the road a big sheet metal sign with the name of our company and the insignia for the adjutant general branch of the Army on it.

“I guess he likes it,” said Taylor, and next we build more furniture for our tent.

I used some lumber to build a cabinet with shelves in its bottom third and space for hanging clothes in its upper two thirds. I added to it a plywood surface that swung up from its shelves, with legs swinging down from the plywood, to make it a writing surface. I called it a wall locker, and Strickland and Reinke and others in other tents built similar cabinets and also called theirs wall lockers.

We also received new tents. I tore a hole in ours, pulling it over the ridgepole of the frame we built, but we patched it with some tar and a piece of the old one. Taylor scrounged the tar in his travels in the mail truck.

But, until we went to work in the PSC, drinking alcohol remained our main activity, and the Army contributed to that, beyond the low prices.

Cam Ranh Village was several hundred shacks on sand near the bay. Concertina wire bordered it on all sides not facing the bay. Tin sheeting that must have been surplus from breweries covered many of the shacks. Some could have become Hamms cans, others Schlitz cans, etc. Most of the shacks were both a brothel and a bar.

“I heard only about three hundred people live in the village,” said Strickland. “The girls come in by boat every day and leave every night.”

MP’s policed the village. They guarded the only land entrance and forbade anyone to enter in a shirt with no collar. I learned that by trying to enter in sneakers with no socks, a short-sleeve sweatshirt, and cutoff jeans

“You need a collar,” said the MP at the gate.

But Strickland solved that problem.

“We’ll go in and buy you a shirt and bring it out,” he said.

He and Reinke and Taylor went in and returned with a short-sleeve shirt with a button-down collar. It also had a pattern of white shapes of palm trees on a bright red background, and they laughed as Taylor handed it to me. But I liked it so much I hung it foremost in my wall locker.

I didn’t hire a prostitute that day. But we visited several shacks and drank a lot of beer. We found that some people there lived as ordinary Vietnamese people did. We came across a woman I thought was too old for prostitution naked from her waist up bathing with water from a pan on a wooden

table. I wondered how many ordinary Vietnamese people knew the difference between communism and capitalism. We looked away and returned to the bars.

I seldom thought of Connie. I had pictures of Sandy and Charlotte and the girl who gave me a picture of herself at the Jazz Keller and put them in an acetate document protector I tacked to a side of my wall locker, and I also wrote to Juliet and asked her for picture. But I had no picture of Connie and didn't ask her for one.

I was writing to her, but I never lifted my plywood writing surface for any reason other than to access the shelves behind it, and I decorated the writing surface with a red and white cardboard "exit" sign Taylor gave me. He said it matched my shirt. But I sent Connie a money order and asked her to send me a 35 mm camera. The Cam Ranh Bay PX developed film. But the first picture I took with it was of the shirt hanging above the sign, and didn't develop any of the pictures I took with it until after I returned from Vietnam.

SFC Green, after others built our worksite but before we began working at it, took us to the other side of the bay to a place U. S. Army soldiers there called Dodge City. SFC Green rode in the front seat of a deuce-and-a-half while Taylor drove it. The other members of the administrative services division and I and some others of the 518<sup>th</sup> who would work in other divisions of the PSC rode in the back. I tried the steam bath and a massage, but I felt silly doing it.

"Do you want a special?" asked the male masseuse, placing a towel over my genitals as I turned over after the massage.

"What's a special?" I asked.

He left the room and returned with a young woman.

"No," I told him. "Thanks."

She seemed to me to be a child and unhappy.

I bought a wooden walking stick. Its top end was in the shape of a lion's head. No one asked me for payment for anything else. Excepting Da Nang and a visit with Hendricks, that was my only trip to the mainland.

I don't know how Hendricks knew I was there, but he showed up behind my tent in a jeep with an M1 carbine leaning against its dashboard. He took me to a French villa where he was living with a Special Forces unit. I had lunch with him and his housemates but had little to say to anyone there and never heard from or of him again.

I bought two Christmas gifts that year. One was for Peggy. That autumn she gave birth to her and Bob's daughter, Autumn. Vietnamese sold a variety of things from tables beneath tarps in the village. I bought her a statuette



of a Vietnamese woman holding a baby. Bob painted in oils. The statuette was cast iron and nearly a foot tall. I paid more to ship it than I paid to buy it

The other Christmas gift I bought that year was a little portable tape recorder for Connie. I bought it from the PX through the Pacific Exchange catalog. I had PACEX send it directly to her. I asked her to send me recordings of her, but I didn't buy a recorder for me. I thought I'd listen to it on a little tape recorder Reinke had. She sent me a tape, but Reinke's didn't work.

At the Cam Ranh Bay PX I bought myself a Hamilton self-winding watch showing both the time and the day of the month. It was much more expensive than the tape recorder. I told Connie Reinke's tape recorder didn't work. But I didn't tell her of the watch.

By then we were working in the PSC. Some of our office buildings were tents like the ones in which we slept but with plywood and screens over the sides of the frames. Others were Quonset huts. Most of the administrative services division worked in one of the Quonset huts.

I and some of my tentmates worked behind a partition at one end of it. The LTC had a private office in its other end. SFC Green, an SGM, and a chief warrant officer, a CWO, worked at desks between the partition and the LTC's office.

My main job was sorting paper coming into and going out of the PSC. The partition was a counter with shelves beneath it. I sorted the paper into boxes on the shelves. People handed me paper through an opening at the end of the partition nearest the main entrance to the Quonset hut. I carried paper to the CWO through a gap in the partition and counter at the other end. SFC Green's desk was the first desk outside that gap. The CWO's desk was the last before a gap in the wall separating the LTC's office from the rest of the Quonset hut. I had to deliver all the correspondence I received to the CWO's inbox. His name was Wright. He seldom spoke to me, either when I delivered it to his inbox or when I picked it up from his outbox to sort it. I don't know what the SGM did, and I don't remember what Strickland did, but Reinke printed orders and other documents on an offset press near the Quonset hut's back door. I also did other things SFC Green told me to do, and officially I was in charge of everyone working on my side of the partition. But I don't remember ever telling anyone there to do anything. I was no kind of leader.

A task SFC Green assigned to me beyond sorting paper was to account for the PSC's office supplies. He asked me to build shelves for them in one of the ConEx containers in which the ship transported our equipment. He asked me to organize the office supplies on the shelves and manage the inventory.

“Here,” he said, handing me a little gray metal box with several packets of three-by-five index cards in it. “You can use this.”

“Can, shit, OG107,” I typed on a card for the trashcans.

The trashcans, like the box, were gray. OG107 was what the Army called the olive green color the Army then used for fatigues. I did that to mock what the Army called nomenclature, its system for naming things.

“What if someone inspects that file?” Sergeant Green asked me after inspecting it while I was out of the office working on another project he assigned to me.

I typed another card. But I knew SFC Green appreciated my sense of humor, and the biggest problem I had with my jobs was the hours. The other project was building racks for our rifles in another ConEx container.

We worked ten on each of thirteen days of each week. We alternated Sundays off, half of the company taking one Sunday off, the other half taking the next Sunday off. We also did that for holidays. That was for the PSC to be open every day.

But still we found time to drink. After leaving work at 6:00 p.m. and eating supper in the mess hall, many of us drank until long after midnight, and I was one of them. I also drank a can of beer between breakfast and going to work each morning.

One morning I befriended a cook.

“How do you want your eggs?” he asked.

“A jelly omelet?” I replied.

He scrambled some eggs, flattened them, and folded some grape jelly into them.

“Is that what you mean?” he asked.

His name was Willie Dye. He was an African American SP5 from Detroit. His physical stature suggested that he enjoyed his cooking. The cooks’ tent was across the board walk from the ASD’s. That night, between the entrances to the our tents, he asked me whether I liked jazz. I told him I did. He asked me whether I smoked marijuana. I told him I did but that I hadn’t found any in Vietnam. He went into his tent, returned with a newspaper bundle of it, handed it to me, and pointed to the hill where the generator was.

“Take it up there and roll yourself a joint,” he said.

Some rolling papers were in the bundle, but I didn’t know how to roll a joint. Sitting on the sandbags we’d stacked around the generator to muffle its sound, I emptied the tobacco out of a cigarette and replaced it with the marijuana. As I smoked that, I did the same with a half dozen more cigarettes.

“Thanks,” I said, returning what remained of the bundle to Willie.

Then I walked up the hill behind our tents to the latrines we'd built and lit another joint. But, as I sat smoking it, I heard the door opening. I threw the joint through the hole, between my legs.

Out supply sergeant came into the latrine and sat on another hole.

"What are you smoking?" he asked.

"Viceroys," I told him. "Want one?"

"No," he said. "Smells like weed."

"Nope," I told him. "Just a Viceroy."

Leaving the latrine, I left my Ronson butane lighter in it. I posted a note on our bulletin board asking whether anyone found it. Receiving no reply, then next time I was in the village, I bought a Zippo. The Vietnamese selling it to me also engraved. I asked him to engrave my last name across the bottom of one side of it in the biggest capital letters that fit.

I also bought my own bundle of marijuana. Some of my tentmates went with me, but I left them in one of the shacks while I went on the search for the marijuana. I don't remember what I told them was why I left them there, but I quickly found some. I walked past the shack beside the one where I left them, entered the next one, and asked a man who seemed to me to be in charge there whether he had any. He told me he did and sold me a big bundle like Willy's for about five dollars in piasters. I buried it in sand outside the sandbags behind my wall locker. I felt I need to hide it from my tentmates. I didn't know any of my tentmates to smoke it.

Ralph Poisson contracted chronic gonorrhea before we left Fort Dix and didn't come with us. MP's caught Ken Harman crawling beneath the concertina wire around the village after they'd closed it for the night. I don't know what the Army did to him for that, but he was no longer with the 518th. I hoped the worst was it did to him was what in Germany we called being shipped to the boonies. But I tried not to think of the difference between boonies in Germany and boonies in Vietnam. But I found another friend.

Though Willie gave me his address in Detroit, I don't remember doing anything else of him at the 518<sup>th</sup>, but another SP4 moved into my tent, and I did much with him.

His name was Marvin Cleveland Powell, but people called him Cleve. I don't know why he came to our company, but I heard before I met him that he came to us from a unit on the mainland. His job with the ASD was operating a Flexowriter. Flexowriters were machines we were to use for automating producing masters for publishing orders on Renke's offset press, and they needed air-conditioning. So he didn't work in the Quonset hut. He worked in a

van with air conditioning, and he was also our first Flexowriter operator. So, in the beginning of his assignment there, he worked alone.

But that wasn't all he did alone. Each night after chow he changed into civilian clothes, left our tent, and didn't return until the lights were out. But, his second week in our company, SFC Green directed that I and others work with him afternoons for a week to learn to operate the Flexowriters. About a dozen of them were in the van, and SFC Green said his reason for directing that was that Cleve might need some help, occasionally.

But most of the complexity was in the machines. So we learned to operate them in one afternoon. They punched holes in paper tapes one could feed through the machines for them to type the information again in a fraction of the time manually typing it required, and one could punch into the tapes holes that made the machine stop for the operator to type names and other varying information. So Cleve used them both to type the tapes and to use the tapes to type the offset masters.

But I spent most of the afternoons of that week using one of them to write poems. I read some of them aloud, and, after chow the evening of the first day I did that, Cleve spoke to me. On his way out, while no one else was in the tent, he stopped at my cot.

"I'm going to the NCO club," he said. "If you want to have a drink later."

So I changed into my cut-offs and shirt, drank a couple of cans of beer, and walked across the half mile of sand between our company area and the Cam Ranh Bay NCO club. It was open to all enlisted ranks, and I found Cleve drinking rum and Coke alone at a table. I went to the bar, bought one for myself, and joined him at the table. We talked about books and especially Kerouac.

Walking back to the tent after the club closed, we smoked some of my marijuana. I'd bought a pipe by then. Both of us vomited in the sand.

"I guess pot and alcohol don't mix," said Cleve laughing.

We also had the same Sundays off. We made a habit of drinking a month of my rations of alcohol other than beer one Sunday and drinking a month of his the next. We did the same with holidays. The three bottles we drank on each of our days off were a fifth of Johnny Walker Red Label scotch, a fifth of Heublein ready-mixed old fashioned, and a fifth of Heublein ready-mixed martinis. Cleve told me Dylan Thomas drank himself to death at the White Horse Tavern in New York City. He never returned to the NCO club.

We also took turns with a prostitute Cleve had found in the village. I thought her face was pretty, and her breasts were extraordinarily large and firm.

Her face also seemed to me to be less oriental than Vietnamese women's faces ordinarily were. When I was with her we undressed completely. The prostitutes there performed their services on low platforms with straw mats on them, but they undressed completely, and so did I. My first time with her, I had an erection before I joined her on the mat. She laughed and grabbed my penis. I laughed also but nearly ejaculated before I lay down.

I don't know how, if Cleve came to our company from the mainland, he found that girl before we became friends. Neither did I ever learn why he left his previous unit, and I never asked. I thought perhaps he might not wish to tell. But he told me his induction was because he took a year off from Texas A&M between his junior and senior years. He said his major was English. So the main basis for our friendship remained literary.

I wrote a short story about a homeless person in New York City.

"Sam sat behind a garbage can," it began. "And nothing made any fucking difference."

I walked the three quarters of a mile of sand between our company area and the PSC to type it at my desk. I asked Cleve to read it. He suggested I send it to the *New Yorker*. A few weeks later I received a rejection letter. Cleve said the editors wouldn't have bothered to send the letter if they didn't think the story showed potential. But I never again went to the PSC only to use a typewriter for anything, and my hanging out with Cleve diminished my writing home.

Peggy wrote complaining that I wasn't writing to her.

"You're in Vietnam," she said. "We don't know if you're alive or dead."

So I wrote and told her I wasn't dead but working ten hours a day.

Nancy wrote telling me she lost her virginity to the second man on the Ferris wheel at the Branch County Fair. She said she lost it in the cab of the truck that carried the wheel from spot to spot. She also said he married her in a shirt of mine I'd left at home. She said she hoped I didn't mind.

I didn't mind, but she also wrote to me that she found my book report on *Of Mice and Men*, copied it, turned in as though it was hers, and received an A. She seemed to me to think I'd be proud of that. My feeling was more concern for her cheating. Of course she wrote that to me before she dropped out of school to marry the assistant ride supervisor. His name was Doyle.

I wrote to Connie that I'd been expanding my experience with prostitutes in the village.

"I don't know what you think you're doing," she replied. "But I'm going back to Karl if he'll have me."

“I’m free!” I cheered, with an audience of most of my tentmates, and all of that happened between our arrival in Vietnam in September and the Christmas of that year.

But, other than the Christmas gifts I bought, my only memory particular to that Christmas was of a poem a member of the company who wasn’t a tentmate of mine wrote and showed me behind our tent, and all I remember of the poem is its closing line.

“Shit,” it said. “Another fucking Christmas card.”

He was complaining about not receiving letters. He showed it to me after I showed him a poem of mine including included the phrases “smell bee shit on a rotten rose” and “eat the ingrown hairs of God” It closed with the lines “and then, when you have done all this, pour out your beer and drink some piss.”

But I remember that New Year’s Day. Cleve and I went to a cove on the South China Sea. He said he learned of it during his assignment to his previous company. Taylor drove us there but left us there with our alcohol and marijuana. We ran in the surf, drank the booze, and smoked the dope, but reaching the cove required climbing down a hill and over some rocks. So, after drinking the booze and smoking the dope, we were hardly able to negotiate the rocks to return to the road. But the next month we went further than that.

“Let’s go to Tokyo,” said Cleve. “I took my R&R to Hong Kong, but they let us take both an R&R and a week of ordinary leave if we want to. I already cleared it with Green for me, and, if you take the leave first, they have to let you have both.”

I’d added most of my combat pay and my promotion pay increase to my Class S allotment, but, with relatively few ways to spend money in Vietnam, I had enough cash on hand to buy a big black vinyl Leeds flight bag and have a little more than three hundred dollars remaining to spend in Tokyo.

The Rest and Recuperation Center at the airport in Yokohama loaned us sport jackets and neckties. Cleve selected the Hotel Takanawa from brochures at the R&R center. The R&R center also provided a shuttle to take troops to Tokyo’s various hotels. We checked into adjacent rooms, stashed our bags, and went exploring.

“You want girls?” asked a man on the sidewalk in front of the hotel.

“No,” said Cleve.

“What do you want?” the man asked.

“Pizza,” I said, though my only experience with it was with Atkinson and Kubiak.

“I know a place with good pizza,” said the man.

He ushered us into a car at the curb, sat on the left side of the front seat, and faced us to talk to us all the way. I wondered not only how he could drive that way but also at the car's closeness to the other traffic. Another man was sitting on the other side of the front seat, but I didn't see until we stopped that the right of way was on the left.

In the restaurant the man talking to us ushered us into a banquette. The restaurant was fancier than I expected a pizza parlor to be. The man left us and returned with two women.

"What do you think?" asked Cleve.

"Let's get out of here," I said, and we did.

"Where are you going?" asked the man.

He followed us out of the restaurant and to the next intersection, still talking to us, but he didn't follow us across the street. We continued walking until we found a small modern but simpler restaurant. We sat in a banquette beside a glass case with red artificial flowers in it. We ordered sake.

"Is that Harry Stalin's tomb?" I asked Cleve.

Pointing to the case, I choked on my sake.

"You died and were buried in Harry Stalin's tomb," said Cleve laughing. "Maybe we can resurrect you with some Suntory. It's like scotch but better."

We drank Suntory on the rocks and ate some ham and cheese sandwiches on white bread with no crust. The cashier calculated our bill and change with an abacus beside the cash register. Next morning I rose before Cleve, walked around a corner, found a small liquor store, bought a liter of Suntory, walked back to the hotel, and I knocked on the door to Cleve's room. He answered the knock but then climbed back into the bed.

Two glasses and a legal pad were on the bedstand. I poured us some Suntory, picked up the legal pad, sat on the floor, and began scribbling what seemed to me pictorial, as what I'd written on leaper in Vaughn's apartment had seemed to me to be logical. Cleve also seemed to me to think it was pictorial. We emptied the bottle and flagged a taxi to go to the Ginza to buy some shoes to wear in Tokyo instead of our army shoes.

## Chapter 13

### Transposition

Cleve selected a pair of thick-soled brown oxfords he called brogans. While a salesman knelt before him examining the fit, another stood behind him gesturing from the top of his head to the higher top of Cleves'. Both salesmen laughed. I selected a pair of thin-soled black shoes with buckles. Neither of us called them anything. I don't remember what we did with our Army shoes.

Our next stop was the Sapporo Beer hall. There we sat at one of many large round tables with white tablecloths. We ordered half-liter bottles of Sapporo. I had no fondness for the setting or the beer. We ordered no more of it. We walked from there to the Tokyo Tower.

"This is supposed to be nine meters higher than the Eifel Tower," said Cleve as we peered through a window in the floor of the elevator as we rode to its top.

At its bottom we asked a woman at a news stand where we could have lunch. She spoke no English, but she smiled at us and pointed to a stairway. At the bottom of the stairs was a cafeteria with long tables. No one was serving at the cafeteria line or eating at the tables. But we sat at one of the tables. Some people came to us. Cleve told them we wanted shrimp. They brought us some batter-fried shrimp. They were the biggest shrimp I've ever seen. Everyone we saw there smiled all the time we were there, and charged us nothing.

"I think it's the employee cafeteria," said Cleve.

From there we walked aimlessly until Cleve stopped walking at a traffic circle and peered down a street leading from it.

"That's what we're looking for," he said.

"Harry's Bar," said a small sign over a door.

As we walked to it Cleve told me of Hemingway and Harry's Bar in Paris. It was a small dark place with a small bar, a few tables, and some banquettes. Several men and women were there. All the men were from the United States. All the women were Japanese. Cleve spoke with all of them.



One of the men said he published a culinary magazine. Another said he was an airline pilot.

At 11:00 p.m. the barmaid told us she knew of a night club that was open all night. One of the men told us Tokyo required bars to close at 11:00 p.m. Cleve and I went with him and the barmaid and some of the others to the all night club. It also had large round tables with white table cloths. We sat at one, drank, and talked. A band played on a stage.

The barmaid's name was Toshiko. She used chopsticks to feed me what she said was Chinese cabbage. I hadn't been able to suffer cabbage before then. But I enjoyed that cabbage. About an hour after we arrived, the lights brightened. The band carried its instruments from the bandstand, and waitresses removed the drinks from the tables. A few minutes later, some Japanese men in suits entered, looked around for a few minutes, and left. Then the lights dimmed again, and, as the band returned to the stage, the waitresses returned the drinks to the tables. We returned to what we were doing. No one explained any of that or indicated any surprise.

About an hour later, Cleve and I, Toshiko, two other women, and another man climbed into a taxi. It dropped off Cleve, the two other women, and the other man. But, as they were climbing out of the taxi, I pushed a hand up Toshiko's skirt. So she stayed in the taxi. So did I. She asked the driver to take her to another address. She didn't invite me in. I asked the driver to take me to the hotel.

When I arose, a few hours later, I walked to the liquor store around the corner from the hotel, bought another bottle of Suntory, and again found Cleve alone in his room. The woman with whom he left the taxi was in a dress with a pattern of big black flowers on a white background. Cleve referred to her as the newspaper. He'd told me his minor at Texas A&M was journalism. After more scribbling and drinking the bottle of Suntory, we again wandered aimlessly.

We came upon some little kids in black and white school uniforms.

"Look at the little Mickey Mouse kids," said Cleve.

Walking on we saw some little kids' shoes hanging from limbs of a tree on the other side of a wall along the sidewalk.

"That's where the little Mickey Mouse kids keep their shoes," said Cleve.

Wandering on we again came to the intersection where we found Harry's. We also spent that evening there. Toshiko said little to me that evening, but she introduced me to her younger sister. Her name was Shizuku. She tended the bar that evening. Cleve spent most of that evening talking with

the newspaper. I spent most of it talking with Shizuku. I put my high school class ring on one of her thumbs. I left it there.

“I wonder if we’d find Harry’s again,” I said to Cleve the next evening.

“You want to go there again?” said Cleve.

“Sure,” I said. “Why not.”

We found it, but we didn’t stay long. After talking with the newspaper for less than an hour, Cleve returned to me.

“She asked me how much money we have left?” he said.

I counted my cash, and then we left, paying nothing.

“The newspaper paid our bill,” said Cleve outside. “I gave her some money to hold onto for me in case we needed it.”

The next day was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I didn’t have enough cash for another bottle of Suntory, but I bought a bottle of Tory. Cleve had told me it was a cheap sort of Suntory. I didn’t enjoy it as much, but we drank it.

The rest of that day, we didn’t leave the hotel, but, that afternoon, to celebrate my having reached drinking age, we drank a shot of Tory at a small tall table in a nook of the hotel’s small lobby bar.

We also smoked some Wolf Brothers Crook cigars I’d bought. I don’t remember where or when I bought them, but we smoked them on the roof of the hotel. While we were doing that another soldier there on R&R came up to the roof. We offered him a cigar. He accepted it and told us he was there on R&R. We told him we were writers. The next day, before returning to the R&R Center to return to Vietnam, we ate spaghetti at the Tokyo USO. Cleve told me we could do that and wouldn’t have to pay for it. I didn’t ask him how he knew that.

I also lit a cigar on the plane that took us back to Vietnam, but a stewardess told me to put it out. I told her the no-smoking light wasn’t on. She told me I should consider the other passengers. We hitched a ride from the Cam Ranh Bay airbase back to our company in a ¾ ton truck. The guy to whom we gave the cigar on the roof was also in the truck.

“I thought you guys said you were writers,” he said.

“We are,” I said.

“Yeah,” he said. “Right.”

Cleve said nothing.

We arrived at our tent in midmorning. SFC Green had told us to go to work as soon as we returned. I immediately changed into fatigues and walked to the PSC. Cleve didn’t.

My coworkers behaved as though I’d never been away. I felt as though I’d never been there. I couldn’t remember my job. An SP4 from the 57<sup>th</sup>

Ordnance Battalion came in for his distribution. He'd done that nearly every day I was there.

"Did you walk into a screen door?" I asked him the first time.

"It's a birthmark," he said then.

But, rising from my desk on my first day back from Tokyo, I knew neither why he was there nor what I should be doing for anyone.

"What can I do for you?" I asked, stepping to the counter.

"The distribution for the 57<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Company," he said, staring at me.

I felt I should know what he wanted, but I didn't, thought that might be what crazy is, and was afraid it might be.

"Would somebody help this guy?" I said, and I walked out the back door of the Quonset hut and back across the three quarters of a mile of sand to our company area.

I found Cleve behind the tents drinking a cocktail from his canteen cup.

"I think I'm going crazy," I told him.

He looked at me, sneered, turned, and walked away, and I wasn't crazy enough not to know why he sneered, that it was because I'd gone to work.

By chow that evening I thought I'd returned to my ordinary way of thinking. But things in our company never seemed to me to return to what they were before I went to Tokyo. They became more like what I thought was ordinary before I arrived in Vietnam. Cleve spent less time with me and more with two guys from Hawaii who'd joined the company and slept in a tent with an elaborate stereo system on a slope above the other tents. Willie Dye transferred to a company between the 518<sup>th</sup> and the NCO Club. Once I visited him in his tent there and listened as he talked about jazz and played a Herby Hancock recording. But we didn't leave his tent to smoke any dope, and I never returned to it.

Yet I continued trying to mix my nonconformity and intellectualism.

I bought Judy Collins' album *In My Life* and played it on Reinke's record player. I thought that, if one played its second side before playing its first side, it told the history of humanity. Cleve and I, to ask the history teacher who was seasick on the troop ship what he thought, took it to his tent. He played it on his turntable.

"I guess you could see it that way," he said.

"Fucking history teacher," I said, and, for no reason I understood, I wept.

"He'll be alright," said Cleve.

Leaving the album on the turntable, he led me out of the tent, but outside the tent he said nothing to me, and rain fell with no stopping through most of that spring, and we had many personnel changes.

One was that the SFC who was acting as our ISG left. In the beginning, we like the SFC who replaced him. He walked about the PSC carrying a saw and other tools to repair anything the water broke. That gave some cheer to us lower ranking people filling and stacking sandbags to keep our office tents and Quonset huts from washing into the bay. But, less than a half hour after the rain stopped, the sand was dry again, and he changed with the weather.

He ordered us to rid our tents of the furniture we'd built. He told us he'd replace it with Army-issue wall lockers and footlockers. But, preferring our creations, we protested. We piled them on the sand between our tents and the generator and marched in a line around our tents singing "Silent Night".

His name was Carrino. He issued an M14 to an SP4 whose name Antolini. He told him to guard the pile. But he didn't give him ammunition.

I don't remember why we sang "Silent Night". But, as the Antolini stood at port arms in front of the pile, we could see the rifle had no magazine. So, preferring not to give him a hard time because of Carrino, we returned to our drinking.

Carrino gave us the wall lockers. But he withheld the footlockers, and Sergeant Green said they'd serve well for file archives. So some of us organized a smaller but more successful protest.

"Does your key to the padlock on the office supplies ConEx fit the padlocks on the ones with the footlockers in them?" Reinke asked me.

It did, and, after evening chow, Taylor drove him and Strickland and me down to the PSC. We loaded enough footlockers into the mail truck for our tent. SFC Green said nothing to me about that, and the next day he ordered delivering footlockers to all the tents.

But next Carrino announced that the 1LT who was acting as our company commander while the LTC who was officially our company commander commanded the PSC had decided we should guard our company area and the PSC and that the E5's and E6's would act as sergeants of the guard.

I didn't know why clerks stood guard in Germany but not in Vietnam. But, not being in a position to question such requirements anywhere, I found myself sergeant of the guard with Cleve one of the guards. The acting company commander also acted as officer of the day, but he didn't inspect the guards. He simply turned them over to me.

"Cleve," I said after the 1LT left the formation. "You're Super."

But, instead of going back to our tent, he sat in the orderly tent with me, and that day was Reinke's birthday. So Reinke, Strickland, and Taylor brought us, in two brown plastic tumblers from the mess hall, some alcoholic stuff they'd mixed to celebrate it. I cared little, either what it was or that one shouldn't drink alcohol on guard duty, but soon I cared a little more.

"Here comes Carrino," said Taylor looking out the screen door.

So I set my drink on the floor beneath a desk and sat on the desk.

"Everything quiet?" asked Carrino, stepping into the tent.

"Everything's quiet," I said.

But then he looked down at my drink, and then he looked from the drink to me, and then he looked at each of the others in the tent.

But then, saying nothing more, he turned and left the tent, and, whatever was in that stuff, I was so drunk by the end of the first four-hour guard shift that I sat down behind the orderly tent, leaned back against its sandbag back wall, and passed out, and, when I awoke, a pack of dogs was staring at me.

I stood up slowly, afraid the dogs might attack. But they turned and went away. So I walked around to the front of the tent and into it. Cleve had changed the guards twice and was sitting at one of the desks, reading a book and apparently sober.

"Thanks, Cleve," I said to no reply.

But he introduced me to a new guy in the company who didn't sleep in our tent. He was from Maine. His name was Walter Batchelder. He was tall and otherwise large and was also in thick glasses with thick black plastic frames. But Cleve said he was alright.

"Too bad the Class VI store's downhill from here," said Batchelder. "Otherwise we could build a sluice to save ourselves all these trips."

So I liked him, and, upon Cleve's recommendation, we agreed to go to Hong Kong together on R&R.

But I was also finding other things to do. By then I was also spending some time with the guys from Hawaii. One of them was tall and blond. The other was shorter and had dark hair. We called the shorter one Robbie. Until he told of some letters he received from some second-graders at home, few of us knew his name was Andre Robinson.

"One of them asked me whether I was a boy or a girl," he said.

One Sunday more than a dozen of us lined up naked at an end of a row of ConEx containers between our supply tent and the back of the back of my tent to jump from one of them as Robbie lay below it in the sand taking pictures with a 35 mm camera.

One night, after showering alone with cold water from one of the 55 gallon drums on top of the wooden building we'd built for that, I lay on my back on one of the benches where we put our clothes while we showered, to masturbate with soap.

I never did that again. I feared someone might enter. But Cleve and I developed a habit of sometimes drinking after the others turned off the lights in our tent to go to sleep. That developed into a habit of masturbating as we sat side by side against the sandbag wall at the back of our tent, and one night we did that leaning against the sandbags of a bunker on the hill behind the latrines. From there we could see tracers streaking through the air over the mainland.

"Maybe we could help each other," I said.

"I'm not going to do that," replied Cleve.

But soon Cleve's tour ended. He left the night of my second turn as sergeant of the guard. As he walked down the boardwalk from the tents to where Taylor waited to drive him to the air base, I stood outside the orderly tent and waved farewell to him. But, with his duffle bag on his right shoulder, he lifted his left hand and showed me the back of it with only its middle finger visible to me above its fist, and my sexual desire wasn't for him but for objects of my imagination.

Before he left, Strickland suggested hiring a girl to clean our tent and do our laundry. I young girl was cleaning the house we built for the LTC commanding the PSC. Supposing she was doing more for the LTC than cleaning his house, I readily accepted Strickland's suggestion.

He hired a pregnant woman, but a girl younger than she and not pregnant spent much time with her in our tent. So, the morning after Cleve left, while I was trying to sleep after guard duty, I used my sheets only to cover the parts of my body my boxer shorts would have covered, had I slept in them. Because of the heat, I always slept naked there, but then I imagined the girl giving me a "special".

She didn't, but time for my R&R to Hong Cong with Batchelder arrived, and I took more cash than I'd taken to Tokyo. I sold my camera to another guy in the company and hit a jackpot on a slot machine at the NCO club two nights before we left. So I landed in Hong Kong with about \$500 in cash.

Our time there began with instructions for dealing with prostitutes. With hundreds of others, we sat in a room at the R&R center for nearly an hour listening to a major tell us how to avoid diseases and avoid paying more than the ordinary rate. Then, from some brochures, we selected the Park Hotel, a high-rise hotel in the center of Hong Kong. There a woman took us into an office and

required us to pay in advance for our five nights there. Batchelder asked her whether she could recommend a tailor.

I hadn't returned my sports jacket in Yokohama, but buying "custom-tailored" suits was customary for troops on R&R in Hong Kong, and the woman told us she'd send a tailor to Batchelder's room.

The tailor showed us samples of fabrics and pictures of suits. Each of us ordered two suits from him for delivery the next day. But Batchelder also asked him whether he could get him a woman. The tailor said he'd send one to the hotel's bar. I went with Batchelder to the bar to wait for her. Another woman was sitting alone at the bar. I sat beside her and talked with her. Batchelder sat on the other side of me.

"You friss cross young man," she said to me.

"I think she means 'first class'," said Batchelder.

She said her name was Elizabeth. When the tailor brought the other woman, Elizabeth invited us to go with her to a private club. We flagged a taxi. Elizabeth gave the driver an address. At the address, she directed us into an elevator, pushed the button for the floor, and pushed another button beside a wood panel beside a door across the hallway from where we left the elevator.

The panel slid up. A man behind the panel asked Batchelder his name, wrote it in a ledger and on a card, and gave the card to him. Then he turned to me and asked me my name.

"Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald," I said.

"Alright, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the man after writing that in the book and on a card, giving the card to me, and pushing a button to unlock the door. "Go right in."

Inside, sitting in deep soft chairs around a low table, we ordered drinks.

"She's old," Batchelder whispered to me, leaning away from the woman the tailor brought. "I wonder how I can get rid of her."

So I leaned to Elizabeth and asked her.

"OK," she said. "I take care of it."

She led the other woman to a corner of the room and talked with her for a few minutes.

"She say we have to give her taxi money," she said, returning to the table but leaving the other woman in the corner.

The amount was less than the major said was the ordinary price of a prostitute. Batchelder gave it to Elizabeth. She returned to the other woman. The other woman left. Elizabeth returned to the table. We had a couple of drinks there, but Elizabeth and I left Batchelder on the street and went to her apartment.

In her bed, I licked her vagina. Next morning I asked her why it didn't smell like a vagina. She showed me a jar of Massengill douche powder and told me to call her Liz. She invited me to spend the remaining nights of my R&R with her. I gave her some cash to buy me a couple of bottles of Johnny Walker Red Label scotch. She gave me a key to her apartment. So I went to the Batchelder's and my hotel and went with him to ask for a refund of the cash I'd paid for the four nights I wouldn't stay there.

The woman I'd paid took us into the office again. She required me to give her the address of where I'd be instead. Elizabeth had given me her address for me to be able to find my way back. So the woman gave me the cash, but Batchelder and I returned to Batchelder's room, to accept delivery of the suits.

The tailor hadn't rounded the corners of the lapels of my suits. I'd asked him to do that because of pictures I'd seen in *Playboy* magazine. He said he'd need an hour to make the changes. So Batchelder and I spent the hour drinking scotch he already had in his room. I told him Liz's vagina didn't stink.

As soon as the tailor returned, we changed into two of our four new suits and went to Liz's apartment. I asked her to recommend a restaurant. She took us to one on a high floor of a high-rise building. We joined others at a long table along a window through which we could see the harbor. That table also had a white cloth. I talked with everyone at the table and paid everyone's bill.

Liz told me in her apartment that I shouldn't have done that

"I thought you friss cross young man," she said.

I counted my remaining cash. It less than fifty dollars. But she didn't ask me to return the key. I slept in her bed, ate fried rice she brought home, and drank the scotch I'd asked her to buy. But she slept on her sofa.

She brought home her son. He played on the living room floor with a big plastic toy .50 caliber machine gun that made noises and threw sparks. She told me his name was Johnny and that his father had given him the gun and was a GI. From then until I left her apartment to return to Vietnam, my only time outside it was part of an afternoon with Batchelder. He came to the apartment and asked me whether I'd like to go with him to find the Pier One Bar. Cleve had told us it was in Kowloon and was like Harry's. Our walk to the ferry to Kowloon took us through a narrow street beside his hotel. Shops there sold chickens hanging whole by their feet. From the ferry we saw the floating market.

We didn't find the Pier 1 Bar but we drank a bottle of beer each in another bar. It was in a basement. I played the Beatles's song "Hey Jude" on the jukebox. It was popular then. I asked Batchelder to lend me fifty dollars.

"No," he said with no explanation.



But he paid for both bottles of beer, and, on Hong Kong Island, before I returned to Elizabeth's apartment, he also paid for my beer in the Playboy Bar. It was a small bar with B girls. He sat at the bar beside one with long black hair and large breasts. I sat on the other side of him. I repeated to him some the instructions the major at the R&R center gave us. I don't know why I thought I should do that.

"You were right," said Batchelder at the R&R center while we awaited our flight back to Vietnam. "Her pussy didn't stink either."

A few days later, as we sat with others at a table beneath the back flaps of a tent beside mine, Batchelder showed everyone there a picture he'd taken of me with Elizabeth on her sofa. She seemed to me to be older and uglier than I remembered her to be. I didn't remember his taking the picture.

A kid from Louisiana took Cleve's cot.

"Jambalaya, horse shit pie, mother fucker," he sang, strumming a cheap guitar he brought to Vietnam.

His first time on guard duty, he passed the time stabbing sandbags with his bayonet. He also snuck out of the company area nights to crawl beneath the concertina wire around the village to call on someone he told us he married. He made several trips to the Cam Ranh Bay dispensary for treatment of results of that.

Such trips to the dispensary weren't extraordinary. Most mornings the line outside it was longer than the building. My last visit to the village sent me there. But sneaking in to the village at night wasn't ordinary, and neither was stabbing sandbags. So, though I don't remember for what, the Louisiana kid received what the Army called an Article 15, nonjudicial punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and then he left our company.

My visit to the dispensary was two days after my last visit to the village. Unable to find the girl Cleve found, I wandered from shack to shack with others of my tent until I found a girl I thought pretty enough. I thought the one I selected was a compromise, but I ejaculated before my penis was entirely inside her. Then, to try to do it again, I pretended I hadn't. But, after a few minutes, I saw her dismay and quit trying. I used a condom, but, the next day, a sore was on my penis.

I asked the doctor at the dispensary whether the sore was syphilis. He said it wasn't, that it was a herpetic lesion. He prescribed some tetracycline capsules and told me to take one each day for thirty days and to drink no alcoholic or carbonated beverages during those thirty days. I hadn't drank carbonated beverages since the rum and cokes with Cleve. I didn't stop drinking beer, but the sore went away in fewer than thirty days.

My next two tentmates could hardly have been more different from the Louisiana kid. They were graduates of Duke University. They enlisted in the Army to attend Officer Candidate School. Their purpose for that was to avoid induction into being privates. But they dropped out of OCS. So they came to Vietnam as PFC's. Their names were Webb and Koestler.

Both said they were Christians, and neither drank alcohol, smoked marijuana or tobacco, or used the prostitutes in the village, but Webb showed us a towel he said was his girlfriend, won a contest at the USO to spend three days at an in-country R&R center, and returned saying he'd lost his virginity.

Koestler said he played basketball at Duke. To show his basketball skill, he tried to change a lightbulb hanging from the ceiling of the Quonset hut by jumping to it. The most remarkable result of that was a series of graceless thuds.

By then, excepting Strickland, Reinke, and Taylor, all my tentmates who came to Vietnam with me had returned home. So I decided to try to leave the 518<sup>th</sup> early, but not to go home. In Germany, my primary MOS, military occupational specialty, had changed from armor to personnel, making armor my secondary MOS. A directive came to the PSC requiring reclassifying to combat engineering anyone with an armor MOS but not performing in it. I submitted a 1049 asking that I spend the remainder of my time in Vietnam performing in my new secondary MOS, as a tunnel rat. Tunnel rats crawled into tunnels to disarm booby traps Vietnamese may have put in them.

I also argued that my current duty MOS wasn't personnel but administration, but the PSC's personnel management officer disapproved the 1049. He cited a regulation saying that in a combat zone the Army could use anyone however it wished. But, of course, that only exacerbated my discontent.

Our Assistant Supply Sergeant acquired some steaks from the Navy. We organized a barbecue for all of our company on the sand above our tents. Drunk at the barbecue, some of us began tearing shirts from one another, and some tore my red shirt from me. So I decided to tear the LTC's shirt from him. Everyone I asked to help me refused, and some threatened to stop me, if I tried to do it myself. I told them the LTC must have a sense of humor, but they ignored that. So that went no further. But, a few nights later, I picked a fight with a cook.

His name was Pearson. He was a short guy with tattoos and a habit of insulting guys bigger than he was, and one night I heard him doing that behind my tent. So I rose from my lawn chair, set down my beer, and went outside.

"Hey, Pearson," I said, "why don't you pick on somebody your own size."

“What’s your problem?” he said turning from the big guy to me.

“You’re an asshole,” I said. “And I think that’s everybody’s problem.”

“I don’t want any trouble with you,” he said, waving his hands in the air in front of him, but I kept insulting him, and a crowd gathered.

SFC Green also walked past. The senior NCO’s had their own tent beside the junior commissioned officers’ tent on the sand between the enlisted men’s squad tents and the PSC. So I didn’t know why he was walking past my tent. But he didn’t stop. So I continued insulting Pearson until I found an insult that provoked.

“You’re a fucking coward,” I said, and one of his fists immediately hit my mouth.

But, at that instant, my mouth wasn’t open. So my teeth didn’t do the damage they did in Florida. So I responded with several quick punches to Pearson’s face, and, as had I in Panama City, he fell to his knees and, with his hands over his head, begged me to stop. I let him return to his feet, but then, with the standard takedown I’d learned in wrestling in high school, I returned him to the ground. I tried to pin him, but he managed to get his legs around me and lock me in a scissor hold. So, with him hanging from my waist, I returned to my feet and swung his head against one of the ConEx containers between our tents and the supply tent.

The crowd groaned at the at the sound of his head hitting the metal, but he loosened his lock, dropped to the ground, rose to his feet, waved his hands in the air, and began apologizing.

“Let’s go to the mess hall and eat some ice cream,” he said, and we did, and the crowd disbursed, and that ended the fight.

But, as I returned to my tent, I saw Carrino entering the junior NCO’s tent. I thought he might be there to deal with the fight. So I followed him.

“You’re drunk,” he said as soon as I spoke. “Go to bed.”

I kept talking, but he repeated the instruction. Then I returned to my tent, but I didn’t then go to bed. Next morning SFC Green called me to his desk. That didn’t surprise me, but he said nothing to me of the fight.

“The general’s coming to see the PSC,” he said. “Do you think you can build the colonel a coffee table?”

So I scrounged up some Masonite and scrap lumber and sat in the sand outside the back door of the Quonset hut to build it, but, as I worked on it, the warrant officer who was the PSC’s Personnel Actions Officer walked past.

“Hey, Harman,” he said stopping and looking down at me. “I hear you gave Pearson a boxing lesson last night.”

“Oh no, sir,” I said looking up. “I don’t think so.”

“Well,” he said, “He was wearing sunglasses in the chow line this morning for some reason.”

I shrugged. He walked in. I finished the table.

SFC Green also let me slide regarding marijuana.

The company provided transportation to and from work in the back of a deuce-and-a-half, but many of us preferred to walk, some to use that time to smoke a joint. Once, as I, after smoking one, slid down the hill at the end of the walk to the PSC, SFC Green was standing at the bottom of it at the end of the line of ConEx containers. He was watching a crane unload crates from a deuce-and-a-half. I stopped to see why.

“Look at that,” he said pointing up at the crane.

“Yeah,” I said, gazing at the crane, still not knowing why he was there.

He turned and looked at me, but he said nothing.

By then marijuana was quite ordinary in our company, and one night the SGM let me slide. Galen, the marijuana smoker who taught me to play blackjack on the ship, had a classical guitar. One night, as I sat on a cot in his tent trying to play his guitar, the SGM entered the tent. What I was doing with the guitar was somewhat like I did with the legal pads in Vaughn’s apartment and Cleve’s hotel room. The SGM looked at me somewhat as SFC Green did at the bottom of the hill. But he left the tent with no word to or from me.

My tentmates remained an exception to the generality of smoking marijuana there. Once, before marijuana became so popular there, I asked Strickland whether he smoked it. He said he hadn’t. So I shared a joint with him and talked to him as Vaughn had talked to me about leaper and marijuana and acid. Another carpentry project SFC Green assigned to me was to build a mailbox for the company’s individual outgoing mail. I built it in about the size and shape and colors of the mailboxes then on poles on streets in the United States. As Strickland and I shared that joint, we walked past it. It’s paint wasn’t yet dry. So it was drying beneath the back flaps of our tent. Telling Strickland marijuana expands one’s mind. That was before I sold the camera Connie sent me. So I took a picture of it. I told Strickland I’d show it to him later for him to compare the two ways of seeing it.

Of course, because I never took the film to the PX, I didn’t, but that was the only time I knew any of my tentmates other than Cleve to smoke marijuana, and, by the time pot was ordinary in our company, I cared nearly nothing for how anyone felt about marijuana and little for how anyone felt about me, but, after it became popular and after Cleve left and after Hong Cong, a new replacement irritated me more than had Pearson, and for less reason.

We were in the back of a deuce-and-a-half returning from work to our tents. Instead of sitting flat or leaning against a side or the front of the bed of the truck, he squatted in the middle it. He winced each time a bump or turn caused him to put a hand on the bottom of the bed to keep from losing his balance. That evening he came into our tent to talk with Reinke. I didn't rise from my lawn chair, but I started insulting him. He ignored me for a few minutes, but, as with Pearson, I persisted.

"You think you can take me?" he asked, striding to my cot.

But I kept my seat and said nothing more to him, and he shook his head and walked away. So my shame of that cowardice intensified my desire to leave the 518<sup>th</sup>, and another incident further intensified that that desire. But it made it more particular to the United States.

In hope of a breeze, we kept the back door of the Quonset hut open while we worked. One morning a young woman walked through it. Her auburn hair made clear that she wasn't Vietnamese. So did her skirt and blouse, their blue and white stripes. They were a Red Cross uniform. So did her brown penny loafers. Excepting a few flight attendants, I hadn't seen a woman not oriental since I boarded the ship in Oakland, and the dust on her bare legs below her skirt did nothing to diminish the charm of that moment.

"Who's in charge?" she asked Reinke.

His offset press was near the backdoor. He looked at Strickland, and Strickland pointed to me. So she walked to my desk and began to speak.

But the sight of her took so much of my attention that I could neither speak to her nor understand what she was saying. Neither do I know how I managed to stand, but I did and walked around the partition, and past SFC Green's and the SGM's desks, to CWO Wright's. Neither do I know how she knew to follow me. But she did.

As CWO Wright looked at her and then at me, I pointed at him. But then I turned away and walked back past the other desks and around the partition and sat at my desk in silent wonder. I don't remember how long.

Carrino's efforts to restore order failed. The SGM who saw me trying to play Galen's guitar left. I thought his replacement was older than people who ordinarily were in the Army, but he passed on to me a pair of jungle boots and a jungle fatigue shirt our assistant supply sergeant scrounged. They were too big for me, but I wore them to work. I used a magic marker to draw an approximation of my rank insignia on the shirt's sleeves.

Carrino also said we needed to accord more closely with Army haircut regulations. An SP4 was augmenting his Army pay by cutting our hair in one of the showers we'd built. I asked him to cut mine short on the sides and back but

leave the top as it was. My intention was to satirize what the Army called white sidewalls. But no one laughed. The barber told me I'd have to pay his full price again if wanted him to finish the job. My tentmates responded by turning away with something like sneers. SFC didn't sneer, but he frowned wordlessly and turned away. I paid again.

Strickland, after hiring the pregnant maid, adopted a pregnant stray dog. He said he though our company needed a mascot. He named it Agee, for the acronym AG. The dog disappeared for a while and returned not pregnant but with no puppies. Some of us said Vietnamese probably ate the puppies.

At work SFC Green brought a package behind the partition and opened it there. It was a cigar box full of cash. He said his wife sent it to him. The Army paid us in scrip. We could exchange it for piasters but not for dollars. SFC Green said he intended to exchange the cash on the black market. I didn't understand how that worked. I didn't aske him to explain, but I worried about him.

He was also African American. My teachers in Coldwater told their classes that all men were created equal. But all of them were European American, and so was nearly everyone else in Coldwater. Cleve mocked SFC Green for pronouncing "laundry" as though its spelling were "lundry". I liked him and supposed Cleve's reason for not liking him may have been warnings he may have given him on his arrival at the company. But I decided to prove to SFC Green that our company wasn't racist. I walked to the Senior NCO tent, knocked on its screen door, told him I wanted to show him something, and led him across the sand and down the board walk between our two rows of tents. In one of them that night was a partly larger than most of our parties.

"See how black people and white people get along here?" I said pointing into the tent.

But I didn't invite him in. He nodded and walked back down the boardwalk. Then I felt how crude I was. But he gave me no indication that he held that against me.

Army Regulation permitted separation thirty days before beginning college classes if the separation date wasn't more than ninety day before the expiration of one's enlistment. I again requested admission to Wayne State. It's fall term began thirty days before the expiration of my enlistment. It again accepted me. I submitted another 1049. I received approval. Thirty days before my new separation date, telling my tentmates I was a short-timer, I quit going to work. Instead I sat in my lawn chair and drank beer. My replacement had already arrived. So I knew no one needed me in the office, and none of my

tentmates told me anyone was complaining. But, at about midmorning on my third day of that, SFC Green entered our tent.

“You’d better get your ass to work,” he said looking down at me and my beer in my lawn chair.

Then he turned and left the tent.

I finished that can of beer and walked across the sand. But, finding my replacement sitting at my desk, still I did no work. Instead I criticized all he did.

He’d told us he was from a tiny town in Tennessee. One night he showed us a picture he said a girl had sent him of herself sitting naked on a bed. Another night he stood naked on his footlocker and pulled his foreskin out from his penis.

“I’ve got the longest, skinniest dick,” he said.

While I was training him, a Mexican replacement taught me profanity in Spanish, and, also at work during all that, I repeatedly farted as loudly as I could, laughing as I did it.

“I’m the champeen farter of Vietnam,” I said.

My replacement didn’t complain about that.

But he complained about my criticism of him.

“Fuck you,” he said. “You think you’re so goddamned smart.”

But he didn’t have to tolerate that long.

“Harman,” said SFC Green from the other side of the partition.

So I walked around the partition and stood in front of his desk.

“Let’s go for a ride,” he said, rising from his chair behind it.

Another reason I wished to leave Vietnam was that Army’s corps of engineers was building us new wooden office buildings and barracks. SFC Green drove us in the LTC’s jeep to one of the new office building. He stepped out of the jeep and went into the building. I followed him. No one else was there. He said the building was to be our new office building. The barracks were two-story. That building was one-story. A pile of 4x8 sheets of half-inch plywood was in front of it. Inside the building its studs were bare.

“We need some interior walls to insulate the air-conditioning,” he said. “You can use that pile of plywood out front. You don’t have to be in a big hurry. You’ve got 26 days.”

The ceiling beams were seven feet above the concrete floor. the studs were sixteen inches apart. A crosscut saw was on top of the pile of plywood. A box of nails was beside the saw. All I had to do was saw a foot from one end of each sheet of plywood and nail what remained of it to the studs. 24 sheets of plywood were in the stack. So, each of the next 24 days, I walked there and cut and nailed one sheet of plywood. Then I walked back to my tent and spent most

of the remainder of each of those days sitting in my lawn chair and drinking beer. No one either inspected my work or complaining about anything I did anywhere during those 24 days.

But one Sunday evening SFC Green again came to my tent, and, thought we had no work formations there other than for guard duty, he told me the whole company was to form near the bulletin board next morning before work, and that I had to be there.

I supposed the reason he came to my tent was that I probably wouldn't have made the formation if he'd asked my tent mates to tell me of it.

Ronald Philip Daniel Long, an SP4 in our company, called himself Arpediel for his four initials. Seeing him in red socks with his fatigues, I'd told him I liked his socks. He told me they were his Monday socks. I bought a pair of red socks and made them part of my nonconformity.

"Pull your blousing rubbers down," said Sergeant Green pointing to mine as I stood in the formation that Monday waiting for the 1LT acting as our company commander to come up to the formation from the orderly tent.

Blousing rubbers were elastics for gathering bottoms of trouser legs at the tops of boots. SFC Green was referring to my having mine above the tops of my boots to show my socks. I pulled them down, but, as soon as SFC Green turned away, I tugged on my trouser legs, to pull them up again. We went through that cycle several times.

"Shit," I said, the last time he told me to pull them down, "I hope I'm not getting the Army Commendation Medal."

"We tried to get it for you," said SFC Green. "But they said they were giving out too many medals."

The reason that was the last time was that, as SFC Green said that, the lieutenant arrived at the formation. When he called my name, I again tugged up my blousing rubbers, but then I conformed with official protocol for such occasions. I stepped back from my rank, did a left face, marched to the end of the rank, did a right turn, and marched to the 1LT. But I didn't salute him, and he handed me a certificate of achievement with a frown and no words. I did an about face and returned to my place in the formation. He dismissed it.

I spent my last evening in Vietnam losing at poker with some of my tentmates. We used the pillow on my cot as the table. As we did that SFC Green again came into our tent.

"You're spending your last night here playing poker?" he said looking down at me.

I shrugged looking up at him.

"Well," he said. "Best of luck to you. It's been a pleasure."



I gladly rose and shook the hand he offered and told him knowing him was also a pleasure, and I genuinely meant that, and wasn't happy to see him leave the tent. But I lost that hand of poker and others, borrowed twenty dollars from Strickland, promised to pay him back in Detroit, and also lost that twenty dollars. Taylor drove me to the airbase, and Reinke and Strickland and some of the others rode along, and they also shook hands with me. But my final farewell was more appropriate to my time with the 518<sup>th</sup> than was the hand-shaking.

“We don't have time for that,” said an SP4 stepping from a building.

“Fuck you,” said Reinke to the SP4, and I followed him into the building.

The plane landed at McChord Air Force Base. An Army bus took us to a mess hall at Fort Lewis. There the Army fed us steaks.

But I'd eaten plenty of steaks in Vietnam. What I appreciated of that meal was the fresh cold milk from a big stainless steel dispenser. The milk in our mess hall in Vietnam was in little cardboard cartons saying it was reconstituted. Expecting the aftertaste, I'd winced at my every sip of it. At Ft. Lewis I made more than a half-dozen trips to the stainless steel dispenser to refill my brown plastic tumbler.

Next morning, I collected nearly five hundred dollars in final Army pay, changed into civilian clothing, threw the fatigues I was in into a trash barrel, threw my big black Leeds flight bag into a taxi, and asked the driver to take me to a cheap hotel in downtown Seattle.

## Chapter 14

### Sagebrush

The title of a chapter of Kerouac 's novel *Desolation Angels* is Seattle Burlesque". In that chapter the protagonist tires of watching for forest fires from a mountaintop above Seattle. So he deserts the mountain and goes down to the city to a theatre to see some strippers.

My memory tells me Cleve loaned me that book in Vietnam, but my memory also tells me that, before I read that chapter in that book, I read it in another book and thought it was a short story.

But, be any of that as it may be, I learned in Vietnam that topless dancing became popular in the United States while I was there. Strickland wrote to Carol Doda. She was a woman who did that famously in San Francisco. She sent him a photograph of her with her autograph. He Thermo-faxed a copy of it for each of his tentmates.

After checking into the hotel to which the taxi driver took me, I walked around Seattle's central business district seeking a burlesque house. But I found neither a neither a burlesque house nor a topless bar. So I flagged another taxi.

"Can you find me a prostitute?" I asked the African American driver.

He drove me to a street with much light and many dark people.

"Are you sporting, honey?" he asked a tall thin woman.

She nodded and climbed into the front seat beside the driver.

"Do you want me to wait for you?" the driver asked me as I paid him, in the front yard of a big old house, apparently a private residence.

"Yes," I said.

I followed the woman onto the porch of the house. Before ringing the doorbell, she asked me to pay her in advance. Inside, she gave some of the cash to a man sitting with a woman and some children at a dining table. Then she led me into a bedroom, removed her panties, lay on her back across the bed, lifted her skirt, and spread her legs. I lowered my pants, put my penis into her vagina, and leaned my face toward hers.

"No kissing," she said, turning her face away.

I finished and left the house. The taxi driver hadn't waited. I walked toward the lights of the little neighborhood business district. Two African American women passed me walking in the direction from which I'd come.

"You'd better zip up your pants," said one of them. "Your stuff's going to fall out."

Next morning I bought a road map of the United States. I found on it a highway heading east from Seattle. A sign on the street on which I was standing said it was that highway. I looked at the sun to see which way was east, turned my back to that direction, and stuck out a thumb. A few minutes later a red Chevrolet Impala convertible with its top down stopped in front of me.

"Where you headed?" the driver asked.

"Michigan," I told him.

"I can take you to Pendleton," he replied.

I didn't know where Pendleton was. But, supposing he wouldn't have offered to take me there if it weren't on the way to Michigan, I threw my bag onto the back seat, climbed into the front seat, and looked at the car's odometer. It said four miles.

"I'm going to the rodeo there," said the driver, pulling away from the curb.

On I-90 he asked me to open the glove compartment.

"Pour yourself a drink," he said.

In the glove compartment were a pint of whiskey and some small plastic cups.

"No thanks," I said. "I'm okay."

"Mind pouring me one?" he asked.

I poured some of the whiskey into one of the small plastic cups and handed it to him. But he emptied the cup in one gulp, threw it onto the floor in front of him, took the bottle from me, took a swig from it, and put the bottle between his legs. Then he accelerated to 110 miles per hour and kept our speed at about that for most of the remaining more than 250 miles to Pendleton.

In Pendleton I also easily caught a ride. Crossing Idaho, I saw nearly every kind of scenery I'd ever seen in the United States. I also saw a sign like a no-passing sign but with another instruction.

"Sage brush is free," it said. "Stuff some in your car."

No policeman bothered me until I reached Wyoming. There, a little after midnight, as I stood thumbing on the main street of a small town a few miles south of Cheyenne, a patrol car stopped in front of me. The policeman stepped out of the car. He was extremely wide with gray hair and a Smokey the Bear hat.

“You probably won’t get a ride tonight,” he said looking down at my bag. “There’s a hotel down the street,” he said

“I’d rather keep trying,” I said. “If it’s alright with you.”

“I know what the problem is,” he said, looking at my bag again, after looking down the street toward the hotel.

Then, before looking at me again, he pointed his right thumb toward his left rear. The hotel was to his right rear. Then he turned his head in the direction in which his thumb pointed.

“There’s a laundromat over there,” he said. “I usually lock it up at about this time, but you can pull a couple of benches together and get some sleep, if you want to. I’ll come and check on you in a few hours.”

“Thanks,” I said, supposing his suggestion was because he didn’t know I had more than four hundred dollars in twenty dollar-bills in my bag, and he climbed back into the patrol car and drove away.

In the next half hour, no car passed me. So I picked up my bag, walked across the street, pulled a couple of wooden benches together, and tried to sleep. At about 4:00 a.m. I heard the door open and opened my eyes.

“Oh,” said the policeman, leaning through the door. “OK. Just checking on you.”

He leaned back through the door and closed it, but I rose, returned to the street, and caught a ride to Minneapolis. In Minneapolis I caught a ride to Chicago. There I spent some more of my separation pay to check into the Mark Twain Hotel, at the beginning of Rush Street. Then I showered, walked up Rush Street, and stepped up steps from the street to the entrance a bar advertising nude dancers.

“Got any ID?” asked a man at the door.

I showed him my tank drivers license from Fort Knox.

“This isn’t good enough,” he said returning it to me and looking away, and I nearly wept.

I thought turning 21 in Tokyo would free me to drink alcohol in the United States, and I’d especially hoped to do that in the newly popular topless bars, and that guy was refusing me both in Chicago.

But then I remembered my DD Form 214, my Armed Forces of the United States Report of Transfer or Discharge, which I’d folded and put in my Moroccan leather wallet I’d bought at the PX at Fort Knox. So I took it out of the wallet, unfolded it, and handed it to the doorman. He looked at it, handed it back to me, and opened the door.

So I ordered a scotch on the rocks at the bar and watched a woman dancing behind a cloth surrounding a stage behind the bar. But, though the cloth

was translucent enough to show her shape, it wasn't transparent enough to show whether she was nude. So, not ordering a second drink, I returned to the shoddy old hotel for the sleep I'd missed hitchhiking.

But a telephone on a stand beside the bed interrupted that.

"It's past checkout time," I heard when I picked it up.

"I'm staying another night," I replied.

"You have to pay in advance," the caller replied.

"I'll be down in a few minutes," I replied.

"I'll send someone up," he told me, and he hung up.

So I mostly dressed and sat on a side of the bed until I heard a knock on the door.

"How much is it?" I asked the African American man outside it.

"25 dollars," he told me, and I had no fives.

"Do you have change?" I asked, showing him a twenty and a ten.

"I'll bring it to you," he said, but I didn't wait for him to return.

I slept until I awoke with no help, showered, went downstairs, and told the European American desk clerk what the African American man had told me. But he told me he didn't know to whom I was referring.

I wondered how he couldn't. But I didn't argue with him. I wandered aimlessly until I saw the Marshall Field department store. Then I decided to buy a winter coat. Thinking of my Reyburn's wardrobe, I told a salesman I'd been in Vietnam for a year and didn't know the current fashions.

"Can you recommend something?" I asked.

He scowled at me, but he recommended a camel-colored car coat with toggle buttons and a hood. I felt somewhat as I felt asking the surgeon at the 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital whether I'd be able to really run, but I thought the car coat was too casual. So I bought a shorter black and gray herringbone car coat with a faux fur lining and collar. That night I drank in a few bars with no dancers. Next morning, seeing a sign on Michigan Avenue saying it was U.S. 12, I again stuck out thumb. In Coldwater, U.S. 12 was Chicago Street. A few hours after I left Chicago, near a sign pointing north to Three Rivers, a sheriff's car stopped beside me on the shoulder. The deputy in it rolled down his window.

"Got any ID?" he asked.

I handed him my DD 214.

He looked at it much longer than had the Rush Street doorman.

"You did alright for yourself," he said, and, handing it back to me and asking no more questions, he bade me good luck and drove on.

My next ride was to the western edge of Coldwater. There the driver turned off Chicago Street into the neighborhood on the channel behind the

Willows Tavern. I went into the tavern, sat at the bar, and ordered a bottle of Budweiser, the first bottle of beer I legally drank in Coldwater.

While I was doing that, I made a telephone call. I was sitting at an end of the bar. A telephone was on the wall there. I'd decided to use some of my savings to buy an Austin Healy Sprite like the one of Jay's Sandy's father wouldn't let her buy, and I decided to buy it before I went to my mother's house. So I called Atkinson to ask whether I could spend that night at his house and use his car to drive to Battle Creek to buy the car.

While I was talking to him, Gale Richardson and Linda Tupalek came into the tavern and sat in a banquette. Gale was the Gale Kubiak said owned my Austin of England before my mother bought it from the used car lot. Linda was a daughter of my sixth grade teacher whose husband owned Coldwater's Lincoln and Mercury dealership. Both had ignored me in high school. But they greeted me as though they hadn't.

So I took my beer to the banquette and awaited Atkinson there. But the conversation was sparse, and Atkinson stood while I gulped the last of my beer and bade them farewell. He said nothing to them, and he also seemed to me to be reluctant to let me spend the night at his home.

His mother had died, and his father had married a woman who had a son much younger than Dick and owned a farm a few miles from town. Atkinson told me she didn't want his father to drink but that he hid whiskey all over the house. He seemed to me to be proud of both that and his new little brother. He also had enrolled in Olivet College and was driving the forty miles there and back. His father had given him the Plymouth Belvedere he'd bought when he gave him the DeSoto, and he also seemed to me to be reluctant to let me borrow the car to go to Battle Creek. My plan was to buy the Sprite from the foreign car dealership where bought the crank for the Austin. But he did. So I drove him to Olivet and drove myself back to Coldwater, to withdraw the cash for the Sprite from my savings account.

But, in Battle Creek, I found that the dealership had closed. So I found a Volkswagen dealership, bought a red beetle with whitewall tires but no radio, and paid sticker price. The total, including sales tax and registration fees, was \$1884.32. I counted 95 twenty-dollar bills from the stack of them I'd withdrawn from my savings account.

"Where did you get the cash?" asked the salesman.

"I saved it in Vietnam," I told him.

"Do you have insurance?" he asked.

He drove me to an insurance agency. I don't remember how I did any of that with no drivers license. But I did.

“Can I leave that car here for a few hours?” I asked him, pointing at Atkinson’s Plymouth when we returned to the dealership.

Then I drove to my mother’s house and showed everyone there my new car before driving it to Olivet and driving Atkinson to his car.

I named the car Jenny, for a song on a Barbara Streisand album I’d bought in Vietnam and played but once, on Reinke’s record player.

“Jenny Rebecca, four days old,” says the song. “What a lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky, girl you are.”

Reinke laid a cigarette on its cover while it was in it and left it there long enough to melt part of one of its tracks, but that track wasn’t that song.

Excepting my family, the first person I gave a ride in it was Alice Harris. I took her to a Howard Johnson’s in Battle Creek and bought us lunch. We ate fried clams. Again she gave me news of Connie. She told she was marrying and that she’d invited her to the wedding.

“The invitation says ‘Miss Alice Harris and friend’,” she said. “Do you want to be my friend?”

I accepted and, after driving Alice home, drove to Branch’s Department Store to buy a wedding gift. Branch’s was Coldwater’s nearest equivalent to Macy’s. It was the only store in Coldwater with an elevator. Peggy and I had ridden the elevator for fun. Several times we spent our 25-cent allowances there. We bought packages in wrapping paper the store sold from a box in the store’s basement. The store called the box a grab bag.

I had no notion what to buy Connie. I bought her gift from the basement but not from the grab bag. I asked the old lady working there for advice. She recommended a Corning Ware casserole dish across an aisle from the grab bag. I didn’t feel it was appropriate to my memories of Connie. But I bought it and I asked the woman to giftwrap it.

The wedding was at Coldwater’s Lutheran church. It was a new brick building across Freemont Street from the high school and a block behind the school where I learned to read. It had little windows of what I thought were different colors of Plexiglas. That seemed cheap to me.

“Are you friends of the bride or the groom?” an usher asked Alice and me.

He led us to a pew on the right side of the aisle. All stood as Connie walked down the aisle with her father. She looked at me. Her head dropped in tears.

“Congratulations, Donovan,” I said to her father as I shook hands with him in the reception line.

He didn't reply, and neither did Connie's mother say anything to me, but Connie gave me a kiss like the first kiss she gave me, the one she gave me as she sat on her bicycle in her front yard on Washington Street.

"Goodbye, Bill," she said.

I didn't reply to that, but I turned to her husband and offered him a hand to shake.

"Congratulations," I said. "You're getting a great girl."

"Who are you?" he asked, but he shook the hand.

"Never mind," I replied, releasing his hand and turning away.

I drove Alice to the reception. It was in the basement of the Southern Michigan National Bank. I didn't go in. I didn't then know how offensive I was at the church, but I felt that I wouldn't be welcome at the reception. I handed the casserole dish to Alice, asked her take it inside, and left her there.

But that evening I took her to another new brick Coldwater church. It was on a hill west of Coldwater across U.S. 12 from the newer side of Coldwater's cemetery. I parked in front of the church, kissed her, and fondled her breasts. But she wouldn't let me do more.

A few days later I enrolled at Wayne State. After a few nights in one of Aunt Bertha's upstairs bedrooms, I rented a room on the second floor of a house in a residential neighborhood across the John Lodge Expressway from Wayne State's main campus and moved into it with my footlocker. It was one room with a double bed, a sink, and a small refrigerator. It had no bathroom, but one opened to the house's second floor hallway.

Before beginning classes, I also found a part time job at the main store of the Good Housekeeping Shops, a chain of department stores local to Detroit. My main job was helping the mail clerk afternoons after classes. But I also relieved the elevator operator for breaks and, evenings helped the file clerks.

The mail clerk's name was Sammy. He was African American and had but one eye. The elevator operator was also African American, and, excepting one European American woman, so were all the file clerks. But the file clerks' supervisor was a European American man.

The elevator operator's name was Otis. So was elevator manufacturer's. Otis operated the elevator far more skillfully than I. I nearly never could stop it fewer than three inches from the floor outside its door. So I nearly always had to tell the customers to watch their step. But I enjoyed operating the elevator more than anything else I did there. I found sorting and delivering the mail most difficult and found filing easiest but also most tedious.

had a half-hour break between my afternoon work and my evening work, and a bar was next door to the stores. So, one afternoon, I spent the half



hour at the bar. All the file clerks were there sitting at a big round table. So I joined them to drink my beer. But I never again went to that bar, and I never again saw any of the file clerks outside the store, so I spent some evenings at a bar on Chrysler Square. I found it after my evening work, driving aimlessly looking for a place to drink.

My first evening there, I opened a conversation with an African American sitting alone at the bar. I asked him whether he knew where I could find a prostitute. He told me he thought he probably could find one, and he did. I followed his directions and took her to my room. He waited in the hallway.

“Do you know what a hum job is?” I asked her in bed after we removed our clothes.

That was a line from a joke I’d heard.

“No,” she said. “What’s a hum job?”

“You put my balls in your mouth” I told her, “and hum.”

She did that briefly. But then I took them out for her to make me ejaculate by fellatio. Then, having no more interest in her, I rose to dress and told her to do the same.

“I thought you wanted to fuck,” she said.

I had, but I thought she was overweight, and her teeth were rotten. I didn’t tell her that. I simply said I didn’t, and her only reply to that was to ask me whether she could use the bathroom. I showed her where it was and waited for her in the hallway with the man who found her. He asked me for the cash for him to take a turn. I refused and drove them back to Chrysler Square.

Soon I moved to a larger room. It was in the same house, but it was on the first floor and had a sofa and a coffee table in addition to the bed. It also had door opening directly to a bathroom, but the bathroom also had a door opening to another room, and, through the door, I could hear the other room’s tenant talking to himself. Once I met him. I forgot to lock his door while I was in the bathroom. But neither of us said anything.

The rent for the smaller room was twelve dollars weekly. The rent for the larger was sixteen. The landlady lived across the street. I opened my first checking account in Detroit, and I did that before I rented the room, but the landlady didn’t take checks. She did the first time I paid my rent. But she told me that was an exception and that she wouldn’t again.

But Wayne State did. I requested V.A. education benefits as soon as I enrolled, but, while waiting for that, I paid for my tuition and books from my savings, and my college education began with a misunderstanding.

I told the admissions counselor I wished to major in English and minor in French. He reminded me that I’d asked to enroll in the Monteith College. In

Vietnam I'd received a letter asking me whether I wished to do that. The letter said the purpose of the Monteith College was flexibility. But I didn't understand that to mean I didn't need to select a major or minor.

I don't know why I decided to minor in France, and I had little interest in any of it, but the advisor let me enroll in the Monteith College while also majoring in English and minoring in French. I suppose the reason I chose French was that it seemed to me to be intellectual, but the advisor didn't ask me for an explanation.

Sammy invited me to a party at the home of some neighbors of his. They ate shrimp and chicken and drank a lot. Sammy unsuccessfully hit on an extremely large woman. I wore my Marshall Field winter coat to that September party, as I'd worn my Marshall Field trench to school on my first day in the eleventh grade. Sammy bought a coat like mine but with no false fur. He showed it to me at work Monday. He also gave me a girl's telephone number.

"She won't go out with me," he said. "But she might go out with you."

While he was delivering some mail, I called her. She invited me to her apartment and asked me to bring a friend for a friend of hers. Remembering I owed Strickland twenty dollars and that he'd given me his address in a Detroit suburb, I drove there, paid him the twenty dollars, and extended the girls request to him. He accepted the invitation.

He also told me the Vietnamese attacked Cam Ranh Bay before he left, and, that evening, I drove him and friend of his to a bar they recommended, found the bar too fancy for me, and drove them to my apartment to listen to Barbra Streisand.

The girl I called was Hispanic was of ordinary height, but I thought she was somewhat overweight. Her friend to whom she introduced Strickland and me had short red hair and was tall and of ordinary width. She and Strickland went into the kitchen. I sat on the sofa with the Hispanic girl. She rejected my kisses, but Strickland told me, as I drove him home, that the other girl let him touch every part of her body, excepting only her vagina.

I never saw any of them again, but I tried to make friends at the Chrysler Square bar. One night the woman who owned the bar asked me to give another woman in the bar a ride home. I drove her to the parking lot of an apartment complex. She and I sat in Jenny kissing and talking. She let me touch her breasts. So I asked her to invite me in. But she declined.

The next time I was in the bar its owner said little to me. But, at the bar, I talked with an old man who said he was a veteran. He suggested we go to Canada. I drove us across the bridge to a bar in Windsor he recommended, but

the bar was cold. So, after shivering all the time we took to drink one bottle of beer each, I drove him back to Chrysler Square.

But I gave him my address, and, a few days later I received a note from him asking me to pick up some things he'd left at the Chrysler Square bar and to take them to him at the V. A. hospital. Though reluctantly, the bar owner gave me in a cardboard box of things. I took it to the hospital and talked with the old man for a few minutes. He told me he had pneumonia and that he'd been there for it before. I never saw him again, and neither did I ever again go to that bar.

At work, while operating the elevator, I hit on a short blonde girl who worked in another administrative department. I thought she was also somewhat overweight but also somewhat pretty. I stopped the elevator between floors and asked her to go out with me after work. She said she would, but, when I went to her office after work to pick her up, she and all the other girls in the office ignored me. I don't remember how I could have both taken her out and helped the file clerks.

One of my classes was in a lecture hall. I couldn't pay enough attention to the lecturer to understand anything she said. All I remember of my French classes is how to say in French that Paris is situated on the Seine. Of my English classes I remember little more than the instructor's saying some of the papers his students submitted were "unprofessional".

He gave no reason other than that the students didn't type them. I'd handwritten my papers for Woody's classes and hadn't bought a typewriter for college, and my savings were nearly gone. So, for many reasons, I quit both school and my job. But I told myself I was quitting to be more like Kerouac and told the Good Housekeeping Shops' Personnel Director my reason for quitting was that, because Sammy had a superiority complex, I couldn't work with him.

"A one-eyed nigger mail clerk has a superiority complex?" he said.

In my Kerouac pretention was a decision to go to Mexico, but I loaded Jenny to do that, and I made three stops before leaving Detroit. At the admissions office I learned that I'd been there too long for a refund. At the bank I closed my checking account. At my landlady's house, no one was at home. So I left the key in her mail box with a note telling her I was leaving.

My first stop first stop after Detroit was my mother's house.

She'd received in the mail a note for me from Connie.

"Thank you for the casserole dish," it said. "We have already used it several times."

She signed it Carl and Connie.

My next stop was at a railroad switchyard on the south side of Montgomery, Alabama. Nancy was on the road with Doyle, her husband. Their

home on the road was part of a car of the train that pulled his carnival ride company from spot to spot. My mother told me where she was, but finding no one on the train, I turned west on U.S. 80.

I picked up the first hitchhiker I saw. Like my first Army squad leader, his name was Kimball, and his father was an Army lieutenant colonel. But, while the candy-stripe corporal's hair was black, the hitch-hiker's hair was red, and the hitch-hiking Kimball said he was traveling for fun because he expected induction soon, and he said he might like to go with me. I mentioned that Jenny was due for her fifteen-hundred-mile maintenance, and he said he'd pay for it if he could ride along as far as I went.

"I didn't think it would be that much," he said, after he paid the bill, but he continued to travel with me and shared one of three joints of marijuana I'd smuggled from Vietnam in a container of Ammon's medicated powder I'd used against what we called jungle rot there,

I hallucinated an octopus. A highway overpass was its head. The eight highway lanes were its tentacles waving around it.

In Abilene we stopped to see Cleve. He'd told me his mother's address. I easily remembered it. It was 518 Palm Street. Not only was our company the 518<sup>th</sup> PSC, but also we planted palm trees along the boardwalk between our rows of squad tents.

As Kimball and I climbed out of Jenny in the front yard of Cleve's mother's little wooden house, Cleve stepped onto its front porch and down its steps to greet us.

"I'm fucking a girl," he said after the introductions.

But he didn't invite us into the house. So, after fewer than ten minutes of chatting with him, we drove on. But, still in Abilene, we stopped at a filling station to urinate. An old man in a black cowboy hat and black army shoes came out of the restroom.

"You guys ever been to Abilene before?" he asked me while Kimball took his turn.

"Nope," I said. "But it's the prettiest town I've ever seen."

"They wrote a song about that," he said grinning.

Our next stop was El Paso, to enter Mexico from there. We saw signs advertising car insurance for tourists driving into Mexico. We stopped at an agency and asked for a price. It was most of the cash I had. I told Kimball I thought we needed to think about it. We decided to park Jenny in El Paso and walk across the bridge to Juarez while we thought about it.

We drank beer in a few bars with dancing girls and in a bodega with swinging doors, a concrete floor, and a mariachi band. In a tobacco shop and a

liquor store, we bought some Marlboros and a fifth of tequila for less than I paid for Viceroy and Scotch in Vietnam. But we paid a man five dollars for a bag of grass much smaller than the bundles I bought in Cam Ranh Village. Before we staggered back across the bridge, Kimball stuffed the bag of grass in his jockey shorts. A border patrol person stopped us but only to charge us 25 cents to reseal the tequila bottle with a government stamp. We were drinking it as we staggered. In El Paso we discovered the grass was lawn clippings and decided we decided we didn't have enough cash to go further into Mexico.

"I have some friends in L.A.," I said as we climbed back into Jenny.

"OK," said Kimball. "But can we stop in Yuma to see the prison?"

The prison was the Yuma Territorial Prison. Its construction was of something like adobe. The cells, but for the bars, were open to the desert. We peered into some of them and drove on.

That night, seeing a sign advertising beer in front of a Quonset hut beside the road, we stopped to see what kind of bar would be in a Quonset hut. In it were a bar, a pool table, the bartender, some drunk men, and a woman I supposed was indigenous. Kimball said the woman probably was a prostitute, but, after but one beer, we returned to the highway.

Our next stop was for a souvenir. Seeing some large cactuses beside the freeway with large balls on them, we decided to take one of the balls from one. But we couldn't reach any. So, deciding to use Jenny to knock down one of the cactuses, I scraped her bottom driving over the curb along the shoulder of the highway, and, as I tried to use her to knock down a cactus, she only spun her tires in the sand. So, again scraping her bottom, we highway to travel on. So my only souvenir from that was needles in my jacket. It was a Navy foul weather jacket the 518<sup>th</sup>'s assistant supply sergeant gave me from a case of them he scrounged. I collected the needles while trying to push over the cactus by hand after trying to use Jenny to push it over.

But the Van Whys welcomed us. They had moved to an apartment house Jim Sr. had bought on Figueroa Terrace overlooking central L.A. They didn't have a guestroom, but they let us sleep in their living room, and, that evening, Jim Jr. suggested that we go to a bar in Little Tokyo.

"That guy says they need shelf pickers at a hardware warehouse," said Kimball after a conversation with some of the other customers while Van Why and I talked at the bar.

He showed us a scrap of paper with the address of California Hardware Company on it. The next morning the Personnel director there hired us and asked us to start the next day. But Kimball didn't.

"I'm sorry," he said to me that evening. "I gotta keep going."

So, the next morning, he continued hitchhiking while I began learning how to find things in a big old brick building on First Street in Central L.A, and the next week I received my first paycheck and rented an apartment in a three-story apartment building on Westmoreland Avenue in East Hollywood.

The apartment was an efficiency with a murphy bed. But it had a small kitchen separate from the living room, and I was the first to rent it after a renovation of every apartment in the building, and the landlord let me select any furniture I liked from the apartments he hadn't rented. The sofa was larger than my studio couch on Monroe Street. So slept on it and left the bed in the wall.

I didn't know what to think of the name of the street being the name of the Commanding General of the United States Army Vietnam, and I didn't sleep in the apartment the night I moved into it.

A bar was at the end of the street, a block and a half from the apartment. I drove there and shot pool with the barmaid. Her name was Pat. The only other customer in the bar was sitting at the end of the bar nearest the door. I sat in the middle of it. The pool table was at its end furthest from the door. Pat won most of the games we played, but she asked me to sleep with her than night.

"I don't want to sleep alone," she said.

When she closed the bar, I drove her to her apartment. It was in the first block of Westmoreland Avenue past my apartment. It was also an efficiency with a murphy bed. She undressed to a black bra and panties, pulled down the bed, and climbed into it. I undressed to my Army issue boxer shorts, climbed into it beside her, and threw a leg across her.

"Get your leg off me," she said. "I just wanted the company."

But next evening she and I went to Curley's Mineshaft. It was a large bar homosexuals frequented on Santa Monica Boulevard. There she introduced me to Sara Margaret Cunningham.

Sara was a tall thin woman with short black hair. She was in jeans and chains, and I immediately liked her, and, immediately after the introduction, Pat moved to the other end of the long bar. I stayed with Sara.

I learned from her that she and Pat had recently broken up. While she was in the ladies' room, I talked with a man sitting on the stool on the other side of me from hers. He talked about designing dresses for movies.

"Is he in dresses?" I asked Sara when she returned.

"Yeah," she said laughing. "Sometimes, I guess."

But I drove Pat home from there, and another evening she suggested that we go to the Pony Bar, a bar much smaller than the Mine Shaft and a half block from Hollywood Boulevard.

There I was the only male. As Pat and I shot pool, a recording of Frankie Valli singing “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You” sounded from the juke box. All the women in the bar sang along and shouted the line “I love you, baby.”

I spent more evenings at the Mineshaft with Sara than I spent with Pat. But one weekend Pat asked me to drive her to a small white bungalow with a clay tile roof. She said she’d shared with Sara. But Sarah wasn’t there.

“She has my kitten,” said Pat.

Telling me Sara wouldn’t give the kitten back to her, she asked me to go into the house and bring it out to her.

“She never locks the door,” she said.

So, while Pat waited in Jenny, I walked up the sidewalk, onto the porch, and into the house, and found the kitten in the living room. It was a little calico one. It purred as I picked it up and carried it to the car.

“I thought you were a good guy,” said Sara to me at the Mineshaft that evening, and she turned away.

“Wait,” I said, and she turned back.

“You’re the only friend I have,” I said.

She looked into my eyes and sat on the barstool nearest her.

“Alright,” she said. “But you’re going to have to buy me a beer.”

So I sat on the barstool beside hers. We drank and talked until Curley closed the bar that night. Then we bought a sixpack of Hamm’s to take with us.

“Have you been to Lookout Point?” asked Sara as she shifted into gear the three-speed manual transmission of her midnight blue Mustang coupe, and I shook my head.

“My dad gave me this car when I wrecked the Honda 305 Dream he gave me,” she said. “That’s what happened to my face.”

Then she drove to a gravel parking area at the top of Beverly Hills. There we drank the Hamm’s, looked at the lights of Los Angeles below us, and talked. But Pat also remained my friend, and soon she and Pat reunited.

One evening they took me to the Farmers’ Market to eat turkey legs. Another evening they took me to dinner in a restaurant. It had red flocked wallpaper like that of the Tibbits.

“Have you ever had lobster tail?” Sara asked me.

“No,” I said, and they ordered it for all of us and paid for it.

“We’re pretending it’s your birthday,” said Pat.

One weekend they took me to a little shop they’d opened to sell their friends’ art on consignment. They told me they’d closed it for lack of customers. Much of the consignment inventory remained on its walls. Pat

showed me a yellow and orange plaster Aztec sun image. Eyes and a smile were in its center.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” she asked me.

The image seemed to me to appear cheap and gaudy. But I nodded. She also told me Sara drew for Hanna-Barbera.

I also continued to spend time with Jim Van Why. Neither did he have many friends. He and I went to a topless bar in Hollywood. A dancer joined us at our table and asked us to buy her a drink. We didn’t.

“We do it for you,” she said. You should appreciate it.”

She left the table, apparently angry.

One night, Jim pointed out young women on Hollywood Boulevard hitchhiking in front of motels. Some seemed to me to be in their teens. He said they were prostitutes.. Another night he suggested that we go to a taxi dance ballroom near my job. Each of us paid a dollar for ten tickets for ten dances.

“This is a dangerous neighborhood,” said a policeman in a patrol car passing us as I drove us away from there.

But Jim was also still taking classes at a junior college. Some of his classmates invited him to a party. I went with him and hit on a Chinese girl. I told her I’d recently returned from Vietnam and asked her for her telephone number. She wordlessly shook her head.

We also bought some marijuana at that party.

“Are you in any way associated with any law enforcement agency,” the seller asked each of us separately as we stood together in front of him.

One of my coworkers invited me to a party. He told me I could bring a guest and should bring whatever I wished to drink. I took Van Why. We bought a gallon of Red Mountain Sparkling Burgundy. The party was at an American Legion hall, was for youths, and didn’t permit alcohol. The coworker and friends of his were drinking in the street in front of the hall. He was in Army greens. They were discussing how to crash the party.

“Are you in the Army?” I asked him.

“Nah,” he said. “Who’s that?”

“You said I could bring a friend,” I said.

“Oh,” he said. “It’s alright.”

But Van Why and I left and didn’t say goodbye.

Van Why also invited me to Thanksgiving dinner with his father and relatives of theirs at the relatives’ home in a suburb on the San Andreas Fault. He was courting a Japanese girl and invited her, but she didn’t accept his invitation. After dinner we sat in the living room watching a documentary on TV about the fault. I said hardly anything while I was there.



But Van Why was my roommate for a while. His father's parents came from Coldwater to visit. Their home was a big red house on Walnut Street behind the bigger red house Stilson bought. In L.A. they slept in Jim's bedroom. He slept in my Murphy bed while I slept on my sofa.

But my lease required paying more rent if more than one tenant rented the apartment, and, the next time I paid my rent, the landlord reminded me of that. I told Jim. He moved out. Feeling the shame of that, after his and his father's hospitality to me, I thought I should have said nothing to him and paid the extra rent. But, though I would have welcomed other company for myself in that apartment, I couldn't make myself do it.

Jim had also told me some of the girls hitchhiking in front of the hotels were runaways. I picked one up, took her to my apartment and offered her some of the marijuana he and I bought. She declined and said she was hungry. I made her a baloney sandwich. I also showed her the story I wrote in Vietnam. She read it as she ate the sandwich.

"It's alright," she said. "But that's just how people are."

I put the story back in the drawer in the kitchen where I kept it, sat beside her on the sofa, and put one of my arms on the back of the sofa behind her, but I didn't try anything more with her.

"I guess I wouldn't mind smoking a joint now," she said.

"Nah," I said, rising from the sofa. "That's alright."

"Are you sure?" she said, also rising.

I drove her back to the motel.

I didn't return to my Reyburn's fashions. When I returned from Vietnam, little of that remained at my mother's house. In L.A. I bought some white jeans and some black long-sleeve turtleneck undershirts and wore them with my Tokyo shoes. I don't remember how I dressed in Detroit. I remember also having a long-sleeve shirt in L.A. with a button-down collar in L.A. and wearing it with my the white jeans with its tail out, but I don't remember how I dressed in Detroit.

"You should tuck in your shirt," said Pat of how I wore the shirt with the button-down collar. "It'd show your butt better."

I didn't take her advice, but she also took me to a bar where most regular customers were male homosexuals, and one night I went there alone. It was smaller than Curley's and a little more elegant. The bar, at its end nearest the entrance, turned toward the wall behind it. I sat near that end but facing the wall. A man around the corner opened a conversation with me. I left with him. At the curb in front of the bar was a yellow and white Nash Metropolitan like Connie's.

“Is that your car?” I asked.

“No,” he said. “But I can probably borrow it if you want.”

“Nah,” I said. “That’s alright.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I said, and I drove us to his apartment in Jenny.

In the apartment, he and I undressed with no conversation. As I undressed, I hid the watch I bought in Vietnam beneath a throw pillow on the floor. As we climbed into the man’s bed, he told me he might be too big for me but that he’d be careful. He began orally, but I immediately decided I had no desire for any of that, either way.

“I guess I’m not gay, I said.

“Maybe I’m just not the right one for you,” said the man as I dressed as a brown boxer stood beside the bed watching, but that situation had made me sure no man would be.

As started Jenny, I remembered my watch. I dreaded returning to the apartment. But I did.

“I forgot my watch,” I said when the man opened the door.

“You didn’t have to hide it from me,” he said as I retrieved it from beneath the pillow.

I said nothing to that.

“We’ll be alright without him,” he said to the dog as I again closed the door.

The next time I saw Sara I told her I’d tried that and didn’t like it.

“Yeah, I know,” she said. “The bartender told me.”

At her house she told me she and Pat had split up again.

She also showed me a picture of herself.

“It’s my high school graduation picture,” she said. “It was before I smashed my face. Wasn’t I pretty?”

“Yeah,” I said, but I preferred her the way she was.

The picture made her look like any ordinarily pretty young woman.

More drunk than I often was, I told her I was God. Feeling that unity, I thought of it more as acceptance and recognition than as arrogance. But Sara frowned.

“You shouldn’t say that,” she said.

The next time I drank with her, she asked me to go with her to Pat’s apartment. I picked a rose from a bush beside the building’s front steps. As Sara knocked on Pat’s door, I sat on the floor in front of it with the rose between my teeth.

“Go away,” said Pat from the other side of the door.

“Billy’s with me,” said Sara.

“I don’t care,” said Pat. “I’ll call the police.”

“She can’t call the police,” said Sara. “She doesn’t have a phone.”

But, a few minutes later, two policemen came up the stairs.

“What are you doing?” asked one of them.

“Knocking,” I said around the rose stem.

“Well,” said the policeman, “you’ll have to leave. We had a complaint.”

“Come on, Billy,” said Sara.

I rose and followed her down the hall and down the inside stairs, but, as we descended the outside stairs, the other policeman spoke.

“By the way,” he said, “how old are you?”

“I’m old enough to drink,” I said, “If that’s what you mean.”

“Oh, no,” said Sara. “Don’t pay any attention to him. He just came back from Vietnam.”

“I’m 21 anyway,” I said, reaching for my wallet to show it to the policeman.

“Alright, war hero,” he said, “you’re going to jail.”

They handcuffed me and took me to L.A. central lockup.

## Chapter 15

### Vertigo

“The charge is Plain Drunk,” said the policeman fingerprinting me. “You can bail yourself out in four hours if you have the cash. That’s how long the law says it takes to get sober.”

Another policeman took me to the drunk tank. It was a big square room with concrete walls up to about shoulder height and plate glass from there to the ceiling. The floor was rubber, but several coats of orange paint was on it. That was evident from cracks and chips in the paint. The only furniture in the room was one toilet.

About two dozen men were in it. One of them was an African American with arms reaching nearly to his knees. He continually walked around the room washing his face in the toilet each time he passed it.

Some of the men lay on the floor sleeping. I sat on the floor acquiring a headache as I sobered up. That was the third time I sobered up while I was awake. The first time was in downtown Frankfurt after I missed the last trolley of that night. The second was when I drank some Grand Prix 33 Vietnamese beer in the village. I lay on my cot to sleep, but I felt too drunk to sleep and tried to rise. As I tried I felt as though my head was nailed to the cot.

“Harman,” said a policeman opening the door to the drunk tank, presumably after four hours of such thoughts. “Do you want to bail yourself out?”

“Yes,” I said, and he led me down a hallway to a window with a wire grate.

“Coldwater, Michigan,” said a policeman behind the window looking up from a piece of paper on the counter between him and the window. “I’m from Coldwater.”

But I recognized neither his face nor the name on his name tag.

“The bail’s \$25.00,” he said. “The Judge might charge you more than that. But, since you’re from Coldwater, I’ll tell you something I don’t tell everybody. If you go back to Coldwater and don’t make your court appearance,

he'll probably accept the \$25.00 as your fine, and you'll never hear about it again."

"Thanks," I said, and I paid the \$25.00 from the cash he returned to me, drove to California Hardware Company, and quit my job.

I already was tired of it, and I thought I soon might lose it anyway. Keeping was contingent on my learning to pick a minimum number of items from the shelves daily by the end of my first ninety days at it. But screwdrivers were beside fishing reels, and shotgun shells were among the kitchen sink faucets, and such disorder was ordinary there. I was two paydays past the ninety days and hadn't made the minimum on any day. So I wondered why I still had the job, and the boredom of the job had made my favorite part of it packing orders at the end of day with paper tape with glue that smelled like the squid in the envelope Benny asked me to smell.

But I didn't tell the Personnel Director any of that. Peggy had written to me that she was sick. So that my sister was sick was the reason for quitting I gave to the Personnel Director. She didn't say she was that sick, but he asked no questions. He replied only that I could pick up my final paycheck the next day. So I thanked him and left.

I was in L.A. hardly long enough to have a California drivers' license and license plate, and the only reason I had those was that a policeman, stopping me for speeding as I drove the junior Jim Van Why up to see the view from where Sara and I drank the Hamm's beer at the top of Beverly hills, told me I needed them, and I nearly failed my driving test.

I knew L.A. law required stopping for pedestrian traffic. But I drove past a guy stepping from between two cars far enough ahead of me for me to stop easily. The examiner told me I needed to learn to shift gears more smoothly. But he said nothing of the pedestrian.

So I had my license, and, as I left California Hardware Company after quitting my job, I wasn't thinking of any of that. Rain was pouring down, and I saw a young woman hitchhiking and picked her up. She was in a white fur jacket I thought made her resemble a drowning rat, but she had wild black hair and green eyes like Sandy's, and she was tall and thin like Sara. She said she'd had enough of L.A. and was going back to Chicago.

"I can take you all the way," I said. "If you can wait until tomorrow. I have to wait until then to pick up my last paycheck. You can stay at my place tonight if you want to."

"I don't want to do that," she said.

So I drove her to a truck stop on U.S. 101 on the way to I-10. As I drove she told me the reason she didn't want stay the night in my apartment was

that she was leaving a relationship that hadn't gone well. She pulled from her bag a book of poems, showed it to me, and said the guy she was leaving had written it. I told her I was a writer. She asked me what I wrote. I told her short stories. Then I slammed on Jenny's brakes.

Traffic had stopped in front of us. Jenny slid on the wet pavement to within a foot of the back of the car in front of us. But I said nothing, and the girl said nothing, and the traffic began moving again. The last I saw of her was in my rearview mirror as I drove away from the truck stop as she stood in the rain in her wet fur jacket with a thumb out.

After sleeping a few hours, I went to Sara's house. I told her I was going home to bring my mother back. I thought I would, and I'd opened a checking account in L.A. So I wrote Sara a check and asked her to find an apartment for my mother and me and pay the deposit from the check. I don't remember the amount, but she said she'd do it. Next morning I picked up my final paycheck, went to the bank where I'd open the checking account, and cashed the paycheck and a check for the balance in the account over the amount of the check I'd given to Sara. Then I headed east on U.S. 101.

But I didn't get on I-10. Partly to stay awake and partly for the variety of experience, I stayed away from interstate highways most of the way. But that didn't keep me from being sleepy.

In the Rocky Mountains, I tried to sleep beside a road. But thinking about bears and other wild animals kept me awake. So I drove on and didn't again think I was sleepy until a semi-truck tailgated me in rain while I was going downhill on a narrow winding road in Missouri. I didn't feel sleepy, but I was afraid to drive faster. I thought the reason for that was that I was sleepy, but, other than to refuel, I didn't stop again before I was in Coldwater, about 47 hours after I left L.A., and still I didn't feel sleepy. So I went looking for David. I found him playing cards with friends in an apartment one of the friends rented.

"What are you playing?" I asked.

"Shit on your neighbor," said David. "Wanna play?"

"Never heard of it," I told him.

"We'll teach you," he said.

I sat down and tried to learn, but his instructions made no sense to me, and soon I was standing on the table.

"Fuck your grandmother," I shouted.

His brother, Eddie, was out of prison and was also there. He'd spent some time in prison for robbing Kerr Hardware, Coldwater's only hardware store. Snow fell while he did that. Police tracked him in the snow. He and I and Bruce Berry, one of the friends, smoked some of the marijuana I bought in

L.A. Once I saw Bruce at the Branch County Fair with Sharon Casey and others. At the fair he was in Army greens and combat boots. He'd bloused his trousers as only Airborne troops customarily do, but he had no Airborne wings on his jacket. We smoked the marijuana in the apartment's bathroom. We didn't tell anyone else what we were doing. I also drank some beer there, but, after smoking the marijuana, I went to my mother's house to sleep. I found Nancy asleep in her bed and climbed into it and onto her.

"I'm your sister," she said.

"That doesn't make any difference," I said, but I rolled aside and fell asleep, and, when I awoke, a clock beside the bed said the time was 6:15.

The time was 6:15 p.m. But I thought it was 6:15 a.m. I wondered why I hadn't slept longer.

David had bought a nearly new blue Ford Fairlane with bucket front seats, a 289 cubic inch V8 engine, and a manual four-speed transmission. He introduced me to a blonde girl. I thought she was pretty. He told me she had bad body odor, but I traded cars with him for a night and took her to Fort Wayne to see Peggy. But Peggy wasn't at home.

I drove the girl home with no other stops, and, returning the car to David at his parents' house the next afternoon, I found him playing Monopoly on the living room floor with his sister Nancy and a friend of hers whose name was also Nancy.

The friend's hair dark but with an auburn tint, and she was shorter than Sandy and not as thin, but her eyes were green, and that reminded me of Sandy. So, though she was also the age Sandy was when I met her, I joined the game, and, that night, I talked her into David's parents' bed. They were visiting relatives in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

"Let me get one of Nancy's thingies," she said as we kissed.

She left the room, returned in a short and sheer blue nightgown, and let me remove her bra and fondle her breasts, but she didn't let me remove her panties or touch anything beneath them.

David's sister Nancy stopped being her friend, but I had joined the crowd that hung out at the apartment where I found David the night I returned from L.A., and so did the girl. The apartment had two bedrooms. Bubb Pete, the friend of David's who was renting it, let me sleep in the one of its two bedroom he wasn't using. That girl, Nancy, spent much time in it with me.

Her full name was Nancy Lee Patterson. She lived in a big messy house on Morse Street with her father, an older brother, a younger brother, and a sister of an age between her age and her younger brother's. She told me her

mother had died of a sort of disease. She introduced me to her father in his bedroom.

The headboard of his bed in his messy bedroom was shelves with many paperback books. When she introduced him to me, he was in the bed and reading one. He replied to the introduction with but one sentence.

“I’m the father of this house,” he said, “and what I say goes.”

Neither Nancy nor I replied to that, but she snickered as we left the house, and I liked her sense of humor in general. She said of my black turtleneck shirts and white jeans that I had a Jughead closet. She was referring to Jughead in the Archie comic books. He dressed similarly.

She and I spent New Year’s Eve with Atkinson, Larry Neitzert, Tom Anderson, and my mother. Anderson’s father owned one of Coldwater’s two dairies. We went to the Lamplighter Lounge.

It was the Topper Tavern when I went to Vietnam. New owners named it for the song “The Old Lamp-Lighter” and furnished it with pews and lamps from Coldwater’s big old First Baptist Church. The church’s demolition was also while I was in Vietnam. People called the bar the Lamp.

But sixteen-year-old Nancy didn’t go in. She waited outside in Jenny. We others didn’t sit in the pews but in chairs at a big round table. We drank pitchers of beer. Neitzert accidentally knocked over one that wasn’t quite empty. I picked it up and threw what remained in it at him. He threw what remained in another pitcher at me. We ordered more. Atkinson and Anderson joined in the throwing. Terry Highland, one of the bar’s owners, was tending bar. He ordered all of us to leave. We went to the Alibi.

There, Anderson, with beer dripping from his nose, stood between the chrome bars marking the service area in the middle of the bar and asked the bartender for five bottles of Budweiser.

“No,” simply said the bartender, shaking his head.

But he let us buy a case of Budweiser to take with us. We took it to my mother’s house. Driving Jenny into the front yard to let the others park in the driveway, I drove her into a tree, after honking at it.

I didn’t look at the damage then, but, when the others left, I found that I couldn’t drive Nancy home. I’d wrapped Jenny’s front bumper around her left front tire. So I couldn’t turn left. So we slept in my sister Nancy’s bed. That winter she was living with Doyle at his parents’ house in Tennessee.

Later in the morning, Nancy Patterson called her father. he drove there and drove her home. I walked to Bubb’s apartment. Rick Speigle, one of the members of the crowd frequenting the apartment, was there. I told him my problem.



“Let’s go look at it,” he said.

He walked with me back to my mother’s house and helped me use Jenny’s tire iron to straighten her bumper enough for me to driver her, after I found a piece of rope to tie her hood handle to her front bumper.

Hitting the tree had also pushed her hood latch out of alignment.

I decided against taking my mother to L.A. She said she might go, but she didn’t show the pleasure in the idea I’d expected, and I had no notion of how I’d pay for the move. So I wrote to Sara. Telling her the plan would have too wait, I asked her to send me the check, if she hadn’t cashed it, and she sent it. She sent no note with it, but still I think she may have been the best friend I ever had.

I applied for a job at Midwest Foundry across the railroad tracks across Park Street from my mother’s house. Its personnel director hired me to start that night. The hours were 11:00 pm. to 7:00 a.m. The job was inspecting wheel cylinder castings, They rattled down a shaking sheet-metal chute to fall into a rotating circular sheet-metal trough with about a dozen other people standing around it inspecting them. Behind us were sets of three big steel buckets. Our job was to pick up each casting, look at, and throw it into one of buckets. One of each three was for one sort of casting. Another was for another sort. The other was for defective castings.

Within a half hour my mind was so far from the foundry that I had no notion into which bucket I was tossing the castings. The supervisor asked for a volunteer to shovel sand into a furnace. I volunteered about as readily as I’d volunteered to go to Europe, and the job was also filthy. When I returned to work after a weekend off, I was still blowing soot out of my nose, and neither my mother’s house nor Bubb’s apartment had a shower.

The supervisor was Bob Kurt. He remembered me. He told me he’d expected me to do more with myself than what I was doing there. So did I. I quit before the next weekend. I lasted five nights. The job required safety boots. The foundry sold them to us and took the price of them out of our pay. My only paycheck there was hardly enough to pay for the boots.

But another reason I wished to quit was that I didn’t wish to stop drinking beer early enough to go to work. So both that and to do more with myself, I also decided to try college again, and that’s the reason I gave that Personnel Director, and she smiled and congratulated me. But my main reason was for beer money from the V.A.

I decided to go to Olivet. I began the admission process by driving Jenny there. Nancy, Rick, and Charlene, Rick’s girlfriend, rode along. On the

way a dog ran from a farmyard onto U.S. 27. I hit it. I was driving up a hill and drove on to the top of the hill. But there I turned around and drove back.

“There’s nothing you can do,” said the farmer looking up from the dead dog as I stood in the road beside him looking down at it. “But thanks for coming back. And look at your car.”

He pointed at the rope tying down Jenny’s hood.

“That was already like that,” I told him.

Saying nothing more, he picked up the dog and carried it back into the yard. I drove us back up the hill and on to Olivet. Nancy and Charlene and Rick sat outside an Admissions Counselor’s office while I sat in his office in front of his desk.

“You don’t seem very happy about this,” he said.

I had no reply, but the school accepted me.

I’d learned in Detroit that weeks would pass before I received a V.A. check. But my mother gave me a surprise. I hadn’t stopped my bonds in Germany, but I’d forgotten about them. She’d collected them in a drawer of a buffet we’d taken from the house on Washington Street. When I returned from Olivet, she reminded me of them. They were several hundred dollars, one 25-dollar bond for each of my months in the Army after I began the allotment. And my friends also helped. In exchange for taxi service, they paid for fuel for Jenny. But Bubb’s landlord evicted him.

The old lady who lived in the apartment on the other side of first floor of the house complained about our noise. We tried to forestall the eviction. The landlord, when he told Bubb he’d have to leave, also told him how old she was and that her birthday was that week. We bought a small cake, and some candles, one of which we put on the cake. Bubb, Rick, Charlene, Nancy, and I went to her apartment to give it to her. Bubb knocked on her door. She invited us in, cut the cake, and shared it with us. But that didn’t change the landlord’s mind.

Bubb said that wasn’t a problem for him, but the rest of us thought it was a problem for us, until Rick suggested a solution.

“Let’s get Billy a place,” he said as we discussed the problem while drinking beer in the apartment. “We can chip in on the rent until he gets his V.A. money. We can party there.”

We found, in the Reporter, a listing for a house trailer Sandy Strockwell’s mother owned. Meeting her at her home in one of the old brick schoolhouses, I thought Sandy may not have lied if he said he was Puerto Rican. But Rick was with me, and she said she didn’t own the trailer park, that I’d need permission from the owner, and that I’d need talk to him for that.

“He doesn’t want a bunch of noisy kids there,” she said.

Rick also went with me for that, but so did Nancy and Charlene. Rick told the trailer park owner I'd be going to school at Olivet. I told him I'd be too busy studying to make much noise. He said he'd give it a try for a couple of weeks. I moved in the next day.

But that night Nancy spent that night with me in Bubb's apartment. She told her father she'd be spending the night with David's sister Nancy. The Nancy who spent that night with me already had spent much time with me there doing what we'd done in David's parents' bedroom. Also, expecting us to do more, Rick had tried to watch through a heat vent near the ceiling, and once, in the apartment's bathroom, I tried to put my penis in her mouth as she was urinating, but she'd kept the limit she'd set at David's house. So, while I thought she was asleep that last time we were in Bubb's apartment, I tried to push her panties down far enough to put my penis in her vagina. I failed, but, the next day, she gave me her permission.

"I was going to wait for your birthday," she said as we sat on the sofa in the trailer. "But I hurt from last night."

We went into the bedroom. I undressed more quickly than she did. I lay on the bed and asked her to stand on it to finish. The thickness of her pubic hair and that it wasn't much darker than the hair of her head surprised me. She didn't bleed as much as I expected her to. A few days later she said in the living room with others there that she'd read that having sex burned as many calories as running thirty miles. She said she'd be skinny if were that true.

The others also spent a lot of time there. Rick knew people on welfare. He brought us a brick of welfare processed cheese and a little Cornish game hen. He baked the hen and divided it among Nancy and Charlene and him and me. He enjoyed cooking and was far fatter than either Nancy or Charlene. He called himself needle dick the bug fucker, but I didn't know what his sexual relationship with Charlene was, and none of asked her why she was his girlfriend.

Our activities in the trailer also included more than the four of us. Bubb never partied with us there, but David, Eddie, and Rick's brother Greg did, and no one asked anyone to be quiet. So, in less than two weeks, the owner of the trailer park knocked on the door.

"I need you out of here by Saturday," he said. "Too many complaints."

We'd drunk enough beer in that time to fill the sofa with beer bottles. It was a sleeper sofa with storage space beneath its cushions for bedding. Rick and I used a blanket to carry the bottles to a dumpster. We hoisted them on top of one side of it, opened the other side of it, and pulled the blanket from beneath them as they slid them clattering into the dumpster.

The dumpster was less than ten yards from the owner's trailer.

"You'll be out of here by five o'clock," he said, leaning from his front door.

He leaned back into his trailer. We returned to the one we were leaving, complied, and didn't complain. But, thanks to Eddie's girlfriend, that wasn't much of a problem for us.

Her name was Ann. She was renting a trailer in a trailer park across Marshall Street from the shopping center. It was smaller but also had two bedrooms. She invited me to move into the one she wasn't using. The crowd followed, and she also enjoyed partying with us, but Nancy and I used her bedroom I was using more than she and Eddie used the one she was using.

"She has pimples all over her back," Eddie told me.

She also drank more beer than Nancy did. But Nancy smoked. She gave money to buy her cigarettes while she was at school. The only time I knew her to drink beer, she dropped a cigarette and burned a big hole in her nylon stocking. She was sitting beside me on the sofa in Ann's trailer.

I picked her up at school most afternoons and once went inside. But, seeing the kids at their lockers, I feared a teacher or someone in the office might see me and think I was the child molester I was. So I didn't go inside that again.

Soon Ann's landlord also evicted her. But neither was that much of a problem trouble for us. Don Calioinan, another member of our crowd, was living alone in a house in Allen. Allen was a tiny town about six miles on the other side of Quincy. But my friends didn't complain about the increase in the cost of Jenny's fuel, and Don's mother was a realtor and owned the house.

There, the night of my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, not-quite-seventeen-year-old Nancy, beneath the white chenille bedspread on the comfortable bed in my room in Don's mother's house, spent another night with me. But that time she neither lied to her father nor told him where she'd be. I learned that the next morning when I drove her to the home of her mother's parents. An uncle of hers was sitting with them in their living room.

"You're a 21-year-old man," said the uncle, "and she's a 16-year-old girl."

But her grandparents said nothing, and neither did Nancy or I, and soon she was pregnant. I asked her to marry me. She asked her father. He promised his consent.

She said she'd like the wedding to be in June, after she finished her eleventh grade of high school. I bought a white gold engagement ring with a diamond much larger than my mother's. I bought it at Culy's on an installment agreement. My mother cosigned for me.

The day I bought it, I drove Nancy to Waterworks Park. I formally proposed to her beneath a weeping willow between the road past the tennis courts and the dam Peggy and I had walked at the State Home picnics. Nancy formally accepted and began planning the wedding. Her father had remarried and divorced, and his second wife had remarried, but she offered to help. I drove Nancy and me to her home in Chicago to order the wedding gown.

“She was fat when my dad married her,” said Nancy. “But she used his money to get skinny and learn how to use makeup. And then she divorced him.”

Her second husband was a construction contractor. Their home was a large flat with new carpeting. She asked us to remove our shoes when we entered it. Nancy selected a gown with what she called an empire waist. She said it was in fashion and would also hide her pregnancy.

She also changed the date to April. But she said that wasn’t because of the pregnancy. She said it was because of her algebra teacher. Her algebra teacher was the one who’d told me my failing to do a problem on the chalkboard wasn’t because of my eyes but because I hadn’t done my homework. Nancy told me that, when the teacher learned she was pregnant and was marrying me, she told her I’d never been any good. She told me her wishing to change the date because she was quitting school because of that.

But she gave her father no reason, and neither had she told him of her pregnancy. But he had a new fiancée, and Nancy told her both. Her name was Sandy.

“She asked me why I hadn’t told her and my father I was pregnant,” Nancy told me. “But she took care of it.”

The next problem was occasional sores on my penis. I thought they were because of my drinking beer while I was taking tetracycline because of the sore from my last visit to Cam Ranh Village. I took that problem to Nancy’s obstetrician.

“Do you have an appointment?” asked the receptionist.

“I didn’t make an appointment to get this,” I told her.

“It’s that 22-year-old man who knocked up that 16-year-old girl,” I heard the receptionist tell the doctor.

But he looked at the problem. He told me it was a herpetic lesion, that it probably would recur throughout my life, that he could do nothing for me, and that I should abstain from sexual activity while it was active, but he also said it wasn’t contagious when no lesion was present, and I told Nancy all that. But she listened to that as passively as she watched my other drunken behavior.

So our next step in the marriage process was to talk with the preacher.

She selected Father Mann, the minister of Coldwater's St. Mark's Episcopal Church. She said it was her mother's church. He told us sometimes young women needed surgery to open their vaginas before coitus. As we left the church, Nancy and I looked at each other and laughed.

The next step for me was to recruit a best man.

"No," said Atkinson in his stepmother's farmyard, after stepping out of the house and meeting me between it and Jenny.

David told me he couldn't afford to rent a tuxedo. I think Eddie refused only because it wasn't a sort of thing he'd enjoy. I don't think I asked Rick. I don't remember why, but next I asked Richard Lyon, and he accepted.

I also asked him to use his car to take us from the church to the reception. Nancy's father had a 1932 Rolls Royce. Nancy asked him to let us use it for the wedding. But he said its block had a crack in it. Bob McNall had a relatively new white Pontiac convertible. But, with no explanation, he refused my request to let us use it, and neither do I know why I didn't ask him to be my best man. Richard had a 1958 Chevy and kept his tools in its back seat. He told me that, but I thought it was more appropriate than was little Jenny with the rope keeping her hood from blowing open.

My next step in the process was to find a job. Problems with that were both that I had no fondness for Coldwater and that I doubted that I could find a job there. So I decided to hitchhike to New York. I thought Vaughn might be able to help me find a job there, and, though I didn't ask, Don Calioinan loaned me twenty dollars for the trip. So, with my Hong Kong suits in my big Leeds bag, I headed east.

I thought police wouldn't let me hitchhike on toll roads. So I thumbed at entrances to the Indiana Toll Road and the Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey Turnpikes. But, at the last entrance to the New Jersey Turnpike before I was to cross the Hudson, a New Jersey highway patrolman stopped me.

He was in a uniform with a Smokey the Bear hat. But the car had no police markings on its outside and sounded like something Richard Lyon may have wished to build. He looked at my drivers license, told me to get into the front seat of the car, and, after a few high speed turns, dropped me at a bridge.

"New York's that way," he said, pointing up the narrow road beneath the bridge.

I waited there longer than I'd waited anywhere on that trip. But a girl picked me up in a Ford Fairlane like David's but brown and not as sporty. She told me she was on her way to school but didn't feel like going to school that day. Vaughn had written to me and told me he'd moved to a loft on East Sixth Street. He said it was in the East Village and gave me its address. The girl

waited for me as I rang the door bell and waited for Vaughn to answer it. But I hadn't told Vaugh I was coming, and no one answered.

"Can you take me to the library," I asked her after a few minutes of waiting.

"Are you going to be alright?" she asked me in front of the New York Public Library.

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks."

I wondered what else she might have done for me. But, not knowing how to ask, I watched as she drove away. Then I walked up the steps of the library and found it wasn't open. So I walked to Port Authority Bus Terminal, sat in a chair in one of the rows of fiberglass chairs, leaned back with my feet on my bag, and tried to sleep.

"Are you waiting for a bus," asked a policeman.

"Yes," I said.

"Let me see your ticket," replied the policeman.

I told him I didn't have one. He told me I couldn't sleep there. I walked to the Lincoln Tunnel and hitchhiked to Fort Wayne.

There I spent a nights on Peggy's sofa. I searched her newspaper for jobs. I requested but one, but I received an interview for it. It was selling men's clothing for a department store.

"I'll get a haircut if I get the job," I said to the woman interviewing me as I sat in front of her desk in one of my Hong Cong suits.

Before I said that, I thought she was going to hire me. But then she frowned and didn't. So I hitchhiked back to Coldwater.

But my mother had another surprise for me. She told me she saw an advertisement in the *Reporter* for a hardlines management trainee at Tempo. Tempo was a mass marketing store at the shopping center were where Richard Lyon's father's drugstore was. She said Wally Heft managed it and that he'd managed Gamble's, the store where my father bought my bicycle and most of our other big Christmas presents. Gamble-Skogmo, the company owning Gamble's, closed it, opened Tempo, and reassigned Wally to Tempo.

The hardlines manager managed about two thirds of one side of the store. The appliance manager manage the front of that side of it. The softlines manager managed the other side of the star. Hardlines were any product not an appliance or clothing or other things made of cloth.

Wally remembered my father and hired me. He was also a Korean War veteran and had married I Korean woman. I don't remember how I knew that, but my salary was \$325 per month. Minimum pay then was \$1.60 per hour, but I thought it was still \$1.25, what it was when I was a busboy.

Mainly I reordered stock ranging from paint to tires, but occasionally I helped customers. I was happy to have a job in which I could work in my Hong Cong suits. But I didn't need to do that. Wally and the softlines manager dressed in suits, but the appliance manager dressed in sports jackets and slacks, and the hardlines manager worked in a tie and white shirts but no jacket, and he rolled up if his sleeves, if they weren't short. I asked Wally whether I should dress in suits. He said I could if I wanted to. But he smiled when he said it. So I did ordinarily, but occasionally I came to work in my Tokyo sport jacket.

Once Dale Otis, my second seventh grade locker partner, came into the store while I was in one of my Hong Cong suits and.

"It looks like you're doing alright," he said. "My wife and I just bought a house."

My next step in the marriage process was to find a home for my new family, but the home I found wasn't a house.

Behind the shopping center, across State Street from the State Home, at the north end of Morse Street, the street where Nancy's family lived, was a small apartment complex. It resembled a motel, but it was about a dozen one-bedroom apartments. Its owner called it Pinecrest. He fully furnished them but didn't charge much rent. The apartments were along two sides of the complex's parking lot. The owner occupied the apartment where the two wings met.

"They call me Bull Moose," he said interviewing Nancy and me at his dining table, facing his front door while we sat with our backs to it.

He showed us the apartment next door to his, told us he was the father of Brad Wallace, a high school classmate of mine, and rented us the apartment. I hadn't told the V.A. I'd decided against Olivet. So I received a check for all the time since I would have begun classes in Olivet. It was enough not only to rent the apartment but also to finish paying for the engagement ring. But I bought the wedding rings by installment payments.

"How's my credit now?" I asked the sales lady at Culy's when I paid for the engagement ring and bought the wedding rings.

So my mother didn't have to sign again.

Two twin beds were in the apartment's bedroom. Nancy and I used but one of them. We began using it before our wedding, but that was the first of our problems with Bull Moose. He knocked on our door one afternoon while we were doing that.

"I know you're getting married soon," he said after I pulled on a sweater and a pair of my white jeans and opened the door. "But she's sixteen



years old, and I'm not sure she should spend so much time here before the wedding."

So my bachelor party wasn't in the apartment. It was at Don Calioinan's house. Atkinson didn't attend, but Anderson and Neitzert did, and so did Rick and Greg and others of my crowd, including Hummer Lindsay.

Hummer was a Navy SEAL in Vietnam. He and Greg had become my main drinking buddies. Greg recruited a girl for the party. The girl, Suzy Tubert, lived on Polk Street a half block north of where Rick and Greg lived with their parents and younger sisters and brother at the corner of Polk and Pearl Streets. Suzy was a little younger than Nancy but already had a reputation for being sexually willing. At the party I asked her to do a strip tease for us. She refused, but I took her into the kitchen and asked her to lend me her bra. She did. I put it on over my shirt and removed it to music in the living room. Then I took her upstairs to bed and licked her vagina a little.

"You're driving me crazy," she said.

But then I stopped, had more ordinary sexual intercourse with her, and went downstairs and told Hummer it was his turn. He went upstairs and came down smiling. But Suzy wasn't smiling when she came downstairs a few minutes later. A few minutes after that she left with Ann and some of the others.

"You're a son of a bitch," she said passing me on her way out.

But later that night I drove to her house looking for her.

"I don't know where she is!" said her father at the door. "You took her out! You're responsible for her! You fucking punk!"

The next day Greg told me I should check myself for gonorrhea. He said some other guys that night had been with both Joanie Palmetier and Suzy. Joanie, a girl between Suzy's age and mine, also had a reputation for promiscuity. But, thinking the others must have been with Suzy after she left the party, I didn't take Greg's advice.

My next step in the marriage process was to introduce Nancy to Peggy. I don't remember whether she came to Coldwater for that purpose. But I remember talking with her about Nancy at a table at the Alibi or Walkup's.

"She's going to be fat," said Peggy.

My next step was to rent a tuxedo at Reyburn's. Al asked me the time of day of the wedding. I told him Afternoon. He recommended a morning suit, but I selected gray eveningwear with silk piping around its lapels. I'd seen a picture like it in *Playboy*. To distinguish me from the best man, I asked him to rent Richard a black tuxedo with silk lapels. My shoes were my black Tokyo shoes.

Nancy told me giving the minister a small amount of cash was customary. She said ten dollars would be enough and that the best man should give it to him. But Richard refused. So I knocked on the door of Father Mann's office and held a ten-dollar bill out to him as he sat behind his desk. He neither moved nor spoke. So I laid the ten-dollar bill on his desk and silently left his office.

He had told us the Episcopal Church forbade kissing at the altar. So I hurried Nancy up the aisle and gave her a big wet kiss outside the sanctuary doors but in full view of everyone in the church. Then I hurried her outside and down the outside steps to Richard's Chevy. The hail of rice as we descended the steps stung my face.

The car was a two-door. I opened the passenger door and leaned the front passenger seat forward for Nancy to climb into the backseat with Richard's tools. Nancy or Sandy or Nancy's former stepmother had hired a photographer. He took no pictures of the outside the car. His only pictures of its inside were closeups of Nancy and Me through the passenger side rear window. Driving us to the reception, Richard honked his horn only when I asked him to.

Because Nancy was a Job's Daughter, she'd arranged to have the reception in the basement of the Masonic Temple. The entertainment was a rock band of which Richard, Nancy's older brother Richard, was a member. As my Aunt Bertha talked to me in front of the low bandstand, I gestured to the band to lower its volume. Richard stopped it completely. The Masons forbade alcoholic beverages there, but, in the kitchen, Rick mixed a bowl of rum and vodka punch. Nancy asked me not to push the cake into her face, but I did. Trying to throw her something-blue garter behind me over a shoulder, I caught a finger in it and dropped it on the floor at my heels. The next day, Nancy told me a cousin of hers at her father's house after the reception bet someone twenty dollars that our marriage wouldn't last six months. A few weeks later she told me the Masons complained about Rick's punch.

"They want us to pay an extra twenty dollars," she said.

I paid it and also kept paying for beer, most often with Greg and Hummer or barhopping only with Hummer. Greg wasn't old enough to drink legally. Hoping to learn from Woody McClellan where I could buy some marijuana from Woody McClellan, I drove Nancy and Rick and Charlene to Ann Arbor. He was teaching there and in living in a relatively new apartment complex. I don't remember how I knew that or why I took Rick and Charlene. I told Woody in his living room why I was there. His wife and son were also in the room. He said he didn't know where we could buy some but that he'd smoke some with us there if we wished. I told him I wanted it for later.

Also while we were there an African American student of his came to the apartment. He and Woody went into the dining room. After a few minutes of wondering whether he'd rejoin us, I went to say good-bye to him. They were standing at the dining table doing something with some papers on it. I bade him goodbye. He silently nodded his head and continued what he was doing.

One night I drove Nancy and Charlene and Rick to Detroit. I don't remember why. I drank all the way to Detroit. In Detroit one of Jenny's tires went flat. Rick told us he saw on TV race riots there. We saw no rioting, but, while changing the tire, I saw that it was bald and that so were her other tires.

Having no cash to buy new ones, I decided to trade her in on an Austin Healy Sprite. My reasoning was that, though I couldn't afford to buy new tires, the bank might lend me the cash for the trade. On my next day off, I drove east on I-94, stopping in towns along the way, looking in phone books for foreign car dealerships, until I found one near Ann Arbor. It had no new cars and no Austin Healy Sprites. I took a British racing green 1952 MG TD for a test drive. Its clutch seemed to me to slip. The salesman told me that was because the clutch was hydraulic. Not knowing whether to believe him, I bought a red 1966 Triumph Spitfire instead. I don't remember the details, but a result of all that was my having to make car payments to the Branch County Savings bank. That was the bank where my father had financed his cars. As had Wally, the Loan Officer told me my father had always paid his debts. He said nothing of his bank's repossessing the Corvair.

When I drove the Spitfire home, I let Nancy take me for a ride in it. A few weeks before our marriage Nancy used Jenny to obtain her drivers license. During that drive we saw Cheryl Hurd's Mustang fastback in front of The Bluebird. Cheryl was a member of our crowd. She and Greg stepped from the Mustang. Nancy parked the Spitfire behind it. Cheryl said she'd take Nancy home for me to be able to take Greg for a ride. As Nancy stepped from the driver seat of the Spitfire, two girls in a red Volkswagen older than Jenny sped by and nearly hit Nancy. Nancy was then conspicuously pregnant, and the Spitfire's top was down.

"Assholes!" shouted Greg, jumping into the Spitfire, over its passenger door. "Come on, Bill! Let's go!"

So I jumped over its other door into its driver's seat and sped after the Volkswagen with Greg holding onto the top of the windshield frame to sit on the back of the passenger seat.

"You fucking maniacs!" he shouted. "Are you trying to kill a pregnant woman?"

But, after a few minutes of that, he decided on another approach.

“We need to report them to the police,” he said.

So I parked in the alley behind City Hall, for us to enter the police station through its back door, to tell the police what the girls had done.

“We have a record of you breaking into Sweeny Buick and Pontiac,” said a policeman after asking me my name and pulling a file from a cabinet.

“I didn’t do that,” I said. “And I was a juvenile.”

“We still have a record of it,” said the policeman.

I drove Nancy to Ann Arbor to see John Cochrane. I don’t remember how he found me or how he invited me. The invitation was between his graduating from Annapolis and his beginning to fulfill the Navy active duty obligation from that. Lucy Loud was also there. The dinner was in her apartment. She was his girlfriend during our senior year of high school. Woody once told me her last name was appropriate for her. I don’t know why she was in Ann Arbor.

On our arrival in Ann Arbor, rain was pouring down. The Spitfire stalled in several inches of water in a street. I remembered Jay’s telling me his Sprite’s firewall wasn’t high enough to drive through much water. But, after a few minutes, the Spitfire started. The dinner was spaghetti and meatballs. I had little to say, but the conversation was polite.

I recommended Greg for a job selling appliances at Tempo. Wally hired him. I slept in one morning after a night of drinking with him and Hummer. Wally came to our apartment. Nancy went to the door.

“He says you’d better get to work,” she said as I lay in bed trying to wake up. “If you want that job.”

“Wally wants to see you,” said Tom, the Hardlines Manager, when I arrived.

“Do you want this job?” asked Wally as I sat in front of his desk. “Or don’t you?”

I said I did. That ended that conversation. I went to work.

During the Branch County Fair that year, Willard came to the store. He said my sister Nancy told him I was working there. Doyle had become the show’s Ride Superintendent.

Greg and I took a break and had coffee with Willard at the Starlight Diner. It faced Marshall street from the shopping center’s parking lot in front of Richard Lyon’s father’s drugstore. As we walked past the Spitfire, I pointed it out to Willard and told him it was mine. Its tonneau cover was over its passenger seat. Willard nodded and smiled.

“Can you work the six-cat for me tonight?” he asked me as we drank the coffee. “I have to do something.”

I said I could, but I left Greg with him to return to work. Greg's work schedule was more flexible than mine. I paid for the coffee.

"Come on, Bill," said Danny Parker that evening. "Let me win."

To try the six-cat again in Michigan, Bob had painted it a different color. Ruth had told me Cubby Lewis was Willard's cat boy before I was. He was friend of Peggy's and Buzz's. At junior high school dances, he danced with his friend Don Halferty, to show others the new dancing styles. They were swamps. The twist was one of the styles. Ruth told me she thought Cubby may have sent the letter to the police describing the six-cat's G. I thought of all that as I let Danny win, but that wasn't the reason I did.

I knew the price of the plush and didn't much care how much stock I threw as long as my revenue exceeded its cost. So I threw stock to attract marks. To keep the cost from exceeding my revenue, I tried to keep track of how much I threw, but I threw more than I thought I did. The other agent stared at me, but I thought that was only because I threw more stock than he or Willard would. I knew I was, but, at end of the night, I saw that I'd thrown more than half of the inventory. So my end was little more than fifty dollars.

But Bob said nothing of that, and I asked him to sell me a teddy bear, and he did. Feeling our child would be a boy, I selected a blue one. Nancy smiled at both the bear and the bucks. Wally gave me a 25 dollar pay raise at the end of my third month working there. But, still, fifty dollars was a seventh of my monthly pay.

## Chapter 16

### Loser

I used the automotive shop at the store to tune up the Spitfire. I took it out on I-69 to see how fast it would go. At 94 miles per hour, its speed suddenly dropped to about 85. I took it back to the shop.

“Look at your vacuum gauge,” said Gary Berry, the guy who did automotive work for Tempo’s customers.

A cylindrical object I couldn’t identify protruded from a sider of the distributor. Garry pushed it in. It pushed itself back out.

“Could be the timing.” he said.

While I owned that car, it never again went faster than 85 miles per hour, but it ran well enough for Bull Moose to complain about gravel from the parking lot chipping the paint on his Ford Ranchero when I skidded to stops in my parking space beside his, and he also complained about my and my friends’ noise.

But Cheryl Hurd rented a farmhouse with no near neighbors. So we partied more there. It was on U.S. 27 on the north side of Kinderhook about nine miles south of Coldwater, but the Spitfire ran well enough to take me there. One afternoon as I drove it into Cheryl’s driveway, a German shepherd jumped onto its hood. The girl whose dog it was threw a rock at it. The rock missed the dog but put a hole about two inches in diameter in the Spitfire’s windshield, making driving the car unlawful. So I decided to trade it in.

At White Chevrolet, beside the Alamo Drive-in, I found a 1964 Chevrolet convertible I liked. It had a six-cylinder engine, but the Spitfire had a four-cylinder engine, and the Malibu’s engine had a chrome valve cover, and I told myself and Nancy it would be better for my growing family. The salesman refused to let me test drive it alone, complained that I drove it too fast over some railroad tracks, and refused to accept the Spitfire as trade-in, but still I wished to buy it. So I offered the bank an alternative.

Suzy Tubert’s father, apparently having forgiven me, offered to trade to me a piece of property the Spitfire. The property was a steep hillside below a

gravel road. I hoped to build a concrete block house into the hill. I had no notion how I'd pay for that, and the bank refused to accept the land as collateral. But it loaned me the cash with no down payment and only the Malibu as collateral. So still I bought it.

But a woman at work both reduced our expenses and solved my problem with Bull Moose. She and her husband owned a house no one was occupying and offered to rent it to Nancy and me for less than I was paying Bull Moose. But still I was throwing money into beer.

A guy at a party at Cheryl's house asked me for a ride to Suzy's house. An old Harley Davidson motorcycle he said was his was in Suzy's front yard. I asked him to let me take it for a ride.

"Can you handle a suicide shift?" he asked.

The gear shift lever was on a side of its fuel tank and operated more like an automatic transmission in a car than like the foot shift lever on the Honda. So I saw no reason I couldn't handle it. But I had other problems riding it. The first was that I killed the engine in front of the Alamo. I had to kick it more than a dozen times to start it again, and, while I was doing that, a police car stopped behind me.

"Are you alright?" asked one of the policemen, stepping out of the car.

"Yeah," I said. "It's just old. It'll start in a minute."

But the patrol car left, and the bike started. So I rode it around the Alamo and turned back toward town, intending to take it back to its owner. But, at the corner of Jay and Pearl Streets, I decided to ride it down Riverside Drive. Polk Street, the street of Suzy's house, ended at Riverside Drive.

But I decided too late to make the turn. So, instead of riding down either Pearl Street or Jay Street, I rode into the yard on the corner. At that corner of the of the yard, a grass embankment sloped up from the street at about a thirty degree angle. It sent me and the bike into the air.

I landed too late to stop short of a pile of brush in the yard, and, when I hit it, I flew over bike's handlebars and bounced my helmetless head off the bike's front fender. My next memory is of waking up. My last memory before that is of thinking I was going to die.

When I woke up I lifted the bike upright and pushed it to the nearest edge of the yard, but then I was afraid to ride it down the embankment, until a car stopped at the curb below me.

"Need some help?" asked one of several guys climbing out of it.

Then, remembering that that my watch band snagged on the front brake lever as I flew over the handlebars, I removed the watch and my wedding ring.

"Hold onto these, will you?" I asked one of the guys.

I handed them to him, rode down the embankment, and didn't stop again until I reached Suzy's house.

I told the bike's owner what I did.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "You can't hurt that old thing."

"Where's your watch," asked Nancy at home. "And your wedding ring?"

I'd left her there to go to Cheryl's house. I left her again to drive to the police station to ask the police whether anyone took my watch and wedding ring there. They said no one had.

Another night, while I was driving drunk with Nancy and Rick and Charlene in the Malibu, police stopped me in front of the hotel. Two policemen were in the car. Both stepped out of it. One told me I was speeding. I stepped out of the Malibu, bent over to point to an emblem on the car's rear fender.

"It's only 230 cubic inches," I said, intending to imply that I couldn't have been speeding, and I didn't learn until years later that the emblem was for a V8 its six-cylinder engine had replaced, but the policemen laughed and left.

Drunk another night, I filled the Malibu's gasoline tank with diesel fuel from a pump behind Coldwater's Ford dealership. I didn't know it was diesel until the car stopped running in front of Putnam's funeral home. I began syphoning the fuel into the street. Again a policeman stopped.

I don't remember how I had the hose or how I refueled the car. But I told the policeman someone had borrowed the car and put diesel fuel in it. He also left me there and drove away.

Drinking beer was legal for eighteen-year-olds in Ohio then if the beer was less than 3.2 percent alcohol. One night I drove Greg and some others to Starks, a dance bar in Brian, Ohio, about fifty miles southeast of Coldwater. On our way back to Coldwater we caught up with a 1960 Buick slowly swerving all over the road. I recognized it as Eddie Grace's car and stayed behind him until he turned from the road into the parking lot of a roadside bar. I told him to slide over and drove him home. Nancy drove the Malibu home.

Another night, drinking beer in Cheryl's driveway with Cheryl and Eddie and his girlfriend, not Ann but a new taller girlfriend with short red hair, and another woman, I tried to talk the other woman into giving us a strip show. I'd left Nancy at home that night also. The woman I asked to strip was somewhat overweight, and she seemed to me to appreciate the invitation. But she didn't do it.

Another night some guys from Angola came there in a pickup truck. No one there knew them. They refused a request to leave. People started hitting



each other. I didn't hit anyone, but a friend of Cheryl's hit me as I sat on the trunk of the Malibu watching the melee.

"Wait a minute, Vern," I said. "I'm on your side."

"Oh," said Vern. "I'm sorry."

He returned to the fight. Still I didn't join the fight, but I left the trunk to wander the yard. I found Greg struggling on the ground in a tangle of television lead-in wire with one of the guy's from Angola. I saw Weasel Gallop chase one of them into their pickup truck. The party crasher locked its doors, and Weasel was small in every dimension, but he grabbed the door handle with both hands and kicked behind it. It popped open. He jumped in into the truck, wrapped one arm around the guy's neck, and pounded his face with his other fist until the other interlopers gave up the fight. Then, to let him and the others leave in the truck, he let the him go.

Nancy was there that night, and the party continued. But, saying she was tired, she asked to go home. I gave her the keys to the Malibu but stayed until only Cheryl and I remained in the house.

"How are you going to get home?" she asked.

"Hitchhike, I guess," I said.

"OK," she said. "Can you take Greg with you?"

"I thought he left," I said.

"He's outside somewhere," she replied.

I went outside and found him sitting beneath a tree weeping.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said looking up at me and wiping his eyes.

"I'm going to hitchhike back to Coldwater," I said.

"OK," he said.

We walked out to the road. A car came swerving up the road from the direction of Angola. Its driver asked us which way Fort Wayne was. Greg pointed south.

"Where are you going?" asked the driver.

"Coldwater," I told him, pointing north. "You need to turn around."

"How far's Coldwater?" asked the driver.

"Nine miles," I told him.

Get in," he said.

Greg and I climbed into the back seat.

Another passenger was in the front seat.

"Want a beer?" asked the driver resuming driving north.

"Sure," said Greg.

"Got any ID?" asked the other man.

Greg handed him his drivers license.

“Speigle,” he said, peering at it after turning on the dome light.

“They’ve got some pretty good stuff in their catalogs. I don’t care how old you are. You’re alright.”

He passed two cans of beer back to us.

As we drank it, lights flashed behind us.

“Shit,” said the driver. “Cops.”

But he stopped. The patrol car stopped behind us. A deputy sheriff stepped from it.

“Son of a bitch,” said Greg looking back. “It’s Rex Thatcher.”

Rex had graduated from Coldwater High School a year or two earlier than I.

“You again, Greg?” he said when the driver rolled down his window.

“Don’t you ever learn?”

“Fuck you, Rex,” said Greg.

Greg dropped out of high school before I graduated.

Rex arrested all four of us, the driver for driving while intoxicated, the guy with him for furnishing alcoholic beverages to a minor, Greg for illegal possession of alcoholic beverages because he was a minor, and me for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

“I’ll get Ben Dajos,” said Greg as we sat in the drunk tank of the Branch County jail waiting for his mother and Nancy to bail us out. “Rex can’t get away with this.”

Dajos, an attorney, had helped him defeat another of Rex’s charges. At our first court appearance we pled not guilty. While we were awaiting trial, Nancy gave birth to a boy. I named him Patterson Cleveland, Patterson for Nancy’s family, Cleveland for Cleve. I waited in the hallway outside the delivery room. The doctor brought him out and showed him to me. He was tiny, wrinkled, red, and two months early. The doctor told me he’d have to stay in the hospital for a while.

“Will he be alright?” I asked.

“Yes,” said the doctor. “I think so.”

Thinking Nancy would also be in the hospital a while, I went to the Penney store and opened a charge account to buy her a bathrobe and a pair of bedroom slippers. The saleslady smiled when I told her why. The only women’s bedroom slippers in stock there then were gold-colored with fluffy tufts on their toes. I thought they were gaudy but bought them. I don’t remember seeing them after I took them to the hospital. Pat stayed there nearly three weeks, but Nancy came home the next day.

By then we'd moved into the house my coworker offered to rent us. Her name was Peggy. When we rented it, it had no furniture and no refrigerator, but Peggy brought us an old refrigerator, and Nancy's Uncle Tom gave us a bed from his farm. He lived alone on the farm. The farmhouse was full of old furniture. We selected a bed with coil springs, but he also gave us a mattress.

"You've got cats everywhere," said Nancy in the farmyard.

"You want one?" asked Tom.

She turned and looked at me. I smiled and shrugged. She smiled and selected a little calico kitten. It resembled Pat's kitten in L.A. Thinking I remembered Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* calling his prep school roommate Ackley kid, I named the kitten Ackley and called him Ackley cat. I immediately liked him.

We used half of a beer case as a litter box. I threw some gravel from the driveway into it. He immediately regularly used it. He also formed a habit of sleeping on the front right tire of the Malibu. When I started the car, he immediately jumped from the tire and ran up the front porch steps and into the house. I thought of beelines.

Rick married Charlene. Reverend Hamlin performed the ceremony at his church on Perkins street. Nancy and I were the maid of honor, the best man, and the only guests. Rick bought some furniture on an installment plan. He decided he needed a car more and couldn't afford to pay for both. He offered to trade the furniture to me for the Spitfire, for him to make the Spitfire payments while I made the furniture payments. The furniture was a sofa, a matching chair, and a coffee table. I accepted the offer.

Sandy, then Nancy's stepmother, arranged a baby shower. One of the gifts was a white wicker bassinet. Every day Pat was in the hospital, Nancy asked me to take her to see him in his incubator. At home she sat on Rick's sofa and lactated in her bathrobe. But, when we took Pat home, she said breast feeding him would make her breasts sag. So baby formula became my first spending priority. I didn't excepting beer, but I never needed to make the exception.

Once Nancy made a big batch of macaroni salad. It was macaroni, celery, and mayonnaise, nothing else. We ate nearly nothing else for about a week. Nancy didn't complain about my partying, but I changed it in a way that pleased her. Hummer, Greg, and I crashed a party in Jackson. Another Peggy was there. Hummer married her. They rented an apartment in Sturgis. So, while Hummer and I barhopped all over the county, Nancy and Pat stayed with Peggy in their apartment.

Rick couldn't make the Spitfire payments. But, though he brought it back, he didn't take the furniture. So, after drinking all of an evening and into the night, Hummer and I took the Spitfire and a case of beer for a ride. He said we could beg fuel from farmers. We stopped at a farm with a 1938 Ford sitting in long grass in the farmyard.

An old woman and a man who seemed to me to be older than Hummer or I came out of the farmhouse. The man stayed behind the woman and said nothing to us. He seemed to me to be mentally deficient. Hummer asked the woman why the car was there and whether she'd like to sell it. She said her husband died not long after buying it new and that no one had driven it since. She said she'd had offers for it but hadn't decided whether she wished to sell it. She gave us some gasoline from a tank beside the barn. From there I drove us to a junior college in Ypsilanti. I'd heard Woody was teaching there.

His office was a cubicle in a building like a large mobile home. A man in one of the other cubicles smiled at us and told us Woody would be there in a few minutes. But he wasn't. So, after a few minutes of standing outside the cubicle, we drove on, begged some fuel at another farm, and drove back to Coldwater.

One afternoon, when I was in the store on one of my days off to pick up my paycheck, one of the women working in the stock room asked me to assemble a tricycle for a customer. As I sat on the floor of the stock room putting it together, Wally came in, looked down at me, and told me to be sure to sign in for the time I spent on that. Once, trying to use a slide rule at work, my boss, Tom Hadley, asked me whether I knew how to use one. I'd learned some of how in Mr. Terdahl's physics class. I told Tom some of the functions. The next time I saw Wally, he told me he'd heard I taught Tom how to use a slide rule.

Still I cared nothing for baseball. But during the world series that year, I joined my boss, Greg, his boss, and the softlines manager in watching, on a TV in the appliance department, the Tigers winning the World Series.

I also went with Greg to his boss's house to shoot pool with his boss in his boss's basement recreation room. His boss's name was Cecil. Greg called him Cecil the Sea Serpent when he wasn't talking to him. He drove an old Dodge pickup to work but often wore a red velour sports jacket to work. But I never again saw any of the store's managers outside the store, and I mocked my boss. He wore white socks and the same pair of shoes to work ever day. I called his shoes orthopedic shoes. Greg laughed at that.

I also tried to spend other money we didn't have. I put a Mediterranean-style console stereo system on layaway and took Nancy to look

at a new mobile home with Mediterranean-style furniture. Mediterranean-style furniture was popular then.

Dennis Ryder, the kid who hit me in the back of my head with a snowball with a rock in it when I lived on Clark Avenue, came to our house selling John Hancock life insurance. So I bought a policy. But I don't remember paying for it, and neither do I remember ever renewing my insurance on Jenny. Neither do I remember paying for insurance on the Spitfire or the Malibu, but I also remember buying insurance for one of them. I bought it at the Sears catalog store next door to Richard Lyon's father's pharmacy.

The salesman stood behind something like a podium and asked me my address. I told him Pinecrest, but he telephoned someone and said I lived in the new apartments between the shopping center and Pinecrest. They were Coldwater's nearest approximation to a high rise apartments, Thinking approval of the policy might depend on the difference between that and Pinecrest, I didn't correct the salesman.

Greg bought a Buick Special convertible. He asked a girl working at the store to go to a movie with him at Coldwater's drive-in theatre. She accepted, and Nancy and I went with them. But we parked in the Malibu. We took Pat in his bassinette and parked beside them.

"No," we heard the girl say several times.

Soon we heard her crying. That plainly made Nancy also unhappy. But she said nothing, and neither did I.

That girl didn't go out with him again, but a girl working on the softlines side of the store went out with him more than once. Her name was Sheila. One morning she came to work in sunglasses with a black eye. He borrowed her mother's car and wrecked it. The wreck was between Quincy and Allen. He broke his nose on the steering wheel, walked back to Coldwater, and told police hitchhikers had stolen the car and broken his nose. The next day police came to the store and arrested him for falsely reporting a felony. Wally fired him, but Sheila didn't stop going out with him.

I don't know why he borrowed the car while he had the Skylark, but one night I also drove him to Sheila's home. She was in the process of a divorce. So I don't know whose house it was, but Her sister was also there, and I sat on an arm of the chair in which her sister sat. Her sister neither spoke to me nor looked at me, but, while she sat in the chair while Sheila and Greg sat on the sofa, I stood up and removed all my clothing.

"Looks alright to me," said Sheila, but still her sister didn't look at me.

So I dressed, but Greg and Sheila went out the back door of the house and left us in the living room for about a half hour. I sat on the arm of the chair

again, and the sister remained in it, but, until they returned, neither of us spoke. Then Greg and I left.

“She doesn’t have any tits,” said Greg as I drove him home. “Just big nipples.”

He and Hummer and I decided to take a trip to New York in my Malibu, but, before the weekend we intended to go, Greg drove his Skylark from a road, scraped a side of it on a tree, and decided not to go.

“I have to stay here and fix my car,” he said. “I have to be responsible for something.”

Once he showed me the back of a calendar hanging on a wall of his mother’s dining room. He told me it was where she kept track of the money he and Rick owed her. His father spent a lot of time walking or standing still on the sidewalk in front of their house. I never heard Greg or Rick speak of him.

Hummer and I decided not to go to New York without Greg. Instead we partied that weekend at a house at Marble lake near where Turner had built his Turn-a-Crafts. Some people not in our crowd rented it for that purpose. Bruce Berry was the leader of that crowd. Neither he nor anyone else there talked to us, but anyone was welcome there. We took our own beer.

After we drank it all, I drove us to Quincy to buy more. Excepting the American Legion, Quincy’s only bar was the K&M. My father had taken my family to both. He bought us cashews at the K&M. When Hummer and I went there to buy the beer that night, Roger Berry, Bruce’s and Gary’s older brother, was behind the bar, and, as I ordered two six-packs of beer from the bartender, Roger took a barrelhouse swing at me across the bar. He wasn’t the bartender, and I don’t know why he was there, but, perhaps because the bartender was somewhat in his way, I leaned back quickly enough for him to miss.

“Roger!” said the bartender. “What’s wrong with you?”

Roger didn’t answer, but he didn’t try again.

“Just let him take his beer and leave,” said the bartender, setting our beer on the bar, and he did.

So I paid for the beer, and we left.

“What was that about?” asked Hummer outside.

“Beats the shit out of me,” I said.

We went to a filling station, bought a loaf of bread and some bologna, and returned to the party house, but we stopped along the way. I was in the fleece lining from the bomber jacket Mrs. Hamlin’s son had given her, and as we passed the farm where Nancy’s friend Susan Stetler’s family raised sheep, Hummer suggested that we make a vest mine from one of the sheep in what was their front yard. We chased them all over the pasture. We didn’t try long

enough to catch any, but I don't know how their bleating couldn't have awakened the family.

After making a couple of baloney sandwiches, we gave most of the bread we bought to a German shepherd in the front yard of the party house. As had Laddie at the corner of our garage, the German shepherd had dug a ditch at the end of the chain tethering him to a stake in the yard. He ate the bread voraciously, catching it in the air as we threw it to him, but he didn't stop barking and trying to attack us. When we finished drinking the two sixpacks, we returned to Coldwater.

Cleve was still in Abilene. He'd married. Another night while Hummer and I were out drinking, I decided I wasn't getting anywhere in Coldwater. I decided to go to Abilene. I had a Texaco credit card. Greg had recommended that I obtain one. He was then a mechanic at the Texaco station across Marshall Street from the shopping center. It was the job Peggy's husband Jack had when he threw her down the stairs from their apartment. I used the credit card to drive to Texas.

I drove Hummer home and told Nancy what I'd decided. She asked no questions. We loaded some clothes, Pat in his bassinette, and Ackley into the Malibu and were about halfway to Abilene before I couldn't drive anymore. We were on an interstate highway, but I stopped on its shoulder to try to sleep. A few minutes later a highway patrolman stopped behind us.

"Problem?" he asked.

"I just couldn't drive anymore," I told him.

He looked into the backseat and smiled, but then he stopped smiling and apologized.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I can't let you sleep on the interstate."

So I drove on to Abilene. Cleve's address was on South First Street. In Abilene, south streets and first streets weren't the south and north ends of each other but parallel to each other on the south and north sides of town. I drove out of town on both ends of North First Street before guessing that, and then I drove north out of town before turning around and finding South Street. So we didn't arrive at Cleve's house until nearly 10:00 p.m., and I hadn't called him to tell him we were coming. We didn't have a telephone.

But both Cleve and Shirley, his new wife, welcomed us.

Cleve said he was allergic to cats but that, though he didn't know why, he didn't seem to be allergic to Ackley, and they had a spare bedroom, and Cleve found me a job the next day.

He was working checkout in a store like Tempo but larger. My job was stacking soap. I carried cases of detergent and shampoo and other kinds of soap

to the sales floor from a storeroom along a side of it. Then, before stacking them, I cut them open to give the customers access to their contents.

My coworkers had retired from the Air Force. One of them trained me and provided me with a boxcutter. He told me to be careful not to cut the soap bottles or boxes in the cases and not to lose the box cutter. None of the others spoke to me.

Evenings Cleve showed me the town. Abilene was in a dry county, but Cleve took me to a private club. Joining it was as easy as was joining the Professional Club in Hong Cong. The bartenders served the members what they called setups. They were drinks containing alcoholic beverages the poured from bottles the members kept behind the bar they sometimes mixed with other beverages.

Cleve also took me to what he and others in Abilene called niggertown. In Vietnam he'd told me of Polly Foxworth, an African American who owned a diner where people Polly knew could buy beer and drink it openly at the counter. In Abilene, he introduced me to him. At his counter, we drank beer with him. Cleve also took me to the home of an African American woman who sold and served alcoholic beverages there and had a coin pool table and a jukebox in her living room. We also played a couple of hands of poker with others there in a banquet room in the woman's living room.

He also took me to a liquor store a few yards past the county line. There we bought a gallon of cheap wine and took it to his house. We spent most of that night drinking it at his kitchen table.

While we did that, I decided I should try L.A. again. Stacking soap wasn't as dirty as inspecting wheel cylinder casting, but it bored me about as much. I awakened Nancy to tell her, packed my big Leeds bag again, and kissed her goodbye. Cleve drove me and the bag to a highway heading west and left us there. As I stuck out a thumb, a skunk prowled the ditch beside the road.

The Van Whys still lived in the apartment on Figueroa Terrace. Again they welcomed me to sleep on their sofa while I sought a job. My first effort was walking to California Hardware Company.

"Not for rehire," said the personnel director reading from a file he pulled from a file cabinet.

"I'm married now and have a kid," I told him.

"You work fast," he said with no smile as others in the room stared at me.

The union steward came into the office, recognized me, and told me he thought the union might owe me a refund of dues.

"I wasn't here long enough to join the union," I said.



“Suit yourself,” he said turning and leaving the office.

“Bill, I wish you’d find yourself,” Jim’s father said to me at supper.

A thought that was trite and didn’t reply.

Thinking of Kerouac, I walked to the L.A. offices of the Southern Pacific Railroad to ask for a job as a switchman. A man there interviewed me and seemed to me to like my attitude. But he told me I’d have to wait until no union members were available.

Also, though I don’t remember how, I learned that Curley had closed the Mineshaft and opened a smaller bar in the San Fernando Valley. I asked the junior Jim to drive me there. The barmaid gave me Sara’s telephone number and let me use the telephone behind the bar. Another woman answered. She told me Sara was upstairs and said she’d go get her. But Sara didn’t come to the telephone.

“She doesn’t want to talk to you,” said the other woman when she returned. “She said to tell you Pat’s at the V.A.”

“Would you tell her I’m not looking for Pat?” I said.

“She doesn’t want to talk to you,” the woman said again.

As Jim and I finished drinking our beers, I decided to try again the argument that I had no friends. But the barmaid didn’t let me use the telephone again. She told me the call she let me make was an exception to policy. Next morning, I began thumbing back to Abilene.

My first ride was most of the way. While another hitchhiker and the owner of the car slept, I drove. In a small town in West Texas, turning corners became difficult. I awakened the owner. He told me to stop at the next filling station. A mechanic said the car was low on power steering fluid. He refilled its power steering pump.

“I’m low on beer, too,” I said to the car owner.

“You want me to get you some?” he asked.

But told him I wouldn’t be able to drive if he did that.

I drove on until I needed to turn south toward Abilene.

I was also low on both food and cash. At the filling station where he left me, I put the pennies that were the last of my cash into a machine dispensing peanuts with a candy covering. After eating them I licked the salt from the palm from which I’d eaten them. I was hungrier than I was from bailing hay.

But some cash was waiting for me in Abilene.

Cleve had three checks for me. One was my final paycheck from the store in Abilene. The other two were from Tempo. I’d written to Wally, apologizing for leaving but telling him I needed to find something to do other than what I was doing at Tempo. He sent me my final paycheck, reimbursement

of the cash for the stereo system layaway, and a note saying he was sorry I left and wishing me luck.

So, with more cash than I had when I left Coldwater, and recognizing that I had no more prospects in Abilene than in L.A. and that I couldn't reasonably continue sponging from Cleve, I left Abilene.

We stopped at the Walmart in Texarkana, to buy a souvenir of Texas and Arkansas. We bought a plastic rotten banana. Pat shrieked every time he saw it. In Tennessee I saw a sign for Clifton.

"I have a friend here," I said to Nancy. "Maybe he can find me a job."

The friend was my replacement in Vietnam. The town was tiny. I stopped at small grocery store on the road where I saw the sign. I asked the woman behind the counter whether she had a telephone book. I found but one number for his last name. The store didn't have a pay telephone, but the woman also let me use one that was behind the counter. His mother answered, but she told me he was out hunting with his father. So I drove on.

Our next stop was Iron City, Doyle's home town. During the carnival off season he was working at a casket factor, the town's only factory. He and Nancy were staying at his parents' house. The house had no plumbing, and its outhouse had a broken seat. But he told me the casket factory might hire me.

I drove him and some friends of his to the factory to complete a form requesting employment. After we did that, I drove them to a bar a few miles outside the town. Doyle bought me a bottle of beer there, but I received no assurance of a job, and Doyle's mother rocked Pat in a wooden straight chair thumping on the bare plank floor of their living room. So we didn't spend the night there. Neither did I see an a promise for me there. So I drove us on.

Thinking of no other possibilities, I turned north toward Coldwater, but, because I hadn't slept since Abilene, we spent that night in a motel in Bowling Green, Kentucky. In a grocery store, we bought bread and lunch meat, formula for Pat, soda for Nancy, and beer for me. I had no plan, but, lying on the bed in the motel after eating, I thought of one.

"I could reenlist," I said, but I began to sob.

In the Army, both draftees and first-term enlistees said career soldiers were people who couldn't "make it on the outside."

"I'd be a goddamned lifer," I sobbed. "I'd be a loser."

But the next morning we stopped at Fort Knox and parked for a few minutes at an edge of a training field.

"What's the spirit of the bayonet?" shouted a sergeant.

"To kill!" shouted the trainees in response to the sergeant.

Though I didn't appreciate that during basic training, then I felt some nostalgia. So, after spending the next night at the house Peggy and Bob were then renting in Fort Wayne, I talked with an Army recruiter. He told me I could reenlist as an SP4 and that the Army wouldn't require me to repeat basic training. I asked him whether I could go back to Germany. He said it wasn't a reenlistment option for enlistees with prior service but that he probably could arrange it and that the Army would pay for my dependents' travel. So I asked him to try to send me to Berlin.

In Coldwater Rick Speigle told us he and Charlene had just moved and that he hadn't yet returned the key to the apartment. We slept there that night, but the next morning I awoke to the landlord coming into the apartment to show it. I told him what Rick told me. He shook his head. As he and the prospective tenants stared at us, we gathered our belongs. We spent that night at my mother's house. But, the next afternoon, while I was outside washing the Malibu, Nancy and my mother disagreed about how to set the table for supper.

"Your mother doesn't like me," said Nancy when I went inside.

"She's not so muckin' fuch," said my mother.

"She's my wife," I replied.

"Bill!" she said with a sound like a wail, but I turned away.

We spent that night at Nancy's father's house. The next day I drove to Indianapolis. The recruiting sergeant in Fort Wayne had given me some papers and said I needed to take them to Indianapolis to reenlist. On the way a policeman stopped me for speeding. I don't know how, but I'd replaced the tires on the Malibu with new ones I bought at Tempo with my employee discount. I'd bought oversize ones. I thought that was sporty. I told the policeman that, because they were oversize, I didn't know how fast I was going. He looked at me, glanced at the front tire on his side of the car, and finished writing the ticket.

A former member of the 516<sup>th</sup> PSC was working at the recruiting main station in Indianapolis. In Vietnam, thinking he was a jerk, I'd thrown a cigarette into his face while he was a picking up his distribution. In Indianapolis, he recognized me, but he took me to a bar for lunch with some friends of his and bought me a beer. He was an SP4 in Vietnam and still was an SP4.

A doctor told me my ankle injury might make me ineligible for reenlistment. He said he'd let me know. I returned to Coldwater and spent about another week sleeping at Nancy's family's house, but the approval came through. So I returned to Indianapolis and took the oath of enlistment.

But, also in Coldwater, while I was waiting for that, I pleaded guilty of contributing to Greg's delinquency. My plea of not guilty was to a justice of the

peace, and his office was in his home, so I went there and changed my pleas. I told him I wished to do it because I was reenlisting, and he accepted the plea and fine me 25 dollars.

But, though I paid the 25 dollars, on the DD form 398, Statement of Personal History, I signed for my reenlistment, I checked to box for “no”, and I left Nancy and Pat at Nancy’s father’s house. A personnel actions person told me in Indianapolis that I couldn’t request travel for them until after I reached my assignment. Of course I also left Ackley and the Malibu and Spitfire there.

My next step in that process was to hitchhike back to Fort Dix for more processing. During several days there, I received new uniforms, took the Army Classification Battery again, received an advance partial pay, and befriended two other guys with prior service. One of them, Cornelius Verboom, bet me twenty dollars his GT score would be higher than mine. His was higher by one point, but I didn’t pay him. I spent most my advance pay on a weekend in New York City with him and the other guy. We slept in Vaughn’s loft.

It was the top two stories of an old three-story brick warehouse. A white baby grand piano hung by cables from its first floor ceiling. So did a dining table and wicker chairs. We slept on padding on wide brick platforms along its first floor bare brick walls. Vaughn gave me a key to the loft and told us to help ourselves to a bag a of marijuana while he was at his job as Assistant Stage Manager for the New York City Opera at the Lincoln Center. After smoking some of it, we walked about the village.

We tried to join some kids in a game of stickball in a street, but a guy about our age told us to leave his brother alone. He took a swing at me, but he missed and didn’t try again. We wandered on in search of a bar. We found the one where the bartender had refused to serve Benny and David and me. The same bartender was there. He also refused to serve us. We bought some beer and cigars in a small grocery store and took them back to Vaughn’s loft. The cigars were in metal tubes. We filled one with Vaughn’s marijuana and took it back to Fort Dix. Near the gate to Wrightstown we found a sandbag bunker. In our spare time between finishing our processing and receiving our assignments, we used it to smoke and drink.

As had my first orders to Germany, our orders assigned us to the 21<sup>st</sup> Replacement Battalion. There, after collecting our 201 files from us, an SP4 told me I’d be on KP the next morning. But that evening we climbed over the fence behind the barracks and took a trolley to the *Kaiserstrasse*. In a strip joint we sat at a table to watch a woman remove her clothing on a stage. The table had a red table cloth. I tried to make a souvenir of it. A candle and an ashtray were also on the table, but I tried to slide the table cloth from beneath them and

our beers to stuff it into my pants. A waitress came to the table and took the cloth from me, but she didn't ask us to leave.

Less than an hour after we climbed back over the fence, the CQ runner awakened me. But Verboom knew a clerk in the replacement battalion and had arranged for my job to be the easiest and cleanest. It was sitting at a table at the entrance to the mess hall to count people coming in to eat.

But, before I counted anyone, I fell asleep at the table. So the Mess Sergeant called me a fuckup and assigned me to washing pots and pans. Several times, falling asleep while scrubbing, I nearly dropped my head into the water.

But I never saw those friends again. They were helicopter mechanics and went from the replacement battalion to a maintenance battalion. I went to a personnel service company. But it wasn't in Berlin.

It was at Panzer Kaserne, a short taxi ride from Boeblingen, a small city about fifteen miles south of Stuttgart. My assignment was to the personnel management office serving the Army's Seventh Corps' Support Command. But my next problem there was with my boss, CPT Berenger, the personnel management officer.

"I know you have prior service," he said the first time he spoke to me. "But you're still a Spec. 4. So you have no more authority than any other Spec. 4."

"Yes, sir," I said to the captain.

My job was processing assignments for people returning to the United States. My home while waiting for Nancy and Pat to accompany me was the barracks on Panzer Kaserne. Most of my barracks mates were draftees.

My second day there I went to the Support Command's Personnel Actions office to begin the process of bringing Nancy and Pat there. But the clerk told me dependent housing there had a waiting list. He said I could rent a place off post but that I'd need a car before I could request the move for that.

So, needing to save the money for the car, I had no way to estimate how long Nancy and Pat would have to wait, and a consideration in that was how much money I'd spend in guesthouses, and a variable in that was that I befriended a PFC in the barracks.

His name was Nolte. He was an enlistee, and, younger than I, he respected me for my knowledge of Germany and the German language. So he readily explored Boeblingen's guesthouses with me. We also made a hitchhiking trip to Tuebingen to see the university there. We also shared a room in a guesthouse that night, but the guesthouse's only vacancy was a room with but one bed. So we didn't do that again.

But my drinking may have profited me in one way. CPT Berenger held for his staff in his quarters in the Army's dependent housing across a street from the *kaserne*'s main gate. Somewhat drunk, I told the captain I hoped what he said to me regarding my rank wouldn't keep him from recommending me for promotion when I proved myself in his office, and I did that quickly.

At work I was one member of a two man team, and my teammate was a PFC. So CPT Berenger couldn't question whether I outranked him. So that made me the team chief, and I used that authority both to divide the processing responsibilities equally between my teammate and me and to make the flow systematic. After doing his part of the processing, he put the paper into a box where the left side of his desk adjoined the right side of mine, and I finished the job. Also, though I had an hour for lunch, my lunch was hotdogs I brought to my desk from a shop in the basement of the building, and that didn't take nearly an hour. So I used the rest of my lunch hour to make copies for distribution and distribute them. But that didn't bear fruit immediately. So, though I arrived in Germany in November, I didn't buy the car until nearly spring.

But Nancy sped that up a little. Once I sent fifty dollars. But, in February, for my birthday, she sent me a wedding ring to replace the one I gave away when I dumped the Harley. So the shame gave me a little motivation.

"*Springen hat gesprungen,*" I said as I climbed into a taxi outside the gate to the *kaserne* one warm Saturday afternoon in early March, to go to Boeblingen to drink some beer.

The taxi driver laughed.

"*Das ist nicht richtig?*" I asked.

"*Nein,*" he said. "*Das is gut.*"

But also that early March I bought a car. It was a rusty brown 1957 Volkswagen with a faulty clutch and a pool four-ball for a gear shift knob. But I took it to a shop in Boeblingen for the clutch repair and bought a more ordinary shift knob for it.

Also that spring an SP5 in my office renting an apartment in Doeffingen, a tiny town on an edge of the Black Forest about twelve kilometers from Boeblingen, returned to the United States.

So I rented his apartment and returned to the Personnel Actions office to arrange for Nancy's and Pat's travel to Germany.

The clerk again tried to make excuses not to process my request. But I knew something about ISG's. So I went to the barracks and found ours in the orderly room. He was talking with the company clerk and some others there, but I interrupted them to tell the him the problem. I was nearly in tears, and the

other stared at him and me as though the conversation were a tennis match, but the ISG made the conversation short.

“I’ll call him,” he said. “Go back down there.”

I did, and then the clerk was quite polite to me. A few days later, he called me and told me he had approval for the move. Less than two weeks after that I received a letter from Nancy telling me she received orders and shipping instructions for what the Army called household good. And Less a week after that she arrived at Rhine-Main with Pat in her arms. That was the last Friday in May.

Of course Ackley wasn’t with her. Later she told he’d disappeared and that she’d seen her father kick him and that she suspected he’d kicked him to death. But at Rhein-Main she was in a new green winter coat with a hood with white fur lining she said her father bought her, and Pat had grown so big and fat that he didn’t seem to me to be Pat.

## Chapter 17

### Lifer

Pat's appearance troubled me so much that, during an official welcoming speech to a large room full of other new arrivals, I left him on Nancy's lap. But Nancy said nothing of that, and neither did she say anything of the old car, or ask me about the apartment. But I had a plan for showing her the apartment. So I was glad she didn't ask me to describe it.

It was in a relatively new house on a hill above Doeffingen. It was in the house's roof, but it was its entire third floor, and, because the house was on a side of the hill, it was but one floor above the street, and its living room window was a view of other hills and the village below, and the entrance to the apartment was to the middle of a hallway from the living room past the kitchen and bathroom to the bedroom. So, to surprise Nancy with each room, I'd closed the hallway door to each.

"Well, this is it," I said as I opened the door to the apartment.

I intended to imply that the hallway was all of the apartment, but neither did she say anything then or as I opened each door, in order by size from the closet to the living room, before showing her the bedroom. Nor, though the living room window was big enough for the designation "picture window", did she say anything when I opened it as wide as I could to show her the view. But, in the bedroom, I gave her something other than talking to do.

The Army had loaned us furniture that included two twin beds. I hadn't assembled them, but the Army had also provided us with some bedding. So and Nancy wrapped Ben in a blanket and laid him on one of the mattresses, for us to make love on the other. But next we went for another ride.

The wives of two of my coworkers also arrived that day. One of them was also one of my barracks mates and invited us to his apartment. But, though they and their wives were drinking when Nancy and Pat and I arrived, no of them offered us a drink, and neither did they or their wives have much to say to me or Nancy. So I supposed the reason was that they were draftees.



But they told us Eisenhower had died and that Monday would be the official day of mourning.

So the three-day pass I'd taken to welcome Nancy and Pat would be a four-day pass, and we made much use of it. I took Nancy and Pat to the Gasthof See. I'd heard it was the nicest restaurant in Boeblingen, and the waitress brought a high chair for Pat. We ordered *wiener schnitzel*. Saturday I took them to the Army Commissary for Nancy to buy groceries, all she wanted. But Sunday I drove them to Heidelberg to see the castle.

Still I didn't offer to help Nancy with Pat. So she climbed the many stairs to the castle with him in her arms. But she seemed to me to be happy about everything, and Tuesday, when I returned home from work, she told me she'd carried Pat down the hill to Doeffingen. She said an old woman smiled at them. She also had brought to Germany a paperback Berlitz book.

But I never knew her to try to learn German, and, helping unload our household goods, from the deuce-and-a-half that delivered them, I gashed open one of my hands with the banding around one of the crates. So I drove to the dispensary on post for stitches. The medic motioned for me to sit on an examination table. I lay on it. The medic shook his head and told me I could sit up. I felt silly, and that also led to a disagreement with my 1SG.

I had no exemption from additional duties there, and, the day after I received the stitches, I was to be on KP. So I went to the orderly room, showed the First Sergeant the bandages, and told him what I'd done. But he told me I shouldn't have a problem with that if I was careful to keep the hand dry. So, not knowing how I could do that on KP, I took the question to the CWO who was CPT Berenger's Assistant Personnel Management Officer. He telephoned the 1SG and resolved the problem in my favor.

But, at home, I thought all was going well. Nancy had acquired and shipped a crib for Pat. So it and our old bed were among the household goods the Army. Nancy didn't ship the mattress for the bed, but, as at Pinecrest, we happily slept on one of the twin beds the Army provided to us.

I also began paying our debts. We owed the hospital and the doctor for Pat's birth. I owed the Department of Veterans Affairs reimbursement for its check I didn't use for education. The bank wrote to me telling me it had repossessed the Spitfire and the Malibu and that they were nearly worthless.

The letter said the Spitfire had a hole in its windshield and holes in two pistons and that Malibu had a crack in its windshield and a crack in its cylinder block because no antifreeze was in it, and I knew or supposed reasons for all of that. I remembered the dog and the rock and supposed I burned the holes in the Spitfire's cylinders when I drove it 94 miles per hour after tuning it up. I

supposed the reason no antifreeze was in the Malibu was that I bought beer instead of antifreeze, and I remembered that Dewey once borrowed the Malibu, that he returned it with the crack in its windshield and that I didn't ask him how.

But soon CPT Berenger recommended me for promotion. He reminded me of what I said to him at the Christmas party and told me I'd been true to my word. But I also had reason to suspect that he especially appreciated one incident.

An MSG's DEROS, date eligible to return from overseas, passed before I received an assignment for him. He complained up the chain of command. His complaint came down the chain of command from the Support Command AG through CPT Berenger to me.

"Specialist Harman," said on the way to my desk from his with the AG. "Got anything on Master Sergeant Shirley Qualls."

I rose from my desk and met them before they reached it.

"Qualls, Qualls, Qualls," I said aloud to myself trying remember what I'd done concerning him, and CPT Berenger flustered me further by frowning and glaring at me as I did that, but suddenly I remembered.

"Yes, sir," I said. "I called USAREUR on him this morning. They said they have his assignment instructions but couldn't give them to me because they were down in the machine room. They said they can give them to me tomorrow."

"How reliable is that," asked the captain as the frown disappeared from his face.

"It always has been," I said, and he nodded to me, wordlessly turned to the colonel, and let my answer be his.

USAREUR was the Army's acronym for United States Army Europe. Because late receipt of assignment instructions wasn't extraordinary, using our office's only telephone to call its headquarters' personnel management office was ordinary for me. So I kept a suspense file to know when to do that.

But I also outperformed the SP4 the CPT Berenger was using as a secretary. The SP4 went on emergency leave, and the captain asked me to fill in for him. So he quickly learned that my assistant performed well enough to do both of our jobs alone and that I a much faster typist and also more literate than his secretary.

"I told you I'd take care of you," he said handing me my promotion orders.

But then I took a risk. Not expecting another promotion soon, I decided to try to correct my record. I took the question of how to correct that to

CPT Berenger's CWO assistant, told him of my conviction for contributing Greg's delinquency, and asked him for advice. He said he'd look into.

Receiving no other answer in the next few weeks, I reminded him. He pulled from a desk drawer a recommendation both for discharging me for my knowingly submitting a false DD Form 398 and for an exception because of my commendable service. But he recommended that he not submit it.

"Why don't you just hold onto this," he said handing it to me. "If that 398 is ever a problem for you, you can show you tried to correct it."

Thinking that was a 1SG kind of advice, I accepted it, and, to help pay my debts, I restricted my drinking to our apartment. Soon after Nancy arrived, I invited Nolte to our apartment for supper, and Nancy cooked spaghetti and meatballs, but he ate it with hardly a word to either of us, and I never saw him again. Once I took Nancy to the NCO club, found my teammate there with a German girl, introduced Nancy to them, and invited them to our apartment for spaghetti, but my teammate declined the invitation. He didn't say why, and that troubled me a little, but I was happy drinking at home with no one other than Nancy and Pat for company, until Nancy ended that.

One afternoon, returning from work, I found her standing beside the dining table the Army had loaned to us, waiting for me, and weeping.

"I'm lonely," she said. "I don't have any friends here."

"You have me," I said.

"But you have your friends at work," she said. "I don't have anyone else."

I considered telling her I had no friends at work and felt no need for any. But I decided saying that wouldn't make her feel any better. So I made her a promise I didn't know how to keep.

"Alright," I said. "I'll find us some friends."

By then Seventh Corps Support Command had reorganized its personnel and administration operations into a Personnel and Administration battalion. It was four units with offices and barracks in three buildings near the main gate to the *kaserne*. The headquarters was on one side of the road leading to the gate. The other three, housing its intelligence operations, its replacement operation, and its other personnel and administrations operations, faced each of three sides of a grassy quadrangle with a drive around it on the other side of the road. CPT Berenger became the replacement detachment's commanding officer, selected me to be one of its two team chiefs, and gave me the temporary rank of SGT, to increase my authority over the replacements.

While I was processing an SP5 we assigned to assist the P&A Battalion's PSNCO, personnel staff NCO, he asked me what he needed to do to

bring his wife to Germany. I told him some of what I'd learned, but I also invited him to our apartment for some of Nancy's spaghetti. His name was Roy Maples. His wife's name was Denise. Both became our friend.

But, before Denise arrived, I introduced Roy to guesthouses, and Roy also befriended Paul Pimentel, an SP4 in the P&A Battalion's intelligence unit, and he had no wife. So, until Denise arrived, that situation was much like the situation in Coldwater with Nancy and me and Hummer and Greg before Hummer married Peggy, but with some differences. One was that we had more money. So, at least monetarily, we could afford that. But another difference was that sometimes we took Nancy with us.

Nancy liked Paul and called him Pete Mattel. So Nancy and I took him with us and Pat to the Stuttgart zoo. He teased a chimpanzee with a package of Winston cigarettes. The chimpanzee reached between bars of his cage, took the package from him, ate the cigarettes, and spit out the packaging.

He and Roy and I also took her to Tuebingen, but once, with neither Roy nor Nancy, Pete Mattel and I snuck into a Tuebingen University women's dormitory, took an elevator to its sixth floor, and climbed onto a railing of a balcony at an end of the hallway, to see into the rooms.

A girl was in the first room into which we looked. While I waited on the concrete railing, Paul crawled from it, returned to the hallway, and knocked on the girl's door. The girl opened it, and, while I wondered why I was risking my life to watch, she talked with him for a few minutes. But she didn't invited him in. So we returned to our barhopping.

One of my two favorite places in Tuebingen was *Tante Emile's*. It was a guesthouse with a stone floor and large old round wooden tables on a bank of the Neckar at the bottom of a winding stone stairway from the street. The largest of those tables was the *Stammtisch*, a table for customers the proprietor of a guesthouse especially favors. But once I went there alone and began a conversation with some of the people at the *Stammtisch*. I started the conversation from another table but moved to the *Stammtisch*, and then the others immediately stopped talking. So I moved back to my table, finished drinking my bottle of beer, and left.

The other of our two favorite Tuebingen places was a private club in an alley. Passing the alley, we saw a small sign with light over its door and a doorbell beside the door with a light in it. I pushed the button. The bartender opened the door. Its bar was along one side of its long narrow room immediately inside the entrance. The room's only other seating was stools along a counter along the wall opposite the bar.

The bartender told us it was a private club, but no one else was there, and he said that, because of that, he'd let us in, and he did that several times, every time we went there, and Nancy went with each time.

He played phonograph records, mostly of jazz and folk music, and he talked with us. One record was a Leonard Cohen album, I asked him to sell it to me. He didn't answer. I persisted. He said he'd rather not. I persisted. He sold it to me. But he scratched several times it as he removed it from the turntable.

Also in Tuebingen both Roy and Paul befriended two *au pairs* who were friends of one another. Roy and Paul also introduced them to Nancy and me. But we didn't spend much time with them.

Once, with none of the others, I took Nancy to the only guesthouse in Doeffingen. There we shared a table with a young German man. He said he was married. We invited him to bring his wife to our apartment for spaghetti. They reciprocated by invited us to their apartment for cold cuts. I thought we may have found some German friends. But he asked us whether we could obtain some American cigarettes for him. American cigarettes were both popular and expensive on the German economy. I bought some for him but didn't charge him for them. Our conversation about that extended to other commissary prices. He asked me to buy him a smoked ham. I also bought him that for no charge. But then he asked me to buy one for his parents.

That time, I didn't promise. I didn't immediately refuse, but, one night, while I was out with Roy and Paul, before I decided how to refuse, he came to our apartment with no invitation. When I returned home, Nancy told me he hit on her while he was there. So I neither bought the ham nor spoke with him again, and neither did he ever again come to our apartment.

But Nancy also told me our landlord hit on her. His home was the main floor of the house, immediately below our apartment. He made black wrought iron candle stands and put big red candles on them. They seemed to Nancy and me to be in the Mediterranean style, and we bought two of them. But Nancy said he hit on her when she was in his apartment to pay the rent.

His name was Muell, German for "garbage", and, after Nancy told me he hit on her, I stopped finding that funny. But I never told him or the Doeffingen guy what she said of them, and one night, drunk at home with Pete Mattel, I decided to go see the Doeffingen guy. My reason was that I regretted my failure at making a German friend. But, though I'd told Pete Mattel the Doerffingen guy hit on Nancy, then I didn't tell him what I was thinking.

"You don't want to do that," he said. "I know what you're thinking."

But I left him with Nancy and Pat, drove down the hill and into the town, and rang the guy's doorbell. He leaned from his third floor window,

looked down at me, leaned back through his window, and closed it. But I rang the bell again, and, while I waited, Pete Mattel arrived in his car.

“Come on,” he said. “I know what you’re doing.”

“I’m not trying to pick a fight,” I said. “I just thought maybe he needed a beer.”

“Yeah, right,” said Paul. “Come on. Let’s go.”

I followed him back to our apartment, and I knew he was right. But then I had to wonder how I could balance the mix of values in that situation. It seemed to me to be a choice of which sort of shame to suffer.

But, through all that, I paid off all our debts. I kept track of my payments and balances with grease pencils on acetate document protectors in looseleaf binders. I took them home from work. That petty theft didn’t seem to me to be criminal. When all the balances were zero, we bought a small automatic washer at a department store in Boeblingen. The store delivered it and installed it in our closet. Because not enough room for it was in our bathroom or kitchen, the installers ran a water line into the closet. We had no way to install a dryer, but the washer spun quite thoroughly.

We also bought some China from that department store. It was like Wedgewood but pink. Nancy saw it in the store and said there that she liked it, but I didn’t decide to buy it until we were at home. Excepting for groceries, I made nearly all of our purchasing decisions, and I thought of both the washer and the China as gifts for her. But, the day after I decided to buy the China, when time came for my shift to go home, though I don’t know why, the MP’s weren’t letting anyone enter or leave the kaserne.

“What the hell’s going on,” I said looking from the window beside my desk at the line of cars at the gate. “I promised to buy something for Nancy today, and the store closes at five.”

But SSG Myers, the staff sergeant supervising both teams, solved the problem. He looked at me, left the office, returned a few minutes later, and told all of us we could go wherever we needed to go. I don’t know how he did that, but I was at the store before it closed.

I also bought myself some clothes. The Carnaby Street style was then in fashion. My subordinates talked about someone selling it the PX. That PX ordinarily sold little clothing, and I hadn’t stopped my high school notion that clothes make the man. I ordered a red and green plaid double-breasted jacket with green slacks, a brown plaid belted jacket with brown slacks, and a pair of brown loafers for the brown ensemble. I thought my Tokyo shoes were Carnaby enough for red and green one.

We also sold our rusty brown 1957 Volkswagen and bought a red 1962 Volkswagen that wasn't nearly as rusty. We bought it from my coworker who wasn't congenial to us at my barracks mate's apartment the day Nancy and Pat arrived in Germany. He was returning to the United States.

I sold the 1957 Volkswagen for less than I paid for it and bought the 1962 Volkswagen for more than I thought it was worth. But soon after that we acquired an expense we didn't have to buy. The Army provided healthcare for dependents of active duty Army personnel, and Nancy and I decided to try to have a sister for Pat.

By then Denise had arrived. But I drove Nancy and Pete Mattel and his *au pair* in our new car to see the Zugspitze. We left Pat at the daycare center on the *kaserne*.

On the *au pair*'s suggestion, we stopped in Ulm to see the cathedral, but we didn't go inside it. Snow fell heavily between Ulm and Garmisch. My windshield wipers jammed several times. Each time they jammed, I rolled down the driver side window and reached out to unjam them, letting snow blow onto Pete Mattel and his *au pair* in the back seat.

We stopped for lunch and drinks at a ski lodge in Garmisch. Leaving the lodge, Nancy slipped in the snow on the lodge's front steps. She fell solidly on her butt. As I helped her up, my new wedding ring slipped from its finger into the snow. I didn't discover the loss until I put the hand on the steering wheel while starting the car. We went back to look for it but didn't find it.

The *au pair* had had been frowning at me since Ulm. Then I felt she had reason, but I gave her more reason. We couldn't see the Zugspitze from Garmisch, and the nearest approach to it by road was through Austria. I wished to be able to say I'd been to Austria, but the *au pair* told me she didn't have her passport with her. I said we might try after coming that far. She frowned again, but we continued. A border patrol officer told us to turn around, but he told us to do that on the Austria side of his booth. So I succeeded at my goal. But, after that, Nancy and I spent more time with Roy and Denise, less time with Paul, and no time with either of the *au pairs*.

Denise asked me where I learned German. I told her I took a two week conversational German course during my first assignment to Germany. But I also told her I didn't think I spoke German.

"You speak German," said Nancy, and Denise nodded.

At Tante Emile's Roy showed me how to make a bottle of beer foam over by tapping its top with the bottom of another bottle. I tried it several times. Aunt Emily asked us to leave.

Nancy and Pat traveled to Germany on one passport. The picture in it was of Nancy with Pat on her lap. I put prints of some of the pictures I took in Vietnam beneath some acetate on my desk blotter at. I developed them while I worked at Tempo. A contractor developed film for the store. Among the prints I put beneath the acetate on my desk at the replacement detachment was a copy of Nancy's and Pat's passport picture. Over the acetate someone drew a mustache on Pat. I took the pictures home.

Two acting SGT's were on my team. The other was an acting sergeant in the Support Command personnel actions office before the reorganization. CPT Berenger made him subordinate to me but let him keep his acting SGT stripes. They weren't the arm bands we called candy stripes. We sewed them onto our sleeves. The other acting sergeant was also draftee and older than I.

The reason the replacement operation had two teams was that, for the detachment to be operational whenever a busload of replacements arrived, the operation was two shifts. One shift was from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The other was from 3:30 p.m. to midnight. The overlap was for communication between the teams. The teams alternated shifts, and, on one of my night shifts, at about 11:30 p.m., a busload of replacements arrived.

"We can let the other shift brief them," said the other acting sergeant.

"It's not that late," I said. "We have plenty of time to do."

"Why?" he asked. "What's the big hurry?"

"Just do it," I said.

Then, saying nothing more, and not waiting for another reply, I turned around and went up the stairs to the briefing room, leaving him to bring the replacements up, or disobey a lawful order. Part of our division of labor was for him to unload the busses and for me to brief the replacements, and we billeted and briefed the replacements on the fourth floor. In the briefing room, while I briefed, the other acting sergeant helped the replacements find items in their 201 files and complete forms. That worked well before then.

But, when I came to work the next afternoon, SSG Myers told me CPT Berenger wanted to see me, and he followed me to the orderly room. 1SG Jenkins, the detachment's first sergeant, escorted me into CPT Berenger's office. He stood by the captain's desk as the captain sat behind it. Familiar with that situation, I stood in front of the desk and saluted.

"From your performance across post," said the captain after returning my salute, "I thought you were the right pick for this job. But I've had some complaints about you, and people have told me they smell alcohol on your breath when you come to work. So I'm going to make Hynes your Team Chief and give the other team to your assistant. The change won't be in writing. So it



won't look bad on your record. But I'll need to take your acting sergeant stripes."

"I drink a beer with supper before I come to work on the night shift," I replied nearly in tears. "And how's losing the stripes going to look on my record?"

"Alright," he said. "You can keep the stripes, but Hynes will be your boss."

So, still, two acting sergeants were on one team while one was on the other, but Hynes was an SP4 in the Personnel Management Office when Captain Berenger told me I didn't outrank other SP4's, and Captain Berenger had also arranged his promotion to SP5 and made him the acting sergeant supervising the other team, and the other acting sergeant was a friend of his.

The first night Hynes was chief of my team, he raided the mess hall. I and the others of the team went with him. I found some sausage, took it back to our office, and sat at SSG Myer's desk, at the front of the office, to eat it.

"You're not going to eat that, are you?" asked Hynes. "You'll get trichinosis."

So I threw it into SSG Myer's trash can.

But that arrangement didn't last long,

"You can handle this," Hynes said to me the second night he was chief of that team. "I've got something I need to do tonight. Is that alright?"

Happy not to have to deal with him, I told him that was alright with me, and, partly because of my fall from CPT Berenger's graces and partly because I didn't wish to be a snitch, I told no one he did that.

But he made a habit of it, and, off duty, I'd begun to try to improve my on duty performance. I'd enrolled in the personnel management supervisors correspondence course the Army's Institute for Administration offered, and, because CPT Berenger was the Detachment Commander, a copy of the report of each of my sub-course completions went to him, and, in response to the first one he received, he called me and my team, handed me the copy, and made a little speech of commendation, literally. As Hynes stood by frowning, he called what I was doing self-improvement and commendable initiative.

He didn't do that again. He brought the next report to my office, handed it to me, and told me it was good, and he sent me the others through normal distribution. But, after receiving a few more, he recommended me for promotion to SSG E6, and, soon after that, arriving at work, I saw no SGT stripes on Hynes' sleeves, and he told me CPT Berenger wanted to see me.

"You're team chief again," said the captain to me then. "That was a mistake. I apologize."

“I’m not through with you yet,” said Hynes to me the next time he saw me with no one else in hearing distance of us, but the CPT Beringer moved him to the other team, and that made me through with him.

So, apparently, someone on my team had told the captain or SSG Myers what Hynes was doing, and no one on my team gave me any indication of preferring Hynes to me, and one member of it made clear the contrary.

“You and Sergeant Myers aren’t like other lifers,” said my SP5 draftee assistant team chief, and another of my subordinates called Nancy mom, and he was a PFC draftee from Thibodeaux, Louisiana.

I was sixth on the Support Command list for promotion to SSG. But, though I knew my performance before that board was also weak, I also knew my placement on the list was a mistake. I knew it because one of the correspondence course sub-courses had taught me that my points for taking the correspondence course should have made me first on the list. So I went to Roy’s boss, the P&A Battalion’s PSNCO, and asked him to recalculate my score.

He was an SFC, but he was also an old drunk, and, looking at my recommendation file, he said the mistake was mine. But an SSG in his office looked at the file, told him I was correct, and republished the list with the correct score. Then I was first on it by a wide margin.

At the *kaserne*’s Army Education Center, I also took the CLEP tests, the College Level Examination Program’s examinations to earn a year of college credit. That would have given me thirty more promotion points. I didn’t receive the results in time for that list. But I didn’t need them.

No one pinned my first set of SSG stripes onto my sleeves. CPT Berenger called me and my team to his office, and 1SG Jenkins also there. So I thought they’d pin them onto my sleeves. So, as the captain held them out toward me, I thought he was only showing me that was why I was there. But he looked me as though he wondered what I was doing. So I took them from that hand and shook the other he then held out toward me.

But, before returning to my office, I drove to the other side of the *kaserne* to have a tailor sew new stripes on the field jacket I was wearing, and I broke a regulation to do it, and I didn’t use the stripes CPT Berenger gave me. For fatigues, the Army was transitioning from yellow cloth stripes on to black metal pins, and I saw the stripes CPT Berenger handed me weren’t SSG stripes. They were either SFC or MSG stripes from which someone had trimmed one or two of the rockers.

But I bought pins for my fatigue shirts and ball cap. I also decided not to worry about the stripes, but, when I returned to the detachment, 1SG Jenkins looked closely at the sleeves of my field jacket. I thought he might remind me of

the change of policy, but he told me the stripes the captain gave me were MSG strips of his and that he'd trimmed the bottom two rockers from them.

"Yes, Top," I said. "I saw that."

"Just wondered if you used them," he said, and Roy later told me Jenkins was an acting 1SG, that his more permanent rank was MSG.

So I supposed that was why he had the MSG stripes handy that day. I guessed he had them in his desk drawer and that his acting rank was also for more authority over the replacements. But, at home that afternoon, Nancy noticed neither the stripes on my sleeves nor the pin on my hat.

"Notice anything different?" I asked her.

"No," she said after looking first into my face and next at my field jacket sleeves. "What?"

So I leaned my head closer to her. Army regulation proscribed wearing headgear indoors while not bearing arms, but, that day, because of the new pin on ball cap, I didn't remove it to enter our apartment. But, though then she also looked my cap, she sook her head, and I had a similar problem at work.

"Yes, PFC," said a replacement in response to my giving him an order while I wasn't in my field jacket.

"It's been a long time since I was a PFC," I said, and, after staring at my hat a few seconds, he silently turned away to follow the order, but a somewhat opposite problem with replacement passing me on the stairs while I was in my field jacket.

"Look at that young warrior," he said to a replacement coming down the stairs beside him.

Occasionally I limped from falling through the skylight in Frankfurt. So I supposed he thought my limp was from a combat injury. But being overestimated had been rare for me since before I tried to sell salve.

Once, in the hallway outside the orderly room, I overheard Hynes and a member of his team talking about a letter Hynes was trying to help the other member of his team write in in French. I didn't hear why they were doing that, but I thought of my failure to complete my minor in French at Wayne State, and CPT Berenger was also talking with them. So then I questioned my feeling superior to Hynes, and, the next day, I received, from the other team member an invitation to his wedding reception at the *kaserne's* officers club. I accepted the invitation, but that lead to more shame.

I bought the wedding gift at the store where I bought the Washer and China. It was a pewter candelabra about a foot tall with three sconces. I asked the sales clerk whether he could giftwrap it. He did, but the box he used was too low for it. So the package wasn't flat, and, though the invitation was to Staff

Sergeant and Mrs., I didn't take Nancy. Neither did SSG Myers take his wife, but, at the reception, I further showed my crudeness.

On the club's patio club I talked with a tall man with gray hair. He said he was an executive for Pan American Airlines. After he mingled on, I told some of my coworkers of my amazement at that, and, while I did that, he mingled past us and looked at me. But my drinking embarrassed me more.

Drunk, going inside for lunch, I bumped into one of the French patio doors, and, the, when I did that, the groom looked at me from the more than halfway across the room, and, sitting beside SSG Myers at a big round table with a white table cloth, I told him I'd rather be a sergeant major than an officer.

At work he told me saying that at an officers club was courageous, and he seemed to me to mean that, and, generally, I didn't regret my drinking, but, sober, I was nowhere near certain SSG Myers was correct.

A new member of my team was an African American SP4. He flew his wife to Germany at his expense before finding an apartment. I invited him and his wife to sleep in our living room until they found one. Nancy told me the SP4's wife told her my drinking beer would cost me my soul. I didn't know how to balance her concern for me against my disagreement with it. But they quickly found an apartment.

We also moved out of that apartment but for another reason. An effect of Nixon's turning the dollar loose on the world currency market was that the decrease in the value of the dollar against the deutschmark increased our rent by nearly thirty percent. So Nancy and I decided to move to the Army's dependent housing adjacent to the *kaserne*. It still had a waiting list, but the buildings had temporary housing on their top floors. The government would pay for but one move, but I used replacements and a deuce-and-a-half for the move into the temporary quarters, and my drinking was also a problem with that.

In Doeffingen, before we loaded the truck, I gave the replacements alcoholic beverages in our living room. I'd used some of our surplus cash to buy some alcoholic beverages other than beer for guests. Watching the replacements carry that washer up four flights of stairs, I thought I owed them more, but the detachment's SP5 assistant supply sergeant drove the truck, supervised the detail, and responded to the drinks by complained up his chain of command. But that wasn't as much of a problem for me as it could have been.

CPT Berenger passed the complaint through SSG Myers down to me. But SSG Myers said he didn't know what was wrong with assistant supply sergeant. He said he'd have done the same thing.

I also invited a replacement to our temporary quarters for a beer. But that was because, during a night shift, while screening his 201 file to determine

his assignment, I saw that his home of record was Coldwater. So I drove to our temporary quarters and told Nancy.

“I know him,” she said. “He was in my brother Dick’s band. He played at our wedding.”

So I drove back to work and took him home. He had a long talk with Nancy. But he said nearly nothing to me.

Also while we were in those temporary quarters, I bought at the PX a Sony receiver and a pair of H. H. Scott three-way speaker systems in Mediterranean style cabinets and connected my Girard record changer to the receiver.

“I didn’t know you knew about that stuff,” said Nancy, but, though I played a tape through the receiver to impress the replacement from Coldwater, neither did he say anything of that.

After my promotion to SSG, CPT Berenger broadened my responsibility. He told me he received a directive to appoint someone CBR NCO. CBR NCO’s advised their units on matters concerning defense against chemical, biological, and radiological warfare. CPT Berenger said the person would have to go to Vilseck for two weeks of training. He asked me whether I’d mind doing it. I volunteered.

“You sure?” he asked.

Then, remembering what the Michaels told me of volunteering, I recognized that others might not welcome the additional duty. So I thought CPT Berenger might be thinking that also. But I also remembered that the ninth trait of military leadership I memorized at the 3d Armored Division Noncommissioned Officers Academy was decisiveness.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

On the way to Vilseck, I stopped in Nuremburg. I’d heard that at the base of the stone wall around what was all of Nuremburg during the Middle Ages was a row of rooms with large windows through which prostitutes displayed themselves to the public. I walked along the wall considering using their services, but the time was late in the evening, and I didn’t know how late I could check into the BEQ, the bachelor enlisted quarters, in Vilseck. So I drove on to Vilseck and checked in.

Most of the other students outranked me and accepted an offer to try some mustard gas on their own skin. I didn’t, and neither do I remember learning anything there I didn’t learn in basic training, and I accomplished all of my CBR NCO duties in the first month I held that title. I wrote the detachment’s CBR SOP, standing operating procedure, and once used the

replacement briefing room to lecture the detachment on CBR, basically to tell my coworkers what the SOP said.

So that didn't broaden my responsibility much, but I received some literal recognition of my promotion during an inspection of the replacement operation. CPT Gates, George Gates' brother who assigned me extra duty cleaning toilets, had become LTC Gates and became 7<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Command's AG and was the inspector, and, as I stood at attention at my desk in my greens, standing beside CPT Berenger while talking with SSG Myers, he looked at me and then looked at my stripes. The change to black pins didn't apply to greens I was in for the inspection. He said nothing to me then, but he said much to me the next time I saw him, at a picnic for the members of the detachment and our families. He told me he was glad to see I was doing well and that his brother George was out of the Army but doing well in Connecticut.

But, in the weeks between the inspection and the picnic, CPT Berenger had returned to the United States, and I had bought at the PX a 35mm camera, and, at the picnic LTC Gates and the new detachment commander sat at a table eating cake.

"I had to get a picture of a captain and a colonel eating cake," I said after taking a picture of that as they simultaneously lifted their forks to their mouths.

Both put their forks down and frowned.

Also at the picnic, trying to play softball, I knocked a ball into the outfield. I thought I scored a home run, but I passed a runner between third base and home plate. He could have scored a home run, but he turned back. The captain and others asked me what I was doing. LTC Gates was sitting nearby watching. I looked at him. He frowned again.

Nancy and I saw the movie *Patton* with Roy and Denise at the movie theatre on the *kaserne*. LTC Gates sat alone in the row in front of us. I told Roy and Denise and Nancy he was an old tanker and a mustang, an officer who received his commission on the battle field. LTC Gates glanced back at me. Then he didn't frown but neither did he speak, and neither did I speak to him.

Nancy gave birth to another son. We went to the hospital late at night. Little traffic was on the road, and I had no reason to think the situation was an emergency, but I ran every red light on the 25 kilometer drive from our quarters to the Army hospital in Bad Cannstatt, and I left Pat in the car to take Nancy into the hospital. An MP found me in the hospital and told me I shouldn't do that. I had to go out and bring Pat inside.

I named our new son Benjamin Clifford, for my father and the title character in *Look Homeward Angel*. I took a leave to take care of Pat while

Nancy and Ben were in the hospital. Though I don't know why, they were in the hospital for several days. I took Pat to work and introduced him to 1SG Jenkins. Pat urinated on the sofa in 1SG Jenkins' office. The sofa's cushions had vinyl covers. Pat, sitting beside me, left a puddle in an indentation in the vinyl. I saw the puddle when I picked him up to go. But I said nothing.

Our more permanent dependent housing was on the first floor. Our first guests there occupied the apartment immediately above ours. They were an SP5 and his wife. I suggested that she and Nancy entertain us with a fashion show. They modeled each other's fanciest clothing.

"Kind of like burlesque," I said, hoping they'd make that a strip show.

They didn't reply. They left a few minutes later. I don't remember seeing them again.

Our next guests were Roy and Denise. Next was SSG Myers. I invited him and his wife, but he didn't bring his wife. He arrived in a sport jacket and tie but said his wife had something else she needed to do. The furnishing in the quarters included a buffet. I arranged on top of it our bottles of guest alcohol and some glasses we also bought for that. SSG Myers drank but one drink.

I again considered going to Officer Candidate School. I asked Nancy how she'd like to be the wife of a brigadier general. She shrugged and said my career was up to me. I also told Peggy of that consideration in a letter. She replied that I never finished what I start.

The Army initiated a policy of paying reenlistment bonuses of thousands of dollars. The minimum length of time in service before reenlistment for that was 21 months. When I reached that mark, I asked the P&A Battalion's recruiting sergeant whether I could reenlist for a NATO assignment. Part of my reason for that was wishing to add another country to my travels, but I also thought of a NATO assignment as a career move.

The recruiting sergeant said that officially I couldn't but that he probably could arranged it, and, a few days later he told me the personnel officer for an Army NATO unit would like to talk with me. He said his PSNCO was returning to the United States soon. The unit was in Mons, Belgium.

On the way I blew up our Volkswagen's engine. A passing driver stopped and told me he'd send a wrecker. The wrecker took me to a mechanic who said the engine needed replacing but that he could put a rebuilt one in it for about a 250 dollars and could do it in about an hour. I asked him whether he could take a check. I'd opened a checking account at an American Express branch on the *kaserne*. The mechanic said he could. I went to a guesthouse for lunch and ordered schnitzel.

The waitress also brought me fried potatoes and peas and carrots. I remembered that my conversational German teacher said leaving leftovers offended Germans. But I couldn't eat it all.

*"Nicht gut?"* she asked me.

*"Sehr gut,"* I replied patting my belly.

She frowned, but, when I returned to the repair shop, the car was ready to go.

In Belgium, I tried to ask an old woman for directions to Mons. I had a map but was having difficulty reading it. She spoke neither English nor German. I didn't know people spoke Flemish in Belgium.

I managed to read the map well enough to reach the unit in Mons before the end of the workday, but the PSNCO I was to replace told me my interview with the personnel officer would be the next morning. He invited me to spend the night in his family's quarters. He was African American. I had little to say either to his wife or to him, but neither did I have much to say to the personnel officer, and he was European American. I left with no assurance of a job.

Returning home I went out of my to see the cathedral in Cologne. But I arrived after dark, and the church was too close to other buildings for me to take a picture of all of its façade. So I didn't try. On the autobahn, a few kilometers from Boeblingen, thought I don't know why, the Volkswagen's windshield shattered. I left it at a service station overnight, but neither do I remember how I made my way home or back.

I asked that LTC Gates administer that oath of reenlistment of mine. The day he was to do that, the new detachment commander told me he couldn't do it that day. He asked me whether I'd prefer to reschedule it or have him do it. Thinking LTC Gates preferred not to do it, I let the captain do it.

My reenlistment bonus was six thousand dollars, but I collect but two thousand of it that day. The payment of the other four thousand was to be over the next two years. I took the two thousand home in twenty-dollar bills and threw them into the air in our living room. Nancy looked at the window. It was open. But none blew out.

I gave half of the two thousand to 1SG Jenkins for a 1966 Pontiac Catalina convertible. It was red when he offered to sell it to me, but he said he'd have someone paint it any color I liked, I selected British racing green. I also bought four new Goodyear wide oval tires with white lettering for it. I thought the color and the tires were sporty.

Before our departure for Belgium, Roy received his promotion to SSG.



“What do you think of that?” ISG Jenkins asked me in his office. “I know he’s a friend of yours, but do you think he’ll make a good E6?”

I told him I thought he’d make a better E6 than the P&A Battalion’s PSNCO made an E7. I was remembering seeing the PSNCO making his way from tree to tree on ice from his car to the headquarters building. Both ISG Jenkins and the PSNCO were African Americans, but I didn’t think of that before I said that. I thought of it immediately upon saying it, and ISG Jenkins looked at me. But he didn’t otherwise reply.

Another problem was selling the Volkswagen. I advertised it in a weekly Support Command news bulletin. A civilian replied and brought his daughter to our quarters. He told us he was thinking of buying it for her. He waited with me in our quarters while his daughter took it for a test drive with Nancy.

“Care for a drink?” I asked him.

He glancing at the bottles on our buffet, frowned, and shook his head. When Nancy and the daughter returned, I saw that the back bumper of the car was loose and had broken through rust in one of its rear fenders. They didn’t buy it. So, for much less than I paid for it, I sold it to the African American couple who’d slept in our living room while they sought an apartment.

But the check I wrote for replacement of the Volkswagen’s engine never cleared my bank account. The day after I closed it, the Army picked up our household goods to take them to Mons. The next morning, we loaded into the Catalina what we thought we’d need before having them again, and that afternoon we were in Mons.

## Chapter 18

### Banderilleros

On the way, in Liege, I missed a turn. I spent more than an hour finding the way back to our route. In Mons, another SSG was sitting at the desk I thought would be mine. The personnel officer said he arrived from the United States after our interview.

“But I found a position for you in the Netherlands,” he said. “Is that alright?”

That assignment was to be PSNCO for the United States’ Support Element of Allied Forces Central Europe. AFCENT was immediately subordinate to NATO, and, thinking of Windmills, tulips, and dikes, I expected to enjoy the Netherlands more than Belgium. So it was alright with me, and I didn’t think I had a choice. So I replied affirmatively, and we headed back in the direction from which we’d come. But, in Liege, we turned north, and that wasn’t a wrong turn.

The Job was in Brunssum. Our first stop was to sign in at the barracks for the Support Element’s headquarters detachment. CPT Hornbuckle, its commanding officer, welcomed me in his second floor office, but I didn’t report to him formally. I stood in front of his desk with my family while he stood behind it. Behind him was a window. In a parking lot below the window a bald SP5 and a blonde woman were climbing into an old gray Mercedes sedan.

“Must be nice,” said the captain. “A Spec. 5 being able to afford a Mercedes.”

Before Nixon turned the dollar loose, I planned to buy a new Mercedes convertible. I wondered why an SP5 owning a Mercedes would surprise a captain. But, also telling us the Support Element had no dependent housing, he recommended a guesthouse in town. He said the Army would pay our expenses there while we looked for more permanent quarters.

Andre, the owner of the guesthouse, operated it with his wife. He checked us into a large room on the second floor. He showed us to the room and also on the second floor showed us a large room with a large television. He said

it was for the guests, and, on the first floor, behind the bar, he showed us a receipt book. He said we could pour our own drinks and keep our own tab. He said he operated the guesthouse informally.

The next morning I reported for work. SSG Devillars, the PSNCO I was to replace introduced to me to the personnel officer, Chief Warrant Officer Helen R. Gilmore. But I had work problems nearly immediately.

Until SSG DeVillars left, I shared an office with an SP4 who had a habit of reading the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper each morning before beginning to do his job. The second morning I saw him do that, I told him he should be doing his job. He ignored me. I didn't care what he was doing, but I thought my job was to make sure he was doing his job. So the next morning I ordered him to get to work. He did, but the next morning an SP5 came into the office to talk with him.

"Is your name Archer?" I asked the SP5 with a smile.

I later learned he was the detachment's assistant supply sergeant, but he also had been the candy stripe corporal who threw my duffle bag on the floor at the beginning of my armor training. He looked at me when I asked him whether his name was Archer, and, after a few seconds, he nodded. But he didn't speak to me then. He returned to his conversation with the SP4. So, not knowing why he'd hold a grudge through all those years, I guessed the SP4 had told him about his interaction with me. So I persisted.

"We were squad leaders together in AIT," I said.

But he ignored that, finished his conversation with the SP4, and left the office, and, a few days after SSG DeVillars left, Miss Gilmore told me an SFC was arriving from the United States to replace him and that I'd maintain the Support Element's personnel records, and I also had a problem with an Air Force staff sergeant who was also staying at Andre's with his family.

"He said anybody can be an E6 in the Army," Nancy told me in our room. "He said he's been in the Air Force eight years and earns his pay."

"We're both staff sergeants," I told her. "But E5 is the paygrade for Air Force staff sergeants."

"Oh," she said. "I guess that explains it."

But it didn't explain it to me. I thought an explanation might have been that Army personnel said the Air Force was only taxi drivers for the Army. So my main thought was that no one told him to join the Air Force.

But also while we were staying at Andre's, I received my CLEP scores and learned I passed all the examinations by a wide margin, earning a year of college credit, and Nancy told people at the guesthouse of that.

"College boy!" said Andre the next time I saw him. "Congratulations!"

But I don't know whether the Air Force staff sergeant said anything of that, and I also received my scores for my annual proficiency evaluation and learned that I scored far enough above average for the Army to pay me fifty dollars per month in superior performance pay in addition to my E6 pay, and also Archer quickly changed his attitude toward me.

"White-letter Goodyears," he said, standing outside the headquarters building as I stepped out of the Catalina, the next time I saw him, and he also told me he had a Dutch girlfriend.

So he and she became my and Nancy's first friends in the Netherlands, and the Support Element's commanding officer's SP5 driver and his wife also befriended us, and they introduced us to friends of theirs, an SP5 working in the motor pool and his wife.

Archer's girlfriend's name was Henny. The driver and his wife were Bill and Maureen Howe. Their friend who worked in the motor pool was Gene Waldron. But I don't remember his wife's name. We didn't spend much time with them.

We rented a two-story rowhouse in Elsloo. Elsloo was about twenty kilometers from Brunssum. The house was at the end of the row and had a separate garage big enough for the Catalina. The Army didn't furnish it, but the landlord did. He didn't include a sofa or a buffet, but he furnished the living room with four comfortable and relatively new chairs, and he took us to a furniture warehouse to buy a buffet for our stereo equipment. A friend of his owned or managed the warehouse, and we went there in an evening while no one else was there. I wanted the buffet to be walnut in the Mediterranean style, but, searching the entire warehouse, we found none. So I settled on oak in the colonial style, but, at the PX, I bought an automatically reversing Akai tape deck and a Sansui turntable to replace our Sony tape recorder and Girard record changer.

Our landlord also owned a guesthouse in Elsloo. He had been a famous bicyclist. An injury ended that, but, in his guesthouse, on racks a few inches above the floor, he had bicycles customers could pretend to ride. And he also had two daughter and a son. His daughter babysat for Pat and Ben, and we also met his son and his wife and mother. We went to his mother's house.

We also invited Archer and Henny to our house for Henny to try American food. It included corn on the cob, but Henny ate none of that. Maureen told Nancy the reason was that people in the Netherlands used corn only to feed pigs. Henny was somewhat extremely overweight.

My commute from Elsoo to Brunssum was nearly twice as far as from Doeffingen to Boeblingen. But, about two months after our arrival, the Support

Element's headquarters moved from Brunssum to a bigger building that had housed a mine. It was in Schinnen and cut my commute about in half.

Before the move and before the new PSNCO arrived, Miss Gilmore asked me to plan the arrangement of our desks in our new office. It was but one room but was bigger than the office suite in Brunssum and bent around a corner with one end narrower than the other and not facing the door. So I drew floor plan with her desk in the narrow end. She accepted the plan I drew and asked me to drive to Schinnen and arrange the desks before the move. But, when I did that, I changed the plan. The kept it the same for her plan, but placed the other desks more in accordance with a work flow sub-course of my personnel management supervisors course.

"What's this?" asked Miss Gilmore when she saw the change.

"I took a course in work flow efficiency," I said. "I think this would work better."

"Put it the way you planned it," she said, scowling and leaving the office, and I did, but Jim Tyson, the SFC who took the job I expected to be mine, made me more than a records clerk, assigning to me any job that came to our office but didn't fit any of the others' job descriptions, and he was also social enough to Nancy and me for Nancy to tell me his wife told her she didn't know whether their garage would be big enough for his empty Jim Beam bottles.

I also performed my records maintenance responsibilities well enough to receive praise from an inspector, but I received no praise for that from COL Sparano, the Support Element's commanding officer.

"The inspector said we have the best-maintained 201 files and Form 20's he's ever seen," Miss Gilmore told me after the inspection. "But the colonel said they damn well should be."

I understood him to mean that my rank was too high for my job.

But one day SFC Tyson told me I needed to go to the colonel's office, and he and Miss Gilmore went with me. I'd received the Army Commendation medal for my performance in Germany, and the colonel pinned it onto my greens jacket, while others stood and watched as the Support Element's photographer took pictures. But, though partly because of Miss Gilmore's management style and partly because of the variety of responsibility SFC Tyson assigned to me, I expected my evaluation score to be higher that year.

"Look it up, Sergeant Harman," replied Miss Gilmore any time I asked her for instructions, requiring me to learn the regulations first hand.

The Army called warrant officers Miss or Mr.

But efficiency reports weighed as heavily as did test scores in the annual performance evaluations.

“I want you to look at this,” said Miss Gilmore before she submitted her first efficiency report for me. “Before I submit it.”

“Looks alright to me,” I said, seeing that she scored me above average in every area.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes, Ma’am,” I said, but later I learned that most Army efficiency reports indicated near perfection, and I kept trying to improve myself.

I registered for two University of Maryland extension courses at the Army Education Center in Brunssum, one in personnel management and the other an introduction to philosophy, but I dropped the philosophy course and performed poorly in the personnel management course.

But I also aced the personnel management course. I performed poorly on the examinations on the examinations, but, the instructor, an Army major, gave me an A on a report I wrote on the book *The Organization Man*. The reason I selected that book for the report was that I’d heard of it in high school, but, excepting the first and last paragraph of each chapter, I read none of it.

“You’re driving me to Webster,” he wrote beneath the A he gave me for it, but I supposed another reason the MAJ gave me the A for the course was than neither had he read it, and I dropped the philosophy course because of the instructor’s attitude he indicated the first night of the course.

“I’m going to teach you how to think,” he told my class.

So I wondered how anyone that arrogant could be a philosopher. But I also wondered how the major was a major and how the director of the education center had his job. When I told the director why I was dropping the philosophy course, he told me he didn’t see how that was a reason to drop the course. He also had a yellow Alpha Romeo with brown leather upholstery I thought was the nicest looking sports sedan I’d ever seen. But his reply regarding the philosophy instructor made me wonder why anyone that silly would own such a car, and I made no more use of the education center. But Nancy made use of it.

She took the took the high school General Educational Development tests and passed with a score above the ninetieth percentile in each area. So she was also trying to improve herself, and, though neither did she try to learn Dutch, she was fitting in well in the Netherlands. She bought produce, baked goods, and beer from trucks traveling the streets of Elsloo. She referred to the bakery truck driver as Hoy the baker. That’s what he said when she answered our doorbell. I took a picture of him handing her a loaf of bread in no wrapper, and, after seeing the print from the PX, I ordered a 5x7 enlargement of it for Nancy to give it to him. The night after she gave it to him, he gave her a dozen cookies, and Henny invited us to her home.

She lived with her parents. I don't know how her parents knew Pat's and Ben's shoe sizes, but they gave them wooden shoes for Christmas, and they fit. Neither did I learn Dutch, and neither could I understand our landlord's mother's German, but we occasionally went to her home for various reasons, and, on New Year's Eve, we went to our landlord's guesthouse. But that was a mistake.

The bicycles in the guesthouse suggested to me that it was casual, but he didn't invite us, and, with one exception, no one spoke to us while we were there. The exception was because police came in looking for us. We'd left Pat and Ben in the Catalina.

"They said it's too cold for your kids in your car," our landlord told us, quietly.

So we didn't wait for midnight but left immediately.

But, while I felt the shame of that, I had Nancy go outside that winter to start the Catalina for me to drive to work in warmth, and I found no shame in that and also found many other ways to shame myself.

Our landlord's son's name was Wim. Once at our house he told me of the rate of acceleration of a model of Porsche. I told him the Catalina would do that and took him onto the expressway between Elsloo and Schinnen to prove it. The Catalina fell less than three miles per hour short, but I kept trying until Wim said it was close enough.

On one of my few visits to the club in Brunssum for both civilian and military AFCENT personnel, as I spoke with an African American SP4 working in our office, he mentioned the European American SP4 I told to get to work my second day at work in Brunssum.

"He hates your guts," he said, and Miss Gilmore's secretary didn't much like me either.

She was a young Dutch civilian and also was our office's receptionist. She gave everyone in the office a birthday gift each year and didn't except me. She gave me a pewter tumbler. But Miss Gilmore told me she complained about me. Miss Gilmore wasn't specific, but I was smoking about four packs of non-filter Pall Mall cigarettes per day, and once the secretary came to my desk and emptied my ashtray

No one else said anything of my smoking, but, however much SFC Tyson drank, one morning he told me I looked worse mornings than he did, and once I was late to work.

Miss Gilmore didn't ask why, but I didn't hear my alarm clock and told her it didn't go off, and a small PX was on the former mining complex. So, during lunch, I went to the PX and bought a big brass alarm clock with big brass

bells on top, and, when I returned to work, I showed her the box. Other than to nod, neither did she reply to that, but she was specific in regard to me in regard to CPT Hornbuckle.

“He said you’re full of shit,” she said.

By then CPT Hornbuckle was no longer detachment commander. He was the Support Element’s S1, the staff officer in charge of the Support Elements personnel and administrative services. So he was Miss Gilmore’s boss, and she was referring to his response to some advice I gave her regarding stereo equipment. I’d told her that, because speakers are more mechanical than transistors, they require more care in manufacturing. I told her that, because of that, speakers should be relatively more expensive than amplifiers.

But my first interaction with him while he S1 was because he was running a weekly football pool from his office. He came downstairs to my desk to ask me whether I wished to participate. Knowing no more of football than I did of baseball or softball, I asked him which were the home teams. He told me the home teams were the teams in the second column. I selected all of them, bet a dollar, and won the pool, about fifty dollars. So I tried again the next week.

“You’re betting on Army?” he asked, and I would have won again that week if I hadn’t stood by that decision.

But, after all that, I also talked with him regarding stereo equipment. He told me where he lived and told me Nancy and I should come over some time. So, hoping to borrow some of his records to record them, though he didn’t say when, we did. He loaned me an album and gave us some drinks, but our visit didn’t seem to please either him or his wife. Neither said much to us, and his wife seemed to me to be angry at him.

But he took my side in a later situation. My only additional duty in the Netherlands was Support Element CQ, and the S1 was also responsible for that, and, because some Support Element operations remained in Brunssum, the CQ runners had use of an Army sedan, and one night my runner drove it to a night club and dented a fender parking it. I don’t know how CPT Hornbuckle knew that, but he arrived at the headquarters building at about the time the runner returned, and he asked me whether I knew the runner took the car to the nightclub. I said I didn’t, but the runner said I must have.

“He’s trying to cover for you,” said the captain to the runner. “You should be grateful.”

Later I learned that, because of the reduction in force because of Nixon’s de-escalation of the war in Vietnam, CPT Hornbuckle was losing his commission. Then I considered the possibility that his losing his commission was the reason for his wife’s anger and the taciturnity of both of them while



Nancy and I were at their house. Still I understood neither why the CQ runner said what he said to me nor why Captain Hornbuckle said what he said to him. But I thought a later situation may have been partly a result of both.

The CQ runner was African American. Captain Hornbuckle, looking at my Form 20 when I reported to him on my first day in the Netherlands, saw the suffix on my MOS code designating my CBR qualification. He asked me to be CBR NCO, and I didn't see a way to refuse. So I also wrote that detachment's CBR SOP there, and that earned me some praise from Miss Gilmore.

"That's what an SOP should be," she said.

I don't know how she knew I wrote it or why she read it, and CPT Hornbuckle said nothing to me of it, but my only other performance of my CBR NCO duty was what I thought may have had been partly a result of that interaction with the CQ runner.

The duty was inspecting the CBR equipment the detachment issued to the troops living in the barracks only for their use during that assignment. They were to display it on their bunks while I walked through the barracks. But, when I reached an African American SP4's room he was sitting on his bunk, and no equipment was on it, and he neither looked at me nor spoke to me, and nothing I'd learned at the NCO academy seemed to me to be relevant to that situation. To me, counseling was a conversation, and I didn't think of telling him I knew he must have a reason for what he was doing.

But, thinking of the my CQ runner, I thought the reason he didn't speak to me may have been that his problem was an African American problem I wouldn't understand, and all I could think of doing was to ask him to go with to the detachment commander's office, and he did. Office. But the new detachment commander was a European American first lieutenant, and the SP4 readily talked with him. So none of that made sense to me, and, though he called the lieutenant sir, he called me Harman.

"Sergeant Harman," I said to him several times when he did that, but he ignored that, and nothing he said to the lieutenant seemed to me to explain any part of that situation. So I considered the possibility that the CQ runner said something to him about me. But I don't know how he knew I'd be the inspector. I don't know how he could have known I was the CBR NCO.

So a net result of all that is that I came out of that situation thinking I had a lot of egg on my face, and I knew that and that I had a habit of that, and that I didn't know why, and another occasion making me feel as ridiculous though not a crucially was also in the barracks.

It was a requirement for everyone in the detachment to go there for an immunization inoculation in the day room. I don't remember what sort of

immunization it was, but I had no underwear newer than what the Army issued to me at Fort Dix. So my T shirts had big holes in them, and we had to remove our outer shirts for the shot, and, as I awaited my turn, I felt I had to say something about that. I don't remember what I said, but I remember a reply.

"It's embarrassing," said the SP5 who photographed me as COL Sparano pinned the Army Commendation Medal on my jacket, and I also remember that, in my office, after he took that picture, I saw that white sweat rings were around the armpits of that jacket, and one of the pictures showed more of my silliness, and he took that one in my office, and he gave me a 5x7 print of it.

In it I'm sitting at my desk in the jacket with the medal on my chest and a map of Israel on a fiberglass panel behind me like the partitions in the Quonset hut in Vietnam, and he also gave me the map. He gave it to me when I was picking up my office's distribution. His photography job was an additional duty for him. His main job was doing for the Support Element what I did for the PSC in Vietnam, and I knew nothing of Israel I didn't learn in Sunday school. So I had less reason to have that map behind me than I 'd had for looking at the maps in the back of my mother's Bible when I was six years old.

But I was still trying to think I was intellectual, and, when another SSG invited me and Nancy to his home to meet his wife, I asked him about a set of books he had in his living room on a set of shelves only for them. Most of them were fiction, but they also included historical works of non-fiction. He told me he bought them from a door-to-door salesman for 75 dollars and that I could have them for fifty. I bought them and proudly displayed them in our living room, but I read none of them, and, thought neither did Nancy or I become friends with him or his wife, with no invitation, Nancy and I took Roy and Denise to their house. They visited us in Elslloo.

When they arrived I was reading sports scores in the *Stars and Stripes* to try again to win CPT Hornbuckle's football pool, and I finished what I was doing before doing anything with Roy other than drink beer, and I don't remember whether I gave Roy a beer before I took him to their house, but I remember that no one there seemed to me to know why were there.

So the conversation was sparse and the visit brief, and a drive to Amsterdam that night was much like that. Roy drove us there in their car, and we did little there other than eat at a guesthouse and walk along a canal past some windows like those along the wall in Nuremburg. There Roy pointed out some condoms floating in the canal, and, though, at the guesthouse, Denise said she'd like to see the Rijksmuseum, no one replied. So we didn't, and they left the next morning.

But Nancy plainly enjoyed the time we spent with Bill and Maureen Howe and their kids. They had two sons older than Pat and Ben and a Volkswagen microbus. They took us, in the microbus, to Keukenhof to see the tulip fields and windmills, and, on Memorial Day, they took us to the Ardennes American Cemetery southeast of Liege, and, in Liege, returning turning to the Netherlands, we stopped at a flea market. Maureen said she wished to see.

A stand at the flea market sold used shoestrings. Beside the stand was a pile of rocks. A man with gray whiskers sprawled on his back on the pile of rocks. His mouth and eyes were open. The man in the stand was averting his eyes from the people walking past. The people walking past were averting their eyes from the man on the pile of rocks, but Maureen stopped walking, turned and stared at the man, stepped closer, bent over, looked more closely, straightened up, and turned back to us.

“Yup,” she said. “He’s dead.”

But I didn’t much care, and neither did I much care to see the graves at Ardennes, but I bought a motorcycle for myself. Single men living in the barracks were buying new 650 c.c. BSA Firebirds and Lightnings from a shop in Brunssum. I went to the shop and asked the owner for prices. He called the Catalina the battleship. I bought a 1954 BMW R50, a 500 cc touring bike.

But I didn’t have it long. Riding it on narrow roads bordering fields near Elsloo, I tried to turn more sharply and quickly than the heavy bike could turn. So I flipped it onto its headlight and traded it back to the shop for a new BSA Victor Special.

The Victor Special was a one-cylinder scrambler and not as expensive as the Firebirds and Lightnings. But the one cylinder was 441 c.c.s, and its compression was so high that starting it required pulling a lever on its handlebars. The lever relieved the compression by lifting a valve. The bike was also lighter than the 650’s, and the shop’s owner told me I could lift its front end by cranking its throttle. I couldn’t do that, but, excepting for the smell of piles of beets the Dutch used for fertilizer, I enjoyed riding it on those lanes between the fields. I left Nancy at home with Pat and Ben while I did that, but we saw the movie *Woodstock* in a theatre in Heerlen with Archer and Henny, and one of the film’s producers rode a Victor Special in the movie. Nancy and I also saw a performance of the play *Hair* in Heerlen with Bill and Maureen. But my only interest in it was seeing the naked women, and, after either *Woodstock* or *Hair*, we walked for blocks looking for the Catalina.

I also took Henny’s father for a ride on the Victor Special. I ran a stop sign at about a hundred kilometers per hour. I was drunk and didn’t see the sign. I was grateful I didn’t kill him, but I took Nancy on one long ride on that bike.

It cruised smoothly on highways. So I decided to take a thirty-day leave for us to travel Europe on it. Henny suggested that her parents take care of Pat and Ben in their apartment for us to do that, and her parents accepted the suggestion.

“What are you going to do with your kids?” Miss Gilmore asked me.

She frowned at my reply, but she approved the leave.

To be more sure the ride wouldn't vibrate Nancy as the Honda had vibrated me on my ride to Detroit, I replaced the bike's rear scrambler tire, and, because the bike's fuel tank was small, I bought a fuel can. We carried the can in an Army backpack and carried our clothes in to more. I attached the packs to an Army pistol belt I attached to the hand grip on the back of the bike's seat, and we bought enough Army fuel coupons for the entire trip.

Our first stop was in Luxemburg to have lunch there to be able to say we'd done more in all three BeNeLux countries than pass through them.

Our next stop was in Boeblingen to see Roy and Denise. Roy had become the P&A Battalion's recruiting sergeant, They had moved into Army dependent housing. Denise said they'd used those quarter to do for a couple what we'd done for the African American couple in Doeffingen. She said the wife masturbated her husband while they were sitting on their sofa.

Nancy asked Roy what had become of his au pair. That brought tears from Denise, but we drank all night. In the morning, on the sidewalk in front of the building, we took pictures of each other showing our navels. After we returned to the Netherlands, Denise wrote to Nancy that neighbor of theirs spread rumors about that.

At the Swiss border, I asked the woman who checked our passports whether she spoke German. She laughed at me.

The next stop in our plan was Rorschach. Excepting to sleep, my only reasons for stopping in Rorschach were that I'd heard of Rorschach tests and the Boden Sea. We stayed in a small hotel with no parking, but the desk clerk said we could park the bike in alley of shops beside the hotel. We didn't see the sea.

The Alps were so cold that I stopped in a rest area in a tunnel to try to stop shivering. A German family invited us into their camper trailer and gave us paper cups of hot soup. But we had lunch in warm sunshine at a table outside a restaurant beside a road with a view nearly straight down into a green valley with snowy mountains beyond it.

The next stop in our plan was Milan. The tunnel through the Alps into Italy was white on its Swiss end and black on its Italian end. Drivers in Milan honked before traffic lights changed and used all the road space they could. That left us riding the stripes between the lanes. The attendant at the parking

garage beside our hotel in Milan told me I couldn't park a motorcycle there, but the desk clerk in the hotel telephoned the manager of the garage, and the manager let me park in a corner where no car would fit.

As soon as we stepped from the bike at the *Piazza Duomo*, a man with pigeons perching on him transferred the pigeons to Nancy. Then he took pictures of us, led us to a desk in a subway tunnel, and told us we could have prints of the photographs in an hour. But the price was more than I was willing to pay, and, when we returned to the *piazza* to see the cathedral, women stared at Nancy's skirt, and they didn't smile. Henny told us women couldn't enter cathedrals in Italy in pants. So Nancy, to save space in our backpacks, was in a miniskirt.

In the *Piazza di Roma* in Venice I parked the bike in a place for bicycles and cashed some travelers checks at an American Express branch. Then we boarded a boat to go to a hotel we found in *Europe on Five Dollars a Day*. After checking in we walked about *Piazza San Marco* and saw the bridge of sighs but didn't cross it. We found a Harry's Bar, but it was a restaurant. The *maitre d'* asked us whether we had a reservation. I said we were only there for a drink. He let us have one at a big round table with a white table cloth. We saw some of Tintoretto's big dark pictures in churches. For that, Nancy was in corduroy jeans, and no one complained or stared at her. We ordered chicken at table on the Grand Canal. I expected a chicken dinner. It was one wing for each of us on a big white porcelain plate.

That evening a gondolier offered us a ride.

"No, thanks," I said.

He lowered his price several times.

"No thanks," I said several more times.

"What?" he exclaimed at last. "Do you want it for free?"

When we returned to the *Piazza di Roma* to travel on to Pisa, the motorcycle wasn't where I'd parked it or anywhere else I could see. We found our way to a police station. The police there told us that station wasn't at the level of government appropriate to our problem. They sent us to another police station. The police there also told us that and sent us to another station. There a man in civilian clothing said he was responsible for taking reports from people who spoke English and asked us to sit at a desk and tell us what our problem was. I told him what happened, including where we'd parked the bike and why we parked it there. But then he asked us what kind of car it was, and, when I told him again that it was a motorcycle, he told us we'd have to go to a tobacco shop to buy stamps to pay for the report. We did, paid for the report, and spent

another night in the hotel. But, the next morning, we checked out. I gave the can of gasoline to the desk clerk. He smiled. We continued our trip by train.

“Look,” said Nancy grinning in our hotel room in Piza.

She was looking at the leaning tower about a block away beyond some rooves of other buildings. I took a picture of her leaning with both hands against it as though she were trying to keep it from falling. At its top she sat beneath one of its bells to look through a guide book she bought. The bell began to ring. She jumped from beneath it about as quickly as Ackey jumped from the tire of the Malibu. The next day we traveled to Rome.

There we checked into a hotel a half block from the Spanish Steps. We walked all over the oldest part of the city. Nancy saw in her guidebook a picture of the statue of Marcus Aurelius on Capitoline Hill. She said she wanted a picture of her on the horse, astride it behind the emperor. But the statue was too high, and the horse was too wide. I took a picture of her on the portico of St. Peters Basilica standing beside a column wider than she was tall.

We spent hours in the Vatican museums. We spent nearly no time looking at the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, but we spent more than an hour trying to find our way out of the museums. We passed several works several times. I ignored Nancy’s complaints that I should ask for directions. She was angry at that but had shown no anger at my losing our way in Liege.

She read in her guidebook of the catacombs. She asked to see them. I didn’t know why and didn’t ask, but that was our only taxi ride in Rome and our only guided tour of the trip. A priest gave us the tour, and I suspected that I should made a donation. But didn’t know how to ask. So I didn’t.

The ruins of the Roman Forum reminded me of the dirty tunnel through the alps. A man in the Coliseum hung a bunch of colored slides in front of my face. My camera was hanging around my neck. I thought of the gondolier and the man with the pigeons. The Coliseum was more colossal than I’d imagined it was. We spend more leisurely time in it than we spent in any other famous site in Rome. I took a picture of Nancy inside it. She was sitting on a stone at about the center of one side of it. I stood at entrance at the end where the man hung the slides in my face. In the picture she was a hardly recognizable speck.

From the Coliseum we walked up a cobblestone street to the Church of St. Peter in Chains to see Michelangelo’s statue of Moses. I’d bought an electronic flash attachment for my camera, but a sign in the church forbade using flash attachments. Taking a picture of it required putting a fifty-lira coin into a coin mechanism to turn flood lights on for that for a few seconds. I did, but then about a dozen other people rushed to take pictures. So I had to squeezed myself among them to take mine.

That picture was to be the 36<sup>th</sup> on a roll of film for 36 pictures. Sitting on the steps in front of the church to change rolls, I discovered that the film hadn't been winding. So I reseat the film on camera's film-feeding ratchet and spent another fifty lira to take another picture of the Moses statue. Then I spent about two hours taking the other pictures I thought I'd taken on that roll.

"My feet hurt," said Nancy, nearly weeping after about an hour and a half of following me while I did that.

"We're almost finished," I said, walking ahead of her and hardly slowing down.

After the Venetian chicken wings we heeded the advice in *Europe on Five Dollars a Day* to eat *prezzo fizzo* in trattorias. In one, thinking desert was in the price, I ordered desert. It was a pear and some cheese. I told the waiter it should have been in the *prezzo fizzo*. I refused to pay. The waiter insisted that I pay. Through several cycles of that, my volume increased while the waiter's didn't. I ended that altercation by leaving the restaurant.

"Come on," I said to Nancy as I turned toward the door. "Let's go."

"Are you going to leave your paper?" she asked.

I never read newspapers before reading the *Stars and Stripes* in the Netherlands, but, on that trip, I was reading the *Herald Tribune* in restaurants. Not looking again at the waiter, I walked past him, picked up the paper from the table, and left the restaurant with Nancy following me. Still I didn't pay.

Our next stop was Sitges. Henny told us it was on the Spanish Riviera. She said a lot of Dutch people went there because it was less expensive than the French Riviera. We stared at Monaco as we passed it on a train.

We'd packed swimsuits. At Sitges I spent a few hours with Nancy on the beach hoping some of the women would be in topless swimsuits. Not seeing any, I left Nancy sunbathing to walk the boardwalk looking for some. I found none, but a young blonde woman passed me in a one-piece swimsuit that was mostly transparent. I walked past her and back twice to see whether a nipple or some pubic hair was beneath a transparent part. If she hadn't looked at me the second time and frowned, I might have kept doing that.

Our hotel was about a half block from the beach. Its owner reminded me of Gene Cecie. He showed us some tour brochures. One was for a bus tour to Barcelona to see a bullfight. I thought one should see one while visiting Spain. I enjoyed the pageantry and color with the trumpets and the *banderilleros* leaping into the air with their darts. I also enjoyed seeing a bull throw a *matador* into the air with his horns, but I didn't enjoy seeing the *picadors* bleed the bulls with their spears or seeing a team of mules dragging a bull around the ring.

Nancy told me she read in the program that the dragging was to honor the bull for its courage in throwing the matador. He threw him immediately upon the matador's sticking the sword in the bull's hump. But I didn't understand how dragging the bull honored it, and neither did I honor the matador for returning to his feet or sticking the sword in again. Nancy also told me the program said the bull's meat went to charity, but I saw no charity in any of that.

That evening, in Sitges, I took Nancy to a bar. It was in a cellar with small tables surrounding a small dance floor. A spotlight shined down on the dance floor. I thought the floor may have been for women to dance nude. We ordered drinks. I waited, but none did. I thought the reason may have been that the only other customer while we were there was a man sitting alone at a table on the other side of the dance floor. But he gave me reason think that wasn't why why he was there.

"Where are you from?" he asked, and he asked us to join him, told us he was from California, said John Wayne was gay, and called him the Duke.

But, the next night, I left Nancy at the hotel and had a drink with him in a Volkswagen microbus, in which he said he was traveling and sleeping.

"I'd like to roll you into that bed," he said.

I didn't reply to that, but the next morning Nancy and I left Sitges with him in the microbus.

The next stop in our plan was Madrid, and he offered us a ride there.

"This is where they film the spaghetti westerns," he said as he drove us through brown hills he said were the Sierra Madres.

In Madrid he stopped in front of a few hotels in which neither Nancy nor I wished to stay.

"I'm not going to drive you around all night," he said.

We checked into the one in front of which he said that.

"Room *cinco*," said the man who checked us in.

He pronounced it "thinko".

The only reason Madrid was on our itinerary was to see the Prado. But, when we went there the next morning, it wasn't open. So, after spending a few minutes looking at it from a park bench in front of it, we found our way to the train station to travel on to Pamplona. We went there because we knew that was the week of the running of the bulls. So we found no empty seats on the train. But, before the train left the station, as we stood outside a compartment hoping for someone to leave it, I leaned from a window and bought a bottle of chianti, and soon a young woman left the compartment. So we jammed ourselves into the space she left



The Chianti turned my teeth purple. Nancy spoke congenially with the young passengers in the compartment. Pamplona's main square was full of young people in red bandanas. Many of them were sleeping. One of them told us all the hotels were full and that the bulls had already run that day. We returned to the train station.

The next stop we planned was Paris. As we stood in front of the station awaiting a train there, a young woman in a loose T-shirt sat near us on the pavement. I tried to see down her shirt. But a young man standing beside her frowned at me. So I looked away.

Our hotel in Paris was on the Left Bank near the cathedral *Notre Dame de Paris*. So we walked to all the famous places I visited on pass there from Frankfurt. We went inside the cathedral but not the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. In the Louvre, too many other people were between us and the Mona Lisa for us to see it, and on neither of those two trips of mine did I find the elevator to the top of the Eiffel Tower. In Pigalle I took Nancy into a cheap strip joint but not into the Moulin Rouge.

The last famous site we saw there was the movie *Easy Rider*, and, in an inexpensive restaurant we found near the Champs Elysees, I didn't leave a tip. We also went there the next day, but no one waited on us. So, after waiting about a quarter of a hour, we left. Tipping wasn't customary in Germany. So I thought it wasn't customary anywhere in Europe.

Neither did anyone clean our hotel room while we were there. I know no reason for that, but the room was on the fifth floor, and the hotel had no elevator. So, the morning after the first day of that I complained to the desk clerk, and, the third day, I complained about it about as loudly as I'd refused to pay from my dessert in Rome, and then he ignored me. Other guests at the desk stared at me while I did that, but he didn't give me that much attention, and Paris was our last stop.

When we arrived at Henny's apartment to pick up Pat and Ben at Henny's parents' apartment, Pat ignored us. He continued doing what he was doing. Ben Stared at us, but, though, in Elslloo, I helped him learn to walk, he didn't come to us.

I gave Henny's father several bottles of liquor for taking care of them, but we gave her mother nothing, and Dutch police investigated whether we'd illegally exported the Victor Special.

But Miss Gilmore asked me to go with her to a conference. I don't remember its purpose, but it was in Worms, and SFC Tyson didn't go. I drove us there in the Catalina. We checked into rooms in a guesthouse. The night of our arrival, we ate supper together there.

“Have you thought about applying for attaché duty?” she asked me.

“What’s attaché duty?” I asked her.

“Embassy duty,” she said. “You like to travel.”

The conference was two day, but she didn’t stay for the second day of it. She took a train back to the Netherlands the evening of the first day, and I neither ate with her that evening nor drove her to the train station. As soon as we returned to the guesthouse, I changed into civilian clothing and drove the seventy kilometers to Frankfurt, to the *Kaiserstrasse*.

After drinking beer in some strip joints, I flagged down a woman I saw driving alone in a 1963 Chevrolet. I suspected that she was a prostitute, and she was. She took me to an upstairs room in a building on the *Kaiserstrasse*. She provided a condom, but I paid her extra to remove all of her clothing.

“You’re beautiful,” I said.

“I like girls,” she replied.

Back on the street, I flagged down a woman driving alone in a Mercedes. She took me to a room she called her office. I also paid her extra cash to remove all her clothing, but she got onto the bed with her shoes on. I asked her to remove her shoes.

“You’re crazy,” she said, but she grinned and removed them.

She also provided a condom, but, after putting it on my penis and before straddling me as had the other woman and the woman at the House of Three Colors in Frankfurt, she performed fellatio on me. Feeling too drunk to drive, I spent a few hours in a room in a small hotel on the *Kaiserstrasse*. I could hardly stay awake during the second day of the conference.

So my libido or virility had greatly increased since my time with Sandy. Nancy never refused me, but I was regularly masturbating. Once she caught me. Our house in Elsloo had a full bathroom upstairs and a toilet and sink in a smaller room beneath the stairs across from our front door. Once Nancy opened the door while I was doing that on the downstairs toilet. I covered my penis with the hand I wasn’t using, and she closed the door saying nothing. But she looked long enough for me to be sure she saw what I was doing.

## Chapter 19

### Sociability

Miss Gilmore paid me the mileage the Army paid her for the drive to Worms and didn't ask why I didn't drive her to the train station or eat with her the night after the first day of the conference. I looked up the procedure for requesting attaché duty and submitted the initial paperwork. Nancy took the necessary photograph with a side of our garage as its background.

In about the same way I befriended Roy Maples, I befriended an SP6 legal clerk new to the company. His name was Eschelmann. He came to my office and asked me how to bring his wife to the Netherlands. But he'd married her while on leave before flying there, and she arrived with her two children from a previous marriage, and he refused responsibility either for her or her children. Bill and Maureen invited them to stay in their home while we administrators administrated the problem, but I told her at their house that I wouldn't have expected that from Eschelmann.

"I know he's a good'n," she said.

But he gave no one there a reason for what he was doing.

Her black hair and green eyes reminded me of Sandy, but, while also wondering why he didn't share her Texas accent, I thought her eye shadow might be a reason he decided against their marriage, and, whatever his reason was, we shipped her and her children home.

Eschelmann also brought a bachelor SP5 and his girlfriend to our house with some marijuana. The SP5's name was Vigil. We smoked the marijuana while listening to music through our stereo system. They returned several times.

One evening they came by for a different reason. Vigil had a grievance against COL Sparano. My processing extraordinary personnel actions there had given me a reputation beyond Miss Gilmore's appreciation for my writing ability. While they told me the details, I used a legal pad to organize them into a comprehensible narrative. I don't know who typed it into a letter, but someone did and submitted it, and Miss Gilmore recognized my writing style.

"Did you write that letter?" she asked me outside our office.

“I helped them with it,” I said, trying to be honest while denying responsibility. “They came to my house and asked me to.”

“Alright,” she said, leaving me to think she was also trying to do the minimum required of her.

I heard no more about that, but neither Vigil nor Eschelmann ever again came to our house, and, though Eschelmann didn’t stop associating with me, he made evident that he didn’t hold me in high regard.

“Those are nice clothes for a guy like you,” he said of my brown Carnaby Street outfit at an AFCENT party at the club in Brunssum, and my only evening out drinking with him anywhere else ended early.

The SP5 with the Mercedes CPT Hornbuckle mentioned the day I arrived in Brunssum was near his separation date. He sent his wife home before he left. Eschelmann asked me whether I’d like to go out drinking with them. I understood the purpose to be to pick up women. We went to a night club. All of us talked to women there, but Eschelmann reminded me that I had a wife, and they took me home early. So then I didn’t understand why they asked me to go with them.

Nancy and I played poker with Bill and Maurine at their house. After their children went to bed, Bill suggested that we stop playing for his poker chips, that we play strip poker instead. I talked them into changing the rules to accelerate the stripping. We did that several nights. One night, completely nude, Bill took Nancy into their shower while I chased Maureen about the house and grabbed her from behind as she tried to run up the stairs. Our interaction never became more physical than that, but, another night while all of us were completely naked, the doorbell rang.

“Shit,” said Bill, peeking from behind a curtain of his front living room window. “It’s the colonel.”

I don’t remember why, but Bill’s oldest son’s clothing was more readily available to us than was ours, and the night was extremely cold.

“You answer it,” said Bill handing me some of the son’s clothing. “I’m too big to get into these. I’ll go upstairs and get some clothes. Don’t let him in.”

I couldn’t button the trousers, but I went to the door and opened it widely enough to talk to the colonel.

“Harman!” he said, shivering. “Where’s Bill? I need his keys to my car.”

“He’s upstairs, sir,” I said. “I’ll get him.”

“Bill,” I shouted, closing the door and leaving the colonel outside in the cold while Bill came down, went back upstairs for the keys, and came back down to give them to him.

A CIA operative came to Schinnen to investigate my request for attaché duty. Miss Gilmore told me when he’d be there. I thought an investigation of me would involve talking about me and not with me. So, when he arrived, I left the office.

“How do you do,” I said hardly audibly as I walked past him as he entered the office.

“Is that CID guy gone?” I asked Miss Gilmore when I returned.

“He wasn’t CID,” she said. “He was CIA.”

CID was the Army’s criminal investigation division. Miss Gilmore’s reply told me she thought I should have known that. Neither did I know the difference between the CID and MI, military intelligence, but I didn’t ask Miss Gilmore the difference or look it up.

My return to the United States was before my reply to my request for attaché duty but after my DEROS. My assignment to Europe was to be three years, making my DEROS 18 November 1971. But I didn’t receive my assignment instructions until December, and they might have been later if Miss Gilmore hadn’t done for me more than I did for MSG Qualls.

“He’s done a good job for me,” I heard her say during her telephone inquiry to our next higher headquarters. “I’d hate to see him get screwed.”

When I had my assignment instructions, Bill and Maureen hosted a going away party for Nancy and me. They asked me to bring the speakers from our stereo system to their house for it. But it was to be a surprise party. So they didn’t tell me why they were asking. So, thinking they wanted to use them in connection with our strip poker, I tried to hurry us into whatever that might be.

“Wait awhile,” said Bill.

Soon Eschelmann, Vigil and his girlfriend, the motor pool SP5 and his wife to whom Bill had introduced us, Archer and Henny, and SFC Tyson and his wife arrived. but Miss Gilmore didn’t.

SFC Tyson suggested shooting craps. Many of us did, against a living room wall. The others taught me how. But SFC Tyson’s wife pulled him out of the game. She took him reluctantly home.

“Sorry I couldn’t make it to your party,” she said Miss Gilmore Monday.

I ordered a new British racing green American Motors Gremlin. I ordered it through the European Exchange, the regional PX organization, for delivery in Detroit. We planned to fly to Detroit for a Christmas leave before I

reported to my new assignment. The assignment was to an Armor battalion at Fort Hood, Texas.

To pay for the car, I requested an exception to the Army's policy of paying my reenlistment bonus in installments. The process for receiving the exception required a letter from my commanding officer saying I was an outstanding soldier. I wrote the letter and asked the 1LT commanding the detachment to sign it.

"Of course," he said reading it and smiling as though he hadn't seen my inability to command the respect of the African American SP4 who refused to call me sergeant, but SFC Tyson was less complimentary regarding two of my decisions.

"You might go to some third world country and get yourself killed," he said of my request for attaché duty, also saying it was crazy, and he said American Motors cars were junk.

Bill Howe suggested that we stay at his house for our last two weeks in the Netherlands. He said I could say I was staying at Andre's and collect expense money from the Army as I had at the beginning of my assignment there. He said that, if I gave Andre some money, he'd give me a receipt to support my claim.

"Kind of noisy there isn't it?" Miss Gilmore asked when I mentioned to her that we'd be staying at Andre's, and, when I asked Andre for the receipt, I learned why she asked that.

He'd divorced and changed the guesthouse into a discothèque. I found him sitting at the end of the bar and had to shout for him to hear my request. But he asked me how much I wanted him to write on the receipt, gave me a receipt for the amount I named, and didn't ask me to pay for it.

"How much do you want for it?" I asked him when he handed it to me.

The amount I asked him to write on the receipt was what I'd paid for two weeks when we stayed there at the beginning of that assignment, and the price he asked for it was about what I'd paid him for each night of that stay. But we didn't stay at the Howes' house during those two weeks. Miss Gilmore's question also made me fear punishment for fraud. But we stayed in Elsloo until our return to the United States, and no one questioned the receipt.

My Aunt Bertha picked us up at the airport in Detroit.

"I didn't think you'd turn out alright," she said looking at us.

I was again in my brown Carnaby Street outfit. She drove us to the car dealership where I was to take delivery of the Gremlin, left us there, and took our luggage to her house. We were to spend that night there.

"I'm Sergeant Harman," I said, offering a hand to a salesman.

He accepted the handshake, but he called me Bill and told me the car wasn't there. He didn't say why, but said he had a better one for the same price. He said it was red and not green but that its engine was a V8 and not the straight six I ordered. I preferred what I ordered, but I accepted the offer. I didn't know how I could wait for transportation.

After supper at Aunt Bertha's house and breakfast the next morning, we drove to Coldwater. Nancy's first priority was to buy Christmas gifts. Mine was to find Greg and Hummer. After a few minutes of talk with Nancy's father and stepmother and siblings, we left our luggage at their house and found Hummer and Peggy. They were renting a house in Sturgis.

"Let's go find Greg," I said to Hummer.

"I don't think so," said Hummer, and he refused to say why.

We left Nancy and Pat and Ben with Peggy at Peggy's and Hummer's house and went to the only bar on Sturgis' main street.

"Want to pick up the nut?" asked Hummer at its bar.

"Who's the nut," I asked.

"She'll pack your pooper," he said

He directed me to a white clapboard house with a wide front porch and told me to park at the curb and wait for him in the Gremlin.

"Her parents don't know you," he said.

He walked up the walk, stepped onto the porch, and rang the doorbell. A man came to the door. Hummer talked a few minutes with him. The man brought a girl to the door. Hummer brought her to the Gremlin and pulled her into the car onto his lap.

"This is Billy," he said. "He's a friend."

"I don't know him," she said.

"That's alright," said Hummer. "He's smart."

He told me to drive out of town. As I drove he told the girl to get into the back and take off her clothes. I'd folded down the back seat for the luggage. That made that easy for her. Hummer leaned between the seats and licked her vagina. I looked back to see it. When I looked ahead again, a deer was standing in the road in front of the Gremlin and looking at us. Before I could hit the brake pedal, I hit the deer. I stopped on the shoulder. Steam spewed from the Gremlin's radiator. I never saw the deer again. A car coming from Sturgis stopped in front of us.

"Need some help?" its driver asked after walking back to the Gremlin.

"No," I said, still hoping for some time with the girl. "We'll be alright. Thanks."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

I nodded, and they left, but Hummer told the girl to dress and took her up a high embankment beside the road. As I stood outside the car looking at the damage to the car and wondering what to do, a patrol car coming from Sturgis stopped behind the Gremlin. I walked back to it. The driver rolled down his window. Another deputy sheriff was on the passenger side. He spoke first.

“Are you Bill Harman?” he asked.

“Dennis!” I said. “How are you doing?”

“Where’s the girl?” he asked.

“What girl?” I asked.

“The sixteen year old girl who was naked in the back seat,” replied the driver.

Dennis Gruner, the other deputy, was a classmate of mine in high school. He was also more of candidate for cooties than I. But I said no more to him.

“I just read the Constitution,” I told the driving deputy. “So I know I don’t have to answer that.”

The Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence were in one of the books I bought from the SSG in the Netherlands. I’d recently I’d read some of the Constitution but not its Fifth Amendment. Neither deputy said more to me. They turned around and drove back toward Sturgis shining a spotlight up the embankment. A few minutes later a wrecker arrived. Its driver hooked the Gremlin to it and dropped me at Hummer’s house.

“Where’s Hummer?” asked Peggy.

“I thought he was here,” I replied.

I opened a can of beer, but Hummer arrived before I finished drinking it. He drove me and Nancy and Pat and Ben to Nancy’s father’s house. The garage charged me 450 dollars for temporary repairs the mechanic told me would be enough for me to drive the Gremlin to Texas. I took a picture of its odometer. It said 451 miles.

“She was a mess when I got her home,” said Hummer the next time I saw him. “She had mud all over her from walking through those cornfields.”

The Christmas gift Nancy bought for her Uncle Tom was some little wrenches in a little orange plastic box.

“He’ll like this,” she said.

But, when he opened it, he took one of wrenches out of the box, scowled, put it back into the box, closed the box, and set it on the table beside his chair, saying nothing.



We slept in an upstairs room between the stairs and the room where Barb, Nancy's sister, slept. One morning, as I sat on our bed waiting for Nancy to ready Pat and Ben for the day, Barb came into the room in a long T-shirt and nothing else. She stopped about two feet in front of me and turned toward me to talk with Nancy for a few minutes.

Her brother Dick had joined the Airforce. He was at a base in Wichita Falls, Texas. On our way to Fort Hood, we stopped to see him. We found him in his barracks, but we arrived in a blizzard. Cars were sliding all over the streets. So we didn't take him anywhere. But road graders were clearing the roads. So I supposed the reason the cars were sliding was that people there hadn't driven in snow enough to know how. So we drove on.

Our next stop was Austin. Cleve had become State Editor for the *Austin Statesman*. So we stopped to see him and Shirley. Cleve showed me a long article on the front page of his newspaper. It was about George Herbert Walker Bush. He was then running for the United States Senate. Cleve's byline was below the headline. After quickly scanning the article, I handed the paper back to Cleve.

"What a bunch of crap," I said.

"Yeah," said Cleve. "I know."

But I knew nothing of Bush and nearly nothing of politics anywhere.

Neither was our next stop Fort Hood. Accepting advice from one of the sub-courses of my personnel management supervisors course, I'd written to the commanding officer of the armor battalion at Fort Hood, telling him I was looking forward to working for him. But I had no wish to work for an armor battalion and had learned that attaché duty often required language training and that a defense language school was at Fort Bliss, Texas. Both Fort Hood and Fort Bliss were in the Fifth United States Army area, and the Fifth Army's headquarters was at Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio. So our next stop was Fort Sam, for me to request an assignment to Fort Bliss.

There an SSG looked at my 201 file and took it to a major. The major and some others talked with me in the major's office. They told me the language school at Fort Bliss taught only Vietnamese, but they offered me an assignment to the Fifth Army's command personnel management inspection team. They told me the CPMI team inspected personnel management operations throughout the Fifth Army area and that the Fifth Army area extended from New Mexico to Michigan. I immediately accepted, both for the travel and the cache.

"Don't you want to ask your wife first?" asked the major.

"She knows it's my career," I replied, and we moved into half of a one-story brick duplex in Fort Sam's dependent housing area.

The other members of the team were a MAJ, a 1LT, a CWO, an MSG, and two SFC's. So I was its lowest-ranking member. But each member had his own category of operations to inspect, and we inspected them with little supervision.

The team also occasionally ate together for various reasons. Before my first inspection trip, the entire team went to the Bean Pot, a restaurant with cafeteria line serving brisket and a buffet with many kinds of beans. At another restaurant the major asked me whether I'd tried the soup. It wasn't soup but a small dish of a clear sort of hot sauce. So that was a sort of joke on the new guy. To keep me from eating it, one of the SFC's told me what it was, but we all laughed.

The MSG invited the team to his house. He'd arranged chairs around the walls of his living room for all of us to have one conversation. He spoke of Boys Town. It was in Nuevo Laredo, across the Rio Grande from Laredo. He said the Mexican government tolerated prostitution and other criminal behavior there. I wished to go there and decided to if I could find an opportunity.

My first inspection trip was to Fort Hood. Seeing the rows of beige World War II wooden barracks, I was glad I hadn't taken the assignment there. But it had a golf course, and we arrived on a Sunday afternoon. So I played my first round of golf with the 1LT. He played nearly as poorly as I. Speaking with the SFC's in his absence, I called him Lefty Lieutenant. They laughed at that.

The first operation I inspected was the headquarters of the battalion whose PSNCO I might have been. Ordinarily we inspected higher headquarters, but we selected that battalion as a sample of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division's many armor battalions. I also helped inspect some of the division's AG operations, but the major assigned that sampling exclusively to me, and an SP5 in the office remembered my name.

"I saw your letter," he said looking at my nametag. "I thought you wanted to work here."

After finishing my part of the job at division level, I watched one of the SFC's inspecting 201 files.

"That one's fine," he said tossing one onto a pile of others he'd inspected.

The SFC supervising the division's records operation was also watching.

"I bet I can find a major deficiency in it in less than five minutes," I said.

"Go ahead," said the inspecting SFC.

I removed the folder from the pile and flipped through papers for less than a minute before coming to the form designating the serviceman's Servicemen's Group Life Insurance beneficiary.

"There you go," I said pointing to the blank space on the form where the serviceman's signature should have been.

Both SFC's shook their heads and grinned. But I returned the file to the stack where I'd found it. So no one recorded the deficiency.

I also quit smoking on that trip. One day, about an hour before lunchtime, I ran out of cigarettes with none of my teammates nearby. So, deciding that bumming a cigarette from people I was inspecting wouldn't be appropriate, I held out until lunch. But, though, at the counter at the PX snack bar, I had the cash to buy a pack ready in hand, neither did I didn't buy it.

"If I quit smoking," I asked Nancy at home, "will you?"

She looked at me and said she would. Then I told her I already had. Still she tried, but, after a few days, she resumed, while I didn't.

I bought a motorcycle, a new 350 c.c. Honda scrambler. Ben Shafstahl, one of the SFC's on the team, told me he'd buy one if I did. But he didn't. I rode mine to the fourteen-foot-wide mobile home he and his girlfriend were renting. They weren't married. So Army dependent housing wasn't available to them. He looked at the bike and grinned, but, a few days later, he told me he didn't have the credit for one. I paid cash for mine.

I bought two helmets and took Nancy for a ride in woods on the post. I asked her to take pictures of me and the bike in the air at the top of a hill I climbed. But ordinarily I did that alone., as I left her at home alone for my inspection trips.

The team's next inspection was of Fort Sill, the Army's Artillery Training Center, at Lawton, Oklahoma. We checked into a motel near the post, but one of the SFC's said we could get a lower rate at the Hotel Lawtonian in the center of the town. So some of us recommended to the major that we move. We did, and I shared a room with an SSG who by then had joined the team.

That trip included a weekend, and Saturday the team visited a big round hill on a Cherokee reservation near the post. As we drove up the road spiraling around the hill, a buzzard flew beside our Army sedan. In the reservation's gift shop, I bought what I called an Indian Joe hat, a black felt hat with a flat brim and a band of turquoise beads around its crown.

Also that weekend, using one of the two sedans we used for our trips, Ben took me to a bar in Ardmore. He told me the reason he wished to go there was that, during an assignment of his to Fort Sill, a girlfriend of his worked there. Partly because the bar had a concrete floor at the level of the concrete

walk outside and had no threshold separating the floor from the walk, I liked the bar. But, though the woman Ben said had been a girlfriend of his was tending bar, we drank but one bottle of beer each there, and their conversation didn't seem to me to indicate that that she'd been his girlfriend.

But that night I went alone to another bar. My roommate was driving the other sedan. So that evening, deciding I'd like to see some of the bars serving the post, I asked him whether he'd like to do that. He said he didn't. So I hid the keys to the keys to the sedan. Initially he refused, but I argued with him until he gave them to me.

Near the post I found a short narrow street with many bars. At one I sat beside a woman at the bar and talked with her a few minutes. I saw that her upper lip had wrinkles of age, but I kissed her and asked her to leave with me. She didn't turn from the kiss, but neither did she return it or leave with me. So I left that bar as soon as I finished that beer, and I tried no other bar that night.

Monday morning a young man in civilian clothing found me while I was inspecting. He told me he was military intelligence. He said he was investigating my request for attaché duty. I thought he resembled the SP5 I thought was investigating the 518<sup>th</sup> PSC for marijuana use at Fort Dix.

"You look like someone I was stationed with at Fort Dix," I said.

"I look like a lot of people," he said returning to his questioning.

He asked me why the address I used for my Michigan drivers license renewal after Vietnam wasn't on my Statement of Personal History. I told him the address was my mother's and that I didn't have a permanent address then. But then he asked me why my conviction by pleading guilty of contributing to Greg's delinquency wasn't on it. So I told him the CWO's advice.

"Did you hang on to it?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"In my quarters at Fort Sam," I said.

Telling me a time and date to take it to the Provost Marshall's office at Fort Sam, he said he'd meet me there and take a look at it, and he did.

Later that week the CWO on the inspection team and I saw the movie *Harold and Maude* in a movie theatre in Lawton. My response to its talk of death included one of what I later learned to call an anxiety attacks. I had some difficulty concealing it from the warrant officer, but not as much difficulty as I had keeping from shrieking or banging on the trunk lid when I went to the drive-in-movie in the trunk of a car with David and others when I was in junior high school.

But I was enjoying my job. I collected my own copies of the Army's main personnel and administration regulations. I read the bulletins announcing changes to them and posted the changes to my copies.

While I was there, I also received an Army Commendation Medal citation for my service in the Netherlands. That surprised me, considering the first efficiency report Miss Gilmore gave me and Colonel Sparano's remark regarding my working below my paygrade. No medal came with the citation, and the major handed the citation to me with no ceremony, but I bought at the PX a new ribbon, one with an oak leaf cluster indicating the second award. Excepting my Good Conduct Medal, that was my only individual ribbon. My less individual ribbons were the Vietnam Service Medal for being in Vietnam, a unit citation for being with the 518<sup>th</sup>, and the National Defense Service Medal for being in the Army during the Vietnam era.

But I received a letter of indebtedness. That's what the Army called efforts to collect debts from Army personnel by writing letters to the Army. So the commander of the company to which 5<sup>th</sup> Army assigned its CPMI team members called me to his office.

SSG Myers became SFC Myers before I left Germany, and, Perhaps from Roy, I learned in the Netherlands that SFC Myers had become WO1 Myers. I thought my NCO Academy graduation, my CLEP success, and my Army Commendation Medal might make becoming a warrant officer also possible for me. So, before I left the Netherlands, I researched the question, and, learning that a consideration would be sociability, I telephoned Mr. Myers. I congratulated him, but I also asked him to send me a letter of recommendation saying I was sociable. He did, but I called from our house in Elsloo.

The telephone was there when we moved in. Our landlord left it there and said we could use it for local calls, if we reimbursed him for any long distance calls we made from it. Finding Mr. Myers' telephone number required several long distance calls, and calling him required one more. So I told our landlord I made those calls. Before we left the Netherlands, I told him of them. But he told me to forget about them.

I also received a copy of the letter, and, before I went to my company commanders office, I wrote a letter reminding him of what he'd told me. So I took a copy of that letter to the company commander's office. As he read it, I referred to a subordinate clause in it and called it a subordinate clause. He told me to send the letter and forget about the letter of indebtedness.

But, as I left the building, so did he. and, in the parking lot in front of the building, he told me he hadn't heard of a subordinate clause since college. So then, because we were outside the building, I wondered whether I should

salute him as I left him, as regulation required, or treat the situation as casually as it had become, and the situation ended before I could decide. So I didn't salute him. But, a few weeks later, while I was taking my turn at sitting in the CPMI team's office to answer the telephones while the others were a lunch, I learned he wouldn't be my company commander much longer.

"CPMI team, Sergeant Harman," I said, answering the telephone in accordance with protocol.

"Are you ready to go?" asked the person calling, violating Army protocol by not identifying himself.

"Where are we going?" I asked, thinking the call was to tell us of our next inspection trip.

"Afghanistan," said the person calling. "If you want the assignment. It isn't on your list."

The procedure for requesting attaché duty required listing six countries to which the requester wished to go.

"That's fine!" I said, grinning then understanding the purpose of the call. "When?"

I'd never had heard of Afghanistan. But my main reason for requesting attaché duty was to go anywhere I hadn't been. So that only increased the appeal, and so did what the caller told me next. Part of his answer to my question was that I'd train for six weeks at the Defense Intelligence School before going on station. I guess correctly that the Defense Intelligence School was near the Pentagon, and neither had I ever been to D.C.

He also gave me the telephone number of his office and told me to call if I had any questions, but I had but one question. I called and asked whether the Army would ship my new Scrambler. But the warrant officer in charge of the office in the Pentagon administering Army attaché assignments answered that call and said the Army didn't ship privately owned vehicles to Afghanistan, and especially not motorcycles.

"I'm not having a motorcycle on station," he said.

So I sold the Honda for much less than I'd paid for it.

But my next step was to buy some clothing. I'd work in civilian clothes in our Embassy in Kabul, and my assignment instructions said the Army would reimburse me for buying some. So I went to Dillard's, San Antonio's largest department store.

I bought two suits with straight pantlegs I thought were business suits, a double knit sports jacket and slacks with flared bottoms I thought were in fashion, and two pair of civilian shoes. When I requested reimbursement, the

warrant officer processing the request said my Army dress shoes would be adequate and that the reimbursement requirement didn't include shoes.

He made an exception, but, considering the distance our household goods would have to travel, I also bought a set of matching luggage and expected no reimbursement for that, and, also in my remaining time there, I extended my drinking and efforts at philandering.

I went with the other SSG on the CPMI team to the Flying Carpet Lounge, a bar in central San Antonio. He'd become a regular customer there, and a barmaid there but not working joined us in a banquette and, after he left, stayed with me in the banquette until the bar closed.

Him?" the barmaid who was working asked her, nodding at me, a few minutes before it closed, and she left with me.

She asked me to drive her home for her to change her clothes. Her home was also her parent's, but she changed clothes in her bedroom, as I watched. I felt she wanted us to use the bed there, but, thinking her parents must have been in the house, I behaved as though I didn't. She suggested that we go to a grassy place on a hill on the campus of a junior college. She said she was a student there. But, as we lay kissing on the grass, she said the grass might stain her clothes. So I took her to a motel.

I had to be at work in a few hours. So I tried to call the front desk for a wakeup call. But I couldn't find the telephone. So I went to the front desk. The desk clerk asked me why I didn't use the telephone. I told him I didn't see one in the room. He said it was on the bedstand. I saw it when I returned to the room. I found the girl's vagina dry, but I ejaculated quickly and withdrew.

"Oh," she said. "Don't leave so soon."

I told her to wait a few minutes, but she rose and went to the bathroom. Watching her go I thought her buttocks were narrower and more muscular than a girl's should be. When the telephone awakened me, I left her sleeping and drove home to change clothes to go to work. Nancy didn't ask me where I'd been.

I rode the Honda to my Office. There I learned that the Fifth Army Commanding General had ordered an inspection in ranks of all the headquarters personnel. During the inspection, fearing the inspecting officer might ask me something and smell the alcohol I'd drunk, I stood rigidly at attention. He stopped in front of me and stared at me for a few seconds. But he asked me nothing

That was a Friday. Monday we were to leave for an inspection. At my office after the inspection I said that, because of that I thought taking the rest of the day off would be appropriate. I also showed the motel key to the other SSG.

"You son of a bitch," he said.

But the lieutenant telephoned the major and received permission to let us go home. I rode to the motel, awakened the girl, and took her in Nancy's helmet back to the bar. It wasn't open, but she went inside.

Still Nancy didn't ask me where I'd spent the night. But I told her. My reason was the reason I showed the motel key to the other SSG. I was proud of what I'd done. But I reminded Nancy that I'd told her before we married that she shouldn't expect me to change. She said nothing, and the next Friday night I returned to the Flying Carpet. The girl was there, and I asked her to have a drink with me. She didn't, but I drank in the banquette until the bar closed.

As I drove onto Fort Sam, I saw lights flashing behind me. They were on a San Antonio police car. I stopped. The police asked me to step from the car, asked me how much I'd had to drink, and began giving me sobriety tests. But military police interrupted that. The San Antonio police left me standing beside the Gremlin and went to the MP's car to talk.

I decided to involve myself in the conversation. But, when I began to walk toward them, one of the two MP's gestured to me stay where I was. I did, and the San Antonio police drove away. But then the MP's came to talk to me.

"Please don't take me to the stockade," I said. "I applied for attaché duty, and we're leaving tomorrow morning."

"I don't want to have to inventory all that stuff anyway," said one of the MP's. That afternoon I'd tied our lug to the roof rack of the Gremlin. As the other MP followed us in the patrol car, He drove the luggage and me in the Gremlin to my quarters and parked the Gremlin in my parking space in the carport behind them.

"Thanks," I said. "You saved my life."

"Don't drive anymore tonight," he said.

"I won't," I told him.

He rode way with the other MP. I walked into the house and went to bed. A few hours later we left for Coldwater.

But, on the way, we stopped again to see Cleve and Shirley.

"That's nice luggage for a guy like you," said Cleve.

The next morning, we continued to Coldwater.

While I was in training at the Defense School, Nancy and Pat and Ben would stay in Coldwater with Nancy's family, but I stayed in Coldwater long enough to go drinking with Greg.

Then he was older than 21. But, riding with me in the Gremlin, he told me he was gay and patted my nearest knee. I didn't much care about either the news or the pat, but I thought it might explain why Hummer stopped drinking with him. Hummer also told me Greg put the head of a hog in the trunk of the



1968 Volkswagen he bought the year after I bought Jenny and that the head was in the trunk for weeks before he learned by smelling it that it was there. But I thought Greg may have done that because of Hummer's reaction to learning that he was gay, and, by then, Neil Burk had wrecked Hummer's Volkswagen. So I didn't know about the timing, and Hummer blamed the wreck on me.

I'd told Hummer one couldn't turn over a Volkswagen by turning it. Hummer told Neil that while Neil was driving it past the Darlings Display warehouse on Division Street. So Neil drove it onto the lawn in front of the warehouse and cranked the steering wheel. But Hummer didn't stop drinking with me because of any of that, and Neil was at the party where Hummer met Peggy, and, also during that visit to Coldwater, Hummer suggested that we go see Ann.

Then she was living with J. C. He was also a members of Nancy's and my Coldwater crowd of friends. We called him J. C. for his beard, but his hair was short, and he wasn't especially Christian. I understood his beard to be because he thought himself to be a sort of outdoorsman. Logs he'd chopped were in their front yard. But he hadn't piled them. They were lying about the yard. He wasn't at home. But Ann was. So Hummer tried to seduce her.

"If that's what you guys came here for," she said as soon as he began. "You'd better go somewhere else."

We did, but, a few hours later, Hummer suggest that we go back and try again. No one was downstairs, but we went inside, went up stairs, and found a girl in bed with an electric space heater at the head of the bed. The house was cold. Hummer offered to take her someplace warm. She accepted the offer. We took her to his house in Sturgis. Peggy had left him.

He took her into his bedroom. They left me in the living room. After a few minutes, I joined them. I removed all of my clothes and climbed into the bed. Thinking the girl was on that side of the bed, I moved against Hummer. Hummer asked me what the hell I was doing.

So I slept on his sofa that night. But, when I awoke in the morning, I found Hummer drinking a can of beer at the kitchen table. The girl stood in front of him with her back to a wall. She was in only her panties.

"Don't touch," she said to me as soon as I entered the room.

I didn't. I left Hummer in Sturgis and drove her back to we found her. The house was on Cutter Avenue around a corner from Nancy's Father's house. I could see his back door from where I left her. I didn't go inside.

"She told me what you two did," said Barb, Nancy's sister, the next time I saw her, and she also told me the girl was Ann's sister.

On my way to D.C. I stopped to see Vaughn. Again I drove through Canada, but this time I drank beer all the way. So, between Niagara and New York City, I stopped to sleep.

“That’s too much,” I said angrily turning away from the front desk of the first motel I considered.

“How much do you want to pay?” he asked.

“Forget it,” I said, again angrily, continuing out the door.

But that was after midnight, and I drove for about another hour before finding another motel. So, at the next motel I saw, I paid more than what I’d refused to pay and didn’t argue.

At checkout time, I could hardly get up, but I also drank the remainder of the way to New York City. Vaughn wasn’t at his loft. So I drove to the Lincoln Center. I asked a woman behind a desk in the main lobby where was the Metropolitan Opera. She asked me why I was asking. I told her I was looking for Vaughn. She made a telephone call. A few minutes later Vaughn came to the desk and led me backstage to a tall desk where he was working on some blocking. He continued to work.

“Need some sleep” he asked.

“No,” I said. “That’s alright.”

“You sure?” he asked.

I nodded and, continuing to stand beside the desk, watched a bald man tack canvas to the stage. He pulled tacks from his mouth with a claw on the hammer, turned the hammer around, and drove the tacks with the same side of the hammer. Someone I thought was Vaughn’s boss came to the desk, frowned at me, and asked Vaughn a few question regarding what Vaughn was doing. When he walked away, I told Vaughn I may need some sleep. He gave me a key to his loft. I parked on the street and, in the smell of Vaughn’s cats, slept until he came home. Then he told me he was soon to marry and asked me to drive him to his fiancée’s home in Brooklyn.

When we left his loft a pile of garbage was on the Gremlin’s hood. Vaughn shook his head and brushed it from the hood with a hand. Trying to keep up with current fashions, I’d bought two pair of bellbottom trousers, one with brown and white stripes and one with red, white, and blue stripes. Vaughn told his future in-laws I was going to Afghanistan to work in our embassy there. A future brother-in-law asked me whether the reason for my pants’ stripes was that I was going to be a diplomat. I was in the red, white, and blue pair.

## Chapter 20

### Diplomacy

But the first of my Defense Intelligence School classmates I met was a helicopter mechanic in a sports jacket and tie. He was reporting for duty to the attaché administration office of OACSI, the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence of the Department of the Army, in the Pentagon when I arrived to do that. So he became my roommate.

The clerk to whom we reported, telling us we'd need to find a place to stay while we were there for training, gave us a list of apartments. The helicopter mechanic didn't have a car. So he rode with me to do that, and we rented the first apartment we saw, a two-bedroom furnished first-floor apartment in brick complex in Alexandria.

I also drove us to classes. The Defense Intelligence School was at the Anacostia Naval Annex. But we had one more interview before the final approval of our assignments. It was with a CIA operative in an office in the Pentagon near the attaché administration office. But we did that separately.

"Do you have any friends or relatives in Afghanistan?" he asked me.

"A cousin," I said.

My mother had told me that. I don't know how she knew it, but she said a cousin of mine was secretary to the United States Ambassador to Afghanistan. She said her name was Thelma.

"What's he doing there?" asked the CIA operative.

"She's the ambassador's secretary," I replied.

"Oh," he said. "I guess she's alright then. Do you drink?"

"Yes," I answered

"How much?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe a sixpack or two a week."

"Well," he said. "As long as you don't drink more than a sixpack or two a day, you're alright."

But my beer habit may have averaged nearly a sixpack a day or more, and I spent many evenings during that training exploring D.C. area bars, and one night I took the helicopter mechanic with me.

In Georgetown I saw on the plate glass front door of a bar a silhouette resembling a hand with two fingers above it. I suggested to the helicopter mechanic that we stop and see why a bar had a peace sign on its door. I ordered a scotch on the rocks at the bar.

“You chuck motherfucker,” said a man sitting beside me pulling a big jackknife out of a pocket and opening it. “I’m going to cut your motherfucking throat.”

It was an indigenous people’s rights bar. The silhouette was of a head with two feathers above it. I was in my Indian Joe hat.

“Just let him drink his drink,” said the bartender.

He let me. I finished it. We left. I gave the hat to the helicopter mechanic. He never again joined me in my exploring.

But we agreed to leave the apartment for classes early enough to do our studying in the classroom. So, for the first few days of our classes, I also made the first pot of coffee for our class. But one day I repeated the grounds-recycling I did when I was a busboy at the Arlington. So one of our classmates told me someone else could make the coffee.

My classmates were Army, Navy, and Air Force enlisted men and two of their wives. The wives, one of an Air Force sergeant and the other of a Navy petty officer, were taking the course to work with their husbands on station. But one day our instructors, two Army warrant officers, took the class to lunch at a bar where women on big a stage in the middle of the room were dancing with no clothing other than G-strings and pasties.

The older of the two warrant officers recommended the Reuben sandwiches. I didn’t know what they were, but I tried one. I didn’t enjoy that cabbage nearly as much as I enjoyed the Chinese cabbage in Tokyo. The warrant officer who recommended the Reuben sandwiches seemed to me also to think I’d never been a strip joint. He asked me what I thought of the dancers. I didn’t correct him. I shrugged.

One rainy evening I went out drinking with an SFC in my class. I was in a trench coat I bought while I was buy the other clothes for the assignment. I thought it was appropriate for intelligence work. The SFC was in no coat other than a sports jacket. He stole an umbrella from a coat hook in the foyer of a restaurant where we drank at its bar.

Another night in my trench coat I went to a strip joint on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. I sat at the bar to watch the dancers. A woman sat beside me.

“Are you a policeman?” she asked me.

“No,” I said. “But I work for the Defense Intelligence Agency. Does that count?”

“Close enough,” she said, but she grinned and didn’t move away.

One weekend I drove to Baltimore and found the strip joints along Baltimore Street.

“Want a fuck and suck in a booth?” a woman asked me at the bar in one of them.

“No, thanks,” I said, though I did. “I just came to see the dancing.”

After the bars closed but before driving back to Alexandria I ate a hamburger in a diner. The diner was busy. I joined a man sitting alone in a banquet. I talked with him. I thought may have been mentally deficient. I gave him a ride home. He invited me in. He said the house was his parents’. I drank a beer with him in its basement.

I was talking with Nancy weekly from a telephone booth in the apartment complex. She told me she’d gone out with the guy she left to go with me. She said he kissed her.

“Bunches of times,” she said.

Though I’d told her to expect such from me, I told her I didn’t accept it from her. She told Cheryl Hurd. Cheryl’s boyfriend drove her and Pat and Ben to Alexandria, with Cheryl and Greg and Rick. I think Greg may have married Sheila by then, but she wasn’t with him, and neither was Charlene with Rick.

Rick told me he’d driven to D.C. looking for me once before. He said he went to the Pentagon but that the guy at the desk at the entrance said he didn’t know who I was. All of them stayed there a few days. They slept in the apartment. We went sightseeing. I don’t remember how we arranged the transportation.

We visited the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial, the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Aerospace Museum, and Mount Vernon. Nancy and Pat and Ben stayed until we left for Afghanistan. The helicopter mechanic complained about none of that to me. But neither did he speak to any of them.

After the others left, the New York City Opera came to D.C. to perform at the Kennedy Center. Vaughn gave Nancy and me tickets to see the performance with his fiancée. Her name was Brenda.

“What should I wear?” I asked him.

“A dark suit would be fine,” he said.

But I rented a tuxedo. Nancy was in a green taffeta gown she’d bought while in high school for a Job’s Daughters event. She’d packed it in our new luggage and brought all of it to D.C. My assignment instructions told me to

expect to have to attend formal social functions. Vaughn expressed some surprise.

“You rented a tuxedo,” he said.

The opera was the Mikado. In one scene, the female lead, with her back to the audience, was naked from the waist up. Vaughn told me after the performance that I should have seen that from where he was. I wished I had. But I didn’t tell Vaughn that.

My training also told me I’d have to attend social functions. I asked the older warrant officer to recommend some reading on etiquette. He smiled and said he’d see what he could find, but he didn’t mention it again, and I didn’t remind him. The school issued to each student a book about the country of his or her assignment. I didn’t read mine, and neither did I perform there nearly as well as I had at the NCO Academy, but the training included a visit to CIA headquarters. A man showed us a wingtip shoe with a radio in its heel.

The last three weeks of the training was to be in film processing. But the clerk in the Pentagon told me that instead I’d go to the Cumberland Gap for three weeks of training to perform the MAP function on station. MAP was the Military Assistance Program. He said part of my job on station would be to process Afghan military personnel for training in the United States. But I received neither training, and no one there told me why. So, during my last three weeks in D.C., I worked a few hours a day in the attaché office in the Pentagon doing whatever anyone there asked me to do.

I also tried to sell the Gremlin during that time, but the only response to those efforts was to a sign I taped to a window of it. It was an offer, but it was less than I was willing to accept, and the SP7 I was to replace wrote to me suggesting that, if I needed to sell a car, he trade me his Dodge Dart for it. The Dart was a year older than the Gremlin, but I thought it must have been worth more than the amount of the other offer. So I accepted the suggestion.

My last duty in D.C. was to go with my class to the headquarters of the Defense Intelligence Agency. It was at Pomponio Plaza, a high rise office building in Arlington. That was for a welcoming speech from the lieutenant general directing the DIA. My assignment was to OACSI for attachment to the DIA for duty with DAO Kabul, The United States’ defense attaché office in Afghanistan, and my last official act in D.C. was to book my travel at the DIA’s travel office at Pomponio Plaza.

“Which way do you want to go?” asked the travel officer.

“Afghanistan’s about halfway around the world. So it doesn’t make much difference.”

“East,” I said.

So, leaving the Gremlin in the part of the Pentagon parking lot the Department Defense relegated to OACSI, Nancy and Pat and Ben and I boarded PanAm 2. PanAm 2 was the Pan American Airways flight circumnavigating Earth eastward while Pan Am 1 circumnavigated it westward. Pat Vomited at Heathrow Airport. Pan Am let us off the plane there for breakfast.

“Must be a heated pool,” said Nancy of the reflecting pool in the courtyard of the United States Embassy in New Delhi.

We had orders to go there to learn where to spend the night between our Pan Am flight and our Ariana Afghan Airlines flight to Kabul. We wandered into the courtyard while waiting for the Marine guard at the Embassy’s front desk to call upstairs to DAO New Delhi. We spent that night in the home of a Navy petty officer working there.

Next morning, while we waited for our plane at New Delhi’s international airport, Pat cut his head. He was playing with an old in a turban with orange die in his beard. I later learned that the orange indicated that he was returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca. Airport staff took us to a room where a man stitched Pat’s head and bandaged it while about a dozen other people stood watching that with Nancy and Ben and me.

But landing in Kabul, I was happy to be there before the plane touched the ground. Seeing the rocky brown hills along the runway told me I’d never been anywhere like that. But inside the terminal wasn’t so pleasant.

The entire staff of DAO Kabul was waiting for us, and so was my cousin Thelma. But, in addition to our new matching luggage, Nancy brought a huge old suitcase of her father’s, and, as I removed it from the luggage cart, its latches popped open. So, as Nancy worked to close it, I tried to explain the gauze around Pat’s head.

Outside the terminal, the Defense Attaché, Air Attaché, Operations Coordinator, and my cousin Thelma left us with the two enlisted men with whom I’d work and the one I’d replace. They took us to Kabul’s USAID Staff House in a GMC carryall that belonged to the DAO. They told us the Staff House belonged to the United States Agency for International Development and that, in third world countries, employees of other government agencies used USAID Staff Houses as hotels. They said the reason we’d do that was that SP7 I was replacing was occupying the house we’d occupy and that he and his family wouldn’t leave it until the next day.

The enlisted men with whom I was to work were Rich Henry and Neil Severns. They and Ron, the one I was to replace, were all SP7’s. I had become an SP6. The Army had decided attaché duty was a specialization that didn’t

require leadership. So my rank was lower, but my pay grade remain didn't change, and we'd have servants.

Rich told us Ron and his wife had two. One did the cooking and house cleaning. The other took care of the yard and acted as a guard. Rich also told us Ron paid them more than others paid servants to do those jobs. But he also said they were excellent servants and that their pay was less than the cost of living allowance I'd receive for being in a third world country, and he also told us nearly everything cost less than it did in the United States, and, the next day, when Rich delivered us to our new home, the servants met us at the front gate. So we kept them.

Daud, the cook and housekeeper, excepting Friday, the Muslim Sabbath, was there about twelve hours each day. Ali, the gardener and guard, lived there. So he was nearly always there. We also had a garage and yard with a wall about eight feet high around all of that. Ali had a room behind the garage and a little bathroom with a shower and a hole in the floor he used as a toilet. He also answered the doorbell and opened the garage door when I honked the horn outside, and we also accepted care of a little white dog Ron had named Bourbon.

The house had three bedrooms, a full bathroom upstairs, and a half bathroom downstairs, in addition to Ali's bathroom. The living room and dining room had marble floors and huge windows. The living room opened to a large marble patio, and upstairs were two smaller patios. The bedroom where Pat and Ben slept opened to one of upstairs patios. The landing at the top of the stairs opened to the other upstairs patio. We used the landing as a bar.

The government also fully furnished the house and paid for replacing the upholstery and drapes with fabric we selected. We selected red and black fabric for both, for the house to be in Mediterranean style. We also asked Daud to go with us to Kabul's rug bazaar and help us buy a mostly red and black Afghan carpet for our living room. With his help, we paid less for it than the price of linoleum in the United States.

"Those things last forever," said Rich. "The Afghans pass them on for generations. They throw them out in the road for cars to run over them to get the dust out of them. They get pissed and shake their fists at you if you drive around them."

Daud also did our grocery shopping. His only transportation was his bicycle, but it had a big wire basket on its handlebars. He also bought us sides of beef from an Afghan butcher who cut them into piece to Daud's specifications. The government also furnished us with a big freezer, but Nancy had to drive Daud to the butcher shop.



We could have bought groceries at the State Department's commissary, but Daud paid less than the commissary's prices, and I preferred the bread he bought. It was brown, and not in loaves but flat, but I liked its chewy texture. I thought its rich taste was how all bread should taste. Afghans baked it in stone ovens that were holes in stone floors of small shops open to the street.

At work I learned why I didn't go to the Cumberland Gap. That plan was for me to replace Ron, but, instead, Neil replaced Ron while I replaced Neil. Before my arrival, Ron was the MAP administrator while Neil processed the attachés intelligence reports. A problem was that processing the intelligence reports included the film processing for which neither did I receive training. But Neil trained me to do that my first afternoon at work there, after I spent the morning learning the organization of the office.

The defense attaché was an Army COL. His name was McTaggart. The air attaché was an Air Force LTC, but I don't remember his name. He left soon after I arrived. The operations coordinator, the most direct supervisor of the enlisted staff, was an Army CWO. His name was Schonstrom. Rich was the office administrator, basically Schonstrom's administrative assistant.

But my longest conversation that morning, other than with Schonstrom while he showed me around, was with the departing air attaché. When Schonstrom showed me his office, he asked me to have a seat. He was sitting behind his desk with his feet on it and a flyswatter in hand. As he talked, he waved the flyswatter. Excepting one remark, I remember nothing of what he said other than that I thought he seemed to me to be flakey.

"You'll want to say clear of the shit around here," he said.

That's the remark I remember, and I thought it might have been more of the craziness, but our first guests in that big house of ours gave me reason to reconsider that, and they were Schonstrom, Rich, and their wives.

The six of us sat in our living room until, excepting Nancy, we were somewhat drunk. Then, with no invitation, Schonstrom's wife sat on my lap. So I suggested that we play strip poker. We didn't, but, while Mrs. Schonstrom sat on my lap, Barb, Rich's wife, disappeared from our living room. So, when Mrs. Schonstrom left my lap, also with no invitation, I went looking for Barb and found her vomiting in some bushes beneath our dining room window. Then I talked with her for a few minutes, but not many.

"We'd better go back inside," she said. "They'll think we're doing something."

But Barb took Nancy on her initial social calls. She told us wives were expected to call on the Ambassador's wife and others and leave a card if the person wasn't at home. Schonstrom told me he could recommend a printer, if

Nancy didn't have calling cards. He said the printer didn't engrave them, as printers did in the United States. But he said no one in Kabul did. So I accepted his recommendation, and the next step in our socializing was less formal.

Rich recommended that I have an Afghan carpenter build a bar and bar stools for the landing at the top our stairs, and he was the first person I served at it.

"The chief sent a message to OACSI recommending that you be removed from station," he said. "He told them you're a drunk and tried to get us to play strip poker. But they said that surprised them. They said they thought you'd do well on station. So the colonel decided to keep you. I think the chief isn't fucking his wife enough. You can smell it in her breath."

Rich also told me he caught Ron with Barb in his and Barb's bed. So I also thought of that in terms of what the outgoing air attaché said of "the shit" around there, but I didn't much worry about it. I worried more about a problem I thought I had with the deal I made with Ron.

The Dart was not only a year older than the Gremlin but also a cheaper model. So I wrote to him telling him I thought he should pay me the difference in value. But he wrote to Rich saying epoxy glue was holding the Gremlin's radiator in it and that the radiator had fallen from it on a freeway. So then I remembered that the mechanic in Sturgis told me the repairs he made were temporary, and Rich also told me Ron's wife had written to Barb and told her Ron had a heart attack in their bathroom and broke his jaw falling on their toilet. So then I was sorry I'd written to Ron and focused more on my job.

Processing intelligence reports was turning various items the attachés brought me into what the DIA called intelligence reports. Most of what they brought me was hand-written notes, and most of my processing was typing them onto DIA forms for that and sending them to DIA headquarters. But often the notes were hardly legible. So, beyond typing, I not only corrected their grammar and spelling but also adjusted their syntax and style. One might have said that was above my paygrade, but the attachés readily signed them, often smiled as they did that, and occasionally praised particular phrases, and the Air Force LTC who replaced the one I thought was crazy occasionally asked me for that sort of help. He was a fighter pilot most of his career.

His name was Elton Weston. His main job in Afghanistan was piloting a twenty-year-old Convair 240 two 9-cylinder radial gasoline engines propelled. He flew it there from DAO New Delhi with a co-pilot and a crew of four enlisted men. Indira Gandhi called it a spy plane and ordered it out of India.

The co-pilot was an Air Force CPT. His name was Edgar Robert Melton, but people called him Bob. The enlisted men were various ranks of Air

Force NCO's. The crew chief was an MSG, and the flight engineer was a technical sergeant. The flight engineers name was David Fliehr. I don't remember the others' names or job titles, but one was also a technical sergeant, and the other an SSG, and all brought their wives with them, but the soon the SSG and his wife left. I heard that was because his wife was ill, and no one replaced him.

CPT Melton was from Dallas. So was his wife. Her name was Helen. He married her between a tour in Vietnam and his assignment to India. She also had a daughter they brought with them. That reminded me of Eschelmann. At the cocktail party welcoming them and the others to Afghanistan, I told them that and why. I recognized the crassness of that as soon as I did it. But they only laughed.

Fliehr enjoyed his job so much he used Brasso to shine the aircraft's aluminum outside. He also told me how its engine's connecting rods connected in a way not to interfere with each other as they turned the central crankshaft. I bought some wicker furniture for my bar and varnished it. So did Dave, but he did a much better job of varnishing his. He was doing that the only time I was in his home. He also called his living room wall Spot. Large pieces of marble were in its plaster. They were flat but otherwise irregular and varied in color from each other. I liked him for all those reasons, but others of the air crew said he was cranky, and I don't remember why I was at his house. The enlisted air crew worked at the airport. So I associated little with any of them. Ordinarily the aircraft's only effect on me was that it had a 70 mm camera in its belly, making Indira Gandhi's assessment both reasonable and theoretically correct.

Officially the primary mission of the United States' Defense Attaché System was to collect intelligence, and that and that the Defense Attaché System was part of the DIA had no security classification.

But, also, any reference to our photography capability was officially confidential, no foreign dissemination, and any reference to our aerial photography classification was officially secret, no foreign dissemination, while actually we had little of either capability. We received a sixteen-hundred-dollar machine to somewhat automate that processing of the 70 mm film, but I never bothered to learn to use it. I didn't process enough 70 mm film to need it.

An oil leak obscured about a third of the camera's lens, but I wasn't sure that was the reason. We also had several 35 mm Leica cameras, but anyone could see anyone using them, and, though we also had a few 8 mm miniature cameras, no one ever used them while I was there. So, for those and other reasons, I began to question our intelligence in general.

Some of LTC Weston's ground photographs were of a mound of dirt with some holes in it he said were gun ports, but the picture was too blurry to discern what they were, or whether anything protruded from them. Some of his aerial photographs were of miles of a river in the Lashkar Gah desert, but nothing in them seemed to me to be recognizable as anything humans were doing, and his notes said they were of a USAID project. So I didn't understand why we'd spy on an agency of the United States' government.

But, later, putting all that together, I suspected that our main function was to distract attention from the CIA. Officially I didn't know the CIA was there, but a clue was an official office directive directing saying "SRF" when we referred to the CIA. I knew who the CIA Station Chief and one of the agents were, and Neil told me water I could hear water running behind the sink in my photo lab was the CIA's photo lab. But I didn't hear it until Neil pointed it out, and I didn't much care. More directly pertinent to me was the question of why no one expressed any concern regarding how much alcohol we drank, particularly considering that most Afghans were Islamic.

Kabul had few bars, but cocktail parties were frequent in the diplomatic community, and the embassy had a bowling league. Afghanistan's only bowling alley's five lanes weren't level and had many dents. But Wahib, its Lebanese owner, welcomed the international community and sold beer.

Once, I bowled there once. I never had bowled, but Rick asked me to bowl with his team. He told me it was easy, but I bowled so poorly that he asked me why I accepted his invitation. So most of my drinking in Afghanistan was at home, at cocktail parties, or at the Marine house.

The single United States Marines who guarded the embassy all lived in one big house. They operated a bar and, for buying drinks at it, sold chit books to anyone. So Wahib also drank there.

My coworkers suspected that Wahib was a spy and had opened his bowling alley for that purpose. But we liked him and didn't talk shop with him. He suggested a picnic for the DAO's enlisted Army staff. We accepted and provided the transportation. He provided a live lamb, some other food, some absinth, and some shotguns. We provided our offices two GMC carryalls.

The venue was a shady bank of the Kabul river about two hours north of Kabul. We used the shotguns to try shoot tomatoes we threw into the air over the river. I did that so poorly that Wahib took the shot gun away from me, and the absinth made my behavior worse. On our way back to Kabul, we stopped to look at some pottery some Afghans were selling beside the road. I knocked over some pots. I didn't intend to do that, but I knocked over several of them, one or two at a time. They shattered. Of course, that angered the Afghans. Wahib

apologized to them. I said I'd pay for them and paid more for them than they asked for them before I shattered them, but the Afghans continued to scowl as we rode away. So, as my suggesting playing strip poker had also suggested, I was ripe for what whatever the LTC I thought was crazy called shit.

Kabul also had a Marks & Sparks, a British supermarket selling groceries and other goods not ordinarily available in Afghanistan. Once its manager and his wife invited the DAO's Army enlisted staff and our wives to an evening gathering at their house. He and his wife organized on their patio a game requiring thinking of how many times per week we performed coitus, then doing some complex mathematical calculations beginning with that number, and then saying aloud the result. Then our hosts told us our original number.

The original number for both Nancy and me was seven, while the number for most of the other guests was fewer, but, while that number was an ideal for me, my masturbation habit made the actuality less. So the numbers for most of the guests was nearer to our actuality, but, later that evening, as I stood drinking at the bar in the house, I told our host's wife she resembled a woman whose picture was on the cover of that month's *McCall's* magazine. Our office subscribed to several magazines, and I'd taken a copy of that month's *McCall's* home for Nancy. But our host's wife expressed incredulity.

"I'll show you," I said.

So I drove home, brought the magazine back, and showed it to her.

But she still she didn't agree.

Once, after Rich and I drank into the early hours of a morning at his bar at his house, he suggested that we go to Wahib's house. A chess board was on a small table in Wahib's living room. I suggested that we play. Too drunk to concentrate, I knocked over all the pieces to end the game. Wahib suggested that we go hunting. We accepted the invitation, but, as we were about to leave, he retracted the invitation.

"I was going to kill you," he told me at a cocktail party a few weeks later. "Knocking down a man's king is an insult, even if you have it in checkmate. And you didn't."

Another place the diplomatic community drank was the Intercontinental Hotel. It was Afghanistan's only luxury hotel. Once all of the DAO staff attended a cocktail party there. Neil and I talked with the Chief of Staff of the Afghan army. I don't think I offended him, but I drank enough to decide at work next morning that I was too sick to work. I blamed it on some little meatballs with toothpicks in them.

"Must have been those frog balls," I said to Neil.

"Frog balls!" he repeated, grinning and snickering.

We seldom saw Thelma. Once she invited us to her house. It wasn't as large or fancy as ours. Once I saw her at a cocktail party. She asked me how I liked my assignment so far.

"I don't like all this drinking," I told her, lifting my drink.

"I don't drink," she replied, showing me her empty hands, and, though we invited her to our house for Christmas, I drank beer while she sat in our living room drinking tea. but, a few weeks later, Schonstrom told me she was ill and was staying at the home of the chief of Kabul's United States Information Service operation, and, a few days later, the USIS station chief invited me and Nancy and Pat and Ben to his home for her birthday.

I found a paperback copy of *Leaves of Grass* in an Afghan bookstore, bought it, wrapped it, and took it to her. But I hadn't read it, and, at the USIS chief's house, as we sat with her on a sofa, I said little. Mostly I stared at the grand piano in the room and the huge Afghan carpet on the floor in front of us, and a few days later Schonstrom told me she'd returned to the United States.

"The doctor here can't figure out what's wrong with her," he told me.

About a week later, COL MacTaggart told me the Ambassador wanted to see me. I'd never spoken with the Ambassador. In his office was a desk beside an open door. No one was at the desk. Dr. Newman, the Ambassador, stepped through the door and stopped in front of the desk.

"Thelma died," he said. "It was cancer. I don't know if you knew that."

"Thanks." I said. "Thanks for telling me."

He frowned and stepped back through the door.

I returned to work.

I invited 75 people to a cocktail party at our house. Rich told me Daud made potato chips. I asked Nancy to ask him to do that for the party. Among the guests were COL MacTaggart and the United States' Narcotics Attaché to Afghanistan. I had speakers both in our living room and behind our bar. I don't remember how I had four speaker systems. I played classical music at the beginning of the party but changed to popular music later in the evening. COL MacTaggart, standing nearby with a drink in his hand, watched me change the tapes. I wondered what he thought of my expensive stereo equipment. I also told the Narcotics Attaché's wife diplomats are phonies.

"My husband's a diplomat," she said.

After the colonel and the diplomats left, LTC Weston quickly caught up with the more drunken of us. Standing at an end of the buffet we still used as a stereo cabinet, he asked me to bring him dry martinis, one after another. He

drank each but told me to make the next one dryer. I made at least a half dozen trips up and down the stairs doing that.

At work I said I wished I had a motorcycle. Rich showed me a classified advertisement in the USIS newspaper for a 1972 BSA Thunderbolt. Thunderbolt was the least expensive model of 650 cc BSA's.

"God damn it!" I said. "Why won't they let us have motorcycles?"

LTC Weston was standing in front of Rich's desk talking to Neil.

"I can have one," he said. "You can register it in my name."

So Rich and I went to look at it. Its owner was a tourist from the United States. He'd bought the Bike in England and ridden it from there to Afghanistan. It had high-compression pistons. The low-octane gasoline in Asia destroyed one of them. He took it apart to fix it but couldn't find a piston for it. The advertisement said it was a kit. I didn't know that's what that meant until I saw it, but I bought it.

"We can get somebody at DAO London to send a piston through the diplomatic pouch," said Rich.

I gave the tourist 150 dollars for the new 650 c.c. BSA and sent a message to my counterpart in London. I asked him whether he could send me two low-compression pistons and rings for a 1972 BSA Thunderbolt. He said he was happy to do it. I sent him a check.

In a few days I received the pistons and rings. Rich and I took the pieces to a shop Rich saw with motorcycles in pieces on the sidewalk in front of it. For about ten dollars in Afghanis, owners of the shop reassembled the bike with the new pistons. But I didn't need the pistons to be low-compression.

Quarterly maintenance of the Convair involved changing its fuel. So Dave Fliehr gave me a 55 gallon drum full of fuel he'd replaced. He and Colonel Weston's Afghan driver delivered it to our house in one of the DAO's carryalls. They also delivered a wooden frame high enough for me not to need to siphon the fuel from it.

"You just need to mix it half-and-half with Afghan gas," said Dave. "If you don't, this stuff's octane'll burn up your engine."

A few weeks later the Army enlisted men of DAO Kabul were a motorcycle gang. Rich and Neil bought motorcycles from Afghan Army officers Neil was sending to the United States for training. Rich's was a 350 c.c. two-cycle Jawa. Neil's was a 250 c.c. four-cycle Honda.

Most of my riding was with Rich while we left our wives at home, but once Neil and I took a ride through the Kabul Gorge with Nancy and his wife, Joyce. We filled our jacket pockets with cans of beer and stopped beside the

road to look at the gorge and drink some of the beer. A black Cadillac limousine passed.

“It’s the King,” said Neil. “See the flags on the fenders?”

“Get on,” I said to Nancy.

I caught and passed the limousine at about eighty miles per hour. But an Afghan soldier standing beside the road flagged me down. He kept me beside the road until the limousine passed us.

“That was cheating,” I said to Neil when he caught up with us.

I pointed at the silent soldier.

“You’re crazy,” said Neil, laughing and shaking his head.

One night Rich and I rode drunk up the hill to the Intercon. On the circular drive at its entrance, stopping to ask Rich whether he wished to go in and have a drink, I dropped the BSA on its side between my legs. As I picked it up the CIA station chief drove up the hill, stopped, and rolled down his window.

“You alright?” he asked.

“Fuck you!” shouted Rich, and the next time the CIA station chief spoke to me was also because of a ride Rich and I took.

On a dirt road outside Kabul we rode past an Afghan soldier standing in front of a mud shack. Also in front of the hut was a tree limb through the fork of another tree limb. But it was pointing upward, and the soldier neither lowered the limb across the road nor otherwise indicated that we should stop.

Riding over the next hill, we found some brick buildings under construction. As we rode through the construction site, about a dozen Afghans came out of the buildings and began throwing rocks at us. We tried to turn back, but I turned too quickly. The BSA slid from under me and stopped running.

Rich also stopped, and, as I tried to restart the BSA, the Afghans surrounded us. Some of them grabbed us and pulled and pushed us in the direction of an Afghan army lieutenant. I hurried them toward him. I gestured to him that I was glad to see him but not glad to be led that way. He ordered the other Afghans to release their grip on us.

He spoke no English, and neither Rich nor I spoke Farsi, but we followed him into one of the buildings. In the building were a big table and some chairs. The lieutenant motioned for us to sit. Then he left the building, but, a few minutes later, he returned with a civilian who spoke English.

Rich told him to call the Afghan Minister of National Defense. He said he’d know who we are. Then the lieutenant left the building again, while he was away that time, others in the building offered us lunch of melons, peaches, and grapes. Rich accepted, but we’d received instructions to eat no raw produce no



one had washed in water someone had boiled. So I didn't. Daud boiled water at our house. We had a big galvanized tank on our kitchen sink.

After about an hour the lieutenant returned and led us back over the hill to the mud shack the turnstile. After about another half hour, I saw, through one of the shack's glassless windows, a half dozen Afghan soldiers walking over the hill toward us. Two of them were pushing our motorcycles. In front of them, one of the others carried a small wooden table while another carried two small wooden chairs. In front of those two were the lieutenant and a colonel. The colonel was carrying a porcelain bowl of hard candy. The lieutenant carried a pot of tea.

While the two with the motorcycles waited outside, the others carried the table and chairs and the tea and candy into the shack. Rich and I were sitting on to other small wooden chairs, but we rose from them, and the Afghans rearranged the furniture, put the tea and candy on the table, and offered it to us. I refused the tea but accepted a piece of candy. Rich accepted both.

Then the colonel led us outside to the motorcycles. I saw that the reason I couldn't restart the BSA was that its coil wire had pulled loose from its coil. So I reconnected the wire and started the engine. Then the colonel and the lieutenant shook hands with us and smiled as we rode away.

At work Rich told Schonstrom what happened. Schonstrom told COL MacTaggart, and COL MacTaggart told the CIA station chief. So, in COL MacTaggart's office, the CIA Section Chief asked Rich and Me to tell him what happened. But still I didn't officially know who he was, and twice I nearly killed myself riding with Rich.

"Where's your helmet?" he asked me the first time.

I'd ridden to his house to ask him whether he wished to go riding.

"At home," I told him.

"Use this," he said.

He handed me his son's football helmet. We rode to one of the brown rocky hills near my house. I hit a rock at the bottom of the hill, fell from the bike, landed head first on another rock, and cracked the helmet from crown to ear. But I did no injury to me.

The second time was on top of that hill. I'd removed the mufflers from the BSA to make it a dirt bike. Rich and I used a pile of dirt on the hill as a ramp to jump our bikes, but the front of Rich's Jawa was too heavy for jumping. So each time he jumped, the bike hit the ground front first. He fell from the bike and tore his pants and scraped a buttock on the rocks. But my problem was our audience.

At least a hundred Afghans climbed the hill to watch. They lined both sides of the path where we were landing. As I and the BSA flew into the air from the pile of dirt, I saw an Afghan soldier on each side of the path. Each was holding an end of a wire. When I landed, they pulled the wire tight at about the level of my neck. But I laid the bike down and slid under the wire.

Another time I might have killed myself on the BSA, Rich wasn't with me. Rain had washed a gully across a dirt road. Not seeing it until too late to stop, I rode into it. But then I had my helmet. So the only damage was to the bike. I bent the front wheel so badly that I had to push the bike home. But, also for less than ten dollars, the mechanic who installed the pistons straightened the wheel, and riding the BSA wasn't the only way I risked my left in Afghanistan.

COL MacTaggart asked me to drive him to Islamabad in the Ford Torino the DIA furnished him. The road from Kabul to Islamabad was through the Khyber Pass. Nancy packed a lunch of sandwiches Daud made of bologna he ground. The COL and I stopped to share it before we reached the pass, but, in the pass, he seemed to me to be in a hurry.

The road was about a lane and a half wide and wound through the mountains. The slope on one side of it was nearly straight up. The other side was nearly straight down. The road had no guard rails, and the right of way in Pakistan was on the left, and I kept forgetting on what side of the road we belonged. So, to avoid head-on collisions with trucks heading toward Kabul, I drove much more slowly than the trucks. So the COL asked me to stop as soon as I could, for him to drive. He made the same mistakes, but we survived, and scarier to me was the drive back to Kabul.

The reason the COL asked me to drive him to Islamabad was that, after doing what he needed to do there, he had to fly to the United States. A Defense Intelligence School Air Force classmate of mine and his wife were working at DAO Islamabad. But they preferred not to put me up.

"They asked me if you could stay at my place tonight," said the husband outside the embassy. "But my wife and I have other things going on."

"That's alright," I said. "I can stay at the USAID Staff House in Peshawar."

So I did. But, as I drove back through the Khyber Pass, the car slowed and nearly stalled. I reached an Afghan army post, and, knowing smugglers and other bandits inhabited the pass. I stopped and asked for help. But the soldiers at the gate spoke no English, and neither did they care. So I continued. But I reached Kabul with no more problems, and I didn't change my risky habits. None of that troubled me.

## Chapter 21

### Tourism

So I took Pat for a ride on the BSA with no helmet, and I also taught him other habits of mine. I never gave him beer, as my father had given it to me. But he copied me in other ways.

“Move, Bourbon,” he said once as the little dog stood in the doorway between our living room and our downstairs patio while Pat was trying to come inside.

Bourbon only looked up at him, wagging his tail.

“Move, Bourbon,” said Pat more loudly.

Still Bourbon only looked up at him wagging his tail.

“God damn it, Bourbon!” said four-year-old Pat. “Move!”

But I didn’t deliberately teach either him or Ben much of anything or take much responsibility for either of them in any other way.

LTC Weston invited Nancy and me to spend a few days flying about Afghanistan. We asked Daud to stay at our house the nights we were away for Pat and Ben to stay with him and Ali. Originally the Convair was for cargo, but, to make it an attaché aircraft, The Air Force carpeted its main compartment and installed two sofas and two banquettes in it.

The trip was mainly to show others of the embassy staff some of Afghanistan outside Kabul. Our first landing of that trip was on a gravel airstrip in the red desert outside Lashkar Gah. Some USAID employees met us there. One of them told us they’d made plans for our visit. He said the men would tour a marble factory while the women toured an archaeological site.

“Wait a minute,” I said standing beside Nancy on the steps from the aircraft. “We’re on this trip together.”

“You can do whatever you want,” said the USAID employee.

So I went with the women, but none of them spoke to me, and that was more responsibility than I ordinarily took for Nancy, and a problem with one of the engines delayed our departure.

Dave said the crew needed to replace a feathering pump motor. He said the only use for feathering pumps was to change the pitch of the propellers to slow the aircraft on landing. But he also said we shouldn't risk not being able to use the pump if we needed it, and he said he had a spare. So we stood on the sand or sat on the boarding steps for about an hour while Dave did his job. But the USAID people didn't wait with us. So I was glad of that.

Our next stop was Mazar-i-Sharif. There we shared a hotel room with at least fifty Afghans sleeping on wicker cots with no mattresses. Before that, we drank Afghan wine on the balcony of the hotel, talking and watching the traffic on the street below. LTC Weston drank more than did any of us others.

At the Kandahar airport Dave told me the United States government built its big modern terminal, that the plan was to make it an international airport, but that no one had ever used it as a terminal.

"See those red dots?" asked Dave pointing to the big red circles on its plate glass doors to keep people from accidentally walking through the glass. "You're now a member of the red dot club. Congratulations."

Neither did we use it as a terminal or go inside it, but LTC Weston LTC Weston also invited Nancy on a trip beyond Afghanistan. Each year the aircraft flew for maintenance to a United States Air Force base. Dave told me it flew to Tel Aviv the year before but that the crew preferred not to go to the same place twice. So that year they took it to Bangkok.

But that trip was to be two weeks, and Nancy thought that was too long to leave Pat and Ben with no one other than Daud and Ali. So she asked Daud to ask his wife to stay in our house with their kids for those two weeks with their kids to help him. She also told me he said he was afraid she might resent living in their little mud house after living in our house. But Rich solved the problem.

"Get some Peace Corps kids," he said. "A couple of weeks in your house would be like a vacation to them, compared to how the Peace Corps puts them up. The Peace Corps won't let you pay them cash, but they can accept other gifts. Maybe something from Bangkok."

So, to add another country to my travels, we left Pat and Ben with a young husband and wife we didn't know.

The plan also included spending a night in Lahore, Pakistan, on the way, but we didn't reach Lahore.

"Look out the window," said Dave standing beside the banquette where Nancy and I were sitting.

I did and saw that the propeller on the engine on that side of the aircraft wasn't moving.

"Is that bad?" I asked him.

“It isn’t good,” he said, and the air crew turned the plane back toward Islamabad.

As it banked to turn, I looked down and saw nothing other than the barren brown mountains of Pakistan. I took a bottle of Chianti for the ride, but Nancy drank more of it than I did, and the aircraft landed in Islamabad with but a slight lurch to the side of the immobile propeller. Dave told me that was why we needed feathering pump motors.

“Nice job,” I said to LTC Weston as I stepped past the cockpit to the steps from the plane. “Thanks.”

“Don’t thank me,” he said with a grin. “Bob landed it. Did a hell of a job. Thank him.”

Dave told me the engine had blown an oil seal. Waiting for one to arrive by diplomatic pouch and for Dave to install it, we spent the next two nights in the home of the United States Defense Attaché to Pakistan. Nancy and I did some tourism in Rawalpindi with the enlisted air crew. In a toy shop I bought a set of bagpipes, but I could make them make a sound. The Defense Attaché to Pakistan was a Navy captain, but he dressed in Pakistani clothing, including a turban.

To make up time, our next stop was New Delhi instead of Lahore. Nancy and I spent another night in the home of the Navy petty officer and his wife with whom we spent our night between our Pan Am flight and our Ariana flight. Thinking we owed them something for both, I asked Nancy to ask the wife whether she wanted anything from Bangkok. She told me she said she didn’t but that she’d like an Afghan carpet and a bottle of Tequila.

In Bangkok we checked into a hotel and began our stay with some shopping. Rich had asked us to buy some gems he could resell, and the Peace Corps couple said they’d like some stone rubbings. After that shopping in Thai shops, we did some shopping for ourselves at the BX on the airbase. The shutter button on my Mamiya Sekor camera had stopped working. So I bought a more expensive Asahi Pentax. But I also bought a Yamaha guitar. It was standard size with a round hole. But it wasn’t classical.

“I’ll learn to play ‘Fire and Rain’,” I told Nancy.

I also told her I thought some thin steaks we ate in a modern restaurant in a modern high rise building were the best steak I ever had tasted.

For no reason I knew, Neil arrived with some of Kabul’s Marine guards. Neil and Joyce had no kids, but Joyce wasn’t with him. The night they arrived, I left Nancy and at our hotel and went to Patpong with Neil. Patpong was Bangkok’s main sex entertainment neighborhood. Neil took me to a bar

with bar girls. He bought drinks for one. I patted her butt. Both she and Neil frowned at that. I guessed that was because he was paying for her drinks.

The next night, we went to another Patpong Bar, the Roaring Twenties, and took Nancy. That bar had bar girls on the first floor, bar girls and dancers in G-strings and pasties on the second floor, and completely naked women on a stage on the third floor. We went to the third floor. One of the naked women smoked a cigarette with her vagina.

Neil laughed. Nancy sat silent. I carefully refrained from reacting. While we were there, police entered, looked around, and left, as at the afterhours club in Tokyo. Also similarly the girl left the stage a few minutes before the police entered and returned to the stage immediately after they left.

Neil left the next day, but the next night I went to Patpong with the Marines. I nearly tripped over a little Thai car turning a corner in front of me. I slapped its trunk lid to keep my balance. About a dozen Thai men emerged from the car and nearby buildings and began practicing Thai kickboxing on us. One of the Marines, an extremely large African American whose station was Bangkok and not Kabul, pulled his wide 1970's belt from his belt loops and began swinging its big brass buckle at the heads of Thais. While he was doing that, two other Marines stopped two taxis.

The taxis took us to the Kabul Marines' hotel. The big Marine washed a cut in his head. That was our only injury, but I'd bought a Seiko watch in a Sikh watch shop in Kabul, and, while the Marine washed his wound, I discovered that it wasn't on my wrist. Then I remembered feeling a jerk on my wrist as a Thai kicked my genital region.

But all of us returned to Patpong and brought some women back to the Marines' hotel room. One of them sat on my lap. I kissed her, but a Marine from Kabul scowled at me. I didn't kiss her again.

The next morning, CPT Melton came to our hotel. He told us the air base there didn't have all the parts the Convair needed. He said we'd be in Bangkok a couple more weeks. I told him we hadn't brought enough cash for two more weeks and asked him whether I could cash a check at the Embassy. But he asked me how much cash we needed, told me to write the check to him, and gave me the cash before leaving our hotel.

The next day Nancy and I took a bus to Pataya Beach and checked into a cheaper hotel there. The beach was dirty, but I rented a 175 c.c. Kawasaki motorcycle for about an hour from a guy riding it on the beach. We also asked the desk clerk to have someone do our laundry. Some tour brochures were at the desk. We booked one for the next day. The next morning, before we were up, a man brought our laundry. I asked him to come back later. He pushed his way

into the room and demanded payment. I paid him but complained to the desk clerk. The desk clerk replied in no way. The tour was a man driving us to see Thai dancers, elephants rolling logs with their trunks, and the Golden Buddha. The man didn't thank us when he returned us to the hotel. So I supposed I should have tipped him.

The next day we returned to Bangkok and checked into a hotel cheaper than our first hotel there. That afternoon we saw the movie *The Getaway* in a Cinerama theatre. We sat near the front, but the film wasn't in Cinerama. So its resolution wasn't high enough for the wide screen. So it was a blur.

Back in New Delhi, we gave the Petty Officer's wife the bottle of Tequila she said she wanted, but I don't remember anything like a Class VI store at the BX. So I don't know where we bought it, and she and her husband paid for it by taking us to dinner at New Delhi's USAID staff house. They didn't intend to pay for that, but the staff house didn't accept cash, and I didn't know how to buy a book of the chits it accepted, and I didn't ask. I felt the shame of that, but also the Afghan carpet we sent was less than a couple of feet square.

Rich reimbursed me for the gems we bought for him, but he complained that I'd paid too much for them. I figured out how to repair my Mamiya Sekor camera and sold the Asahi Pentax to a USAID employee for more than I'd paid for. Rich told me doing that was both illegal and greedy. I felt that the stone rubbings weren't nearly enough compensation for the Peace Corps couple to baby sit for the month our trip became, but I made no effort to correct that. A few weeks after our return CPT Melton asked me whether he could cash my check.

"Sure," I said. "You could have then."

"I didn't want to cut you short," he replied, and we quickly returned to our routine there.

My office received 16mm prints of feature films from the Army and Air Force Motion Service. In exchange for our letting USIS show the films in its theatre in Kabul, it loaned my office some projectors, enough for each of our homes. But I didn't have an anamorphic lens to use mine to show widescreen films, and Neil's patio was close enough to the wall around his yard for him to show films on it while we drank on his patio. So we ordinarily watched the movies there. One night a miller landed on the edge of Neil's glass. He swallowed it and vomited but mixed himself another drink and watched the rest of the film.

I made another trip through the Khyber Pass. Some United States Army generals flew to Islamabad. COL MacTaggart told Rich and me the generals wanted to see the pass from the ground. He asked us to drive them

through it in his and LTC Weston's government cars. Rich and I readily complied. We loaded coolers full of beer into the cars.

COL MacTaggart also asked us to pay for an order of his at a big furniture shop in Peshawar. While Rich made the payment, I wandered the shop. I bought two wooden and brass semblances of camel saddles people used as foot stools. We didn't have to pick up the generals until the next day. So we stayed in the Peshawar USAID staff house that night.

No other diners were in the staff house's dining room that night. I remembered Vaughn's telling me about Pakistani hashish. I suggested to Rich that we try some. He said he'd never tried any drugs but was willing to try some. I asked the waiter whether he could find some for us.

He brought us a brick of it about the size of a stick of chewing gum but thicker and shorter. He charged us about a dime for it. We smoked some of it at the table. The next morning we refilled our coolers, drove on to Islamabad, and picked up the generals. Two road with each of us. On the road I offered bottles of beer to those with me. They accepted them. I drank slowly and didn't offer them a second round, but, at the border, while Rick was in the toilet after we showed our passports, those with him complained about him to me.

"Could you say something to him?" one of them said. "He's drinking a lot!"

"He outranks me," I told them. "But I'll try to say something to him."

"Hey, Rich," I said as the generals walked back to the cars after he came out of the toilet. "Those guys said you're drinking too much. I don't know what their problem is."

"Fuck 'em," said Rich turning back to his car.

I shrugged and turned back to mine. I watched him in my rearview mirror as we continued to Kabul. Between the border and Kabul was a dip in the road to let rainwater cross it. I slowed to keep from bottoming out the car's suspension or jumping the car out of the dip. I saw in the rear view mirror that Rich bounced out of it after nearly bottoming out. But, if the generals complained to anyone other than me, no one told me about it.

In Kabul an Afghan opened what he called a night club. He invited some of Kabul's international community to its grand opening. Dancing with the wife of a teacher at the American School in Kabul for children of English-speaking members of the diplomatic community there, I put both of my hands on her buttocks.

"You're a very strong young man," she said.

I asked her to go with me to my house for a few minutes, but she said her husband and my wife might look for us, and soon she left with her husband.



Soon after that, Nancy drove Barb home in our car, but Rich and I stayed until after most of the other guests left. We asked our host for some hashish. A few minutes later he handed me a brick of it larger than the one we bought in Peshawar. I took a bite of it and gave the rest of it to Rich. Soon after that Rich drove me home.

A few minutes after I went to bed, my heart began beating harder than I thought it ever had. I got out of bed and jumped around our bedroom trying to distract my attention from the fear I felt. It was more fear than I felt in the trunk of the car at the drive-in movie.

“Call somebody!” I said to Nancy. “Something’s wrong with me!”

She refused to call anyone. I thought her reason was fear of what that might do to my career. I feared more what my heart was doing, but, slowly, over about a quarter of an hour, my heartbeat slowed enough for me to sleep.

That night at the nightclub I also invited its owner to our house to see a movie. But I also invited the owners of motorcycle repair shop there for that the same night. Later I thought the night club owner might not wish to see a movie with motorcycle mechanics, and another problem was that the film was in widescreen. Solving the second problem only required borrowing Neil’s projector, and his house was around a corner from ours across the street from our back wall. But I forgot to do that before our guests arrived.

“Did you forget you invited me?” asked the nightclub owner, when I told him I had to walk around the corner for the lens, and he said little to the motorcycle mechanics.

I also invited a neighbor of Rich’s to our house for dinner with his wife and two daughters. I met him at Rich’s house. While he sat at Rich’s bar while his wife and daughters were in Rich’s living room with Barb and Nancy, I asked him what he’d like to drink. I don’t remember his answer, but I told him I’d go down to the cellar and see if Rich had what he requested. Then, starting at one end of the bar, I walked to the other end while progressively bending my knees until I was out of view of the neighbor. Then I grabbed from beneath the bar a bottle of what he requested and reversed the act. Rich’s house had no cellar. He told Neil of that at work, and Neil also laughed at that.

The neighbors dress for the dinner as though it were semi formal. Nancy and I dressed casually. But the only other awkwardness at the dinner was lack of conversation.

I also tried to learn Farsi. I paid an Afghan to teach both me and Nancy in our bar area. I quit that after fewer than a half dozen lessons, but I also tried to learn Russian. I paid a Russian woman to give me those lessons, but those lessons were in our third bedroom and only for me.

Her name was Ludmilla. She also taught at the American School. Her husband taught physics at Kabul University. I thought she was a little over weight, but she had extraordinarily large breasts. A bed, a desk, and a chair for the desk were all the furniture in the bedroom. I sat at the desk while she sat on the bed, but I also invited her and her husband to see a movie. I didn't forget to ask Neil to lend me his projector, but I waited until the afternoon of the Friday evening I was to need it.

Because Friday was the Muslim sabbath, we had Fridays off each week instead of Saturdays, and Neil and Joyce were at a softball game. The Embassy had a softball diamond in a lot beside the Embassy compound. I found him there and asked him to lend me his projector. But he refused.

"Fuck you," he said, and he returned his attention to the game.

But Schonstrom was also there. So I asked him whether I could borrow his. He said his wife was at home and that I could go there and tell her he said I could. I hadn't spoken to her since the night at our house when I suggested that we play strip poker. She didn't invite me in. She brought the projector to the door. But, when she gave it to me, she apologized for that night.

Ludmilla and her husband seemed to me to enjoy the movie at our house, but, as she left our house, Russians detained them. They interrogated them all night. In the morning the principal of the American School called me at work. He told me Ludmilla was at the school and wished to speak with me there. He briefly told me what happened to her and said she was afraid to go to my house. I drove there, but still she didn't speak to me. The Principal told me she was afraid to speak to me and that she was distraught. Neither could I think of anything to say to her there, but back at work I told Schonstrom what happened. So he told COL MacTaggart, and COL MacTaggart told the CIA station chief. So I again talked with the CIA chief. But, like the conversation regarding the ride into the construction site, that conversation was in COL McTaggart's office, and the questions were all the CIA station chief's while the answers all mine. But I never saw Ludmilla again, and that ended the Russian lessons, and other changes there began coming quickly.

Neil, Rich, and COL MacTaggart returned to the United States. Carl C. Crump, an SP6 who came to work in a red double-knit blazer, replaced Neil. Frank Pankey, an SP7 whose red crewcut and penny loafers made him resemble Archie in the comic books, replaced me, while I replaced Rich. A COL whose name was Eliasson replaced COL MacTaggart.

The entire DAO staff and many others of the embassy staff drank champagne at the airport to bid farewell to COL McTaggart. The teacher's wife

whose buttocks I'd squeezed at the new nightclub was also there. But she wasn't part of the farewell for Colonel MacTaggart.

I don't know why she was there, but, passing the table where we were drinking, she smiled and nodded at me. I looked at her, but I quickly looked away with neither a nod nor a smile, and then she frowned, and, the next time I saw her, she was playing volleyball at a party at the Marine house. I joined the game, but, too drunk to play, I served into the net.

"Get him out of here," she said loudly from the other side of the net, and I got myself out of there.

Crump called Frank Hanky Panky when he wasn't with him. Crump also told me his wife had a scar all the way around her waist. He said it was because of an accident that nearly cut her in half. He also suggested that he and I join the Kabul Golf and Country Club.

Our office had two sets of golf clubs. They were in a room with our ground cameras and some shotguns and 45 caliber pistols. The DIA paid for our membership to the Country Club, and Crump and I took the golf clubs home. I also took a 45 caliber pistol home, but that was Schonstrom's idea. So did Neil, and Neil and I once practiced with them at a gravel pit. Once in Germany I tried to qualify with one at a rifle range. It double-fired each time I pulled the trigger. The NCO in charge took it from me. I fared little better with Neil at the gravel pit, little better than with Wahib's shotgun, but Neil didn't laugh at that.

"That's enough," he said, much as had the NCO at the range.

I don't remember whether Rich had a 45 at home, but I remember that Crump didn't, that the standard rate for the Afghan caddies was less than fifty cents for once around the nine-hole course, and that initially Crump and I played at least two rounds each Friday and Sunday and occasionally one or two rounds before work. LTC Weston and CPT Melton once played with us once with their own clubs. I put a ball on a green on which another foursome was putting.

The greens were a mixture of sand and oil. So, after players left a green, an Afghan smoothed them with canvas on a stick in the shape of a T. Because of the hardness of the dry fairways, a rule permitted tees on them. The third hole was a par three with gopher holes between the tee and the brown green. A sand trap was on the far side of it. I used a three wood at the tee, deliberately risking over shooting the brown green. Crump advised me to use a nine iron to putt from the dry hard sand trap.

One afternoon a foursome at the third hole beckoned Crump and me to play through. My tee-shot put my ball into the sand trap. My caddie offered me a putter. I scowled at him, shook my head, grabbed the nine iron from the bag, and birdied the hole. I also bought a pair of black and white Corfam wingtip

golf shoes a USAID employee advertised in the USIS newspaper. But double bogies were ordinary for me.

Yet I nearly won a tournament. Crump didn't count all his strokes, but I saw no reason not to count mine, and we dropped our score card in a box at the clubhouses. So, when we played in that tournament, I learned that Crump's not counting all his strokes wasn't extraordinary.

The regular play ended with a tie for first between me and a Pakistani. So, on our next Friday off, we played a tiebreaker. In a sand trap, aligning my shot, I touched the sand with my club. I wasn't aware of the rule not to do that. The Pakistani didn't require me to take the penalty, but he informed me of the rule, and, while holding the pin for the putt that was my next shot, he also told me the tournament was sudden death. The putt was less the a yard, but I missed it. The next day at work I telephoned the diplomat who'd organized the tournament and asked him whether the Pakistani was correct in telling me it was sudden death.

"Good question," he replied. "I'll call you back."

But he didn't, and Crump told others in our office that I'd cheated by over-counting my strokes on the scorecards I dropped in the box at the clubhouse, and, while drinking beer while talking with a woman on the club's patio during the tournament, I told her I was thinking of leaving the Army to return to school, and that I was thinking of Harvard.

"He's thinking of leaving the Army to go to Harvard," she said to a civilian who joined us at the table a few minutes later.

"Eventually," I said. "I guess I'll have to prove myself somewhere else first."

I played less golf after that, but I wasn't lying to the woman about my thinking of leaving the Army to return to college. I'd already told Nancy of that and suggested that she find a job to help finance it, and she did. She found a clerical job for a State University of New York demography team there. The team had a carryall it used to transport its employees to work, and we increased Daud's and Ali's pay to compensate them for their taking care of Pat and Ben while both Nancy and I were at our jobs.

One of Nancy's coworkers was Carol Safi, the wife of an Ariana Airlines pilot, Daud Safi. My office had sent Daud to Fort Sill for training. He met Carol while he was in training and used that training on small aircraft as a step toward flying airliners for Ariana. She and Daud became friends of ours, and, at our bar I told Carol about Ben Shafstahl's taking me to the bar in Ardmore to meet his former girlfriend, and, also at our bar, Daud told us he flew Timothy Leary into Kabul.

“Somebody famous was on my plane today,” he said the evening after he did that. “A passenger came to the cockpit and told me Timothy Leary was on my plane and said I should radio ahead and tell somebody. I’d never heard of him, but I did, and, when we landed, police arrested him.

“Holy shit!” I said. “That’s the guy that made LSD famous!”

“Yeah,” said Daud. “Carol told me when I told her about it.”

So a picture of our Narcotics Attaché was in *Newsweek*. Leary waived extradition, and the Narcotics Attaché escorted him back to California, where he’d escaped from prison. The picture was of Leary with the Narcotics Attaché standing behind him.

We hosted another party at our house. I invited Carol and Daud, COL Weston, CPT Melton and their wives, all the Marine guards, the Narcotics Attaché and his wife, the embassy’s Communications Center Supervisor, the teacher whose buttocks I’d fondled, an American School teacher with whom I’d played golf, and two Peace Corps volunteers. I also invited all their spouses, but I didn’t invite the gunnery sergeant in charge of the Marine guards. I don’t remember whether I invited COL Eliasson there or Schonstrom, but neither do I remember seeing them at the party. The reason I didn’t invite the gunnery sergeant was that I’d heard his subordinates didn’t like him.

“Where’s my invitation?” he asked me in front of the guard desk in the embassy’s lobby.

“You didn’t get it?” I said.

“No,” he said.

“I’ll send you another one,” I said.

But I didn’t, and Daud didn’t make potato chips for that party. Nancy asked him to do it again, but he told her it was a lot of work. So then I was sorry I’d asked him to do it for my other party.

Contrary to diplomatic etiquette, I typed the invitations on pink cards with no ending time and no request for an RSVP. My motive was to make the party informal and drunken. Neither the Narcotics Attaché nor the teacher whose buttocks I’d squeezed showed. Late in the evening, sitting on a piece of glass I was using for the top of a wicker table between two wicker chairs I was using for bar furniture, I broke the glass.

“He did it himself,” said the teacher I’d met at the Country Club. “I’m trying to maintain.”

One of the Peace Corps workers’ name was Dave. I knew him to be especially drunken. He brought two young Afghan women. He asked me to drive them home. The older of the two sat between me and the other. She pulled up her skirt and showed me a small dagger a garter was keeping in place

on her inner thigh. She said it was for her protection. I didn't know how to balance that with her showing it to me, but I left the two in front of the house to which she directed me and returned to the party.

The other Peace Corps volunteer I invited was female. She stood at our dining room table and ate smoked oysters until they were gone. Carol Safi attended in a long but plain blue taffeta dress that showed the shape of her nipples. I don't remember inviting the Embassy's consul or his wife, but I remember that communications center supervisor brought his wife but spent much of the evening kissing the consul's wife on the patio outside our bar.

After COL Weston and most of the other guests left, I suggested to Helen Melton that we turn the party topless. She laughed and told Bob what I said, but she and I continued our conversation without him. She asked me whether I played tennis.

"I haven't," I said.

"Meet me tomorrow at the courts down the road from the embassy," she said. "I'll bring the rackets and balls. One o'clock."

"OK," I replied.

The last guests to leave were Helen and Bob and Carol and Daud. I suggested to Helen that we play spin the bottle. We did, on our dining room floor. I put my tongue into Helen's mouth, and Bob appeared to me to put his into Nancy's. But the game ended the party, and, unsure of whether Helen was joking, I didn't go to the courts.

"Where were you Sunday?" she asked me the next time I saw her.

Not wishing to express my doubt either in her or in myself, I said nothing.

"I waited a half hour," she said.

One night at the Marine house, Nancy and I played dealer's choice poker with some of the Marines and a CIA agent. A Marine new on station chose a version of seven-card stud with many wild cards. Because of the difficulty of estimating the odds, I ordinarily I folded out of wild card games, but, not to make the new Marine feel unwelcome, I called every bet. But my sixth card gave me five deuces. So, on every remaining bet of that hand, I raised the limit. The others folded before the last bet, but the CIA agent also raised the limit to the end, and then he laid down a royal flush and began to rake in the pot.

"Wait a minute," I said laying down my deuces.

"He didn't even know what he was doing," said the CIA agent as I raked in the pot, and, at a party nearly as casual as my second party, he called me an idiot for asking people to pour drinks into the hood of the Navy foul weather jacket into which I'd collected cactus needles in the Arizona desert.

But, I heard his wife was Russian and that, though she was also there, he was in a relationship with the assistant consul's wife, and I understood all that to be common knowledge there, and I also heard that the two wives left station while both husbands retained their positions, and I know, because I spoke with him after the killing of one of the Kuntz brothers, that he remained on station.

United States Marines all around Earth celebrate the birthday of the Marine Corps by hosting a formal ball. The Kabul Marine guards hosted theirs in the grand ballroom of the Intercontinental Hotel. The gunnery sergeant in charge of them told me I need a tuxedo. He recommended an Afghan tailor and offered to send him to my house. I accepted the offer.

"Will it be in style?" I asked the tailor.

He said it would, but what he delivered had narrow lapels and straight trouser legs, and the only picture I could find to show him what was then in fashion was in *Playboy* magazine. It was one of the magazines to which my office subscribed. Thinking the tailor probably was Islamic, I thought the magazine might offend him. But I didn't think I had a choice.

He asked whether he could take it with him, and he returned it with a tuxedo like the one in the picture. The bowtie he brought wasn't as wide, and I couldn't find one I could buy. But I bought some black silk and made one, and I also found in an Afghan shoe store black shoes with square toes I thought were in fashion. I don't know what happened to my Tokyo shoes.

Nancy asked me which of her two long dresses she should wear. I selected the one she didn't wear to the opera. It was black with a white lace bodice and white lace puffy sleeves. I thought it less formal than the other, but it reminded me of Heidi. Peggy had taken me to two of the annual performances of the play *Heidi* in the auditorium of Roosevelt Junior High School.

My memory tells me Rich laughed at my bell bottom trousers. But he'd left station by then. So I don't know who did. But Dave Fliehr said of my shoes that he didn't know anyone who had square toes, and I doubted the sincerity of a remark of the wife of the Deputy Chief of Mission regarding Nancy's dress.

"That dress suits you well," she said.

"Where's the scotch man," I'd heard her husband ask as he arrived at a cocktail party, but the only other behavior at the ball I thought was a *faut pas* was Schonstrom's.

Other than the Marines, he was the only person there in uniform. He was in his dress blues, the Army's most formal uniform, but I thought that may have offended the Marines. Neither did he attend the breakfast the Marines

hosted at their house, but, though I and Helen Melton and the Kuntz Brothers did, neither did the DCM or his wife, and Helen, sitting at one end of a long table as I sat at the other end, seemed to me to have forgiven my not keeping my promise to meet her at the tennis courts.

“Your problem,” she said to me loudly enough for every one at the table to hear, “isn’t that you’re crazy but that you’re too sane.”

The Kuntz brothers were trying to walk around Earth for UNICEF. They spent a few days in Kabul along the way. The morning after the breakfast they continued their walk toward the Khyber Pass. Before reaching the pass they stopped to sleep beside the road. In the night some bandits robbed them. The Turkish government had given them a shotgun. One of the brothers tried to use it in defense. A bandit shot him to death. The CIA agent with whom I’d played poker took photographs of the scene. Further suggesting that that my office’s purpose was to distract attention from his office, he brought the film to my office and asked me to process it. It obviously indicated that he thought the secrecy of the CIA’s photo lab was more important than the secrecy of the DAO’s photo lab. But, whatever that says of when Pankey replaced me in our film lab, I processed the pictures and took a print of one home.

The Turkish government also gave the Kuntz brothers a cart and a mule. The picture was of the dead brother lying on the ground beside the cart with a bullet hole in his neck. The other brother wasn’t in the picture, but the mule was. I had a photograph album I was using for pictures I took during that assignment. I put the print of that picture in it.

The University of Maryland offered classroom course at Army education centers and also offered correspondence courses to Army personnel anywhere. So, in Kabul, to resume learning Russian, I enrolled in a beginning Russian course, and, to resume learning English literature, I also enrolled in a course in nineteenth-century American literature. But I dropped both for less reason than I dropped the philosophy course in the Netherlands. My drinking distracted me from my efforts to study. The instructor for the American literature sent me a letter saying I was an excellent student and that he was sorry I was withdrawing, and I received some phonograph record for learning Russian. I kept the records but not the letter and continued my drinking.

In the hallway of the embassy between my office and the Ambassador’s was an Army electronic surveillance team. An Army SSG with that team borrowed my guitar. He also played classical piano at a cocktail party I attended. He returned my guitar with a small crack along a bottom edge of its body. He asked to borrow it again. I told him of the crack. He apologized and



withdrew his request. He never borrowed it again. I told Crump the SSG's wife was the best looking woman on station.

"Naw," said Crump, but I thought she was far better looking than his wife.

Former Texas Governor John Connally flew to Afghanistan on the Boeing 707 Richard Nixon was using as Air Force One. The trip involved a tour of Kabul. Connally rode with the Ambassador in a limousine. High ranking members of his entourage rode in another embassy sedan. Low ranking members of the entourage rode in the DAO carryalls. I drove one of the carryalls.

The sites we saw included the Hazrat Ali Mazarwas, the noon gun, and Kabul's gun bazaar. All I knew of the Hazrat Ali Mazarwas was that it reminded me of the Taj Mahal and that Rich and Neil and their wives called it the blue mosque. The noon gun was on a wall I heard Afghans built to keep Genghis Khan out of Kabul. All else I knew of it was that an old man fired it every day at noon, that Afghans set their watches by it, and that I once drove Nancy up to see it. All I knew of the gun bazaar was that it sold Khyber rifles and copies of Khyber rifles, that some of either worked but that some didn't, and that I bought one that didn't work and hung it on a wall of our living room over the buffet we used for our stereo equipment. One of the people I drove on the tour asked me what the Hazrat Ali Mazarwas was. I told him I didn't know. None of them asked me any more questions.

One night, a few weeks later, in the middle of a night, I heard small explosions outside our bedroom window. I rose and looked outside. Tracers were streaking across the sky, but I didn't know they were tracers. I didn't remember seeing the tracers over the mainland from the bunker on the hill behind our tents in Vietnam or those over the basic training infiltration course.

"Some kind of fireworks," I said to Nancy, and I returned to bed, but, when I arrived at the embassy later that morning, one of the old Russian tanks the Soviets had given to the Afghan army was outside the embassy gate.

It didn't stop me from driving through the gate. But in my office I learned that Afghanistan's monarchy had ended that night. So then I remembered the tracers in Vietnam.

The King was vacationing in Italy. A rumor had circulated that a prince was planning to attempt a coup during his absence. To prevent the coup, the Afghan army removed the batteries from all its tanks, excepting the twelve tanks belonging to Palace Guard. A lieutenant colonel my office sent to Fort Knox for armor training commanded those twelve tanks. They took over the country. After work that day I drove past the home of Abdul Wali. He was the

prince the rumors said might effect the coup. His house was about two blocks from ours. A hole about a yard wide was in a second floor wall.

But I heard of no injury during the coup other than a soldier shooting his own foot, and I heard that was only as a rumor. So more credible to me was that Nixon sent Conolly there to assess the potential value of a coup and the potential success of the CIA or our office instigating one by spreading that the Abdul Wali rumor. But then I didn't think it through far enough to suspect that they did it to set the Soviets up for making Afghanistan their Vietnam as it eventually did. So then I thought letting the Soviets set up a puppet government was stupid, and the effect of the coup most directly affecting Nancy and me was that Afghans nearly killed Carol Safi and her kids.

Most of the square block between our house and Abdul Wali's was an empty field. After the coup the Afghan army parked a few dozen tanks in it. Apparently intending to deter people from driving past the tanks, some lined some rocks across the road, but they weren't apparent enough to inform Carol of their intention. So she drove her Volkswagen over them, with her kids in the car, and an Afghan soldier put a few AK-47 rounds through the Volkswagen's windshield. None of the rounds hit Carol or her kids. But some of the glass from the windshield cut her face. So some Afghans took her to Kabul's hospital.

Daud was on an international flight then, but Nancy was at home, for the same reason neither was Carol at work, that no one picked them up to take them to work that morning. So Carol called Nancy from the hospital for a ride home, and Nancy called me, and I drove home, picked up Nancy, drove to the hospital, and drove Carol and her kids home. I don't know why I picked up Nancy, but our house was across the street from the back fence of the embassy compound. So picking her up only required my driving around the block.

But soon the tanks were gone. Kuchi nomads with their camels sheep and tabernacles often parked in a vacant lot facing our house and the lot the tanks left. So, when they left, the nomads returned, and the Afghan Minister of National Defense also seemed to me to return to his ordinary coming and going. His home faced the street behind ours.

But, whether not the nomads or the minister resumed what they ordinarily did, Nancy and I did.

## Chapter 22

### Pants

But that varied considerably from our life before Rich and Neil left.

Before taking Rich's job, I had my own office between the photo lab and the office Rich and Neil shared. After taking Rich's job, my desk was between Crump's desk and the door to Schonstrom's office. My first day at that desk, LTC Weston dropped a stapler on a piece of glass Rich used to make information key to the job quickly visible to him. But I had come to like LTC Weston. So I was sorry only because LTC Weston seemed to me to be sorry. Welcoming the opportunity to make the job more mine, I replaced it with a desk blotter and acetate like what I had in Boeblingen. It didn't permit much of that. I was basically a file clerk.

But the job also included security administration. When people left, I changed the combinations to the steel door to our office suite and the file cabinets in which we kept documents with any security classification above for official use only, and, at the end of each workday, I was responsible for assuring that all those documents were in the cabinets. But, though those documents had red cover sheets making them conspicuous, I failed at that on several occasions.

That was also an AFCENT Support Element CQ's responsibility, and once I found that the LTC who was responsible for the Support Element's security failed to lock the file cabinet in his office. So I called him at home, and, asking me why I was calling him, he told me to lock it, but, in Kabul, part of the Marine guards' job was assuring that I did that part of my job. So, at night, after I went home, a Marine went through our offices looking for anything I should have secured but didn't, and then they reported any such failures to Pomponio Plaza, in what they called incident reports.

But, though I was the subject of several of those incident reports, no one officially reprimanded me for any of them. So, after my third such failure, I asked Schonstrom why, but he said he didn't know, and I also had ready access to all the messages of any security classification coming into the DAO. Part of my job was to walk across the hallway to the communication center and bring

them back to the office, and the Yom Kippur war was while I was doing that. So, though I knew little of Israel when I taped that map of Israel to the wall behind my desk in the Netherlands, in Afghanistan I had no excuse not to know secret defense information regarding that war, and, thinking I should have cared, I read some of it But I didn't care. So I read little of it.

But, after the coup, Schonstrom also left, and, after he left, COL Eliasson showed me an efficiency report for him. He told me he thought I should see it, and it was worse than the first efficiency report Miss Gilmore gave me. But the COL didn't say why he thought I should see it.

So I only nodded my head at it, and neither did his replacement reprimand me for my continuing incident reports. But his name was Flanigan, and he was no Schonstrom. He was an Alcoholics Anonymous member, and his nose suggested the reason for that.

But I had other reasons to question his competence.

One Friday he called me at home and asked me to help him move some doors. Excepting the steel door to the hallway, all the DAO's offices were wooden. One of those other doors was also to the hallway, and, excepting the door to the photo lab, the office suite's only wooden doors with locks opened to CPT Melton's office and to the hallway and COL Eliasson's office, and CPT Melton's office was between COL Eliasson's office and LTC Weston's office, which opened to Flanigan's office. So Flanigan decided to move the door between CPT Melton's office and COL Eliasson's to between his office and the office Crump and I shared. The steel door opened to the one Crump and I shared, and the one Crump and I shared opened to the rooms with the safes and weapons and Panky's office with the photo lab behind it. He the said the extra lock between the steel door and the door from CPT Melton's office increase security. He also said that neither would that fully meet security requirements, but, after we removed the doors, we saw that the of the hinges the doors we removed opened in opposite directions. So they weren't transferrable.

So we reversed what we'd done, and I went home to drink more beer, and Flanigan didn't bother to request either a new wooden door or another steel one, and my masturbation habit also continued as it had.

Once, while I was doing that with a copy of *Playboy* in the bedroom where Ludmilla had tried to teach me Russian, Nancy opened the door as she'd opened the door to the bathroom in Elsloo. I was doing it in a corner behind a wall making the corner a sort of closet. So she couldn't see what I was doing.

But, after looking at me as she'd looked at me in Elsloo, she closed the door as she had then, and I also extended that habit to work. I was taking copies of *Playboy* to the restroom across the hall way from the vault door, and once,

while some of the enlisted aircrew members were in the office, one of them asked me what were some small white spots on the front of my trousers. I looked down but didn't reply.

"I know what it is," said another of them.

Neither of them said more of that to me, but I suspected the spots were what I suspected they suspected they were. They weren't. One morning at home, brushing my teeth while in my suit to go to work, I saw that they were toothpaste from my rinsing my toothbrush. But I thought telling them that would add more suspicion, and I joked about such as my masturbation habit.

The communications center supervisor's wife invited Nancy and me to a birthday party for her husband. I found a cuspidor in an Afghan shop selling various brass pots and pans and filled it with things I thought might represent habits of dirty old men, including a copy of *Playboy* and a deck of cards with pictures of nude women. I don't remember how I acquired the deck of cards, but I remember both that no one laughed and that the communications supervisor loaned me a phonograph album for me to record. He was reluctant. He asked me the stylus pressure of my turntable. But it was less than a gram. So that wasn't a reason for him not to lend it to me, and Helen organized what she called happy hours. They were weekly early evening gatherings of her friends at her and theirs, and she and Bob hosted the first one in their home.

I danced with the wife of the enlisted air crew chief. She had large breasts and breathed into one of my ears as we danced, and I asked Helen why Helen's butt was flat. She told me the reason was that she rode horses, but she also said we should go to the Intercon sometime, if I'd pay for the room. I looked at Bob and told her I didn't think we should do that. But she laughed, turned to the aircrew chief's wife, and told her I'd refused her, and, also that night, needing to defecate and not wishing to do it in her home, I drove home to do it. But, returning, instead of ringing the bell and waiting for the guard, I climbed over the wall around the yard, and the guard told Helen.

"Did you just climb over the wall?" she asked me.

"Yeah," I said. "I didn't want to bother anybody."

But Carol and Daud were also there that evening, and Carol left before Daud did. So, a few minutes later, I also left, drove their house, and rang their doorbell, and she let me in. The house was incomplete. Instead of by a mortgage, she and Daud were paying for paying for the house by paying the contractors as they built it. So they lived on the second floor while the contractors finished the first floor. But Carol apologized for that, invited me upstairs, and offered me a drink. I asked for a beer, and, as I drank it, Nancy and Daud came up the stairs.

“She said it wasn’t her idea,” said Nancy to me next morning.

I’d hit Nancy twice. Once was a slight slap in Germany. Then she was complaining about my driving drunk with Pat and Ben and Roy and Denise in our car. The other time was in Afghanistan and wasn’t a slap.

I several times told here I wore the pants in the family. Once, as we stood arguing in the doorway between our living room and our entranceway, she asked me what made me think I did. I was drinking a bottle of beer. It was in my left hand. So I hit the left side of her face with my right fist, and then I threw the bottle of beer against the door to my right. Ali ran out of his room and began sweeping up the mess. That wasn’t a slap but a cudgel, but, though Nancy called the slap hitting her, she said nothing of the cudgel and tolerated nearly I did to her, until a few days after she found me at Carol’s house. Then she asked me for a divorce.

But she never gave me a reason. When she asked for a divorce, she also told me she’d written a letter home complaining about dysentery from living in Afghanistan, but she apologized for that, and, knowing she had plenty of cause, I didn’t ask for a reason. Instead I quit my job.

It was the most expedient way I could think of to force the Army to send her home. But I didn’t tell anyone I quit my job. I simply stopped going to work.

The night of my first day of drinking at home instead of going to work, I drank all night with an African American SFC who worked with the guitar-playing electronic surveillance SSG. I’d offended him at a cocktail party by using the word “nigger” while talking about the continuing problem of race relations in the United States. But, at another cocktail party, we talked about the interest we shared in jazz, and then he invited me to his house to listen to his record collection and told me where he lived. So, though, as hadn’t Hornbuckle, he didn’t say when, the night of the day I quit my job, I went there, and he welcomed me.

His collection spanned most of the width of a wall of his living room, and, playing selections from it, he told me that one of those days he’d bring out his real stuff. As the night progressed I reminded him of that promise several times and asked him when he would. But he didn’t until, as the sky brightened into dawn he played a recording of Louis Armstrong singing “What a Wonderful World” and said that was his real stuff. A few minutes, later his wife came into the living room, silently looked at us, and left for work, and then I went home.

At home Nancy told me Flanagan had called. She said he told her COL Eliasson wanted to talk to me. I called my office. Flanagan answered and told

me the same. I told him I'd be right there and I immediately drove to the embassy.

But, when I entered the combination into the lock on the gate at the top of the stairs, the lock didn't unlock. I tried twice more, but still it didn't unlock. So I looked down the stairs at the Marine guard at the reception desk. He was also looking up at me, but then he picked up the telephone on his desk.

"Someone will come get you," he said hanging up.

He'd returned my nod when I passed him on my way to the stairs, but then he'd said nothing.

"Boy that was quick," I said, referring to changing the the combination.

But I laughed when I said it, and the Marine laughed with me.

Crump opened the gate. I wordlessly walked past him, around the corner to our offices, past Flanigan, through LTC Weston's and CPT Melton's offices, and into COL Eliasson's office. I was glad LTC Weston and CPT Melton weren't in their offices.

"Sit down," said COL Eliasson.

I considered reporting with a salute but decided it wasn't appropriate in civilian clothes.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"My wife asked me for a divorce," I said. "And what we're doing here is crazy anyway. So I'm not going to work here anymore."

"Have you been drinking?" he asked.

"Yes," I said and didn't say "sir". "I've been drinking scotch and listening to jazz all night."

My only time at COL Eliasson's house was for a lunch. After lunch, his servant who served the lunch asked us whether we wanted coffee. I asked for beer. When he brought it, COL Eliasson looked at the bottle and looked at me, but he said nothing.

"We don't have to talk right now," he replied to my reply to his reply in his office, "if you want to go home and get some sleep first."

"No," I said. "That's alright."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Absolutely!" I replied, and I told him that nearly everyone on station was a drunk, that no one had bothered to fix the leak obscuring the lens of the camera in the belly of the attaché aircraft, and that our using the USIS projectors to show Army and Aircraft Motion Picture Service movies at home was contrary to regulation.

"Horse shit," he said.

"What?" I asked.

A picture of a horse was on the wall behind his desk, and I remembered hearing him and his wife talking about the horses they had at their home in the United States, but I wasn't asking about that or asking what he said. I was asking what of what I said he was calling horseshit. But he answered both questions.

"Horse shit," he said more loudly. "You watch those movies."

"Not anymore," I said. "I'm through with the whole thing."

"Any chance of your changing your mind?" he asked.

"No, sir," I said, and I leaned forward in my chair to rise.

"Alright," said the COL. "Let me think about this."

But a conversation with Nancy the next day surprised me more than his approach to the problem. She's bought some new China at Kabul's China bazaar. I don't know when, but she showed it to me then.

"What do you think?" she asked.

It was black with gold around its rims. I told her I thought black wasn't appropriate for dinner. She took it back the next day and bought some white China with a green floral pattern. Neither did I much like that, but I didn't tell her that, and neither did I ask her the question then most foremost in my mind. I wondered why she was buying China or cared what I thought of it if she intended to divorce me.

But the next day I received a more welcome surprise. LTC Weston telephoned and asked me to come to his house for a few drinks. Having a few drinks with LTC Weston would have been a pleasure for me in any circumstance at any time, and, after two days of drinking alone at home thinking about the mess I'd made for myself, the prospect delighted me.

"No chance of you changing your mind, is there?" he asked as we sat at his bar drinking scotch. "They said they'd forget about it if you do."

"No, sir," I said, meaning that and feeling that my tone of voice expressed the certainty I felt.

Much of the certainty was from doubt of the possibility of anyone either forgetting what I was doing or behaving as though anyone did, but LTC Weston accepted it at face value, and I also appreciated that.

"I didn't think so," he said, and then, instead of arguing, we talked about problems in the office, and he didn't ask why I was doing what I was doing, and I didn't tell him, and neither did I tell him what I thought of the coup or the Convair's camera or the movies, but I told him what I thought of Flanagan's door project.

"And everybody thinks Crump knows what he's doing," I said.



“Nobody thinks Crump knows what he’s doing,” replied the LTC, and he laughed when I told him about Flanagan, and he also told me he’d be sorry to see me go, and the next day Flanagan called me and asked me to come to his office to talk about what I thought we should do, and once more Crump escorted me through the gate and through the vault door.

“I can’t figure out how to handle this administratively,” said Flanagan.

“Let me see what I can figure out,” I said.

I still had my collection of Army personnel regulations. I’d lined them up on the desk in our third bedroom. In a few minutes at home I found in the Army’s main travel regulation a provision for personnel who developed mental disorders on assignments outside the United States with their dependents. It said the Army could send the dependents to the service member’s home of record and send the service member to the nearest Army psychiatric facility for psychiatric evaluation. So I took it to Flanagan, and Crump escorted me again, for the last time.

“Do you want to sell your motorcycle?” he asked, and I sold it to him for twice what I’d paid for it, and that was the only time I ever made a profit on a sale of a motor vehicle.

The next day Helen telephoned me and asked me whether I’d like to come over for a drink. Over her stairway were three large red and black paintings of trees she’d bought from an Afghan artist. The red reminded me of *The Scarlet Letter*. I asked whether she’d read it. She said she hadn’t. I told her both that I liked the paintings and that she might consider calling her daughter Little Pearl. But, while I was trying to think of how to tell her why, I saw, through the window behind her bar, her guard go to her gate and bring to the house the State Department doctor who’d failed to diagnose Thelma.

He didn’t say why he was there, but, as he drank the scotch Helen poured for him, he asked me what I thought of *The Catcher in the Rye*. I remembered I’d told Colonel Eliasson that the embassy’s phoniness reminded me of it. But I told the doctor I didn’t think life was as futile as Holden Caulfield says it is when he can’t rub out a “fuck you” sign on a wall of a stairwell in his sister’s school.

“It doesn’t matter anyway,” I said, trying to quote it. “Even if you had a million years, you couldn’t rub out half the ‘fuck you’ signs in the world.”

“They think what you’re doing is my fault,” said Helen after the doctor finished that one drink and left,

While Flanagan struggled through applying the regulation I showed him, I obtained a Pacific Exchange mail order catalog and ordered a quadraphonic receiver and tape deck and an additional pair of speaker systems.

The shipping address I used for the order was the Midtown Manhattan apartment Vaughn was then sharing with Brenda. My mother had moved again. So I didn't think I could be sure of how long she'd be anywhere. But I was also afraid of what Dewey might do with the equipment if it went to her house.

A few days after Crump picked up the BSA, he brought it back. He told me the clutch was slipping and that he'd adjusted it as far as he could. He'd adjusted it as far out of engagement as he could. I showed him how to adjust it and how to use a coin to measure the gap.

"Thanks," he said, riding away.

I suggested to Nancy that she ask Bob Melton to try to sell the Dart. LTC Weston telephoned me to tell me what the deciders had decided. He said they'd send Nancy and Pat and Ben to Coldwater and send me under escort to the 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. Flanagan called to be sure I understood and to tell me Dave Fliehr would escort me.

"We know you like him," he said.

LTC Weston's driver drove Dave and me to the airport in one of our office's carryalls. They picked me up at my house. Daud and Ali bade me farewell at the gate. They touched their foreheads to the hand with which I shook theirs. During the flight, I told Dave about guesthouses in Germany. He said we'd stop at one on the way from the airport to the hospital. We took a taxi but stopped nowhere before we reached the hospital. I didn't remind him, didn't blame him, and didn't expect us to. But I wondered why he said it.

"Nice knowing you," I said to him as we shook hands at the hospital.

"Good luck," he said turning away to leave me at the reception desk.

We arrived there at about 9:00 p.m. An SP4 in a white coat escorted me from the reception desk to the psychiatric ward. He asked me to complete some forms. One was part of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.

"Are you upset?" he asked me as he looked at my MMPI answer sheet.

"My wife asked me for a divorce," I said. "I quit my job, which nobody can do in the Army, and I don't know what they're going to do to me for that. And I'm in a psychiatric ward. Wouldn't you be?"

"Not necessarily," he said putting the answer sheet into a folder with the other forms.

Then he led me out of the office and down a hallway to an intersection with another hallway. The intersection had a door on each side, but the only open door was the one to the hallway from which we entered it. Each door had but one little square window, and the windows had wire screening in their glass.

"This is where we put you if you don't behave," said the SP4.

I saw no psychiatrist or psychologist that night, but I spent three nights in that ward. A psychiatrist spoke to me a few times during the two days in between, and a nurse woke me up each morning before the lights came on, to take my blood pressure. I spent much of my other time there playing spades with the other patients.

The SP4 who admitted me told me to leave my luggage at the reception desk. It was my Leeds flight bag and an attaché case. I bought the attaché case at Fort Sam. I thought it was appropriate for attaché duty. In it were my checkbook, some checks from selling the bar and the stereo equipment I was replacing, and a book of postage stamps. All of my pay was then going to a checking account I opened in Coldwater. I asked the psychiatrist for the attaché case. I told him the checks were in it and that I needed to send them to my bank. Another SP4 escorted me to a storeroom and watched me remove the check book and checks and stamps from the attaché case. He told me to leave the attaché case there, but the next morning the psychiatrist showed me a form with my diagnosis on it.

“Job dissatisfaction on a situational basis,” it said. “No disease found.”

So, the same morning, another SP4 escorted me back to the storage room and then escorted me and my luggage to the hospital’s personnel office.

“I don’t know how long it’s going to take to figure out what to do with you next,” said the personnel sergeant. “But you can stay at the BEQ while you’re here, and I wonder if you’d mind helping us out a little while you’re waiting.”

So did. The BEQ, Frankfurt’s bachelor enlisted quarters, was within walking distance of the hospital and a mess hall. But my first breakfast after discharge from the psychiatric ward was in the hospital’s PX snack bar, and a CPT in a white coat interrupted me while I was eating.

“Mind if I sit down?” he asked.

“No, sir,” I said, stopping eating but not putting down my fork.

“Don’t let me interrupt you,” he said. “I just heard about you and wanted to meet you.”

But, fork in hand, I ate nothing, while he expressed sympathy in terms I thought irrelevant to me. So, soon, seeming to me to feel as uncomfortable with me as I did with him, the CPT bade me good luck and left the table. But neither did I enjoy eating at the mess hall.

The chow there tasted as I imagined dirt to taste. I thought it was worse than the chow in the mess hall at the replacement detachment in Boeblingen, and previously I thought that was the worst I’d tasted. So, during

my lunch breaks from the help the personnel sergeant asked me to provide, I ate at the hospital's snack bar.

An African American SP5 in the personnel office asked me to his home for dinner, but his wife said little to me, and his small son said nothing to me, and, while talking with the SP5 about race relations, I remembered my English professor at Wayne State referring to what he called the Negro non-standard dialect, and I mentioned it.

"Negro!" exclaimed the SP5, and a few minutes later he said the time was getting late, and I was back in the BEQ by 9:00 p.m, and, excepting that in the office he told me a black man doesn't have to hurry, I remember no more conversation with him.

I spent other evenings re-exploring Frankfurt. I re-visited the Jazz Keller and the *Kaiserstrasse*. My second week of that time in Frankfurt, an SP5 moved into my room. It had two twin beds. The SP5 said he'd never been to Germany. I showed him the Kaisterstrasse.

"How much is a beer here?" I asked the doorman of a strip joint.

"You know the price," he said frowning. "You've been here before."

At Frankfurt's main PX I bought a Shure V-15 phonograph cartridge. I'd read in *Playboy* that it was the best model of phonograph cartridge available. The PX was across the street from the hospital.

In my third week of that stay I asked the personnel sergeant whether he'd heard any news of the possibility of my leaving.

"No," he said. "But we could use you here on a more permanent basis."

I didn't reply to that. He said he'd try to find out what was happening. Two days later I asked him whether he had. He again said he hadn't. I asked him for a day off to go to Bonn to ask the operations coordinator of the DAO there to look into it. I took a train there. The operations coordinator seemed to me to care, but another week passed with no word from him. I told the hospital's inspector general my problem. A few days later he came to the personnel office and sat in front of my desk. But neither did he have news.

"I'll give it three more days," I said. "If I don't have an answer by then, I'll buy my own plane ticket."

"I don't blame you," he replied.

A travel agency was also in the block with the hospital and the PX. Four days later, having heard nothing more from the IG, I went to the travel agency. I asked prices for flights to Detroit. The salesman cited a price that was less than what I thought I had in my checking account. I asked him whether he'd take a check.

“Do you have a copy of your orders with you?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “But I’m traveling on an official passport.”

“Oh,” he said. “A red-book passport. I guess that’ll do.”

Three days later I was in Coldwater. I took a bus from the airport in Detroit to Coldwater. I called my sister Nancy.

Doyle’s boss, Rod Link, the owner of the ride company for which Doyle worked, had bought them a 14-foot-wide mobile home. He owned a farm on Willowbrook Road on the northeast edge of Coldwater. He parked some of his rides there in the winter and let Doyle park the mobile home there.

Nancy had begun calling herself Kay. She said three other Nancys were on the show, that one of them was Bob Bradburn’s daughter, that people on the show called Bob’s daughter Little Nancy, and that they called the other one Big Nancy. She said she asked them to call her Kay.

Coldwater’s bus station was between Chicago Street and the drive past the Willows Tavern. Kay came and picked me up. She told me Nancy and Pat and Ben were at her trailer. Nancy met me at the door and came outside.

“We want to be with you,” she said.

“Are you sure?” I asked her.

“Yes,” she said.

“You’re not going to do this again, are you?” I asked.

“No,” she said.

I’d reconciled myself to the divorce, but I accepted the reversal. A few days later a conversation with Greg suggested to me both why she changed her mind and why she tolerated the attitude toward it my questions suggested. Though I don’t know why, we were sitting in a banquette at Harry’s.

“I talked to her here a couple of weeks ago,” he said, “and asked her why she put up with you. She said she didn’t think she could do any better.”

That made little sense to me, but I accepted it with all else. I rented an apartment from the justice of the peace who’d sentenced me for my ride with Greg from Kinderhook. I had Michigan Bell install a telephone in the apartment and wrote a letter to the inspector general of the Department of the Army. I told him where I was and how to contact me.

I also bought an old Dodge van. In Afghanistan I also ordered through PacEx a new yellow Volkswagen for delivery to wherever I’d be next, but we needed transportation in Coldwater, and I had two reasons to buy a van. One was that I needed to pick up my new stereo equipment from Vaughn’s apartment in New York. The other was that I was thinking of customizing it to use it for interaction with women. A song popular then had the line “making love in my Chevy van”. But I couldn’t find a used Chevy van.

Cheryl Hurd gave us a twin size mattress for Nancy and me to take turns driving and sleeping on the way to New York. On the Ohio turnpike the van's lights dimmed. I stopped in a rest area, turned off the engine, and lifted the engine cover to see whether the battery connections were loose.

They weren't, but I closed the cover, started the engine, and turned on the lights, and then they were bright. So I drove on into Pennsylvania. But they dimmed again. I stopped in another rest area, lifted the engine cover again, but again saw nothing I didn't think was ordinary.

We tried to sleep until morning to give the battery time to recharge enough to get us to a repair shop. But the month was February. So we went into the rest area's service building for warmth. I asked the attendant how far was the nearest automobile repair shop. He asked me what was the problem. He offered to look to see if he could see what was causing the discharge. He found a small wire loose from a screw on the generator and reconnected it. I asked him whether I should pay him. He said I needn't. I didn't. I drove on shamefully thinking I should have.

Nancy drove some of the way while I slept. When I awoke we weren't on the turnpike. I angrily asked Nancy why. She said she didn't know. I remember nothing more of that drive other than seeing the smoke of Wheeling, West Virginia, from a bridge as we passed it.

I'd called Vaughn to tell him when we'd be there. He told me Brenda had given birth to their daughter, Nancy and I bought a little dress for her.

"I thought maybe it was gifts for her," said Vaughn of the stereo equipment.

The apartment was small. The stereo equipment nearly filled a closet. The wrapping on the dress tore during the drive. Brenda said little to us. We were there only long enough to pick up the stereo equipment. Vaughn asked us to deliver a package to a high school for the performing arts where he was doing some volunteer work, but I dropped the package on our way out of town. Somewhere in Pennsylvania we waited in a long line for gasoline. That trip was during the OPEC embargo.

A few days after our return, a major from the office of the Army's inspector general telephoned, apologized for what he called errors on the part of various Army agencies, and told me the Army's Institute for Administration at Fort Benjamin Harrison needed an instructor.

"If you're interested," he said, "they'd like to talk to you."

I had a set of greens with me but no shirt or tie for them. I bought a shirt and tie, but the tie and collar were wider than what the Army issued. The

color of the shirt was approximately the Army issue hue but was but lighter. The width of the collar and tie were because of current fashion.

A captain interviewed me. He was the director of the Institute's Unit Clerk Course. He didn't mention the lack of uniformity of my uniform. He offered me the job. I returned to Coldwater, told Nancy I'd find a place for her and Pat and Ben as soon as I could, returned to Fort Harrison, and checked into the BEQ there.

The job began with I took a two-week instructor training course. Evenings I behaved much as I had in D.C. before Nancy's arrival there. I found two strip joints near the post, the Sign of the Ram and the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar had no cover charge and lower beer prices. It was also a biker bar, and I could see the dancers from the bar by turning my head to once side. I had to turn all the way around to see them from the bar at the Sign of the Ram. So I preferred the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar to the Sign of the Ram.

Fort Harrison had a trailer park. I found a mobile home dealership and ordered a new 12x65-foot three-bedroom trailer with a washer and a dryer and Mediterranean-style furniture. The salesman showed me samples of available wall paneling. None of them were like the walnut I though was Mediterranean. So, thinking pecans were also nuts, I selected a pinkish color the sample said was pecan.

"Don't you want to ask your wife?" asked the salesman. "I know I'd be in deep trouble if I didn't."

Neither did I much like the color. But I didn't think I had time to ask Nancy, and the salesman solved problem with no more talk from me. He ordered oak paneling and didn't tell me until after the trailer arrived.

"I thought you might like this better," he said the salesman, showing me the trailer, and he was correct.

He also told me his brother had an oil tank on his farm, sold it to me for fifty dollars, and delivered it with the trailer, and Nancy and Pat and Ben moved down the next day. Nancy said she liked the trailer, but she complained that one of its bathtub faucet knobs was difficult to turn. I told the salesman, and his boss came to the trailer and said the difficulty was normal, but I didn't accept that response.

"Would you want your wife to put up with that?" I asked.

He frowned but had a plumber replace the faucet.

Next was finding some friends for Nancy. I was again an SSG., and one of the other SSG instructors in the Unit Clerk Course also lived in the trailer park and invited us his trailer. His wife was Korean, frowned during the entire

visit, and said nothing to us, and neither did either he or we say much while we were there, and we never returned. The institute's PSNCO for the unit to which the institute's instructors belonged was also an SSG and also lived in the trailer park. But he didn't invited us to his trailer. My first friend there was also a unit course instructor. He was an SP5, but he also had a wife and two young sons.

His name was Spencer Morgan. The first time I saw him I was sitting at my desk in our office. I stared at him as he passed my desk on his way to the CPT's. I don't know why, but he stared back, and we became friends, immediately. Neither did he live in the trailer. He and his family lived in in Fort Harison's dependent housing in a duplex much like ours at Fort Sam. But they also owned a Volkswagen Super Beetle, and I decided to buy a Volkswagen Beetle in Indianapolis. But I didn't buy a green one or a Super Beetle. I found a dealership with a yellow standard beetle like the one like the one I'd ordered in Afghanistan. Nancy suggested that we buy a red one like Jenny, but, thinking the yellow was more in fashion, I told her the yellow ones looked better. She didn't argue.

I drove the van to the dealership to pick it up. Nancy went with me to drive the Volkswagen home. On our way home the Volkswagen stalled. Its starter motor wouldn't turn. I asked Nancy to push it to start it. She fell in the street behind it. It started, but, at the dealership we waited about an hour for replacement of the starter, and the company with which I placed the order in Afghanistan refused to refund my deposit.

I went to Fort Harrison JAG office for help. I told a lieutenant my reason for buying the one in Indianapolis was that the company didn't give me a firm delivery date. I said I couldn't wait indefinitely. About a week later the lieutenant called me and told me he had a check for me in the amount of the deposit. But, when I picked up the check, he told me his success was because the company hadn't given me a firm price. He seemed to me to be proud, but I frowned and reminded him of the reason I gave him, and, as I left his office, he was also frowning.

I didn't enjoy instructing. The institute's instructor course taught a standard lesson plan format and standard ways of standing before the classes, and graduating required a 1LT's monitoring one of my classes. The class he monitored was in duty rosters, basically in how to use the forms the Army used to schedule additional duties. The Institute scheduled three class periods for that course, and I could have read the entire regulation in one class period, but I solved that problem by going through three lesson plans for the class the lieutenant monitored, and the 1LT's only complaint was that the image of the



form I projected onto the chalkboard was difficult to read from the back of the classroom where he was sitting.

Ordinarily I let the students roam the hallways during most of my class time. But no one complained about that, and I rid myself of the suffix on my MOS indicating my qualification to be a CBR NCO. I replaced it with a suffix indicating my ability to instruct.

But I continued my plan to return to college, and Nancy found a clerical job at a wire warehouse. She dropped Pat and Ben at Fort Harrison's daycare center before work and picked them up after work, driving the Volkswagen for that. I drove the van to work.

Spencer drank beer and also used a variety of other drugs. He was also sexually promiscuous with his students. So were other instructors. One told me he felt bad about not taking a student to bed after she performed fellatio on him in the front seat of his car.

One day, before Nancy came whom with Pat and Ben, Spencer brought a student to our trailer. He told me to turn on some music for the girl to dance for me. Swaying in front of me, she unbuttoned the blouse of her uniform, but Spencer said the music was too slow. I tried to replace it with a recording of David Rose's "The Stripper", but, while I was winding the tape to find that part of it, Spencer said that was taking too long. He suggested that we go to the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar. But, before we left, he spent a few minutes in our bathroom with the student, and, when they emerged from the bathroom, he told her to show me her tan. She unzipped her skirt and pulled it and her panties down far enough to show me her bikini tan lines. But she quickly pulled both up again.

"Show him those little titties," then said Spencer.

But she said she needed music to do that.

At the bar we sat at a table about three yards from the stage. I went to the stage several times to stuff dollars into the front of a dancer's G-string. I stuffed them deep and felt her vagina with my knuckles.

"Boy," said Spencer. "That's pretty gutsy. Most people just put them in and get out."

But he also suggested that the student dance on the stage. She didn't, but one of the courses I instructed was in non-judicial punishment. I wrote a classroom exercise for it with a narrative about a female soldier performing at the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar while male soldiers watched. My rationale was that the behavior was unbecoming of a soldier in the United States Army.

Another of the institute's courses was the classroom equivalent of the personnel management supervisors course I took in Germany. Taking it was

part of the normal career progression for the Army's personnel management NCO's. One day Ben Shafstahl walked into my office. He was there for that.

"Ben!" I exclaimed jumping from my chair as he walked past my desk on his way to the CPT's.

He looked at me and grinned and shook the hand I offered. But next he asked me whether the office had a WATS line he could use to call his office. So, not knowing what a WATS line was, I looked at the CPT, but he said we did, and, after making his call, Ben told me why he was at Fort Harrison and said his girlfriend was with him. So I asked him to bring her to our quarters for some of Nancy's spaghetti. He did, and he told her there that I nearly jumped into his arms in my office. But the conversation was sparse, and I never saw him again.

SFC Tyson also came to Fort Harrison while I was there, but that wasn't for the supervisors course. The Defense Department's second-largest building was at Fort Harrison. Only the Pentagon was larger. In the one at Fort Harrison was the Army's Finance Center and its central personnel records repository. So many people came there for many reasons.

If SFC Tyson told me why he was there, I don't remember, and neither do I know how he had our home telephone number. But he called me at home from a motel on the opposite side of Business Loop I-465 from Fort Harrison. He suggested that we have a drink together. I drove to the motel, drove him back to our trailer, and drove him back to the motel, but that driving took longer than the drinks, and neither did I ever see him again.

I received a check from Bob Melton for the Dart. It was for more than I thought the car was worth, and he sent a note with the check, he said he sold the car to the SSG who'd borrowed the guitar I bought in Bangkok, and he also said the SSG's wife had divorced him and was working at the main PX at Fort Harrison. So I went to the PX and had lunch with her at the PX snack bar.

I asked her to help me buy a set of golf clubs. Fort Harrison also had a golf course, and I decided to buy a set I saw at the PX, but they were out of stock when I went there to buy them. I found an identical set in civilian store with a low price guarantee, but the store required verifying competitor's price, and the person the sales clerk called at the PX told him the PX doesn't divulge its prices to civilian stores. So I asked the SSG's former wife to verify it. She did, but neither did I ever see here again.

Rich Henry came to Fort Harrison for the personnel management supervisors course. I ran into him in the hallway outside my office. He told me he and Barb had also divorced. I took him to the Sign of the Ram and the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar. He was drinking more than a quart of vodka a day and passed out on

our Afghan carpet in our living room. He asked me whether he could stay with us instead of in the apartment he was renting. He said he could sleep on the carpet. I refused, but I did it as politely as I could, and he also went with me to buy a 1961 Harley-Davidson Sportster. Unless going to the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar inspired my doing that, I don't know what did.

“How big is the engine?” Rich asked the owner.

“74 cubic inches,” I said,

I thought all Harley-Davidson engines were 74 cubic inches.

The owner didn't correct me.

“Can I take it for one more ride?” the owner asked me.

He rode it to the nearest intersection and back. During that short ride he disengaged the bike's rear chain sprocket from its axle. But I paid him the price he originally asked.

“I'm going to fix it up anyway,” I said.

I don't know whether Rich finished the course, but, after he left, neither did I ever see him again.

To rebuild the Sportster in the back of the van, I bought some tools, an electric heater, an extension cord, and a shop manual telling me its cylinder capacity was 55 cubic inches, but I also bought a new enduro.

For that I bought a magazine saying Bultacos were the best off-road bikes. A newspaper advertisement told me a shop in Indianapolis sold 250 c.c. Bultaco enduros at a price I was willing to pay. I drove there to buy one, but the shop owner told me the price was much higher than what the magazine said but that he could sell me a 250 cc Yamaha enduro for the price I told him the advertisement said. I was drunk and belligerently argued with him.

But I bought the Yamaha and spent more hours riding it in Fort Harrison's woods than I spent working on the Sporter.

## Chapter 23

### Nontraditional

None of that involved Nancy, but many weekends she and I drove the 280 miles from Indianapolis to Coldwater. She and Pat and Ben slept at her parents' house while, to come in late, I slept at my mother's, but we spent some time together with Cheryl. Cheryl was renting a house with Dave Magel. I knew him in high school, and others I knew also frequented Cheryl's house. One was Weasel Gallop. He had joined the Outlaws motorcycle gang and was often their with needles in his pockets.

Some weekends I used the van to take the Yamaha to Coldwater.

I took a board to use as a ramp to push it into the van.

"I'd just ride it in," said Weasel.

Cheryl smoked marijuana, and Nancy and I smoked it with her, but I took Cheryl for a ride on the Yamaha. I took her down the road behind the sewage disposal plant to where Sandy and I first tried to copulate. Piles of gravel and many mosquitos were where the woods had been. Cheryl and I lay among the piles of gravel. I fondled her breasts. The gravel was from a small stone quarry. A man was fishing in the quarry. So I didn't copulate with her there. I took her back to her house and quickly ejaculated in her on her bed.

We went to Coldwater was for my sister Sally's graduation from high school and for her wedding a few weeks later. Her graduation ceremony was on the high school's football field. A streaker streaked the ceremony on a Yamaha like mine. He fell from it and landed on his back in only boots and a helmet. But he picked up the bike and rode on.

Doyle was also there. Afterward the ceremony he picked up a girl he knew. He took Sally's fiancé and me and Dewey to the Alibi. We left the girl in the car, but I told Doyle he should have her streak the Alibi.

"You don't want to see those black titties," he said.

But she wasn't black, and, when the bar closed, we when for breakfast to the Tekon. The Tekon was a truck stop in Tekonsha about eleven miles north

of Coldwater. The girl rode in the back seat between Sally's fiancé and me. Dewey rode in the front seat with Doyle.

"Fuck her," said Doyle to Denny, Sally's fiancé. "That's what we took you out for."

"Nah," Denny said. "That's alright."

"Can I fuck you in your ass?" I asked her.

"You're not fucking me in my ass," she said.

She passed out before we reached the Tekon. Again we left her in the car. She was drunk before we picked her up.

Dewey ordered breakfast but then returned to the car.

"Go out to the car and look in the back seat," he said to me when he returned.

I left my breakfast and went outside. The girl was completely naked with one of her feet on the back of the back seat and the other on the back of the front seat. I climbed into the backseat, closed the door, pulled down my trousers, and tried to push my penis beneath her vagina and into her anus. I don't know into which I put it.

I gave Sally away at her wedding. She asked me to wear a suit. I did it in my Afghanistan tuxedo with the big bowtie I'd made for it.

"You look like Frank Sinatra," said my Aunt Bertha, sitting beside me in the front pew of the Church.

My wedding gift to them was a vacuum cleaner. Denny's mother told me she'd given them one like it. She said she'd return it.

We also went to Coldwater for my high school class's tenth reunion. The reunion events were a picnic in the shelter at Parkhurst Park and a dinner and a dance at Coldwater's Moose Club. I went to the picnic but not to the dinner or dance, and I didn't take Nancy.

"Are you ashamed of me?" she asked.

I was to some extent, but my main reason was that I wanted to be open to any opportunity that might arise, and, to impress people, I rode the Yamaha.

Larry Knapp was in the Navy and had a beard. George Finchum was an SP5 in the Army working in supply. He was one of the kids other kids said had cooties. Kubiak said he was teaching college in California. Atkinson wasn't there.

"You and Atkinson are the only reason I came to this thing," I told Kubiak.

He scowled and walked away with no other reply.

Skip Bobier and Linda Hosek were there, but their husbands weren't. Remembering my Aunt Bertha taking me to the Detroit Museum of Art, I told

Linda that in high school she reminded me of a Greek statue. She thanked me and walked away.

“George is in the Army too,” said Skip. “Does the Army have much of a problem with the Peter Principle?”

Though I don’t know how, I knew *The Peter Principle* was a book, that its author’s name was Peter, and that the title referred to his theory in it that organizations tend to promote people beyond their ability. Supposing she meant to imply that I was no better than George, I thought of telling her George had been in the Army longer than I, that I’d been a rank higher than George’s current rank for more than five years, and that the Peter Principle was a reason the Army needed able people. But she interrupted my thinking before spoke.

“The Peter Principle is . . . ,” she said.

“I know what the Peter Principle is,” I said.

Then I thought of a question for her.

“Where’s your husband?” I asked.

“Tom?” she said. “He couldn’t come. He had something else he had to do.”

Remembering that Tom Ward was Terry Ward’s twin brother, that Terry was her boyfriend, that people said Tom was stupider than Terry, that Woody told me our classmate Snyder had told him his IQ was higher than mine but that Skip’s was higher than Snyder’s, I wondered whether Tom Ward was the Tom she’d married, but, because then she also walked away, I didn’t ask her.

On my way to the restrooms to rid myself of some of the beer, I met Sue LaBelle on her way back from them. By then her brother may have graduated from West Point and become an Army officer. She’d never spoken to me in high school, but she stopped to speak to me then. I felt a little as I did when the Red Cross girl spoke to me in Vietnam.

“I’d better let you go,” I said. “I don’t want you to wet your pants.”

She turned away with a look that suggested to me both that she thought I intended to offend her and that she cared what I thought of her.

Larry Neitzert and Anderson were also there. I talked with them more than with anyone else. They were also drinking a lot of beer. Neitzert suggested that we go see Wally Atkinson. Wally was still living with his second wife. I followed them there. Wally grew marijuana between the corn rows on his wife’s farm. We stood outside the farmhouse smoking some of it.

“Why was the CIA asking about you?” he asked me.

I told him. I told him little of the results, but I was the last to leave. I stared at Wally as he stared at me as I tried to start the Yamaha many times

before remembering to open the fuel line valve. I thought the marijuana may have made me forget to do that.

For that trip Nancy drove the Volkswagen while I rode the Yamaha. On the way to Coldwater, forgetting that the right handlebar grip was the throttle, I raised my right fist to signify right on to bikers on the other side of I-69. On my way back to Muncie I stopped to see Gene Cecie.

I hadn't seen him since he found me in Indiana. Vaughn had told me he was living in Marion. I found his address in a telephone book and found him in an old wooden house on a dirt street. He'd married again and showed me a picture of his wife. I thought she resembled his first wife. He was shirtless and had gained much weight. He took me to an empty upstairs room and showed me a .22 caliber rifle leaning against a wall beside an open window. A vegetable garden was most of the backyard of the house. Pointing at it through the window, he told me he used the rifle to shoot groundhogs. He took me to the garden, showed me a dead, and said he shot it that morning. Riding away on the dirt street, I looked back. He was standing in the road looking at me, but, when I looked back, he turned to return to the house.

Someone at the daycare center called me to tell me Ben had a seizure there. She said he was at Fort Harrison's dispensary. I found him in a room there, on a table or gurney. Medical people were all around him.

"Who's that?" asked a doctor looking at me.

"The father," said an SP5 medic.

"Get him out of here," said the doctor.

I left the room.

The medic was Mark Hebner. A few minutes later the doctor and Mark came out of the room. The doctor said Ben had a seizure disorder. He said he was prescribing phenobarbital to control it. Mark, after the Doctor returned to the room, asked me what I was doing for fun. I told him I was spending a lot of time riding Fort Harrison's trails on the Yamaha. He told me he had a Honda. The next Saturday, we rode trails together. Rain poured down. Mark's Honda was a 160 c.c. road bike like Neil's. He dumped it several times in the mud.

I took him and his bike home in the van. I'd removed some storm windows from our trailer to install air conditioners. The storm windows were in the van. I don't remember whether that was before or after I rebuilt the Sportster. Mark leaned his bike's handlebars on the windows. One of the windows broke. He was renting a small house with his girlfriend. He introduced her to me. She only frowned at me. He wasn't at the reunion. I never saw the girlfriend again and didn't see Mark again until years later.

Spencer said phenobarbital was a downer. He asked me for some of Ben's pills. I told him Ben needed all the doctor prescribed for him. But I let him dry marijuana plants in our dryer. His stepparents and stepbrother and stepsister lived on a farm near Muncie. His stepbrother grew the marijuana between the corn rows on his stepparents' farm.

The LTC who supervised the CPT who supervised the unit clerk course called a meeting of the course's instructors. Neither the CPT nor the SFC who was between the CPT and the instructors in the course's chain of command were there. The LTC said he was replacing the captain and the SFC and that he replacing the SFC with an SSG whose time in grade was less than mine.

"Is that alright with you," he asked me. "I know you're a good instructor, but I think he's a better fit for the job."

"Yes," I said. "But I want out of the course."

"Good," he said turning away.

But then he turned back.

"What?" he said.

"I want out of the course," I said. "And I think the captain's a fine officer."

From that moment on I became a chronic complainer.

Orders came from the Pentagon for me to attend the classroom personnel management supervisors course. Another instructor told me he heard the LTC talking with the SSG who'd replaced the SFC about keeping me from attending it. I told the SSG I heard of that conversation. The SSG wordlessly rose from his desk and left the office. A few minutes later he returned to the office, sat behind his desk, and beckoned me to it.

"The colonel wants to see you," he said.

In the LTC's office, with neither a salute nor waiting for permission to sit, I sat in a chair in front of his desk.

"I thought you'd decided to get out of the Army and go back to school," he said.

"That isn't certain," I said. "It depends on how things go."

"I'm having problems with my heart," said the LTC. "I don't need this."

But, though my decision was nearly certain, I didn't reply to that.

One of the other unit clerk instructors had told me he'd graduated from Ball State University and that it had a trailer park. Ball State was in Muncie. Muncie was about fifty miles from Fort Harrison and about 140 miles from Coldwater, and I'd requested admission there. But I didn't tell the colonel that. So I took the supervisors course, and, because, one of my personnel



management supervisors course instructors told my class we could receive VA education benefits to take college courses while on active duty, I also took a Vincennes University extension course in psychology.

But I performed poorly in both courses. One of the other unit clerk instructors told me I had guts for telling the lieutenant I thought the captain was a fine officer and that he bet some money that I'd graduate from the personnel management supervisors course at the top of my class. But I graduated near the bottom of the top third of it, and, for the opposite of the reason I received an A for the personnel management course in the Netherlands, I received a B for the psychology course.

Ben caught measles. Nancy told me she'd have to work the night of the final examination for the psychology course. So I told the instructor that and asked whether I could reschedule the examination. He said I needn't take it, but Nancy arranged not to work that night. So I took it and received a C on it, and that lowered my grade for the course from an A to a B, and I also had to face another evaluation.

The day after I graduated from the classroom personnel management supervisors course, I returned to the unit clerk course office.

"We're disappointed in you," said the instructor who'd bet on me, but I didn't have to deal with that long.

The course's new CPT told me I'd leave the course to maintain personnel records for the Army's Student Detachment. The Student Detachment was the unit to which the Army assigned Army personnel who were full time students at civilian educational institutions. It was some clerks, desks, and filing cabinets in the Finance Center building, and I found the records a mess. So that was another challenge, and the complexity of my home life also increased.

Pat began the first grade at Fort Harrison's school for Army dependent children. I went to his first parent-teacher conference. Nancy couldn't take time off as easily as I. The teacher and I sat on little chairs at a wide but low round table. She told me Pat was having difficulty. A few weeks later the principal called Nancy and told her he needed to go to kindergarten.

The American School in Kabul had no kindergarten, and I did nothing to help him learn anything academic. Fort Harrison's school had a kindergarten but provided no transportation for kindergarteners. So I joined a carpool for that. The other drivers were mothers, but Nancy's job was too far from Fort Harrison for her to take Pat from the school to the daycare center during lunch. So, for that, I drove the Volkswagen while Nancy drove the van to work. I also picked up Pat and Ben after work.

One evening, when I was picking them up, the woman who supervised the daycare center showed me a red blotch in the shape of a hand on Ben's face.

"No one here did it," she said.

"I know what it is," I told her, and I did.

I'd slapped him the evening before, but I didn't tell her that. I don't remember why I slapped him, but I'd done it more than once. So then I thought that may have caused his seizure disorder.

I also often argued loudly with Nancy. The distance between our trailers and the trailer behind it was little more than the width of an ordinary driveway. So I thought the people living behind us may have heard both that and my loud music. So I tried to control my temper, but I didn't much worry about the music, and I failed at controlling my temper, and my troublemaking at work increased. But I meant that to be positive.

I was receiving documents for 201 files I couldn't find. Anyone in the office could have any 201 file for any reason or no reason. The operation had no segregation of responsibilities no method of recording who had the files.

"If you'll consider it," I said, telling the SSG supervising the Student Detachment's clerks the problems I was having, "I'll put together a plan to streamline the operation."

"I'll take a look at it," he said, "but it has to be dress-right-dress."

The plan I gave him was several pages and ended with diagram of an arrangement of desks like what Miss Gilmore had disapproved for her operation there. The SSG flipped through the plan until he reached the page with the diagram. Then he handed it back to me.

"This isn't dress-right-dress," he said.

I took it back to my desk, thought about that a few minutes, took it to the W1 supervising the SSG, and told him of that conversations with the SSG.

"He's responsible," said the W1.

"Well," I said, "I can't work for the guy."

He said he didn't know what he could do about that. But a few days later he introduced me to a CPT who supervised three civilian women providing customer service for the Finance Center by researching questions they received by telephone from all over the Army, and the captain asked me to analyze that operation and make suggestions to streamline it. So I no longer worked for the SSG.

I spent a few weeks sitting at a desk in the office where the women worked. I watched them, listened to them, and talked with them. But mostly, when they weren't answering their telephones, they talked about their husbands. One of them had taped pictures of naked men to the back of a calendar on the

wall beside her desk. Another ridiculed her husband considerably more than did the others. In my view, the one with the pictures was unattractively overweight, but, though the one ridiculing her husband was thinner than Connie, I found her somewhat attractive. So I suggested that she come home with me for lunch. I told her I lived in the trailer park. But she didn't

My recommendation was about the length of the one I'd given to the SSG for the Student Detachment and also included a floorplan.

"I asked you to make some suggestions," said the CPT looking through it as I sat in front of his desk. "Not a finished product."

"You're reprimanding me for being too thorough?" I asked.

A few days later he called me to his office and offered me another assignment. He said the Army was planning to consolidate all of its pay and personnel management operations on a computer system in the Pentagon and that a team was to draw the flow charts for it at the Finance Center. He asked me to join the team.

All I knew of flow charts or computers was from my instructor training. It was one class period, and the instructor was an SP4 I thought was Korean. He called flow charts frow chalts. But I accepted the job.

The team would be but three members. The acronym for the project was COPPER for Consolidated Pay and Personnel. The team chief was a finance major. The other member other than I was a finance SSG. My part of the project would be the PER part of the acronym.

I thought I could do that job if anyone could, but I decided in about two days of trying that no one could. I thought charting the number branches of alternative possibilities would require innumerable years and innumerable reams of paper. So my next trouble making was to tell the major that.

"Well," he replied, "just do the best you can."

"I already am," I said, literally throwing up my hands.

The next day I became an examination proctor.

Officially most of that job was assisting officers in administering MOS proficiency tests. But most of the officers sat in the back of the room while I did my job and theirs. For them it was an additional duty.

But an exception was a young female lieutenant whose short black hair reminded me of Sheila, my first grade classmate of whom I was thinking when I lost my shoelaces at Parkhurst Park.

"What do I have to do?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said. "Usually I do everything."

"What am I supposed to do?" she asked.

So I told her, and she did it. She called the names, read the instructions, and watched the clock. All I did was distribute and collect the test materials when she asked me to. I thought the reason she did that may have been that she thought I thought she couldn't because she was a woman. But her being more dutiful than the male officers favorably impressed me, and a male West Point graduate who was also one of my instructors in the personnel management supervisors course impressed me in the opposite direction.

But he wasn't proctoring an MOS proficiency test. He took a Russian language proficiency test I proctored while he and I were the only persons in the room. So my only conversation with him was before he took the test.

"I don't know why I'm doing this," he said as he sat in one of the student chairs in the room. "I haven't used my Russian since my classes at the Academy."

I also saw one of my personnel management supervisors course instructors while riding the Yamaha. One bank of a creek in the woods was higher than the other bank. So, approaching it from the high side, I didn't see it until too late not ride into it. I braked, but that only made the front wheel fall more quickly than the back wheel. So I summersaulted head first into the creek.

But I did some thinking while I summersaulted. I thought I might die. I also thought of Rich's son's football helmet and was glad I had my motorcycle helmet, but then I thought my helmet would keep me from breaking my neck when my head hit the bottom, and then I thought that, if I didn't break my neck, I might drown, if I knocked myself out or of the weight of the bike pinned me to the bottom. Seeing the pebbles on the bottom of the creek, I also thought of the pebbles at the bottom of the creek where Connie last returned my class ring. But all those thoughts quickly went away.

I had no problem standing up, picking up the bike, and pushing it out of the creek, and then I remembered a article I read in a motorcycle magazine. It said that, if an enduro's engine stalls in water, one should remove the sparkplug and pump the water from it. So then I turned the bike upside down and used the sparkplug wrench that came with the bike to remove the sparkplug, and, while I was doing that, the instructor arrived.

He was a CPT on a 175 c.c. Kawasaki enduro.

"Need any help?" he asked

"No," I said. "I'm alright."

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Pumping the water out of the engine," I said. "You don't know about that?"

But, saying nothing more, he rode on.

The Sportster was a chopper. It had what bikers called a hard tail, a rear end with neither springs nor shock absorbers. It also had what bikers called a springer front end. The forks were longer than standard and had springs instead for shock absorbers. I kept the front end as it was, but it was all had a hardtail, neither shock absorbers nor springs in its rear end, and I changed that.

To make it what bikers called a soft tail, I cut the frame above the rear axle to install a small spring in each side, and I also made other changes. I made what bikers called a step seat. I made it of plywood, foam rubber, and leather and stitched the leather by hand, and I also bent a chrome strip around the back of it and stitched a pieces of leather around the back of that. That was to be a grip for the passengers, and I also used aerosol cans of orange and yellow paint to paint the cylinder heads and the fuel tank and the frame.

But the back of the van was too small for me to do the painting in it. So I painted all that in the kitchen and speckled every thing in it. I thought Nancy might have complained about that. But she didn't mention it.

I also rebuilt the engine from the crankshaft out. So didn't need to take the bike into the kitchen. I took them and the fuel tank inside while I had the engine apart. But, when all that remaining of the project was connecting the brake, clutch, and throttle cables, I thought I lacked the skill for that. So I took the bike to a Harley-Davidson shop on 38<sup>th</sup> Street where bikers who frequented the 38<sup>th</sup> Street bar worked. But, when I returned to pick it up, the one with whom I spoke said the soft tail I'd made would come apart if I rode it.

"We call it the popsicle," he also said, referring to the colors, and he refused to install the cables.

So I took it home. At home I unloaded and started the engine, but, though it easily started, the first six or more inches of each of its exhaust pipes turned blue. So I bought a bicycle security cable to secure the bike to the oil tank rack at the back end our trailer and never rode it.

I also bought a 1965 Mustang convertible with a 289 cubic inch engine and a three speed floor shift and intended to restore that. But I paid far more for it than it was worth, and dents in its body were more than I had reason to think I could repair, and it was blowing more oil than gasoline from its exhaust pipe, and, before beginning that work, I began trying to restore the van. The Mustang ran well enough for me to drive it while I worked on the van. I also replaced its piston rings, but I did that at Fort Harrison's craft shop. It had a with a garage where Army personnel could work on their motor vehicles. I also screwed some sheet metal over the rust on the van's rocker panels and painted the sheet metal flat orange. But I did that at home, and, also at the craft shop, I spent more money on the Mustang.

For parts I bought a 1966 Mustang. An Army dependent son wrecked it, took it to the craft shop, and decided he couldn't repair it. So he sold it to me for !50 dollars. But the only part of it I used was its instrument panel, and it discharged the Mustang's battery and smoked when the ignition was on, and the only other work I did on the 1965 Mustang was to paint the words "Sad Paradise" on its rear fenders. I'd read that Kerouac said he called the main character in *On The Road* Sal Paradise because he misread another writer's use of the phrase "sad paradise." But I continued to drive the 1965 Mustang, occasionally.

"He's got a convertible," said Spencer to two female students with whom I found him at the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar. "Want to go for a ride?"

I put the top down and followed Spencer's directions down a dirt road to the creek into which I'd summersaulted the Yamaha. We waded to an Island. Trees covered most it, but I sat beneath a tree in a clearing with one of the students. Spencer took the other out of sight into the trees, but they returned in less than ten minutes.

"I need to trade girls with you," he quietly said to me. "You're not doing anything with yours, and mine won't do anything."

He took the other girl into the woods. About a half hour later they returned. He suggested that we go to my house and listen to music. Spencer and the second girl he took into the woods sat on the sofa. The other girl lay on her belly on our Afghan carpet. I put a tape on the tape deck, sat on the floor beside the girl on the carpet, and put a hand on her back.

"I'm not that kind of girl," she said.

Nancy came out of our bedroom in her bathrobe and looked at the girl lying on the floor. But she worldlessly returned to the bedroom. A few minutes later Spencer asked me to drive him and the students back to his car.

Nancy and I slept in the back bedroom of the trailer. It was the largest. Pat and Ben slept in the second largest. It was in the front of the trailer. The smallest was in the middle of the trailer. I build a desk into it with some shelves above it, lined my regulations up on one of the shelves, and updated them, but soon after that I decided to use the front bedroom as a playroom for Pat and Ben and to buy some bunkbeds for them to sleep in the smallest bedroom. I don't remember what I did with the regulations to do all that, but I found an advertisement for a set of bunkbeds in a store selling furniture for children and took Nancy there to buy them.

I argued with the store owner about whether the price should include the mattresses. I thought the advertisement said it did. I told him it did, and, as when I bought the Yamaha, I was drunk and belligerent. But, when I bought the

bunkbeds, the owner's wife was in the store. So I tried not to be as belligerent and used that as a rationale for again paying the asking price.

Part of my reason for giving Pat and Ben a playroom was to use it for an HO gauge electric train set and a slot car set. So, for that, I built something like a desk into the room. It was basically a box on legs with hinges on its lid. One had to lift the lids to access the train and car sets.

I was also drunk when I went to the hobby shop to buy the electric train and slot cars, and the salesman seemed to me to recognize that, but I found no reason to argue with him, and Spencer went with me, and not Nancy.

But I built the box too small. The distance from its back to its front was hardly adequate for the narrowest track oval I could buy. So the train frequently derailed. Pat and Ben seldom played with it, but I suspect that the main reason was that, to do that, they had to ask me to lift the lid and hook it to the shelf I built above it. Also, part of my reason for doing all that was for me to play with it, but I never did other than to be sure it worked.

Nancy invited my mother and Jerry to stay with us for a couple of weeks. They slept in the bottom bunk while Pat and Ben slept in the top one. Nancy told me that, because she was working as much as I was, I had to cook for them. I'd never cooked, but I was spending far more of our earnings for my pleasure than she was for hers. So I didn't argue.

I tried to make fried rice, but I don't remember eating it before then, and I didn't have a recipe. I boiled rice, chopped green peppers, fried the rice and peppers with chicken I sliced, put the result into a casserole dish, and baked it. Then, each night my mother and Jerry were there, I reheated it. So they stayed but four nights.

"We have the same thing for supper every night," said my mother the third night, and the next day she asked me to take her and Jerry back to Coldwater.

I received an efficiency report from Flanagan. He marked me below average in every category and wrote that that I was irresponsible, but I knew the efficiency reports regulation proscribed reports for short periods of extraordinary performance. So I showed the report to Fort Harrison's IG and told him what the regulation said. He said he'd take care of it.

A few weeks later I went to the Army's central personnel records repository in the Finance Center building to review my record. The report was there. I complained again and reviewed my record again. Still it was there. I went through that cycle once more. Still it was there.

"Are you trying to set a record for reviewing your record," asked the clerk at the records repository.

But part of my reason for checking on that efficiency report was that I'd become eligible for promotion to SFC. The Army called SSG's junior NCO's but called SFC's senior NCO's. Boards for promotion to senior NCO pay grades were in the Pentagon in the absence of the persons they were considering, and distribution of efficiency reports wasn't to the local 201 files but only to the Fort Harrison and Pentagon files. The board disapproved my promotion, and I thought Miss Gilmore's second efficient report and her Army Commendation Medal commendation would have offset her first efficient report for me. So I thought Flanagan's report must have cost me the promotion. So I accelerated my troublemaking.

While telling the Ft. Harrison IG of that failure of however he tried to take care of that situation, I also mentioned many other violations of Army official policy I'd seen at Ft. Harrison, so many that he assigned a CPT to research my complaints.

One of them was that the SP5 whose job was sending to the Pentagon answer sheets from the proficiency tests I proctored pointed to a file cabinet and told me months of them were in it.

"That drawer's full of them," he said laughing.

"That's the sort of thing you should tell us," said the CPT, and he asked me to meet him in a conference room.

But with him were the IG and a two other officers, and the officers sat on two sides of a long conference table, while I sat alone at an end of it.

"Do you mind if we use this?" asked a major, setting a pocket tape recorder on the table in front of me, and I proctored no more examinations.

My next assignment was to sit at a desk and wait for an assignment, but I interrupted that with wandering the building and taking long lunch breaks, and no one complained.

One afternoon, while wandering the building, I read the nametag on the fatigues of a pudgy little SP5 carrying his 201 file.

"Shellenbarger," it said.

"Are you Donny Shellenbarger," I asked. "From Coldwater, Michigan."

"I lived there when I was a kid," he said, looking at my nametag and stripes, but he frowned and walked on.

The SGM who supervised the MSG who supervised the SP5 who laughed about not sending the answer sheets called me to his office and told me he'd made an appointment for me to talk to a psychiatrist.

"It says here," said the psychiatrist, "that you stare off into space when you're involved in deep thought. Do you?"



“Yes, sir,” I said. “I guess so.”

“When?” he asked.

“When I’m involved in deep thought,” I replied.

He didn’t laugh. But neither did he ask me anything else. So I returned to wandering the Finance Center deeply thinking about things about which to complain.

My next complaint was of the MSG who answered to the SGM. He was responsible for the desk where I did nothing other than read *The Army Times*. He prepared an efficiency report for me and asked me to sign it, but, citing the pertinent regulation, I told him he hadn’t been my supervisor long enough to give me an efficiency report, that the minimum was ninety days.

“Well,” he said, “if you’re afraid of what it’ll say.”

So I didn’t sign it. So he didn’t submit it. So I complained about that to no one other than him. But, after that, he complained to me about me, twice.

“You don’t have two Army Commendation Medals,” he said pointing at my oak leaf cluster as I sat at my empty desk. “Both of your commendations are for one tour in Europe.”

I was aware of the regulation proscribing awarding more than one Army Commendation for one period of duty in one theater of command. But AFCENT was subordinate to NATO through SHAPE, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. So it wasn’t subordinate to USAREUR through Seventh Corps, as was Seventh Corps Support Command. But I removed all my ribbons from my uniform. He looked at my uniform the next day, but he said nothing to me then. His next complaint was a few days later. Then he was walking among the desks telling people they needed haircuts.

“You too, Harman,” he said, but then I immediately left my *Army Times* on my desk and went to the barbershop in the building.

But I learned from an *Army Times* that Walter T. Kerwin, the major general who commanded the 3d Armored Division when I was there, had received two more stars and become General Kerwin and the Army’s Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. So I wrote to him, telling him some of my complaints, while also telling him I’d served under him in the 3d Armored Division.

“This is on behalf of General Kerwin,” said a letter I received from a major, “in response to your letter.”

The letter also said the major would look into my complaints, but, whether or not he did, I received no notification of any results, and I also read in and *Army Times* that the Sergeant Major of the Army, the highest ranking enlisted person in the Army, was open to complaints.

“I’m Glad You Asked” was the title of the article.

So I sent him a letter asking many questions, but I received no reply to any of them from anyone, and during that lack of assignment was my first turn at Fort Harrison to be sergeant of the guard.

For that I reported to an SSG with gray hair. He told me no inspection of the guards would be necessary, that the supernumerary should be the first guard reporting for duty, and that I could let the supernumerary dispatch the guards, if I wished, and then he gave me his telephone number, told me I could call him if I needed him, and said I could do the same with the super. So I did, but the next day the MSG told me the CPT commanding the Finance Center’s administration company wanted to talk with me. So I went to the CPT’s office and reported to him as my basic training told me to report to commissioned or warrant officers.

“Where were you last night?” he asked.

I told him my understanding was that I could do what the SSG told me I could do, but, not wishing to be a snitch, I didn’t tell who told me I could do it.

“Do you want to talk to a lawyer?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

He telephoned JAG, and, after a few minutes of my waiting on a sofa in front of the CPT’s desk CPT waited behind it, a JAG 1LT jointed me on the sofa.

“Why were you at home?”, he asked me,

But I told him the SSG told me I could do it.

“Why didn’t you just say that?” asked the CPT, and I shrugged, rose from the sofa with the 1LT, returned to my desk, and took a leave.

Fewer than three months remained before the expiration of my reenlistment. I’d accrued about five months of leave and knew a regulation proscribed paying me for more than ninety days of it on discharge. So I took a five-workday leave every alternate week for the remainder of my time in the Army. When I returned from the first of those leaves, my desk was gone. So I spent much of my remaining time in the Army at home drinking beer, whether or not I was on leave.

No one asked me where I was while I did that, but, when I returned from one of those leaves, I learned I was on the list for sergeant of the guard again. So I pointed out to the MSG that the duty roster regulation said my time between turns should have been longer by the length of my leaves, and he told me he’d take care of it, and, apparently he did. Never again was I on the list.

But my next step toward my discharge was to take my regulations to the MSG and give them to him, and he put them in a metal book cabinet near

where my empty desk had been, and I hadn't stopped keeping them up to date. So I watched to see if anyone would posted the changes while they were in the book cabinet, and no one did. So I regretted that, the waste of them.

During those last few weeks before my discharge, Nancy invited Dewey to stay with us. He slept on Pat's and Ben's lower bunk and went with me to the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar and the Sign of the Ram. One night, between the bars, we picked up two hitchhikers . One of them left his wallet on the back seat of the Volkswagen. Dewey saw it and handed it to me. I handed the cash from it to Dewey and threw the wallet with everything else in it into a dumpster. The cash was about fifty dollars. I told Nancy I did that.

"You didn't try to find the hitchhikers?" asked Nancy.

Dewey didn't smoke. So I don't know why he'd have a disposable lighter or a can of lighter fluid, and neither do I know why we'd walk past a bus stop. But one night, as we walked past one, he stopped, put some lighter fluid in his mouth, waited until a bus stopped, and, when its front door opened, he lit the lighter and blew the lighter fluid through the flames at the driver.

"Did you see that black guy's white eyes?" he asked, and Dewey repeated that at the Sign of the Ram.

He climbed onto the runway behind one of the girls and blew flames at her buttock. But, though the bus driver was African American, he'd calmly closed the door and driven away, and Dewey received no more of a reaction from the girl at the Sign of the Ram or from anyone else there. But he told me to try it, and I did.

But I stopped blowing before all the fluid was out of it. Then both Dewey and I laughed. But neither did I see anyone, and neither of us tried it again, and Dewey remained welcome there and one night road the Yamaha there alone, and, when the bar closed, the bike wasn't where he left it. So a dancer gave him a ride home. I telephoned the police. But they did entirely by telephone. So I didn't expect them to find the bike and used my next leave to hitchhike to Austin to see Cleve.

He was still State Editor for the Austin Statesman. He took me to the Cattlemen's Club and said Lyndon Johnson was a member, and he and Shirley had had a son. His name was Devin.

But, at supper, at their house, I said "damn".

"That's enough," said Shirley, "Go to bed Devin."

On my way home I ate eggs and hashbrowns at a counter of a roadside diner. A man came to me on the customers' side of the counter. He asked me whether I was trying to catch a ride. I replied affirmatively.

"Don't do it here," he said.

But I was so hungry I ordered a second portion.

As I stood trying to catch a ride in front of the diner, a young woman picked me up.

“I saw you in there,” she said. “I’m a waitress. Are you a sophomore?”

“No,” I said. “Are you?”

“Yes,” she said.

“What college?” I asked.

“I’m not in college,” she said. “I’m in high school.”

She told me she was going home to take a shower. I asked her whether I could go home with her. She said she didn’t think she should do that. My next ride dropped me at a freeway entrance. I had an uncontrollable urge to defecate. I did it in a concrete trough drainage trough. I don’t remember why it was there.

At home I called the police and asked whether they’d found the Yamaha. The person who answered told me they hadn’t. I called again a week later. The person who answered then said they’d had it since the night I reported the theft. Apparently Dewey had left the key in the ignition switch. Apparently someone had taken it for a ride and left it where the police found it. I had to pay for three weeks’ storage.

A tweeter in one of our H. H. Scott speaker systems stopped working. I told Dewey he must have turned the volume too high, but I never knew him to do that. I replaced the tweeter with one at an electronics store. It’s fidelity wasn’t as high as that of the H. H. Scott tweeters.

Dewey helped me with the move to Muncie. On post was a large parking lot with no restriction. I was using it to park the Mustang I bought for parts. I asked Dewey to take its engine apart. My plan was to sell the van and what remained of the Mustang to a junk yard but to sell the Mustang’s engine block separately. I advertised it for 150 dollars. the only person who replied to the advertisement offered me fifty dollars. He pointed out the rust on it from sitting beneath the trailer. I accepted his offer.

I attended student orientation at Ball State in a room with hundreds others.

“We have a lot of nontraditional students this year,” said a speaker.

He made clear that he was referring to students who were older than most college students. I’d hoped to be a traditional student. But part of that hope was for sexual relationships with female students.

I reserved a spot for our trailer in Ball State’s trailer park and arranged to move it there. A woman called me from the office administering Fort Harrison’s trailer park. She told me I’d have to move our trailer before my

discharge date. I told her I'd already made the arrangements, but, after that call, the SGM called me to his office.

"Someone from the trailer park office called me," he said. "You have to get that trailer out of there before your discharge. I'm not fucking with you."

"I've already arranged for that," I told him.

"Well," he said. "You damned well better."

Nancy packed most of our things for the move, but she left Fort Harrison before the move of the trailer. Her brother Dick was at Sawyer Air Force Base on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She said she'd like to take Pat and Ben up there in the Volkswagon.

I removed the air conditioner from the kitchen window. But, because the one in the back bedroom didn't add to the width of the trailer, I didn't remove that one. Walking around the trailer picking up the concrete blocks supporting the trailer, the driver who moved the trailer hit his head on the air conditioner.

"You're supposed to remove them," he said.

He banged his head hard and cut it a little, but he said nothing more about that and helped me and Dewey set the oil tank on its end in the back seat of the Mustang, replaced two tires on trailer, and charged me but fifty dollars for that. The tires wore out on the way. He said that was because their axle wasn't straight and that the fifty dollars was only the price of the tires. So, effectually, he was telling me he charged nothing for that additional time and labor. He didn't accept a check for the fifty dollars, but he followed me to my bank for me to cash one for the cash to pay him.

Our lot in the Ball State trailer park was the most scenic there. It was at an end of a row along a drive. On the other side of the drive was a creek, and, on the other side of the creek was a big empty field of grass between it and the main campus.

Dewey stayed there until after Nancy returned from the Upper Peninsula. We went to the Indiana State Fair. I paid for us to sit on a front bench in a tent to watch an African American woman I thought was ugly sway in front of us. She didn't remove her clothing. When Nancy returned, I drove Dewey back to Coldwater, drove myself back to Fort Harrison, and signed in from the leave I took for all that. Then, effectually, I discharged myself. I typed my own DD 214.

I gave the uniform I was in for that to the SP5 who let me do it.

"Hey, Sergeant Harman," he'd said before I took the leave. "Can I have your TW's when you get out?"

Instead of khakis, officers' summer uniforms were what the Army called tropical worsted. So did many career enlisted men. So had I.

For my DD 214 to be perfect, I asked the SP5 to bring me another each time I made a typographical error. Because the 214's were a credential for eligibility for many benefits for both veterans and active duty military personnel, the Army kept close track of them. But the SP5 didn't ask me to sign for them, and I also typed on mine two awards of the Army Commendation medal. The SP5 didn't question that or anything else I typed on the form, and neither did the warrant officer who signed it. But I made it as accurate and complete as I could.

To give the SP5 my TW's I had civilian clothes with me in a paper bag that day. After the warrant officer signed the 214 I went to a restroom and changed clothes. After changing clothes, I put the TW's in the bag.

"What's that?" asked the SP5 when I handed him the bag.

"My TW's," I said. "You asked for them."

"Oh, yeah," he said shrugging.

## Chapter 24

### Culmination

As at Wayne State my major and minor academic concentrations at Ball State were English and French. But I bought a portable typewriter. Nancy found a job as an administrative assistant for a psychiatric clinic. Having no job, I enrolled in six courses my first term there. The normal load was four. I earned A's for five of the six and a B for the other.

The B was in English literature from *Beowulf* through *Chaucer*. The professor spent most of his class time talking about problems with a neighbor of his and about someone he said had cancer, but the reason for the B was that, because of a night of drinking with Spencer and his stepbrother, I took a day off from classes. The professor told my class that day that the only questions on the final examination regarding the *Canterbury Tales* would be on its prologue. So, because I wasn't there for that, I studied all the *Canterbury Tales* selections in our textbook, the Norton Anthology of English Literature. So I received a C on the examination, lowering my grade from an A to a B. But I learned that lesson. I never again missed a class because of drinking.

But that course was also the beginning of my troublemaking there. I wrote to the head of the English department complaining about that professor's wasting class time with his non-academic problems, and I also I complained to the Dean of Education about the school not offering Greek. I gained nothing from either of those complaints, but I did from another.

The head of the English Department, the first time I spoke with him, apologized for the department's policy requiring me to take Beginning Composition despite the credit I'd earned through the CLEP. But I aced Advanced Composition, went to his office again, and argued that doing that while not having taken Beginning Composition should exempt me from Beginning Composition. He didn't immediately agree, but I persisted, and he arranged a special exemption, though my A for Advanced Compensation was despite some other troublemaking of mine and surprised me.

Dr. Hoilman, my professor for that course, didn't tell my class he graded on a curve, and he gave me a C for a paper about D. H. Lawrence's story "The Rocking Horse Winner". He had a list of what he called limiters, errors that would lower one's grade on an assignment a full grade, and one of them was plagiarism, and, in that paper, I mentioned the fact that some of the names of the characters in that story resemble names of characters in *The Scarlet Letter*. He said I should have added a note to the paper giving credit to a critic who also mentioned that.

"It's obvious!" I said. "How many notes would I need if I said the sky's blue?"

Dr. Hoilman's only reply was a frown, and I didn't know he graded on a curve until I received my A for the course, but I had an indication during a French class that professors were talking about me favorably.

Donald Gilman, the Assistant Professor of French who taught all my French courses, asked me during a French class whether a verb should be singular or plural if it's the predicate of an English sentence with a compound subject with one subject plural and the other singular.

"Singular," I said.

Thinking further through that question, I decided it should be plural if the noun nearest the verb were plural and that Professor Gilman hadn't included that detail in his question. But I also thought about why he'd asked me that question in French class, and he also said in class that his first choice of careers was law and that the reason he was working on a doctorate degree in French at the University of Carolina was that his faculty advisor at Harvard advised him to study French instead of law. So I also wondered both why a Harvard advisor would behave as had my sixth grade teacher had when I told her I wished to be an architect and why a Harvard student would be as docile as a sixth grader. But I liked that he carried his dissertation in progress in an old brown briefcase everywhere he went, and he invited my class to a party in his apartment, to celebrate our completing our first term of French.

He also asked us to bring our own champaign, and I hadn't learned in Afghanistan any criteria for selecting champaign, but Nancy solved that problem.

"We have some at the office my boss said you can have," she said in reply to my mentioning the problem to her.

But, picking it up at her office, was an embarrassment.

"How much do I owe you for it?" I asked her boss.

"Forget it," he said.

"Thanks," I replied.



“It isn’t for you,” he said.

Also at work Nancy won a gift certificate for dinner at Muncie’s most expensive restaurant, and we went there, but neither did I feel I knew how to behave in an expensive restaurant.

“Let’s get out of here,” I said.

“Why?” she angrily asked.

“This place is phony,” I said.

But, at Professor Gilman’s party, I met Chris Quayle, Dan Quayle’s brother. Dan was then the youngest member of the United States House of Representatives, but Chris was a Vietnam Veteran, drank a lot of beer, was married and had two young sons, and lived in an apartment on campus with this wife and sons. Differences between him and me were that a Marine Sergeant in Vietnam and that his wife was a realtor, but someone at the party mentioned Dan, and his response suggested to me that he wasn’t proud of being Dan’s brother. He rose from the floor where he was sitting beside me and went to the kitchen for more champaign, and, when he returned, he suggested that we go out for a beer some night.

“Careful,” said the girl who mentioned Dan. “He’s asking you for a date.”

But he became my closed friend at Ball State, and both he and I were consistently on the Dean’s List.

The first time we went out for beer together was the day both of us learned both of us aced Advanced Composition. Dr. Hoilman told us our grade when we went to his office to pick up our final examination papers. That was when I learned Dr. Hoilman graded on a curve, and later I learned Advanced Composition was a sort of rite of passage for a degree in English there and that Hoilman failed students more often than he gave them A’s.

During those first few months after my discharge I also requested veterans disability compensation for my ankle and received a ten percent disability rating paying about 35 dollars per month. I also requested disability for my eyes because of some sand made its way into one of them temporarily while I was sanding body putty while working on the van. But, between requesting that and receiving the rating, I forgot I’d requested it.

“There’s nothing wrong with my eyes,” I said to the doctor who informed me of the rating and that it was only for my ankle and not for my eyes.

The first persons from Coldwater to visit us in Muncy were Cheryl Hurd and her son, Kip. While Nancy was in the trailer with the kids, Cheryl and I sat in the Mustang talking and drinking. At Fort Harrison I’d built a plywood

box to use as a porch and as a sort of tool shed. The kids came outside but went no further than the porch. They went back inside in less than a quarter hour.

“Kip said they came back inside because you and Cheryl were naked under a tree,” said Nancy when I came inside for more beer.

“We were just sitting in Sad Paradise,” I said.

I also built some bookshelves and some shelves for our stereo equipment. Nancy had left the buffet in Afghanistan. I also built a shelf for glasses above a counter between the kitchen and the living room. I put a piece of transparent red plexiglass across its side toward the living room. I also painted our front door fuchsia.

“Are you trying to make our house like the Sign of the Ram?” asked Nancy. “And who wants a purple door.”

I don’t know how she knew anything of the Sign of the Ram, and I didn’t ask her, but I also bought a TV. We’d never had a TV. I said television wasn’t intellectual, but I made a compromise. I bought a tiny black and white one. It was small enough to fit in the foot-high bottom shelf of what I built for our stereo equipment, but, for us to lean comfortably against our sofa while we sat on our Afghan carpet to watch it, I removed the legs from our living room furniture. But we watched neither news nor anything intellectual, and neither did we watch sports. Nancy’s favorite show was *Little House on the Prairie*. But my performance at Ball State impressed Nancy’s sister and her brother Rob. They came to see us.

“We didn’t know you were intelligent,” said Barb.

“Yeah,” said Rob, “We thought you still listened to AM radio.”

Rob left Barb there to stay with us for awhile. But I told Barb she should lift the Plexiglas cover of the turntable by the slot for that and not by putting fingerprints on the sides of it. She wept when I said that and soon left.

Spencer’s foster parents’ house was at the end of a drive about a quarter mile from the road. Dave, Spencer’s foster brother, lived in an old fourteen-foot-wide mobile home across the drive from the house. He was diabetic and used more drugs than Spencer did. Once I took Chris there.

Chris said little either to Spencer or to Dave, but he tried some white powder they offered us and said was cocaine, and both of us tried it. I’d never tried cocaine and I couldn’t detect that it did anything to me. Chris told me as I drove him home that he admired my willingness to broaden my experience, but his parents owned a house less than a mile east of the farm and about as far from that road.

Chris and I also went to a bar in Yorktown that reminded me of the Stag and the Alibi. As at the Alibi, card tables were in the back beyond the bar,

but no wall separated them from the bar, and stacks of beer cases lined the walls around them. As at the Stag the bartender fried hamburgers on a grill with salt and no grease and served each with a thick slice of an onion on it, and we also tried them. I told Chris of watching father play cards, and again said he appreciated the breadth of my experience. But I asked him how long he'd been homosexual.

“You think I’m homosexual?” he asked.

I didn't reply, but neither my saying that nor my not replying seemed to me to offend him, and we also drank sangria but at a bowling alley, and he suggested both the bowling and the sangria.

I also played tennis with him. My time in the Army exempted me from the university's physical education requirement. But I took introductory courses in both tennis and golf. The tennis course was in a gym. It began with the instructor asking each student to show him a serve. I watched the students in line ahead of me and tried to do what they did. But I hit the ball into the rafters. I learned much during the course, but I didn't become good at it, and the instructor didn't grade on a curve.

“That guy beat you?” exclaimed the instructor to the only student I defeated during the course.

“He's got some serves,” said the student.

But my grade for that course was my second B at Ball State.

I received an A for golf, but most of the course was hitting drives in the field across the creek from our trailer, and the instructor instructed nothing, but I took many other courses there only because I wished to learn.

I took a year of Russian, two quarters of piano, and a quarter each of music theory and art appreciation. For the music theory course, I spent some discretionary hours listening to tapes in the music laboratory to learn how to recognize instruments by their sounds. I also bought a piano, but, ostensibly, that was for Nancy for her birthday. I found a piano store in the Yellow Pages, rode the Yamaha there, and bought a new walnut spinet in the Mediterranean furniture style.

“How are you going to pay for it?” asked the shop's owner.

“Cash,” I said. “Well, I mean a check. Is that alright?”

“Sure,” he said smiling. “That's alright.”

“Does a bench come with it?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he said, “A bench comes with it.”

But he didn't smile at that.

“Can you deliver it without calling first?” I asked. “It's a birthday present for my wife.”

“Are you sure someone will be there?” he asked.

“I’ll make sure she’s there,” I said. “I hope she doesn’t have a heart attack.”

The owner frowned at that, but he said he’d do what I asked, and Nancy’s employers gave their employees their birthday’s off with pay. The night before the delivery I rearranged furniture to make a space for the piano and asked Nancy to be sure she was at home at the time the owner promised the delivery. For it to be a surprise, I didn’t give her a reason for any of that, and she didn’t ask, but, when I returned from classes on her Birthday, the piano was in the space I’d made for it, and she was sitting at it, on the bench.

“Look what Santa Claus brought me?” she said turning to me and smiling.

“That wasn’t from Santa Claus,” I said frowning.

But the price of the piano was less than the price of the Yamaha, and more of our cash came from Nancy’s job than came from my V.A. education benefits, and I used the piano more for my classes than she used it for anything. So, as soon as I said that, I thought of that and also that the piano’s brand, Henry F. Miller wasn’t appropriate for a birthday gift for one’s wife. I’d read none of Henry Miller’s novels, but I’d heard they were sexually explicit.

Neither did I use it much. I didn’t enjoy practicing. But I used it to write a melody. An assignment for the music theory course was to select a poem and set it to music. I selected Leonard Cohen’s short poem “Silence”.

“Interesting,” said the instructor when I showed him the poem, but I spent less than an hour writing the melody, and he said it didn’t accord with the poem, but, at the end of the quarter, he asked the students to complete a form evaluating the course and asking whether we intended take the second course in the series.

The course was three quarters, and I never intended to take the other two. So, though I evaluated the course favorably, I answered the question negatively, and, the next day, he asked me after class why.

“I’m not an English major,” I replied. “I mean I’m not a music major. I’m an English major.”

“Well,” he replied, “you’re beating the pants off these music majors,”

So I aced that course, but the art appreciation course was all lectures, and I didn’t expect it to be as easy for me as the music theory course. So I took it only for credit, not for a grade. But, at the end of that course, the instructor posted on a bulletin board every final examination score in descending order, and I was at the top of the list.

I also received an A for my first quarter of piano, and I intended to take the second quarter of that. So I asked to receive lessons directly from an instructor the second quarter, and I received approval. But the final examination for that me to play part of “La Habanera”.

“I hope this isn’t going to blow my 4.0 G.P.A.,” I said to the instructor after sweating through pounding it into a mess.

He gave me an A, but the next quarter he asked me whether I still had a 4.0 G.P.A. I didn’t and told him that. He gave me a B for that quarter. So the next quarter I returned to class study. But I didn’t finish it.

“I’m surprised to see you back,” said the instructor the first day, and the next day I withdrew.

One afternoon I found Pat sitting on his bunk sobbing.

“What are you crying about,” I asked, but I didn’t sit beside him.

“I don’t want to die,” he said in a frantic moan.

Not knowing what to say, I said nothing, and, after a moment, left him alone.

Once, as I was berating him for something I don’t remember, he responded as I should have expected him to respond.

“I don’t like you,” he said weeping with his whole body shaking.

The only exception I remember to my not intentionally teaching him or Ben anything is that I gave Pat a bicycle for one of his birthdays and tried to teach him to ride it. My method was pushing him to a start and then trying to keep him and the bicycle from falling. Each time I did that, I had to catch him nearly as soon as I released him. So I quit trying, and he didn’t try by himself.

But, the same day, Ben taught himself to ride it. So I didn’t wait for his birthday to buy him one, and the one I bought him was red, white, and blue with stars, and its brand was Huffy, and I told him it was a Huffy, and he called it a Huffy. Pat’s bicycle, beyond being purple, was hardly remarkable, and I also played with Ben more than I played with Pat. When I threw Ben into the air, he laughed. When I threw Pat into the air, he cried.

A thin blonde girl in my French classes had scars on her face. But I found her somewhat attractive, and she was congenial to me. So I thought she might be a relatively easy target. Her name was Cindy.

Doyle’s ride company played the Delaware County Fair. He and Kay then had a son and daughter, and they were with them on the road. Their quarters on the road were part of a semi-truck trailer. I asked Cindy whether she’d like an inside view of the carnival business. I introduced her to Doyle and Kay in their quarters and asked Doyle for some ride passes. Doyle offered us drinks and told him I didn’t need passes.

“Just tell them I said you could ride,” he said.

But Cindy asked only to see one of what carnies called freak shows, a tent with some farm animals with mutations. She stared the longest at a sheep with five legs. I paid for that but hurried her out of that and onto the Himalaya, an extremely fast ride moving in a circle over rises and dips ostensibly representing the Himalaya mountains. I sat on the outside, and, before it began to move, knowing the centrifugal force would push Cindy against me, I put my arm behind her across the top of the back of the car. But, before the ride began moving, she looked at my arm with a frown, and, during the ride, she tried to pull herself away from me, with her knuckles white on the bar across the front of us.

“I think I should go home now,” she said after the ride.

I also took Nancy and Pat and Ben there, but Doyle and Kay were as congenial to Cindy as they were with Nancy, and they mentioned to neither neither when the other was there.

When I took Nancy and Pat and Ben there, I left them in the trailer with Kay and her kids while I walked the lot with Doyle as he supervised shutting down the rides for the night. He took with him a .44 caliber revolver and knocked down one of the ride employees by punching one of his shoulders with his fist that wasn't holding the revolver. I guessed he did it to remind anyone watching that he was boss.

Also walking with us an extremely large man Doyle called Tiny. Tiny's living quarters were a small compartment in an end of one of the ride trailers. Doyle took a girl with large breasts into it and closed its door. When he came out of it, the girls stayed in it. Then Tiny went into it.

“Your turn,” said Doyle to me, when Tiny came out.

The girl told me to sit on the little bed in the compartment. She unzipped my trousers, pulled out my penis, and took it into her mouth. But I was too drunk to ejaculate that way.

“Let me stick it in your ass,” I said.

“He didn't pay me enough for that,” she said.

So I pulled up the stretch band covering her breasts and put my penis between them. Then, with no instructions from me, she used her hands to squeeze her breasts around it and rub it. After a few minutes of that, I returned it to her mouth and ejaculated, and then she opened the door and spit outside.

“I don't swallow it, you know,” she said.

“What the fuck were you doing?” asked Doyle when I rejoined him and Tiny.

I didn't answer, but, as we walked back to his quarters, I thanked him.

“For what?” asked Doyle.

I didn’t mean for the girl, but for the lesson in how things were on the ride side of the carnival business, but I didn’t answer..

“Ever try one of these?” Spencer asked me in Dave’s trailer.

Showing me some black capsules, he told me they were black beauties.

I tried one.

“Let’s go to your house and listen to music,” he said,

But, on our way there, I turned right where I should have turned left and didn’t know I’d made a wrong turn until I saw a city limit sign for Fort Wayne, and neither Dave nor Spencer asked me where I was going. So, By the time I drove them back to Dave’s trailer and drove home, I was nearly late for class. But, remembering my C on the medieval English examination, I parked the car and walked to class and didn’t take time to shower or change clothes.

Dr. Hoilman stared at me but didn’t say anything. Neither did I say anything during that class, but, in my next class, I spoke to the girl sitting beside me. It was my requisite course in journalism. The girl didn’t speak to me, and neither did the instructor, but the instructor smiled at the girl. I thought the instructor was about my age, and she had extremely large breasts. Once, for a field trip, she took her class to Muncie’s newspaper. I rode with her but I didn’t have the courage to hit on her.

As the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence approached, the instructor of my requisite speech course asked my class to make speeches concerning liberty. I said in my speech that white racists asked other white persons whether they’d like black men to marry their sisters. I said that, if they did, after a few generations, we’d all be one race. A female African American was sitting directly in front of me. I looked at her, but then she looked away. The instructor gave me a C for the speech and gave me my fourth Ball State B. He said the speech wasn’t on the subject he’d assigned.

I received an invitation to join Lambda Iota Tau, an honor society for English majors. My grade point average made that automatic. At the initiation ceremony I sat with Cindy and her boyfriend. The woman conducting the ceremony asked the prospective members to stand in a circle to receive membership. One girl was in a wheelchair. She rose onto crutches, but then had difficulty moving forward into the circle. She was directly behind where I joined the circle. So considered trying to help her. But I couldn’t think of a way I didn’t think might offend her. So I didn’t try.

“You can just accept membership from where you are,” said the woman conducting the ceremony, smiling at the girl, and then frowning at me.

I'd hoped to enjoy bicentennial celebrations. But, carrying a double academic load, drinking beer with Chris and Spencer, and drinking beer with neither at the Pastime, a big old bar with pool tables on Walnut Street south of Muncie's railroad tracks, I didn't find time for that. But I also decided to rent an apartment and buy a van, to broaden for me what I thought was the traditional college experience. So, after reminding Nancy that I'd told her before she married me that I wished to experience everything, I went shopping for a new Chevy van.

But a salesman at Muncie's Chevrolet dealership told me that, because Chevy vans were popular, none were available. So then I shopped for other brands, but all the salesmen I asked told me none were in stock and that the manufacturers had a backload and weren't accepting orders. So I considered buying a Buick Skylark or Chevrolet Cavalier convertible. But I received the same answer to my efforts at that. So I bought a Chevy Monza hardtop.

I saw it while I was asking for a Cavalier convertible, immediately liked its appearance, and also its model name, for the Monza grand prix, and it also reminded me of the model Ferrari I customized with my wood burner, and had a four-speed manual transmission.

I couldn't pay cash for it, but I tried to simplify my other transportation. I sold the Mustang to a junkyard. I also removed the lights from the Yamaha to make it more of a dirt bike and left it at Spencer's foster parents' farm for people there to play with it. But I kept the Sportster.

For the apartment I bought a listing and found one I thought I could afford on the second floor of a house about four blocks from the campus. It was a living room, and kitchen, and a bathroom. A hallway went from the stairs, past the kitchen and bathroom, to the living room. Hoping to impress my guests, I put the Sportster in the hallway.

I also took our stereo equipment to the apartment, furnished it with our Afghan carpet and the mattress Cheryl had given us for the van, and bought a red bedspread for the mattress, for the apartment to seem more Mediterranean.

But, because of roaches, I used the mattress only as a sofa. I slept in the kitchen on a rollaway bed the landlord left in the apartment. Lumps in its mattress kept me from sleeping well, but I tried.

Cindy was my first guest in there. I decided to take my second year of French by independent study and told her that. She decided to do that also and suggested that we study together. I suggested that we do it in the apartment, but, as we sat on the mattress studying, I saw a roach crawling on the carpet. So then I suggested that the next time we study at a bar near campus. I saw that she also saw the roach.



I arrived at the bar before she did. When I arrived, one of my English professors and a classmate of mine in his classes were sitting at a table. I bought a bottle of beer at the bar and took it to the table. When Cindy arrived she looked around the dark bar until I waved to let her know where I was.

“Kind of noisy in here,” she said.

So I rose from the table and left with her.

“Whoa!” then exclaimed the other student.

Outside I suggested that we study in the quadrangle outside the building where Professor Gilman’s classroom was. There we studied beneath a tree, but I rushed us through the chapter, and the next time I saw her she told me she hoped to teach French and didn’t think she could learn it well enough independently to do that. But I think she may have telephoned our trailer, anonymously.

“Some girl called,” Nancy told me at the trailer one afternoon. “She asked if I was Bill Harman’s wife. She hung up before I answered.”

By then both Pat and Ben were in school, and, not having entirely abdicated my responsibility for them, I was taking care of them between their classes and mine and Nancy’s coming home from work.

Emerson, their first school in Muncie, was a public school a few blocks from campus. But the next year we enrolled them in Burriss, Ball State’s laboratory school. It was on campus. Nancy drove them to school mornings. They walked home afternoons. I walked them there and back several times to show them the way. They took much longer when I wasn’t with them, and my berating them for that didn’t speed them up, but I continued depending on that to save me some time.

My B.A., to follow in Woodie’s footsteps, was to be a teaching degree. So it required student teaching and, before that, preparation for student teaching by assisting a teacher. My preparation was helping a Burriss teacher teach sophomore English. I gave every student an A for every assignment the teacher asked me to assign. The presence of a blond girl I thought was pretty made me uncomfortable. But I didn’t try to yield to that temptation.

On Spencer’s foster parents’ farm were many firearms. We set a board across the top of an oil drum there for burning trash. We set cans and bottles on the board to shoot them. I outperformed the others with a little semi-automatic .22-caliber pistol. Spencer suggested that we go hunting. He handed me a twelve-gauge shotgun. As at our house in Ionia, railroad tracks were on the far side of a field behind Spencer’s parents’ house. We walked across the field and then along the tracks until I saw a rabbit in some bushes beside the tracks.

“Shoot it!” said Spencer to me.

But I couldn't bring myself to lift the gun.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked.

We walked back to the trailer.

When we reached the barrel, I saw a huge yellow beehive hanging in a tree perhaps not much more than ten yards from us. Looking at it I also saw a sparrow in a tree on the far side of it. I shot it, walked past the beehive to where it fell, and picked it up. As with the yellow warbler at Marble lake, I picked it up and I carried it to the others.

"Big deal," said Spencer. "You killed a sparrow with a shotgun."

I felt I should and would suffer from that but not because of Spencer said that.

Also after I moved out of the trailer Ben fell from a little tree beside the little porch I built. I'd hung a tire from a limb of it for Pat and Ben to swing on it. Ben fell while climbing from the tire into the tree. He broke an arm. I wasn't there. Nancy telephoned me after taking him to Muncie's hospital.

The tire was one I replaced on the Volkswagen after it went flat after Spencer borrowed the Volkswagen and didn't tell me it went flat while he was using it and that he'd had someone repair it. I launched a complaint campaign for Goodyear to pay for that. But that effort also failed.

Spencer also asked me how to steal some cash. I told him we could rob Muncie's K-Mart. I said we could hide in cupboards beneath dry goods displays while the store was open and come out and rob the office after it closed. I was thinking of the dry goods displays at Tempo. I remembered Wally left the safe open for the register drawers an office clerk would collect from the cashiers after the store closed. I told Spencer we could take the cash from the safe while the clerk collected the drawers and sneak out the back before the clerk returned.

"We should do it Sunday night," I said. "They don't make deposits during the weekend. So the safe'll have three days of cash in it then."

But, a few days before we were to do it, Spencer told me he'd changed his mind.

"I don't want to go to prison," he said.

"We won't go to prison," I said. "No one will see us."

"I don't want to take the chance," he said.

Ordinarily I went to the Pastime alone, but twice I took Christ. Once I parked on the north side of the railroad tracks, and, when we left the bar, a freight train was crossing the street. So Chris grabbed a ladder of a boxcar and rode it to the next street.

"I always wanted to ride a freight," he said as we walked to the Monza after I caught up with him.

The name of one of the Pastime regulars was Shirley. Each night I was there while he was, I shot two games with him for a dollar each. Each time, I won the first, and he won the second. Partly because I nearly won the second, clear was that he let me win the first.

Smitty, the Pastime's owner, ordinarily tended bar, but sometimes a young woman did. One night she lifted her T-shirt above her breasts, showing me that no bra was beneath it. When the bar closed, she apologized for that but asked me to drive her home.

"You tonight?" one of the regulars asked me on his way out.

She directed me into an alley and asked me to stop at a gap between two garages facing the alley.

"I live through there," she said. "You can drop me here."

The gap was nearly as narrow as the Monza. But, hoping to be there awhile, I told her I could drive through the gap. I did, but she thanked me for the ride and left me outside. I had little hope that I could back through the gap, but I did, and then I drove to an all night diner for a chef's salad, as I ordinarily did nights I drank at the Pastime until it closed.

Once I took a girl to the Pastime. Her name was Ann. She spent a lot of time at Dave's trailer. Spencer told me she was pregnant. I thought she was Dave's girlfriend, but a guy who also spent a lot of time at Dave's trailer told me that, awakening during a night he spent in one of the trailer's bedrooms, he found her standing beside the bed. He said his wallet was on the bedstand but that she pretended she came in to perform fellatio on him, and that then she did.

One night I went to the trailer and found her there alone. I sat in the rocking chair in the living room. She lay on the floor beside it. I leaned down and touched her back.

"We'd better go somewhere," she said, "if we're going to do something."

I knew what she meant, but I took her first to the Pastime and bought her a beer at the bar. A man with whom I'd shot pool there several times came to the bar, sat beside me, and set his beer bottle on the bar. But it wasn't empty, and he didn't order another. He turned to me.

"This is no place to bring a girl," he said.

When Ann and I finished our two beers, I took her to the apartment, but I already had intended taking here and intended taking her to the Pastime to be only a prelude.

At the apartment, with no conversation, she removed all of her clothing. I laid her down on the Afghan carpet. She said it was too rough. So we moved to the mattress. Partly because I'd put the carpet there partly for that

purpose, I moved her back to the rug. But, too drunk to ejaculate either on the mattress or on the rug. I leaned down to kiss her, but she turned her face away.

“Dave likes to stick it in my ass,” she said.

“Do you like that?” I asked, hoping she did, but she shrugged, and I didn’t, and, soon after that, I ejaculated.

After sleeping a few hours with her on the mattress, I went to class, but, having an hour free between my first two classes that day, I returned to the apartment, awakened her, and told her I’d take her home and that I had to hurry to return to class.

Still naked, she rose from the mattress. I watched her breasts and pubic hair as she bounced on one leg pulling on her jeans. She had no panties when I picked her up. I desired another round of copulation with her, but I hadn’t forgotten my B in medieval English. She directed me to her to her parents’ home. They were in their front yard.

Nancy was corresponding with Denise Maples and Maureen Howe. She told me that both Roy and Bill had left the Army, that Roy and Denise were in Georgia, and that Bill and Maureen were in California. She said Denise said Roy was working in a Montgomery Ward store, that they’d bought a life insurance policy, and that, because they had no children, they’d made Pat and Ben secondary beneficiaries. She didn’t say what Bill or Maureen were doing, but she said they were living in and that Maureen invited us there. So, during the next break between terms, I took Nancy and Pat and Ben to California.

Before we left I went to Dave’s trailer. I told him I’d pick him up some Coors in Colorado. Ann said the Monza impressed her parents. Dave said nothing to me during that visit.

Also, one rainy night before we left, I hit a pickup truck turning left in front of me to turn into a shopping center. The policeman who came to the scene of the accident told me the driver told him my lights weren’t on. I thought he may have been correct, but I told the policeman and the insurance investigator they were on. The investigator came to our trailer.

I’d bought some cedar deck furniture for in front of our porch.

“This is nice,” said the investigator sitting in one of the chairs and gazing across the creek.

“You lied to them?” said Nancy when I told her about the lights.

We left for California before I received the insurance settlement and while Ben’s arm he broke was still in a cast. In St. Louis we left I-70 to see the Mississippi River more closely. On cobblestones sloping down to the river near a paddlewheel river boat, Ben slipped and fell on his cast. At Salt Lake City we

left I-80 to see the Great Salt Lake. It smelled like a dead fish. We saw one lying in sand along its shore.

The Howes' home was a ranch style house on an edge of town. It had a fireplace, and, when we arrived, Bill was sharpening a chainsaw beside a pile of wood in their front yard. He finished sharpening the saw before offering me a beer. But, inside, as we drank some beer, I told him I'd like to see San Francisco and Big Sur, and he said he and Maureen would take care of Pat and Ben while we did that.

The woman working the front desk of the motel where we slept in San Francisco asked me whether I was aware of the damage to the front of the Monza and pointed out that my Mastercard was expiring that month.

My main reasons for wishing to see San Francisco were Kerouac and Carol Doda. Nothing I saw there reminded me of Kerouac, but I took Nancy to the bar where Doda danced. We sat at a table. She descended from the ceiling on a white baby grand piano like the one in Vaughn's loft.

"Are you newlyweds?" she asked us.

Neither of us answered.

"I guess not," she said.

"I'm going out exploring," I told Nancy at the motel.

She said she also wished to explore. We argued about that until we heard pounding on a wall. Then I left. I saw two girls hitchhiking at the bottom of Telegraph Hill and gave them a ride to the top of the hill. Nothing else I saw interested me.

"Why don't you make love to me?" asked Nancy when I returned to the motel, but skin was peeling from my penis.

I thought the reason was its have its been inside Ann too long, but I didn't tell Nancy that.

"I've got my thing," I said.

That's what she called my recurring herpetic lesions.

Next morning, in pouring down rain, we walked to Fisherman's Wharf. We saw a trolley but didn't ride it. At Big Sur we stopped beside the road, but we didn't walk down to the beach.

After we returned to Redding, Bill and Maureen took us whitewater rafting in sight of Mount Shasta. I deliberately capsized the raft. We pulled it to the nearest riverbank to turn it back over. Bill told Maureen to take off her blouse to wring it out. Maureen looked at me.

"It isn't anything he hasn't seen before," said Bill.

"I don't remember that," said Nancy.

Maureen stepped back into the raft.

She didn't wring out her blouse..

In Kansas, on our way back to Muncie, I bought two six-packs of Coors in a grocery store. In Muncie I took Nancy to the K-Mart to buy gifts for Anne's impending child. Ann thanked us and kissed Nancy.

"I'm not kissing you," she said to me.

"This beer's 3.2," said Dave.

I gave the other six-pack to Cindy.

On our next trip to Coldwater, Dewey and I went to the Lamplighter. Greg and Rick Speigle were there. I shot a few games of pool with Greg.

"That guy's a lawyer," said Greg, pointing to a man in a business suit sitting with others at a table. "What's this place coming to?"

Greg left early. Rick said a grasser was in a field on a farm between Coldwater and Quincy that night. I drove him and Dewey there. A guy in the drive beside the farmhouse asked us for five dollars. He said it was for the beer there. I paid him. I don't remember whether the five dollars was for all of us or for each of us.

The Black Rose, the band that played at my wedding, was playing on a plywood platform in the field. Nancy's brother Dick was then out of the Air Force, but he wasn't playing with the band. He had multiple sclerosis. The last time I saw him, he was at Nancy's father's house. I didn't recognize him. Nancy said it was because of cortisone treatments. At the grasser I talked with the band member I'd seen in Germany. I apologized for having been an SSG.

"Don't worry about it," he said, but he walked away from me.

Weasel Gallop was there with other bikers. He was sitting on his bike. It was an old Harley chopper with a chrome-plated chain and no chain cover.

"Nice bike," I said, but he ignored me.

Terry Ward was also there. He spoke to me before I recognized him. He was balding and fatter than he was in high school,

"I'm a psychologist now," he said.

I didn't ask him how anyone who'd been a bully and a jock could be a psychologist, but I walked away from him.

Rick and Dewey and I had gone separate ways to explore the field. Rick found me at the pickup truck with the kegs of beer. He told me he wanted to go back to the Lamplighter. We found Dewey and left the grasser.

Rick left the Lamplighter before it closed, but Dewey and I stayed there until it closed and then returned to the grasser. On the way, I saw a girl hitchhiking. I picked her up. She said she was going to the grasser. Deciding to rape her, I drove past the farm.

"You missed the driveway," said Dewey.

Not knowing how to answer, I drove back.  
The girl left us and walked toward the band.  
“I was going to rape her,” I said to Dewey.  
“I wish you’d told me that,” he said.

We drew two more plastic cups of beer and stood with others around a fire. After emptying those two cups we drew two more. They were the last of the keg.

“There’s that girl again,” said Dewey.  
She was standing on the other side of the fire talking to no one.  
“Maybe she needs a ride home,” I said.  
“I’ll go ask her,” said Dewey laughing.

I watched him walk around the fire, talk to her for a few minutes, and bring her back around the fire. With her in the Monza, I turned right out of the driveway. Left was the way to Coldwater.

“You’re going the wrong way,” she said.

Neither Dewey nor I said anything to that. I drove past the next farm house, turned onto a gravel road, and stopped when I thought we were too far from both the other road and the farmhouse for anyone to see us. We pulled the girl from the car. A grassy ditch was between the road and a cornfield. In it we removed her clothing. She screamed.

Hearing a dog barking at the farmhouse on the other side of the cornfield, I looked across the cornfield in that direction. After finishing undressing her, we threw her into the back seat of the Monza. I climbed into the backseat and told Dewey to drive. As I positioned her, she bit one of my arms and didn’t release the bite until I shook a fist at her.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” I said.  
She released the bite.

“Your brother’s trying to outlast you,” she said during Dewey’s turn.

## Chapter 25

### Sobriety

The backroads I drove took us into Coldwater from the south. As we passed the fairgrounds, I asked the girl where she lived. She told me I didn't need to take her home. She said I could let her out anywhere.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes!" she said. "Please!"

So I turned into Waterworks Park. I let her out at the tennis courts, across the road from where I gave Nancy her engagement ring. Climbing from the car, she said she couldn't find one of her shoes. I offered to take her back to the ditch to look for it. She said she didn't need it.

She walked on past the tennis courts with her other shoe in one of her hands. I backed out of the park, to keep her from seeing my license plate. Then I bought Dewey and me breakfast at a little diner on Chicago Street.

I knew, because I'd eaten there after other nights of drinking, that the eggs were always there. I also knew that Danny Parker's mother was the cook, and I wondered why a mother would cook so poorly. But no other Coldwater restaurant was open all night.

After breakfast I drove us to my mother's house and slept in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Awakening remembering what I'd done, I felt too much shame to leave the bed and didn't until David Grace arrived in the afternoon to ask me to go drink beer with him. Then, wishing not to increase my shame by making David feel bad, I drove him and Dewey to the Willows. But we sat at a table and not at the bar as I ordinarily would.

"Maybe it was too dark for her to see what we look like," said Dewey.

"What did you guys do?" asked David.

Neither of us answered, but, back in Muncie, despite my shame, continued to behave much as I had. One night, as I parked the Monza in front of the apartment after eating a chef's salad at the diner, a patrol car stopped behind



me. The street was one way, and I'd driven the wrong way on it and backed into a driveway beside the house to turn around and park the car in the right direction, but the policeman didn't ask me about that. He asked me to get into the back seat of the patrol car and asked me what I was doing out that late at night, but, for a policeman, he seemed to me to be extraordinarily congenial, and, after telling me to be more careful, he left me there and drove away.

Because of Dewey's right arm, police arrested him first. A few weeks later police arrested me while I was taking care of Pat and Ben while Nancy was at work. They asked me whether I could call anyone to come to take care of them. So I called Nancy, and they waited until she arrived before and didn't handcuff until after they took me outside, and, at the jail, a detective not in a uniform asked me whether I'd like to make a telephone call and left me alone in an office to do it. I called Nancy, told her I'd didn't know how long I'd be there, and asked her to remove everything from the apartment and to bring me a book I was reading for a course.

"I didn't think she knew about that apartment," said the detective after the call.

So supposed the policemen who stopped behind me in front of the apartment was surveilling me and that the reason for that was that I was Dewey's brother, but that was they end of their congeniality.

Then they took me to a cell with concrete shelves like the brick shelves along the walls of in Vaughn's East Village loft but with no padding. It wasn't as large as the drunk tank in L.A., but more people were in it, and I thought the food tasted more like dirt than did that in the mess hall near the hospital in Frankfurt. So I neither slept nor ate that night.

But, in the morning, Nancy brought me the book I'd asked her to bring and told me her employers' lawyer was working on the situation, and that afternoon was a court appearance for me, and the lawyer was there.

His right arm was like Dewey's, and he rested it on the bench while he talked with the judge. He didn't talk with me, but later that afternoon Nancy came again and told me he'd arranged bail. She said it was seven thousand dollars and that her employers would lend it to us. She said they'd pay either the seven thousand or ten percent of it, that, if they paid the seven thousand, and I attended every court appearance, the court would pay all of it back, but that, if they paid the ten percent, the court would pay none of it back under any circumstances, and she asked what I preferred. Dewey had been in jail since his arrest, but, despite that additional shame, I asked for all of it.

That was all that lawyer did for me, but the court in Coldwater appointed an attorney for both Dewey and me. I learned that when I drove to

Michigan for my booking. So, after the booking, I drove to the lawyer's office. He was the one Greg pointed out to me at the Lamplighter the night of the crime, and his office had been the office of the attorney with whom Dave Norton's mother had the adulterous relationship, the attorney whose leaves I'd raked. So it was in the house of Vaughn's Coldwater apartment, where I first kissed Sandy.

I don't remember what I told him, but I remember that he told me he couldn't lie for me, that I did think I had, and that he said he'd have his wife help defend us. He said she was also an attorney and that a woman might give us credibility with the jury. But I defended myself, and my reason wasn't that he wouldn't lie for me. My main reason was that he said we needed to have Nancy and others attest in court to my good character. My shame was too much for me to bear having Nancy or anyone else I knew hear what I'd done. But another reason was that I had reason to believe the attorney lied to me.

I complied with his request for names and telephone numbers of people who might attest to my character, but he told me he couldn't get in touch with any of them. I couldn't believe that they didn't have answering machines, and Professor Gilman told me he'd be glad to testify for me. So, thinking I couldn't depend on the attorney, I accepted the risk to Dewey of separating the trials and the trouble of having to attend hearings the attorney ordinarily would have attended in my absence. Each hearing required a round trip of about 280 miles, and I thought that also required updating my wardrobe.

So I flared the trousers of my attaché duty suits and dressed in one of them for each hearing, and once I stopped at a bar in a small town on my way home to drink beer, shot pool with some of the other customers there, and told them I was an attorney, but that trip was remarkable for another reason.

A narrow bridge on the backroad from that little town to Muncie arched higher than the road. So, as I approached it, I didn't see the lights of a car approaching from the other side soon enough to avoid a head-on collision. But I crossed the bridge and continued on with no collision, and, looking into my rearview mirrors, I saw no lights, and neither did I hear a crash, and I didn't think that was because I was drunk. But I told no one of that, and I was in despair through all the months between the crime and the trial to the extent that I quit drinking.

But that lasted but six months before I did what my father called falling off the wagon. Then, Drunk I told Nancy I was out of control and asked her to ask her employers for help. But, though she said she could see that, she refused.

I also moved out of the apartment. Jerry helped me, but I gave him the Yamaha. I also offered him the Sportster, but he said he didn't want it.

Also, while I waited trial, Ball State closed its trailer park. I complained to responsible officials, but, of course, neither did that do any good. We moved the trailer to a trailer park on the west side of Muncie. Its name was Hickory Haven. Many trees were among the trailers, but it was adjacent to a drive-in movie theatre, and our trailer was within a few feet of the fence separating the drive-in from the trailer park, and people had beaten down the wire fence, presumably to sneak in. One night, drinking outside our trailer after the drive-in closed for the night, Chris and I stepped over the fence.

I began kicking speakers from their posts, and, as I did that, a patrol car entered the drive-in. I stopped kicking the speakers, but the patrol came to where we were drinking, and two policemen stepped out of it. One asked me what I was doing. I pointed to our trailer, told them I lived there, and said I was minding my own business.

“Oh, no,” said Chris, and again I went to that cell in the Delaware County jail.

Nancy bailed me out, but, while I was there, I talked with a bald man who said he was awaiting trial for murder, and, the next time Chris and I went to the Pastime, the murderer was there. He told us he knew where we could get some free ice cream and directed us in the Monza to the loading dock of a building on a street behind the Pastime. He went inside, came out with two half gallons of ice cream, put them on the floor in front of the back seat, and walked away. As I drove Chris home, he asked me to turn onto a side road and stop. A ditch was along the road. Chris threw the ice cream into the ditch.

“I don’t steal,” he said.

Nancy’s brother Rob called Nancy to tell her he had a psychiatric problem. She suggested that he come to Muncie for help from her employers. He admitted himself to the psychiatric ward of Muncie’s main hospital. Nancy called her father and stepmother. Sitting in the cedar chairs in front of the porch I’d built, they ate chicken and corn on the cob we cooked in a hibachi pot we’d bought. Her father tried but failed to make our Pakistani bagpipes work.

Also while I awaited trial, I decided to try to go to law school, to help Dewey if he but not I went to prison. I wrote to Indiana University’s law school in Indianapolis for a catalog. It said admission required taking the Law School Aptitude test. I took it. When I received my scores, I called the school to ask what courses I should take at Ball State. The woman with whom I spoke asked me what my major was and whether I’d taken the LSAT. Her reply to my reply was to ask me what my LSAT scores were.

“That’s good enough,” she said in reply to my reply to that.

I applied, and the school accepted me.

“I’m going to be Mrs. Petrocelli,” said Nancy, referring to a TV series about a lawyer and his wife.

I don’t remember the charge for kicking the speakers. but I pleaded not guilty. The judge looked down at something in front of him for a few seconds and, looking up, frowned at me. But he let my bail continue while I awaited trial.

Between that and my trial in Michigan, Dewey went to trial. The jury found him guilty. The Judge sentenced him to ten to twenty years in prison. He went to the state prison in Ionia. When my family lived in Ionia, it was the state hospital for the criminally insane where my father worked as an accountant. When Dewey went there it was a prison for inmates needing protection from other inmates. Dewey went there because of his arms.

The courtroom in Coldwater was on the second floor of the new Branch county courthouse. Pat Luce had burned down the old one. Pat was a year or two younger than Greg Speigle and lived on their block of Polk Street between Greg’s and Rick’s house and Suzy Tubert’s. He was eighteen years old when he burned the courthouse and was his family’s hope. But he spent two years in prison for that and, after prison, became a biker.

The wooden display case with the stuffed owl in it that was on the first floor of the old courthouse had survived the fire and was on the second floor of the new courthouse a few feet from the door to the courtroom of my trial. As I entered the courtroom with the prosecutor, I told him I remembered the display cabinet from the old courthouse. I didn’t mention Pat, but he frowned.

“I guess it’s brown suit day,” I also said

He was in a brown suit. I was in my brown attaché duty suit. He also frowned at that.

The Judge told me the lawyer he’d appointed would remain available to me. He suggested that I ask him for some instructions on the jury selection process. The attorney told me the difference between a peremptory challenge and a challenge for cause. He also said I should thank and excuse any juror I chose to remove.

All my challenges were peremptory. I removed most women and a farmer who said he had work to do on his farm. Until I removed the farmer, I didn’t understand the attorney’s instructions regarding thanking and excusing. So I didn’t follow them. But neither did the prosecutor.

“I’d like to thank and excuse the gentleman who says he has work to do on his farm,” I said when I understood.

After that the prosecutor expressed his challenges in the same way.

I also excused the boyfriend of Nancy's she left to be with me, the one she said kissed her "bunches of times" while I was in training at the Defense Intelligence School. He told the court Nancy had been his girlfriend. So the attorney I rejected knew that. But he told me he didn't understand why I removed him.

The only witness I called was Nancy's father. I called him only to testify to my respectability in the community. Because of some of what Nancy told me of him, I felt less shame in his presence than I did in others'. He testified favorably, but the prosecutor argued that, because I lived in Muncie while he lived in Coldwater, his testimony regarding my respectability in the community was irrelevant.

My defense was mainly that the girl couldn't have recognized me in the dark. Looking at the prosecution's evidence before the trial, I learned that the Coldwater detective investigating the crime showed a copy of my Ball State identification card photograph for her to identify me. I thought it hardly resembled me. But, instead of arguing that it resembled me, the prosecutor argued that it was admissible despite the protection of academic records under the Freedom of Information Act, and he also handed it to the jury for them to pass it around to compare it to me.

Also, looking at the prosecution's evidence, I looked at the girl's panties. I felt the shame of doing that, but I saw no grass stains on them. So, cross examining the detective who investigated the crime, I asked him whether he saw any when he examined them. He said he didn't, and I also asked him what kind of car I drove. The girl testified that I was driving a black Mazda. The detective said he understood me to own a Volkswagen and a Monza.

I also cross examined the doctor who examined the victim that night. He said she was staggering but that the staggering wasn't as though she was drunk but as though she was distraught. I asked him what was the difference. Basically he said he could just tell. I repeated the question.

"Objection," said the prosecutor. "He's answered the question.

"Sustained," said the judge.

"Thank you, doctor," I said.

"Thank you, doctor," said the prosecutor.

Originally I intended to question no one other than Nancy's father. I hoped to keep the trial simple. But, in the judge's instructions to the jury, he said my failure to testify or produce or examine witnesses wouldn't be reason to acquit me for lack of proof beyond a reasonable doubt. That made no sense to me, but I decided that, for my argument that darkness would have made the girl unable to identify me by my appearance, I decided I needed to ask her three

questions and introduce two more pieces of evidence. So I took pictures of the Monza and of a dark green Mazda. My purpose for entering them as evidence was to show the difference between a Monza and a Mazda and that dark green and black were the same in moonlight. But, though I don't remember why, I asked Greg to develop the film, and he didn't. So, hoping at least to make evident that no lights were there, I asked her whether any were. She was the only witness who was at the grasser. But, though she said none were, she sobbed as she said it. So, both because of my shame and because I immediately knew it worked against my defense, I immediately regretted asking her,

During a recess for lunch I took Jerry to MacDonalds.

"Hi, Jerry," said a girl with red hair and freckles I thought was about his age.

He said Hi but didn't otherwise acknowledge her presence.

"I think she likes you," I said to Jerry.

He shrugged and frowned and looked away.

The prosecutor and attorney I rejected were also there for lunch.

Hoping the lack of evidence that I was at the grasser would acquit me, I also planned to make no closing argument. But, at Kay's trailer, the night before the night before last day of the trial, I also changed my mind about that. In my attorney role-playing I'd bought some legal-size vinyl folder with a legal pad in it. So, at Kay's kitchen table, I used that to write many arguments I thought favored me. But, in the courtroom, I could hardly speak. So the court recorder asked the judge to ask me to speak more loudly. I moved from my seat to the recorder's stand and tried, but I don't know what effect that had.

The trial was less than three days. The jury, after less than two hours of deliberation, found me guilty. Immediately after the reading of the finding, a deputy sheriff handcuffed me. I asked him to let me call Nancy. He told me I could at the jail, but that walk was short. The jail was on Pearl Street between the courthouse and the parking lot where Lincoln Elementary School was when I was in the fifth grade.

It was newer than the one in Muncie. It had replaced the old brick one where Eddie Grace had spent much time, but it was the one in which I'd spent a few hours with Greg Speigle, and this time one of my cell mates was Eddie Parker, Danny Parker's older brother. I remembered seeing him in a fight in the street in front of the Lamplighter. I'd never associated with him, but he also recognized me.

The bunks in that cell were six steel shelves with mattresses. Along the side of the cell opposite its door were bars separating the cell from a walkway between the cell and narrow horizontal windows permitting the inmates to see

the sidewalk on the other side of Pearl Street where the school had been. Eddie spent much time standing at the bars peering through one of the windows.

“Hey, Bill,” he said one day during the weeks I was there awaiting sentencing. “There’s your mom. I think she’s crying.”

Another day Reverend Hamlin and some others came along the walkway. They stopped and sang some hymns, but no one in the cell joined them. I lay on my bunk with my face toward the wall, until they moved on.

In the cell was a checkerboard with checkers. Another prisoner and I, to make a chess set, tore a sheet of paper into pieces and wrote on the pieces the name and color of each chess piece. No books were in the cell.

“Just think how smart you’d might have been if you didn’t drink,” said the person who interviewed me for my pre-sentence investigation.

“Do I understand you still to maintain that you’re not guilty?” asked the judge at my sentencing hearing.

“I cannot admit guilt,” I said, unwilling to have Nancy share my shame.

“I understand,” said the judge, and he gave me the sentence he’d given Dewey, but my chess partner told me the ten to twenty years could be six years and four months, if I wasn’t troublesome in prison.

“You’re guilty,” he said when I left the jail to go to the prison.

“You don’t know that,” said the deputy who took me downstairs, and he didn’t hand cuff.

The detective who’d led the investigation drove me to the prison. Neither did he handcuff me, and he let me ride in the front seat of his car. A file folder was on the seat between him and me. I looked down at it.

“You can look at that,” he said. “If you want to.”

But I didn’t.

“I think you’re sick,” he said, and he told me someone in Muncie was raping old women.

“Isn’t that still going on?” I asked, having heard or read that in Muncie.

“It stopped,” he said.

He parked in front of a door to the prison. He walked inside with me but left me at a window across a small entranceway from the door. A woman behind the window took everything I had with me. Another door was beside the window. A man took be through that door, took my clothes, and told me to take a shower. After the shower a man sprayed my genital area with a white powder. From the shower, I could see the woman at the window.

Next a man gave me a blue prison uniform, socks and jockey shorts, and a pair of black leather boots with tops lower than the tops of combat boots. Then he ushered me into a large wire cage where several men stood on

walkways outside the wire. The walkways were at about the level of my shoulders. As I dressed, the men taunted me.

“Was it worth it?” said one. “That must have been some nice pussy.”

In each cellblock were seven tiers of about forty cells each. People there called the tiers galleries. They called the bottom gallery base and numbered the others from lowest to highest. So the top gallery was sixth gallery. Two such stacks were in each block, but the stacks were face to face in some blocks, and back to back in others. The cells facing each other had bars both in front and in back and had translucent windows behind them on the other side of a narrow walkway. The back-to-back ones faced translucent windows on the other side of space beyond narrow walkways. Space for exercise was in front of the base galleries. The cells were about six feet wide and ten feet deep. Each had a bunk, a toilet, and a sink. Some had wall lockers, and some had small desks. Numbers also designated the cellblocks, but the back-to-back stacks had separate numbers while the ones facing each other shared a number.

From the wire cage, a guard took me to a cell on the sixth gallery of six-block. He left me there with a view of nothing other than the ceiling and the wall with the translucent windows across the space in front of it. The next person I saw was an inmate bringing me lunch in a Styrofoam container.

Everyone who passed refused to speak to me. What I wished to ask, already feeling more desperately claustrophobic than I had in the Branch County jail, was how long I'd be in that situation. But, the next day, I moved to what people there called quarantine.

The cells there were the same, but meals were at tables on base, and I was frequently out of the cell for testing. I guessed the reason for the quarantine designation was that part of its purpose was for the new inmates to adjust to imprisonment before joining the general population.

In line for lunch, I left a gap open between me and the inmate immediately in front of me. The inmate immediately behind me walked around me to fill the gap. He scowled at me as he passed.

“Got a date?” I asked him.

“You need to keep up,” he said scowling back at me again.

A lever at the end of each gallery unlocked all the cells of the gallery at once, but for individual purposes, a guard had to come to the cell to unlock it, and the same was true of letting individuals back into the cells.

After some processing, while I was waiting in front of my cell for a guard to let me back into it, the person in a cell beside mine initiated a conversation. He asked me whether I had any postage stamps. To my replying that I didn't, he asked me whether I had any scrip.



Inmates had cash in accounts at the prison. Scrip was withdrawals in the form of coupons to buy things from the prison store. The pocket cash I brought to prison went into my account, and by then I had some scrip. But I hadn't yet had an opportunity to spend it.

I told the inmate I had some. He told me that, if I loaned him enough for some stamps, he'd repay me at the end of the week when he received some cash in the mail. I loaned him a coupon of the smallest denomination.

He was African American. Soon I learned that African Americans there called European Americans peckerwoods and that inmates of any race called new inmates fish. Of course he didn't repay me.

A library was in quarantine. But it was a rack of books in a cell on base, and the books were in no order I could detect. The only book I found in it that I wished to read was *Walden*. So I read it and wrote a quotation from it on a well of my cell. The prison provided pencils and kites at no charge to the inmates. Kites were forms for writing letters or sending messages to prison officials expressing needs or complaints. The reason people called them kites were that they had lines on them showing where to fold them to send them.

"If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider," said the quotation, "the world would be just the same to me while I had my thoughts about me."

Also in quarantine an attorney came to talk with me. He told me the court had appointed him to handle my appeal. I asked him whether I could appeal the judge's instruction regarding reasonable doubt. He said that, because I didn't object during the trial, I couldn't.

He also told me everyone in prison says he's innocent. I already had learned that many people in prison brag about their crimes, and the attorney's eyes were bloodshot, and he was in a red plaid flannel shirt beneath a tweed sports jacket. So I expected nothing from him, and I heard no more from him.

When my time in quarantine ended, I didn't go to general population. To wait for a cell to open in general population, I went to the sixth gallery of seven-block. There, waiting for a guard to let me into my cell, I talked with a European American in a cell near mine. He was making things of toothpicks and glue. I thought they may have earned him and A in Mrs. Hawley's math class. He told me the lower galleries of seven-block were for inmates needing protection from inmates in general population. He also told me he used a rock to bash in the back of the head of some who'd picked him up while he was hitchhiking. He didn't tell me why he did that or why he was telling me, but he told me a big library was in general population.

Already the prison didn't seem to me to be a correctional institution. So, deciding to correct myself by aligning my personality more closely with society, I used a kite to list in chronological order three hundred books my education told me society especially honored, and then I sent a kite requesting a visit to the library. But, though the library had enough books to fill many cells, neither were they in any order I could discern. I found a copy of the Iliad, and was near the top of my list, but I found no other book on the list. So, because the Old Testament of the Bible was at the top of my list, I sent a kite requesting a visit to the prison's chaplain to ask him for a Bible. But, before I told him my purpose, he offered me a New Testament, and, after I told him my purpose, he said the New Testament was the best he could do. So I let him keep it, but I mentioned that to the inmate with the toothpicks, and he suggest that I send a kite to the block counselor. So I sent him a long kite, telling him of my project, its purpose, and the chaplain's response, and he called me to his office, told me his name was Dave Jamrog, gave me a Bible, and offered me two jobs. He was also the block manager. One mob was to be his clerk The other was to be the block librarian, and I readily accepted.

The total pay for the two jobs was less than \$1.50 per day, but the clerk job was filing less than an hour per day five days a week in the counselor's office, and librarian job require less than two hours per week, and many other considerations were pertinent.

The library, like the one in quarantine, was a rack of books in a cell on base, but it was on wheels, and, each Saturday I pushed it to the gate from base to the small exercise yard only for the seven-block inmates. I let the inmates borrow or exchange books. Then I pushed the rack back to its cell. But my main considerations were that the library cell also had an office desk, that paneling covered the cell's bars, and that meals for the inmates needing protection came to the cell block. So the library cell was both my private office and my private dining room.

But other considerations were that I also had full access both to the general population yard and store and library to the protection yard when the inmates needing protection weren't in it. My cell was on the first gallery, above base and at an end past which none of the protection inmates passed, and a guard unlocked it each morning before breakfast. He left it open, but I had a padlock for it, and some kites I sent to Nancy improved my situation further.

I asked her to use my V.A. disability compensation to buy the books on my list and bring them to me on her visits. Rules prevented her from giving them to me directly. So guards took them when she arrived. But they took them to the library for me to pick them up there. Rules also required that the books be

new, but I asked Nancy to save money by buying books that appeared to be new, and I received all she brought, and during her first visit, we agreed that, because the round trip was more than 360 miles, she shouldn't visit more than once a month. But once a month was often enough to keep up with my reading.

TV's were on shelves between the translucent windows. An earphone jacks for them was in each cell, and the inmate store sold earphones. But I never watched the TV's. I found plenty else to do. I subscribed to *Time* and read every article in every issue. I asked Nancy to bring me my typewriter and typed a twenty-some-page letter to the judge to tell him what I was doing. The inmate store sold reams of typing paper. I argued in the letter to the judge that my project was more correctional than any activity the prison offered and that I could do more if I weren't in prison. But he replied that he'd received my "somewhat lengthy letter" but could do nothing.

I also tried to make my cell a kind of office. Choices for breakfast each morning included individual boxes of cereal. I made a desk and shelves of about a dozen empty cereal cases. But soon I felt silly about that and threw the boxes in the trash.

I also asked Nancy to bring me some clothes, a button-down shirt and khakis for visits with Pat and Ben and some jeans and T-shirts for ordinary wear.

The only problem I had with any inmate in general population was with a short overweight African American working at the library.

"What would you do if I asked you for sex?" he asked following me back to seven-block after I picked up some books.

"I wouldn't do it," I told him.

"What if I forced you?" he said.

"I'd tell my boss," I said. "I'm the counselor's clerk."

"You'd snitch?" he asked.

"You can call it that," I said.

I already had learned that generally inmates detested no one more than snitches, but he ignored me after that.

I also learned that, next to snitches in inmates' detesting were what they called baby rapers and that next were what they called tree jumpers. Baby rapers were child molesters. Tree jumpers were other rapists. But I also learned that generally inmates refrained from asking other inmates why they were there. So I was grateful for that, and I needed that comfort for another way of spending time I thought might be correctional.

A local junior college, Jackson Community College, offered courses inside the walls at no cost to the inmates. Excepting student teaching, all the

courses I lacked for my Bachelor of Arts degree in English and French were at junior college level. I could have graduated by then if I hadn't taken all those courses I didn't need for graduation.

"You know, Bill," Ball States' dean of education once said to me, "You're going to have to graduate some day."

So, to graduate in prison, I only needed to change my major from a teaching major to a major with no teaching requirement.

But, also in prison, I took courses my degree didn't require.

The first course I took was what the college called Comparative Religions, and the Hindu notion that the *atman* is *brahman* seemed so reasonable to me that I asked Nancy to send me a book on *hatha yoga*. I understood from that course that the word "*yoga*" is Sanskrit for "union" and that Hindus use it to refer to realizing that all is one and that thus each separate self, what they call the *atman*, is also the universal self, what they call *brahman*. So, for the remainder of my time in prison, I read in the lotus position and stood on my head for a few minutes each morning before the lights came on.

But I took enough courses I needed for my Ball State B.A. in English and French to receive it in my second year in Jackson. Ball State's registrar rejected my first request for that, but I wrote a long letter delineating how I'd fulfilled the requirements. So the registrar replied that she'd thought I was asking to graduate with a teaching major, made the change, and sent Nancy my diploma.

"Congratulations to my *magna cum laude* beebee," Nancy wrote to me when she received it.

"Beebee", her pronunciation of "baby" before we married, had become her main term of endearment for me, and, if the hearings and trial and despair hadn't distracted me and forced me to miss some classes, I easily could have graduated *summa cum laude*.

But an AB for a course in abnormal psychology kept me from a perfect Jackson Community College GPA, and, because that college refused to make an exception to its Beginning Composition course, only my not taking kept me from also receiving an Associate of Arts Degree while I was in prison.

The AB was because the instructor, saying no one was perfect, gave no A's. I wrote to the college pointing out that its catalog said an A signified excellence, not perfection. But the reply was that the instructor no longer worked for the college but that the grade would stand. I also pointed out that I aced Advanced Composition at Ball State, but the reply that was basically that rules were rules, and I also had another problem with that psychology instructor.

He required reading Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo Nest* and writing a paper on it saying what it meant. I don't remember how the instructor disagreed with my paper, but I wrote to Kesey in care of the publisher and asked him to arbitrate. He replied and sent with a note and a small brown feather, but, basically, his note said only that the book means whatever it means to the reader.

I also had two small problems in a psychology course with the title *Adult, Aging, and Dying*. One was with the instructor. The other was with a student. But neither came anywhere near affecting my grade, and both involved my extending a paper into a twenty-some-page synthesis of the religions course with all the psychology courses I took.

"Not everyone can write a book," said the student to the instructor when I added my paper to the stack on the instructor's desk, and, excepting one point in that paper, the instructor seemed to me to appreciate my efforts.

By then I'd also read the Gospels. So I said Jesus' saying the kingdom of God is within you is like the Hindu notion that the *atman* is *brahman*. The instructor said the original Greek for that means more nearly that the kingdom of God is among you and that Jesus was referring to himself. But, though neither that nor the inmate's remark was the reason, that course was the last college course I took in prison.

"Do you have a degree," asked a clerk looking up at me from a desk behind a window between him and me as I tried to enroll in another course, and, to my replying affirmatively, he said the program wasn't for people with degrees.

But I responded to that by subscribing to more magazines.

I subscribed to *Psychology Today*, and, in other reading, I learned of Sergei Eisenstein's application of dialectical materialism to film montage. Eisenstein, more in accordance with Hegel, called it dialectical idealism, and I synthesized it into my understanding of the yogic purpose Zen koans, that finding sequitur in non sequiturs freed ones mind to accept the unity of all, and also into a theory of aesthetics. So I subscribed to *American Cinematography* and *Vanity Fair*. I read in *Time* that *Vanity Fair* was a new journal of the arts.

But I also was becoming political. What I read of George Herbert Walker Bush in *Time* while he was running against Ronald Reagan to be president suggested to me that he and not Reagan was the dominant personality in winning the Cold War. But he also seemed to me to be trying to impersonate John Wayne and using profanity to do it. So I wrote to him telling him his profanity wasn't helping him. I also read that he and his wife were Presbyterian, but my only reply was a campaign bumper sticker, and more important to me

was that Jamrog confirmed that my ten-to-twenty-year sentence could be six years and four months. He told me at the end of four years of my working for him that I'd have to move to Northside to begin phasing out of prison.

Northside was the medium security part of the prison.

I could see trees and grass through the chain link fence on three sides of the Northside yard. Northside also had doublewide house trailers with double bunks, and I preferred the privacy of a cell. But it also had two cellblocks opening to the yard, and my move was to the sixth gallery of one of those.

So I suspected that Jamrog arranged that for me, and, a few weeks after I moved to Northside, Dewey moved from Ionia to the other Northside cellblock. But my first reprimand in prison was for standing beside its entrance for Dewey to come out of it. A guard told me I was out of place. But the reprimand wasn't official, and I didn't see Dewey much.

The only conversation I remember having with him there regarded Daoism. Trying to explain to him the notion of action with no acting, I told him that leaning a broom against a wall with the least possible slant put the least pressure on the wall. Dewey shrugged and shook his head.

But, though another reason I didn't see him much at Northside was that, because he'd been in prison longer than I, he moved to minimum security before I did, Eddie Parker also came to Northside while I was there. His crimes ordinary required only jail time, but he went to prison for being a repeat offender, and, in warm dry weather at Northside, I read in the yard, and that summer I wore out a Russian dictionary reading *Anna Karenina*, *Crime and Punishment* and the *Brothers Karamazov*, and *Eugene Onegin*. So that's how Eddy found me, but I have no other memory of seeing him there.

But inmate who made things of toothpicks also came to Northside while I was there, and I remember standing in line with him outside the Northside dining hall for lunch. Part of my effort to correct myself was to stop eating meat, not for my health but for compassion. The toothpick inmate asked me whether he could have my portion of meat. I told him that would do as much harm as eating it myself, and I remember nothing more of him.

So moving to Northside didn't improve my social life, and, though, from the beginning of my reading project I wrote to Nancy telling her of what I read, in reply to my typing Wordsworth's *Prelude* and sending it to her, she said my letters were too long and that she didn't have time to read them, and, during a visit, she told me my tan from reading in the yard wasn't what it would be from a beach, and she also told me the Monza's throttle didn't work properly and that Barb's boyfriend told her it needed a new carburetor. I already knew both that the throttle didn't work properly and that the reason was that the

throttle linkage was loose, and I told her that, but she told me he was a mechanic and knew what he was doing. His name was Mark. I'd met him in Muncie and told him the Monza resembled Ferraris of the sixties, and that literally took him aback, but I didn't argue then or with Nancy against him.

Before I moved to Northside, Nancy also sold the Volkswagen, and she also sold the Sportster, to Don Calioinan, and, after I moved to Northside, she sold the trailer, bought a house in Kalamazoo with her brother Rob, joined the Church of the Latter Day Saints, and brought two of the kids Mormons call elders and missionaries to visit me.

"The Bible's deep," replied one of them to my telling him I'd read it.

"A lot of black people here," said the other.

Also while I was at Northside, Nancy told me in a letter that she was pregnant. She didn't tell me who the father was, but she said she wouldn't marry him. I suspected he was Spencer, but I told her I didn't blame her and asked her to bring me a copy of the Book of Mormon. She brought me one and also a copy of *Pearl of Great Price*, and I read both.

Immediately lear to me was that the language of the Book of Mormon was an inept effort to emulate the language of the King James version of the Bible. But introductory pages said Joseph Smith translated it from gold plates he found in New York in 1823 and that he did it by way of an Urim and a Thummin he found with them. I pointed out to Nancy that King James's scholars translated the Bible in 1611 and asked her why an 1823 New England translation by any means would emulate a 1611 Old England translation by scholars.

"Scholarship has nothing to do with it," she replied.

But, to me, the question was enough reason not to join the Mormon Church. So she again asked me for a divorce. She told me the church was refusing to give her what it called the patriarchal blessing. She said the church didn't tell her why but that she thought my refusal to join was the deciding one and that she thought divorcing me might eliminate the problem. But, asking her whether the church believed in divorce, I accepted her request.

During her next visit, she asked me for permission to sell her engagement ring. During her next visit, she told me the diamond had a flaw in it and that she couldn't sell it for much. Soon after that she stopped bringing me books. Soon after that she stopped visiting me.

The last book she sent me was a high school history text. She told me it was from repository for school books no longer in use to. She said she had to climb a pile of books to find it. She said she feared doing that might cause a miscarriage.

But, by then, I'd read all the books on my list, added more to it, and also read them. My reason for adding the history book was the same as my original for the list, and so was my asking her to send a copy of Emily Post's book *Etiquette*. But I also asked her for a book on oenology and two books on ballet. One of the ballet books a history. The other was a compilation of the stories in some of the most famous. I rationalized that the books on oenology and ballet accorded with what I understood people to call cultural. But what drew my attention to ballet was an article about a sixteen-year-old New York New York City Ballet ballerina, and I also wrote some letters to her and a poem about her I enclosed with one of my letters.

Though I knew the prison stamped its return address on mail inmates sent, I don't remember how far I thought through the question of how people in Jackson or in New York might respond on behalf of the ballerina, considering why I was, but I received no response from anyone regarding those letters.

When Nancy stopped visiting me, she said Barb would bring Pat and Ben to see me. Once Barb did, but, I wrote to her asking her to bring me books, and she replied that she didn't know how I'd had the audacity to ask Nancy to do it, and, after that, no one visited me. But I responded to receiving no more books I found another way to spend my time. I decided to write this book.

But, then having little reason to write anything and thinking of both my Zen aesthetic theory and Finnegan's Wake, I decided to make it experimental. I tried omitting articles and other small words I didn't think were semantically necessary. But, when it reached two thousand pages, not seeing how it fit my aesthetic theory and seeing no reason anyone would read it, I threw it in the trash. But by then I'd moved to Southside, the minimum security part of the prison, and there I made a friend.

Southside had two cell blocks and no trailers, but, one day, as I left my cellblock on my way to lunch, a big man with long hair and a long beard was also leaving it for that purpose, and he spoke to me.

"Hey," he said. "How are you doing?"

I looked at him but didn't recognize him.

"You were in my Comparative Religions class," he said.

During that course he was thin with short hair and no beard. But, when he told me that, I remembered him. His name was Mike Mead, and he spent all of his yard time walking around the perimeter of the yard. So I began to do that with him, and, though I didn't tell him what my crime was, he told me his. He said he was a Vietnam veteran, that his father was a policeman, and that, after returning from Vietnam, he lived in a van in a gravel pit. He said that once, while he was talking with his father at his father's house, his father took a pistol



from a cabinet, that he pointed it at Mike's head and told him to stop living in the gravel pit, and that he took the pistol away from his father and shot him, killing him. He said a court called him guilty but mentally ill and sent him to prison with no release date. He said his release was contingent on psychologists declaring him sane, but that he refused to talk with any psychologist.

He also told me green demons with long tails came to his cell. I began to tell him of Gregory Bateson's double-bind theory of Schizophrenia. I'd read of it in the main text for the abnormal psychology course I took. Basically it's the notion that the cause of the schism from reality is finding oneself in a damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't situation. But that was the only time Mike seemed to me to be angry. He also told me the prison was confiscating his veterans disability compensation and had emptied the bank account he'd used for direct deposit of it. But he said that much more calmly than he responded to what I told him of Schizophrenia. So I said no more to him about it, and none of that kept me from liking him and thinking him a friend, and I still think and feel he was. But, at southside, I also interacted with two other inmates somewhat frequently. One said he was a writer and showed a short story he'd hand-written.

"My writing asks 'what if?'" he said.

I found it hardly comprehensible. His style wasn't as far from tradition as mine was in my first effort to write this book, but his main variance was in grammar and spelling. I told him it needed work.

"That's what editors are for," he said, obviously angrily, but he didn't seem to me to be as angry as Mike seemed to me to be when I spoke to him regarding schizophrenia, and neither stop associating with me.

The other inmate with whom I was associating painted with oils in his cell. He offered to lend me some magazines picturing naked women. I accepted the offer. I stopped masturbating when I entered prison, but my first day in Southside, I drew a pencil sketch of a rear view of woman bending over with her feet wide apart. As I was doing that, a guard came to my cell to search it for what the prison called contraband. Southside cells had both a wall locker and a small desk. So I threw the sketch into my wall locker. Immediately upon entering the cell, the guard opened the wall locker and looked down at the sketch. But he said nothing of the drawing.

"You're alright," he said, and he immediately left the cell, and, when the inmate loaned me the magazines, I resumed masturbating, and, also at Southside, I also wrote a short story about a women enjoying having her body, specifying her feeling that her colon wasn't entirely empty.

But also at Southside I joined a therapy group for sex offenders. It was another step in phasing me out of prison. It met in a room at an end the first gallery of my cellblock. Dewey was also in it, with about a dozen others. I don't remember seeing Dewey in Southside before that. I don't know why.

I told the therapist I thought psychologists of our time would diagnose Jesus as paranoid schizophrenic. He said religion was a crutch. He also said he liked opera. I told him I liked Wagner's incidental music. I whistled parts of the Lohengrin prelude and the Tannhauser overture. He said voice was more important.

A female therapist joined several sessions to observe his performance. I thought she was a little overweight below her waste, but I generally liked her appearance, especially her big green eyes. She wept during one of the sessions. During the first session after her last session, the therapist she was evaluating told the group an emotional woman with a pretty face shouldn't be in a supervisory position. Thinking he shouldn't be in his position, I stopped attending the sessions.

Another therapist interviewed me to ask me why. I told him I didn't think I needed to be cured of my religion, and, though I don't remember why or what I said about it, I also referred to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association*. It was one of the books I'd added to the original reading project.

"The DSM has a lot of errors," he said.

"It's basically a dictionary," I said. "If you see symptoms that don't fit a DSM diagnosis, can't you just write another diagnosis and call it something else? Otherwise you won't be able to communicate with your colleagues. That's how language in general and dictionaries in particular work. How can we use language to communicate if we can't agree on terms?"

"Psychiatrists wrote the DSM," said the therapist. "I'm a psychologist."

He also asked me to talk with the other therapist to tell him what I thought. I told him I'd been talking with him through all those group sessions. No one asked me to return to therapy.

But I decided to become a psychologist, to tell the entire profession what I thought and to be more therapeutic than I understood psychologist to be. I read that the reputation of the psychology department at the University of Michigan was second only Stanford's. I wrote for a catalog. Learned from it that admission required taking the Miller Analogies Test, I wrote to the organization administering it and acquired a book about it and some practice tests. My scores on the practice tests were extraordinarily high.

One afternoon, from the Southside yard, I saw smoke rising on the far side of the Southside cellblocks. A guard with a shotgun was standing on the roof of one of them. Other guards herded us back to our cells. Northside inmates were rioting. I and the other Southside inmates were in our cells for weeks. *Time* reported on the riot.

I wrote a letter to the Civil Liberties Union complaining of being punished for what inmates in the other side of the prison were doing. I received a reply, but it said the situation didn't affect enough people to justify the Civil Liberty Union's involvement.

I also wrote to *Time*. An article in it said inmates reported that knives were easy to obtain in the prison. I said in my letter that I'd been there five years at every level of security in every part of the prison and saw no knives there other than table knives. I also received a reply to that letter, but, though it thanked me for my letter, basically, it only said *Time* considers all reports.

One night, during that increase in security, I felt pain in my lower abdomen. It increased until I felt as though everything in it was coming apart. I considered shouting for help but instead I waited for a guard to pass on his regular round. I didn't know how the guard could help, but he let me out of my cell, took me down to the guard office on base, and gave me a pass and directions to the prison's infirmary. It opened to Southside.

Two men at a desk there told me to sit on a gurney, asked me a few questions, told me they thought I had a kidney stone, said a doctor would be there in a couple of hours, and returned to the desk. After about a half hour of sitting and lying on the gurney trying to find a relatively painless position, suddenly the pain stopped. So I left the gurney, went to the desk, and held my hands out to my sides to indicate my surprise. That seemed to me to surprise them as much as it surprised me, but, telling me the kidney stone probably had passed they gave me something like paper towels or napkins, told me to use them to try to catch the kidney stone when I urinated, and sent me back to the cellblock. I never saw any kidney stone, but neither did the pain return.

A breakfast during that security increase included raw eggs. I knew it by cracking one of them, but, after the return to minimum security, Mike told me he didn't crack one until several days later and that then the shell was full of maggots. Also during that security increase, conversations between an inmate in a cell beside mine and the inmate in a cell on the other side of his drove me to fantasizing about dragging him into some woods and chopping him into little pieces. In one conversation he complained about feces on his penis after sodomizing another inmate. I had never before imagined killing anyone.

## Chapter 26

### Regression

Soon after the return to minimum security, I learned that another requirement for transitioning out of prison was having a job. I hadn't had one since leaving seven-block and refused to accept one. I told the assistant to the deputy warden for Southside that I was working toward what I'd do after prison. I told him any job available to me in prison would distract from that. I also pointed out that other inmates were begging for jobs.

He asked me what I was doing. I told him of my reading and said I was working toward becoming a cultural anthropologist. Then, considering the breadth of my reading and that Gregory Bateson, the formulator of the double-bind theory of schizophrenia, was a cultural anthropologist, then I was thinking that more appropriate for me.

"The hole is where we put cultural anthropologists," said the assistant deputy warden..

He didn't send me to the hole, but he sent me to the deputy warden. The deputy warden told me that, if I persisted in refusing to accept a job, he'd have to send me to Marquette. He was referring to a maximum security prison in Marquette, a city on Michigan's upper peninsula, more than four hundred miles north of Jackson.

"My kids won't be able to visit me there," I said, though then neither did I have reason to think they ever would anywhere.

"Alright," said the deputy warden. "But we're going to have to do something. Let me think about it."

But, the next day, a guard came to my cell and told me to pack to go to Marquette. So I walked out of the cellblock, down the street to the building where I'd talked with the Deputy Warden, into the building, and past about a half dozen people working at desks. But I stopped at the door to the deputy warden's office and spoke from the doorway.

"You told me I wouldn't go to Marquette," I said.

"Get him out of here," he said from his desk.

But I returned to my cell with no obstruction in either direction. So, knowing that walk was far beyond what the prison called out of place, I wondered why. But, a few minutes after I returned to my cell, a guard came to it and locked it, and, that evening, my supper came to my cell, and so did my breakfast next morning. But I ate neither, and, less than two hours after breakfast, a guard came to my cell, told me the block counselor wanted to see me, and led me downstairs and opened the door to the office

“Hey, Dave,” I said. “How you doing?”

Jamrog was sitting at the desk.

“Good, Bill,” he said smiling.

But then his smile disappeared.

“But I’m not so sure about you,” he said. “Sit down.”

Then he asked me whether I was on a hunger strike.

“I’m only fasting,” I said.

But his reply to that was that he’d have to move me to base for the guards to be able to keep an eye on me for my health. I understood that he understood that I valued my privacy too much to accept that, and he confirmed that by changing the subject to my refusing to accept a job. He asked me what kind of job I’d accept, and, understanding that to be an opening to congenial negotiation, I told him I’d accept a job on the movie crew.

Each Saturday evening, a crew showed 16 millimeter feature films in the open space on the base level of my cell block. Partly because of my Zen, Eisenstein, Hegal theory of aesthetics, I watched all of them. Using no proper nouns, I tried to express my theory to Dave in cultural anthropological terms and told him of my operating 16 millimeter projectors in Afghanistan. He told me he could arrange it. But he also said I’d have to wait for a vacancy, and then he extended his negotiation. He asked me whether I’d accept a job with the dish crew in the dining hall if he arranged for me not to have to wash dishes but only to carry them to the serving line and carry the empty trays back to the dish room.

“Alright,” I said, understanding that I couldn’t reasonably expect a better outcome, but I also grabbed a tiny bit more from the negotiation.

“Thanks, Dave,” I said. “But I’m still going to finish my fast. I was already thinking about doing it.”

He agreed to that, but, for lack of will, it lasted but five days, and, a few days after I began the dish job, an inmate washing pots and pans asked me how I got the easiest job and told me I’d better watch myself. So I didn’t go to work the next day, and the next day a guard told me the kitchen supervisor wanted to talk with me, and, considering the danger of snitching, I refused to tell her my reason. But the next day, she called me to the dining hall again and told me not

to worry about the problem, and I didn't. I felt I could trust her, and, when I returned to work, the inmate who'd threatened me apologized, and I already was enjoying working with the others on the crew.

"Do you still kiss?" the inmate supervising the crew asked me as we ate lunch before the other inmates arrived, and another crew member at the table asked me why I drank so much milk and whether it made my sperm yellow, and both were African American.

But I felt no threat from either. The supervisor lacked several of his front teeth, and the other reminded me of Hummer. So, considering the general misfortune of being in prison, I accepted that as genuine curiosity and congeniality and perhaps some legitimate curiosity, and I also developed a little conscientiousness regarding my job. I suggested to the dining hall manager that I rearrange the racks from which the inmates obtained their trays and cups and flatware. While a gap was always in the line between the racks and the serving line, the inmates stood in line outside the building. So I suggested arranging the racks for them to pick up their trays and utensils from both sides.

"You can try it," said the dining hall manager.

But the inmates' complaints about changing their routine were the main subject of their conversation as they went through the line for the first lunch after the change. So, for supper, I returned the racks to how they'd been, and soon I left that job. But the reason wasn't that Jamrog was true to his word.

He was, and the movie crew member inmate I was to replace began training me. But the training was to be two Saturdays, and I was to remain on the dish crew two more weeks. I wasn't to join the movie crew until after the release of the inmate who was training me. Overcrowding was permitting many early releases, and part of the reason I didn't see Dewey at Southside before I joined the therapy group was that he was working in the prison's print shop. So Dewey was Gone. His supervisor had recommended him for early release.

I had no reason to expect a recommendation from the kitchen supervisor, but, that week, for whatever reason, I went before the parole board. It was two men and one woman in a small room with the woman sitting behind a desk, the men sitting on each side of it, and me sitting in front of it. The woman asked me why I quit the therapy group. I told her what I told the psychologist who asked me that question, that I didn't think I needed to be cured of my religion.

"At least you tried," she said, and the week I was to join the movie crew I learned that the board had approved the parole, and the next week was my release.

I made a going away gift for the dish room supervisor. He rolled his own cigarettes and was using a tin tobacco box to try to keep them dry while he washed dishes. Thinking the screw cap on the container of the Right Guard stick deodorant I was using would be more waterproof, I scraped the identifying markings from the tube, bought a pack of the cigarettes the supervisor also sometimes smoked, filled the tube with them, and gave that to him. He grinned and thanked me, and I shook hands with him, told him I'd enjoyed working with him, and also shook hands with each of the others of the crew.

But I nearly missed my release date. More than five years earlier I had bought a trunk like a footlocker at the inmate store. The night before my release date I packed it, and, the next day, I sat on my bunk waiting for further directions. But, by suppertime, I'd received none. So, during supper, I went down to the guard office and asked as politely as I could what was the situation.

My reason for not going down earlier was that I didn't wish to make trouble on that crucial day. But, with a look of concern and apology, the guard asked me why I didn't ask earlier and picked up a telephone. I didn't answer his question, but, a few minutes later, a guard drove me to Jackson's Greyhound station and bought me a ticket to Kalamazoo.

Sally and Denny took Dewey in on his release, but Sally told the parole officer that, because I asked that she not visit me in prison, she didn't think I wanted her to do that for me. My shame was why I asked that, and I extended it to everyone other than Nancy and Pat and Ben visit me in prison and thought I'd made my reason plain. But I couldn't explain that to her while I was processing out of prison, and I preferred not to ask Jerry.

While I was in seven-block, my mother had a stroke. Jerry promised always to take care of her, but, while I was in Northkside, he quit trying. So Sally placed her in a nursing home. Before her stroke, a government agency had helped her buy the house where I slept the night of the crime, and Jerry was still living in it. But, after our mother's stroke, he married a daughter of the the farmer for whom I'd picked strawberries, and I not to ask him to new wife to tolerate my moving in with them, and my parole didn't permit my leaving the state. But the guard who drove me to the bus station offered an alternative.

Looking at a form, I'd have to sign before he gave me the ticket, he asked me where I wished to go and told my choices were Coldwater and Kalamazoo. So, expecting Nancy to feel more responsible for me than would anyone in Coldwater, I asked him to send me Kalamazoo. I supposed the prison had Nancy's address because of her having corresponded with me.

I don't remember withdrawing the cash from my prison account, but I had enough cash to use a payphone. So I used one to try to call Nancy. Rob

answered and told me she didn't wish to speak with me, but he said he'd see what he could do and would call back in an hour, and I had a use for that time. I left my trunk in a locker at the bus station and went for my first free walk in more than five years.

But I was in the clothes Nancy had bought me for visits. They were a pink and white plaid shirt and bell-bottom trousers. Once an inmate serving food in the Southside dining hall called me Howdy Doody, but I thought those clothes were high fashion. But, in Kalamazoo, young woman on the street looked at the bottoms of my trousers and then looked into my eyes, with a sort of apparent wonder. I hadn't considered that fashions change in five years.

But a strip joint was in that block and distracted me from those thoughts. No one had yet told me that a parole stipulation was that I drink no alcohol. So I went inside. But the bar was dark, and no one was dancing. A woman told me I was welcome, but I left the bar and walked back to the bus station, and, nearly exactly an hour after Rob told me he'd call back in an hour, the payphone rang. So I answered it, and he had solved my problem. He told me he'd called my parole officer, that the parole officer found me a place to stay that night in Coldwater, and said he'd take me there.

Conversation was sparse during that drive, but he took me to a motel across Division Street from where my mother was living when I returned from Afghanistan. It wasn't operating as a motel, and I remembered that I once found Rick Speigle unconscious on the floor of the house that had its office in it when it did and that I couldn't wake him up. Supposing he was drunk, I left him there. But that night, I slept there in what had been a motel room, and, the next morning, I carried my footlocker to the parole officer's office.

I told him of my plan to study psychology at the University of Michigan. He telephoned the Salvation Army shelter in Ann Arbor and bought me another bus ticket. I spent that night at the shelter, but the next day I rented a room in a house a woman was sharing with two big dogs and two men younger than I. The rent would be weekly.

A friend of hers worked for a cable television company, and, at no cost to her, he'd connected her television to every cable television channel. So, as the dogs wandering about the house while she and her other two tenants were at work, I sat in the living room watching the Playboy Channel. But I also went to the Ann Arbor office of the Michigan Department of Social Services.

I had no notion of how I could pay another week's rent, but, a few days later, I was living in a room in the basement of a Tudor mansion less than a block from the University of Michigan's main campus, with the state of Michigan paying my rent.



I took the Graduate Record Examinations and the Miller Analogies Test. I scored above the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile in every area of the GRE and in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the MAT, much higher than my scores on the practice test. But the university rejected my request for admission. So, though I don't remember how I arranged the appointment, I spoke with the dean of its psychology department, and, in his office I told him some of my thoughts regarding Freud's notions of repression and Rank's notion of the birth trauma. But he picked up a computer graph on green-bar paper with holes in its edges for a dot matrix printer, and, holding one end of it, he dropped the rest of it in front of me.

"We don't study Rank here," he said. "This is what we do."

So I started looking for a job. But, preferring not to lie, I answered honestly the question of whether I'd ever been convicted of a crime. So all of those requests of mine also failed.

"You didn't cut her up or anything like, did you?" asked one prospective employer, but my negative reply made no practical difference.

A woman living with her college age son and daughter invited me to dinner with her and them, but I had little to say to them and didn't know how to answer their questions, and neither had I much to say to the other occupants of the basement.

One of them used grow lights to grow plants in the living room we all shared, and one night police brought home another. The one growing the plants told me the police told her they found the other on the street naked. But that woman had gray hair, and I thought the landlord let the one with the plants live there free of rent to watch the tenants. A younger female also lived there. But I thought she was mentally deficient and to young to be living alone.

My room was small, but I used my trunk as a desk and sat on the floor to type. When the landlord interviewed me before approving the social services request, he was sitting at a table he used as a desk. Excepting the chair in which he sat, the only chair on the other side of the table. As I sat in it he asked me whether I knew anything about computers. He said he was thinking of automating his business. So I went to the Ann Arbor public library and read a book about computers. I didn't understand what I was reading, but I typed several pages summarizing my misunderstanding of it and took it to the landlord. He thanked me for it but never again talked with me.

I called Nancy to ask whether I could see Pat and Ben. She replied that she'd take them to Sally's and Denny's house. They'd bought a big Victorian house in Coldwater. I hitchhiked there. Nancy let me use the Monza to take them for a drive. I drove them to the Irish Hills, took them to the top of one of

the towers, and put a quarter into one of the telescopes for them to look out at the hills.

The Monza plainly was no longer new, but I told Nancy in Coldwater I'd like to buy it from her when I found a job. I'd hoped, when I bought it, to keep it long enough for it to be an antique. But Nancy told me I didn't want it.

On my way back to Ann Arbor, a man picked me up in a 1969 Shelby Mustang. He drove the curves of the Irish Hills at more than ninety miles per hour. The car easily held the road, and the speed didn't keep me from enjoying the day lilies in a ditch between Saline and US-23, where I had to turn north.

The basement of the house had a common kitchen. The Department of Social Services gave me food stamps, but the supermarket nearest to the house was about a mile from it. I walked there for groceries, but I quickly found that I wasn't the only person eating the food I put in the refrigerator. So I stopped keeping my groceries in the kitchen, and, excepting eggs I kept on the sill of my room's only window, I bought no food requiring refrigeration.

But, after a few days of that, a man knocked on the door of my room and told me I couldn't keep food in it. I told him why I was doing that, but his reply was that he'd keep an eye out but that I had to stop doing. So, not trusting that, instead of stopping, I wrote to Kay and asked her to ask Doyle to hire me, and she found an alternative I preferred. She replied that Willard owned some joints and would give me a job.

I don't know how she knew I'd worked for Willard, but my parole officer made an exception to the rule that I not leave Michigan. So I told the woman who grew the plants that I was leaving. She said she'd tell the landlord, and, the next day, and the man who'd told me I couldn't keep food in my room knocked on the door of my room again and told me I didn't have to leave. But I did. I hitchhiked to Montgomery.

I remember using some of the little money I had for repair of my typewriter and that the repair person restored it nearly to new condition. But I don't remember what I did with it or my trunk, and neither do I remember how I knew Kay and Doyle playing the state fair in Montgomery, but I found Kay there, and she helped me find Willard

He was in Link's cookhouse. Carnies called cookhouses food concessions that traveled with rides and offered meals at a discount to the ride workers carnies called ride boys. Though I remembered that Willard had worried about his weight while I was working for him more than a decade and a half earlier, if Kay hadn't pointed him out to me, I wouldn't have recognized him. He'd gained a lot of weight. But Kay left me with him, and he bought me a cup of coffee and told me he needed someone to take care of his office.

It was in a fifth-wheel trailer with partitions separating it from the overhang and a space between it and the rear doors. A counter the width of the trailer and about the height of a bar was against the front partition. A bench the width of the trailer was against the rear partition. The counter served as a desk. The bench served as my bed. On it was a foam rubber pad with cloth covering.

My job was to collect the cash from Willard's joints and account for it. I counted it with the agents on the midway, wrote the amounts in a spiral note pad, carried the cash back to the office in a cloth apron, and copied the numbers into a spiral notebook. During each spot I gave draws to the agents and the sucker help and also recorded that in the spiral notebook. At the end of each spot I used an electric desk calculator to calculate the pay still due to them and paid it to them. Willard's crew called me his money man, but I also transported them from spot to spot in an old brown Ford Econoline van.

At the end of the first spot, I bought some sheets and pillow cases for the bench and a couple of plastic lawn chairs for sitting outside the office in my spare time. But I'd resumed drinking beer a few days before I left Ann Arbor. So I also used a lot of my pay to drink beer with Willard's crew, drove the van drunk, and used it to take his crew to bars after the show closed.

One night, returning to the lot with some of them after the bars closed. I backed over a junction box, and Link saw me do that. So he came to the van and told me junction boxes cost a hundred dollars. They were wooden boxes lying on the midway to distribute electricity to the rides and joints.

Then he turned and walked back to the trailer in which he and his wife resided on the road. But, after parking the van, I walked to the trailer, found him sitting with his wife at a table outside it, and dropped a hundred-dollar bill on the table. Then, saying nothing, I turned and walked away.

"Did you give Rod Link a hundred dollars?" asked Willard the next morning.

I nodded, and he said nothing more of that. But I never knew how he calculated my pay, and, though I knew he seldom drank alcohol and disapproved of drunkenness, I suspected that he gave me a little extra cash when he paid me at the end of that spot. After I paid the others for each spot, he paid me out of what remained on the counter, and we never talked of how much that might be.

Two Joes were then working for Willard. His crew called the larger Big Joe. The other was from Du Quoin, Illinois, but his crew and other called him Kokomo Joe. He had worked for Willard much longer than had Big Joe.

The Illinois State Fair in Springfield was one of the spots Willard ordinarily booked with Link, and, some of those years, Willard's crew slept at the home of a couple older than Willard. They had a swimming pool, and one

night I jumped into the pool in my clothes, and Big Joe jumped in after me and dunked me several times, letting me up hardly long enough for me to take a breath and kept that up long enough for me to fear that he might drown me. He kept it up until the owners of the house came out of. But they only told me I shouldn't swim in my clothes, and that bothered me more than nearly drowning.

Willard's birthday was there that year. The owners of the house were having a yard sale. I found among what they were selling some cloth flour bags. I bought some for Willard and told his crew and him they were for his money. He carried it to this car each night in paper bags. He didn't laugh or use them.

Also in Springfield a female town mark with long black hair and big green eyes and a shape one might call lithe worked in Willard's milk can joint handing the balls to the marks. I thought her ideal, and she went to Houston with us. I took her to see the Houston Ballet perform Romeo and Juliet. She told me she didn't sleep with anyone who didn't take her to dinner. After the ballet, I took her to a Denny's and from there to a motel room Bobby and Nancy, two of Willard's concession agents, were sharing with her. I don't remember the girl's name, but I thought she resembled the picture on the ballet program of the ballerina who danced Juliet, and, pointing to it, I told Bobby and Nancy that. They left the room. I took her to bed.

She moved her hips more quickly than I thought was ordinary. So I stopped and looked into her eyes. Then she stopped moving, but I ejaculated and enjoyed watching her walking naked to the bathroom. Still I thought her appearance was ideal.

At Denny's, Willard came in and looked at us, but he didn't speak to us. He bought a coffee to go and left. But, the next day, while I was at the counter working on the books while he sat on the bench beside a plush salesman, he mentioned her to the salesman.

"But she looks nice," he said. "Doesn't she Billy?"

I wasn't listening to their conversation. So I don't remember anything else he said of her. But I guessed to whom he was referring.

"Yeah," I replied.

But Big Joe also mentioned her to me, and he wasn't at Denny's.

"You don't have to wine and dine them," he said.

I didn't reply to him, but that was also the last time I took her anywhere. She told me she liked "everything cowboy". Joe wore cowboy boots. She went from me to him.

But she ignored a Springfield town mark who wore a straw cowboy hat and also traveled to Houston. He had a huge crush on her and bought her a dozen blue roses. But I doubted that he'd seen or read *The Glass Menagerie*.

We also played the Ionia Free Fair, and, before we opened, I found Cheryl Hurd in relatively large and new townhouse in a suburb of Grand Rapids. I don't remember how I knew she was there, but I spent that night with her. A member of Willard's crew was with me, but I left him in the van.

"I'm shaking," she said when she answered her doorbell.

She had gained weight. She said the reason was that a psychiatrist had prescribed lithium. She didn't say why, but I had reason to suspect that she used a lot of amphetamines. So I suspected that the psychiatrist prescribed them because of that, but she also said she was administrative assistant for an appliance repair company, that the townhouse was part of her pay for that, and that her boss had bought some DeLoreans as an investment. We talked until about 3:00 a.m. before going to bed. But that was because of my timidity. Kip was living with her, but, though I don't know why, I didn't see him there until we rose for the day. He had a computer and showed me some graphics on it, but I didn't understand what he was showing me, and also had gained much weight.

I sent Cheryl some roses from Ionia, but they weren't blue. They were Sonias. The reason they weren't red was that I didn't wish to seem too romantic. I didn't see her again before we moved on.

Our next spot was in Du Quoin, Illinois. It was also a state fair, but what distinguished it from the fair in Springfield was that the fairgrounds were also the home of the World Trotting Derby. In Chicago, on our way to Du Quoin, Jack Tice, Willard's roughie, accidentally exited I-94 and led the trucks through a Puerto Rican ghetto. Everyone in the van was drinking, and a blonde agent whose name was Dawn was drinking Reunite wine from a bottle and said she needed to use a restroom. So I stopped at a bar. Only she went into the bar, but the other trucks continued on. So didn't see them again until we reached the fairgrounds in DuQuoin.

"Do you have the van keys?" asked Jack.

"Yeah," I said.

"Let me see 'em," he said, and, putting them in a pocket, he turned away.

I supposed that was because I didn't stay with the trucks, but he returned them to me at the end of that spot.

A go-kart was about a half mile from the fairgrounds. The night before the show opened, some of Willard's crew went there the night before the show opened, and I went with them. We rented go-carts, and I pushed the accelerator as far down as I could and kept it that way until I needed to stop. As I passed another of Willard's crew on a curve, he ran over the front of my cart and one of my legs. So both he and I stopped. He stopped to ask me whether I was alright.

“God damnit!” I said. “Just give me a minute.”

In less than two minutes, I continued to race, but the track owner evicted the other member of the crew from the track.

In a biker bar in Birmingham, I dropped a bundle of hundred-dollar bills on the floor. I exchanged my pay I didn't spend for hundred-dollar bills from the receipts and carried them in my front right trouser pocket. I'd carried my cash that way since working for Willard for Bob Bradburn.

“Nobody's getting that close to my stuff,” said Willard.

Most male carnies also carried their cash that way, but neither did anyone other than my friends get close to my hundred-dollar bills. I picked up to few, but my friends picked the others. Bobby and Nancy picked up most, and Nancy told me I should be more careful. But Big Joe picked up one or two, and, at the end of the season, he gave me more evidence of honor among thieves.

He rode with me to Phenix City. On the way he showed me a .22 caliber pistol and told me he'd stolen it to make money during the off season. In the middle of the night, I stopped to refuel, but the only filling station at the freeway exit where I stopped wasn't open, and the engine died and wouldn't restart. So we slept in the van that night, and Joe didn't rob be. But also remarkable was that, when the filling station opened, the van restarted before I refueled it.

In Phenix City, the crew spent an evening in a bar a sister of Willard's owned. Her name was Patricia, and I also learned then that she was Jack's wife, and we spent the night on their living room floor. But, though Willard paid me a bonus for the season, he gave me no indication that he had a job for me there. So I shook hands with him, thanked him, and bade him farewell.

“I thought you were going to stay here,” he said.

But he gave me no indication of what I might do there. So I hitch hiked back Michigan. But I didn't go directly to Coldwater. I hitchhiked to Grand Rapids and spent another night with her. But neither did I stay there.

A 1973 Ford Torino in her front yard. It was a plain green sedan one might think was a salesman's company car, but she told the reason it was so nondescript was that she'd used it to run drugs from Texas to Florida, and she also sold it to me for two hundred dollars and also told me Sherry Beers, the girl with whom I skated at Connie's birthday party, was in Coldwater and managing the Cadet Motor Inn. I don't remember how our conversation turned to her, but I drove back to Coldwater and, that evening, found her at the Cadet.

Liking the short style of her nearly blonde hair and the shape of her buttocks in her jeans I kissed her. Her kiss wasn't much of a kiss, and I thought she may have been trying to discourage me from kissing her again, and she also

told me she'd married and had four daughters. But we began spending a lot of time together, and I quickly learned that she simply couldn't relax her mouth.

Days she was Regional Supervisor for a convenience store chain. So she worked the evening shift at the motel, and a kitchen was behind the front desk. So she and I drank a lot of beer together in that kitchen, and, after that, we spent some time in bed in one of the rooms. She drank Miller Light.

But I again went to Social Services, and Social Services sent me to the Southern Michigan Bank to talk with someone managing some rental properties, and he arrange for an apartment for me, an efficiency apartment on the second floor of a house Branch's Department Store owned on Marshal Street, and I also found a job. It was weekend third shift cashier at the Clark filling station. I'd bought cigarettes for Nancy there, but then it was I Sinclair station.

Also, at some time during all that, I told Sherry I was in prison and why. But, for that, I took her to Oran's, a bar in Union City Chris Seller's brother Oran owned. She wept, when I told her that. But not for the victim or for making the mistake of liking me. She plainly wept for me.

The apartment had no furniture, but I bought a used twin size mattress and box springs and retrieved from Nancy the books I'd returned to her after reading them in prison, and while I was doing that, she asked me whether I'd also like to have our Afghan carpet and our stereo equipment, and she also had the red bedspread from the apartment in Muncie, and also let me have that. So, after that, Sherry came to the apartment after her shifts at the motel, One night Cheryl stopped by while she was there, but I didn't answer the doorbell, and Sherry didn't ask me who I thought rang it.

But one night I went to the motel while she wasn't there, and she asked me why I did that. Her friend Judy was working that night. She worked there two nights each week, to give Sherry those nights off, and, while I was there while Sherry wasn't, she sat on the kitchen table with her feet on a chair while I sat in front of her in a chair with its back to the wall and crossed her legs in a way giving me a view up her skirt. She was in a navy blue pleated skirt and knee socks.

I didn't look. But, the next night, Sherry asked me why I was there and told me Roger Berry had been her husband and that she divorced him because he was having a sexual relationship with a daughter of the owner of Coldwater's Ford dealership. I thought that may have explained why Roger took a swing at me at the K&M bar when I was there with Hummer, but that conversation changed nothing between Sherry and me.

I bought a bottle of sherry wine, wrote a poem for her, poured some of the wine on the paper, and burned its edges to make it resemble parchment, and,

the next night, when she came to the apartment, I gave her the poem and shared the remainder of the wine with her.

But, one afternoon while she was at the apartment, my parole officer rang its doorbell. I didn't know who was ringing it, but I answered it and I brought him upstairs, and, while I was downstairs, Sherry went into the bathroom, and she stayed there longer than I thought her using the toilet required. But she came out before the parole officer left.

"This is my boss," I said, "Sherry."

"Sorry," she said after he left. "I got tired of sitting in there."

One night Billy Kling came to the Clark station. I didn't recognize him. He had a big beard. But he recognized me and told me he owned some carnival joints. I never saw him again, but I met his daughter. By then, though I don't remember how, I again had my typewriter. I don't remember having my trunk then, but I'd built a plywood platform, covered it with contact paper, and was sitting on the floor use it as a desk, as I had my trunk. So I advertised my typing in the *Coldwater Advertiser*, and the only reply to it was from Billy Kling's daughter. She asked me to type a term paper for her for school. But, after she paid me, neither did I see her again, and the manager of the Clark station fired me.

A person who wasn't a customer and appeared to me to be hardly old enough to drive told me another person had pumped gas but didn't pay for it. Not knowing what to do or why the guy told me of that, I did nothing, and, when I arrived at work the next night, the manager told me what the guy told me and also told me my inventories were short. The cashiers worked alone and had to count all the merchandise at the end of each shift. Of course the preceding cashier could have falsified his report, but I didn't tell the manager that. So he fired me. But losing that job cost me nothing.

Sherry hired me to clean rooms, and, as soon as one of the desk clerks quit, she promoted me to desk clerk. But both the cashier job and cleaning rooms paid minimum wage, and the desk clerk job paid little more. So, for a better job eventually and for V.A. benefits in the shorter term, I drove to Kalamazoo to enroll in some business courses at Western Michigan University.

But I took more than a few. The woman with whom I spoke in the admissions office asked me whether I thought I might like to be an MBA, and that was while MBA degrees were popular because of the book *In Search of Excellent*, and I'd read of that in *Time*. So I asked her what I had to do for that.

She said that, because my undergraduate degree was in English and French I'd need to take thirty semester hours of prerequisites. But she also said Western required but thirty graduate semester hours for its MBA degree and that



all had to do begin was to complete a request for admission. So I did and began classes the next term, and, before receiving any V.A. benefits, I received a student loan and moved to Kalamazoo.

The father of an undergraduate student majoring in computer science gave him a small BMW and a four-bedroom house for him to use for school. He rented the two downstairs bedrooms to other students, slept in the smaller of the two upstairs bedrooms, and rented the larger upstairs bedroom to me.

Sally bought a new sofa and gave her old one to me, and I bought a used double size mattress and box springs. My room wrapped around a corner and was big enough for me to put the sofa near the room's entrance and put the bed at its other end out of sight of the sofa, and both Sherry and Cheryl also came there to see me there. Cheryl brought me a house plant.

"It's a philodendron," she said, though "philodendron" means "love branches", and also a woman who sat in the row in front of me in my introductory accounting course befriended me.

She was also what Ball State might call a nontraditional student, and I thought some people might have thought her nose was ugly, and she was also blonde, but, to me she seemed neither ugly nor as dumb as people said blondes were, and she was no less traditional than I.

But nothing changed between Sherry and me. She gave me the two weekend third desk clerk shifts, let me sleep in one of the rooms between the shifts, and often shared that room with me. But I didn't much need the room. Often, while ostensibly working, I slept on the kitchen floor, and I also studied while I was working, and soon she promoted me.

One of my two requisite computer courses at Western included an introduction to using an Apple IIe to use VisiCalc. So, deciding to buy a computer, I asked my young landlord what to buy. He advised buying an Apple IIc, AppleWorks, and Star SG-10 letter quality dot matrix printer.

The difference between Apple IIe's and an Apple IIc's was that the IIe's were expandable while the IIc's were more compact. The main difference between VisiCalc and AppleWorks was that VisiCalc was only a spreadsheet application while AppleWorks was an integration of a spreadsheet application, a database management application, and a word processing application. So I used the word processing application for all my courses and used the spreadsheet application for my accounting courses, and I also used the spreadsheet application at the Cadet.

I suggested to Sherry that she pay the housekeepers by the room instead of by the hour and that I used the spreadsheet application to calculate their pay. I told her housekeepers would clean more rooms in less time, and she accepted

the recommendation, talked the owner into it, and also talked him into giving me a pay raise and the title Assistant Manager. So, for that, I also took my computer printer back and forth between Coldwater and Kalamazoo.

Also blonde classmate came to my room in Kalamazoo to see the spreadsheet application and also told me she owned a sailboat. But I had some new shoes that made my feet stink, and my computer was on the platform I'd built for my typewriter. So, as we sat on the floor for me to show her my computer, I could smell my feet. I also once went to her apartment, and there she was in no shoes or socks. But I didn't hit on her. She referred to singles clubs and called them meat markets.

One night, driving backroads from Kalamazoo to Coldwater, I hit a deer. I saw no damage to the Torino from that and remembered Jim Tyson's telling me American Motors cars were junk, but the deer lay alive in the road in front of the car, and I didn't know what to do. But I knocked on the door of a house beside the road, and a man answered my knock and solved the problem.

He came out to road, looked at the deer, returned to the house, returned with a claw hammer, and bashed in the deer's skull.

"Do you want it?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Mind if I take it?" he asked.

"Not at all," I said, grateful, and he dragged the deer from the road.

In Coldwater I again came across Eddie Parker. I don't remember how or where, but he and I and Sherry drank at the Alibi. When we left the Alibi, I drove over the curb between two parking meters, continued down the sidewalk past what the Stag had become, returned to the street, and continued down Monroe Street. When we reached the Commercial, I continued through its parking lot to Park Avenue.

"I used to live in this Parking Lot," I said driving through it.

On Division Street, as we crossed the railroad tracks on Division Street, police stopped us. I don't remember where we were going, but the police took me to jail. Sherry bailed me out, but the deputy releasing me told me to report to my parole officer, and, by then, Coldwater's parole officer had transferred responsibility for me to a parole officer in Kalamazoo. As I sat in front of his desk, he told me I'd violated my parole not only by drinking alcohol but also by associating with a "known criminal".

I was aware of both but tried to excuse the second.

"I've known him and his brother since the fifth grade," I said.

"You're lucky you're not back in prison," he said.

"I know," I said as meekly as I could.

“Do you know there have been some rapes on Western’s campus lately?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. “I read about it in the paper.”

I seldom read newspapers, but I saw the headline while walking past a vending machine for them on campus. He didn’t send me back to prison, but he told me I’d have to find a job in Kalamazoo.

“I can’t supervise you,” he said, “when you’re spending your weekends sixty miles from here.”

Considering all of my circumstances, I didn’t expect to be able to find a job anywhere, but I did. The owner of a fastener warehouse hired me to do whatever he told me to do. I shoveled snow, replaced a headlight in car, and did maintenance work on two rental houses also on the property. I saw few of the warehouse’s nuts or bolts or other fasteners, but once, doing some electrical work in the warehouse, I turned off a circuit breaker, causing the warehouse’s minicomputer to lose all of its inventory data. Then the owner told me how much trouble that would cause him. But he didn’t fire me. So I worked there through the remainder of my parole.

But then I quit and returned to driving to Coldwater weekends to work for Sherry, and I bought a 1979 Plymouth champ for that. I’d bought new tires for the Torino, but it became unreliable. Often, for no reason I could discern, I couldn’t start it. So I asked Sally to cosigned fore me to buy the Champ.

Its seller was a Western Michigan University BBA student living with his wife and daughter in a house near one of the lakes southeast of Coldwater. When I went to his house to pay for it and pick it up, he wasn’t at home. He’d taped a note to his mailbox saying he’d changed his mind. But I used some of what I’d learned in one of my MBA curriculum’s requisite law courses. I left the check and a note pointing out that our agreement fulfilled all of the three requirements for a legal contract and telling him I’d be back at the same time the next day. Neither was he there then, but the keys and the documents I needed where in the mailbox in an envelope with my name on it.

At the Cadet, Sherry took a picture of me in the Champ’s driver seat with its driver door open. I removed the Torino’s tires and sold Torino to a junkyard. The person who picked it up used a winch to drag it onto flatbed truck. I put the tires in a storeroom at the motel.

I asked Sherry to see a performance of *The Glass Menagerie* with me on Western’s campus. She picked me up at the house in Kalamazoo in an Oldsmobile Toronado she’d recently bought. She was in a black leather pantsuit. One of my housemates answered the doorbell. I occasionally played

nickel ante poker with my roommates, but I suspected that her pantsuit and makeup negatively impressed him.

“You should see his girlfriend,” he said to my other housemates the next time we played poker, and some graffiti in a restroom I used in a building across the street from the theatre seemed to me to be inauspicious.

“When the going gets weird,” it said. “The weird get going.”

But I also took Sherry and her daughter Courtney to an American Ballet Theatre performance of *The Sleeping Beauty* at Detroit’s Masonic Temple. I don’t remember how I learned of it, but she had told me Courtney liked ballet. I drove them there in the Champ and bought them dinner at a restaurant in Jonesville on the way.

“This is pretty zippy,” said Sherry of the Champ, “for being so small.”

The Champ’s two-speed differential behind its four-speed manual transmission zipped it along much more easily than her automatic transmission propelled her huge Toronado.

I also took Pat and Ben in the Champ to a minigolf course. Nancy had left the house in Kalamazoo she was buying with Rob entirely to him and moved into a townhouse in a government-subsidized complex in Sturgis. I picked them up there.

For Christmas I bought them an Atari computer and a floppy drive and gave them with that some games my young landlord had copied to floppy discs. I gave them all that, with copies of the documentation my young landlord had also copied, in the Cadet’s kitchen. But I didn’t give it to them all at once. I made two trips from Sherry’s office to the kitchen.

“But we don’t have a disk drive,” said Ben when I gave them the computer and the games and documentation.

Then I brought them the floppy drive.

“Boy, Dad,” said Ben. “You went all out.”

The next time I picked them up, they showed me that their mother had given them a small TV to use as a monitor.

But I asked whether they’d organized the documentation, and they said they hadn’t, and I berated them, but I also bought Sherry’s daughter Morgan a subscription to *Time* for her birthday. I hadn’t stopped subscribing to it, and Sherry told me Morgan was smart, and, though Morgan was in kindergarten, after I bought her the subscription, Sherry told me she was reading the magazines. But, a few weeks later, she told me Morgan’s teacher told her Morgan was failing kindergarten. So I went to the Superintendent’s office and told her Morgan read *Time*, and Morgan passed to the first grade.

But Sherry also told me her husband wore her underwear and that Judy's husband was his best friend, and a truck driver who often stayed at the Cadet often shared his room with Judy and watched TV with us in the kitchen, and, one morning, after drinking all night, I went to Sherry's house while she and her family were eating breakfast.

That didn't seem to me to surprise them much, but, though Sherry told me her house was immaculate, it seemed to me to be neither clean nor orderly, and her company car for her job supervising convenience stores was messier than her house, and she often complained about her childhood.

She said she loved her father but that he was dead and that she was afraid of ever becoming like her mother. She said that, because she had but one sweater when she was a child, she then had many and that her favorite pastime was shopping for sales at Spurgeon's. Spurgeon was a clothing store on Chicago street across Division Street from Putnam's Funeral Home. Sally worked in its office, and Sherry told me she knew her.

She also complained of extreme difficulties with childbirth and both of not having had the opportunity to become a nurse and of not having had the opportunity to become a beautician.

But she fashioned her friends' hair in their homes, called that doing hair, and charged them for it.

But people generally liked her. She acquired her regional supervisor job by way of her boss pulling her up behind her. Her first job with that company was cashiering in its Coldwater store, two blocks west of the Cadet, and she became that store's manager by way of its manager's promotion to regional manager, and she became a regional supervisor by way of a recommendation from that former manager. I don't know what the former manager became next, but, after Sherry's promoted to regional supervisor, she promoted a clerk she'd hired to manage it. That is, she did for her friends what her friends did for her and what she did for me, and she materially helped me in another way.

Once, as I drove from the Cadet to the Coldwater store she'd managed, a much larger car hit the Champ from behind, knocking it over the curb and into the gravel between the curb and the parking lot of Coldwater's MacDonald's. Someone came out of the MacDonald's and asked me whether I'd like him to call the police, and I said I did, but the driver of the car stayed in it until the police arrived. He was an old man, but, when the police arrived, I saw what I thought may have been another reasons for him to stay in the car. He could hardly walk or talk, and he couldn't find his drivers license. First he looked in

his pockets, and then he looked in his glove compartment. But, though, the policeman gave him a ticket, he let him drive away.

The damage to the Champ was too much for me to drive it away, and, though the insurance the bank required paid for the repairs, it didn't pay for a rental car. But Sherry loaned me her Toronado. With her company car she didn't need it.

But she also told me she read many newspapers, and she also told me that she read in the *Coldwater Daily Reporter* that the ticket the policeman gave the old man was only for driving too closely. So I went to the police station and I told the policeman at the desk that the old man seemed to me to be drunk. He asked me whether I wished to complain to the policeman who issued it, but, doubting that the policeman who issued the ticket would admit that he'd made a mistake and thinking he might check my criminal record, I decided not to.

Western's College of Business was on a hill across a highway from the main campus in buildings that previously were a state psychiatric hospital.

"You better watch out," said kids to other kids in Coldwater when I was a kid to tell them they were crazy. "They'll send you to Kalamazoo. They'll put you on the hill."

One afternoon, after the repair of the Champ, as I was speeding up the hill, a patrol car stopped me. My reason for speeding was not to be late for a final examination, and I told the policeman that. His only response was to give me a ticket, but I passed the examination and received my degree with about a 3.5 grade point average. Bug the minimum grade point average for masters degrees there was 3.0, and my diploma was less than half the size of my Ball State diploma. So I didn't attend the graduation ceremony.

But I bought a new gray pin-stripe suit. I thought it would be appropriate for the employment I hoped I'd earned, and I wore it to take my blonde female classmate to a Pizza Hut. But I let her pay for the pizza she ate, and I never saw her again.

I tried to find a job in Kalamazoo, but my only interview was to be a department manager at Meijer's Thrifty Acres. I was in my new suit for that interview, but I drank a few cans of beer before going, and one called me for a second interview. So I moved back to Coldwater.

I rented a one-bedroom apartment in the back of the second floor of a big old brick house on Chicago Street. The landlord was a realtor and had been a mayor of Coldwater. His offices were next door to the house.

The apartment's bedroom was separate from its living room, but its kitchen wasn't, and no paint was on the steps to the apartment, and neither was any paint or other covering on the floors of the apartment. But I saw in the

Coldwater Advertiser an advertisement for some carpeting and looked at the carpeting. It was shag, but it was nearly new and enough to carpet the living room. So I bought it and put the Afghan carpet in the bedroom. I also built some shelves for my books.

I also replaced its single kitchen's sink with a double one. I bought the sink at Coldwater's Farm & Fleet store. Sherry's husband was its Assistant Manager, but I didn't see him there. I found the valve in the basement to turn off the water to the house to install the sink, but I forgot to connect the plumbing beneath the sink it before turning the water on again, and, in the time I took to return upstairs and see my mistake and go down and turn it off again, water began dripping into the apartment below mine. The landlord told me that the next time I paid my rent, but he didn't charge me for any repairs.

Sherry asked her friend who managed the Coldwater convenience store she supervised to hire me to work its third shift, but soon I again went to jail for driving drunk. That time my sentence was six months in jail, but the judge approved work release for me to continue working at the store. I asked him to do that for the Cadet also, but he said he'd done enough for me.

A stipulation was that I walk directly from the jail to the store and back and stop nowhere on the way. My apartment was on the way, but I abided by that stipulation. So Sherry picked up my mail and took it to the store. I mailed my paychecks to my bank and mailed checks for my rent to my landlord, and the jailers let me take my copies of *Time* to my cell.

But, when I wasn't performing my cashier duties, waxing and buffing the floor, or doing what Sherry called fronting the shelves, I was drinking beer. I bought a quart each night and I drank it in the cooler. I could see the store's entrance through the cooler's glass doors. One night my high school classmate Larry Booher came into the store and told me he worked at the jail. But he didn't say that was why he was there, and neither did he give any indication that he could smell what I was drinking. He talked as one might seeing an old friend again and said he didn't like his job.

Shirley, Sherry's friend who managed the store, told me several mornings that my register was short the night before. But, though Sherry mentioned the shortages to me and told me Shirley mentioned it to her, on one officially reprimanded. So I asked Sherry why Shirley didn't write me up.

"I don't know," she said, and, upon my release from jail, she promoted me to manage a store she supervised in Battle Creek.

My sentence for driving drunk included suspension of my drivers' license, and I looked for an apartment near the store, but, during the search, I commuted to Battle Creek from my apartment in Coldwater and drank beer

during my commute, and, daily at about lunchtime, I drove to a bar a few blocks from the store to drink a bottle of beer, and, at the store, I kept an open quart bottle of beer in the cooler, and an employee told me he found one there.

“I put it there,” I said. “It was with some returns. I was going to pour it out.”

But I worked so many hours that the company had to pay me overtime.

Generally managers were exempt from overtime pay, but the company required its managers to clock in and out, and Sherry told me the exemption stopped at eighty hours per week.

A young woman I hired complained to Sherry that I talked down to her. But she didn't tell me her reason, and all I could remember saying to that employee was that I tried to give the employees the same hours each period. I would have appreciated that and thought the employees would, and the only other complaint against my performance was from Sherry's boss. But the young woman quit with no notice and no explanation to me, and the complaint from Sherry's boss regarded inventory control.

He came to the store with Sherry and saw that the store was nearly out of half gallons of whole milk. I was using my computer to manage inventory. So I didn't understand how that happened. But soon I fired myself.

One night, as I was driving home, police stopped me in Union City at a turn that was famous in the county for being a speed trap, but the police arrested me for more than speeding. I poured my beer on the floor of the Champ. So I didn't go to jail for driving while drinking. But I did for driving while drunk with a suspended driver's license, and I expected the sentence for that to be more than six months. So, after bailing myself out and paying for the towing and storage of the Champ, I went back to work for Willard. I asked Sally to store my books, the Afghan carpet, and the stereo equipment, and, by then I'd paid off the Champ. I don't remember how I knew where Willard was, but I guess I may have asked Sally where Kay and Doyle were.

I took my computer and printer with me. So I used them instead of his calculator and spiral notebooks. So my job that season was a little different from what was in my first season at it. I'd also bought a three hundred baud modem to connect to Western's mainframe, but that was useless on the road. I also drove the Champ and asked Willard to pay for the fuel for the Champ, but he refused, and neither did he give me any indication that he appreciated the computer. But my data entry speed plainly impressed Jack. He grinned as I repeated some key strokes while setting up a series of formulas, and the computer also impressed a plush salesman.



“You’ve got a little computer,” he said sitting beside Willard on the bench in the office trailer.

“It’s Billy’s,” said Willard.

My main drinking partner that season was an agent everyone called Turtle. He rode with me on jumps, drank with me while I drank and drove, and went with me to a strip joint in Oklahoma City. It was the first in the United States in which I saw completely naked dancers.

In Birmingham I took a sixteen-year-old girl to a room in a Days Inn. She was traveling with her mother. I picked her up on the midway, and, pushing Turtle out of the Champ and leaving him there, I took her to the hotel where I’d stayed the night before. I stayed there that night because Turtle and I arrived ahead of the trucks. But I was so drunk I hardly could find the hotel, and I hadn’t told anyone that I intended to stay for more than one night.

“We don’t have you registered,” said the desk clerk when I asked him for a key to the room.

“I was here last night,” I said. “I didn’t check out.”

He looked at the girl but checked me in again, and, while the girl sat on the commode urinating, I put my penis in her mouth, and in bed I felt that my penis was penetrating her womb, but she gave no indication of any pain.

“You act like you’ve never been laid before,” she said.

And she also seemed to me to be proud of what she’d done.

“I screwed one of the big guys,” she said grinning as I drove her back to the lot.

Turtle told me he told Willard I screwed a sixteen-year-old girl, and I worried that I might go back to prison for that, but Turtle somewhat mitigated that trepidation.

“He said, ‘Good for him,’” he said.

But, at the end of that season, I didn’t go to Phenix City. I drove to San Angelo. I hoped he’d find me a job again. Cleve and Shirley had divorced, and he was Assistant Managing Editor of the *San Angelo Times*. But I stopped in New Orleans along the way.

## Chapter 27

### History

Greg and Sheila had also divorced. He and a friend of his had moved to New Orleans after working construction in Houston with Greg's brother Bob. Craig, his friend, was also from Coldwater. They were sharing a shotgun house around a corner from the Maple Leaf Bar and working at an Ace hardware store next door to the bar.

I arrived in New Orleans late at night. I stopped at the Days Inn on Canal Street, but the valet parking attendant told me the hotel was full. He suggest that I try the Clarion Hotel, two blocks nearer to the river. Thinking of Days Inns as motels, I knew nothing of Clarions, but I thought it would be expensive, and steam was coming from beneath the hood of the Champ. So I stopped at Steak and Eggs restaurant and called Greg from a pay telephone. He came to the Steak and eggs, ate breakfast with me, and led me to his house. I slept that night on his and Craig's living room floor.

The next day, in the Champ, we went to the French Quarter, but we didn't stop. I knew nothing of New Orleans, and all I remember of that drive is the parking lot of the outdoor market at the north end of the French Market, and I didn't stay another night in in New Orleans. That afternoon I drove on to San Angelo.

As I looked for a motel there, police stopped me for driving the wrong way on a one-way street, but they didn't arrest me.

"What are you doing in San Angelo?" one of the policemen asked me.

I told him I was there to see a friend but then was looking for a motel.

"Who's your friend?" he asked.

"Cleve Powell," I said.

"What's he doing here?" he asked.

"He's Assistant Managing Editor of the newspaper," I said.

He gave me directions to an American Inn and told me to be careful. But, immediately forgetting the directions, I drove around a few blocks and found myself driving the wrong way on the same one-way street. Seeing the

patrol car cross the street a block ahead of me, I used a driveway to turn around and, at the next corner, turned in the direction opposite that in which the patrol car was going, and, at the next corner, I saw the American Inn. So I stayed there that night, and, the next morning, I found Cleve in a big house he was sharing with Devin, and, that night, he took me to a party.

The guests were coworkers of his, and all of them were smoking marijuana, and Cleve smoked much more than the others. But, the next day, he and Devin and I watched a football game on TV, and, though I told him I needed a job, he didn't offer any help. So, the next day, I returned to New Orleans, and Greg and Craig again let me sleep on their living room floor. They seemed to me to do that reluctantly, but I found a job in less than a week, and it was the first job I requested. In response to an advertisement in the Times-Picayune, I drove to the Lafitte Guest, and Counce Hightower, its manager, interviewed me immediately and hired me immediately.

Still I knew nothing of the Quarter, but I learned quickly. The Lafitte was a fourteen-guestroom hostelry in the quiet end of Bourbon Street. It was a mansion in the mixture of French and Spanish architecture typical of the Quarter, and, though it had no restaurant, its furnishings were antiques, and no two rooms were alike. A doctor living in Alabama owned it.

My official title was Concierge. But I worked the third shift. So I had few opportunities to act as a concierge. But, working alone and studying the menus and tour brochures at the desk, I learned some of the history of the Quarter and to appreciate it, and I also quickly found an apartment.

A realtor, French Quarter Realty, was two blocks up Bourbon Street from the Guest House. It had a listing for a ground floor one-bedroom slave quarter apartment on Dauphine Street. Dauphine was the first street after Bourbon away from the River, and the apartment was in the block directly behind the guest house, and my carnival savings was enough for me to move in and buy some furniture. Slave quarter apartments were small apartments opening to the courtyards behind main houses, and a Volunteers of America store selling used furniture was a half block from Dauphine Street eight blocks up from the apartment.

I bought a sofa and a dresser I used as a desk. I gave a homeless volunteer a five-dollar tip to pull the sofa to the apartment on a dolly, and Greg helped me carry the dresser, and I also bought a used double-size mattress and box springs. I don't remember when or where or how they came to the apartment, but a table and chairs were in the courtyard a few feet from my door, and Matassas', a grocery store the Matassa family owned and operated was across the street, and a laundromat was a block down Bourbon street from the

guest house. Matassas' also had a big old bicycle with a big wire basket on its handlebars the parked beside a lamppost in front of their store and used for deliveries it used for deliveries. I didn't need deliveries, but I appreciated the aura of hominess of the whole situation, and Matassas' also sold beer.

The guest house had a dead-end driveway beside it and used it for valet parking. So I parked the Champ there for a few days, but soon I moved it to the street in front of Greg's and Craig's house. If I needed it, I could take the national landmark St. Charles trolley from Canal Street to Oak Street. But I didn't, and I enjoyed walking about the Quarter.

Sunday afternoons, I picked up the Sunday Times-Picayune and a couple of sixteen-ounce cans of Coors light at Sidney's grocery store on Decatur Street, walked to the Moonwalk, and sat there reading the paper, drinking the beer, watching boats and ships pass on the Mississippi, and listening to any musician playing at the steps down to the river, and soon I found another job, helping customers at Mary's True Value Hardware store a block down Bourbon Street from the guest house. Both jobs were minimum wage, but the job at Mary's was days. So I worked both jobs.

No Mary owned Mary's. The owner's name was Houston. A tall woman with short red hair was the daytime cashier, but her name was Carol, and all the other employees were men, and, though I vaguely remember asking who Mary was and receiving one or more vague answers, I don't remember receiving any clear answer. But I didn't work there long.

The Clarion Hotel advertised for a telemarketing representative. I didn't know why a hotel would need a telemarketer, but I asked a coworker of mine at Mary's whether he could manage without me while I requested the job. He said he could. So, in the suit I bought for my graduation from Western, I walked to the hotel, and the Human Resources Director hired me immediately. The job was full time at \$5.50 per hour. Minimum wage was then \$3.35 per hour. The next day I gave Houston two weeks' notice.

"No need to give notice," he said. "After ditching yesterday, I don't think I want you working here."

I told him my coworker told me he could manage without me, but he said that still I didn't need to give notice, and I was grateful for that.

The hotel was forming its first telemarketing operation. The job was telephoning meeting planners to ask them whether they'd consider having their conventions or other meetings in New Orleans. But it required working in a suit, and, though I didn't know why it did, I welcomed that and returned the trousers of my attaché duty suits to their original width. I'd taken them on the road in hope of such an opportunity. I also dressed in a suit to work at the

Lafitte, but, working alone in the middle of the night, I saw no reason to try to impress anyone, and I also quit that job.

Counce, by then, was gone. The new manager was a son of the Alabama doctor who owned the guest house, and neither did he require notice. He was obviously gay and said he wished to hire some of his friends, but I thought he might have had another reason not to require notice. One night the third-shift concierge who trained me came in and found me in Counce's office with a glass of wine on Counce's desk. Amenities at the guest house were delivery to the rooms of a carafe of wine on check in and croissants and coffee and orange juice for breakfast. The wine was white, and I hoped the coworker thought it was water, but I thought that hope was slim. I thought more likely was that he didn't and told the son. But, whatever his reason for not requiring notice, I had reason to be glad both of that and of Houston's not requiring it.

I had told the Clarion's human resources director that I wished to give two weeks' notice, but Sherry was to be in New Orleans for a week of vacation during those two weeks. But part of my plan for her visit was for us to spend a night in the guest house's room opening to its second floor balcony over Bourbon Street, and I'd arranged with Counce for that to be free of charge. When the doctor's son accepted my resignation in apparent good humor, I asked him whether the reservation I'd arranged would stand, and he said it would.

The day before Sherry's arrival, I looked in the reservations ledger to be sure it was there and found that it wasn't, but I told him that, and he reinstated the reservation, and Sherry's vacation went nearly as I'd planned.

I'd acquired a Mastercard during that time in New Orleans. So I made reservations for the famous breakfast at Brennan's, for dinner at some of the other restaurants I'd learned were famous, to rent a convertible for us to see some of the plantation houses along the River Road, and to take a paddlewheel riverboat cruise to the site of the Battle of New Orleans. But not all of it went as I planned.

For me to go to the airport pick her up, I booked an airport hotel shuttle from the guest house. But I brought her back in a taxi, and part of my plan was to ask the driver to drive past some famous places, but the driver, telling my the airport rate was for the most direct rate, kept to that.

Also, at the guesthouse, no one delivered either the carafe of wine or the croissants. But the guesthouse's little kitchen was immediately outside the door to the room I reserved. So I delivered both to the room and served it to Sherry on the balcony over Bourbon Street, as I'd planned. That balcony was why I reserved that room.

But I'd also arranged for the rental company to pick us up at the guest house, and they were late, and the person at the counter at the rental company told us no convertibles available. She said all of them were in use for a parade. She also said one might return soon, and we waited about fifteen minutes. But she said couldn't promise anything. So we rented a sedan.

Because I had no drivers license, Sherry drove. But I'd planned for that, and I enjoyed seeing the architecture, and she seemed to me to enjoy our lunch of blackened redfish at Nottaway plantation. She also told me she had a white dress that would be perfect for visiting the antebellum plantations., and it didn't have the full skirt I imagined, but that wasn't a change of my plans, and neither was a complication that spanned several days.

Before we went on the river boat cruise, Cleve and Devin came to New Orleans. They stayed at the Fairmont, across Canal Street from the Quarter. but they came from San Angelo in Cleve's car. So I had to asked another favor from the Doctor's son. I asked him to let Cleve park his in the Lafitte's little parking lot. I felt I was asking too much, but he did, and Sherry and I went to the restaurants before he and Devin arrived. So their presence wasn't much of a problem.

But another small problem was because of a purchase I made while Sherry and I wandered the Quarter before their arrival. In a shop near the French Market selling a variety of things that weren't new, we found a classical guitar, and, one night after midnight, as we sat talking with Cleve and Devin at the table in the courtyard outside my apartment, I played it, and Cleve asked me whether I knew "Malaguena". So I strummed a progression of bar chords Benny had told me sounded like "Malaguena".

"Yup," said Cleve. "That's it."

"Some people have to work in the morning," shouted someone from a house on the other side of a plank wall along a side of the courtyard.

But the riverboat cruise went well. On that we enjoyed a lunch of red beans and rice. But Sherry left the next day.

I'd also planned how to send her off, and Cleve and Devon weren't there for that. So that went well. I kissed her goodbye outside my gate before she climbed into another taxi, and, after she climbed into it, I leaned in and kissed her again and gave the driver the airport fair with a tip. But Cleve and Devon stayed and gave me no indication of any intention of leaving until I told Cleve the guesthouse needed its parking spaces. I told him that while drinking a beer with him at a bar he said he liked next door to the Fairmont. I didn't see how the was remarkable, in comparison to all the bars in the Quarter. But I didn't ask him, and he and Devin left the next day.

The Clarion was on Canal Street and covered all of a square block. With 759 guestrooms and seventy thousand square feet of meeting space, it was the sixth largest hotel in the city. It was also on the National Registry of Historic Landmarks, but that was because, when it opened in 1925 it was the largest hotel in the south. But then it was the Jung Hotel, had 1200 guestrooms, and was across Canal Street from the Southern Railway station, when Storyville was behind the railway station. When I worked there, the railway station was gone, and the government had closed Storyville's illegal entertainment operations and replaced them with a public housing project. The entertainment operations migrated to the Quarter, but the Quarter was four blocks from the hotel, and the hotel's name had changed three times since it was the Jung.

The Jung became the Grand, and the Grand became Braniff Place. When Braniff Airlines went bankrupt, the hotel closed, but, in the middle 1980's, a Connecticut investment company organized a seventy million dollar renovation of it involving removing walls to enlarge the rooms and add meeting space and more. So, when I worked there, it had two restaurants, two lounges, a 24-hour deli, two ballrooms, an exhibit hall, some smaller meeting room second floor, and a pool on its sixth floor with more meeting rooms facing it. So, while the Clarion had fewer guests rooms than the Jung, it was larger. The part of the hotel with most of its guestrooms was eighteen floors.

So many of my telemarketing calls were to Executive Directors of national associations. But, when I began working there, I thought most hotel guests were what I learned to call walk-ins, and the hotel was as new to telemarketing as I was to hotel sales. The telemarketing operation was the hotel's market research manager supervising me and an African American woman from her desk in one of the second floor meeting rooms while we worked at banquet tables.

Lynn, our boss, gave us call sheets, forms with questions we were to ask the meeting planners. After making the calls and completing the forms, we gave the forms back to her. Then, if she thought a form might lead to a booking, she passed it on to a sales manager. Before that I didn't know hotel's had sales departments, but Lynn also had a private office in the sales office suite, on the mezzanine level, opening to the foyer of the Tulane ballroom.

But I changed the operation. Finding the job mostly robotic while nevertheless requiring keeping the meeting planner talking, I enjoyed it about as much as I'd enjoyed trying to sell salve or Christmas cards. But that wasn't my only problem with the job. My first calls were to veterans planning military unions. So some of the them were dead, and one of persons who answered was the veteran's widow and wept on the telephone.

I told Lynn that, and she expressed pity for me, but, through those calls, I also learned enough about meeting planning to know that more flexible call sheets would permit gathering more pertinent information, information more particular to the meeting planner's needs and accordingly more useful to the sales managers. So, at home, I used my computer to design a call sheet with captions instead of questions and more space for writing. Then I printed one, took it to work, showed it to Lynn, and told her my reasons, and she made the change immediately.

I also added a white blazer and blue slacks to my work wardrobe, but that was a mistake. On my employee review, at the end of my ninety day probationary period, she marked me below excellent for grooming. But I asked her for clarification, and then she said I sometimes I wore a sport jacket and slacks to work, instead of a full suit. So I told her my wage made buying suits difficult. She said dressing in suits was nevertheless a hospitality industry tradition, but she also gave me the maximum pay increase.

So, after I saw my raise on my paycheck, I bought a new suit. I wasn't sure it was adequate. It was khaki, and I was afraid she might say it was too casual. But she smiled when she saw it, and, a few months after that, she promoted me to Telemarketing Supervisor, and that was with another pay increase. The director of marketing joked that I was supervising a crew of one, but soon after that I received another promotion and a much larger pay raise.

Lynn's husband was a sales manager for New Orleans' Radisson Suites but quit that job to become Director of Sales for a hotel in Nashville. So she went with him, but she also recommended me for her job. Her job included using an IBM PC to prepare the sales statistics reports and administering the sales department's eleven-workstation Novelle network

"Bill has a computer," she told me she told the Director of marketing. "He can do my job."

By then small cubicles had replaced the banquet tables in the telemarketing office, but, with that promotion, at salary nearly a third higher than my initial telemarketing wage, I also inherited her private office.

I'd never seen a PC, but a key to the sales office suite also came with that job. So, the first Saturday morning after my promotion, I bought a sixpack of beer at the Walgreens across Canal Street from the hotel and went to my office to try to learn. But, before noon, I accidentally deleted the spreadsheet templates for all the sales reports and uninstalled the spreadsheet application from the PC's hard disk, and the spreadsheet application wasn't AppleWorks. It was Lotus 123, and neither had I ever seen Lotus 123 or used a hard disk. My Apple IIc operated through an internal floppy drive and an external one I bought



after I bought the computer. But I found the Lotus user manual and paper copies of the sales reports, reinstalled Lotus, and reconstructed the report templates. I think that was the only time I ever sweated from fear, but I did all that before Monday, and no one at the hotel ever knew I did that.

So I felt confident enough to recommend Greg for the telemarketing supervisor job. But, upon the success of that recommendation, the other telemarketer quit. So Greg had no one to supervise.

But soon he was supervising two telemarketers. A daughter of the president of the Connecticut investment company that had arranged the financing of the renovation of the hotel was majoring in hotel and restaurant management at Tulane. So she and one of her classmates became parttime telemarketers.

But, before either of those promotions of mine, Cheryl flew down for Mardi Gras, but Greg called me and told me they were at the bar next door to the bar next door to the Fairmont Cleve liked. So I walked there and found them in a big red leather banquette. I don't know they were there, but, on the wall behind the bar, were autographed photographs of famous people, including one of Frank Sinatra, and Greg told Cheryl I was telemarketing for a major convention hotel. He said I was coming up in the world.

But I didn't see him again while Cheryl was there. He also had told me he'd worked at the Fairmont for a while but was afraid to live in the Quarter, and that the reason was that he was afraid it might kill him. I thought he was referring to AIDS, but, whatever the reason, most of the drinking he and I did together in New Orleans was at the Maple Leaf around the corner from his house. Cheryl told us people were removing their clothing on her flight down, but, for whatever reason, I was her tour guide while she was there. So she slept with me.

I took her to the Court of Two Sisters. Not knowing that what was on the dessert carts was plastic resemblances of the desserts, I tried to make my choice by taking one from the cart. She said nothing of that, but, at a Mardi Gras parade, I led her beneath a grandstand and tried to lift a wire to pass beneath it for a closer view of the floats, and that nearly knocked down a child leaning against the wire, and showed anger at that, and, that night in bed, when I initiated intercourse, she told me she didn't feel that way about me. I continued, and she relented, but she left the day before Mardi Gras, and I don't know how she made her way to the airport.

But her leaving before Mardi Gras was somewhat a relief to me. Greg had told me of the women removing their clothing on Bourbon Street for Mardi Gras. So I wished to see it and was afraid Cheryl wouldn't.

But I was literally respectable at work. Part of my market research job was tracking the sales managers' responses to the call reports, and part of the sales managers' job was reporting to me within a week how they responded to them. So another part of my job was attending the weekly sales meetings, and my main job at the sales meetings was distributing to the sales managers copies of the call reports to which they hadn't responded within that deadline.

Before one sales meeting, the director of marketing asked me in the hallway outside the meeting room not to distribute his to him. So I didn't, but he didn't attend the next sales meeting. The general manager said at it that he'd made a change. Making changes was what he called firing people.

But soon after that, partly because of that change, I lost my private office. Another part of my job was supervising the sales department's administrative staff, but, not seeing how they needed me to supervise them, I didn't, and Joe Kneen, the director of sales, was acting as the director of marketing, while Joe Rodriguez, the general manager, decided how to complete his change. So Kneen, recognizing that failure of mine and hoping to become director of marketing by impressing Rodriguez with his administrative abilities, removed that responsibility from my job. So I moved to back to the telemarketing office.

But I had a desk there, not one of the tiny cubicles, and I excelled at administering the sales department's data processing systems. Lynn had never learned how to implement the sales projection module of the sales department ran on its Novelle. But I easily did, and I also converted to Lotus most of what Lynn was calculating with a calculator, and I also used Lotus macros to streamline data entry and to make Lotus a practical database management application. So the move wasn't a demotion, and, thought I again had to do some telemarketing, I also excelled at telemarketing.

The hotel's management company called referrals of sales leads from one of the properties it managed to another intersells. I outperformed everyone in every hotel the company at that. A requirement was that the prospect indicate no interest in one's own property, but my telemarketing position gave me plenty of opportunities for that. None of mine booked. So I receive no commissions for them. But the management company published a list of the top intersellers to all of its properties, and it was the largest management company in the United States. So my name was at the top of lists all over the country.

But Kneen also asked Greg and me to do some door-to-door selling. Installing a door directly from the hotel's deli to a side street between Canal Street and the cities main commercial and medical districts opened the hotel to

an increase in walk-in food and beverages sales. So Joe asked us to distribute sandwich menus to neighborhood businesses.

I felt about that as I'd felt about trying to sell salve and Christmas cards, and, while we were distributing the menus to the several floors of a Tulane medical facility, someone called the police. But I offered a brochure to the policeman. Greg told Kneen and others in the sales office I did that, and all of them laughed with apparent appreciation, and, though Joe didn't ask us to do that again, he sent me to Atlanta to learn how to coordinate the hotel's marketing management system with its property management system. Atlanta was the home base of the company providing the property management system.

Of course I appreciated the career push, but I also had another use for that trip. Kay's daughter, Kimberly Kay, graduated from high school that week, and they'd moved their trailer to Iron City and built an addition larger than the trailer. So I mentioned the graduation to Kneen. Iron City not only had no airport but also wasn't on the way from New Orleans to Atlanta. But Joe asked his administrative assistant to book me a layover at the airport to Iron City, and Sally picked me up there and drove me back after the graduation.

I don't remember where the airport was, and I remember little of that visit to Iron City and nothing of the graduation ceremony, but I remember that my gift to Kim was a jewelry box with no jewelry and that, while Kay was telling us where we might sleep, she said Sally and Denny could sleep in a bed in one of the addition's bedrooms.

"I'm not sleeping with him," said Sally.

But I also I remember that Greg called me while I was at the trailer, that I tried for about a half an hour to tell him every keystroke of one of the macros I designed, that, as I did that, Doyle looked at me with apparent respect, and that Sally drove me back to the airport, and I also remember that Sally's sons were with her when she returned me to the airport, that she and they waited with me for my flight, and that she said her sons had never seen an airplane on the ground, and I remember much more about Atlanta.

Joe's administrative assistant also booked a hotel for me there, and it was a short walk from the training, and property management system company had recommend it, but no one told me that before I left New Orleans. So I asked a taxi driver to find a cheap motel. But he took me to two motels with no vacancy. So I asked him to take me to the hotel the administrative assistant reserved, and the net result was a waste of time and a huge taxi fare, and I also took a taxi to see topless dancers in in Atlanta's Underground. So I submitted no taxifare on my expense report. So Kneen's only question regarding it was why I used the Clarion's New Orleans number for my daily calls to know how

Greg and the telemarketers were doing. He said I should have used the hotel's 800 number. But he approved all of the report.

Neither do I remember anything of the training, but no one asked me what I learned, and neither did Rodriguez didn't promote Kneen director marketing. But, though that was partly because of me, it had no relationship to that trip. Kneen asked me to write a memo to the Rodriguez complaining about his administrative assistant, and Rodriguez asked me about it.

He called me to his office and asked me whether I wrote it. I supposed he recognized my writing style from my marketing reports or telemarketing call sheets, and I supposed part of why Kneen asked me to write it was that my responsibility for the sales department's administrative assistants had shifted to her. But I responded to his question much as I responded to Miss Gilmore's asking me whether I wrote Vigil's complaint against COL Sparano, and then Rodriguez asked me what I thought of Kneen.

"I think he may be the hardest working person I know," I said. "But I don't know about how he treats some people."

"Alright," said Rodriguez. "I guess we'll have to find someone to supervise him."

So, soon after that, a marketing executive for the hotel's management company came to supervise him, but, when Kneen brought him to see the telemarketing operation, the investment company executive's daughter was sitting on the floor filing call sheets in the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet with her back was to the door, and the marketing executive stared at her bottom and grinned at Kneen, and the next time I saw him, he was in the Quarter with Rodriguez, but the only conversation I had with him was about Greg.

"You're a class A player," he said. "But you've got a class B player working for you up there."

And I told Greg he said that, and, soon after that, Greg said he had a back problem and took a medical leave of absence, and, after a few weeks of that the Human Resources Director told me she'd have to make the absence permanent, but, by then, the marketing executive was gone.

We had a new director of marketing. But he was also assistant general manger. So his office was on the second floor near Rodriguez', as was the telemarketing operation, and with him. His name was John Burns, and hers was Marilyn Dean, and, with the telemarketing operation also on the second floor, I had no problem with any of that, except perhaps losing Greg. But my first conversation with John was in the engineering department on the fifth floor.

"You're everywhere," he said happening to see me there.

"Borrowing a screwdriver," I said, and I showed him the screwdriver.

I'd borrowed it to try to figure out what was wrong with one of the sales department's PC's.

"Come see me Monday," he said to me one afternoon in the Tulane foyer as I was coming out of the sales suite on my way back upstairs.

By then I'd had many conversations with him and thought he was absent minded. Once, less than an hour after I distributed the monthly sales and marketing reports, he called me and asked me for one of them. I told him I'd put it on his desk that morning.

"Well come help me find it," he said.

When I did, he asked me some questions regarding it, but, when he asked me to come see him I was in the process of preparing the monthly reports, and the Tuesday after the Monday he designated was the deadline for them. So, thinking he'd forget, I didn't go. But Tuesday, again in the Tulane foyer, he reminded me.

"You were going to come see me yesterday," he said.

Knowing I had no excuse, I said nothing.

"Well," he said, "come see me after lunch."

"John asked me to come see him," I said to the assistant tour and travel director as I passed him the Tulane foyer after delivering the reports I was there to deliver when John intercepted me. "He's either going to promote me or fire me."

"Have a seat," said John after lunch as I stood in front of his desk.

I sat, and I was correct.

"I'm thinking we need to give you a little more money," he said, and he offered me responsibility for all the computers in the hotel.

He said I'd have the rank of a department head and would attend the weekly staff meetings for them, that I'd answer directly to him and not to Kneen, and that the little more money would be an increase in my salary of several thousand dollars, and, of course, I readily accepted.

"What do you think we should call you?" he asked.

"Information Systems Manager," I immediately replied, and he said that sounded right to him, but what he said next was more of a breath of fresh air than not answering to Kneen.

He said he was thinking my office should be the room with the server for sales department's Novelle network and that he'd assign responsibility for the telemarketing operation to one of the sales managers.

But I suspected that the change wasn't entirely because of my computer competence. A few weeks earlier, he called me to his office to talk with him and the college students. One of them had complained to him about me. I don't

remember what either I or they said during that meeting, but I remember that John frowned at what I said. So I thought that, from his point of view, the situation was a little like moving me back to telemarketing from the sales office suite.

But my new desk was bigger than the one I'd inherited from Lynn, and John also asked me whether I could use a long counter the convention services director wanted out of the convention services office. So I moved the server to one end of the counter, moved the right side of my desk against the counter near its other end, moved my PC from my desk to that end of the counter, and used the middle of the counter for sorting reports. The server had been on top of a file cabinet.

"I'm impressed," said John when he saw the rearrangement.

So I also thought the change was part of his management style.

I thought that, unlike Rodriguez', his notion of a human resources change wasn't firing an under-performing employee but promoting the employee into something the employee could do better.

My office wasn't private. It was between the sales department suite and the Tulane Foyer. So, just inside the door, against the wall opposite the wall where I put the counter, was a banquet table with the sales department's coffee urn on it. But I didn't mind that company, and neither did I mind that soon I shared that space with an assistant John decided I should have, and she also excelled with no training.

Instead of interviewing her at my desk, I did it while showing her the server and the minicomputer for the property management system, but her response to one question I asked her made me sure she was right for the job.

"How much experience have you had with Lotus?" I asked her in the elevator as we returned from the second-floor minicomputer room to the server room I'd share with her as our office.

"None," she said. "But I'm sure I can figure it out."

So, because her telling me she had no experience told me she was honest, I also believed she could figure it out, and she did, easily, with nearly no instruction from me, and I also liked that she said we needed some music in our office.

So, for her birthday, I bought her a powder blue table radio for beside her workstation, and, during her day off for her birthday, I created an autoexec Lotus macro birthday file for her.

Her name was Susie. So, when she opened the file, it alternated filling the screen with "Happy Birthday" and then "Susie!" 21 times, and, to surprise

her, I temporarily changed the name of a Lotus file she opened every day and temporarily gave its name to the birthday file.

While I was working on it, Kneen brought some people into our office to show them our computer operation, but that wasn't a problem.

"I'm making a birthday greeting for my assistant," I told the visitors.

Only "Susie!" was on the screen then. But they smiled, and my only error in that was that I didn't surprise Susie enough. The morning of the day after her birthday, I asked her to look at the file she opened every day to see a change I'd made to it.

"You should have waited until I opened it anyway," she said, after sitting through the repetitions.

But we worked well together. I figured out how to hack the copy protection of our copy of Lotus. Then Susie and I used her workstation to figure out how to share it across the entire Novelle network.

"Did we do what I think we did?" she exclaimed in the tour and travel office when we opened Lotus on the workstation there.

I also liked her appearance, partly because she had extremely large breasts, but I never considered trying to seduce her, and she said her husband worked in a pet store in Slidell specializing in snakes, and, before her ninety-day review, she told me she was pregnant, and that resulted in more discord between me and Kneen.

I gave her a maximum ninety-day review and recommended the maximum pay increase. Kneen said that, because we couldn't be sure she'd return from her maternity leave, we shouldn't give her the maximum pay increase. Still, because our office was so near the sales offices and because I retained most of the market research responsibilities, I was working more directly with Kneen than with John. But, remembering what John told me in that regard, I told John I saw no reasoning in what Kneen said. So Susie received the maximum pay increase. But she never returned from her leave. Neither did she take her radio, but I mailed it to her, and we didn't replace her.

The human resources director tried, and, while looking for a permanent replacement for her, she provided me with an African American woman from a temporary employment agency, but the only person I interviewed to replace Susie more permanently was a young blonde woman who seemed to me to be what people called bimbos, and I told John that.

"But I guess I can train a bimbo," I said.

"That's inappropriate," he said, also frowning at that. "Calling a prospective employee a bimbo."

But he didn't hire her, and the temporary employee was no kind of Susie. So, though I bought a mug of flowers from a florist shop in the Quarter and gave it to her on Secretaries Day, I told John I could do as well without her as I could with her. So he told the Human Resources Director to let me.

But I had reason to regret that somewhat.

"Did I do something wrong?" she asked as she gathered her belonging after the human resources director informed her of the dismissal, and I was too ashamed of what I'd done to remind her that she was working for a temporary employment agency, and, making me feel worse, she took her mug with her.

"And after what you did for her," said John in response to my saying I hated to see Susie go."

And, though I don't remember the context, he also commented on my ridding myself of the temporary employee.

"And you dusted your assistant," he said.

But mornings, as I closed the gate of my house behind me to go to work, looking at Matassas' delivery bicycle and at the Quarter's distinctive mixture of eighteenth and nineteenth century French and Spanish residential architecture, I felt at home, and I don't think I ever felt at home before that, and I know I'd never found any interest in history beyond Greek architecture, and there that extended to learning that Audubon did most of his work on Birds of America at a house on Dauphine Street between my house and Canal Street, and, walking past it on my way to work, I remembered checking it out of the Branch County Library and being unable to afford binoculars for birdwatching.

But my nearest neighbor restore paintings for the New Orleans Museum of art, and that reminded me of nothing. His name was Bob Marchant, and his apartment was my house's second floor front balcony apartment, and he also sculpted in bronze. He put in the courtyard, where one could see it from the gate, a tall sculpture with bronze balls resembling beehives on branches extending from a central bronze stalk.

But he was also a bouncer at the Bourbon Pub, the largest gay bar in the Quarter, and he told me he sometimes found five-dollar bills beneath his bed after he brought men home, and I found him questionable in other ways.

One was that he told me a portrait on an easel in his apartment was a Michelangelo and that he was "correcting" it. But I was certain a portrait over his mantle was a masterpiece. He told me it was an El Greco, and I believed that. The fireplace wasn't working. In it was a gas space heater. But I burst into tears the first time I saw the portrait and had no thoughts telling me why, and my Ball State art appreciation course had shown me enough art history for me to recognize El Greco's style. So I never knew what to believe of Bob.



Once he brought me a television like the one I bought at Fort Harrison and, telling me it belonged to a girl who lived in the apartment above his, asked me to me to repair it. I don't know how he thought I could, but I found a loose wire in it and reattached it, and it worked, and he gave me ten dollars he said the girl gave him. But I returned it to her, and, when I returned it, she was sitting on her bed in a loose sweatshirt and leaned forward to except the ten dollars.

I could have looked down her sweatshirt, and I suspected that she did that she did that intentionally, and she also gave me another similar opportunity. She came downstairs barefoot in a loose nightgown and, looking beneath the stairs, said she'd dropped a letter from her mother and bent forward with her hand on her knees, letting the front of her nightgown hang loose. But, though Bob also told me she tried to let him see her pubic hair, I took neither opportunity. But also told me he didn't want to see "that black thing", but she wasn't African American, and I liked her appearance. So I don't know why I didn't accept those advances.

Sherry came down to see me again, and I took her to see a performance of the Kirov Ballet at the Saenger Theatre, and Bob loaned her a bracelet of moonstones for that, said it was of the crown jewels of a cousin of his and that it was from the Hermitage, and also gave me a Chinese stone rubbing picturing some dragons, and Sherry wore the moonstones to the performance and said she liked the stone rubbing and, seeing the girl on the stairs, gave her what one might call a dirty look, and Bob also said the girl and her boyfriend stuck needs in her vaginal labia, but neither was neither was any of that why I didn't accept the girl's advances, and still I don't know why I did.

But Ben graduated from high school and came to live with me. I don't remember how he made the trip, but, with no help from me, he found a job in the gift shop in the hotel. The hotel's owners didn't own the gift shop. So the hotel's management didn't manage it.

But he and I frequently argued. I asked him to help pay for the groceries, but the contention went beyond that. So one day while I was at work he left in the Champ and told me of that only by leaving a note in the apartment.

"You fumigated the place!" said Bob when he left.

All I'd done was to restore it to the order I preferred. But I didn't tell Bob that, and he also told me Ben was Gay. I disagreed with that, but later I learned he was correct.

Also later Pat came down to live with me. He drove down in an old Chevrolet Monte Carlo with a hole in its floor. Its catalytic converter had burned the hole, but He parked it in front of Greg's house where I'd kept the Champ.

“So I have to babysit another vehicle for you,?” said Greg.

But he and Craig went to Jazz Fest with Pat and me.

Pete Seeger and Santana were there that year. Santana was on the main stage. Seeger was in a tent, but the tent was full. When he came onto the stage, the audience stood and sang happy birthday to him. Pat didn't know who Santana was. But he knew who Seeger was. I'd taped one of Seeger's albums and played his song Abby Yoyo for Pat and Ben when they were little.

The only alcohol Greg drank was Budweiser. That was a way he tried to minimize his alcohol consumption. Another was by rotated his stock of Budweiser in his refrigerator. The only brand of beer at Jazz Fest was Miller. So Greg didn't drink while we were there, and he was obviously miserable. But he called me that night and told me he'd looked up Seeger in the dictionary. He said he didn't think he'd ever before seen anyone who was in the dictionary.

Pat stayed longer than Ben. He worked in the parking garage of the Hyatt Hotel. The first New Orleans Grand Prix passed the garage while he was at work there. So did Pope John Paul II in his popemobile.

Pat also bought a 19-inch television and a bicycle while he was there. He nearly lost the bicycle. The Riverwalk, the site of the New Orleans World Fair, had become a mall, and Pat rode there, parked his bike to walk around, and, when he returned, it wasn't where he left it. But, when I came home from work, I walked to the Riverwalk with him and found it in a few minutes. Security had it and let us have it.

I also took Pat to dinner at Antoine's. Mastercard declined the charge, but the waiter accepted a check, and soon my pay increase stopped that sort of thing. But Pat and I also had a little less expensive fun. We made a vegetable soufflé we called ugly food, and he also spent a lot of time trying to learn AppleWorks. But once, while I was trying to help him with the database module, I made him weep.

“I don't understand,” he said nearly wailing,

But I found a word processing file he wrote describing ejaculating between an infant's legs. worried me more.

“It's just a story,” he said, but soon, with no farewell, he left his TV and bicycle and drove his Monte Carlo back to Michigan.

John's confidence in my ability exceeded mine. Also in the Tulane foyer, he asked me whether I could produce, in time for the next staff meeting, a report of some data I wasn't reporting. Considering the question, I scowled.

“I'll take that as a yes,” he said, and he turned and walked away.

I produced the report in time, but, on another occasion, Rodriguez' administrative assistant called me to ask me whether I could bring the guest

comment card summary to the staff meeting. The guest comment card summary was one of the monthly sales and marketing reports, and, though they weren't due until the next week, the staff meeting would be in about a half hour, and I knew Rodriguez was intolerant of anyone being late for any meeting. But, though I told her I'd try, that time I was a few minutes late and found John was sitting between Rodriguez and a vacant chair.

"There's your assistant," said Rodriguez to John.

So I sat in the chair, handed half of the stack of copies of the report to John, and handed the other half to the manager on the other side of me.

"Look at this," said the food and beverage director. "A hundred percent excellent for the lounge."

"But you have to consider the sample size," I said. "That's a hundred percent of two cards."

"So you should thank that couple who had a good time at the bar," said Rodriguez as the others laughed as the food and beverage director frowned, and, after the meeting, Rodriguez's administrative assistant apologized to me for making me late, but at home I tried oil painting again.

I bought some pre-stretched canvases and some primary colors of oil paint. I planned to mix my other colors myself. But before I began, I scattered the canvases in the courtyard to think about what I was going to do next. So Bob came downstairs to see what I was doing.

"Surveying your materials?" he asked.

But once he called me a mudpie. That was in reply to my telling him I'd like to be president of Slippery Rock College some day, and I was serious. That had been a thought of mine and occasionally approached being a plan.

"A mudpie can't be college president," said Bob.

But once, he came into my apartment in a bathrobe and opened it and rubbed against. I repelled that, but one night he came to my apartment, told me he was bleeding from his penis, and asked me to drive him to the New Orleans V.A. hospital, and I did and waited with him. He had a small pickup truck he parked on the street.

The first step was X-rays, and dozens of people were waiting for that. But no one was doing any X-raying. So, after about a half hour of that, while Bob was in a restroom presumably bleeding, I looked behind a counter there, saw a telephone, picked it up, and dialed zero.

"This is Doctor Hykstra," I said. "I'm up in X-ray, and no one's doing any X-raying."

"I'm sorry," said the person answering. "Doctor who?"

"Hykstra!" I said. "H-Y-K-S-T-R-A!"

“I don’t have any doctor by that name,” the person said.

“I don’t care what you have!” I said. “Just get somebody up here!

People are bleeding here!”

Then I slammed down the receiver. But, less than ten minutes later, someone began X-raying. So I went to the restroom and brought Bob back and went to the restroom to urinate some beer, and, when I returned, Bob was in for his X-rays.

“They told me what you did,” said Bob as I drove us home. “I was the first one in after I came out of the bathroom, and I guy they X-rayed while I was in the restroom said he said he was sorry he went in ahead of me. They said you’d be fun to work with.”

I don’t know what the diagnosis was. but that was the only time I was proud of lying, and once I angered Bob.

The apartment above mine was vacant. Thinking of my new wealth, I told the realtor’s receptionist I thought I might like to install a stairway to make that apartment and mine one apartment. I didn’t have that much wealth, but one morning, while I was sitting at my computer with my door to the courtyard open, Bob came to my apartment and told me the landlord told him I was thinking of that.

“I was going to use that apartment as a studio,” he said, and then he threw a card on the dresser, told me to call the number on the card to learn of my next mission, and returned to his apartment.

The card had a telephone number and the name Raphael on it. But, before that, he’d told me he was “God’s other son”, and, on another occasion he said I saw flames shooting from his fingers when I saw the El Greco portrait. So I threw the card into a drawer of the dresser and continued what I was doing.

But, a few days later, Bob was walking about the courtyard in a sheet and using a mop handle as a walking stick, and, in the sales office a few days after that, Marylin Dean, who then was still Kneen’s Administrative Assistant, stopped me as I passed her desk and handed me her telephone receiver.

“It’s for you,” she said.

The caller told me he was the Orleans Parish Prison psychiatrist and asked me whether a Bob Marchant was a friend of mine. I told him I didn’t know whether he was a friend of mine but that I knew him and that he was my neighbor. But then asked me whether he seemed to me to be unusual in any way.

“He’s a textbook schizophrenic,” I said. “If that’s what you mean.”

“You got it!” he said, and he asked me whether I knew how to contact any of Bob’s relatives.

I told him I didn't, and that ended that conversation, but at home I remembered the card and called the number on it, and the person who answered told me he was a cousin of Bob's. He said he was in Texas and couldn't come to New Orleans, but he gave me Bob's father's number, told me he was in Albuquerque, and suggested that I call him. So I did, and his father told me he'd be in New Orleans as soon as possible.

The next day at work, Charles, the hotel's assistant tour and travel director showed me a newspaper clipping with the headline "Holy Walker to Biloxi". After I handed Marilyn's receiver back to her, I told her about Bob's sheet and mop handle, and Charles was passing her desk and joined the conversation. The clipping said police had apprehended a man in a sheet walking toward Biloxi on I-10 with a mop handle for a staff and that he refused to identify himself, and that evening Bob's father arrived. I used a small hammer I had for no reason I remember to break a small window pane in the door to Bob's apartment to open it by its inside doorknob, and the next day his father brought him home from jail. Charles had let me keep the clipping. So I showed it to Bob.

"I told them exactly who I was," he said.

I took a day off from work to help him and his father load a U-Haul truck for his father to take him home to Albuquerque. Bob's father asked me how much he should pay me, and I sweated a lot of beer doing that on that New Orleans summer afternoon. But I told he didn't need to pay me anything.

"You'll never get rich that way," he said, and Bob offered me a small Chinese embroidery in a frame I'd told him I liked, but neither did I accept that

His father was in a black cowboy hat and black shoes like Army shoes like the old man at the filling station in Abilene, but he bought sandwiches from Matassa's, and I accepted one of those and also some house plants Bob was growing in his apartment. One was a peace lily. While we loaded the truck a woman who lived across the street asked Bob for the plants, and Bob had told me she had a swimming pool, but he stood by his offering me the plants.

"The plants are Billy's," he told her.

But I didn't remove them from the apartment. I asked the realtor to transfer my lease from my apartment to Bob's, and the realtor approved the request. So I moved upstairs, and, soon after that, Sherry moved in with me.

After my move, she told me she and her husband had bought a big house with a swimming pool, that it had been the home of the Civil War general for whom the city had named Parkhurst Park, and that my high school typing teacher had retired and was renting the apartment that was the top floor of the house. But later, telling me they'd spent a lot of money furnishing it and

couldn't pay the debt, she asked me whether she could move in with me. She didn't tell me how any of that was reason to leave her family. But I didn't ask.

"Wait 'til she sees this place," said Greg helping me move.

But all she said when she saw it was that it was an improvement over the slave quarter apartment, and among the furniture she brought was a big old recliner that reminded me of her Basset hound who died while I was in New Orleans. But she also brought an old oak dining table and chairs she said she'd refinished, and the apartment had a dining room between its living room and its kitchen. She also brought a lot of clothing, but the apartment also had a large walk-in closet, and she quickly found two jobs in quick succession.

The first was selling cleaning supplies wholesale to retailers. That required having a car to make cold calls on retailers. But I bought her a 1980 Ford Fairlane station wagon.

"That's nice," she said. "Buying me a car."

But I bought it with a cash advance on my Mastercard, and we rented a space for it in a lot the realtor managed. The realtor's administrative assistant told me the waiting list for the lot was long, but one of the agents overheard that conversation and asked me how long I'd rented from them, and I included my time in the slave quarter apartment in my reply. So he told the receptionist to let me rent the parking space immediately.

But Sherry sold little of the cleaning supplies, and she told me she heard another salesperson for the company tell her boss she was a dirty girl. So she quit and refused either to return her samples or to pay for them. So I wrote one of my trouble-maker letters to her boss. I said it that what the salesman said was reason for her not to bother returning them, and She approved it, and no one asked her again to return the supplies.

Her next job was managing a convenience store near Lake Pontchartrain. She could have taken a bus to that job, but we kept the car and also bought a wicker daybed to use as a sofa, some vinyl balcony furniture, some plants for the balcony and the steps of the fire escape from the balcony to the loft apartment, and a vinyl table, some vinyl chairs, and an umbrella for the landing of the stairs to the loft apartment and the courtyard, and, though she said married people hanging wallpaper together was a sure cause of divorce, we also papered the kitchen together. Not all of that went to my Mastercard, but we didn't have a joint bank account. She said her money was hers and cashed her paychecks at the store she managed.

When we bought the table and the umbrella, I saw that the person at checkout didn't charge us for the umbrella. I supposed she thought the price for

the table was the price for both, but I didn't tell her that. I told Sherry that at home and laughed, and she told me I should be ashamed.

Kay and Doyle came to see us. They slept on the daybed. Sherry said Doyle was pretty, and, taking him a cup of coffee as he sat on the balcony the next morning, she called him old boy. Kay called the city the beautiful city of New Orleans and stood in obvious awe in St. Louis Cathedral, and we drove them to the site of the Battle of New Orleans. The hotel's tour and travel director had given me passes for Sherry and me for the Creole Queen cruise there, but, when I asked her for passes for us and Kay and Doyle, she said she couldn't make a habit of that. I also showed them around the hotel.

I also used my Mastercard to fly Sherry home to bring her daughters to new Orleans for a visit. We took them on the Natchez steamboat cruise. That cruise didn't stop anywhere, but Shannon, her oldest daughter seemed to me to enjoy standing at the back of the boat watching the paddlewheel, and Sherry's younger daughters seemed to me to enjoy seeing the steam engine.

The city picked up bags of trash from the sidewalks. We dropped them from our balcony. Matassa's was on a corner. African American boys waited around the corner for us to drop the bags. Then they ran around the corner, grabbed the bags, and ran back. I supposed they did that for the beer cans. The girls laughed when they did that.

Once Sherry's husband called. The conversation was obviously contentious. I took the receiver from Sherry and told him to fuck himself. He hung up.

After their divorce, Sherry asked me to marry her. I told her I'd rather wait until we could pay for a nice wedding, but she didn't accept that. We argued about it on our balcony over the street. The entire Matassa family operated its store. Seeing that one of the owner's sons was standing in front of the store and heard us arguing, I stopped arguing and asked her to find out what we had to do. So she found a Justice of the Peace. She called me at the hotel. On the way to meet her at his office, I stopped at a Macy's to buy the rings.

Friends of hers came to New Orleans for the wedding. One was the woman who, after promotion to regional supervisor, promoted Sherry to store manager. The other was her husband. They had married after an affair like the one Judy was having with the truck driver.

"Good luck," said the Justice of the Peace after his officiation. "You're going to need it."

On his desk was a transparent plastic box with thing in it resembling crawfish drinking beer while sitting at a table.

## Chapter 28

### Receivership

After that officiating, we took Sherry's friends to lunch. She wanted to take them to a big German restaurant on St. Charles Avenue across Canal Street from the Quarter. I told her we should show them New Orleans culture. She didn't argue. I took them to the Croissant d'Or Patisserie. The Lafitte Guest House bought it's croissants there. In a shop in the same block, Sherry's former boss saw a clown doll and said she collected clown dolls. After we left the shop, I decided we should give them something for witnessing our wedding. So I went back and bought it for her.

I didn't tell anyone at work why I left work that morning. So I don't know how John knew that was the reason. But, the next day, he asked me why I didn't tell anyone. My reason was that I wasn't proud of it. So I only shrugged, but, at a Christmas part at Joe Kneen's house, Sherry gave me more reason not to be proud. Joe asked the guests to bring small gifts for random selection from beneath the tree.

"You think I'm fucking fat?" she asked when she saw that the gift she selected was a Jane Fonda workout video.

She seemed to me to be trying to find any way she could to fit the word "fuck" into her conversation.

But the marriage served me well in another situation.

Pat called me. He told me I was correct regarding the "story" he used my computer to write. He said police were investigating him for such and asked me what I thought he should do. I told him he should come to New Orleans. I said we'd figure out there what to do. He took a bus there.

In New Orleans he told me Ben saw him doing what he did and called the police. A few days later police arrested him while I was at work. He called me at work from the jail.

I took the rest of that day off and found a lawyer in the yellow pages. He asked me how I knew to call him. I told him how I found his number, but he



accepted the case. He also told me he'd become a lawyer because he didn't like lawyers.

I was in my MBA suit. Sherry sat beside me. Pat sat among other jail inmates in a part of the courtroom for that. The bail the prosecutor requested was far more than I could have paid. The attorney told the Judge Sherry was Pat's stepmother and that we were respected members of the community. The judge looked at all that and set bond at a small fraction of what the Prosecutor requested, low enough for me to borrow ten percent of it. I kissed Sherry's cheek nearest to me. The Judge smiled.

The judge was a woman. The lawyer's name was Fred King. He referred me to a bail bondsman. So, for the next hearing, Pat was sitting with Sherry and me.

"Is your client out of jail?" asked the Judge. "Yes. There he is."

I don't remember why that second hearing in New Orleans was necessary. But, after it, in the hallway outside the courtroom, Mr. King asked me what else I thought he could do for us. I remembering that the psychiatric clinic's lawyer used waving extradition as a tool of negotiation. So I asked Mr. King whether he might do that for Pat. He said he'd try, gave me his business card, and told me to call him if I needed anything else. I gave him mine and asked him to call me at work to tell me the results of his efforts.

"Exchanging business cards," said Pat.

Mr. King gave us a ride home. His car was a gray Camaro and had a lock bar on its steering wheel. He said nothing of that as he removed it. A few days later he called me and told me he'd negotiated a promise of a sentence of a year in jail if Pat voluntarily returned to Michigan and pled guilty. The next day I walked with Pat to the bus station and bought him a ticket.

But I didn't wait with him for the bus. I couldn't. I saw how lost he felt, but, to keep him from seeing me weep, I turned away and left him on the platform, and I don't remember how or whether I bade him goodbye, and that wasn't all of my shame in that. The judge in Michigan abided by the agreement, but I never paid Mr. King. Originally he told me his fee would be \$150, but he told me after the negotiating that he'd have to charge me a thousand. He said I could pay him whenever could, and I intended to pay him. But, giving priority to paying the loan for the bail, I paid him nothing, and I also again showed my own criminal sexuality.

A girl had moved into the slave quarter apartment I'd vacated. When Sherry and I bought the daybed, I gave the girl sofa I bought from Volunteers of America, but, at night, I peered through her windows to see her naked. Once I stood on a chair to look through the bathroom window, but the window was too

high and the room was too small, for me to see much of her. So, another night, I stood on the sill of the bedroom window, and then, completely naked, she was masturbating while lying on her back on a mattress on the bedroom floor. But she looked up at the window and began screaming.

So I jumped down and ran out the gate. I didn't want the girl to see me going up the stairs. But I was barefoot and I didn't have my keys with me and didn't know what I'd tell Sherry if I rang the doorbell for her to let me in. So, wondering what to do next, I walked to the Governors Nichols Street wharf and sat on a mooring post. While I was there, a patrol car stopped. The policeman looked at my bare feet, but, after telling me the wharf was condemned, that it and wasn't safe, and that I couldn't be there, he let me go.

Still I didn't know what to do, but then I walked home, and when I arrive at our gate, a young girl was sitting on the front steps of the house next door. I told her I'd locked myself out and asked her whether she could let me in. I told her she could climb over the plank wall between the courtyards and open the gate from inside. She tried, but the girl in the apartment had called her father, and he was there with an old twelve gauge shotgun, and as the neighbor girl tried to climb over the fence, pointed the gun at her and shouted. She told him what she was trying to do, and then, looking down the passage to the gate, he told her to go ahead and do it, and she did, but then she climbed back to the top of the fence and watched.

The father, after looking at my bare feet, told me why he was there. But his daughter told him the person looking through the window was bald. So, thinking of nothing I wished to say, I continued up to our apartment.

Sherry was asleep. She said nothing to me of that when she awoke. But, that evening after work, I saw that I'd left my beer on the window's air conditioner. Afraid removing it might draw suspicion to me, I waited until the next day before removing it, but an old man was then renting the second floor slave quarter apartment, and, when I retrieved the beer, he came out of his apartment.

"That's the kind of beer you drink," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "It's my beer. I left it there when I was hosing down the courtyard yesterday."

So I felt that I was digging myself into a hole, and that feeling flowed into other situations.

John Burns asked me whether I played golf. I told him I had but not well, but he told me he'd send me to a corporate meeting in Florida. He told me how well I played didn't matter, but, afraid I'd embarrass myself and shame the hotel, I felt I was sinking further into the hole. So I sought a way out of it.

Sherry, telling me more of her childhood, said she wasn't sure her mother's husband was her father. She said she thought a friend of his might be and that he was nearly blind and living alone in Colorado Springs. I asked her whether she'd like to move there, and she said she would. So I told John I'd leave my job in thirty days. He asked me to stay and told me the most stressful events in life were marrying and changing jobs, but, though I didn't change my mind, he called Sherry and invited her to a surprise farewell party for me in the sales office, with two going away gifts. One was a plate commemorating the renovation of the hotel. The other was a coffee mug full of jelly beans.

"Don't stop smiling," said the mug.

"Is this from Kelly?" I asked.

Kelly was one of the sales manager. She told me her husband received a traffic ticket for driving 120 miles per hour. Once, standing beside me in the sales office, she kissed me on a cheek, leaving a big blotch of red lipstick on it.

"No," said John frowning, but I immensely appreciated the plate, and he also told me I was going to God's country.

His last job before moving to New Orleans was Director of Marketing for the Colorado Springs Clarion, and Sherry and I had helped him and his girl friend move into an apartment over a courtyard further up Dauphine Street, but among what I helped unload from the truck was a coffee table with a top that was a slice of a tree trunk, and I didn't think that or his girlfriend measured up to what I ordinarily thought of him but more at the level of his calling New Orleans New Orleans and calling people guy.

So what he said of God's country gave me no positive expectations of Colorado Springs, and neither was our move otherwise auspicious.

We sold the car for much less than I paid for it, and the plants we took didn't survive the U-Haul move. The old man didn't seem to me to need us, and Willard called and told me he was coming to New Orleans and asked whether I could get him a room at the Clarion. I'd asked the telephone company to forward our calls. But we slept in a small bedroom in the old man's small old white clapboard house, and both Sherry and I quickly found jobs.

She sold lawnmowers and other hardlines at a Montgomery Ward store and soon transferred to selling draperies. I taught accounting parttime for a proprietary business college. Rosanne, the college's Dean of Education, interviewed me with an Irish setter in her office and hired me immediately.

But Sherry told me the old man was peeking at her through a window between his bedroom and the bathroom while she was in the bathtub. So we moved to an apartment with a fireplace and a small balcony in an apartment complex with a clubhouse, tennis courts, and a pool. I walked to work from

there, but Sherry took one of the old man's cars with us. He had two, one red, the other white, both relatively small but relatively new. A woman much younger than the old man drove the red one. Sherry drove the white one. She also said the young woman was robbing him and that so were telemarketers.

But we never went to the club house or used the tennis courts or the pool. I used the fireplace to burn some Styrofoam packing, but a neighbor knocked on our door to tell us of the smoke, and, sitting on the balcony, I severely burned my knees. And, in my first month at my job, I nearly lost it.

Rosanne asked me to teach what she called a touchy feely course. Its title was Personal Relations, but its purpose was to teach students how to efficiently manage their time, and the school didn't have enough text books. So I had the only textbook for that course. So, thinking of Socrates, I taught it by discussing with the class what they thought of what the textbook told me.

But, my first week of that, the school's owner called me to its conference room, and, with Rosanne also there, he told students were complaining, that he'd put his life savings into school, and that he couldn't afford to lose it. He was African American, and his name was Reagan Holbrook Brown, and the school was Holbrook Business College. But, while Rosanne and I waited at the conference table, he went to the classroom, and when he returned, he apologized. He also told me the complainers were complaining that I was asking them what they thought, but he also said most of the students said I was an excellent teacher. He also said he'd teach that course the remainder of that term, but that was also the beginning of a steady rise in my credibility there.

Roseanne told me my job required state certification and that certification required recommendation from an employer, but she gave me a form for that with a list of occupations including hotel and restaurant management, and I sent it to John Burns, and he checked every occupation in in the hotel and restaurant section of it, and the state certified me for all of them, and, soon after that, Joe Kneen called me, told me he was going to AIRCOA's headquarters in Denver for a meeting, and asked me to meet him there to see what AIRCOA could do for me.

So Sherry drove me there, and Joe greeted me as though we were old friends. AIRCOA, Associated Inns and Restaurants Corporation of America, was the Clarion's management company, and I met the company's director of information systems. He had a huge desk, and, soon after that someone called me from the Clarion Colorado Springs. It was at the base of Cheyenne Mountain. So it served NORAD, and the person who called me asked me to go there for an interview.

"Someone's really pushing for you," he said during the interview.

But he interviewed me in the lobby, and I never heard from him again.

Reagan also moved the school to a building too far from our apartment for me to walk there, but it was newer and larger, and Sherry and I moved to apartment complex nearer to it. It had no tennis courts or pool or clubhouse, and the apartment had no fireplace. But it had a washer and dryer and a large balcony with a view of Pike's Peak, and, though Reagan hosted a party at a bar for the instructors and their spouses, I asked Sherry not to say "fuck" at it, and she didn't, and we bought a new sofa and coffee table, and a water bed. Sherry had sold waterbeds. But then I pointed out the interest we were paying in interest for my Mastercard.

"You're hung up on interest," she said, and, though, before we married, she bragged about her cooking and especially her broccoli and cheddar soup, in Colorado Springs, in response to my praise her broccoli and cheddar soup, she said anyone can make broccoli and cheddar soup, and one evening, in response to my beginning to tell her something that happened at work that day, she told me not to start with her.

In New Orleans I stopped being a vegetarian. In Colorado Springs I tried again. I didn't eat meat when I ate with Sherry, but, after she went to bed, I ate some leftover fried chicken she left in the refrigerator, and she berated me for that. She didn't call me a hypocrite, but the reason I didn't go to bed when she did was that I stayed up to watch the Playboy Channel. I subscribed to it and didn't tell her, and, about the time she berated me for eating the chicken, I told her I was through with her, and didn't entirely mean sexually.

But I also used the Mastercard to fly her daughters to Colorado Springs, and they stayed out after Sherry went to bed. So I locked the door to keep them from seeing that I was watching the Playboy Channel. I opened it when they knocked, but, the next evening, Sherry asked me for a divorce.

"Nobody lock's my kids out," she said.

"They shouldn't be out that late," I replied.

"Your son's a pervert," she replied to that, but she also asked me whether she could keep the water bed, and I said she could, and, though I didn't ask her where she was going, she told me she had friends, and her kids took their pictures from a frame in our spare bedroom, but I bought a king size mattress from a used furniture store, extended the sleeper springs from daybed for it to fit the mattress, walked to a supermarket for my groceries, and brought them home in taxis.

I was glad Sherry was gone, and I was progressing at work. Rosanne asked me to teach computer applications instead of accounting. By having the students work independently through the tutorials that came with the

applications, I taught all of those courses simultaneously. In New Orleans I'd bought a PC compatible computer running MSDOS on a thirty megabyte hard disk, and a Sales Manager gave me a copy of the dBase database management application with no copy protection. In Colorado Springs I used it to write an interactive tutorial for teaching Airline reservations. I learned it by reading the schools only textbook for it. I learned dBase by writing the application.

One of the school's floppy drives stopped working. I replaced it. The computers the students used had two floppy drives and no hard disk. I'd installed a hard disk in New Orleans, but I'd never installed a floppy drive. To do that, I needed to move a jumper switch, and I didn't know what a jumper switch was. But I moved one to see what it would do, and it worked.

I also took my printer to the classroom to use it for the little direct instruction I gave the students. Someone stole it, but Reagan bought me a new one, and he also asked me to find him a new computer for his use. I ordered one by telephone and mail, but turning it on required keying in a password. Reagan complained about that, but I found a way to bypass it. Neither did I know how I did that, but I tried to tell Reagan how I did it.

"You fixed it," he said interrupting me, and Rosanne also asked me to teach the school's course in Hospitality Industry Computer Systems.

The instructor for the schools other hotel and restaurant management courses was the Director of Marketing for a hotel in Denver, and all the materials for them came from Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Motel Association in East Lansing, and they sent the books directly to the students. So all of the schools hotel and restaurant management students always had textbooks. But they also sent the final examinations, and one of my students failed the course I taught. But several students failed the final examination of each course the other instructor taught, and Roseanne asked me whether I could teach the course in Food and Beverage Management, and I told her I could.

"Are you qualified?" she asked.

"I'm certified for it," I replied, and she let me teach it, and no one failed that effort of mine, but I changed my method.

EI also sent practice examinations. So I used them as class notes to teach by the Socratic method. If a student answered a question I asked in class incorrectly, I asked a question with a more obvious answer, and, while was teaching that course, the other hotel and restaurant management instructor quit. So I became the schools only hotel and restaurant management instructor and never again taught a computer course there, and, after the computer course, no other student failed any EI course I taught.

But two of my students teamed up to teach me a lesson.

An employed European American man answered my questions more easily than did the others. So I asked him more questions. But sitting beside him in class was an African American single mother there on a Pell Grant.

“Why do you ask me all the questions?” asked the European American. “Ask her.”

That course was in hospitality accounting, and she told me at beginning of course that she could never learn accounting, but I asked her that question and many more, and she passed that final examination with honors.

But I also laced my instruction with anecdotes from my relevant experience at the Clarion, and I organized field trips to Colorado Springs hotels. Not having a drivers license or a car, I rode with students for that, and, though I don’t know how they knew when my birthday was, after one field trip they took me to Colorado Springs’ Olive Garden for lunch and gave me a necktie and a plastic piece of cake. I’d told them of my selection at the Court of Two Sisters.

I fantasized relationships with female students, and one came to class in a loose blouse with an open back, dropped something on the floor of a hallway and bent over to pick it up. I was behind her and could have seen her breasts. But, though I wished to look, I didn’t, and neither did I hit on any student.

At a faculty meeting, Reagan said I was the only instructor there who knew how to manage a classroom. The computer classroom had three printers for two dozen computers. I arranged the tables in a way permitting eight computers to share each printer. In the hotel and restaurant management classroom, I arranged the chairs diagonally with my lectern in a corner. That was for me not to need to turn my back on the students to access the whiteboard.

The day Desert Storm began, I taught an evening course. Talking of that distracted from the instruction, and Reagan was in his office. So I went there and asked him for permission to let the students go home.

“We’re at war,” I said.

He said he couldn’t do that, but, a few minutes later, he came to the classroom pushing a TV on a stand.

But the textbook shortage was but one indication of the school’s financial difficulties. My pay, little more than my Telemarketing Supervisor pay, was another, and he reduced it further. After making me the entire hotel and restaurant management curriculum, he reduced all the instructors’ pay, and Cleve had left his job in San Angelo. He was working for a smaller newspaper in Port Lavaca and called me and told me I should go to there for him and me to go into business together. He didn’t say what business or how, but I went. He rented a U-Haul truck and drove to Colorado Springs to move me, and Reagan and Rosanne wished me luck.

Cleve and I drank and drove all night, parked the truck in Cleve's front yard, and went to a bar. Both the bar and his house were outside town. His house was a ramshackle farmhouse so full of his stuff that I could see no room for mine and little room for me. He said in Colorado springs that my apartment was nice. On our way to the bar he stopped beside the road and silently stared across the flat land for a few minutes. When we returned to his house, I climbed back into the U-Haul truck and drove to Phenix City. Willard had bought a house there. While we talked, a dog was sitting on his sofa between him and me, and he didn't ask me to stay. So I drove on to Iron City, unloaded the truck in to a woodshed at the end of Kay's and Doyle's driveway, and drove on to Coldwater. Pat was out of jail and renting an apartment with nearly no furniture. But my next step was to take the truck to a dealer and walk to Sally's house.

In New Orleans I'd written to the judge who'd suspended my drivers license. I told him I'd committed no crimes since then and asked him to lift the suspension. He replied that I'd have to deal with that in Coldwater. So I asked Sally to drive me to the jail and there handed her my wallet, asked her to keep it for me, and turned myself in, and a deputy escorted me to the courthouse. The judge told me he called New Orleans and Colorado Springs, said he was happy to learned that what my letter to him from New Orleans was true, and reinstated my drivers license, and he didn't return me to the jail.

So I rented another U-Haul, returned to Iron City for what I left there, moved in with Pat, and bought an old red Chevrolet Citation. Davenport College of Business advertised for a computer instructor at its extension on the second floor of a bank building in Battle Creek. The Dean of Education had an MBA degree from Western Michigan University. His diploma was in a frame on the wall behind his desk. I told him I taught several computer courses simultaneously for Holbrook Business College. He immediately hired me.

The owner of the nursing home where my mother was living also owned a Quality Inn and a Super 8 motel in Coldwater. I went to the Quality Inn and talked him into hiring me as an independent marketing consultant. I also helped Jackson Community College initiate its hotel and restaurant management curriculum.

Mark Hebner called Pat's apartment from the Lamplighter. He said Sally gave him Pat's number. He came to the apartment. He told me he was manic depressive and that once he wrote a check for a new Jaguar on an account he'd closed. He said the salesman let him drive the car away. Mark, in high school, also had bought my guitar. But I never saw him again, and Pat told me his Parole Officer said he shouldn't live with me. His parole officer also had been mine. So I rented an apartment in a complex in Lansing.



Denny had a small pickup truck, and I borrowed it to move. But Cleve called me again, told me he bought the *Lincoln County News*, a weekly newspaper in Lincoln County, New Mexico, said he needed a general manager. So I quit my jobs, rented another U-Haul truck, and left the Citation with Pat.

The newspaper was in Carrizozo, Lincoln County's county seat. I moved into one of the bedrooms of a two-bedroom house Cleve was renting from the realtor who sold him the newspaper. I had fun. I hung out at the White Oaks Saloon in White Oaks. Billy the Kid had hung out at the White Oaks Saloon when White Oaks was a gold mining boomtown. Then the White Oaks Saloon was a bordello. When I was there White Oaks was a ghost town, but an electrical contractor from Michigan retired, moved to New Mexico to prospect for gold, and opened another White Oaks Saloon.

His name was Jim Penrod. The saloon he opened was a small brick building with a big addition on the back of it. The building was a lawyer's office in Billy the Kid's time, but Penrod used the addition for Saturday night dances he called balls, and his only prospecting for gold was filling a cooler with beer, throwing it in the back of his pickup, and driving around in the hills behind the saloon looking for nuggets. Once I went with him.

I also befriended Harlan Webb. Harlan was a saddle maker. He sold some of his saddles for more than thirty thousand dollars, but he sold few and lived alone in a ramshackle ranch house on top of a mountain. White Oaks was on the side of the mountain toward Carizozo, but, as Penrod found a few nuggets, Harlan's daughter was the world's winningest female jockey, and he sold some saddles to Kim Novak. He lived with her in Hollywood for awhile and had an album full of pictures of her and him. He'd tooled its leather cover.

I wrote an article about him for the *Lincoln County News*, and Cleve bought some newspaper vending machines and bought an old Ford sedan for my use. One of the vending machines was in front of one of Carizozo's two filling stations, and, the day we published my article about Harlan, while I was filling the Ford's tank at Carizozo's other filling station, Harlan put a quarter in the vending machine at the other station and removed all the papers. He looked at me looking at him, but he kept all the papers and never mentioned that to me.

I also befriended Alfonso Luceros. Some of Alfonso's friends operated an automobile body shop and painted cars to send them back to Mexico after they unloaded drugs they brought up, but Alfonso was also an excellent guitarist. Once, drunk, I jumped into a hole in the ground beside the road about a quarter of a mile from the saloon and lay on my back at the bottom of it.

"Bury me," I said "I've had enough of this shit."

Alfonso jumped into the hole and ripped my shirt trying to pull me out.

I also befriended Carrizozo's Mayor. Her name was Cecilia. She also owned one of Carrizozo's two bars, and another of Carrizozo's civic leaders invited me to join the Masons. Telling me he was making an exception to the Masons' policy of not recruiting members, he invited me to a lodge meeting.

Cleve spent less time in White Oaks than I, but he had a girlfriend in Ruidoso, and Devin was then old enough to drink and also came there to live with us. But Cleve had borrowed twenty thousand dollars from his father to buy the newspaper on a land contract, and though we increased its circulation, partly with help from the vending machines, such as buying them and buying me the car made keeping up with the land contract and the other debts he incurred impossible. I increased the efficiency of his business management, but he was paying me more than Reagan had, and Cleve had broken the broken latch of the glove compartment in his old Datsun by the frequency of his opening it. It was full of peppermint star mints he used to hide the smell of the alcohol he drank all day. He kept a half-gallon bottle of vodka in his desk and a big glass on it. Mornings, he went to the drinking fountain in the outer office, filled the glass with water, returned to his office, poured the water from a window, and filled the glass with vodka.

I went to Carrizozo's only bank and asked the bank for help, but the bank refused. I also talked with the realtor, but I told him I didn't see a way out and asked him to shorten the story. So he arranged for a transfer of the contract to two of the newspaper's three other employees, told me they didn't need a business manager, and asked me to remove the Lincoln Count News signs from the front doors of the old Ford. We'd asked one of the newspaper's employees to make them for it, but one night, returning with me to Carrizozo from White Oaks, Devin assaulted the car's windshield and dashboard with his fists.

After Cleve and Devin left, I moved into an apartment in Capitán. He left the car with me, and I used it to help the Ruidoso extension of Eastern New Mexico University initiate its hotel and restaurant management curriculum. I launched it with a breakfast Ruidoso's Best Western Hotel hosted. I obtained promotional materials from the AHMA's Educational Institute. Cecilia drove me to the breakfast in her Cadillac.

"How did you get these?" asked one of the attendees, but most of them left them there, and my pay was for teaching but one course per term.

I asked the Inn of the Mountain Gods, a hotel and casino on the Apache reservation at Ruidoso for any employment opening they had, but that failed. So I called John Burns. He had become the Clarion's general manager, and he told me he'd call me back in an hour and called me back in less than an hour. He told me the best he could offer me was a job in security and a room in the hotel

for a week, but I accepted it, put most of my belongings in storage in Capitan, drove to New Orleans, found a room in a rooming house on Dauphine Street, and sold the car to a junk yard. I learned of the rooming house by shooting pool at a bar in the quarter, and the only vacancy was hardly big enough form the bed in it, but I managed to fit my computer in it

Greg was dead. He shot himself while sitting beside Craig watching TV. He collected things he thought were unusual, kept them in a shoebox, and played with them while watching TV. One thing was a ring he said he'd made of a silver dollar by tapping on it with a spoon while watching TV. Another was a Smith & Wesson Model 1 .22 caliber pistol. He'd shown both to me, and Craig told me the pistol was the one he used to shoot himself.

My security job was on the third shift answering the telephone and watching the monitors in the security. Joe Kneen was gone, but, before I left the Clarion, I recommended to John that he hire a security guard with tattoos. John told me a sales manager expressed disdain regarding his tattoos, but he also told me he could wear long sleeves. All I knew of him when I recommended him was from one conversation with him about computers, and I don't remember what he said, but he called me in Colorado springs to ask me how to hack the copy protection on the hotel's copy of Lotus., and, when I returned, he invited me to supper with his wife at their house in Gretna, but I didn't go back.

Soon I moved to a larger room in the rooming house. It had windows and a sink and was near an indoor bathroom, and about two months later I moved into an apartment. The administrative assistant at French Quarter Realty asked me what I'd been doing since I left my apartment on Dauphine Street.

"Traveling?" she asked while I tried to think of an answer.

"Yeah," I said, and she let me rent a third-floor slave quarter efficiency apartment next door to the bar where Bob had been a bouncer.

One night, while drinking in one of the hotel's lounges with his girlfriend and their dog, he walked past the security office to walk his dog outside the employee entrance to the hotel. He asked me how I was doing and whether I'd move out of the hotel. I told him I had and that I'd rather be working in accounting. He asked me how long I'd been working in security. I told him six months.

"Come see me tomorrow," he said.

I did, as early as I thought he might be in his office. His administrative assistant used the telephone on her desk to tell him I was there. She told me to have a seat, but he came out nearly immediately.

"Good morning, Bill," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"You asked me to come see you," I said.

“When?” he asked.

“Last night,” I said.

“Oh,” he said. “Come in.”

But he stood by his word. The investment company managing the financing for the renovation had skimmed profits. So, because it couldn't maintain its debt, it went into receivership with the Resolution Trust corporation. So AIRCOA withdrew from its management contract, and the hotel's accounting software was proprietary to the AIRCOA, and John recommended to the Controller that I help him change accounting systems.

I did that parttime days while working in security nights, but, while I was doing that, the hotel's income auditor became its food and beverage controller, and John called me to his office and offered me the income auditor position. But my overtime pay and security pay together totaled more than the salary he offered. So I told him that, and he said I probably wouldn't work as many hours with no overtime pay. But then he asked me how much I was receiving with the overtime pay, and a few days later he offered me a little more than the amount told him. But soon after that the whole situation there changed.

Palm Beach Hotel Group, a hotel investment company in Florida, bought the hotel out of receivership. Some Palm Beach Hotel Group managers and employees and investors came to watch the transfer. I helped them audit the transfer of the hotel's seventy-five thousand dollars in cashier banks. One of the investors stayed and worked in accounting. Her name was Betty. She was older than I, but, talking with her in the accounting office, I offered to show her some of New Orleans. I took her to Oak Street on the Saint Charles trolley. We drank beer at the Maple Leaf.

But later we extended that to the Quarter, and my promotion had increased my barhopping there. So another bar hopper had also befriended me. His name was Jay Sharp. He was a clerk for an international travel agency with offices in New Orleans' Central Business District. He introduced me to some bars to which I hadn't hopped, and occasionally Betty barhopped with us, but she also extended my circle of friends.

Palm Beach Hotel Group replaced the Hotel's Controller. The new Controller's name was Ben, and Betty knew him. So she became his Assistant Controller, and she and I showed him some of the quarter and went some other places with him. He didn't go with us to the places we frequented with Jay, but he expanded my responsibilities at work.

He had designed a Lotus spreadsheet for daily management reporting, and he assigned that to my income auditor responsibilities responsibility to me and later also assigned me supervisory responsibility for the night auditors and

increased my salary. I kept my income auditor, but, as had John, he asked me what I thought my title should be with that addition responsibility, and suggested Internal Auditor, and Betty said that that sounded good and told me to order business cards with that on them. So I also upgraded my living conditions.

David Grace telephoned me and told me he'd bought a van. So I asked him to use it to help me move my belongings from Capitan to New Orleans and arranged for him room at the hotel free of charge for the night before the trip, and the hotel's accounts receivable clerk asked me to bring back a cow's skull from New Mexico. His name was Alvarez, but I don't know whether that was his last name or his first name.

At a service station in Texas, the van wouldn't start, but two young men in a pickup truck at the service station offered us a ride. So we left the van there, and they took us all the rest of the way. They slept on the floor of a motel room I rented in Capitan and the next day took us to the White Oaks Saloon.

During the drive I told them of Gilbert and Gwen. While I lived in Carrizozo, Gwen, a young blonde woman, left her blond cowboy husband for Gilbert, a Mexican cowboy, and sent him to her house for her clothes. Her husband shot him in an eye with a .38 caliber revolver. But he didn't die, and he and Gwen stayed together after her husband went to prison.

We arrived at the saloon on a Saturday afternoon, and, while I was there, Saturday afternoons at the Saloon were for what Penrod called jam sessions. Also in my earlier time there, Penrod married a Mexican woman, and, when the guys with the pickup took us to the saloon, Penrod and wife were in Traverse City to pick cherries. Her name was Mary. But that didn't stop the jam session. When we arrived some people were playing guitars at tables in front of the bar, helping themselves to the beer in the cooler, and leaving a dollar per can on the cooler to pay for it. Penrod also permitted that, but, also while were there then, Gwen and Gilbert came in. Gilbert was walking on a cane and sat in a chair beside the potbelly stove that heated the saloon as Gwen began tending bar.

"Penrod told me to keep an eye on the place," she said.

"I'm glad to see you walking," I said to Gilbert.

"Me too," he said, and Gwen remembered me.

Gilbert was missing the eye, and Gwen was missing the cowboy hat I'd previously habitually wore, but she brought me a Coors before asking the others what they were drinking.

"How's Harlan doing," I asked .

"I don't know," she said. "I haven't seen him in a while. Go get him."

The guys with the pickup drove us up to his house.

“Are those the people you were talking about?” asked one of them.

Harlan showed us some of his saddles, gave us some rattle snake skins, and rode down to the saloon with us. I bought a cow’s skull for Alvarez and, for others at the Hotel, some pieces of barbed wire people collected. A woman sold all that from her ranch house across the road from the saloon. Her name was Ruth Birdsong. She used part of her house as a tourist shop.

“Nice seeing you again,” I said shaking hands with Harlan as we left.

“Always good to see you again, sir,” said Harlan.

The next morning the guys with the pickup drove us to Ruidoso for me to rent a U-Haul truck and left us there. Back in Carrizo David and I came across the mayor crossing a street in Carrizozo. She looked at David, but I didn’t introduce her to him. I told her I was work for a hotel for which I worked before I worked for the newspaper and that its general manager hired me back.

“It’s good to have friends,” she said.

I gave her my business card and told her to give me a call if she was ever in New Orleans.

“I will,” she said.

I also went looking for Alfonso. I knew he lived with his mother, but she said he was going with a girl and was doing well and wouldn’t tell me where I could find him. He hit on me once in my apartment in Capitan.

In the changes at the hotel, Charles, its assistant tour and travel director, had become its assistant front office manager. He told me David had skipped on several pornographic movie charges, but he said he’d write them off. I told David he told me that, but david said he didn’t rent any. After helping me carry my furniture up to my third floor slave quarter apartment, he spent a couple of hours exploring the quarter, but I didn’t go with him.

I put the cow’s skull on Alvarez’ desk.

“Whoa”: he said when he saw it, after he sat, but the next day he told me his wife disapproved of it, and I received no reaction to the barbed wire.

Jim Thimmis also worked for Palm Beach Hotel group. He also worked in accounting for awhile, but with no title. I moved into a second-floor apartment with a balcony over Royal Street. Jim helped me move into it.

John told me the Palm Beach Hotel Group people liked me. At the employee Christmas party in the hotel’s grand ballroom that year, he asked me to join him and some Palm Beach executives a their table. I was somewhat drunk. I’d asked a tall African American woman who tended bar at a punk bar in the Quarter to attend that with me. She shook her head, but I also asked a European American woman. She said she would, but, when I went to pick her

up, I couldn't find her. I told John I thought I should sit with my troops. I sat with the night auditors and accounting clerks.

John resigned. Palm Beach eliminated the hotel's Housekeeping Supervisor position. An African American woman had held that position. Her employee number was 2. That meant she was the second employee the hotel hired after the renovation. Palm Beach also implemented urine tests for drugs. Others long-term, employees left because of that. Rick Dennis, the Information Systems Manager who had replaced me, resigned rather than take the test. He told me he smoked marijuana and preferred quitting to being fired.

Several general managers in quick succession succeeded John. The first asked for suggestions for solving the hotel's problems. I already had submitted so many that I wondered why no one was treating me as a troublemaker. But John was correct in saying the Palm Beach Hotel Group people liked me. The general manager who asked for the suggestions ended his report with a section he entitled "Bill Harman's Suggestions". It was about a third of the report, and he asked me to implement one of them.

It was to write new job descriptions for every position in the hotel and to base them partly on asking the employees to describe in writing both what they were doing and how they thought they could improve it. He promised a bonus of a thousand dollar for that, and the Palm Beach president told me I was on a fast track to general management. But I fell in love with a barmaid.

Like many bars in the quarter, Nugent's, a small bar on Conti Street Betty and Jay and I frequented, had plastic strips hanging in its doorway to keep in the air-conditioning. One Saturday afternoon, arriving there with Betty and Jay, I pushed through the strips ahead of them, pushed between two customers, and asked the barmaid her name. I knew outside that I'd fall in love with her.

She was small with straight black hair and eyes the color of the sky at dusk. I thought she said her name was Evangeline. It was Angela, but I sent roses to her at the bar, wrote a book about her, and told people at work about her. Every time I saw her on a street, the sky literally seemed to me to brighten. But no one at work seemed to me to think that was beyond credibility.

Marylin Dean, after my return, became John Burns' Administrative Secretary, and his successors'. She invited me to her apartment in the Garden District to teach me to dance. I took the St. Charles Trolley there.

"I just want to help you get your girl," she said as we sat on her sofa.

But I felt her breasts. She was older than I, but they were extremely large, and she wasn't as old as Betty. She said I didn't want an old woman. I said she wasn't old, but she said her daughter might be coming home soon and drove me back to my apartment. I invited her up, and she looked up at my

balcony, but she didn't come up, and Angela's requital didn't go beyond congenial tolerance.

The accounting staff drew names for Christmas gifts. Jim Thimmis drew mine and exceeded the price limit to buy me a shirt and necktie. The Sales Department's had season Saints tickets. Jim used them to take me to see the Saints play the Tigers. I cared nothing about football and little about Michigan, but I went.

Palm Beach created a position for a public relations manager. The first person in that position talked about her big dogs and seemed to me to resemble them. The second came into Molly's at the Market with her husband while I was there. They sat beside me at the bar

Molly's was the name of two bars in the Quarter. Jay had introduced me to Molly's at the Market. It was on Decatur Street near the French market. It became my favorite bar. The other was smaller and was on Toulouse Street. Jim Monaghan founded both and also Nugent's. He managed Molly's at the Market, but his girlfriend, Eileen Nugent, managed Nugent's, and he sold the other Molly's.

"This is Bill," said the Public Relations Manager, introducing me to her husband at Molly's at the Market. "He works in accounting and hangs out at Molly's!"

Her name was Kristin. I thought her lips were too thin, but her bright brown eyes and wild sienna hair attracted me with a sort of sparkling perfection that to me was both feminine and unique, and she also seemed to me to like me. Standing behind Betty's desk to shower her a brochure while I sat in a chair in front of them, she nearly showed me her small breasts. Then she looked up at me and grinned.

I took her to the Saenger Theatre to see the American Ballet Theatre performed the Nutcracker. The Sales Department sent tickets to the Accounting Department. I acquired two of them, and, knowing that Nina, the assistant reservations manager liked dance, I asked her see it with me. But, to ask her, I knelt on the floor beside her desk as she sat at it, and feeling that I was being too intense, I thought she responded accordingly.

"No," she said simply, after a few seconds of looking at me.

So I asked Kristin, and she accepted immediately. But the tickets were for orchestra seats, and I preferred balcony tickets, to see the choreography from above. So I bought two and gave away the orchestra tickets.

I offered them to Angela. She was walking up Bourbon Street with a male bartender. She stopped to hear what I had to say. But she immediately said no and walked on. At Nugent's I offered them to a friend of the person who



told me of the rooming houses on Dauphine. He was there with his wife and also said no. Neither he nor Angela looked at the tickets. But a barmaid at Molly's did. Her name was Maggie. She drew a charcoal portrait of Yeats that hung behind the bar.

"These are good tickets," she said looking at them, and she kept them.

But I didn't literally take Kristen to the performance. She drove to the parking garage across the street and met me in the Sanger's lobby. But she had enhanced her sparkle with a literally sparkling white pantsuit and a red coat and high heels. I thought she looked like a Valentine. But I led her to seats that weren't ours. I led her to seats in the second row of the first balcony. Ours were in the second row of the second balcony section. So an usher asked us to move.

But, while we waited for the performance to begin, I told Kristin some of what I thought I knew of ballet in general and of the Nutcracker in particular, and, during the intermission, I bought her a glass of wine, and, after the performance, I asked her to have another drink with me in somewhere and took her to Touché, small bar in the Royal Orleans hotel but opening directly to the street, and we sat at a table in an area at the bottom of stairs descending from the bar.

"You're intensely sexy," I told her.

"You're making me uncomfortable," she said.

But she told me when I asked told me when I asked her to the ballet that her husband didn't deserve her, and, from Touche, we walked to Molly's. But Molly's was busy. So we joined a man sitting alone at one of the tall tables along the wall facing the bar, and Kristin seemed to me to be flirting with him, and, after we left, stepping from the in front of Tujaque's, a block from Molly's on our way, she slipped stepping from a curb and fell on her back, and I didn't help her. While stood looking down at her, a man passing by helped her up.

"Did I get the goods?" she asked looking at her pantsuit and saying she'd bought it for that occasion. "Is your place near hear?"

It was nearer to Molly's than to the Saenger, but I took her there.

"At least I didn't get the goods," she said as she bent over an end of my sofa using a dishcloth to try to wash spots from her coat. "It's cold in here."

My apartment had no heat, and in New Orleans I seldom needed any, but I didn't answer her question.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

I was trying to remove the cork from a bottle of wine. I'd bought in hope of taking her to bed that night, but I hadn't bought a corkscrew. So I was trying to dig it out with a screw driver, and, though I succeeded and poured a glass of it for her she took but one sip of it, and I didn't ask her to spend the

night with me. But, When we reached the parking garage, its gate was down for the night. So then I asked her to spend the night with me, but she said her husband knew where she was and asked me whether I knew of a place nearby with a telephone she could use. So I took her to Nugent's.

Angela wasn't tending bar, but the daughter of the woman who operated the kitchen was sitting at the bar with some friends.

"That's an awful pretty girl you're with," she said while Kristen was in the poker machine room making her call.

The girl's name was Cheryl Lynn, and once she asked me why I loved Angela so much.

"Something in the way she moves," I sang.

"If I ever fall in love again," she replied, "it'll be true blue."

"He said he'll pick me up at the hotel," said Kristin after her call.

So I walked her there.

"I should have told him I was spending the night with a friend," she said, removing her coat in the warmth of the warmth of the valet parking entrance, and I kissed one of her bare arms.

But the valet attendant was staring at me.

"You'd better not be here when he gets here," she said.

The next Monday, she came into the accounting office to use its copy machine, and, as she bent over the copy machine, I turned my head quickly to look at her buttocks, but then the accounts payable clerk stared at me, and Kristin neither spoke to me nor looked at me, and, the next time I saw her, she was in the hallway outside her office with her husband, and then both of them looked at me, but neither spoke.

Betty moved out of the hotel and into an apartment across the street from mine. From there she called me every morning for me to walk to work with her. On the way, we picked up donuts for the accounting staff. Eating in offices was contrary to policy, but no one complained.

She also told the African American accounting clerks of someone she knew who went to Howard University and referred to her as her black friend, and she also told me our Human Resources Director was black. She didn't seem to me to be African American, and Betty also complained about my route to the hotel. It was across a corner of the public housing project that had replaced Storyville. But she also asked me to rent an apartment with her, and I went with her to look at some new apartments across Canal Street from the Quarter. But I refused to help her entertain a friend of hers who shared her house with her in Florida.

"You were supposed to be a friend of mine," she said.

So, after telling me a smell of gas in her apartment was unhealthy for her, she moved without me, and the general manager who made the recommendations was only there for that, we quickly went through two more. Those two also seemed to me to like me, but I couldn't suffer the next one. His name was Doug Horn, and he was from Dallas, and, in a Dallas Cowboys hat in a general employee meeting in the hotel's grand ballroom, apparently either not knowing or not caring that most of his audience must have been New Orleans Saints fans, he told the employees that the hotel had two eras. He said they were BD and AD, before Doug and after Doug, and next he struck closer to New Orleans culture. On the employee cafeteria's Monday lunch menu he replaced red beans and rice with white beans and rice. So I resumed my suggesting and made some particular to him, and, before responding directly to me, he scoffed them in another general employee meeting. He didn't say my name, but he made it conspicuous, and next he told me he'd find something else for me to do, instead of my job description project.

He did that by promoting me, and giving me a thousand dollar salary raise, but the promotion was to be food and beverage controller and that moved me from the accounting office to an office on the ground floor across a hallway from the employee cafeteria, and that also removed the daily management report from my responsibilities and accordingly ended my fast track to management, and he fired the food and beverage controller I replaced in the income Auditor position and did all that literally over Ben's dead body.

Ben died. He developed a swelling in his neck and died less than two weeks later. Betty told me the doctors didn't know the reason for any of that, but Ben was gay. He had a young boyfriend in New Orleans who sometimes went places with him and Betty and me. All of the accounting staff attended his memorial service, but the person who delivered the eulogy at his memorial service didn't know him. He said Ben had asked that part of his memorial service be the playing of Willy Nelson singing "An Uncloudy Day", but he played it on portable cassette player. I didn't know anyone to complain of that, but all of that together added up to me again firing myself.

An additional duty for managers in the hotel industry was taking turns acting as general manager nights and on weekends. The term was MOD, and the duties were a little like a CQ in the Army but with more management responsibility, and upon my promotion to internal auditor, Betty asked me whether I'd like to take my turns at it. So I volunteered.

One Friday night, when I was to be weekend MOD beginning at 8:00 the next morning, I drank at Molly's until it closed at 3:00 a.m., and, as barmaid

closed the bar, she asked we whether I'd like to go with her and another customer to Harry's Corner, another bar I frequented, and I did.

I estimated that three hours of sleep would be enough, but, in stages, I reduced that estimate to a half hour, and then I climbed onto the bar. I don't know what I intended to do on it, but, before I had time to do anything on it, the bartender told me to leave. So I went home, changed my clothes, and went to work, and, when I arrived, Betty was in her office with the former general manager who'd included my recommendations with his.

"Did you sleep at all last night?" he asked.

"Sure," I said, but then I went down to the front desk, checked into a room, and slept until the telephone in the room awakened me, at about 2:00 p.m.

The caller was a front desk clerk telling me some meeting planners would like a tour of the hotel.

"What's your job here?" asked one of them in an elevator.

I told her I was the food and beverage controller. They thanked me and left me as soon as the elevator door opened. I finished my turn as MOD, left my keys in the center drawer of my desk, went home, and never returned to that desk. Instead I made hanging out in the bars my full time occupation.

After my first night of that, returning home at about 3:00 a.m., I saw a girl walking along the other side of the street with big duffle on one of her shoulders. I asked her whether she had a place to sleep. She said she didn't. I told her she could sleep at my place. She asked me where it was. I pointed over my head at my balcony. She nodded, followed me through the gate and up to my apartment, set her duffle on my living room floor, and looked at my books.

"Nice collection," she said.

"You can sleep with me or on the couch," I said. "It's up to you."

She chose the sofa. I gave her a blanket. When I awoke, she was still asleep with a bare foot of protruding from the beneath the blanket. I began another day of barhopping, and she was asleep when I returned, but she awoke as I entered the living room. So I continued my drinking with her. She told me she hadn't slept in three days, that name was Raenise, that her father lived in Colorado, and that she had a daughter who lived with her mother in Slidell. But I thought she said her name was Renee, and I didn't ask her anything.

She also said we should eat. I told her I didn't have much for groceries, but she said she'd cook if I bought some. So we walked to the little A&P store up Royal Street from my apartment. She corrected a price error the woman working checkout made, and, at home, she cooked what she called remake. After we ate, she sat on my Afghan carpet with her back against the sofa and sang acapella a long song about life on a farm, and the she went back to sleep.

Peggy had called me to tell me she and Kay and Sally and a friend of hers were planning to come see. I told her I might be able to book them a complimentary room at the Clarion, but, as my situation deteriorated, I called her and told her I might not be able to. I told her I had a queen size sleeper sofa and a king size bed, but she said they'd be on vacation and that she'd rather stay in a hotel with a lot of clean towels, and she called me again and told me they'd found a motel in Metairie. I told her how far Metairie was from the Quarter and advised her against that and hadn't heard from her since.

When they arrived, I was standing on my balcony.

"Yup, this is it," said Peggy looking up as they stepped out of a taxi.

I threw them my key to the gate and met them at the door to my apartment. There they told me they'd booked a room in Metairie. In my living room, they stared at Raenise. She was still sleeping on sofa. But, as they stared, she awakened. I introduced her as Renee, and she didn't correct me. Then I told Peggy I'd left my job.

"That doesn't surprise us," she said, and they they asked me where they should go for something to eat.

Raenise recommended Coop's, a casual restaurant next door to Molly's, and they accepted her recommendation, but, on the way there, Peggy kept me behind the others long enough to ask me how long I'd know Raenise.

"You just met her last night?" she said, grinning at my telling her.

But at Coop's Raenise broke a tooth.

"I can sue them," she said. "You're all witnesses."

She put the separate part of the tooth into a pocket of her jeans, and, the next day Peggy's friend left, and the others did some tourism before returning to my apartment. They asked me whether I wished to go to the casino with them, but I told them I didn't. They'd bought some souvenirs, and Kay suggested that they leave them at the apartment, but Sally didn't do that.

"I'm not leaving my stuff here," she said.

Returning from the casino Peggy asked me to take them where I met Mickey Rourke. I'd told her, during one of her calls regarding their impending visit, that I'd met him at the *Déjà vu*. It was also where I first shot pool with the person who recommended the rooming house on Dauphine Steet to me. His name was Ed Hamm, and he also built model airplanes, flew them in Audubon Park, baked bread, and loaned me a small TV when I lived in the third-floor slave quarter apartment, and he was at the *Déjà vu* when we arrived.

"These are my sisters," I said to him. "Aren't they beautiful?"

But he was sitting at an end of the bar while we sat at table, and Peggy said the cocktail she ordered wasn't red enough. But Raenise took it to the bar,

and the bartender made it redder. His name was Dougie. He was majoring in chemistry at the University of New Orleans, and I also told them Ed flew model airplanes and baked bread. Raenise left the table, talked with Ed for a few minutes at the bar, returned to the table, and told us he'd bake a loaf of bread for them. She said he said he'd bring it there the next night.

The next day, she told me her name wasn't Renee but Raenise, and she seemed to me to be angry.

"How about if I call you Rainy," I said.

"OK," she said, seeming to me to be no longer angry. "I like nicknames."

That night she told me she was going out. She asked me whether I wanted to go with her, but I was nearly out of money. So I didn't. I was asleep when she returned, but I'd given her a key to the apartment, and her banging through the door and stumbling into the living room and against the coffee table awakened me. So I rose and went into the living room. She was sitting on the sofa and had rolled a pantleg above a knee. The knee was bleeding, and a bruise was on one of her arms, but she was cleaning a crack pipe with a paperclip.

"Why did you let me go alone?" she asked.

"Oh, Rainy," I said. "I'm sorry."

"But I got it," she said. "I got the bread."

She went to the kitchen, and I followed her, and the loaf of bread Ed baked was on the kitchen counter.

"We need to put it in the refrigerator," she said, and the next day she gave it to my sisters.

I took them to La Madaleine at Jackson Square, but I didn't eat with them, and, though I drank a bottle of beer, I didn't pay for it.

"We didn't pay for your beer," said Peggy as we left, and that was my only tourism with them, and the next day they left New Orleans, but the next day the controller who replaced Ben called me.

He asked me whether I was coming back to work. I told him I wasn't. He asked me to bring back my keys. I told him I left them in my desk drawer. He thanked me and told me I could pick up my final paycheck the next day. The next day I went to the accounting office, but the controller wasn't in his office, and neither was Betty. While waiting for the controller, I talked with some of the accounting clerks. The accounts payable clerk asked me whether what I'd done was intentional.

"Sort of," I said, and then Horn came into the office, asked me what I was doing there, replied to my reply by telling me I could pick up the check in the human resources office, and told me he'd make sure security didn't let me

into the hotel again, but my check, with my vacation accrual, was a little over a thousand dollars, enough for me to resumed hanging out in the bars.

Rainy didn't always go with me. But one night she told me she was going out and didn't ask me to go with her. So I reminded her of what she said to me when she brought back the bread.

"It isn't what you think," she said.

When she returned, rain was pouring down and had soaked her hair and her clothes, but she was smiling.

"I heard her," she said. "I heard Melissa Etheridge sing."

She'd stood in the rain in front of the House of Blues for that.

Twice she spent a few minutes with me in bed, and once she called me at home, told me she was at the *Déjà vu*, asked me to join her there, and, when I arrived, kissed my mouth, and once she took me with her to a house in Marigny to buy some crack.

"It's good that you know what she's worth," said the African American woman selling it, but once, while I was barhopping while she wasn't with me, I came across her on Decatur Street.

"Give me some of those tens and twenties," she said.

"Just keep walking," said a woman to me, coming out of a shop, and at least once Rainy stole cash from my wallet.

I thought of the term "crack whore". Twice while Rainy was living with me, I put some cash in the top drawer of chest of drawers in my apartment to keep from spending it while I was out. Once, I suspected that what remained was less than I'd left, but I hadn't counted it when I left it .

The second time, when I returned home, an African American girl was there with her, and, extremely drunk, I lay on my back on the Afghan carpet, and Rainy opened my fly, pulled out my penis, and asked me whether I'd like her to suck it. But I didn't then, and she went to the bathroom.

So I counted the cash in the drawer and found that a hundred dollars was missing. So I asked the African American girl whether Rainy had taken a hundred dollars from my wallet, and he nodded. I said nothing to Rainy then, and they left.

But, the next time I saw Rainy, I picked up her keys from the coffee table and told her she'd have to leave, and she took a shower, put on clean clothes, including a T-shirt of mine, packed her duffle, and left, and I never saw her again.

## Chapter 29

### Acquiescence

But I also befriended a homeless Lucky Dog salesman. His name was name was also Bob, but one night between bars he and I came across an extremely thin girl he knew, and he asked me whether we could take her to my apartment. Rainy never folded out my sleeper sofa, But they did and slept on it that night, and, awakening in the night, I saw her naked on her way to the bathroom. Seeing me seeing her, she covered her breasts with a forearm, covered her pubic area with a hand, and hurried past, but, in the morning, Bob left her there, and she asked me whether I'd like to go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and we did, but she didn't seem to me to be welcome there, and, telling me her boyfriend was a clown and clowned for tips on streets of the Quarter, she said he wasn't funny, and she took me to the apartment she shared with him. The apartment didn't have a balcony, but its furnishings and neatness made me wonder that she lived in it and how she could afford to, and we did nothing there and didn't establish a relationship.

But I saw her again, once or twice. I also befriended an old man who told me he was temporarily homeless and let him sleep on my sofa several nights. And one night we across the thin girl.

"I know who you are," she said to him, but she didn't say who, and he didn't reply and one night I awoke and found him urinating on a side of my bed.

"What in hell are you doing?" I asked, and he didn't sleep there again.

I also remember her shouting to me from the street in front of my balcony and that I offended her, but I don't know how or why, and I'm not sure of that memory.

I didn't see much of Jay after I left my job, but, when I was nearly out of the cash from my final paycheck, he loaned me 75 dollars.

"If what happened to you happened to me," he said. "I think I'd kill myself."

I thought of what had happened me as what I'd done to myself, and I didn't ask him for the loan, but I accepted it, and when it was nearly gone, Craig called me. He asked me to have a drink with him at the Good Friends bar, a new



gay bar on Dauphine Street, and, when I arrived, I saw Craig sitting at the bar with his back to a side entrance several feet from the bar, so I entered through that entrance and squeezed his shoulder, and, before looking back, he relaxed as though suddenly a weight had lifted from his shoulders, and, as I drank a beer with him, he asked me whether I knew of a cheap apartment available in the Quarter, and I had decided to leave and hadn't signed a lease. So I told Craig mine would soon be available and I told him he didn't need to go through the landlord. I told him all he had to do was mail the rent to the landlord, and then I went home and packed.

I still had my Army duffle bag, and once, in an argument with Sherry, remembering how I felt about hoboes in Ionia, I'd threatened to use it to leave her. But, dragging the duffle bag once instead of carrying it, I wore a hole in its bottom. So, also to make it easier to carry, I cut about a quarter of its bottom end from it and closed the new opening with thread.

I packed a change of clothe, a copy of a bartenders' guide, the manuscript of the book I wrote about Angela, a bartenders' guide, my DD 214, a picture of my father standing in tall grass on a hillside in a suite and a straw boater, and the Bible I won when we lived at Marble Lake. Sally, when I was prospering at the Clarion, though I didn't ask her to, had sent me a box of things including the picture and the Bible. The reason I packed the manuscript was that I hoped to deliver it Little Brown in New York, but the bartender's guide was in hope leaving the road by becoming a bartender.

Next morning, in my Army field jacket and combat boots, I walked to the Elysian Fields Avenue entrance to I-10. My funds were less than a dollar in change and what remained of some food stamps I requested nearly as soon as I left my job, and I spent most of the change before I left town. I stopped at the Mardi Gras truck stop on Elysian Fields, bought a can of beer, and stood in the middle of the Elysian Fields median to drink it.

"Where are going?" asked a young African American woman.

She walked to me from beneath the I-10 overpass.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"New York," I told her.

"That's a long way to walk," she said. I

Then she pointed toward a ledge underneath the highway.

"I've got a house up under the bridge," she said.

I looked where she pointed but I didn't see anything on ledge.

"I don't plan on walking," I said, and I stayed where I was until I finished the beer, but I didn't go directly to New York.

I walked up the ramp and hitchhiked to Phenix City.

Willard was already on the road, but his brother Bobby answered my knock on Willard's door, and, though he said he didn't know where Willard was, he said he called every day for messages.

"You can call tomorrow," he said.

"What time?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "About ten?"

So I sat beneath a tree in a vacant lot to decide what to do next. A policeman told me neighbors complained about that, but he gave me directions to a park. So I found a supermarket, used food stamps to buy some food in enough small purchases for enough change for the telephone call and a forty-ounce bottle of beer, found the park, drank the beer at a picnic table, slept on the table that night, and called Bobby at exactly 10:00 a.m. Sherry had given me a gold-plated watch for one of my birthdays. Before we married, I bought her a wristwatch with some small diamonds in its face. I'd never given anyone anything more expensive.

"Oh," she said. "It has some small rhinestones in it.

"Those aren't rhinestones," I said.

"I'm sorry, Billy," said Bobby. "I didn't know who you were."

He told me Willard was in Andover, Ohio. Near Columbus a man with rotten teeth gave me a ride. He offered to suck my penis.

"You won't have to do anything for me," he said.

But I didn't accept his offer.

Waiting for a ride in Lodi, I saw a sign in front of a building across a street saying it was the Lodi Historic and Cultural Center. I walked across the street and asked a man inside how Lodi was historic. He gave me paperback book answering my question.

In Andover, I found Willard on the midway talking with a woman working a joint. The woman looked at me before Willard did, but then he looked at me and grinned and laughed his southern "heh, heh, heh".

"You need any money?" he asked as we walked to his office trailer.

"I could use some," I said.

"How much?" he asked.

"A hundred dollars?" I asked.

He counted out twenty five dollar bills.

"Why don't you give me a hundred dollars?" said a friend of his who sometimes traveled with him and joined us as we walked, but the fives were my first indication that Willard's business was deteriorating.

Rod Link had died. Willard was booking with Ski, a former concessionaire who had bought some of Link's rides, and wasn't sleeping in

motels. He'd bought a bunkhouse, a fifth wheel trailer with compartments for his crew and a shower on each side of its rear end, and was sleeping in a compartment with another shower and his bed in the overhang the trailer's hitch. I again slept in his office and again accounted for his cash, but he collected the cash on the midway. He'd become more cautious. But he'd replaced the bench and the counter with a big sofa and an office desk,

We played the River Festival in Portsmouth, Ohio, on the Ohio river. The town was Roy Roger's birthplace. One morning before the show opened I wandered into a music shop and saw an Alvarez classical guitar I thought I liked, but I hadn't yet accumulated enough cash that season to buy it, and, excepting the hundred dollars in Andover, I'd never borrowed money from Willard. So I didn't decided to buy it, but I told Willard's stock man, his crew member who delivered the stock to the joints. His name was also Joe.

"Borrow it from Willard," he said, and he was in the officed after I paid everyone at the end of that spot.

"Did you ask him," he then asked me.

"Ask me what?" asked Willard, and Joe told him, and Willard asked me how much I needed, and I told him three hundred dollars, and he counted it out in twenty-dollar bills, and, the next morning, while most of the crew was sleeping before the jump, I returned to the store.

"I robbed a convenience store," I told the salesman.

He looked at me as though I was serious, and I accidentally gave him one too many twenty-dollar bills. But he counted the cash, gave the twenty back to me, and put the guitar in its packing box. A recurring dream of mine was that I could play guitar spontaneously with all my finger, and, after the jump, the first time I had time to play that new guitar of mine, the dream came true. So, after naming the guitar Angelina, for Angela, I began writing songs and learning others' songs. I entitled the first song I wrote with her "I Love You Angela".

Jack had road girl that season. Her name was Lynn. She was an agent in one of Willard's joints. She also pulled the office trailer. I rode with her on our first jump that season, but she asked me whether I had a drivers license, and I told her I did. By then, though I don't know why, the Louisiana Department of Motor Vehicles had let me have one. So she asked me to show it to her, and, the next time we refueled, she asked me to drive, and, after that she rode with Jack. So pulling the trailer with Willard's Chevrolet pickup truck became part of my job.

Sometimes I played Angelina for others.

"But he's a hell of a guitarist," said one, responding to a woman's response to some of my drunken conversation in her G-top.

G-Tops were bars carnies operated unlawfully on carnival lots, and hers was in an old Blue school bus, but I also sang my song about Angela in others' presence, and Joe sang a line of its refrain in Willard's presence, but I also thought I fell in love with the wife of one of Willard's balloon dart agents. So I also wrote a song about her.

The crew called her Mona, but her name was Ramona. I heard that she and her husband were inmates together in a mental hospital before they married and that her husband's father arranged for the release of both of them. She was small with dark hair and pale blue eyes. Willard helped her husband and her buy a camper trailer. They had two young sons, and their sons traveled with them in the trailer, but I bought two plastic lawns for sitting outside the office trailer, and watching her wash the camper trailer barefoot as I sat in one of those chairs was when I thought I fell in love with her. Joe told me, as we sat on stones to drink beer in a nearly dry creek bed beneath a bridge while Lynn watched our laundry in a laundromat on the street above us, that he'd copulated with her in a porta potty. But, though tainting them, that didn't end my attraction to her. I also heard her husband call her dummy as she spoke with him while he was working his joint, and, in another spot, while their her trailer was behind the office trailer before the show opened for the week, I heard her berating him. But none of that made much difference to me.

In Detroit someone came onto the lot giving away kittens, and she accepted one but asked me to take care of it for her. Someone's rule kept proscribed having pets on that lot. I don't remember whose rule that was or why I could take care of the kitten while she couldn't, but I did. I bought cat food for it, and it also slept on Willard's chest while he napped in the office. It was a little calico kitten Ackley and Pat's kitten in L.A. But once I carried on a shoulder to a committee joint where Willard and Sheila, Ski's wife, were eating.

"You'd better get that out of here," he said, and Mona also spent a lot of time with an obese African American woman traveling with Johnny and Hook, two African American men who operated Willard's long range basketball joint, and, one night, while we were playing the American Legion Fair in Newton Falls, Ohio, the African American women told Mona's husband she was in one of the showers in Willard's bunkhouse, with Joe.

Johnny was quite ordinary, but Hook was tall and gangly and had crooked teeth. So I didn't understand nothing of that *ménage à trois*, or why the woman in it did that. But Mona's husband went the shower and banged on its door, and Mona came out in two towels, one around her head and the other around enough of her torso to conceal her breasts and *mons veneris*. But Joe locked himself in the shower

“Come out of there, you fucking coward,” shouted Mona’s husband. But then he turned to Mona. Ski’s bunkhouse was behind Willard’s Mona there. So she was sitting on its shower’s steps.

“You’re ruind,” he her husband, and, as Willard and most of his crew stood watching, he began to weep.

“Fucking coward,” I said, referring to Joe, and Willard looked at me.

But the crowd disbursed, and Mona’s husband left Joe in shower, left the show, took the oldest of their two sons, but he the younger and their camper trailer there.

That night, as I walked past their trailer on my way to take a shower, Mona called to me from, asked me where I was going, asked me inside, and, inside, I rubbed her back, and tried to push her bra above her breasts, but she didn’t let me go further.

“I’ve already committed adultery once tonight,” she said.

So I left and took my shower. By then, Joe had left the shower, but he was hiding the woods behind the lot, and the next day, we jumped to Hiawassee, Georgia, to play the Georgia Mountain Fair and left him wherever he was by then. But, before we opened, Mona’s husband came and took Mona and their other son home, to Marietta, Georgia, and, that night, as I tried to sleep, I heard Jack and Lynn talking outside the office trailer.

“And Wild Bill’s in love with the girl,” said Jack.

“And tonight was going to be his night,” said Lynn.

But, while we were there, I rafted the Nantahala Gorge with Jack and Lynn and Ski’s children. We went there in the pickup I used to pull the office, but Jack drove, with Lynn beside him, while I and Ski’s kid rode in the bed. Willard bought the truck new to pull it the first year I was his Money Man, but since then someone had removed its tailgate by trying to pull the trailer before engaging its fifth wheel hitch, and, during that ride, Ski’s son lay at the back edge of the gateless bed, and, at the gorge, Ski’s daughter fell into the Nantahala trying to jump into the raft from a rock, and Patricia came to Hiawassee and spent a few nights with Jack in the Airstream trailer he shared with Lynn and Kokomo Joe. So Lynn asked me to drive her to a motel, shared a joint with me there, and complained about what Jack was doing. As we smoked it, she stood in front of me in a way that told me she’d like me to unbutton her jeans, I didn’t, but, In another spot, as only she and I sat outside the Airstream after the show closed, she offered me fellatio.

“No thanks,” I said.

“Fuck you,” she said

Another night, in another spot, I told her, as we sat with others of the crew but not Jack, that I'd refused because Jack was a friend of mine, and then she smiled, but Jack told me she didn't wear underwear, and, in Oklahoma City, I bought a gig bag for Angelina and some stick-on letters for it.

"Ride please," said the letters, and, one night, before the show closed, I drove Willard's pickup to a bar and drank there until the bar closed.

I'd also done that on 14 July of that year, and then I told Willard I did it to celebrate Bastille Day, and then he smiled. But, when I did it after sticking the letter on the gig bag, I drove back to the lot after the show closed, left the keys to the truck and the office trailer on the desk in the office trailer, and headed more directly toward New York. I told myself I myself I did it because working for Willard wasn't being either a writer or a hobo.

From the road, a few days later, I sent Willard a postcard. I also left my DD214 and the picture of my father in an envelope in a cabinet in his office. But I don't remember whether I told him that in the postcard, and neither do I remember anything else I told him.

At a truck stop, for occasional shelter, I bought a blue plastic tarp.

"I see you have some money" said the truckdriver who took me there.

But he let me sleep in his trailer that night, and another ride was in an old pickup truck its owner had turned into a hotrod. I put Angelina and all else I had with me in its bed, and Angelina slipped through gap in the bed's planks. Her gig bag rubbed against a tire, but I smelled the burning and told the driver So all the damage to Angelina was two small dents in her finish from bouncing against the wood. I felt as though I'd risked the life of my closest friend.

Near Nashville a man in a Cadillac picked me up. He asked me whether I was a singer. I told him I was and that I also wrote songs. Telling me some of his friends were in a band and needed a singer, he asked me whether I had time to meet them, and I told him I wasn't in a hurry. So he took me to an old gray clapboard house with drums and other musical instruments in its carpetless living room. But he didn't tell them why he took me there.

After a few minutes of nearly no conversation, they told me they were going to a liquor store, and I went with them, out the back door and through an alley to the other side of the block, and bought a pint of Jose Cuervo. I drank it all afternoon and planned to spend the night there, but, as I sat on a porch swing drinking the tequila while the band was inside, a man I thought was older than the band came out to the porch. I'd seen him inside but hadn't spoken with him.

"Where are you going to sleep tonight?" he asked.

"Here," I said.

“You’re not staying here,” he said. “You’re the most obnoxious person I’ve ever met.”

“I’m the greatest songwriter who ever lived,” I said.

“We’ll see,” he said. “I’ll give you a ride to the highway.”

“I need my guitar,” I said.

He asked me where it was. I told it was in the trunk of the Cadillac. He asked a band member where the driver of the Cadillac was and drove me to another house. The Cadillac was in the front yard, and the driver came out of the house, opened the Cadillac’s trunk, and handed me my guitar, and then the man who took me to that house took me to a highway overpass. So I slept that night behind a concrete wall beside the road beneath the overpass, and that was the first time I used my tarp. I don’t remember where I was the next time I slept in a bed, but I think I must have been somewhere north of Virginia. A young man in an old Chevrolet Cavalier told me he could drive me to Newark but that he had to stop for the night. I offered to pay for a motel, but, say he’d find somewhere else to sleep, he’d drop me at one and pick me up there in the morning.

The motel had a bar. Everyone in it was African American, and the bartender told me it had closed. But I bought a sixpack to go and drank it in the room. The next morning the young man returned as he said he would and drove me to the bus station in Newark. But he quoted apocalyptic Bible verses all the way, and, at the bus station, he asked me for money for gas. I gave him some.

My first stop in New York City was at the corporate headquarters of Little, Brown. I selected Little, Brown because of Salinger, and a sign in the lobby listed it. So I took an elevator to the floor it listed, but the elevator lobby was tiny and had one door other than the elevator door. I couldn’t turn its knob, but a button was beside it. So I pushed it, and young women opened a window in the door. So I told her why I was there.

“You can leave it if you want to,” she said.

A grate was across the window, but a space was open at its bottom.

“This is an act of faith,” I said, pushing the manuscript through the space, but then I dropped Angelina on her head, and the young woman frowned both when I spoke and when I dropped Angelina, but the building was but a few blocks from the White Horse Tavern.

So I walked there and told the bartender why I was in New York and that I was at the White Horse because of Dylan Thomas.

“I’ve thrown Norman Mailer out of here,” he said. “I guess I can throw you out.”

But he didn’t, and I didn’t know why he would.

From there I walked to McSorley's old Ale House. Atkinson had told me about it, and I'd been there on one of my visits to New York to see Vaughn, but this time I drank at a table with two women. The women's liberation movement, in the years since my previous times there, had ended McSorley's tradition of no female customers, and the women seemed to me to enjoy my conversation. But from there I returned to the White Horse and found myself no longer welcome.

"You're drunk, aren't you?" said a man at the door.

So from there I walked to Washington Square, hoping to sleep in the fountain, if it was dry. It was empty, but barricades were at the entrances to the park, and a police car was at the barricade nearest to the fountain. So, hoping to sleep in Central Park, I walked uptown. But at the curb in front of the front entrance to the *Newsweek* building was a pile of large cardboard boxes no one yet had folded for use, and, in the entranceway, a man was sleeping on a pile of several of them. So I pulled three more into the entranceway and did the same.

I had a knife I'd bought from a town mark in Hiawasse before the Georgia Mountain Fair opened. Its blade had a perforation into which one could insert one's thumb to open the knife with one hand. Willard, seeing it on top of a file cabinet, had told me it was "a hell of a weapon." So I tried to sleep with the knife in hand. When I awoke, the knife and the other man were gone, but Angelina was still there, and from there I returned to Washington Square.

"A homeless musician," said a man to a man walking with him.

I sat on a bench and nodded briefly, but when I opened my eyes, a policeman was standing in front of me. He walked on, but so did I, to Times Square, and there I decided to buy a road atlas. I'd had some difficulty finding my way to New York. So I asked a policeman whether he knew of a bookstore near there. He frowned when I began speaking to him, but the frown disappeared when I asked the question, and he told me of one a block away. So I bought the atlas and used it to New Orleans to check on my mail. I'd kept a post office box there at the post office on Iberville Street.

I hitchhiked through the Lincoln Tunnel, went there as directly as I could, and, after picking up my mail, walked to the apartment and rang the doorbell. A young man stepped onto the balcony. I told him I was looking for Craig. He asked me whether I was Billy, told me Craig wasn't there, and asked whether I wished to come up. But I told him I'd return later, and, after reading my mail on Washington Artillery Park, I did, and Craig was there. I found that he was sharing the apartment with several homosexual men.

But then I went barhopping, beginning at the Alibi on Iberville Street. It had become one of my half dozen favorite bars. A policeman owned it, but I



liked his main barmaid, Debbie LeRoy, and had sent her a big plush lion from the road. But, on Bourbon Street, on my way to the Alibi, I made a brief stop, to talk with a strip joint doorman I knew.

“Debbie got that teddy bear you sent her,” he said. “That was neat.”

“It was a lion,” I said. “Her name means Debbie the King, as in ‘king of beasts’, and she looks a little like a lion. I mean her hair and her upper lip.”

“Well,” said the doorman. “It was neat anyway.”

Both Debbie and Bob the Lucky Dog salesman were at the Alibi. Thinking of the fountain of youth, I’d decided to go next to St. Augustine. I asked Bob whether he’d like to go along.

“We’d have to be partners,” he said.

“No problem there,” I said.

“I mean really partners,” he said.

I nodded, and we agreed to meet the next morning at the Alibi. But both of us slept at my apartment that night, and, on my sleeper sofa, he tried to draw me into a sort of threesome with one of Craig’s homosexual friends. But I slept in my bed, and he was gone by morning and didn’t meet me at the Alibi.

In St. Augustine I checked into a homeless shelter. It was a house. Someone had built some wooden double bunks into a second-floor room. Then I went for a walk and found a square with a bronze statue of Queen Isabella on a mule while a man led the mule down some rocks, and there, in front of a bar, was bicycle with a basket on its handlebars. In the basket was a dog. On the basket was sign asking for money for beer.

I bought a quart of beer and drank it on a bench facing the water, and, after drinking the beer, I threw the bottle into a trash basket at the end of the bench and began playing Angelina, and, as I was doing that, man I’d seen at the shelter joined me on the bench. I was working on a second song about Angela and played as much of it as I’d written, and the man asked me why I was at the shelter. I told him the reason was that I drank too much beer.

“Have you drank any today?” he asked.

“No,” I said, afraid the truth might cost me my bunk at the shelter.

The man went away, when I returned to the shelter, he was there.

“There’s your great musician,” said another man to him.

I slept there that night and ate pastries and drank coffee there next morning, but I decided to travel on.

“I saw you coming into town,” said a female police officer stopping me as I was leaving town. “How do I know you’re not an ax murderer?”

I had no answer, but she let me hitchhike, and two young men in a van gave me a ride to Jacksonville. I don’t remember why I was heading north, but

the man in the van's front passenger seat had crutches with him, and his conversation with the driver told me the van was his, and they stopped in a convenience store parking lot and bought some crack. People were openly buying and selling it there. I'd seen a sign saying Jacksonville was drug-free.

A man driving me to Charleston asked me why I was hitchhiking. I told him I fell in love. He said that restored his faith in humanity and that he especially liked the song "Seven Spanish Angels". He bought me lunch in a cafeteria and told me I might be able to sleep in Battery Park.

"But you must know more about that sort of thing than I do," he said.

I found my way to Battery Park, sat on a bench overlooking the water, and finished writing the song I was writing in St. Augustine. The title I gave it, thinking of her blue eyes and the sun seeming to me to brighten when I saw her, was "Angela, I Can't Tell You From the Sky". But that evening I saw, through windows of a big old house, people in dinner dress standing and talking with drinks in their hands. So, doubting that police would let me sleep in the park, I used my tarp to sleep on the ground between the backs of two apartment buildings, but next morning I found a building with some men who didn't seem to me to be together standing in front of it. So I asked one of them what they were doing, and he told me the building was an employment office and that people needing day laborers came there to hire people. So I asked him whether he knew of any services for the homeless in Charleston, and he asked me what kind of services I was seeking.

I'd left my field jacket in New York, and the heels of my combats were protruding into my heels. I don't know what happened to the field jacket. Once I dropped it and didn't know I did, but then someone picked it up, caught up with me, and gave it back to me, and, though I don't remember what I told the man in Charleston, he asked me whether I was a veteran and told me he knew of a place where veterans could obtain both field jackets and combat boots, and he gave me directions. So I walked there and talked with a man in an office. He told me he didn't provide that service, but he asked me whether a field jacket lying in a chair in front of his desk would fit me, and I tried it on. I found it a little too small, but I said it was good, thanked him, and left in it.

Hitchhiking out of town, I saw the Carolina Coastal Fair. Entering the lot through the gate required paying admission, but I walked around the fence looking for another way, and seeing some men behind a Xyclon, I asked them whether they knew of anyone there needing help, and they told me they needed some help tearing down the Xyclon that night. Xyclons were portable rollercoasters. I asked them how I could enter the lot, and they threw a ladder over the fence.

I tried to sleep on one of the ride's trailers, but someone asked me to help load riders onto the ride. So I did that until the show closed and then worked all night at the physically hardest and dirtiest work I'd ever done. I helped carry the greasy steel tracks to the truck. The person who hired me told me the pay would be fifty dollars, but the person who paid me paid me thirty, and I didn't complain. I didn't feel I'd measured up to the job.

I found a shower on the lot, but the water was cold, and I had no soap. So the shower didn't nearly wash away all that grease, and, few minutes after I returned to the road to hitchhike on, a patrol car stopped in front of me, and the patrolman told me I couldn't hitchhike in South Carolina. So, for a ride out of South Carolina, I walked back onto the lot, went to the show's office trailer, and asked whether the show could use any help in the next spot, and Jocille Link, daughter of Rod Link's, was at the window. I thought she recognized me, but, telling me she was sorry, she said that was the company's last spot of the season.

So I lay on grass beside drive to the fairgrounds' main truck exit, turned the request for a ride toward the traffic approaching the exit, and tried to sleep. But someone interrupted that by lightly kicking one of my feet and asking me where I was going and whether I had a driver's license and could pull a trailer. I answered the second and third questions affirmatively and told him I didn't care where I went. So he took me to a man who asked me whether I had a commercial driver's license but replied to my negative answer by asking me whether I'd ever pulled a trailer. So I told him I'd pulled a 28-foot fifth wheel all over the country.

"He can handle it," he said.

So I pulled Bozo Bill's bozo to what had been Rod Link's winter quarters in Montgomery. A bozo is a joint at which people throw balls to trip a lever to drop a seat from beneath a clown to drop him into a tank of water, and Bozo Bill not only owned the bozo I pulled and had written a book of bozo taunts but also owned and operated the cookhouse that had served Link's employees, and I had a more direct connection with all that. Jimbo, Kay's and Doyle's son, was briefly a bozo in that bozo, and a guy who rode with me knew him. But more important to me then was that the pickup I used to pull the bozo had a camper cap on it, and the guy who kicked my foot let me sleep in it that night, drove me to buy some beer, and told me he'd pay me twenty dollars in addition to the fifty the show would pay me for the drive, and he also suggested that I ask Link's son Greg whether he could use help during the winter, and Greg was on the farm when we arrived.

But his reply told me he recognized me but not pleasantly.

"No," he said frowning and turning away with no other word.

But the man who suggested that I ask him gave me a ride a highway, and, after I reminded him of his promise to pay me the extra twenty dollars, he cheerfully paid it.

My next stop was in Valdosta, Georgia. Except to buy some beer, I didn't intend to stop there. But, as I looked for a convenience store, a guy on the street looked at my tarp and asked me whether I was there for the fair.

In Florida, drinking a quart of beer while sitting on a bank of a boat channel, I'd seen a rope running into the water from a stake beside me. So I cut the rope from the stake and used it for a way to carry my belongings more efficiently. I rolled them into the tarp and tied the ends of the rope around the ends of the roll, with enough slack between to use it as a shoulder strap. So I guessed that was how the guy in Valdosta guessed I was traveling homeless.

I don't remember my reply to him, but he told me his name was Al and that people called him Alkie Al. So we found a convenience store, bought two quarts of beer, and drank it in a backyard. The yard was nearly grassless, and I saw no indication that anyone lived in the house, but Al said the woman who owned it didn't care and that he'd met Mickey Rourke there, and, after drinking those two quarts of beer, we bought two more. But we drank those two in some bushes beside the convenience store's parking lot.

On the side of the bushes away from the parking lot was an apartment complex, and a large ground floor window of one of the apartments faced a patio facing the bushes, and we could see a woman in the apartment. But she wasn't doing anything that interested me. So I took Angelina out of her gig bag.

"Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," said Al after I played that song. "I thought you probably just knew a couple of chords."

But, after we drank those two quarts, Al called the police from a pay telephone in front of the store and told them we were too drunk to walk, didn't have any money, needed to get to the fairgrounds, and didn't want to be arrested for public drunkenness on the way, and a female police officer came for us. While we waited for the police, we bought two sixteen-ounce cans of beer to take with us. But she asked us no questions. The show had closed, but some other carnies were drinking at the cookhouse. So we joined them, and I took Angelina out of her gig bag again, and, as I played her while drinking my can of beer, the policewoman returned.

"You left this in my car," she said, handing me my field jacket, and she smiled when I thanked her, and, when I finished my can of beer, other carnies brought me another, and then another, and man and woman among them told me I could sleep in their Cadillac that night, and, for that, the woman brought me a blanket and a pillow from their trailer.

Next morning, as I stood outside the Cadillac leaning against it, a large man came to me and asked me whether I needed work. People called him the big Indian, but the job was operating a kiddy boat ride, boats floating in a tank of water at ends of spokes around a motor. The pay was ten dollars a day, but it included the top of one of perhaps a dozen wooden double bunks in a semi-trailer. A blonde girl with large breasts also slept in the trailer, and, as I lay on my bunk, she asked that no one look at her while she changed clothes. I tried not to close my eyes completely, but she didn't remove her bra.

Mornings, before the show opened, I sat in a plastic lawn chair outside the trailer drinking beer and playing Angela.

"That's the best one," said a crew member coming around the corner of the trailer after I played John Denver's song "For Baby".

"Don't get too drunk to work," said the big Indian.

I had a copy of the New Testament. I don't remember how or why, but I read it as I worked. The boat ride had nearly no riders., and, as I read it, I tore out the pages, wadded them up, and threw them on the ground in front of me. A girl walking past stopped and asked me what I was reading. She was a carny but didn't work for the company for which I was working.

"The New Testament," I said.

"Should you be doing that to it?" she asked, but I shrugged.

The company owning the boat ride booked but one other ride there that year. So, after some of the crew members helped me strike the boat ride, I helped tear down the other one, an old Eli Ferris wheel. Each of the two posts supporting the wheel was in two sections, and fitting them into the truck required folding them, and that required removing one of two pins from each post, from where the sections overlapped, and that required lifting the top sections enough to lift the weight from the pins, and the big Indian tried using steel bar like a tankers' bar to do that from the ground, but he couldn't.

"Can I try?" I asked, after watching him fail for about fifteen minutes.

"Sure," he said.

So I grabbed a pry bar less than two feet long, climbed to an empty hole between the pins, and, with the prybar through the hole, pried the top section up far enough for another member of the crew to remove the pin. I don't remember who did that on the other side, but, when the owner paid us, he paid me fifty dollars more than the big Indian had promised me, and that was more than the total receipts for the boat ride that week. He wasn't on the lot during the week, and that was their last spot for that season, but he also gave me his business card and asked me to call him if I wanted to work for them again the next season.

That night, because the lot had no showers, I split the price of a motel room with one of the other crew members. He asked me whether the girl's small black dog could also share the room with us, and the next morning she came for the dog and looked at the other crew member. He looked at her and then at me and then at her again. To that he nodded, and he left the room. But I didn't know how to follow up on that. So I left her and the dog in the room.

With Angelina hanging from one of my shoulders and my bedroll hanging from the other, I walked downtown and found a little building selling beer. Everyone in the building was African American, but a man behind a counter between a few small tables and a small kitchen sold me a sixteen-ounce can of beer for little more the convenience store price.

"Nobody'll bother you," he said.

So I sat at one of the tables, talked with some other customers, and suggested that they turn off the jukebox for me to play Angelina. After I suggested that several times, they did, and I began to play Melissa Etheridge's song "Talking to My Angel". But, before I finished playing and singing its first stanza, they turned the jukebox on again.

From there I found a social services office to request food stamps. But the person I asked said the process would take weeks. So I hitchhiked on.

Alkie Al had worked a grab joint in Valdosta. That's what carnies called trailers selling food one could grab to eat while walking. The last day of that spot, I went to the one he was working and asked him where he was going next. He said he was going to Fort Lauderdale, to the Broward County Fair, and that it was the last fair of the season anywhere. Though he expressed no interest in my traveling with me, I went there, but I found no way onto the lot other than by paying admission. So I sat in some bushes to decide what to do and decided to find a convenience store to buy some beer. Then, finding one, I bought a sixpack and found the beach. I buried five of the cans in the sand to keep them cool, opened the other, and sat in the sand playing Angelina.

A young man came to me and told me he was a member of the Glen Miller Orchestra. He said it was a continuation of the Glen Miller franchise of the late 1930's and early 1940's and that I had quite an audience there. Some sandpipers walking along the beach had stopped in front of me. Then the man asked me for a beer. So I dug up a can of beer, handed it to him, and I told him the sandpipers seemed to me to like especially the D minor chord. That was true, but then he asked to use my handkerchief. I was using one to wipe sand from the rims of the beer cans, but I thought it was too dirty for anyone else to use it. So I didn't hand that to him, and he didn't sit down. He said he was glad he'd met me, but he walked back in the direction from which he'd come.

I spent that night among some sea grape bushes along a wall of some property facing the beach. I kept one of the leaves and used it as a bookmark for a book about Taijiquan I had. I don't remember where or why I bought the book, but, from Fort Lauderdale Beach I hitchhiked to West Palm Beach.

My ride into West Palm Beach was with a man and his two sons. The father told me they were on their way to repossess a semi-truck tractor. They cut a lock from a chain on a gate and drove the tractor outside the gate. One of the sons drove the tractor away with the other son. The father drove me to a highway, gave me a business card, and told me to call him if I could acquire a passport and wished to work for him in Honduras. He didn't say what work.

I don't remember how or why I made my way to the other side of Florida, but a man who gave me a ride to Venice let me sleep in a condominium unit under construction there. Next morning a man and woman came into the unit and said they owned it and asked me why I was there. But they responded to my telling them by giving me an orange and a ride to a highway.

"I need to find a place to take a shower," I said to the next person who picked me up, but, by thin I'd also told him I was looking for work after working the carnival season.

"It's bad when you can smell yourself," he said rolling down the driver door window, but, after I rolled down the window beside me, he told me he worked for an organization that helped homeless people and that he knew a man who operated a small amusement park and often hired homeless people.

He told me the man's name and took me there. But left me there with no introduction. So I sat on a low wall outside the gate of the park to consider whether I wished to work for more rides. But a security guard told me I couldn't sit there, and I already felt uncomfortable with situation. So I left with no argument.

I found a Salvation Army shelter letting people shower for a dollar and eat for no charge. But, as I stepped from the shower, a man came into the shower room and told me he wanted to see how much longer I'd be, and, as I left that building, I again dropped Angelina on her head. So, though I ate a full meal there, I traveled on. But, in Sarasota, I found relatively steady work.

A day labor agency there referred people and paid them by check daily but officially enough to deduct from the income tax and social security withholdings. So I stayed there long enough to make a kind of friend. His name was Alan, and he drank as much as I.

A liquor store near the day labor agency cashed the checks for a fee, and once, after cashing our checks there, Alan and I bought two quarts of beer and sat on the step of an alley entrance to the liquor store to drink them, until a

police car entered the alley. We hadn't drunk enough to be drunk, and, across the street at the end of the alley, people were drinking at tables on the sidewalk outside a restaurant. But the police handcuffed Alan and me and took us to jail.

"Who handcuffed him?" asked the policeman who removed the cuffs from me at the jail, after one of the two arresting officers left the room.

"The Chief," said the other arresting officer.

"He doesn't seem that drunk either," said the one removing the handcuffs, shaking his head.

The jail was relatively new, but the food was baloney sandwiches, and the room where we went after the initial processing had a concrete floor and no furniture, but that night a deputy moved us to individual cells with no bars and no view from it other than through a tiny window in the door.

"No!" I shouted as the cell's door closed with only me in it.

I told the person locking the door I was claustrophobic. But, though he looked at me when I said that, he said nothing, and, the next morning, upon our release from the little cells, Alan looked at me in a way suggesting to me that he wondered what psychological damage I might have suffered from that. But, a few minutes later, we went to court and received a sentence of time served.

"Freedom!" I shouted in the square in front of the jail, and others in the square looked at me and grinned.

The dispatcher at the day labor office gave me priority over others, but I supposed the reason was reports he received from the temporary employers, and the dispatcher seemed to me to confirm that.

"Can you operate an air hammer?" he asked me.

"I don't know," I said. "What's an air hammer."

"Don't worry about it," he said. "You can handle it."

So, about a half hour later, I and an air hammer were hanging by a rope to chip concrete from the outside of the tenth story of a building. But I enjoyed that, and it was what the day labor agency called a skilled ticket. So my pay for it was about fifty cents an hour more than the minimum wage the agency ordinarily paid. But, after an assignment unloading some Christmas trees, I decided to begin working my way north for Christmas. The man supervising the unloading said the trees were from Michigan.

But, before I was out of the Sarasota metropolitan area, I bought a quart of beer at a filling station and took into woods behind the station to drink it, and sitting on a fallen tree to do that, I saw a pup tent in the woods about fifty yards to the right of me. So, when I finished drinking the beer, I went to the tent and found in it five cans of beer in the plastic binding of a sixpack, but also in it were a newspaper and a watch. The date of the newspaper was about a month



earlier than the date I was there, and the watch had stopped about a day after the date of the newspaper. But what surprised me most in all that was that, a few minutes before I bought the quart of beer, I'd decided I no longer had a reason to worry about time. So I left the beer and the watch and all else and continued on.

I decided that, if I saw a policeman before my next ride, I'd tell him of the tent. But I didn't, and the pain from the nails in my boots was increasing. So my priority shifted to solving that problem. So I found an agency providing services for the homeless. The person who talked to me there also told me he couldn't help me with that. But he told me an agency in the next town north might, and he gave me a bus token. So I went there.

The services were a doublewide house trailer across a road from big wooden building somewhat like a barn. Boots weren't among the services, but the trailer provided a nights of sleep on a mat on its floor, and the barn provided meals. So I ate a meal in the barn and slept that night on one of the mats, and the meal was Thanksgiving dinner. I didn't know the day was Thanksgiving until I walked across the road for the meal, but neither did I stay there another night, and my next night indoors was by invitation.

As a stood thumbing in front of a ranch style house a little above the highway, a young man with long blond hair came out of the house and asked me whether I needed a place to stay that night. I told him what I needed was a pair of work boots, but he said that, if I spent the night there, he'd see what he could to the next day. Inside the house were a Christmas tree and about a half dozen other young men, and the blond one asked me my name and wrote it in a ledger.

Next morning, after breakfast of pastries and coffee, as I sat with some of the others at a picnic table outside the house, the blond man came out of another building and offered me a pair of cowboy boots. But they didn't fit. So, saying he'd see if he could find something that did, he went back into the building. The others said they were waiting for someone to pick them up to take them to a day labor job and that I could go with them, but, I waited neither for the job nor for the boots. I went down to the road and resumed hitchhiking. Before I caught a ride, the blond man came out and asked me where I was going, but I told him I had to move on, and then a van stopped.

"Nutcrackers of the world unite," said some letters in sloppy paint over the van's right rear wheel well, and an old man was driving it.

But I climbed in and told him I was trying to get to Iron City to spend Christmas with my sister, and he told me he was going near Iron City but had to make a stop along the way, stopped at a small house at the end of a drive about a hundred yards from the road. said the house was his wife's and that she was divorcing him, and walked around the house looking in the windows.

After a few minutes of that, we left, but then he said he had to make another stop. Some sugar cane was in the back of the van, and he said the next stop was to sell it. That stop was also a small house, but it was nearer to the road, and a man came out of it. While he talked with the old man, I urinated beside the van, but no one complained about that, and, on the road again, after they unloaded sugar cane, the old man said his family owned the Winn-Dixie supermarket chain and that he had to stop at one of its stores to cash a check. The clerk at checkout said he had to ask his manager, but the manager came to checkout and approved the check with no questions, and we bought some beer and traveled on drinking it. But at the Alabama State line, the old man said we needed to buy more beer. He said the county across the line was dry, and, at a convenience store, He took some beer and snacks to the cash register. But, when the clerk told him the amount, he said he didn't have enough money.

The check he'd cashed was for 25 dollars, but I'd kept my checking account in New Orleans, and my V.A. disability compensation still was going to it, and a bank with an ATM outside it was across the street from the store. So I walked across the street and withdrew fifty dollars, but, when I returned to the store, police were there. The clerk had called them.

"There's my partner," said the old man.

"Are you his partner?" asked one of the policemen.

"I wouldn't say that," I said.

"Can you pay for this stuff?" asked the policeman.

"Yes," I said, showing him the cash.

After watching me pay for it, he asked the clerk whether he was alright, and the clerk said he was. So the police left, But, expecting them to stop the old man for drunk driving as soon as we left the store, I was glad I wasn't driving. They didn't, but they were Florida police, and, in Alabama, saying he needed to sleep, the old man parked in a parking area. It was for a park but was on the road, and, though I climbed into the back seat and tried to sleep, the old man didn't immediately make that effort.

"I've got a bee-yer," he chanted outside the van.

A few minutes later, he quieted and returned to the driver seat, but, soon after that, I heard a pounding on the top of the van.

"Driver!" someone shouted. "Get out of the car!"

The person shouting was a policeman and shouted it twice more before the old man obeyed, and then another policemen opened the passenger door and shined a flashlight back at me.

"Who's that?" asked the policeman.

"My partner," said the old man.

The policeman ordered me out of the van and asked for my drivers license.

“He’s from Bourbon Street,” he said. “That figures.”

“Is this your beer?” asked the other policeman.

I don’t know how, but what remained of the beer I’d bought was behind the back seat of the van, and the policeman had opened the back doors.

“I guess so,” I said. “I bought it.”

So then, after telling me we were in a dry county, he and the other policemen there took the old man and I to the Hanceville police station, and there the chief interviewed me alone in an office, told me someone had stolen the van in Mississippi and killed its owners, informed me of my right to remain silent, and asked me whether I’d waive them.

No one else was present, but I told him I didn’t think I should.

He sent me to the Cullman county jail. There a Deputy Sheriff left the old man and me in a big cell with a long steel table, a toilet, and a shower stall. A gate in bars along one side of the room opened to a hallway with about a dozen smaller cells along it, and neither the gate to the hallway nor the doors to the cells ever closed while I was there.

Each cell had four steel shelves for bunks, but everything else there was up for grabs. So some of the inmates had more than one mattress and blanket while others had none of either, and the Deputy who took me there took my field jacket. The jail’s kitchen was undergoing renovation. So the local Burger King furnished all the meals. But trustees pushed them through a slot in the door to the outside hallway. So they were also up for grabs.

The only window was a small skylight outside the gate to the inside hallway. So I claimed a top shelf in the cell across from that door and spent much of my time there lying on the shelf reading a Bible I found in the big open space. One of my cellmates had a small TV and had put it on a small table in the center of the back wall of the cell for everyone to be able to watch it, but 700 Club was plainly the most popular program there. As in the psychiatric ward in Frankfurt, the inmates there played a lot of spades, but I couldn’t concentrate on that and never won a game, and seldom did the other inmates speak to me. But one conversation gained me some sympathy.

“That guy said you’re his partner,” said one of the inmates.

“I’m not his partner,” I said. “He picked me up hitchhiking.”

“Good for you,” he said. “That guy’s fucked up.”

But I never saw the old man there. The second day I was there that inmate told me the deputies had moved him for his protection, and my situation gradually improved. I don’t remember how, but I obtained a pencil and some

paper and used them to write to the jailers, telling them where the old man picked me up, that the blond man had written my name in a ledger, and that he'd seen me get into the van. I received no reply in that regard, but I also asked for my field jacket, and, a few days later, someone brought it to me, and, a few days after that, someone brought me some other clothes. So I washed my clothes in the shower, and the inmate who owned TV gave me one of his mattresses, and I found my way out of there. A telephone was at end of the common room. So I called Sally and, thinking of George Herbert Walker Bush, I asked her to call the Presbyterian Church in Cullman and tell them my situation, and she did, and the church sent an attorney.

"You want to get out of her bad, don't you," he said talking to me through bars beside the telephone, but he got me out of there.

A few days later, Mississippi police came for extradition, and he attended the extradition hearing, and, the next day, someone with the title warden processed my release at a small desk at the bottom of the stairs to the cells.

"Let this be a lesson to you," he said. "If you ever commit a crime again, don't do it in Alabama."

My only crime that time was possession of beer in a dry county, but I wanting to find a way to pay the attorney. So I walked from the jail directly to his office. But a receptionist told me he wasn't there and that she didn't know when he would be, and I didn't feel I had time to wait for him. So next, hoping to find Angelina, I hitchhiked to Hanceville.

My first ride left me somewhere between Cullman and Hanceville. There a patrol car stopped, and the policeman in it told me I couldn't hitchhike there. But he asked me where I was going and replied to my reply by giving me a ride there, and the chief was there, told me she was there, and took me to a closet, and both Angelina and my bedroll were there.

"Can you tell me what kind of guitar it is?" he asked. "I need to be sure it's yours."

"It's an Alvarez classical," I said, and I pulled her out of her gig bag far enough to see the label beneath Her sound hole.

Not to hitchhike again in Alabama, I decided to take a bus to Iron City, but the nearest bus station was in Cullman. So I began walking on the right side of the road with the request for a ride on Angelina's gig bag facing to my rear, but the sun set before I caught a ride. So I slept in the bed of a truck in the driveway beside a business that had closed for the night.

In the morning I resumed walking, but another policeman stopped and told me my gig bag wasn't fooling anyone, and, though I also told him what I

was trying to do, he didn't give me a ride. So then I walked on the left side of the road, but a man with a woman and a baby with him stopped and gave me a ride. Near Cullman's city limits, he ran out of fuel, and felt that I should stay with them and try to help them. But, though ashamed, I immediately left them to walk to the bus station.

At the bus station I learned that Iron City didn't have a bus station. But I called Kay, and, telling me Kim was working in a shop in Florence, Alabama, she gave me its address and told me to ask her daughter to call her when I arrived. Kim had become a beautician, and the shop was next door to a discount store. So, while I waited for Kay to come for me, I bought a new pair of work boots. But that was an exorbitant purchase for me. So deciding which to buy was difficult for me. So I bought a pair of false suede boots, took them out of the store, changed my mind, exchanged them for a pair of false black leather ones, and changed my mind again.

So, when Kay arrived, I was trying to retrieve the box and the receipt from a dumpster behind the beauty shop. I told her what I was doing, but I didn't ask her to wait for me to exchange the boots. I spent that night in what she and Doyle had made of their trailer in Iron City, but I didn't stay for Christmas. Deciding to try to stop being homeless, I hitchhiked back to New Orleans and moved in with Craig and his friends.

Greg had traded me a Japanese flower print for the Chinese stone rubbing Bob Marchant had given me. Sherry complained about that, but I kept the print. So it still hung on a wall of the apartment.

"Want to see me make Craig cry?" I asked one of Craig's friends as he sat between me and Craig on the sofa.

"Yeah," he said.

"Hey Craig," I said, and I pointed at the print.

He looked at and immediately sobbed and burst into tears.

But he told me of a job opportunity. A small guesthouse in the Quarter had hired him to be its night auditor three nights a week beginning that night, but Arnaud's restaurant also hired him to wait tables, and he told me that and that he'd decided in favor of Arnaud's. So I dressed in a suit, walked to the guesthouse, and began working there that night.

A cassette player was in the closet with the guesthouse's property management hardware, and, when the night auditor who trained me left for the night, a cassette was in it playing Melissa Etheridge's song "Yes I Am", and I immediately liked and, looking to see who it was, I remembered Rainy. but, also remembering the man I'd helped repossess a truck in West Palm Beach, I also obtained a passport, and, on Christmas Eve I went barhopping.

I intended my first stop to be Nugent's, but Molly's on Toulouse was on my way there, and Bob the Lucky Dog salesman and his Lucky Dog cart were at the curb in front of the bar.

"Hey, Bill," he said. "Where you going?"

"Nugent's," I said.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I'll go with you."

A homeless friend of his was talking with him. So Bob turned his cart over to him, pulled his belongings from beneath the cart, and took them into the bar, and the bartender stashed them behind the bar for him. But, when we entered Nugent's, Bob walked up to the biggest man there.

"Fuck you," he said, standing nearly nose to nose with him, and Eileen was tending bar and told us both to leave.

But we went to the next corner, to the *Déjà Vu*, and there, though Bob made as much noise as he could sliding one of its heavy steel barstool around on its concrete floor, the bartender grinned at him and brought us the beer we ordered, and, though then the man Bob had told to fuck himself came into the *Déjà vu* and made a line straight for Bob the bartender grabbed a night stick from beneath the bar and, with one step to the top of the beer cooler and one to the top of the bar, was on the floor between Bob and his attacker.

So the attacker backed out the door and didn't return, and Bob and I drank several more beers, talking with the bartender.

"That's Lenny," said Bob as we barhopped on. "He loves me."

Our next stop was the Tropical Isle on Bourbon Street, and Earl, the owner of the *Déjà Vu*, also owned the Tropical Isle, and Cheryl Lynn, the girl who had told me at Nugent's that Kristin was pretty, was tending bar there, and, though Bob similarly slid some tall chairs at some tall tables there, neither did she complain.

But she gave no indication that she knew him.

"Hey, Bill," she said as we entered.

"Pretty girl," said Bob as we left.

## Chapter 30

### Transactions

But I didn't keep that that guesthouse job long.

I spent my days looking for another job and nearly became Director of Sales for the Ramada Inn between the Clarion and I-10. The city was planning to extend its casino gambling to land, and the hotel's director of marketing, smoking a cigarette while interviewing me in its lobby, told me a man from Kentucky had bought the hotel and was renovating it in hope of making it the first casino of that plan. The hotel was the Palace Suites years earlier but had closed. She showed me one of the rooms he'd renovated, and the new owner was in the elevator in which we returned from that. But, though she introduced me to him, he neither spoke to me nor smiled. The next day she called me and offered me the job, but she offered me less than the Clarion had paid me to be Information Systems Manager. So I countered by asking about was the Clarion was to pay me to be Food and Beverage Controller. But she told me that was more than her pay. So I told her I'd accept the sales administrator position at a lower salary. She had also told me that position was open, and she said she'd think about it. But she didn't call me back.

I also went to Accountemps, and the woman who interviewed me there told me she'd met at a cocktail party the last controller for whom I worked at the Clarion, that he told her some of what I told her about West Palm Beach Hotel Group's management approach, and that she'd see what she could find for me.

But Jim Thimmis had become Controller of the Radisson Hotel at the airport, and he interviewed me. I don't remember how I knew he was there, and I'd grown a beard in my travel, but, though he said he nearly didn't recognize me, he introduced me to the general manager and offered me a four-night per week night audit position, and I accepted his offer. The woman at Accountemps called me and said she'd "found something" for me, but I told her I'd found something. I thought what she'd found might be a more managerial position and pay more, but my conversation with Jim seemed to me to promise more in the long run. So, though my reply to the woman at Accountemps seemed to me to disappoint her, I didn't ask her what she had in mind.

One of Craig's friends told me he heard Craig introduce himself to the tenant owning the shop below the apartment.

"Oh you're the one not paying his rent," he said the tenant said.

Peggy had given me a razor for one of my birthdays. I didn't use it, but blades for it were in the medicine cabinet in the apartment's bathroom. Another of Craig's friends moved into the apartment. Blades began disappearing from the medicine cabinet. One afternoon while I was playing Angelina that friend of Craigs' turned on Pat's TV.

Craig told me he was planning a big Mardi Gras party. Ben called me and told me he and some friends of his were planning to come to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. I asked Craig to cancel his Mardi Gras party, told him about the disappearing razor blades and his friend's turning on the TV while I was playing, asked him to ask him to leave, and told him I was working two jobs and could afford to take over the apartment again. I was working three nights per week at the guesthouse and four at the Radisson.

The others moved out before Mardi Gras. So, when Ben and his friends arrived, only Craig and I remained there, but I quit my job at the guesthouse, by telephone with no notice. I told the desk clerk who answered the telephone was also the one who'd trained me for that job. So he'd have to fill in for me that night.

"You're a son of a bitch," he said.

One of Ben's friends was a girl. She called Ben and his friends her boys and slept with them on my sleeper sofa. Craig and I slept nights in my bed, but I slept evenings. He slept nights. One evening, while I was trying to sleep while Ben and his male friends were out, I heard a conversation between Craig and the girl as they lay on the sleeper sofa.

"I love Billy," said Craig.

"I know," said the girl.

Another night Ben and his friends and I ate at Coop's.

"I'm seriously in need of Parenting," said Ben to me.

He asked me why I'd done more for Pat than I'd done for him. I told him the reason was that Pat needed more help. He frowned.

One afternoon he told me he'd like to try some Cajun food, and Lucy, a friend of Jay's and mine, operated the kitchen at Molly's at the Market. So I introduced Ben to her and asked her to recommend something, but he said he didn't like spicy food. So, sorry I'd put Lucy in a position of having to tell him Cajun food was typically spicy, I shook my head, left him there, and went home, shaming Ben and me, and embarrassing Lucy more.



I missed three nights of work. Twice I said the reason was that the Mardi Gras parades disrupted the bus service. The third time I was in suit ready for work when I called, and Ben and his friends were in the apartment.

What do you do?" asked the girl.

Night Auditor for the airport Radisson," I said, but then I decided not to that night, and Jim answered the telephone, and, telling him my son was visiting, I asked him whether he'd like to speak with him.

"No," he said. "Do you want this job?"

"I don't know," I said, and I never returned.

"Do you know any songs?" asked Ben referring to Angelina.

"I know this one," I said. "It's about me and your mom."

And I played and sang "Railroad Bill".

"Kill me a chicken," it says. "Send her the wing. She thinks I'm working. I don't do a thing. I just ride, ride, ride."

I closed the song by singing "And I ride, and I ride, and I ride," and the girl looked at me in apparent surprise, but she looked away when I looked back.

Their car disappeared. They'd ignored the signs announcing street cleaning times and places and towing for that. After paying for the towing they said they didn't have enough money to stay through Mardi Gras, but they said they had enough money for a farewell lunch with me. They asked me to recommend a place. I'd heard praise for a new Pizza place on Royal Street about three blocks from the apartment, and, thinking it wouldn't be expensive, I recommended it. They ate there but complained about it.

Mardi Gras afternoon I came across another strip joint doorman I knew. I asked him where he was going. He said he was going to Coops for his bayonet. He said he had a Civil War bayonet he carried in a pantleg, that he'd pulled it out at Coop's the night before, and that the bartender confiscated it. I went there with him, and the bartender gave it to him, but then he and I went to my apartment and smoked a joint of homegrown marijuana he had with him.

"Mardi gras's over," said a policeman through the speaker on top his car the next afternoon as he drove past Bob the Lucky Dog salesman and me as we walked past Nugent's. "Get out of town."

I returned to Florida. Having heard of the domiciliary at the Bay Pines Veterans Administration Medical Center near St. Petersburg, I went there and asked for admission to its substance abuse treatment program, but the domiciliary supervisor said its waiting list was months long. He suggested that I try again in six months, but, having heard that Asheville, North Carolina, was famous for the colors of its autumn, leaves, and thinking of Michigan's maple

leaves, I tried to settle there and found a bunk and a wall locker large enough for Angelina available at the Salvation Army shelter there.

I obtained some food stamps, and, as in Charleston, People picked up people for casual labor in front of the state employment office there. A low wall between the sidewalk and the lawn served that purpose, and a man in front of the employment office told me I could sell them for two thirds of their face value. He was European American but took me to some African Americans' house. A man there gave me about half of their value. So I told him what the other man told me, and he told me he'd get the rest, but then everyone in the house went into another room, and after a few minutes, I left with what I had.

The Veterans Representative at the Asheville office of the North Carolina Department of Social Services sent me to a security agency, and a man there asked me to complete some forms and sent me to the Radisson hotel across Thomas Wolfe Plaza from the boarding house where Thomas Wolfe grew up.

"I'm sorry my boots don't go with the uniform," I said to the director of security.

"Did they run a security check on you?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Well," he said. "I'll do it myself tonight."

The man at the security agency told me he'd find another assignment for me, but I decided not to work for such a security agency. I didn't tell him or the Veterans Representative why, but I told the Veterans Representative I didn't blame the director of security. So he sent me to the Holiday Inn Sunspree golf resort for a dishwashing job, and there, after I completed another form, the Human Resources Director called Joe Kneen.

"That was nice," she said. "I wish I could do better for you, but we'll see what comes up."

That was evenings. So, days, did some sightseeing. I didn't visit the boarding house, but I found Thomas Wolfe's and O. Henry's graves in the cemetery and told the Veterans Representative that. He smiled and asked me whether I'd found Zebulon Vance's grave. I knew nothing of him, but I learned that Asheville was a haven for old hippies, and Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were in Asheville that Autumn and not together. But I saw neither of them.

The walk from the shelter to the resort was nearly three miles.

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," I said loudly to man in charge of the shelter for the night as he smoked a cigarette in front of the building as I arrived after washing dishes for a banquet.

"You're doing some thinking on those long walks," he said.

Much of the way to the resort was along an embankment along a highway. Above the walkway was a grassy place. Seeing no one else using that walkway, I used the grassy place to drink beer and play Angelina. But, my second time there, a young man came along the walkway and came up to where I was sitting, and we went barhopping.

We found O. Henry's, but it was a private club. No one else was there, but the bartender refused to serve us. So we went to a big two-story bar, and there, standing at the bar on its second floor, I joked about homosexuality. I didn't mean to offend, but the bartender told me I had to leave. So I went downstairs. But he followed me there and again told me to leave. I thought that might cost me my place at the shelter, but it didn't.

One of its guests had a concert size Spanish guitar. He told me one should change guitar strings daily, but I never knew him to play. As he and I sat in the shelter's lobby, a man in yellow dingo boots came in.

"Hey Jim," said the man with me. "How's that court case coming?"

"Alright," said the man in the dingo boots. "Just the usual legal stuff."

"That's Jim Bakker," said the person talking with me after the man went through an inner door. "This is a federal halfway house. He has to come here once a week."

Once, after checking in for the night before supper, I took Angelina across the street to the top of grassy embankment sloping down from the street, and, when I returned the woman who managed the shelter told me I shouldn't go out after checking in, and then she asked me whether I'd been drinking.

"No," I said, though I had that day, the walkway embankment.

"I thought I smelled beer," she said.

But most of my dishwashing was evenings, and a mission near the shelter served baloney sandwiches for lunch and let people eat them at tables in a lot beside the mission, and, as I ate one, the woman who managed the Salvation Army shelter came into the yard and to the table where I was eating.

"He doesn't like me," she said of me to the others there.

Another day I went to the employment office and sat with others on the concrete wall hoping to make a little more money. A man stopped and asked whether anyone there knew how to lay concrete blocks, and a man sitting beside me said he could, and then prospective employer asked whether anyone else could, and the man sitting beside me told him I could. So the prospective employer took both of us to his house and showed us his efforts to replace an outside wall in his basement. But we laid no blocks.

Offering us beer, he invited us up to his living room. About a half dozen white plastic barrels about the size of 55-gallon oil drums were there and

so were a woman and a young boy. The man gave each of us a can of beer and told us he was breeding worms in the barrels, but he didn't offer the woman a beer, and no furniture was in the room.

After we drank all the beer he had, he drove us to a convenience store for more, but while he was in the store buying the beer, I urinated outside his car, and when he came out of the store, he told me he was through with me and drove me to the shelter. So again I was afraid the night supervisor might not let me in. He did and said nothing to me, but next morning I left of my own will. I'd looked for an apartment to rent but found none I could afford. So I didn't feel I was getting anywhere there.

"There he goes," said one of my roommates as I gathered my belongings from my locker.

Before leaving town I stopped to buy a can of beer at a little store in an old hotel that had become a rooming house. The man who said I could lay concrete blocks was there, and I told him I was moving on, and he said that so was he. He was a train tramp and that so was he.

I hitchhiked back to Sarasota, but, when six months had passed since I went to Bay Pines, I went there again. I made my way there by city buses, and, while I sat in a seat with its back to a side of the bus, a woman in a seat facing the front of the bus from immediately behind the wheel well immediately to my right put her feet on the wheel well and spread her knees apart. After thinking of that through several stops, I bent forward and untied and tied one of my boots, but, as soon as I turned my head to my right, she put her knees together, and I also saw that a man sitting across from me was watching all that.

At Bay Pines, I reminded the domiciliary supervisor of what he'd told me, and he checked me in, but In New Orleans, I'd acquired a knife like the one I lost in New York. So checking me in involved confiscating the knife. But he assigned me to a room with its own bathroom and but one other occupant. That night, to buy some toothpaste, I walked to a convenience across the street from the medical complex. On my way back, I lost all the cash I had with me, about sixty dollars. But I didn't need money there, and in the dining room was a piano I could use to tune Angelina, and across a field from the domiciliary was a pond with benches facing it where I could play her, And I took advantage of several V.A. services there. I transferred there a request for a disability rating increase I'd initiated in New Orleans, and a dentist pulled a tooth I'd broken eating an oatmeal cookie one night in Colorado Springs, and, after a few weeks there, I entered a 28-day 24 hours per day substance abuse program that wasn't Alcoholics Anonymous. That program was in another building, but my room in that building also had but one other occupant, and it also opened to a screen

porch with a view of the beach over a walkway with benches beneath live oaks, and the program didn't keep me from going outside the building. So I continued playing Angelina there and used the porch to write songs.

"That's how guitar playing should sound," said my roommate after I played "When I Fall in Love" in the room on my side of a partition separating his bed from mine, and a man in my therapy group said he wished he knew a hundredth of what I knew about music.

"What are you going to do when you leave Bay Pines?" asked my therapist.

"I don't know," I said. "But one of my goals was to build a repertory of thirty songs I could sing and play on my guitar, and it's up to fifty now."

She smiled. But one night I awakened myself with a scream. So I went to the bathroom the group shared, and, while I was looking into a mirror wondering why I did that, the night supervisor came in.

"Was that you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, but that didn't happen again.

In my only conversation with my therapist outside the group, she sat in a chair facing mine and crossed her legs. So I glanced down, but she glanced up at me when I did that, uncrossed her legs, and turned her knees aside. But I didn't leave Bay Pines when I left the substance abuse program. I returned to the domiciliary and started looking for a job.

A convenience store near the medical center advertised for a clerk. So I went there and asked the clerk whether I could speak with the manager. The clerk seemed to me to like me, but she also seemed to me to be mentally deficient, and the manager didn't hire me.

My brother Jerry wrote to me. He said he was selling health supplement, that I could make money doing that and by recruiting others to sell them, and that I've always wanted to make money. But I told him I wasn't a salesman and that I'd always wanted to earn my living, and a counselor at the domiciliary suggested what the Veterans Administration called compensated work therapy, CWT, basically working for the V.A. for minimum wage.

So I accepted that recommendation and found myself riding about the medical center in a little three-wheel motor vehicle with an African American patient doing such as raking leaves and picking up trash. But my coworker, telling me I was working too hard, reminded me that the "T" in "CWT" was for "therapy". So I again became a trouble maker. I told the CWT program administrator that and that I hoped the purpose of the therapy was to make the patients productive workers and that I'd like to do something more productive. But that complaint worked out well for me. He responded by asking me what I

could do, and, to my telling him of my computer experience, he responded by assigning me to customer support for the medical centers data processing operation. That was 1995, when the Clinton administration couldn't pass a budget before the end of the fiscal year, and the computer operation had no funds in its customer support budget but had a surplus in its office supplies budget. So it paid me minimum wage from its office supplies budget.

A mainframe computer was the core of the medical center's data processing operations, and most of my job was solving people's problems by telephone. So, generally I sat at a small desk with a computer terminal and a telephone on it, and I was one of a half dozen doing the same along a partition separating us from the larger desks of others doing other data processing jobs. But occasionally I went to other buildings to solve problems, and, though I no mainframe experience, I had found that job easy.

One doctor called nearly every morning to complain that he couldn't log on. His problem was that he wasn't logging off when he turned off his terminal at night. So I only needed to use my terminal to clear his logon. I told him that the first three times. But then I let it remain routine, and most of my trips to other buildings was to change printer cartridges. We had a cart we pushed from building to building to do that. The person who trained me told me that, because of my extraordinary circumstances, I shouldn't do that alone, but once I did, and I wasn't the only person there in extraordinary circumstances.

The member who trained me left it for treatment in the medical center's psychiatric ward, and his replacement lived in a car with rottweilers. So once, during lunch, while only the rottweiler owner were at our desks, I fulfilled a request to change a printer cartridge. Then the rottweiler owner told our supervisor I did that, but, though the supervisor reminded me of the constraint, he didn't reprimand me, and, when the rottweiler owner was out to lunch, I complained him to my coworkers, and they agreed.

"Maybe I could change a printer cartridge alone if I lived in my car with rottweilers," I said, and a woman on the other side of the partition laughed, and complaining wasn't all I did in response to that complaint against me.

The rottweiler owner's desk was in front of mine, and the terminals permitted us to send messages to other terminals anonymously.

"Big brother is watching you," I sent to his when he returned from lunch, and soon he lost his job, while I kept mine, and that was after I had some confrontations with the medical center's police.

I found a place on the beach where I thought I could play Angelina privately. Trees and bushes surrounded it on all side other than the waterfront,

but I found a path through the bushes. So I hoped to spend my evenings there. But two police officers also found the path through the bushes.

“This is off limits,” said one of them.

Then I left, but, the next evening, after looking around to see whether any police were around, I returned to the beach. But then a seagull was there in a tangle of fishing tackle. So, intending to help the seagull, I laid Angelina in her gig bag on the sand. I couldn’t think of a way to gain the gull’s confidence, but I watched until it struggled its way into the bushes, and then the police reappeared.

“I told you this is off limits,” said the one who had.

“I didn’t see a sign,” I said.

“Well, it is,” he said. “So pick up your shit and get out of here.”

So I sent a note to the chief of the medical center police complaining about that. He called me to his office and apologized for the officer’s choice of words, but he told me the officer’s concern was the possibility of patient suicides. So I didn’t go back. But I found another place to play relatively privately. A narrow dock extended into the gulf near that beach, and at the end of it was a gazebo with a table on it. So I took Angelina there and sat at the table to play. But a policeman came there also.

“Did you see anyone near here who looked like he might be thinking about killing himself?” he said.

“No,” I said, and then I played “Love Me Tender”, and then the policeman listened through all of it and silently returned to shore, and also at Bay Pines I found a Spanish translation of the Bible and compared its translation of the Gospels to a translation in English, and also while I there I bought a boombox with a cassette player and bought and some cassettes, including some by Melissas Etheridge, but I decided I was ready to leave.

Finding a newspaper advertisement for a 1973 GMC pickup for sale near the medical center, I made an offer, and the owner accepted it. The medical center was requiring me to save most of my CWT pay in an account for my departure, but I told I told a counselor I was leaving. So he arranged for me to withdraw enough to buy the truck. But I also wished to give the computer center time to decide how to replace me. So I also asked the man from whom I bought the truck whether I could leave it there for a few days, and he acceded to that also. The truck in field near a pole barn on the property.

But, before I left Bay Pines officially, I left it for a night of barhopping, and, when I left the last bar to which I hopped, I was drunker than I ordinarily ever was, and, during my effort to walk back to the medical center, I came upon a statue of Mary with some spotlights shining on it and on the grass in front of it

to try to sleep, but, before dawn, I awoke and walked to where truck was and slept in it until after dawn.

“Sober enough now?” asked a man standing near the truck when I stepped out of it.

“Were you AWOL last night?” asked one of the domiciliary counselors that evening.

She gave me a breathalyzer test, but I passed it and received cordial farewells.

“Bill’s leaving for parts unknown,” said my substance abuse therapist at my last follow-up group meeting, and the data processing staff gave me a going away pizza party on my last day of work.

“I’m going to miss you,” said the woman who laughed at my complaint against the rottweiler owner. “And I mean that.”

I also wrote some songs at work, and another of the women working there saw me doing that, asked me what I was doing, responded to my telling her by asking me whether she could see it, and responded to my showing her by saying nothing but plainly indicating appreciation.

But, after the pizza party, I retrieved my knife, withdrew the funds remaining in my account, and left.

My first stop was to register the truck, but, having no Florida address and no insurance, I couldn’t. So my next stop, driving with a paper temporary license plate, was New Orleans, and my first stop there was the apartment. But no one was living there. So I went bar hopping, starting at the Alibi, but, though Jay was there, Debbie wasn’t tending bar.

“Where’s the real bartender?” I asked.

So the barmaid refused to serve me, and, though Jay followed me to the *Déjà Vu*, but he told me I’d been kicked out of every bar I’d been in that night. Though, before the *Déjà Vu*, the Alibi was the only bar I’d been in that day, but I’d drunk on the road, and, though I asked him whether I could stay at his apartment that night, he refused. So, that night, I slept in my truck, and, in the morning, I climbed out its back window. I don’t know how I thought that would fool anyone, but I did it for police not know I’d slept in it, and then, hoping to find Craig, I went to a jewelry store on Canal Street where I knew one of his friends to work. But he said he thought Craig might be in jail.

So then I checked my mail. Before I left I’d rented a private mail box across Royal Street from the apartment, and bank statement and my final pay check from the resort in Asheville was in it. So then I went to my bank.

Before beginning CWT I tried to replace the sixty dollars I lost the night I checked into the domiciliary. It should have had some V.A. deposits and



my last Radisson pay in it, but the ATM told me the account had insufficient funds, and checks showing my why were with statement that was with my mail. They told me the overdrafts were because Craig had forged the checks.

So I showed a customer service person at the bank that the signatures on the checks weren't mine and asked him why I'd signed signature cards to opened account. He left his desk for a few minutes, returned, and told me he could refund those overdraft charges but not the one for trying to make the withdrawal at Bay Pines. So I asked him how I could have known then that no cash was in the account. So he left his desk for a few more minutes and refunded the overdraft charge also.

"What's your occupation now?" he asked.

I pointed at Angelina.

"Where are you going next?" he asked.

"The Georgia Mountain Fair," I said.

But next, intending to use my Royal Street mail service address to insure and register the truck, I found a Metairie insurance agency in the yellow pages and went to Metairie for that and also to replace the truck's tires. But, though I bought the tires, rain was falling, and, saying it was the beginning of the arrival of a tropical storm, the insurance agent, told me couldn't insure me then. the agent with whom I spoke told me he couldn't sell me insurance then. So, not knowing how I could wait for the storm, from there I drove to Hiawassee, and the insurance agent was correct. Before I was I was out of Louisiana, I was driving through streets the storm flooded.

But I was in Hiawassee before midnight. So I slept that night in a parking lot for the ball diamond the fair used for the carnival rides and joints. But I wasn't there for the carnival. The main attraction to the Georgia Mountain Fair was a big Appalachian music festival. So I I was there hoping to play Angelina in it. But, though I knew it would begin soon, I didn't know how soon or how long I could wait. So I didn't wait.

I drove on until I saw another carnival, and the man behind the window told me I could help operate the show's jenny the rest of the day and help strike it that night, and the jenny was a Hershelle carousel with a paper-driven Wulitzer organ, and I went with that show to its next spot.

So I went with that show to it next spot. The show didn't set up the jenny there, the main operator of a dragon kiddy told me that, though the jenny was the show's owner's wife's pride and joy, the dragon ride was her second-favorite. So I helped set that ride up and stayed to help operate it.

But, though that spot, Richmond, Virginia, was the show's last spot of that season, it was also its home town, and there I also found a way to register

and insure the truck. A man with whom I drank in a bar told me I could use his address, gave it to me, and said that, if, when I had an address, I'd send it to him, he'd send me the policy. But, that week, I also needed the insurance.

Richmond was also that show's hometown, and nights I parked the truck where the show kept its rides winters. So, deciding to build a house on the back of the truck, found a lumber yard, bought three sheets of plywood, two for the pitch of a roof over the truck's bed and one to enclose its ends, and, from the lumber yard and other stores, bought tools, a plastic tarp to cover the roof, and paint and other materials, and did the work mornings where I parked the truck to sleep. But, on my way to the carnival lot, before I secured the two sheets of plywood for the pitch of the roof to the bed, they blew from it and landed a few feet from where some men were standing beside the road talking.

"You could have killed us," said one of the men in response to my looking at them and laughing when I backed up to picked the plywood .

But I needed the insurance after I secured the plywood to the bed by using some nylon rope I also bought to tie the tarp over it. Backing from a stop sign, to park in grass outside the lot before going to work, unable to see a car behind me on the road, I pushed truck's trailer hitch through the car's grill, and the owner told me he'd bought the car new and that I'd done first damage to it. So a policeman came, and I admitted fault both to the owner and to the owner and gave the owner my insurance information, and a few days later, I heard my name over the fair's public address system in a request for me to go to the fair office, where a woman handed me a telephone receiver. The call was from the insurance company, and again I admitted guilt.

The caller said she only needed to verify that, but, the next day, but, the next day, as I walked onto the lot after parking on a road along the other side of it, a security guard in the parking lot frisked me and told me I couldn't take my knife onto the fairgrounds.

"He's got a big knife," she said to another security guard.

So I took it back to the truck. But I also had bought a harmonica and played it while I worked, and my boss said harmonica's on carnival lots were bad luck. Though I hadn't hear that, but, for my truck, I also I bought some purple, green, and yellow house paint, and hose were Mardi Gras colors, and I painted the truck purple and used the yellow paint to paint various messages.

"I'm from New Orleans," I painted along each side of the truck's bed. "Throw honeysuckle."

"*Via con Dios amigo*," I painted backwards on the front of the hood for people to be able to read it in their rear view mirrors as people read "ambulance" on the fronts of ambulances."

On the lot, a joint was selling straw sombreros. So I bought one and nailed it above the cab on the triangular front panel of the roof, but the triangle also reminded me of Maslow hierarchy of human needs. So I painted that on the back panel, and the tarp I bought was green, and the rope I bought to tie it down was also yellow. At the end of that week, my boss told me I could stay there that winter, but he also gave me a business card and told me that, if I didn't stay but withed to work for that show the next season, I could call him. So I kept the card but moved on as soon as I finished the work.

While I was refueling the truck, a hitchhiker I picked up went into a convenience store. When he came out he told me the clerk in the store told him the truck was a peace truck. But I returned to Sarasota for the day labor.

I tried to sleep in my new house in a parking lot at the beach. But I heard police outside the truck talking about it. So I began parking it in a different place each night. I also planned to shower one night per week in motel rooms, and one night I shared one with Alan. But I asked him not to holler at the TV. So he slept that night in a lounge chair beside the pool.

But a worker who'd worked with me on the air hammer job told me I could park the truck in his driveway and shower in his house, introduced me to his girlfriend, and said me she was an exotic dancer. I'd loaned him five dollars for lunch on the air hammer, but, as he said he would, he paid me the five dollars as soon as he cashed his check that evening. So I don't know why he did all that for me, and one night Alan also drank some beer with me in that guy's driveway. Listening to my boombox, Alan called Melissa Etheridge the screaming bitch from hell. But he slept on the seat of the truck that night, and a picnic table was in the back yard. So one afternoon I played Angela at it. Some Hispanic people were in the backyard of the house next door, but when I stopped playing, they applauded.

"*Uno mas!*" they shouted, and the dispatcher paid me extra for driving people to jobsites in my truck, and the contractor on one of my jobs told me he might pay me on the side for hours for which he didn't contract.

That job was riveting steel flooring to the second floor of a warehouse. But he also occasionally asked me to drive a forklift, and Alan said he was good at riveting. So I asked the dispatcher to assign him to that job.

"I know he's a friend of yours," he said. "But I don't know."

So he didn't, and, for no reason I knew, one of the contractor's employees told me I wasn't riveting correctly. So I mentioned that to the contractor. But he frowned and gave me no extra hours.

I considered renting a spot in a campground with shower and a laundry room. So, taking Alan with me, I rented a spot in one for one night. A karaoke

bar was near the campground, and I tried to sing the “Ballad of Pancho and Lefty”. But the judge called it an interesting rendition, and we didn’t stay another night, and, soon after that, I left Sarasota again.

I had an appointment at Bay Pines to check on my request to increase my V.A. disability rating. So, to be sure I wasn’t late for the appointment, I drove up early and found a day labor agency in St. Petersburg with a back lawn where I could park. But one night, while I was trying to sleep, I saw a light flashing outside, and, looking through the crack between the roof and the bed of the truck, I saw that the light was a policeman’s flashlight.

I’d hinged the back panel to the roof and attached a hasp to it to lock it to a two-by-four across the top of the tailgate, and, for people not to be able to open it while I was in it, I attached the hasp in a way permitting me to pull it in. So, from outside, no way to open it was apparent. But, after a few minutes, the policeman knocked on the panel. So I opened it.

“I wondered how you get in there,” he said.

But he told me a neighbor had called the police to tell them I was there. So I told him I was working for the day labor agency while waiting for the V.A. appointment. I also asked him whether he wished to see the appointment form, but he said he didn’t. He told me I was alright and went away.

But I didn’t wait for the appointment. I again decided to go north for Christmas. But I also again went to jail in Cullman County, Alabama. I left the free way to find a motel and made a U-turn on a gravel strip across a grass median of a street and that time went to jail for both illegal possession and drunk driving. I don’t remember the name of that town, but that time I had enough cash in my checking account to pay my bail. So I called Kay, told her that, asked her to come bail me out, and told her I’d pay her a check. So she drove the ninety miles to Cullman to do it, but, from there.

“Is this good?” asked Kay when I gave her the check, but I don’t remember why I didn’t stop in Iron City before driving further north.

I drove to Bourbonnais, Illinois. Peggy and Bob had lived there since I was in the Army and had bought a new little house among other new little houses in a housing development there. Bob was chef at the Kankakee Holiday Inn, and Nancy and Pat and Ben and I had stopped there between the Netherlands and Texas. But this time, in Kankakee or Bourbonnais, rain froze on my windshield faster than deicer I bought at a filling station melted it, and, though Peggy had a guestroom, she didn’t offer it to me. So I slept on her sofa, and, though she gave me a blanket, neither did she offer me a shower.

In Coldwater, I found that Pat had moved to a downstairs apartment of the house where he’d let me share the upstairs apartment with him. Rolls of

carpeting were on his living room floor, and he told me his landlord was letting him live there free of rent while he helped renovate the apartment. So I slept that night on one of the rolls. But the next day I drove to Kalamazoo. Pat told me Ben was graduating from Western Michigan University that week and that he and some friends of his were living in the house Nancy and Rob bought while I was in prison. So I drove there and played Trivial Pursuits with Ben and his friends.

“He painted Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs on the back of his truck,” said Ben after taking me inside after looking at my truck.

“I remember he was crying about something,” I said in reference to a Trivia Pursuits question referring to Jack Parr weeping on the Tonight Show.

“He lived it,” said the only girl there. “That isn’t fair.”

But, though Ben loaned me a camel-colored blazer and a tie for the graduation ceremony, I sat with some of his friends and saw neither Nancy nor Pat there, and, though his major was Business Administration. His minors were Portuguese and Spanish. He had been a Mormon missionary in Portugal. Nancy, while I was working for the Clarion, asked me to help fund his mission and said I’d promised her I would. But I didn’t remember that promise and refused to do it, and Ben left Portugal because of illness. I don’t remember what illness.

When I returned to Coldwater, Pat wasn’t at home. I parked my truck in the yard on the Montgomery Street side of the house, but, trying to sleep in it, I wondered why my feet weren’t freezing. I also wondered how I ever could stop being homeless, but, before dawn I decided not to stay for Christmas. I headed south again. But I didn’t go directly to Sarasota. I drove to the address on the card the man I’d helped repossess the truck gave me. It was in my wallet, and at the address was a ranch style house about fifty yards from a fence along a road outside a small town. But, as I stood at the gate trying to decide whether to go through it, a woman came to it and asked me what she could do for me. So I told her why I was there.

“I’m his wife,” she said. “But I don’t know where he is.”

She seemed to me to wish to do more for me, but I drove to Sarasota, found that labor agency had moved to offices with parking behind them, and parked my truck there a few nights, until again I heard police talking outside it.

“There’s another one,” one said.

For people not to see me climbing in and out of its bed, I’d parked the truck with its back toward the building, but standing behind it drinking a can of beer the night after I heard the police talking, a police car came into the alley and stopped. So I set my beer beneath the back of the truck, and that car had but

one policeman in. He stepped out of it and walked to the back of the truck, but then he looked up and not down.

“What’s that?” he asked looking at the back panel of the truck’s roof.

“Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs,” I said.

“What’s that?” he asked, and I briefly told him.

“What level are you on?” he asked, but I told him I was on the self-actualization level, and then he looked down.

“Oh,” he said. “I see what you’re doing.”

But he didn’t arrest me. He crushed the can with a boot and told me I couldn’t camp there and would have to find someplace else to park, and, to my telling him that, because I’d been drinking, I didn’t think I should drive and that he might arrest me if I did, he told me to wait a little while and then leave. But then another patrol came into the alley, and, though that policeman also asked me about Maslow’s hierarchy, I told him I was on the self-esteem level. I’d thought about it after I my reply to the other policeman to that question.

“How much esteem does someone living out of a purple truck have,” said the second policeman.

“You told me you were on the self-actualization level,” said the first.

“Guess we should take him in,” said the second, but the first policeman told him we had an agreement, and they left.

So, after sitting in the truck for about a half hour, I drove to the house where I’d slept in the driveway, but then no one was living in the house. So, though I slept there that night, I was afraid to sleep there the next night. So I drove around looking for a place I could park with less risk of arrest, and, while I was doing that, I came across the man who’d let me sleep in the driveway, and he was sitting with an African American man on steps from the sidewalk to the walk to the front porch of a house. I stopped and asked my former coworker why no one was at the other house, but he only told me he’d moved. He didn’t say where, but the African American joined that conversation. So I asked him whether I could pay twenty dollars a week to park in his backyard and shower in his house, and he accepted that offer. But that arrangement lasted but one night.

The only time I showered there a blonde girl followed me into the bathroom and offered to shower with me. Expecting to have to pay more than twenty dollars for that, I rejected her offer., and she left. But that night, while I was trying to sleep, a young European American man knocked on the back of my truck and asked me to lend him some cash to buy some beer. I also rejected that request, and he also went away, but the next day I looked for another possibility, drove out of town in that search, and found tractor path into some woods.

The path continued beyond the woods and across a field toward a farmyard, but I hoped the farm house was on another road and that the farmer wouldn't use the path at night, and no one did while I was there, and, though I couldn't shower there and didn't ask for a refund of my twenty dollars, I could use it for both sleeping and drinking. So I was back to renting a motel weekly. So, in the spring, I drove down to Gibsontown, to look for carnival work. Carnies called it Gibsown, and I'd heard that a lot of carnies wintered there. Carnies also called it the carnie capital of the world.

I found a dirt drive parallel to the main road through the town. It was too narrow to be a thoroughfare. So I thought I might be able to park on it. But a man on it in another pickup truck told me I was on private property.

The only bar in that tiny town was the Showtown Bar & Grill. I asked a man at the bar whether he knew of a show's winter quarters where I might be able to park until I found a job. He directed me to a place where he said a concessionaire kept his joints winters. There, a man came out of a building there, talked with me, and gave me a price. But it was more than I thought I could risk spending with no certainty of a job. So I parked on a street that night.

But the next day I found a job. A carnival sideshow giant had retired and opened a restaurant on an edge of Gibtown. He called it Giant's. I went there for breakfast, ate at its lunch counter, and talked with another man at the counter. He told me Bluegrass Shows would begin its season the next week and that its winter quarters were in Tampa. Bluegrass was the show playing La Porte when I worked Bob Bradburn's basketball joint there. I drove up to Tampa, parked on the street outside a gate at the address, and found the show's office trailer.

"Rides or joints?" asked a man behind its window.

"Rides," I said for the same reason Willard didn't asked me to work any of his joints, the reason I failed at selling salve and Christmas cards.

"Where's your gear?" he asked.

"In my truck," I said, pointing to it.

"Bring it in," he said, and, after I parked it inside the fence, a man told me he could use me on the Scrambler, but, a few minutes later, another man told me he needed some help on the sky wheel, and I preferred the sky wheel.

"Are you afraid of heights?" he asked, and he responded to my replying that I wasn't by hiring me with no other questions.

The shows first spot of that season was in Naples, Florida. Excepting a mistake I made and perhaps nearly breaking my back, I enjoyed setting up the ride. The mistake was breaking a florescent tube after the ride supervisor warned me against that. He didn't tell me the reason for the warning, but I

quickly learned it. The tubes were inside the towers. Climbing the towers required putting one's feet through holes in them. Climbing one while helping set up the ride, I put a foot too far through one and broke a tube.

The perhaps nearly backbreaking part of the job was holding up an end of one of the towers while another crewmember secured it to the axle. I let my back bend back far enough to feel the strain. But I didn't let the fright from that make me drop it.

My favorite part of the process was raising one wheel to assemble the other. Sky wheels were two wheel rotating around a common axle. Setting them up required assembling half of one wheel, then swinging it to the top to assemble half of the other wheel, then doing that twice more. For the same reason that alternation was necessary, the process required swinging the lower the lower wheel for momentum. The foreman did that, and the foreman on that sky wheel had earned the name Sky Wheel Jimmy by his skill at it, and I seldom saw him other than for that. He spent most of his time playing drums in the ride's trailer he used as his living quarters. But sometimes he couldn't. So then three employees climbed to the top wheel to counterbalance it by riding it down. They stood on part of the wheel's frame while holding its axle. I found that literally a rush, and a Naples town mark helped the Blue Grass crew every year only for that possibility. I especially enjoyed seeing the bed of a pickup truck rushing toward us as we fell.

But Jimmy didn't hire me. His immediate subordinate, the sky wheel's Supervisor, hired me, and I soon learned more of why. He used me as a taxi driver to take him in my truck to buy groceries after the show closed. He was traveling with his wife and daughter. So I didn't much blame him for that. But he didn't fire me when I thought he should have.

While operating the ride while another crew member loaded it, I started after the other crew member loaded a seat but while a young boy remained on the loading platform. He had to sprawl prone to keep the seat from hitting him. But, the next night, Jimmy gave me an honor that was part of the reason I wished to work on that ride.

When carnivals were smaller, the signal to close a show for the night was to drop the sidewalls on the jenny. But, as carnivals grew, the signal shifted to turning off the lights on the tallest wheel on the lot. So, while wondering why Jimmy gave me that honor, I was proud and grateful. But, doing that, I dishonored myself, the ride, and the show.

The supervisor, showing me which switch in the switch box turned off all of the ride's lights, told me to turn it off when a man in a golf cart in front of the ride flashed a flashlight. But, a moment before the man flashed the light, I



looked away from the switch box. So, when he flashed it, I had to look for the switch, and, in the seconds I took to find it, the lights went off on a giant wheel another company had set up on the midway that morning. So, for the remainder of that spot, the giant wheel had that privilege.

But the supervisor irritated me in way beyond using me as a taxi service. He borrowed one of my Melissa Etheridge cassettes and didn't return until after I asked him for it three times. The third time I went to the truck where he slept with his wife and daughter. They slept in its sleeper cab.

He didn't complain about that, but, one morning, as I sat on my tailgate playing Angelina before the show opened, he suddenly appeared from beside the roof I'd built. He said nothing, but, before turning away, he looked down at the tailgate. So I supposed he was trying to catch me drinking before work. I don't know why I wasn't, but one night I refused to provide taxi service for him, and the next time I tried to refill my truck's fuel tank, an obstruction between the cap and the tank made that nearly impossible.

So I decided to quit. But I'd also learned that Bluegrass owned the first Sky Wheel, that its ride superintendent's father had invented the sky wheel, and that we'd set up the old one beside the newer one in the next spot. So I stayed for that. But, though one of members of the crew rode with me, I drank beer all the way there.

"Did you sleep it off?" asked another crew member when I stepped out of my truck after sleeping it off, and I also saw that the older sky wheel was already up, but I also saw that a difference between the two sky wheels was that the older one had incandescent lights and no florescent lights, and, then, looking at a plate on one its towers, I saw that its serial number was Herschell Chance 001.

"I can hardly wait to operate it," I said.

"You'll never operate this ride," said that other crew member.

So I decided to quit immediately.

But first I took an R key as a souvenir. R keys were large cotter keys. Some people called them hitch pins, but their shape resembled the letter "R", and carnies used them not only for trailer hitches but also to hold both rides and joints together. They'd replaced the nails carnies used to hold joints together when I was Ruth's balloon boy and Willard's cat boy. So they'd become a symbol of the carnival business. Sky Wheel Jimmy had one with gold plating he kept on a gold chain around his neck. So I pocketed one from one of the possum bellies of one of the trailers carrying Herschell Chance sky wheel 001. Possum bellies were big tool boxes hanging beneath ride trailers.

Possum bellies were big enough for carnies to call especially promiscuous carnie women possum belly queens, and next I found the supervisor, told him I was quitting, and asked him to pay me. But he told me I'd have to go to the show office for that, and the man behind the window told me I'd have to give him a few minutes. So, sitting in a plastic lawn chair at the bottom of the steps to wait for him, I decided where to go next.

*Amusement Business*, what carnies called *Billboard* was the main trade journal of the carnival business. A copy of its current issue was on the lawn chair before I sat in it. So, as I waited, I looked through it, and, while looking through it, I found that a show would be opening in Delhi, a tiny town in Louisiana, the next week. So, thinking of both New Orleans and Hinduism, I decided to go there.

But the man behind the window had used a radio to call Jimmy.

"He didn't do anything to you," he said when I told him I was quitting because of the supervisor, "and I thought you were doing a good job mostly. That's why I didn't fire you when you almost hit that kid."

But still I received no pay. Jimmy walked away, and the man behind the window asked me for an address where he could mail me a check. Then I gave him my New Orleans address and headed for Delhi, but on the way I stopped in Sarasota. I found Alan at the day labor agency waiting for his check for the day and went with him and a homeless man sitting beside him to the liquor to store for them to cash their checks, and then we went to a restaurant to drink beer at table with a tablecloths. I talked them into going to Delhi with me, but from the restaurant we returned to the liquor store, bought some beer, and went to the tractor path. We decided to leave next morning after drinking the beer and sleeping. But we didn't sleep.

"This is alright!" said Alan. "How did you find it?"

"Just driving around," I said, and they talked all night.

So I couldn't sleep, and, at a filling station, while I drizzled fuel into my truck, they bought more beer and complained about how long I was taking. I also tried to sleep at a rest area on I-10, but they continued drinking and urinated outside the truck. So the man overseeing the rest area told them restrooms were there. He also told them that, if they traveled on before getting some sleep, he'd call the police, but still their talk kept me awake.

So I drove on. Before leaving, I urinated in the restroom, hoping the man overseeing the rest area would see me and see that I was driving. But on I-10 a Florida state policeman stopped us and asked me to step out of the truck, walk a straight line heel-to-toe, spread my arms, and touch my nose. I did, but he inquired further.

“Do you have any beer in the truck?” he asked.

“Not now,” I said.

“You drank it all?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I said, laughing.

So then he gave me a breathalyzer test, and I didn’t pass that.

So he handcuffed me, asked me whether I had any weapons, took my knife, and asked me whether anyone was in the back of the truck.

“Just my baby,” I said.

“What?” he said.

“My guitar,” I said.

“Mind if I have a look?” he asked, and I told him I didn’t.

Then he looked. But he also told me he’d leave my knife in the truck. So I asked him whether I could take my *Taijiquan* book to jail, and he brought it from the truck. But he said he didn’t know but that he’d find out.

“You know you could have killed somebody,” he said on the way to jail.

He also asked me what I was doing with Alan and his friend and said the police who took them away would take them to a homeless shelter, but he kept my drivers license.

“This is no good,” He said.

The jail was in Tallahassee. The policeman asked a deputy sheriff whether I could keep the *Taijiquan* book. But the deputy said he’d have to put it with my other property he was collecting from me. The jail was also relatively new, and my first court appearance was the same day. But it was by video conference, and my second court appearance was weeks later.

My first week in that jail, I slept in a cell like the small one in the jail in Sarasota, but I spent my days in a large room with chairs and a television, and, the remainder of my time there, I slept on a top bunk in an area for them in a large room to which the cells opened, and then was my second effort to write this book. The jailers let me use some of the cash I left with my *Taijiquan* book to buy some writing pads. So I wrote while others watched TV.

“Working on your case?” asked an inmate sitting beside me as he watched TV.

That was my fiftieth birthday.

## Chapter 31

### Transitions

“That’s my seat,” said another inmate on another day.

I relinquished that seat with no argument. But no one did that to me again, and my next court appearance was in a courtroom. I pled guilty. The judge sentenced me to six months of probation and a three-year suspension of my drivers license and asked me whether I had any questions. I asked him whether the time I’d spent in jail would count toward that. The prosecutor said it shouldn’t, but the judge permitted it.

My release was a little afternoon the midnight of the day of the sentencing. The jail’s offices had closed for the night. So I couldn’t withdraw my remaining cash. Wandering aimlessly I came upon a building I thought might be a homeless shelter. Inside found it was and told the woman there my situation. She assigned me to the only bed remaining. While I waited for that a young man asked me to help him with a crossword puzzle. The bunk had a broken slat. So the mattress sagged to the floor. But I slept well that night. The lights were always on at the jail, and I didn’t know what to expect from the other inmates.

Next morning, after eating some pastries and drinking some coffee at the shelter, I walked to the jail. A woman behind a window gave me my cash, my wallet, and my Taijiquan book and told me where my truck was. I walked there and found that it was in a junkyard. The amount of the towing and storage charges was more than the total of my cash in hand, but the man who spoke with me there told he’d give me fifty dollars for my truck if I’d sign the title over to him to save him the administrative trouble.

“Can you make it a hundred?” I asked. “It’s a little rusty, but it runs well.”

“I saw the new tires too,” he said. “But it’s already my truck.”

“Can I get some of my things?” I asked, and he walked me to the truck.

“The cop said that was all that was in there that you cared about,” said the man as I took Angelina from the truck.

Finding my passport, I told the man I’d be out of business with out it. But I couldn’t find my knife. I was buying half gallons of milk and keeping them in a cooler. I opened a bottle of it and asked the man whether he wanted some. He scowled at the milk and asked me where I was going from there. I told him I was going to Asheville.

“North Carolina’s a commonwealth,” he said.

He asked me how I was going to get there. I told him by bus. He told me that, if I could wait a few minutes, he’d have someone drive me to the bus station. Another person working there drove me there in another pickup truck, but I bought a ticket to New Orleans. In jail I’d decided to try Asheville again, but I went to New Orleans to check on my mail.

I checked my mail and bought a ticket to Asheville, but next I went barhopping. When I returned to the bus station I left Angelina on the floor inside and passed out on a bench outside. When I awoke and went inside, a man was looking down at her. But, as he bent to pick her up, I picked her up.

In Asheville I found a Presbyterian Church and asked a woman there for help. She sent me to a homeless shelter with a big room full of cubicles with one twin size bed in each. One was available. Though the social services veterans representative seemed to me to recognize me, he offered me no help, but a cafeteria at the airport hired people from the shelter to wash dishes, and the shelter provided transportation to it in a van. I told the man at the cafeteria of my day labor experience. He said he wasn’t sure he could use me, but then I told him of my twelve-hour days working carnival, and then he hired me.

I also acquired a card for Asheville’s public library. In my time off and during my breaks at the cafeteria I read a history of the Cold War, a history of the CIA, and biographies of Gorbachev and George Herbert Walker Bush. Those books suggested to me that Gorbachev was a CIA mole and that Bush became his controller when Gorbachev was briefly in Paris while Bush ostensibly was driving across Texas buying mineral rights for Zapata Petroleum, a company the Harriman’s helped him form. I drank no beer while I was doing that, but I found that Asheville had drug problem, and I found no other employment. So I bought another bus ticket.

I’d never been to New England. But I’d wished to go there since reading J. D. Salinger’s story “Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut” in High School. So, preferring the maples of Michigan to the Oaks of Asheville, preferring not to return to Michigan, and having heard that Massachusetts had maples, I bought a ticket to Boston.

Hoping to end my homelessness, I'd rid myself of my tarp and rope, but I bought a small satchel. During a four-hour layover in D.C., I walked to the Capitol Mall. It was more secure than I'd found it with Nancy and our friends while I was on my way to Afghanistan. Then I'd walked into the Capitol through its main entrance, but, on that return, I saw people waiting in a long line at a basement entrance, and, at the National Gallery of Art, a security guard told me I'd have to check Angelina. So went no further into either.

I arrived in Boston on April Fools Day and walked from South Station through the Financial District to a park to a park I thought might be Boston Common. Later I learned it was, but then I doubted that police would let me sleep there or anywhere else. So I asked a man I thought might be homeless whether he knew of any homeless shelters. He told me of St. Francis House and the Pine Street Inn. He said St. Francis House might have too many rules for me. So I founded my way to the Pine Street Inn.

It was full for that night, but the city provided city buses to transport homeless people to Long Island Shelter, a former state mental hospital the city was using as a homeless shelter. During a frisk before boarding the bus a woman told me I couldn't take a small screw driver I'd bought to install new tuning gears on Angelina. In Florida I'd broken one of her tuning buttons.

"I'm sorry," she said, but I told her that was alright.

"You'd better keep that close to you," said another woman, referring to Angelina, as she handed me a towel

In Florida, to take a nap beneath a tree out side a building after eating Thanksgiving dinner in the building, I wrapped Angelina's gig bag strap around one of my arms.

"You been snuck," said another homeless person watching me do that.

So I also did that at Long Island Shelter. The towel disappeared in the night. So I had no shower in the morning. But I still had Angelina.

Back in Boston I found my way to the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training and talked with its veterans representative. With my dishwashing pay and my V.A. compensation I'd accrued a little over three hundred dollars in my checking account. I told him that, but he told me that wasn't nearly enough for a start in Boston and that neither would my MBA degree help me much there.

"Boston's full of unemployed PhD's," he said.

But he also asked me whether I knew of the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans and told me it was three blocks away, on the other side of Government Center from the building where we were. So I walked across past Boston's City hall and through an alley to the front of a building with a small

bronze plaque on a front corner of it saying it was the site of the print shop where Benjamin Franklin learned from an uncle of his to be a printer and went into the building. It was the shelter.

“What can we do for you?” asked a man at its front desk.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I need a job and a place to stay.”

“We can help you with both,” he said with a big grin, and the shelter did that for me and much more.

In the beginning I slept on an air mattress in the shelter’s dining room, and, though I had a locker, it was too small for Angelina. But the next week I had a wall locker and a bunk on the second floor. Soon after that I also had a Massachusetts identification card and food stamps, but before that the shelter gave me a suit like the one I bought when I received my MBA degree, and the shelter also provided use of computers and printers I used to create a resume.

But one windy day before I had my wall locker, as I walked down Beacon Street toward the Common, Angelina’s gig bag strap came loose. So she fell on her head again, and her gig bag’s pocket opened. That was where I kept the songs I’d written, and they scattered in the wind.

But I was crossing the plaza in front of One Beacon Street, a high rise state government office building, and the people there also scattered, and brought every one of my songs back to me.

“I’m sorry,” said a young man on a bicycle who brought most of them back to me, but I wasn’t sorry.

I felt grateful, and hopeful, and welcome. A blizzard that April broke limbs from trees in the Public Garden, but, in the suit the Shelter gave me, I delivered a resume and completed a form requesting employment at every hotel in Boston’s Central Business District, and, during the blizzard, the human resources director of the four-star Boston Harbor Hotel interviewed me. I’d also bought a pair of wing-tip shoes, and the shelter also gave me an Air Force issue rain coat. But I supposed pity or curiosity was why he interviewed me.

“\$3.35 an hour?” he asked. “That’s the wage you’re asking?”

Still I hadn’t learned that no one could live on minimum wage in Boston. But the V.A. provided transportation to a V.A. hospital in Bedford for CWT paying me that to take apart Polaroid film for recycling. So I used that cash to expand my wardrobe and rent a telephone answering service and a mailbox with a Park Plaza address. But I didn’t need the Park Plaza address.

I went to Accountemps. Accountemps sent me to St. Francis House. Its bookkeeper had quit. Before I reported to that assignment, another Accountemps person left me a message on my answering service telling me he had another possibility for me. But the person who sent me to St. Francis House

left me a message telling me the other message was a mistake. He referred to the answer service as “whatever this number is” and told me the dress at St. Francis House was “business casual”. So I supposed he’d figured out that I was homeless. But another reason for sending me there was that the shelter’s accounting software was what I’d helped install at the Clarion.

I never used that system at the Clarion, but, at St. Francis House, I learned it quickly, as I learned Lotus at the Clarion.

“Do you know how to cut a manual check,” asked Neville, St. Francis House’s chief financial officer.

“No,” I replied. “But I’m sure I can figure it out.”

“Oh, no,” he said, but I not only figured it out but also learned the system so quickly that I never needed to enter into the system another check anyone wrote manually, until after my first vacation from there, when I had to enter the checks he wrote while I was gone.

Neville also asked me to organization the accounting archives in a storage room, and that seemed to me to impress him more than my computer acumen, but a telephone conversation I overheard walking into his office to ask him a question told me something I did must have impressed him.

“I’m extremely pleased with his performance!” he said.

Then, after he hung up, he turned to me and answered the question that raised in my mind.

“That was Accountemps checking on you,” he said, and the next week he asked me whether I’d like to work there permanently at a salary “somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty thousand dollars”, and that was nearly a third more than the Clarion ever paid me.

“I guess 29 thousand would be enough,” I said.

But, after paying off the Accountemps contract for about a third less than it stipulated, he started me at thirty thousand.

“For the psychological value,” he said. “Why quibble?”

The reason I knew the contract amount and how much he paid Accountemps is that I cut the check and filed our copy of the contract.

St. Francis House was an eleven-story building. It had more than seventy employees and a ten million dollar balance sheet. Neville’s staff was its human resources coordinator, its information technology coordinator, the executive administrative assistant, and its main receptionist and telephone operator, and Neville asked me what I thought my title should be. My predecessor’s title was Bookkeeper, but he said my qualifications were higher than hers. So I suggested Finance Administrator. His title was Direct of



Finance and Administration, but he told me to order business cards with what I suggested on them.

The building was in the block of Boylston Street between Boston Common and Boston's Chinatown. I had my own office on the third floor with a big window overlooking the street. Neville's office was next door.

On a small cork bulletin board in my office was a button saying "Don't Panic." Covering most of a wall beside my desk was a task list detailing the job I inherited from her. I heard that Neville often literally had driven her to tears, but I replaced the task list with what the Army called a suspense file and a one-page checklist with sections for daily weekly tasks. Each morning I removed the checklist from the file. Each afternoon, after checking all the tasks for that day, I returned it to the file but for the folder for the next day.

Once, to summon me, Neville pounded on the wall his office shared with mine, but I didn't go. A few minutes later he came to my office and told me what he wanted, but I never again knew him to pound on that wall, and soon after that he took a two-week skying vacation to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He told me he was afraid to take a vacation before he hired me.

"Any problems," he asked me when he returned.

"No," I said. "I just need you to sign these checks."

"Well I'm going back to Jackson Hole then," he said.

He didn't then, but, after the shelter's next annual audit, he told me it was the easiest audit he'd "ever been through."

The shelter's weekly payroll was over a hundred thousand dollars. It had five bank accounts and a brokerage account for stock donors donated. My predecessor used green paper ledgers to reconcile all that. So I converted all that to Lotus and found that more than ten thousand dollars in checks the ledgers said were outstanding had cleared the bank. But soon I learned Excel. Microsoft Office wasn't on the computer on my desk, but it was on Neville's, and I found a copy of it in the files storage room. So I installed it on my computer and learned it by transferring my Lotus spread sheets to it.

But my personal priority was finding an apartment. My first request failed. I couldn't pay both the first and last month's rent. The landlord suggested that I borrow it from my employer, but I preferred not to.

"We need you to fill out an employment application," said Neville when he hired me. "But you already have the job. So you don't need to worry about it."

So I was sure he knew I was homeless. But I preferred not to ask for favors so early in my employment. So soon I accepted an apartment I rejected the first time I looked at it, and it was nearer to St. Francis House than was the

first one I requested. The apartment whose landlord rejected me was in the North End. The one I rented was on Beacon Hill, on Temple Street, a half block behind the Massachusetts State House. So my commute to work was less than fifteen minutes, and most of it was across the Common. So it was literally a walk in the park.

The apartment was an efficiency about the size of my first apartment in Coldwater after prison, and, excepting the Afghan carpet, I furnished it about the same. I don't know what happened to the Afghan carpet after Craig left the apartment on Royal Street, and I don't remember how I transported the mattress, but a Salvation Army shop was a half block from the Common. So furnishing it cost me little, and I had enough cash to buy a microwave oven. It was my first.

"So you have your own place on Beacon Hill," said Neville grinning, hearing me tell the human resources coordinator of my change of address.

"That's more money than I make," said the housing counselor at the veterans shelter when I told him I was looking for an apartment and how.

I also bought a CD player with magazines. Each magazine held a dozen CD's it changed automatically. I also bought a 19 inch TV and a VCR. The TV was the size of the one Pat left in New Orleans. I used the VCR to play French movies. I borrowed the movies from French Cultural Center on Marlborough Street in the Back Bay. I joined it and enrolled in a course the center called Intermediate French. I also walked the Freedom Trail. I also resumed drinking beer, but I didn't resume barhopping or drink while I was working. I developed a habit of drinking a can of beer before walking to work each morning, but Neville stopped that.

"What's got into you?" he asked me one morning.

I don't remember how I replied to that. But his question suggested to me that he thought what "got into" me was alcohol. So I immediately stopped that habit.

Ben and a friend of his came to see me. Ben had bought a new red Volkswagen Beetle. I tried to show them the Freedom Trail. As we walked past the Old Granary Burying Ground, I pointed out the graves of John Hancock, Paul Revere, and Benjamin Franklin's parents. But Ben looked away, literally turning up his nose. At the Post Office in Faneuil Hall he asked the cashier to show him some Elvis Presley stamps. He used a credit card to buy one stamp. We turned back before reaching Quincy Market.

I offered to show him St. Francis House, but he snorted and shook his head. He asked me where Tower Records was, and I gave him directions, but I didn't go with them. At home he told me he didn't know it was that far.

"It has a turntable!" he said of the microwave oven.

He asked me how I paid for it and my entertainment devices.

“Cash,” I said.

“It pays to save,” he said.

He asked me where was the nearest grocery store. I told him it was in the parking lot across the street from the bottom of the street. When they returned he told me he couldn’t find it but found another one. I asked him where. He said it was in the parking lot at the bottom of the street.

“You pick nice places to live,” he also said.

I didn’t complain about his attitude, but they left after spending one on the floor between my mattress and a dresser I also bought. The space was narrower than my mattress, but Ben didn’t say that was the reason they left. As he had in New Orleans, he ignored a no parking sign. So the city towed his car, and he said that was the reason he left so soon. I’d had similar problems with Pat. He not only parked his bicycle illegally at the Riverwalk but also once received a ticket for parking his Monte Carlo on a sidewalk in the Quarter. But Pat accepted the blame. Ben said the signs didn’t say what they plainly said.

I once had to break into my apartment. St. Francis House’s IT coordinator borrowed my keys. I don’t remember why he borrowed them, but he forgot to return them, and so did I, until I was home. So I climbed from the front steps of the house to one of my front living rooms and through it into the apartment. The house was directly across Temple Street from Suffolk University’s security office, and a security guard watched me do that. But he said nothing to me.

At the end of my lease, I looked for another apartment. I was hoping for a one-bedroom with one or more of the bay windows distinctive to residential architecture in that capital of the bay state. I found two available that I liked and could afford. One was on Hancock Street a block from Temple Street. The other was on Marlborough Street a few blocks from the French Cultural Center. But both landlords checked my credit and declined my request. So I rented one on Charles Street.

“You should be making fifty thousand a year to rent this apartment,” said that landlord. “Do you think you can handle it?”

“You bet!” I confidently said, and he looked at me in apparent surprise and rented it to me.

It didn’t have a bay window, and Charles Street was Beacon Hill’s commercial street and not on the hill but between it and what people there called the flat of the hill, but its bedroom was separate from its living room, and a laundromat was below it, and it was a little nearer to St. Francis House.

Kathleen, St. Francis House's human resources coordinator, and Dan, its volunteer coordinator, helped me move in Kathleen's station wagon.

"That's all I had when I came to Boston," I said to Dan as he carried my guitar and my satchel out to the station wagon.

"You're a true Franciscan," he said.

He had been a Dominican Friar.

I bought a new king size mattress, box springs, and frame. I built a wooden frame to make my twin size mattress, box springs, and bedspread more of a sofa. I bought a small wooden table and two wooden chairs to use for dining. I painted the frame green to match the chairs and table legs. I bought a pink and green oriental style rug for beneath them. I bought some wicker chairs and a wicker headboard. I also bought some wine from a wine store on Charles Street and bought a wine rack for it. But I drank little of the wine.

I bought much of that at Downtown Crossing, a shopping area a block from the Common. The stores there ranged from the Salvation Army shop to a Macy's. I don't remember how I acquired the lumber for the frame, but I bought the king size bed at a mattress store and bought the wicker at Pier One Imports. Both Pier One and the mattress store delivered, and subways or buses took me anywhere I needed to go. I bought the TV, DVD player, and microwave oven at Lechmere, a large store in Lechmere that had a connection with the Montgomery Ward franchise. I carried all that on the subway. Green line stops were a block from Lechmere and on the Common. I didn't need a car.

I also made our IT coordinator unnecessary. To comply with the accounting requirements of grants and other contracts funding the shelter, we had to allocate our payroll across more than seventy cost centers. Neville was using Excel for that but decided to ask shelter's payroll service's customer support people whether they could. They said they thought they said the could, but they tried but couldn't. So I suggested using Microsoft Access. Neville said he needed more than a list, but I told him he could put formulas in the fields. He asked our IT coordinator to do it, but he didn't know Access. He tried another database application, but neither could he do what Neville needed.

Someone donated some PC's to St. Francis House. Their operating system was DOS. So they couldn't use Windows. But I asked Neville whether I could have one, installed Lotus on it, took it home, and used Lotus to plan the data base. Then I saved the file to a floppy disk, took it to work, and learned Access by using my plan to build what Neville needed. So allocating the payroll became part of my job.

"You did that at home?" asked Neville when I told him my method, and he also took me with him the next time he went to a computer shopping.

He bought St. Francis House's software from a large computer store in Cambridge. But he bought its computers from a small computer shop in Newton. The shop in Newton built them to order. I ordered a computer running Windows 95 for myself from the shop in Newton and bought a copy of Microsoft Office Professional from the store in Cambridge, and, soon after that, our IT coordinator quit.

I don't know why he quit. He told me I was the only person at St. Francis House with whom he'd enjoy working. But I didn't feel that way about him. Once I went to this apartment. I don't remember why, and it was in one of the old buildings with bay windows on the southeastern side of the city. But he had black sheets and hadn't made his bed, and computer video camera pointed at the bed, and I was already wondering why Neville hired him. But that wasn't because of his apartment. It was because I never knew him do any IT coordinating. But Neville replaced him, and neither did I ever know his replacement to do any IT coordinating, and I also wondered why Neville hired that particular person.

The week he hired him, saying we needed a break occasionally, he took him and me to a bar near the shelter and bought us a round of beer, but our conversation turned to our past work experience, and I mentioned my accounting for the seventy-thousand dollars the Clarion had imprest account for cashier banks.

"Seven thousand?" he said.

"Seventy thousand," I said.

"Seven thousand," he said.

"Seventy thousand," I said. "It was 75 thousand before some new owners tried to cut it to fifty and bumped it up to seventy when they found out we couldn't operate on fifty."

But he also could smell Swedish ivy. I'd read in *Time* that Swedish ivy was on the mantel in the Oval Office. So I put some on a shelf in my office.

"Do you have some Swedish Ivy in here?" said the IT coordinator. He was standing in the doorway of my office, but the door was between him and the ivy. So I pointed to it, and he took the step necessary for him to see it.

"I can smell Swedish ivy," he then said.

But he also quit, and neither do I know why he quit, but Neville didn't replace him. He contracted a company providing computer support on site as its customers need it, but we seldom needed it, and that was after he gave me a pay increase. After a few weeks of doing the job the two IT coordinators ostensibly had done, I pointed out to Neville how much more he'd paid the last of the two

to quit than he was paying me. I knew, because I was allocating the payroll, how much we were paying everyone.

“Yeah,” he said. “But you don’t have his background.”

But then he looked at me with a look that told me he suddenly remembered something. My guess was that he remembered I was an MBA and had been information systems manager for a 759-room convention hotel. But, whatever he was thinking, he gave me a three-thousand-dollar pay increase then, the maximum pay increase policy permitted on my next annual employment review, and, at the end of that calendar year, a bonus of several thousand more dollars. But I had other reasons to question the shelter’s human resources management.

Ira, the shelter’s Executive Director, recruited a new director of counseling with whom he’d worked in New York. His name was Kel Flaherty, and he invited me and Kathleen and the counselors he directed to his home. It was also in one of those old apartment buildings on the southwestern side of the city, but it was larger than that of the former IT coordinator, and he lived there with his wife and son.

He asked his guests to bring what they wished to drink. So, on my way there, I bought an eight-pack of sixteen-ounce cans of Coors at a Trader Joe’s near the nearest bus stop to his apartment. It wasn’t near a subway.

He had an electronic keyboard and also played music in bars. So he played and sang some standards as I and others sang along. He told me my voice was pleasantly distinctive among the others, but he also said he’d rather play music for a living than counsel homeless people, and he also asked me for advice on what internet service provider to use. By then I had my own domain on the Web, had acquired one for St. Francis House, and had used it for stfranchishouse.org email addresses for the shelter’s staff. But that company hosting that wasn’t my ISP. Mine was star.net, and I advised him to use that. But at work he told me his son told him I didn’t understand the purpose of computers. He said his son advised using AOL. But he also suggested that I go barhopping with him that weekend. He said his wife would be out of town.

He came to my apartment. We walked down Charles Street to a bar next door to where I’d bought my wine. But, after drinking one bottle beer each there, we walked back to my apartment and ordered a pizza. A pizza place was across the street from my apartment, and we agreed on an order. But Kel waited in my apartment while I walked across the street to pick up the order.

“Our pizza’s gourmet,” said the woman who took the order.

She took the order, but when I returned to the apartment, Kel was taking the CD’s out of the magazines to look at them. My apartment also had a

fireplace, but I didn't use it for that. I'd organized my CD's as I'd my tapes in Germany and lined them up on the mantle. I also smelled marijuana, but, though I said nothing of that, I expressed some irritation at that dismantling of my system, and I never drank only with Kel.

That summer Kay decided to organize a family reunion. But Sally did it instead. The store where she'd worked had closed, and Denny had no job for nearly a year, but Sally had dealt for years with the nursing home where my mother lived, and the county's mental health clinic had hired for an administrative job, and a factory in Quincy hired Denny for third shift. So Sally was acting as head of our family.

But I attended. By then I'd paid all my debt, including my student loans, and acquired another Mastercard, bought a bag like my Leeds bag but of green canvas, and bought a new gig bag for Angelina. I also bought one for her in New Orleans, and both were black nylon, but the one I bought in New Orleans was cheaper and too big for her. The one I bought in Boston fit and had a soft red lining and more padding than either of others, and I bought it in a music shop near the Berklee College of Music, and, though I don't know why I thought Angelina needed a gig bag, I took her to the reunion, on a train.

The nearest Amtrak stop to Coldwater was Waterloo, Indiana, but Peggy picked me there and drove me to a house Ben had bought with his boyfriend in Kalamazoo. They bought me dinner at an Olive Garden, but they were installing a jacuzzi in their bathroom. So I had no way to shower and asked them to take me to the Super-8 motel in Coldwater. Peggy and Kay were sharing a room there. So I checked into one adjacent to theirs.

I don't remember why or how, but I had a boombox and some cassettes with me, and I'd made one of Angelina and me playing some of our repertoire. In my room I played for Peggy and Kay that tape and other. I told them Dolly Parton's song "Do I Ever Cross Your Mind" reminded me of Connie and that Melissa Etheridge's song "Nowhere to Go" was how I thought music should sound. Next morning Peggy knocked on my door.

"We heard your shower," she said.

Kay drove to Sally's house. Peggy took me to a house a girl was sharing with Pat on US-12 on the Quincy side of I-69 and left me there. I didn't know what Pat's relationship was with the girl, but he told me he was a department head at Coldwater's Walmart and showed me a large computer he'd bought. He plainly was proud of both, and he also still had the stereo equipment I bought when I was in the army. I'd left it in his apartment in Coldwater.

Ben and his boyfriend arrived at the reunion in a big new white pickup truck they'd bought. Ben was driving and told me the reason his boyfriend

wasn't was that he didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea. I thought he was referring to male and female roles, but still that made no sense to me.

The reunion was at Heritage Park, a new park near Coldwater's middle school. The school was new. It had a ninth grade to relieve the overflow at the high school. The park had tennis courts and a building for events but no trees and no playground.

Sally said the park had a rule against alcohol. Peggy brought a cooler full of beer and some cozies to hide what it was, but Dewey didn't drink with us. He had joined Alcoholics Anonymous, married an A.A. member, and had two sons by her. He'd used his prison printing experience for a job in a franchise print shop in Coldwater, but he quit that to peeled logs for the veneer company for which Jerry had worked since high school. I don't know what his job was doing then, but he and wife and sons were living in a ramshackle gray-shingled shot-gun sort of house at one of the lakes north of Coldwater.

"This is my bro Dew," I said, introducing Dewey to Ben's boyfriend.

My Aunt Bertha died of some sort of cancer while I was in Prison, but both of her daughters were at the reunion. One was there with her husband. The other had never married. The one with no husband talked more than her sister, but the other's husband talked with me more than did either sister.

I was in a St. Francis House T-shirt, and he was the only person there who asked me about it. He asked me what I did there. I told him my title.

"Oh," he said. "So you're the money man."

My mother was there and smiled when people talked to her, but she was hardly able to talk. Peggy's sons and their father and their father's wife were also there. Peggy had found them in Angola the year before the reunion and had become close to her sons and congenial with their father and his wife. Jerry had remarried. His wife had divorced him to marry the person who'd talked him into trying to sell health supplements, but Kim, his first wife, was there for a few minutes and congenially greeted me.

The veneer company was German. Jerry had progressed from peeling logs to buying logs and on to selling veneer. He told me, while Kim was his wife, that his boss offered to send him to Germany to meet managers there but that told his boss his wife didn't want to go and that he didn't think he should go without her. At the reunion I talked with one of his and Kim's sons, liked his spirit and imagination, and said so. But Jerry's second wife told me said I didn't have to deal with her stepson every day. The afternoon after the reunion, I played golf at the course at Coldwater Lake with Jerry and Denny and Sally's sons, but Jerry's sons weren't there.



That morning, Kay and I went to church. I'd packed a suit on that trip to go to the Presbyterian church with the steeple. Excepting the preacher's, the only other suit I saw there was on a man in the pew behind us. He told me about the church's building fund. No one went there with Kay and I.

Sally told me Mike Watson asked her to ask me to call him. He wrestled in the next weight class lower than mine and was the only varsity wrestler I beat in practice. He was sick that day, but I called him and ate a hamburger with him at Harry's. He and Lloyd Walrack, another former Coldwater High School wrestler had opened a financial services business in the new one-story brick building that replaced Stuckey's Inn. The hotel had collapsed. I walked there to walk with him from there to Harry's. He said Linda Hosek, the girl I thought resembled a Greek statue, was a "manhater", that Mark Hebner had killed himself, that Charlotte Button had married and was living with her husband in North Carolina, that he'd recently seen Marcia Enos working in a convenience store, and that she was beautiful. He gave me Charlottes's address. I paid for the hamburgers.

"Now that you're respectable," he said on the sidewalk before I turned toward Sally's house as he turned toward his office, "maybe we can have a relationship."

I remembered what John Wilson asked me to do in his basement and that John also wrestled.

"Want to wrestle?" I said, shifting into a wrestling stance.

"No," said Mike, and he went his way as I went mine.

Peggy's vision was dimming. Her drivers license didn't permit her to drive at night. When we checked out of the Super 8, she told me the desk clerk was Johnny Rogers' wife. I didn't ask either Peggy or the desk clerk what became of Shirley, but that was my immediate thought, and I wished to know.

"Traveling with your guitar," said a girl on the train returning to Boston. "That's impressive."

She said she sang and would like to be in a band. I told her about Kel, gave her one of my business cards, and suggested that she call me. I told her I'd ask Kel whether his band needed a singer. I suggested that she call me.

"I didn't hear her sing," I told Kell. "But she has a nice voice."

"She has a nice voice?" he asked.

I also once told him I liked Jo Stafford.

"She has no range," he replied to that.

The girl called, but I only told her Kel said he didn't need a singer.

Pat and I figured out how to use our computers to chat over the Web. Few people did that then. Also, in that remoteness, we drew a sketch together

on our monitors. He emailed that police were investigating him again for child molestation. I told him that, because of his previous conviction, the court probably wouldn't be so lenient again, but I also emailed Ben and asked him to give Pat whatever support he could. He replied that he took him to a Steak and Shake for lunch, but soon after that, I received another email from Pat.

"Dad, you're real," he said. "That's why I love you."

A few days after that I received another email from Ben.

"Is Pat there?" he asked. "We haven't seen him in over a week. Mom said he might be there. She said he couldn't live on the run. She said my dad could but not Pat."

Pat had borrowed a car from a friend, driven it into some woods on a farm between Coldwater and Quincy, and, leaving its engine running, ran a hose from its exhaust pipe through a window. Ben told me all that and also that the farmer found Pat while he was walking his dog, but I don't remember where or when. I flew to Nashville for Kay to pick me up at the airport and drive me to Coldwater. In Coldwater Ben and the friend who loaned Pat the park took me to the woods. Ben also told me the person accusing Pat was the girl with whom he was sharing the house and that at she was accusing him of her and her husband's daughter and that an acquaintance Pat's told Walmart management Pat was under investigation and that Walmart's management fired him. .

Cheryl Hurd came to the visitation. She found me sitting alone and sat beside me. Thinking of nothing to say to her, I rose and moved to where others were looking at a photograph album Nancy took there. Cheryl followed me there to say goodbye. The album was one I compiled in Afghanistan. One of the pictures was of Pat in pajamas sitting on the floor of our living room there in front of the buffet we were using as a stereo cabinet. The door to the tape deck was open. Headphones were on Pat's head. His eyes were wide in apparent surprise and awe.

"That must be where he got his love for music," someone said.

Peggy provide most of my transportation while I was in Coldwater for that. that trip also. But I was ready to leave the visitation before she was. So I waited for her in the hallway. But, while I waited for Peggy, Nancy came out, came to me, and hugged me.

"He was a good boy," she said.

Then she went back into the room, but, as she did it, Peggy came. But so did others. So Peggy stopped to talk. So I then I went to an end of the hallway and looked out a window there to wait for her, and, as I turned back to see whether she was ready to go, she was talking with Kay ands Sally.

"She hugged him," said Peggy.

Ben told me he'd be one of the pallbearers and asked me whether I'd like to be on also. I said I would, but, on the way to the funeral at Coldwater's Mormon Church, Peggy suggested that we stop at the Willows for a beer. We did and were late, but a man at the entrance to the sanctuary asked me whether I still wished to be a pallbearer. I said I did, but then I had to walk to the front pew to join the others, as people stared at me.

Nancy's brother Rob played piano and sang compositions of his he called Gospel Rock. He'd founded a church in California and recorded a CD. No one asked me what I thought of any of that, but I tried to bear more than my share of the weight of the coffin. A man I didn't know was the only person who spoke at the cemetery. But I thought he was somewhat elegantly general.

"Nice job," I said to him, but he looked at me as though he didn't know why I would say that.

Pat's grave is in the newer side of the cemetery, but it's amid some trees on a hill, and I remain grateful for that. David Grace and I had coasted down a road winding down one of those hills on our bicycles for fun. I asked Sally to find out how much was the funeral and the burial cost. My next two paydays I sent Nancy a check for as much as I thought I could afford, but, after the second check, she sent me a note saying she didn't need any more. So I stopped that.

Sally continued the reunions. For the next one, I didn't take Angelina, but I again flew to Nashville, and Kay again picked me up at the airport and drove me back to Nashville after the reunion, but I shared a room with Peggy at the Super 8. Peggy arose in the middle of the night to sit in the dark on a side of her bed to smoke. I bought her lunch at Coldwater's Chinese restaurant.

"You can see that?" she asked as I pointed out from a window of our room the sign on the roof of the restaurant identifying it?

Before it was a Chinese restaurant, it was Gracie O'Shanahan's. Before it was Gracie's, Gracie owned a restaurant on the other side of town in what had been her home. That restaurant thrived. Donavon Cornell took his family there. My family couldn't afford it. But the new building was in a style one might expect of a fast food franchise, and there the restaurant quickly failed.

Peggy asked Kay and me to go with her to Ionia to look at the house where the three of us lived before the births of our three other siblings. The people living in the house were having a yard sale. They told us they were leaving the house because someone soon would demolish it. We didn't ask who or why. Among the items they were selling was a pool cue one could separate into sections for it to fit in a box about a foot long. Sally was a member of a pool team playing in a league. We bought the cue for her.

The league played at Omar's. What had been the Stag had become Omar's banquet room. I think Omar's may have been Bill's Bar, between the Stag and where my father checked tables, but I'm not sure. Peggy and Kay and Sally and I went there to shoot pool, but, while Sally and I play partners against some other regulars, Peggy watched us as Kay played a poker machine.

I shot the cue ball from the table.

"He lives in Boston," said Sally to the person whose shot followed my table scratch.

"He can take that shot back to Boston," he said.

Another night we went to the Quality Inn's bar for karaoke. We sat with some of Sally's friends. None of us sang.

Before our golf that year, Jerry and Denny and Sally's and Denny's sons took me to Dick's Sporting Goods for me to buy some clubs. I'd rented clubs the previous year. I'd given the clubs I bought in Indianapolis to Jerry. He'd bought new ones, but I don't know what he did with the ones I gave him. I also bought two bags for the clubs, one for the course and one to carry all of that on the plane. But I bought no more clubs than I thought was necessary. I bought an oversize driver, a driving iron, a five iron, a pitching wedge, and putter. The bag I bought for the course was the smallest the store sold.

"Only God can hit a one iron," said Jerry of the driving iron.

The person at checkout was the girl who had accused Pat of molesting her daughter, and she plainly recognized me, but she didn't speak to any of us, and neither did any of us speak to her.

In Nashville Kay dropped me at the Ramada Inn across the river from Nashville's main entertainment district. I'd decided to do some barhopping the night before my flight. The hotel had a pool in the shape of a guitar.

Though I don't remember when, I'd been to Nashville once twice before. I'd seen musicians playing in bars for tips. They taped tin cups to their microphones for the tips. I also saw a woman briefly show her pubic hair on a stage in a bar. This time the music bars were professional, and women in bars in an alley came onto the stage completely nude and showed their vaginas and rectums. The bars didn't sell beer, but a small beer store open to the alley did, and the bars permitted bringing it into them. I drank one bottle of beer in a music bar and drank many cans of it in one of the strip joints.

At the airport I talked with a barmaid until about a quarter of an hour before departure time. When I arrived at the gate the plane was leaving. I belligerently told an airline employee I'd never fly that airline again, but she booked me on a flight leaving less than two hours later, and, when I arrived at Logan, my luggage, including my new golf club, was on the floor in the baggage

claim area. That airline was Northwestern, and hadn't flown enough to have a preference. But, for the next reunion I flew U. S. Airway and found that it checked bags at the curb. So I decided keep booking U. S. Airways.

Also that year, though my salary was forty thousand per year, Peggy lost her job. She'd quit waiting tables. For years she was file clerk for a nursing home. But she told me the nursing home installed a computer system, that her boss said his reason for firing her was that he needed someone with computer experience, and that she couldn't afford to share a room with me. So I paid for all of mine. I would have paid the same if she'd shared it with me, but I didn't invite her to do that. So she slept at Sally's house, and, because of her smoking, Sally made her sleep on the floor of her sun porch.

But, at a continuing education center, she also began taking computer courses, took courses for the high school GED examination, and passed the GED examinations, and I bought a computer running Windows 98. So I gave her my Windows 95 computer. I mailed it to Sally's house to show her how to set it up while I was there for the next reunion. In the mail, its hard disk developed some bad sectors, and some inside connections came loose, but I was able to repair all that.

"Damn, I'm good," I said, but Sally scowled at me and shook her head.

Our cousin also Leonard came to that reunion. He'd become a biker and was living in Nebraska near Sturgis, South Dakota, the site of the biggest annual biker rally anywhere. But he also had a new wife.

"She's a young'un," said Sally about her but not in his or her presence.

He and his wife were to stay at Sally's house. But, saying they needed a shower after their thousand-mile drive, Leonard asked me whether they could use my room at the Super 8 for that. Sally's house had a tub but no shower.

I gave him the key to my room, but, returning it, he said they'd rented a room. Sally said Leonard looked like Sam Eliot. But, remembering him from Ionia and Grand Rapids, I said he looked like Randy Travis.

"Randy Travis," he said with a smile.

But left immediately after the reunion.

That evening my siblings and I played cards at Sally's dining table. It was from our house on Washington Street, but she'd refinished it. I don't remember what we played, but I think it must have been hearts or spades. Peggy had her cooler with her, but Again only she and I drank the beer in it. Sally put a candle on the table to deodorize Peggy's smoke.

Peggy said she'd called Buzz Travlebee that afternoon. She said he told her he'd married, that his wife had psychological problems, and that, because he didn't want to upset here, he couldn't see Peggy. I told her she

shouldn't have called him, but, if that troubled her, she didn't show it. She also once told me she looked up our Uncle Bob and found him in a rooming house.

Autumn was also there for that reunion, with a friend of hers, but he seemed to me to wish to be more of a boyfriend to her than she seemed to me to wish him to be. He played golf with us but said he had a problem with his wrist and went to Dick's Sporting Goods for a wristband with a thumb hook. With Jerry for that golf was a Walmart corporate manager. Jerry said he was there to advise local management. But he didn't say how, and I don't know how Jerry knew him. Autumn's friend talked about his wrist. Jerry and his acquaintance and Denny talked about what was becoming of Walmart since Sam Walton's death. That was most of our conversation while we played, but the Walmart manager mentioned my hook. I had a severe one and, having no notion of how to correct, tried to compensate for it.

"He plays it that way," said Jerry.

A few weeks later Peggy called me from Bourbonnais and told me she couldn't make her computer's speakers work. In several more conversations during the next few weeks I tried to tell her how to connect them. But I failed and became impatient.

That New Years Day would be the dawn of the New Millennium. I was thinking of going to New Orleans for that. So I decided to go to Peggy's house between Christmas and then and then ride the Amtrak train the City of New Orleans from Kankakee to New Orleans for New Years Eve. I was thinking of the song "The City of New Orleans" and of what Cheryl said of people removing their clothing on her flight to New Orleans for Mardi Gras.

But Peggy died. A family cafeteria hired her as a hostess. Her only heart attack killed her at work during brunch the last Christmas Eve of that millennium. The picture for her newspaper obituary was of her in her cap and gown for her GED graduation ceremony.

I love my sister.

One  
more  
beginning

## Addendum

But the discord didn't stop. The world didn't end either one or two millennium after Jesus. Neither has it ended a decade and a half after I copyrighted this two decades after the end of the second millennium after Jesus. It's only kept proving that Jesus was correct in agreeing with Buddha that one shouldn't look outside one's self for the kingdom of God.

The airline charged me 75 dollars to change my flight reservation. The person with whom I spoke told me she could wave the fee only if I'd send her a copy of the death certificate. Of course I preferred to pay the 75 dollars.

Peggy's friend who came to New Orleans with her picked me up at O'Hare and drove me to Bourbonnais. She said Peggy had been looking forward to my visit. I slept in Peggy's bed while I was there. I felt as though that was a sort of necrophilia. She and Bob had been sleeping in separate rooms.

Star Trek posters covered the walls of her room. On a small table in her living room, beside the chair where she ordinarily sat to watch TV, was a VCR tape of the movie *The Matrix*. The originally white walls and ceiling of the house's kitchen were yellow from her smoking. She once told me she wanted a yellow kitchen. As Sally and Kay and Bob and I stood talking in the kitchen, Sally reminded Bob of his having expressed contempt for me. Bob said that was in the past.

He drove only me to the cemetery to select a place for Peggy's grave. The name of the cemetery was All Saints. An obese wheezing woman behind a counter in its administrative building asked us how we'd pay. I asked her whether she accepted MasterCard. She said she did. I asked her whether we could see what we were buying. She showed me a map with numbers on it. She told me the numbers on the map referred to numbers on markers at the plots.

I looked for a plot with a tree. The cemetery had few, but I found a vacant plot near a small one. I asked Bob what he thought of it. He said it was alright with him. I looked at the number on the marker, but, by the time we returned to the building, I wasn't sure I remembered it. The woman, telling me

the number I gave her wasn't on the map, suggested a similar number. I accepted her suggestion and paid.

At the funeral home I found that the mortician had made Peggy's face far fatter than it had been since she was a small child.

"She said she thought she was thin because she was sick," said Sally.

"That isn't anyone I know," I said.

Kay wasn't with us then, but she joined us a few minutes later.

"He said it doesn't look like anyone he knows," said Sally, laughing.

A preacher delivered a eulogy, but Sally also read one. Most of it was a long metaphor with computers representing education and life. She recently had taken a course in creative writing. The preacher smiled at its beginning but frowned before she finished it. The funeral ended with the preacher calling the attendees to walk up an aisle, past the casket, and down another aisle. When my turn came I was thinking of other things. Jerry was sitting beside me.

"Are you going?" he asked.

I did, but, after again seeing what the mortician had done to her, I returned to my reverie, and, as I walked down the other aisle, I nearly burst into tears. But then I saw Doyle awaiting his turn in a chair in the row behind mine. He was looking at me with apparent concern but also curiosity. Curiosity about that shifted my thoughts, deterring my tears.

At the cemetery I found that the burial plot wasn't the one I selected. No tree was within many yards of the hole to which the hearse took the casket. Before leaving I went to the administration building and complained to a man behind the counter there. He told me he was the manager and that filling that grave and digging another would be expensive. I told Bob.

"I don't see that it matters much," he said. "She's dead."

But I didn't cancel my trip to New Orleans. So I spent much of the next few days watching TV with him, but I also I found that the reason Peggy's computer's speakers didn't work was that she'd plugged them into the microphone jacks on the front of the computer. So I plugged them into the speaker jacks on the back, and they worked. The computer was in her bedroom, but Bob came into the room, asked me whether the sound was the computer, and also told me both Kay and Autumn wanted the computer and that he'd told them it was up to me. I told him it was Peggy's and that the problem was theirs.

The computer went to Autumn, but that situation spanned about two years. Earlier that year I told Kay that, in less than a decade, nearly everyone would have a computer. She said she wouldn't, but the next year Doyle gave her a computer for Christmas, and the next time I saw her she told me Autumn said the computer I gave Peggy was worthless. But my main wonder in all that



was at the jockeying over the little Peggy left behind, and my main problem in the few days between the funeral and my leaving for New Orleans was boredom.

The day after Bob told me of the computer question, he took me to a shopping mall and, leaning on the counter of a jewelry kiosk, talked with the salesman as a regular customer might talk with a bartender. But I had nothing to say to the salesman the mall and nearly nothing to say to Bob at home, and still he didn't drink alcohol. So, during those few days, neither did I drink any.

But we had plenty of food. Neighbors brought food both before and after the funeral. One brought a casserole while we watched TV. But the boredom continued at the train station. Bob drove me there and waited with me until I boarded the train, and neither, and neither was any partying on the train, and neither was a bar, and neither were any lockers at the New Orleans train station. Counting on that, I hadn't booked a hotel room. Instead, I booked a round trip ticket to O'Hare and a one way bus ticket there from New Orleans. I planned to sleep on the train bus and plane. I asked a policeman where the lockers were. But he said none had been there since 9/11.

So I called the Clarion and asked Nina, the Assistant Reservations manager I'd asked to see *The Nutcracker* with me, and asked whether she could arrange for me to leave my bag at the bell stand. She said she could, and she tried, but the Bell Captain, after asked me some questions suggesting to me that he remembered me and instructions concerning me from Horn, told me I couldn't leave it there. But I found an alternative.

I carried the bag to the Alibi and asked the barmaid whether Mike, the policeman who owned it when Debbie worked there, still owned it, and she said he did. So I asked her whether I could leave the bag there for a few hours, and she said I could. Unable to see the bag from where she was standing, she pointed behind her to a shelf too small for it. But, after I showed her the bag, she said she could put it upstairs and asked someone I thought might have been the barback to take it there. So I finished the beer I was drinking during that conversation, gave her a twenty dollar tip, and barhopped on.

But, that night, excepting Pam, the wife of the owner of the *Déjà vu*, I came across no one I knew, and I didn't come across her at the *Déjà vu*. She was at one of the tall tables at Molly's with some people I didn't know. She also seemed to me to recognize me, but I didn't speak to her. I continued my barhopping alone and was extremely drunk when I returned to the station. I thought a woman sitting across the aisle from me on the bus was a prostitute on her way home from work. But neither did I speak to her. I passed out before she left the bus. During a stop for lunch, I was a wake and went into the

restaurant and ordered lunch. But, as I ate, another passenger told me my bus was leaving. So I went to the bus. But only the bus driver was there,

“Are you drunk?” he asked.

“Not now,” I said.

“Just hung over?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I said.

“OK,” he said.

So I boarded the bus and went back to sleep. But in Chicago I spent more in taxi fare looking for a cheap motel near the airport than I spent for the room. I’d hoped to do some barhopping in Chicago, but I found but one bar open, and I was its only customer. I hadn’t considered that I’d arrive on New Year’s day.

But, in Boston, I found that the V.A. had approved my request for reevaluation of my disability rating. It increased it from ten percent to thirty percent retroactive to the date I requested the reevaluation, and the retroactive pay was more than ten thousand dollars. So, thinking that was a lot of money, I asked a customer service person at the branch of my bank nearest to St. Francis House for an investment option with a rate of return higher than my savings account paid. But he shrugged and suggested a money market account.

The bank was BankBoston, and St. Francis House had hundreds of thousands of dollars in a BankBoston money market account. So I knew the interest rate on Bank Boston’s money market accounts was but a small fraction of a percent higher than its interest rate on my account it called regular savings. But I found on the Web that BankBoston offered online brokerage accounts. So suddenly I was a stock market investor.

I bought shares of Microsoft, U.S. Airways, and UPS. That was the year UPS went public. But my stock market investment went beyond that. Also that year St. Francis House began fifty-percent matching of employee 403(b) contributions to MFS mutual funds, and I’d asked Neville to replace my annual bonuses with an equivalent salary increase. So, by the time of our next family reunion, my total annual monetary income was a little over fifty thousand dollars. But, before the reunion, for no reasons other than that I had the cash and, at Bay Pines, the day I left in my truck, had seen a bumper sticker saying “You better Belize it”, flew to Belize, but not by U. S. Airways. It didn’t fly there. So I flew American Airlines and sat on a runway in Austin for hours because of a little rain.

I found on the Web a small hotel near the center of Belize City, and, immediately on checking in, I went looking for a bar, but I arrived on a Sunday and couldn’t find either a bar or a sign for one, until someone showed me to one.

“Are you an American?” shouted a man from the other side of the city’s main street.

“Sure!” I shouted. “Aren’t most people here Americans? Isn’t this Central America?”

He didn’t answer those questions, but I walked across the street and asked him whether he knew of an open bar near there, and he took me to one, and I liked it. Its bare concrete floor reminded me of the bar in Ardmore. So I bought a bottle of Belikin beer for myself and one for my guide. But we didn’t sit the bar. I wouldn’t have minded that, by guide led me to a small table. Another man came to the table and asked me to buy him a beer, but my new acquaintance told him to leave me alone.

I didn’t ask him about himself, but he told me he was from Alaska, that law there sent people to prison on their third conviction for driving drunk, that he’d brought his life savings to Belize to avoid going to prison, and that he’d spent it all on bad advice from locals, and then he asked me whether I’d like to go to Yarborough.

“Is a bar there?” I asked, and he said one was.

It was a slum on the beach with a fence around. Inside the fence, clotheslines ran between upper floors of ramshackle two-story wooden buildings. Also people shared an outdoor water tap in front of a common bathroom, but across the street outside its gate was a bar with its entire front open and people standing in the street drinking

We went there in a taxi. It dropped us at the gate. Beside the gate stood a young man with a big gold medallion hanging on a gold chain around his neck. The Alaskan introduced me to him. I asked him whether he was the big fish of the neighborhood. He laughed. We became friends.

He was a taxi driver. His name was Johnny. I don’t remember the Alaskan’s name. Johnny’s wife’s name was Roberta. I spent most of my evenings in Belize at that bar buying beer for the Alaskan and others but not for Johnny. He was always working. Roberta told me Johnny was my body guard. She said she was Johnny’s. He said she worked in housekeeping for one of the city’s beachfront resort hotels.

“We give people nicknames here,” said Johnny on my second evening there. “Do you want to know what yours is?”

“What’s shithead’s?” I asked, referring to the Alaskan.

“Shithead,” said Johnny.

Another night he told me a game was in the city’s soccer stadium and asked me whether I’d like to go for a ride. Two girls rode in the back seat of his taxi while I rode with him in the front seat. One of the girls was obviously

younger than the other. Johnny asked me which of the two I preferred I didn't reply. He drove on to the soccer stadium, mumbled something I didn't understand, and drove us back to the bar.

One of the bar's regulars was a professional soccer player. Early one evening he told me he was going to a family barbecue later that evening. He asked me whether I'd like to go. I said I would and reminded him several times. He seemed to me to reconsider the invitation, but late in the evening Johnny took him and me and the Alaskan to the barbecue and attended it with us. The Alaskan passed out on the lawn in the backyard of the house. Johnny and the soccer player picked him up and carried him back to Johnny's taxi. Johnny took me to my hotel. I don't know where he took the Alaskan.

The beer at the barbecue was Guinness. I took the one I was drinking with me to the hotel. I left it on the dresser and passed out. Next morning I took a sip of it. I dashed the bathroom to vomit. But I didn't quite.

Johnny also took me and the Alaskan to a beach bar. It wasn't open, but we talked with a man there. A pay telephone was on a wall of the bar. The Alaskan said he wished he could call home. I told him he could use my AT&T calling card, but we couldn't make it work. I gave him my business card and told him to call me if he needed help going home.

He also told me I should see the keys. I asked him to come to my hotel the next morning to go with me. The hotel's security guard escorted him to my room. Telling me he was living in an abandoned house with no water, he asked me whether he could take a shower. Johnny was outside waiting for us, but, not knowing that, I let the Alaskan take a shower.

Johnny dropped us at a building where a woman sitting at a counter behind a wire screen sold me tickets for me and the Alaskan to take a speedboat with others to San Pedro Key. I bought us big paper cups of beer to drink while we waited for the call to board the boat. Before the boat left, telling me drinking them on the boat would be difficult, the Alaskan poured his over the side. I tried to drink mine, but the bouncing of the boat on the waves made it impossible. So then I tried to pour it over the side. But the man driving the boat was at its rear. So wind blew the beer into his face. He gave me a look I thought I deserved.

I was in shorts and felt the sun burning my knees. The sand on the key was the whitest I remembered seeing. We drank beer at two bars. We were the only customers at one. I thought it was typical of beach resorts. Many customers were at the other. It had a thatch roof and no walls and sold Zaps potato chips. I'd never seen Zaps potato chips outside New Orleans. I told the bartender that and asked him whether he was from New Orleans. His only reply was a look like the one the boat driver gave me.

When we returned to the mainland the boat driver tried to make us pay for the return trip. I went to the window and asked the woman whether she hadn't sold us round trip tickets. The boat driver followed me. She looked at him. Saying nothing more to me, he returned to his boat.

The sun burned my knees so severely that I could hardly walk. When I returned to my hotel, the desk clerk was out and had locked the front door. The owner saw me but had no key to that door.

"You've been to the keys," she said, looking at my knees.

Gesturing to a door to stairway, she said I could wait in her home. But, not knowing whether I could climb the stairs, I told her I'd wait. I was glad my room opened directly to the courtyard.

I didn't go to Yarbrough that night. I could hardly get out of bed to use the bathroom. But the next day I limped out of the city and up a hill. I was looking for a resort I found on the Web. The Web said it was near some Mayan ruins. I found a large restaurant in some trees at the top of the hill and drank bottle of beer in its dining room, but I saw no ruins and was the only customer in the restaurant. So I limped down the hill, again looked for a bar on Belize City's main street, saw a man I remembered from Yarborough, and I asked him whether he knew of a bar nearby. He took me to one with pool tables, but no one there paid any attention to us. So I suggested that we go to Yarborough.

The next day I took a bus up to Belmopan, checked into a hotel, and looked for a bar. I found a large one with a room on its second floor with an open window the width the room facing the street with a table at it also the width of the room. The only other customer there was a young blonde woman with a large tattoo on her left lower leg. She was sitting at an end of the long table. I sat a few seats from her, but she spoke to me before I spoke to her.

She told me she'd come there from Mexico to snorkel in a cave. She suggested that I go with her to another bar to shoot pool, but, still limping and feeling drunker than I often did, I told her I'd had enough to drink for that day and returned to the hotel. It was expensive but dirty, and no hot water was in the shower. The next morning I returned to Belize city.

Another tourist was at the bus stop. He told me he preferred not to ride the public buses. About a half hour before the old public bus I rode arrived, a big red modern bus arrived. The other tourist boarded the big red one. In Belize City many taxi drivers and porters offered me their services. I took a taxi but carried my bags. The next morning I flew home.

I'd taken a thousand dollars in cash to spend in those four days and five nights. When I checked out of the hotel, a little over fifty of it remained. I asked the desk clerk whether I could leave a twenty-dollar bill for the staff. She

said I could if I wanted to. So I gave her one and asked her whether she could call a taxi for me. She asked me whether I had anyone in mind. Johnny had given me a slip of paper on which he'd written his number. So I handed it to her. She dialed the number on her cellphone and handed it to me.

"Hey, Johnny," I said. "This is Bill. Reckon you can run me out to the airport?"

The desk clerk smiled. But she didn't smile when she looked at my bill. I'd paid for the room in advance and spent nothing at it while I was there.

"Nothing," she said. "No breakfast. Nothing."

On the way to the airport, Johnny invited me to his house. He pointed down a sideroad and said he and Roberta lived down it, but I didn't think I had time. I also considered the possibility that he was thinking of robbing me, but he didn't need to.

"You can have that," I said at the airport as he offered me change for the big Belizean bill I gave him, and then I handed him all of my remaining Belizean currency. "And I don't need that either."

I shook hands with him and thanked him but didn't tell him to give my best wishes to Roberta. I regretted that as soon as he drove away, but I had to use my Mastercard to buy a souvenir T-shirt and ballcap and a bucket hat in the airport gift shop. The bucket hat was for Kathleen. She'd given me a can of tea on her return from a vacation in England.

At the family reunion that summer I mentioned to Sally and Doyle that that my gross annual income had passed fifty thousand dollars. Doyle told me that so had his. After Link died, he made a living driving trucks. I also told Sally what Doyle said.

"He says he does," she said.

At the park, as we walked from the cars to the building, she told me how much she had to pay to rent the building. I handed her a twenty-dollar bill. She, apparently angrily, immediately handed it back. Dewey told me she told him she'd thought I'd attend no more reunions after Peggy died.

In Boston the real estate market was booming, and my landlord increased my rent about twenty percent in two years. So I looked for an apartment in Southie, and a counselor for a St. Francis House employment assistance program HUD funded told me he owned a one-bedroom condominium unit there. He said it was vacant and that one could see the beach from it. I'd need to take a bus to work, but the apartment was two blocks from a bus stop. So I looked at it.

But it was a fourth-floor walkup, and the view of the beach was between rooves of buildings, and the administrative assistants to our director of

funding development told me she was vacating a first-floor apartment in the same house and for less rent. So I also looked at that, and it was larger than the walkup and had a small backyard. The counselor was a graduate of the program for which he was a counselor and told me he'd never expected to own real estate. The Administrative Assistant preached "pro-choice" and "environmentalism" and made administrative mistakes making my financial administration more difficult than it ordinarily would be. The rent for either apartment was less than the rent for my Charles Street apartment had become, but the rent for the first-floor apartment was less than my initial Charles Street rent. So I rented it. But, though I packed, I hired a company to move me.

That New Year's Eve was the eve of 2001. I took a bus to New York for that. Many people were saying the millennium didn't begin until then. Effectually, their basic argument was that the first year of a person's life didn't begin until the person's first birthday, but I didn't go there to celebrate the dawning of the new millennium. I was hoping that argument would produce an extraordinary amount of partying at Times Square.

But a northeaster dropped an extraordinary amount of snow on both Boston and New York City that year, and New York City proscribed drinking on streets at any time. So I didn't wait in Times Square for the ball to drop. I barhopped from Port Authority bus terminal down to Greenwich Village and back. So at midnight I was between bars on my way back. I also returned to Coldwater for the reunion again that year. But Jerry told me he hadn't had a honeymoon and was saving money to take his wife to Hawaii. So we didn't play golf that year, and that was the last of those reunions I attended.

In Boston, generally, during breakfast each morning before work, for the news, I watched Good Morning America on TV. But, though my memory tells me I was doing that when the first plane hit the World Trade Center, and that would have made me late for work. So I don't know how I heard of it.

But remember clearly that I had a small radio on my desk and turned it on to hear what was happening, that Ira stopped and stood in my office doorway to listen but said nothing, that, when our executive management decided to comply with the request to hang flags on all public buildings, the only flag our director of facilities found available was nearly too large for the flagpole on the front of the building, and that I spoke to him regarding that.

"Alright, Ron!" I said to him.

"Karen said it's too big," he said.

"Yeah, well," I said, and Ron laughed.

Karen was our deputy executive director and, though various forms of what social services professionals called substance abuse were the main reason

most of St. Francis House's guests were homeless, she smoked cigarettes on the sidewalk in front of the shelter and, while doing that, talked about needing a drink.

But that winter I bought a condominium unit. My stock market investments and other savings were enough for me to make a ten percent down payment on a one-bedroom unit in a six-unit duplex on a quiet one-block street ending across Dorchester Avenue from the Red Line subway station, and it also had a washer and dryer. The washer and dryer were one unit, but, excepting our mobile home, it they made that both the first home I own the first washer and dryer I owned.

But it was also about four blocks from Coyne's Tavern. Coyne's may have been the crumbiest bar in Boston, and most of the regulars there were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. So I enjoyed it.

One of the regulars was a Rod Stewart impersonator from Liverpool, England. But he was struggling to make a living at singing telegrams and balloon decorations for parties. His name was Jamie Lewis.

"Jamie Lewis, Liverpool, England," he said to introduce himself.

I developed a habit of spending nearly every Friday and Saturday evening there and occasionally hopping with Jamie to other crumbly Boston bars. I preferred his conversation and the other conversation at Coyne's and the other crumbly Southie bars to the Red Sox talk and intellectual pretention I found ordinary in most Boston bars. My favorites of the others were Keilly's, and Whitey's, but none of those three bars had a sign in front of it, and regulars at Whitey's said Whitey Bulger owned it.

But, also that year, Israelis besieged the Church of the Nativity, ostensibly because Palestinians were taking refuge from them in it. So, because inconsistencies in the TV reporting of that were why I used the word "ostensibly" there, I took a vacation to see it for myself. A fictional account of that is in my book *Dust*. But more directly pertinent to me is Karen's response to my beginning to tell her of that at St. Francis House's annual picnic that summer.

"I go to nice places on vacation," she said, and she turned and walked away, adding to several other circumstances motivating me again to become a troublemaker.

My book *Dust* also contains a fictional account of many of those circumstances, including that my job made me aware of fiscal corruption and racism on the part of St. Francis House's executive staff. So I won't detail them here. But a result was that, a step at a time up my chain of command, I pointed some of them out to Neville, Karen, and Ira, and a result of that was a



conversation between me and Kathleen and Ira regarding the racism. But Iran only said he wished to avoid the “appearance” of that. So then I wrote to my counterpart on the board of directors, and a result of that, Karen came to my office, asked me to come with her to Ira’s office, and fired me. As the three of us sat in directors chairs around a table there. she said the termination would be immediate but that they’d give me a month’s severance pay, wouldn’t contest my unemployment compensation, and would pay for professional employment counseling, and then she followed me to my office and told me I could use petty cash to take my belongings home in a taxi. Part of my job was accounting for petty cash.

“I don’t need this stuff,” I said, but I offered a hand for to her to shake.

She looked at and then looked up at me with a look that seemed to me to express dismay at my situation, but she shook it.

Then, after she left my office, I went next door to Neville’s office and told him I left my keys on my desk.

“I’m sorry it had to end like this,” he said.

Then I walked through Chinatown to South Station and took the Redline subway home as I had most days since I bought my condominium unit.

I was in despair. At home I could hardly move. I’d asked a Coyne’s regular to see with me the American Ballet Theater perform Giselle at the Wang. She was talking of buying a hunter green dress for that. The day of the performance I called her. She said she changed her mind. I felt I’d disappeared.

But, before that week was over, I surprised myself by suddenly finding myself thinking of my situation as a problem to solve. So the despair became more like disappointment. Seeking legal advice seemed to me to be an act of desperation, but I could think of nothing more reasonable. So I tried it.

Another of my responsibilities for St. Francis House was accounting for rent from tenants in its transitional housing program HUD also funded. On several occasions I’d appeared in court with the attorney St. Francis House was using for evicting tenants. I’d also used him to buy my condominium unit.

When St. Francis House fired me, it was using another law firm to evict tenants. So I called him. Though I didn’t understand how, he told me his helping me against St. Francis House would be a conflict of interest, but he referred me to another member of his firm. I described the situation in writing and took the description to her. But she asked me to tell her what it said. I told her I didn’t see how I could say it more briefly than I had in what I gave her. Then, in less time than I thought anyone would need to read one page of it, she looked at each of its three pages, looked up, and told me I had no legal complaint against racial discrimination if it wasn’t against me and that I had no

legal basis for demanding reinstatement. But she told me that, if I hired her, she'd do the best she could on the basis of my having worked there for more than six years with no policy infractions on my part. So I hired her. I didn't point out that, whoever was the target of the racism, they had no right to fire me for pointing it out. What she'd told me told me she wouldn't listen, and I didn't think I could afford to shop for an attorney.

She acquired for me three months of severance pay and a letter of recommendation. Karen called me to ask what I'd like the letter to say and to ask whether I'd like her to sign it or Ira. Of course, because of Ira's higher title, I asked that he sign it, and he did, and the letter was excellent. She included in all I suggested and much praise I thought was accurate but didn't suggest.

But I was in my mid-fifties with a five-year gap in my resumé for prison and a two-year gap for homelessness, and I didn't see how either that letter or any professional employment counseling could offset any of that, and the new severance agreement didn't include professional employment counseling, and then I had more at risk than I had when I was homeless.

Paying ahead on my mortgage, I'd reduced its balance to more twenty percent less than I'd paid for the unit, and mortgage rates had fallen. So, to lower the interest rate and eliminate the requirement for private mortgage insurance, I was in the process of refinancing my thirty-year mortgage for fifteen years. So I was afraid losing my job might result both in disapproval of that request and in keeping me from making payments on the original mortgage.

But I survived all that. The bank didn't ask for the recent pay statement it said it would require for the refinancing, and I made a change in my budget. I quit drinking Beer.

After the despair lifted, a woman at Coyne's told me the woman I asked to the ballet told her the reason she changed her mind about seeing the ballet with me was that she saw me "kissing Jamie on the mouth". I didn't do that, but Jamie was bisexual, and made no secret of that, and, between asking her to the ballet and her telling me she changed her mind I gave history of the American Ballet Theatre with big full color pictures. So, though the woman I asked was a regular at Coyne's didn't seem irregular to me, my guess was that she was afraid she wouldn't know how to behave at a ballet.

"She threw the book at me," said the woman telling me what she said.

But I didn't need to quit drinking beer. In the first six months after I quit drinking alcohol, I found that my unemployment compensation and veterans disability compensation were enough for me to make my new mortgage payments while drinking beer and barhopping, and that I didn't need the severance pay. So I resumed both drinking beer and barhopping.

But soon I again quit the barhopping. A new bar opened on the corner between my condominium unit and the Andrew Station Redline stop. Jamie and I went there. The bar ostensibly was a sports bar, but its name suggested otherwise. Its Yellow Pages listing called it the Sports Connection, but a sign over the street the width of its roof said only “The Connection”. A young woman sitting at the bar had been discharged from a drug rehabilitation program that day. Jamie and I took her to my condominium unit. Jamie made plain that he intended a *ménage à trois*.

“Get out of here.” I said.

“What?” said Jamie.

“Get out of here,” I said.

“You want her for yourself?” he said.

“Take her with you,” I said.

“That’s it between us,” he said.

“Don’t break my heart,” I said, sarcastically, and he looked at me and left, but he didn’t take her with him.

So she spent that night there. But she told me her situation. So I told her she could sleep either with me in my bed or on the sofa, and she chose the sofa. But we folded it out, and she showered, and, next morning she called a friend, told her where she was, said I wasn’t a threat to her, and asked me to talk to the friend.

“God bless you,” said the friend to me.

But, after that call, she said she had to go out for something. I remembered Rainy, but I asked her nothing and never saw her again. She left some things in my condominium unit. and I found her friend’s telephone number among them, called the number, obtained the friend’s mailing address, and mailed the things to her. But, during that unemployment, though I never heard from either of them again, I found much to do.

I looked for a job, wrote the first draft of my book *Dust*, and reconnected with Cleve Powel and Chris Quayle.

I published the draft of *Dust* on my website. An attorney for St. Francis wrote to me saying doing that violated the severance agreement and demanding that I remove from my website any reference to St. Francis House. But my only change because of that was to make the names fictional.

Chris was in Phoenix, His wife was still a realtor. He had a computer and a Web connection, but he didn’t use email. He told me he wrote his letters by hand before copying them into his computer to print them. He said everyone eventually has cancer and dementia. He expressed as his notions some partisan cliches Democrats attribute to Republicans. He had a summer home on a

mountain in Idaho. Above the salutation of each of his letters was a quotation from mainstream literature, but he based much of what he said in his letters on fringe distortions of fact. He quoted, as though it were fact, Salman Rushdie's saying the compilation of the Qur'an wasn't until centuries after the death of Muhammad. To denigrate Buddhism, he said "nirvana" means "extinction". But my pointing out his errors didn't end our correspondence.

Cleve was living in Abilene in a government-subsidized rooming house for single senior citizens. He told me some of the old ladies on his floor were "kind of hot." He also had a computer and a Web connection, but he used them neither for email or any other writing to me. All of our communication was by telephone. He asked me to help him surf the web for pornography, but he didn't seem to me to understand that the words and pictures on the screen were words and pictures, and my surfing instructions seemed to me to anger him. I wrote him a few letters, but he replied to them only by telephone, and our telephone conversations were less coherent than my correspondence with Chris. So I stopped answering my telephone when caller ID told me he was calling.

Considering that my friendship with Cleve began with our common interest in literature, I enclosed with a letter of mine a copy of an exchange with Chris I hoped would nudge him back in that direction. But he responded to that by leaving me a voicemail message saying he didn't appreciate my sending him a letter that wasn't to him and telling me not to write to him or call him or try to communicate with him in any other way. So, though my disagreeing with Chris didn't end our communication, that message ended that reconnection with Cleve, and all of that was before I found a job, and spanning all of that was discord with my family that also involved at Wellesley graduate from North Carolina.

I emailed Kay telling her of my trip to Palestine. She replied that I was lucky to have walked where Jesus walked. She had begun to call herself a born again Christian. When the woman at Coyne's told me she'd decided against seeing *The Sleeping Beauty* with me, I emailed Kay, asked her to see it with me, and offered to pay her airfare to Boston. She said she was afraid to fly. I asked her how that fit with faith and not fearing evil while walking through the shadow of death. She replied that her fear of flying was her opinion and that she and others had a right to their opinions, and the discord escalated from there.

I established email correspondence with the Wellesley graduate through her replying to a posting of mine on an email news group for non profit organizations, and she also called herself a Christian. Once, while, though I don't remember where, I was on vacation away from Boston, she visited St.

Francis house and donated five hundred dollars. But she also involved herself my discord with Kays side, and so did Ben.

Despite his briefly having been a Mormon missionary, he never called himself a Christian in my presence, but, calling Kay meek little Kay, he effectually said I was bullying her, and the Wellesley graduate brought his homosexuality into it. Though I don't remember why, I'd mentioned his homosexuality to her before all that, but what took it into that discord was that I said been cared for nothing more than having his ass kissed. Though I've found that generally to be true, I don't remember why I mentioned it in that discussion, but the Wellesley graduate, then taking Ben's side, asked me whether that was a reference to his homosexuality, and evolved into a broader discussion of Christianity. She said Christian forgiveness was loving people because of their faults, but, setting aside the question of whether or not homosexuality was a fault, I said love, Christian or not, would be helping people be the best they can be. She said nobody's perfect.

But perhaps the silliness thing I did in all that was to ask Sally what she thought. She said she preferred not to involve herself in a "family" feud, but that broadened the discord to more of my genetic family. Then I didn't much care, but later I did.

My mother died. Jerry called to tell me. I waited for the voicemail to tell me who was calling. His voice sounded to me as though he was trying to sound said. So still I didn't answer, and, partly because of the uncertainty of my finances but mainly because of the family discord, I didn't go to the funeral. But I didn't worry about Mom, and no one else called me, and my reemployment continued to be a struggle.

I didn't find a job until less than a month before the end of my ten months of unemployment compensation, and I changed jobs twice in the next three years, and all three of those jobs were night audit jobs. I did that for the Best Western Inn at Longwood Medical Center for a little over a year, for the Radisson Hotel in Cambridge between Harvard and MIT for a little less than a year, and for Radisson Hotel in Boston a little more than six months. But my leaving the Radisson Boston night audit wasn't to leave my employment there.

My reason for looking for a job while working for the Best Western was that I preferred working for a larger hotel with a broader market. But, soon after I began working for the Cambridge Radisson, the principal night auditor for the Longwood Best Western emailed me to tell me its Front Office Manager had embezzled more than a hundred thousand dollars by washing cash between accounts receivable, most of it from the account of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and I already knew that Front Office manager was a thief. He tried to

keep a ring a found in the employee restroom and gave to him. After I gave it to him, I asked some of the employees there whether they'd lost one, and a reservationist said she did. He gave it to her but not until she told him I told her I'd given it to him.

I worked at the Cambridge Radisson during the Boston Democratic National Convention while the Red Sox were breaking what people called the curse of the Babe. Former Vice President Mondale stayed there for the convention and told me he couldn't turn off his voice mail light. and some Yankees fans shit on the floor of their room when the Red Sox won a game. Neither could I turn off the light, but, though Vice President Mondale told me he'd throw a towel over the light, told not to worry about it, and also proved himself gracious in other ways, the head of his Secret Service detail told me some drunks passed out in a van in the parking garage while watching a game on TV, and, also during that world series but after the convention, O. J. Simpson was there with a daughter of his to consider schools for her.

"Hey, people!" he shouted drunk at me and a desk clerk at the front desk while we were changing shifts.

He was on his way from closing the bar in the hotel's Japanese restaurant to closing the bar in its Greek restaurant. But my only other encounter with him was checking him out the next morning. I didn't need to have seen him the night before to know he drank much that night, but the only conversation between me and him that morning was my greeting him by name when he stepped out of the elevator and, while I checked him out, his asking me the score of the game between the Red Sox and the Yankees while he drinking. I told him I didn't remember but that it was more like a basketball score.

I also checked in Mark Gastineau one night and checked him out the next morning. He was a repeat guest and, after I checked him out, he returned and asked me to give him a key for him to return to his room. I didn't check him in or out again, but I learned later that he skipped on some porn films. He watched the films after the system charged his credit card on checkout.

But Greek night in the Greek restaurant was more of a problem for me and the hotel. It involved drunken belligerence and men throwing money at women as they danced on the dance floor. One night one of the Greek drunks came to the front desk and asked me to call a taxi. But he immediately told me not to. Instead he used his cell phone and told the taxi dispatcher to hurry because his wife was having a baby. So, a few minutes later, a firetruck arrived. One of the firemen came to the front desk and asked me who called. Hoping the fireman would call the police, I pointed the Greek out to him.

He didn't call the police, but, on other occasions there, I was grateful for firemen. The hotel's first floor pipes often froze. So part of my training was in how to turn off the main water valves when that happened. But fire alarms sounded immediately, also drawing the fire department, and some guests called the front desk while others came downstairs.

"Good multitasking," said a guest to me one night as I answered the telephone more than a half dozen times while talking with him.

But, though the firemen didn't need to put out any fires, they squeegeed water from the lobby out the back door, and I was grateful for that, and most of the problems at the hotel were human resources problems. It's only security guard slept on chairs he lined up in the Japanese restaurant, and I heard him tell the assistant general manager that "Indians" could shoot arrows between turkeys' eyes. A night auditor briefly working with me had a cellphone ringtone saying "Pimp phone, pimp phone, pick up, pick up", and once he left it at the front desk, and it sounded while a guest was at the desk. But other problems were because of deliberate human resources policy decisions.

The hotel offered union membership but no 401(k) matching or periodic employee reviews or pay increases. Union members used their union membership to avoid doing anything not specific to their job descriptions, and no one replied to my request for a pay increase. Also, while I worked there, the hotel's human resources director died of cancer, and the hotels owners said they wouldn't replace her. But another problem was my walk from the subway.

It was about three quarters of a mile from Massachusetts Avenue down Pleasant Street to Memorial Drive. One night several young men robbed me. I called police from the hotel, and they quickly came, but that, of course was too late, and another problem with that was that night auditor with the pimp phone ring tone left the front desk to listen to my conversation with the police. But neither the security guard nor the night auditor with the pimp phone ring tone worked there long.

"You tried to tell us," said the general manager to me of the security guard after firing him for writing notes on walls complaining about other employees, but, thinking of St. Francis House, I hadn't said nearly as much as he needed to know.

The night auditor also told me he was studying music at Berkeley College of Music, but, though I didn't believe him, I don't know why he left, and, though I was happier working alone, I didn't work there much longer.

Part of many hotel night audit jobs was what hotel marketers call competitive surveys, calling other hotels' night auditors to ask them their occupancy and average room rate for the night, and, one night, during my call to

the Boston Radisson, its night auditor asked me whether I knew of anyone looking for a night audit job.

So I said I was, and, a few weeks later, I was working there.

During that hiring process the general manager of the Cambridge Radisson offered me a pay increase to a little more than my beginning pay would be at the Boston Radisson, but the Boston Radisson offered 401(k) matching, and, because the hiring was through a three-person human resources operation, I thought I had more reason to hope of advancement there.

So, sitting in front of the Cambridge Radisson's general manager's desk to tell him I was leaving, I told him of some of that, including the pay difference. But his only reply was to say 401(5) matching wasn't much of a consideration, and I had to wait three months for the 401(K) matching to begin. But, after little more than three more months, I was the hotel's general cashier with my own office in its accounting suite, and, about two years after that, I was the hotel's income auditor. My pay there never reached my final pay for St. Francis House, but thirty years of limping on my right ankle resulted in enough arthritis for the VA to give me a new hip and increase my disability rating to a hundred percent during the surgery and recovery fifty percent thereafter, and the hotel paid me sixty percent of my pay during my time off for that, and, two years later, the VA fused the ankle. The VA didn't increase my rating for the ankle fusion, but it paid me a hundred percent during the surgery and recovery, and the hotel paid me sixty percent during my time off for that also, and I was taking international vacations before the increase to fifty percent.

While I was General Cashier, I took vacations to Russia and Egypt, and, while I was Income Auditor, I took vacations to Morocco and to Las Vegas to see Vaughn Lowther.

Searching for Vaughn on the Web, I found the website of a person saying on it that Vaughn had taught him hypnotism. So I emailed him, and he emailed me Vaughn's email address. So I emailed Vaughn, and he replied partly by telling he was in Las Vegas trying to begin a career as a stage hypnotist. So I tried to use my website to help him do that.

In Las Vegas, he told he'd moved from New York to Chicago and bought some rental properties there, that a tenant shot six bullets into his face, that the medical bills had bankrupted him, and that he was working parttime doing inventories for Walmart. He didn't mention his hypnotism act, but he didn't seem to me to have aged much through the decades since I'd seen him. We had dinner at a casino in a restaurant he recommended, and he took me to a comedy show and bought me a T shirt. He paid for the T shirt with what he said were gambling credits, but I paid for the dinner and for his drink at the show.



I stayed at the Excalibur but wandered through some of the larger and more famous casinos, but the only gambling I did there was some blackjack through a bar-top machine in a small bar off the strip, and the lions in the MGM casino seemed to me to be sick.

In my fifth year of working for the Boston Radisson, I paid off my mortgage and retired from working for money. I was 64 years old, two years short of what the Social Security Administration then called full retirement age, but I did enough arithmetic to know my Social Security income and VA disability compensation would total more than my hotel pay minus the total of the mortgage payments the bank required and the extra I was paying every month to pay it off early. A problem was that, because of an outstanding warrant for my arrest for not staying in Tallahassee to fulfil my probation requirements there, the Social Security Administration told me I was ineligible for payments. But I wrote to the Judge in Florida.

A woman replying on his behalf told me the warrant stood, but she also sent me copies of the warrant and the details of the sentence. They were three years of probation and suspension of my drivers license, six months of community service, and a fine. So I wrote to the judge again.

But, with that letter, I enclosed a check in the amount of the fine and a copy of my letter of recommendation from St. Francis House, and in the letter I said I hoped what I did for St. Francis house was community service, and I pointed out that I'd had neither a drivers' license nor a criminal record in the fourteen years since I left Florida, and the Judge canceled the warrant.

But Ben learned of that. He'd become a Regional Supervisor for the Social Security Administration and emailed me saying he'd looked up my Social Security account, that he'd found the problem, and that he could delete it. But I told him I preferred to solve the problem honestly.

I'd planned for years to return to New Orleans when I retired from working for money, and I did. Little more than three months after that retirement, I sold my one-bedroom condominium unit in Southie for ten percent more than I paid for it and paid more than twenty percent less than that for a two-bedroom condominium unit with a pool behind it and deeded parking on Esplanade Avenue a block and a half from the Quarter. I never used the pool, but I used most of my remaining cash to a 2012 Mustang convertible for my parking space. It was black with gray upholstery and had a six-cylinder engine and a six-speed manual transmission. I ordered it from the factory for that. My fourteen years of not driving not only permitted me to obtain a drivers license but also gave me a safe-driving discount on my insurance, and I successfully resolved not to drive less than three hours after drinking more than three beers

and used my new drivers license not only to drive my new Mustang, and I also had enough cash remaining to a road trip around the British Isles.

I rented a car in Dublin, took a ferry from Belfast to Scotland, and took another from Holyhead back to Dublin.

I enjoyed nothing in Ireland, and, excepting a woman in Belfast who told me no pub was near where I was walking, no one said anything to me in Northern Ireland, and, though neither did anyone speak to me as I drank a beer in it, I found a pub a few blocks from where she told me that. But I enjoyed the scenery of the Scottish highlands, some conversations in pubs in Scotland and Wales, and seeing Dove Cottage at Grasmere, and I delighted in seeing the Lake District from the top of Orrest Head and enjoyed seeing Stonehenge not only for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* but also for whatever it originally was. But I felt no connection between the Globe Theatre and Shakespeare, and, excepting a bar with the name the Artful Dodge, neither did I find any connection between anything else in London and my degree in English.

"That's Fagan right over there," said the barmaid in that bar, nodding toward a customer sitting alone at a table, but he didn't speak to me, and finding it was after my spending most of an afternoon walkin along the Thames looking for a reminder of movies I'd seen of Dickens' books.

But I saw the statues of Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela in Parliament Square, and I saw a cayote in the park along the Thames across the street from it. Many people, some with television cameras, were in the park. So I stopped to see why they were there, and the cayote stepped out some bushes. But it turned around and stepped back in. It seemed to me to feel about London about as I did, and the movie on the ferry back to Dublin was about Justin Bieber, and, a few days after I returned to New Orleans I took my Mustang on a nostalgia road trip.

But in Phenix City I learned Willard was dead. His brother Bobby, again or still, was living in Willard's house. He told me he'd buried Willard the year before and that all of his carnival joints and vehicles and other equipment were "gone", that Willard's mind was also "gone" before he died, and that his mind's being gone was "a shame" because "he lived so good." But he said Ruth and Ricky and Nancy Bradburn were still alive. Willard had told me Bob had died of a heart attack and that Ricky was in a sort of dispute with his mother over Bob's possessions.

Jack Tice was living across the river from Phenix City with some young people in a ramshackle one-story house on a dirt road a few miles outside Columbus, Georgia, with a messy yard and a big barking dog outside the house. When I found the house, one of the young people told me Jack was at a food

bank picking up some food for them. Though he also said he probably would be back in less than an hour, I decided not to wait. But I changed my mind before I was on another freeway, and, when I returned, Jack was sitting on the front porch. I took a six-pack of beer with me, but Jack was drinking from a pint glass what appeared to me to be the bourbon with melting ice he drank while working Willard's milk can joint. So I shared the beer with the young man who told me where Jack was when I initially arrived.

"I don't remember you," said Jack to me.

I told him I was Willard's money man. Still he gave no indication that he remembered me, but he told me Willard was the best friend he ever had. I didn't ask him whether Patricia was still his wife, but he told me Lynn had a kid by him but was in California. He said she'd maxed out a credit card of his for her initial inventory to go into business selling used snowmobiles and that she'd recently called him and told him time had come for their son to live with him. But then he asked me how I knew where he was, and, as I answered, a girl came out of the house and asked Jack what I'd said. I'd told him I looked him up on the web, and he replied to her by wiggling his fingers in front of him.

Kay, a few years earlier, organized a reunion for Rod Link's former employees and others who'd worked for companies he booked. She suggested that I go. I didn't, but later she emailed me that Jack and Kokomo Joe did, that Joe owned some joints, that Jack was nearly eighty years old, and that his memory wasn't good. About a year after that road trip of mine, she told me on Facebook that Jack was dead, and, about a year after that, she told me on Facebook that Lynn was dead. I replied that she wasn't exactly faithful to Jack while they were together. Joe replied to my reply that she wasn't a good person. I sent Joe a friend request, and he accepted it. But that conversation of mine with Jack wasn't as long as it would have been if I hadn't resolved to stop driving drunk. I drank two cans of beer and left two.

"You can have those," I said to the young man drinking with me.

From there I drove to Hiawasse. I timed that trip to be there for the Georgia Mountain Fair. Someone I thought was one of Willard's former agents was standing in front of a joint. He looked at me and seemed to me to recognize me, but I didn't speak to him, and the school bus G-top wasn't there.

My next stop was at the address in North Carolina where Mike Watson told me Charlotte Button lived, but I didn't go to the door.

From there I drove to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, the town where David Grace lived before he moved to Michigan. He'd returned there. I found him living with only a little black Chihuahua in a messy little apartment in a government-subsidized housing project. He had a big belly, but he told me he

hadn't smoked or drank alcohol in more than a decade and that he regularly went to church and to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. A print of *The Last Supper* was on a wall of his living room.

But he had a huge TV. He told me it had belonged to a friend of his who'd died. He said the friend's family gave him the TV because he'd performed taxi service on demand for the friend. In front of the apartment was a van he said he'd used to provide that taxi service.

But also in his apartment were oxygen tanks. Decades earlier, against my advice, for cash to buy a van, he'd settled a disability claim against the battery factory for which he worked when he tried to drive me to Carrizozo. Since then Kay had told me that, because he had emphysema, I should go see him soon if I wanted to see him before he died. I asked him whether the one in front of his apartment was the same van. He said it wasn't. So, essentially, his reply was that I was correct in my advice, but he didn't mention my having advised him. He also said he knew he owed me for my paying for our trip to Carrizozo, but I thought I owed him for the expense of leaving his van along the way and for his having to return later to retrieve it, and I still think that. But I replied only that, because he was trying to help me, he owed me nothing.

Not knowing he'd quit drinking beer, I took a sixpack of beer to his apartment. He wasn't at home when I arrived. So I drank one can of beer while waiting for him to return and learned his A.A. membership when he returned. He told me of it in reply to my asking him whether he still drank beer.

"OK if I do?" I asked.

"Yeah, OK," he said after brief consideration. "Come on."

So I took inside the can I opened as he arrived and drank the remainder of the sixpack in a motel room a few blocks from his apartment. He invited me to spend the night in the apartment, but it was a one bedroom apartment with no sofa. I also asked him whether he'd like to go to Coldwater with me and said I'd drive him back, but he said he needed to take care of his dog. So I left while he was walking his dog. But I had with me a copy of *Dust* and a Million Dollar Quartet CD and remembered that he liked Elvis Presley when we were kids. So, outside, before he walked his dog, I gave him both.

"Do you read books?" I asked, handing him the book.

"I'll read this," he said, looking at the cover.

Driving through Indianapolis, I found that Fort Harrison was no longer an Army post. But I didn't stop to see what had become either of it or of the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Bar or the Sign of the Ram. In Muncie I tried to find Spencer's foster parents' farm and Chris' parents' house, but I didn't remember the way. A vacant lot was where the Pastime had been, but I drank a beer in a bar a block

further south, and the barmaid remembered the Pastime. On my way back to I-69 I found the bar where I asked Chris whether he was homosexual, but, because of extensive renovation of both the bar and the street, I hardly recognized it. I confirmed my recognition only by asking the barmaid after ordering a beer.

My next stop was Angola. I'd found on the Web someone with my full name with a warrant for his arrest for operating a methamphetamine lab there. So, considering the possibility that he was my son by Sandy or the victim of the crime for which I went to prison, I stopped at a filling station and looked for the name in a telephone book. I didn't find my name, but I found many Harmans. One was Sherry Harman, but didn't call the number.

My next stop was Coldwater. I checked into the Cadet and told the desk clerk I'd worked there. She frowned at me. I drove from there to Nancy's house to see Ben. He'd told me years earlier that Nancy's husband had died of a sort of cancer. Knocking on the door I saw someone standing at a table in the kitchen. I thought it was Ben or Nancy, but Nancy came to the door, leaving the person there. The person was Cheryl Hurd. She and Nancy were working on a jigsaw puzzle. Ben was in a hospital bed against Nancy's living room window.

He had no seizures or taken seizure medication for decades, but, while I was working for St. Francis House, Sally told me by email that he was "very sick". Through emails after that, I learned from him and others that, because of that sickness, he'd taken some leaves of absence from the Social Security Administration. He told me he'd lost years of his life from his memory. I supposed the Social Security Administration was paying him both general Social Security compensation and a sort of compensation particular to his having worked for the Social Administration. But I didn't ask. In Coldwater he asked me for a hug and rose from the bed to receive it. Looking from the living room window toward the driveway, he asked me whether my Mustang was there. I'd taken delivery of it the day before his 41<sup>st</sup> birthday and snail-mailed him a picture of it with a note telling him it was a birthday present to me for his birthday.

"So you finally got the Mustang you always wanted," he replied, also by snail mail.

He said he remembered my showing him and Pat a black Mustang convertible at Coldwater's Ford dealership and telling them I'd ordered one. I had, but the salesman told me, with no explanation, that he couldn't order it, and I had little to say to Ben during that visit. Before leaving the house, I went into the kitchen and hugged Cheryl. She returned the hug but apparently reluctantly.

"What happened to Hummer?" I asked.

"He killed himself," she said.

“I heard that,” I said. “Do you know why?”

While I was in the Army Hummer became a machinist. While he worked on a steel table with a forklift supporting it and his legs under it, another worker drove the forklift away. He told me doctors told him he’d never walk again, but he learned to play golf. We were playing golf when he told me that.

He also married again and divorce again. At a trailer where he was living with his second wife, he told me he was looking into settling his worker’s compensation to buy a franchise but that he hadn’t decided what sort. The next I knew of him was that he’d become a barber and opened his own barber shop. The next I learned of him was by Sally’s emailing me to tell me he shot himself. She gave me no other details, and I didn’t ask.

“Infection in his legs,” said Cheryl.

“Did he leave a note?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, and the next day I drove north.

Virginia Pope was one of the few female high school classmates of mine who spoke to me much. She lived in Kinderhook then, a short walk from Silver Lake. Once I hitchhiked there. Her father had a wooden rowboat on the lake. I took her for a ride in it. Rowing into wind, I nearly pulled an oarlock from its wooden gunwale. She climbed out of the boat into the shallow water to try to pull it. She cut one of her bare feet on something on the bottom. We stopped at the nearest shore to wait for the wind to calm. She stood among some birch saplings on a slope near the water. We looked at one another. She seemed to me to be wondering whether I’d approach her for sexual purposes. I didn’t. Kubiak said she wasn’t a virgin. Ostensibly, her boyfriend was Poo Lyon. His father was Coldwater’s Mayor and an uncle of Richard Lyon’s. Poo wasn’t someone people said wasn’t a virgin. Immediately after graduation, Virginia left her home, and not with Poo. Kubiak and Atkinson, though I don’t remember in what terms, said her disappearance sunk Poo into dejection.

Mike Watson, at Harry’s, said Virginia was in the town where she went upon graduation from high school. He said she married the guy with whom she went there and that he was still her husbands. He gave me both her USPS address and her email address. I sent her an email telling her what a mess I’d made of my life and reminding her that she’d written in my sophomore yearbook that I was crazy but that she thought I wasn’t completely insufferable. The yearbook was in the box of things Sally sent me in New Orleans. I never bought another yearbook, but, not quite recognizing either my craziness or how insufferable I was, I didn’t quite express in the email the disappointment I felt reading what she wrote. She didn’t reply to the email, but my driving north on

that road trip was to find her house. I found it, but, as at Charlotte's, I only looked at it. Then I drove back to New Orleans, as directly as I could.

New Orleans, when I returned there from Boston, was remarkably different from what it was when I lived there in the nineties. Basically, the corrupt politicians had used Katrina as a ploy for letting their Las Vegas interests play money ball with the Saints to buy them the Superbowl, to turn the French Quarter effectually into one big sports bar with poker machines. Ostensibly that was to draw the tourists back, but also nearly everyone I knew in New Orleans in nineties left before I returned.

Jay was still there, but he was a sports fan when he befriended me. He once suggested that I form a band and call it the Ditkas. Lucy was also still there, and so was Mark, her boyfriend with whom she'd moved there from New York. But Lucy had become a barmaid and had adjusted her personality to fit her customers' demands, and Mark had always gone with any wind he thought opportune.

For decades, Ruthie the Duck Lady walked the streets of the Quarter with ducks following her. Tourists gave her money, and bartenders gave her beer. Also for decades, Willie Taylor stood on Bourbon Street with a beer case at his feet, twirled an umbrella, and wagged his tongue. Tourists threw money into the beer case. He had a big tongue. One night in the nineties Ruthie came into the Alibi while I was there. I asked Debbie to bring her a beer. She brought her a bottle of Budweiser. I drank a draft with her. A few minutes later Willie came in table in the corner nearest the door. Debbie took him a draft.

"Your boyfriend's over there," she said to Ruthie when she came back around the bar.

"He'th not my boyfriend!" said Ruthie. "He'th not my boyfriend!"

Both died while I was in Boston. Willie was in the morgue for weeks before anyone who knew him knew he was dead. Then people who knew him gave him a second line funeral through the Quarter with two white horses pulling his hearse. An article with pictures took up about a quarter of a page of the Metro Section of the *Times-Picayune*. I don't know how Betty knew I was in Boston, but she sent me a clipping of it. Ruthie, with an umbrella over a shoulder, was in the first line, marching beside a picture of Willie in front of the hearse. But Ruthie had no second line funeral. She survived Katrina, but her smoking and drinking put her in a nursing home in the Garden District, and, for another Hurricane, the city evacuated the Garden District nursing home to Baton Rouge. So she died there. I once told Debbie I wanted to be Ruthie when I grew up.

While I was in Boston, I sent Jay a check for his 75 dollars with a picture of Elvis Presley dancing in *Jailhouse Rock*. He once invited me to his apartment to see a VCR tape of *King Creole*. He told me Elvis Presley was a god. I sent him a note with the check and picture telling him where I was and that I was working for St. Francis House. He called me at St. Francis house, asked me whether the check was any good, and complained that the glass of the picture frame had broken in the mail. I think he may have told Betty where I was, but he didn't seem to me to wish to have much to do with me after my return.

Once, at Molly's, during my second residence in New Orleans, I came across Washboard Lisa at Molly's and offered to buy her a drink. I had no more cash with me. So I couldn't, but, during my third residence there, after I retired from working for money, a again came across her at Molly's, told her of that earlier occasion, apologized, and asked her whether I could buy her a drink then.

"That's alright," she said, but she accepted the drink.

In the nineties she played washboard in a band on Royal Street in front of the A&P store on Royal Street and between Jackson Square and the cathedral. When I bought her the drink, she'd stopped playing in street. She was playing in bars, most often the Apple Barrel. But I never saw her again.

But I made a few new friends after my return. I met Coco Robiceaux and Uncle Lionel, both at Molly's. Coco invented hoodoo rock and was in the Louisiana Songwriters' Hall of Fame. Uncle Lionel played base drum in second line funerals. Both were in the HBO series *Treme*. Once, at Molly's, as I drank a beer with Uncle Lionel, a tourist asked me why mules pulled the carriages at Jackson Square instead of horses. I deferred to Uncle Lionel.

"The heat," he said.

Another time, also at Molly's, after I bought him a beer, his daughter came in.

"Who bought you that beer?" asked his daughter.

"This man," said Uncle Lionel referring to me.

She turned and left.

Coco named himself for a kid a Cajun folktale says a Rougarou abducted for being naughty.

"How did you get away from that Rougarou?" I once asked him at the Apple Barrel.

"I didn't," he said.

I also befriended Daren LaNoix and Captain John. Daren's mother named him for Bobby Daren, but he knew none of Bobby Daren's songs. I liked him because of his incongruity of thought. His last name is French for "the



nut”. So I called him Daren the Nut. Captain John was a tugboat captain. Both Daren and Captain John preferred Checkpoint Charlie and Aunt Tiki’s to Molly’s or the Apple Barrel. So I also spent much time at those two bars. Both were on Decatur Street between Molly’s and the Apple Barrel. But Checkpoint Charlie was on the Faubourg Marigny side of Esplanade Avenue.

Molly’s hadn’t changed much, but Jim Monaghan had died and left it to his son, Jim, Jr. Junior had kept the number of TV’s and poker machines at Molly’s to one each and hadn’t rid it of its clutter, but he added to the clutter his father’s ashes and ashes of some regulars in urns and a box on shelves behind the bar, and his namesake son, whom people called Trey, helped him operate it and talked as though he’d make it a disco if his father would let him.

Similarly, Nugent’s hadn’t changed much in appearance, but, having separated from Eileen Nugent, Monaghan had left it to a younger couple who changed its name to the Erin Rose, and, though they didn’t change its number of TV’s or poker machines, they rid it of its pool table and ran sports pools from behind the bar, and one of their barmaids told me Ruthie was a beggar.

Dave still owned the Alibi, but Debbie was gone, and Dave was trying to make it more of a restaurant than a bar and had also rid it of its pool table, and Pam and Earl had sold the *Déjà Vu*, and its new owners had also rid it of its pool table, and all the New Orleans bartenders I’d known to be bartenders were gone.

But I established some congeniality with several new bartenders at Molly’s. One, Tara, had tattoos on all her skin I could see, excepting her face, hands, and one leg. She was also in nursing school but, after I bought my Mustang, bought a new black Dodge Challenger. Another, Gracy, worked at the Abby, between Molly’s and Aunt Tiki’s, when I returned. But later the owner of the Abby fired her. So then she worked at Aunt Tiki’s. She was a somewhat obese blonde woman from Columbia. I don’t know whether any of that contributed to or detracted from my liking her, but I did, and, fitting my new barhopping schedule, both she and Tara worked afternoons.

Instead of drinking all weekend every week as I had in the nineties, I drank in the bars three afternoons a week and found other things to do at home. I played Angelina and an electronic keyboard I bought to try to learn to play piano, expanded my efforts to learn *Taijiquan*, and published my book *Dust* on Lulu.com, and began another effort at writing this book. Because the Abby’s owner fired Gracy, I quit going there. But before I quit going there, a barmaid there told me about Lulu.com, and after that I took another international trip.

I spent August of 2012 covering the gap in my circumnavigation of Earth. In the Army, excepting, the longitudes between Cam Ranh Bay and Bangkok, I traveled around Earth twice. So that August I booked a round trip to

Beijing and, between my arrival in and departure from there, covering that gap twice, flew to Dunhuang and across Kathmandu and northeastern India.

I visited the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the section of the Great Wall nearest to Beijing, but my main reason for that trip was my interest in Taijiquan and Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. So, also in China, I visited the Mogao Grottoes and the Shaolin Monastery, and in India I visited the deer sanctuary at Sarnath, the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya, and the Triveni Sangam at Allahabad. But the grottoes weren't my main reason for going to Dunhuang.

I Knew they were there only because Coco told me about them when I told him I was planning to track the Buddha. He told me he heard of the Grottoes through the National Geographic TV show. So I looked them up on the Web and learned they were at Dunhuang and that Dunhuang was on the Silk Road at the southwestern edge of the Gobi Desert. So the grottoes gave me a reason see the desert. So I drank a couple of beers at the Crescent Lake oasis.

But I flew from Dunhuang to Chengdu, and that was for the Buddha. The Chinese government didn't permit tourists to travel to Lhasa individually. So I flew to Cheng du to join a tour group. But, when I was there, Buddhists in Tibet then were again immolating their ostensibly physical bodies in response to the Chinese government's efforts at governing them. So I found myself in Chengdu with three days of nothing to do.

But that resulted in a highlight of my trip. Deciding to see China's central mountains, I took buses to from Chengdo to Ya'an and back, spent two nights in Ya'an, and, between those to nights, took a minibus to Shangli and back. I learned Shangli in my hotel room in Ya'an by searching the Web for reasons. It was a mountain village the Chinese government was preserving for tourists, and the scenery and architecture were what Chinese watercolor scroll painting told me to expect of China, and I didn't fly to Nepal to see the Buddha's birthplace. I flew to Kathmandu to fly past Mount Everest and back on a sixteen-passenger propeller-driven Beechcraft.

But I saw on that flight that I'd seen it from the plane that took me from Chengdu to Kathmandu, and, after seeing the *sangam*, I took a train to New Delhi for no reason other than to drink beer with nothing else to do, and, on my way home, I spent four nights in San Francisco I didn't plan. Hurricane Isaac delayed my change of planes there. But by then I had a cellphone. I didn't need one in Boston, but, after Katrina, few people in New Orleans had land lines. So, at the airport in San Francisco, I booked a cheap motel near the center of the city. So I walked to Fisherman's Wharf and North Beach, to Haight-Ashbury and a bar where Kerouac had hung out, and to San Francisco's Chinatown.

But neither did I find bartenders there to have much interest in talking with anyone not a regular, and, though the barmaid at Kerouac's former hangout was the more congenial than any other bartender I found in San Francisco, she said she'd never read anything by Kerouac.

In New Orleans, after those years of traveling homeless with Angelina and nearly losing her several times, burglars broke into my condominium unit and stole her, and they did it during one of my afternoons of barhopping.

I found the same model on the Web, but playing it reminded me of the loss, and I was beginning to feel that way about barhopping there, and both Coco and Uncle Lionel died. Uncle Lionel died at home, but Coco died at the Apple Barrel. Sarah, the barmaid, was clearing a table when he came in, but he sat at the bar as he ordinarily did, and she gave him a kiss on a cheek, returned behind the bar, and took him his double shot of tequila, as she always did. But he didn't drink it. He had a heart attack, fell from the barstool, and died on the floor. But both Coco and Uncle Lionel had big second line funerals.

Uncle Lionel's ended at the Mahalia Jackson Theatre for the Performing Arts in Louis Armstrong Park. Coco's ended at the House of Blues. Uncle Lionel had said he wanted to die standing up. I don't know whether he did, but the *Times-Picayune* said he was standing up in his coffin on the stage at the theatre. I didn't go. So neither do I know that. But, though Lucy and I and others waited at Molly's for Coco's second line to march past it, the City routed it through less busy streets, and Coco's and Uncle Lionel's departures decided my departure from New Orleans. Deciding not to wait for the quarter to deteriorate further, I returned to Coldwater.

I didn't miss anyone there, but I missed its snow and maple trees, and real estate prices there were low, and I learned from the World Wide Web that Bob McNall had become a real estate agent working my last Coldwater landlord. So, finding Bob's email address on that former mayor's real estate agency's website, I emailed Bob, asked him to show me a house on Pearl Street I also found on the Web, and drove to Coldwater, looked at it, paid for a home inspection, and made an offer. The owner rejected my offer, but, also through Bob and with no trip to Coldwater other than that for the close, I bought a manufactured home on a lot on Daugherty Street. I paid cash for it with a line of credit on my condominium unit, sold the unit for more than three times what I paid for the manufactured home and lot, and paid off the line of the credit at the close.

So I returned to Coldwater with no debt, a nearly new car, a savings account with a balance of more than twice what I paid for the manufactured

home, and an income of nearly twice my living expenses, and that home was across Daugherty Street from where Sandy live when she was my girlfriend.

But that former home of Sandy's had become an illegal drug dealership, and I didn't receive much of a welcome from my family. Sally's house was less than two blocks from mine, but she never came to mine and complained on Facebook that I never went to hers. Jerry stopped by once and asked me for a hug, but he sneered at my guitar and mocked my Mustang.

"I see you still have your little guitar," he said, and, regarding the Mustang, he asked me whether I was in my second childhood.

He suggested that we "do lunch sometime," but he refused my offer of a seat. So I didn't correct him regarding my guitar. I told him neither that it wasn't Angelina nor that all classical guitars were the same size, that such was what made them classical, and, though he arrived in a big new pickup truck I later learned his employer bought him, neither did I reply to his remark regarding my Mustang. But, though neither did we "do lunch", and neither did he ever return to that home of mine, Dewey came by and established a new relationship with me, and I took Ben for a few rides in my Mustang. He'd rid himself of the hospital bed to live in his mother's basement. But soon I took another road trip.

My first stop was for a night of barhopping in New Orleans. The next stop I planned was to see Cleve, but, in hope of finding a motel a short walk from a bar, I drove backroads from New Orleans to Abilene, and, on the main highway through the tiny east Texas town Malone, Texas, I found the Whiskey River Saloon across the road from the town's only motel. So I checked into the motel and walked across the street. A truckdriver in a cowboy hat drinking Budweiser at the bar invited me to the saloon's equivalent of a *Stammtisch* and introduced me to its owner. I also shot pool with regulars there and left a copy of my book *Dust*.

But Cleve answered the door to his room in his underwear. He didn't recognize me until I greeted him, and then he reminded me that he'd told me not to contact him. He didn't invite me in, but he asked me what I was doing then and replied to my telling him I bought a house in Coldwater by telling me that was good, and behind him was clutter, including, in the middle of the room, some cases of bottles of water.

"I'm sorry you feel that way," I said.

"So am I," he said, closing the door.

My next stop was to see Chris in Phoenix. At his address was a big one-story southwestern adobe-style house with a wall around it. In a driveway behind the gate was a boat somewhat like a cigarette boat, and the neighborhood

was obviously wealthy. But no car or people were there, and I hadn't told him I was coming. So, supposing he was in Idaho, I drove on to my next stop, the Grand Canyon.

Thinking of Thelma and Louise, I took a picture of my Mustang with its top down facing into the canyon from the edge of its south rim.

My next stop was a bar in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The truck driver in Malone had recommended it. It was a big bar with but one other customer. He was talking with the bartender, but neither showed any interest in talking with me. So I drank but one bottle of beer there and drove on to Mount Rushmore.

Entering Grand Canyon National Park, I'd bought a pass the person offering it said was good for any national park. But the person at the entrance to Mount Rushmore National Park said Mount Rushmore was an exception. He recommended seeing the Little Bighorn battlefield, but he spoke of it as though it were a monument to Custer. So I paid to see Mount Rushmore, but, having no interest seeing a memorial to Custer, then I drove on to Sioux Falls and spent a night in a motel there sharing its parking lot with a bar, and in that bar I enjoyed some conversations on subjects other than sports. The last was with a man and woman on several subjects, and, when I left, the man said they were glad they'd met me, and the woman nodded. A barmaid in New Orleans once called me an expert raconteur, and that was after my nineties drunken enthusiasm, during which a regular at Nugent's told me I was the best conversation in New Orleans.

The last stop I planned for that trip was to see Rick Speigle, in Danville, Illinois. His brother Bob gave me his address. Dewey told me where Bob was living. He didn't answer my knock on his front door, but he was growing marijuana in a pole barn behind his house southwest of town. So I walked around to the pole barn, but then he stepped from the back door of his house and asked whether he could help me. He seemed to me to think I was some sort of threat. He didn't seem to me to remember me either before or after I told him my name, but he gave me both Rick's address and telephone number, and that surprised me, not only because he didn't seem to me to recognize me, but also because Dewey told me Rick was living in Danville to avoid paying child support. One of Rick's uncles lived there. He'd killed a woman who was a neighbor of mine at Marble Lake and moved. So he moved to Danville to escape his reputation, but eventually he developed some real estate. So Rick was living in one of his apartment complexes.

To find him I checked into a hotel room and called him from my room. No one answered, but I left a message, and he called back a few minutes later. He told me the reason he hadn't answered was that he was taking some neighbor kids trick-or-treating, and gave me directions to his apartment. It was one of a

row of one-story apartments opening directly to their parking spaces. When I arrived, he was standing outside his door. I asked him whether he still drank beer. On my way there I bought an eight-pack of sixteen-ounce cans of Coors, and he said did. So Inside we drank most of it.

He showed me photographs of his visit to D.C. with Greg and Cheryl to take Nancy there. One was of Greg standing at an end of the front steps of the National Gallery of Art. I didn't remember his hair ever being so long.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Greg," said Rick, looking at the photograph and then looking at me and smiling, but I left after filling my three-can drinking before driving limit.

"I don't want to go to jail for drunk driving again," I said.

"I don't want you to either," said Rick.

In Coldwater I established a barhopping schedule, but I did it walking.

Also in Coldwater, though I had much more money than I needed, I tried to make more. I bought a big brick house a few years older than the Tibbits. It was also in the Second French Empire style of architecture, but it was on South Jefferson Street behind the fairgrounds with a view from its high front porch of soybean fields to the south and an expanse of grass and trees across the street to the west. I learned at the Coldwater Public Library that Branch County's first Sheriff had built it and that the last meeting of Coldwater's Pioneers Club, an organization of ancestors of Coldwater's founder's, was in it. But other owners had divided it into three one-bedroom apartments and added a two-story two-bedroom apartment to the back of the house. The one-bedroom apartments were on each each floor of the main house.

The property was in foreclosure and needed a lot of work. So I paid less for it than for my manufactured home. But I put nearly that much into it, and Dewey moved into the ground floor one-bedroom apartment. He was renting a hardly habitable fourteen-foot-wide mobile home in Kinderhook and had borrowed some money from me to buy some propane to heat it. So I rented the apartment to him at cost, and its back entrance opened directly to a laundry room I'd installed. I'd installed a coin washer and dryer for the tenants, but, excepting what I paid to do my laundry, I also gave Dewey the quarters from the machines, and the laundry room opened to the driveway. He had been driving from Kinderhook to Coldwater to do his laundry at a laundromat. I asked him to mow the lawn and blow the snow and take on some of my managerial duties, but I bought a rider mower and a self-propelled snowblower, and, living on Social Security disability benefits, he had no demands on his time, and the managerial duties were only to take care of the place while I took another road trip.

But significant to me was that, excepting a push mower I bought for my smaller yard Daugherty Street, I never before owned a snowblower or a power mower, and the road the road trip was a two-week medieval tour of France.

I rented Renault Twingo at Charles De Gaulle Airport. My first stop was to Tours to be near the battlefield where Charlemagne's grandfather Charles Martel hammered back the Moors. I found no marker for the battlefield, but I drank a beer in a bar in the center of the city before driving on to Pamplona to see the battlefield where the French national epic says Charlemagne's rear guard stopped a Moorish effort to add France to their conquest of Spain. Searching the Web I found no hotel nearer to Roncesvalles than Pamplona, but I found a marker for the battle field, a marker, took pictures of it and a church near it, drank a beer in the nearest bar, and, the next day, drove to Bayeaux. That was to see the Bayeaux tapestry, but, while in Normandy, I visited Omaha Beach.

Next I drove to Domremy, and that was my main purpose for the trip. To base the main character of my book *Dust* partly on the girl people call Joan of Arc, I read a biography of her. That book inspired me to read more about her, enough to learn her name wasn't John and that she wasn't from Arc, but I also fell in love with her. So my main purpose of that trip was to track the steps of her keeping France from being part of England.

So I visited her home in Domremy and then drove to Vaucouleur, Chinon, and Poitier. I read that she talked the commander of the command post in Vaucouleur into giving her an escort to Chinon to talk the Dauphin into giving her command of France's army and that the Dauphin sent her to Poitier for clerical scholars and women at what became the University of Poitier to examine for evidence that she was a heretic or wasn't a maid. Ruins of the command post remained, but I found no remains of the Dauphin's palace or the original buildings of the university, and, excepting the river, neither do I know whether I saw any remains of anything she saw in Orleans, where I drove next. But, of course, the cathedral remains in Reims, where I drove next.

I'd learned that the two things she said God told her to do to save France from England was to raise the siege at Orleans and to escort the Dauphin to Reims for his coronation, and I saw many statues of her, one in Orleans's central square, one in front of the cathedral in Reims, and one in Paris.

I'd learned that she was never in Paris, but the gold equestrienne statue of her I saw there was the largest I saw, and a full size copy of it is at the French Market in New Orleans less than two blocks from Molly's. But I had no interest in driving to Compiègne to see where the Burgundians captured her or in driving back to Normandy to see where the Church burned her. So, from Reims, I drove

back to De Gaulle Airport to turned in the car and the final three days of that trip in Paris. So during those three days was when I saw that gold statue of Jehanne.

But, also during those three days, I saw some of what I missed in my earlier trips to Paris. I found the elevator to the top of the Eiffel Tower and saw in the *Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris*, in a chapel behind the pieta behind the church's main altar, hardly visible in a blood red box, what the Roman Church says was Jesus's crown of thorns. Considering what the Church did to Jehanne nearly a half millennium before it called her a saint, the question of how England or France or any other participants in either colonialism or what the Church still calls crusades, and the history of selling the thorns from the crown to finance wars, I found little credibility in the Church's flaunting that crown. But I also took a day trip to Versailles and found in the palace's *Galerie des Batailles* the huge painting of Jehanne de Domremy at Orleans, and, in the Louvre, I again found the fascination with the *Nike of Samothrace* I found on my first visit to Paris. But, in Coldwater, I returned to my barhopping.

The bars to which I hopped there were Coldwater's American Legion Post, the Lamplighter Lounge, the Commercial Inn, the Commercial, the Club 105, Lefty's, and Omar's. Once I went to the Willows, but it was nearly two miles from the other bars on my schedule. So driving there and staying long enough for much conversation would have exceeded my three-beer limit. So I didn't return, and I gradually shortened my list.

I heard at Lefty's that Omar's son was managing Omar's and was a Heroin user and dealer. Once the barmaid at Omar's let me look into the banquet room to see what had become of the Stag, but she seemed to me to be hostile to me, and, when I looked into the banquet room, the son scowled at me from a ladder he was using to work on the ceiling, and I suspected that the reason for the barmaid's hostility was that she remembered my shooting pool there with Sally. But whatever the reason may have been, I deleted Omar's from my schedule after about three hops.

Smitty had left the Commercial to a son of his, but the son had sold it outside their family, and it had become a keno bar with keno the main subject of conversation there, and few customers were there on any of my few hops there.

So it was the next bar I dropped from my list.

I joined the American Legion only because of my father, but I found another reason to go there. Dan Swick, one of its afternoon regulars, owned Coldwater's only store mainly selling home appliances, and, when I bought my rental property it had no appliances. The Dan Swick at the Legion had retired and relinquished management of the store to his son Dan, but he told me his son



sold new and operable but somewhat damaged appliances at a substantial discount. So I bought four refrigerators and four electric ranges from him.

Also the realtor and former mayor whose customer I'd been as both a tenant and a buyer was a member of the Legion, but the only time I saw him there was I was leaving. He was in the parking lot behind it. I greeted him with a handshake, but another customer leaving warned him against that.

"Careful," said the another member. "He's kind of rough."

"He isn't too rough," said the former mayor. "He's buying houses from me."

But neither did I enjoy any conversations there, and pictures of Jane Fonda were in the bottoms of its urinals. So I tried a little more troublemaking. I withdrew my membership by writing to the Legion's Michigan Headquarters and saying in it that the pictures in the urinal were enough of a reason.

I had three conversations at the Lamplighter during that hopping. I enjoyed one of them but never again saw that conversant. The second was at the largest table there with more than a half dozen people who graduated from Coldwater High School less than a decade after I did. A woman among them gave me a ride home, but the ride was in a big white extended-cab pickup truck, and I'd enjoyed neither her conversation nor that of any of the others. So I didn't invite her in and never again saw any of those conversants.

The third was with Terry Highland. He was no longer an owner of the Lamplighter, and new owners had removed the pews and otherwise renovated it, and Sherry had told me that, while she was managing the Cadet, Terry bought the Cadet on a land contract and defaulted on the contract. So I don't know why he was at the Lamplighter. But Bob McNall had told me he was one of the previous owners of my rental property. So I had a reason to speak with him, and, one afternoon, while I was the only customer there and wondering why the barmaid was ignoring me, he wandered in the back door. I was sitting near the end of the bar nearest the back door.

"Are you Terry Highland?" I asked.

He said he was but gave me a questioning look. So I introduced myself to him, reminded him that he'd thrown me out of there for throwing beer New Years Eve of 1968, asked him whether Bob was correct, and told him I'd bought the property. He said Bob was correct and that his mother had lived in the ground floor apartment, the one I was renting to Dewey. But he told me nothing more about the property, and I didn't ask him, and, also, when I returned from France, Dewey told me he'd come by and told him he had some information on the house's background that might interest me, but I made no effort to contact him again, and, by then, I'd also dropped the Lamplighter from

my barhopping habit. So, then, my barhopping was only hopping from my house to Lefty's and back.

Then, Lefty's and Omar's and a restaurant in the building that originally was the firehouse were all the bars in that block of Monroe Street. The name of the restaurant was the Firehouse, but I never went there, and think Lefty's may have been Walkup's when I was growing up. With the Topper Tavern and the Club 105, Walkup's was one of the first three bars in Coldwater to have a liquor license. That was because they were the first three bars in Coldwater to have carpeting. The State of Michigan made that a liquor license requirement. Since then, the 105 had replaced its carpeting with hardwood floors, and I eliminated it from my list my first day of including it, the day I eliminated the Willows. I was the only customer then, and the barmaid didn't speak to me.

The Topper Tavern, after becoming the Lamplighter, went through at least two major renovations. But, though Terry Highland, during some of that time, was a part owner of Lefty's, when I returned to Coldwater in 2013, Lefty was its only owner, and the condition of its carpeting suggested that it may have been the carpeting the owners of Walkup's installed for its liquor license, and Lefty had also otherwise let it earn a reputation for degeneracy. But I had two conversations there relevant to my childhood.

One was with one of Dave Norton's sisters. I don't remember where, but I'd heard Dave died of some kind of cancer after becoming an outrageous drunk. His sister didn't mention that, but she told me that what my mother told me of his mother's relationship with the attorney was true and that the reason the attorney didn't divorce to marry her was that he and his wife were Roman Catholic.

My other conversation at Lefties relevant to my childhood was with a son of Eddie and Danny Parker's brother Mike. Dewey told me Eddie was dead. His son told me Danny had died of a brain aneurism somewhere in the Carolinas. Mike was Danny's and Eddie's youngest brother. The last time I saw him was also at Lefty's or Walkups or the Alibi. I was sitting at the bar and bought a round of drinks for him and the others sitting with him at a table near me. He told me I didn't need to do that. I don't remember why, but I mentioned to his nephew that I needed a handman to help me with my rental property, and he told me Mike sometimes did that sort of thing and gave me his address. So I went there and knocked on his door. The house was on West Pearl Street.

He wasn't there, but his wife came to the door. She seemed to me to resemble Danny's wife. Danny had introduced me to his wife at his house the last time I saw him, but Mike's wife didn't seem to me to recognize my name,

and she told me Mike had stopped doing handyman work. She said he was working at Walmart instead. I gave her my telephone number and asked her to ask him to call me if he was interested, and she said she would. But he didn't call me, and soon after that I stopped hopping to Lefty's.

I was trying to structure my time around working on this book, keeping my guitar accumen, learning to play my keyboard, and learning *Taijiquan*, and I enjoyed all of that more than hanging out at Lefty's and far more than dealing with tenants, and, because occasionally I had to drive across town to deal tenants, my drinking at home added to that problem.

So I sold my manufactured home and moved into two of the one-bedroom apartments. I asked Dewey to move to the top floor and opened a stairway between it and the main floor apartment. A previous owner had closed a stairway to the ground floor and the main floor two apartments, but I opened the stairway. stairway to make the apartments two.

The reasons I didn't move into the addition were that I'd have to climb stairs to go from the living room to the bathroom, that I wished to live in the original old house with the view, and that the addition had a tenant with a lease. The main floor one-bedroom apartment also had a tenant with a lease, but she wasn't paying he rent. So I evited her, and the reason I moved into two apartments was to use Dewey's living room as a bedroom. The bedroom on the main floor was tiny. I did all the work to open the stairway and also to build a wall to separate the laundry room from a stairway to the main floor. But, between that and the move, I found one. He moved to the Philippines, but he left his business his assistant, and I paid a former boyfriend of hers and a friend of his to move Dewey. But I sold the property on Daugherty Street for enough more than I paid for it to pay the cost of all of that, and the next ride on which I took Ben in my Mustang was to show him the house. He asked to see it.

We entered it through the laundry room. I told him I bought it out of foreclosure and what I paid for it. He grinned and shook a right-on fist in the air. I told him it was a mess when I bought it. But he seemed to me to me to ignore that. So I didn't tell him about my problems with the tenants.

But that was also his last ride in the Mustang.

Driving back to Nancy's house that day, I took a short detour to show him Buzz Travelbee's house. I'd found a listing for him in Coldwater's telephone book and driven to the address. It was a one-story ramshackle blue house with a messy yard facing a road along the east side of Coldwater's airport.

"Buzz's knives," said Ben, reading a sign on a tree in the yard.

On the way there with Ben I told him a little of Buzz and Peggy's relationship and the results of it.

But reading that sign was his only reply to any of that.

“See ya,” he said stepping from the Mustang in his mother’s driveway, and, with no other word and no look back, he went into the house and closed the door behind him, and I never went back.

I occasionally communicated with him through Facebook Messenger, but I sold the rental property on a land contract to the last handyman who helped me with it. The handywoman didn’t measure up to my previous handyman, and one winter the tenant in the addition turned off furnace and left with no notice. So the pipes froze. So I had to replace all its plumbing. But my main reason for selling the house was that I was sick of Coldwater.

Every minute in Coldwater was a reminder of my miserable childhood and the resulting crime and punishment, and I found in Albion, about forty miles northeast of Coldwater, for less than I paid for the rental property, a small concrete and stucco Cape Cod house, and Albion also had snow and maple trees.

I put about as much cash into both properties after I bought them as I paid to buy them, but I sold the rental property to the handyman for about ten thousand dollars more than the total I’d put into it, and he paid off the land contract in less than two years, was a low-cost high-productivity handy man, and also helped me with the house in Albion. So, when he paid off the contract, I opened an E-trade brokerage account with more than three times what I paid for my house in Albion, and, less than five years later, my net financial worth was more than a quarter of a million dollars.

But, before that, I took another road trip. I wished to see for myself whether the drug and immigration problems along the Rio Grande were what TV news said they were. So, also remembering what the CPMI team MSG said of Boys Town, I drove to Laredo to see both.

But other reasons I wished to go to Laredo were that I wished to make the number of border towns I’d visited three, that the song “The Streets of Laredo” was in my guitar repertoire, and that the Whiskey River Saloon in Malone was on the way, and, also on that trip, after Laredo, I spent a night in New Orleans, a night near Gibtown, and a few minutes in Selma, Alabama, to see the Edmond Pettus Bridge.

I reserved a room in the little motel in Malone, checked in, and walked across the street. But I arrived late on a weekday evening, and, though several people were sitting at the bar and talking with the barmaid, she told me the saloon wasn’t open, and to my further inquiries, she told me she couldn’t sell me a sixpack to go and that the nearest place to buy one that late was in the next town, about ten miles. So I drove there, bought a sixpack and a sandwich, drove back, consumed both in my room, and drove to Laredo next morning.

I'd reserved a room at the Laredo Ramada Plaza. After checking in, I walked to the border. The only check of my passport was through an electronic kiosk on the bridge, and I saw no evidence of drug trafficking in either Laredo or Nuevo Laredo. In Boys Town I saw some women standing outside a building and thought they were prostitutes, but they didn't speak to me, and the building didn't seem to me to be a bar. I found some bars and talked with some customers and bartenders. But few customers were in the bars. So I returned to my hotel early enough to leave for New Orleans before dawn the next morning.

But, also before dawn, before I left Texas, I saw some evidence of the drug problem. A sign on U.S. 59 directed me to stop at something resembling a weigh station. A policeman was standing outside a building. So I stopped in front of him. Then, thinking he motioned me on, I continued, but then he shouted at me. So I stopped again and rolled down a window, and then he asked me whether I'd ever been through a drug check and whether I had any drugs. I said I hadn't and didn't. Then another policeman let a German shepherd sniff beneath the Mustang and waved me on. But that wasn't my last drug check.

On I-10, near Lake Charles, a state policeman stopped me. He told me the reason he stopped me was that changing lanes put me too close to the back of another car, but then he asked me whence I was coming and whither I was going, and, to my telling him I was on my way from Laredo to New Orleans, he asked me why my hands were shaking. I thought that was either from worrying about losing my safe-driving insurance discount or from trying to drive through the tight traffic at the maximum speed to arrive in New Orleans before Tara's and Gracie's shifts ended. I told the policeman of the second possibility but not the first, and he told me to take the next exit from I-10 and stop at the filling station on the left side of the exit. He said I'd find another policeman there.

I did, and he and the other policeman searched my Mustang for more than an hour. They removed its air cleaner cover and the inside panels in front of its doors. The one who stopped me to put the top down and whether I had any weapons. When I visited the Shaolin Monastery I hadn't learned enough of Taijiquan to doubt the legitimacy of the relationship between the taiji sword form and Taijiquan. So I bought a taiji jian, and I had it with me. By then I had reason to doubt the security of my neighborhood in Albion. So I told the policeman I had a sword in my trunk. He asked me why, and I told him. He asked me why I didn't trust my neighborhood, and I told him I was new to it and didn't know if I should, and he asked me whether he could see it. By then he hadn't asked me to open the trunk, but then I did, and he said he liked the sword. But, a few minutes later, I remembered I had a pocket knife somewhat like the one I bought in Hiawasee. So I asked him whether he wanted to see it.

But he gave me something a good-humored smirk. So I asked him whether I could use the restroom, and his reply to that was that they wouldn't be much longer. But then he asked me what a number I'd written on the back of a fuel receipt meant. I was calculating my fuel economy and told him that asked me to tell him my route from Albion to Laredo, and I told him that, but then he told me no one would drive from Michigan to Laredo for one night. Earlier he'd asked me my route from Albion to Laredo, and I told him as much as I remember, but then, after also telling him I spent less than two hours at the Shaolin Monastery, I told him Laredo wasn't to be my only stop on that trip, offered to show him my Google Maps printouts and showed him the ones for from Laredo to New Orleans, from New Orleans to Selma, and from Selma to Albion. He asked me where was the one for from Albion to Laredo, but was throwing them away as I used them, and I told him that.

"It's starting to make sense now," he said to the other policeman, and then they stopped searching, but then he asked me to sign a form saying they had my permission to search my car, and, though, as I signed it, I told him it was a nice day and that I'd leave the top down, he told me it might rain. So I put it up. But, in New Orleans, Gracie and Captain John greeted me as though I were a long lost friend.

"Bill!" exclaimed Captain John the instant I entered Aunt Tiki's, and, when I put my hands on the bar, as I sat beside him and asked Gracie for a beer, she reached across the bar and took both of my hands, and Darin the Nut similarly welcomed me at Checkpoint Charlie.

He was drinking with some young people. One was a girl, and I talked about music with her. I asked her whether she knew why Melissa Etheridge called her song "Royal Station 416" what she called it.

"The address?" she asked.

"The time signature," I said.

"That's impressive," she said. "That's fast."

So I beat the time on the bar. But, because of the search of my Mustang, my arrival was after Tara and Lucy left work, and the next morning I drove on to Gibtown. But not directly. Before stopping in Gibtown, I drove on to Sarasota to try to find Alan.

But I couldn't find the day labor agency for which we'd worked, and, though I found some others, the day was Sunday. So none were open. I looked in other places I'd known him to frequent. But I didn't find him. I also wished to see the opera house where Vaughn had worked, and I found that. But he'd told both it and the Tibbits were Victorian. The Tibbits' Second French Empire style somewhat resembled Victorian, but the building in Sarasota was modern.

I'd found a motel in Gibtown on the Web, called it, and made a reservation, but, when I arrived, no room was available, and nothing on the building indicated that it was open, but some young people were standing in front of it. So I talked with them, and one told me she'd taken my reservation. But she also told me no rooms were available and that she'd told me I'd have to call the day before my arrival to confirm the reservation. I didn't remember her telling me that, but I didn't argue. I drove through town looking for another motel, and, at the other end of town, I found another building resembling a motel, but, though a man was also standing in its parking lot, neither did it appear to be open. So I asked him whether a room was available there. He told me he did know, but, as he told me that, an older man came down some stairs from the building's second story.

"What does he want?" asked the older man.

"He's looking for a room," said the younger man. "He looks like a regular person."

So from there I drove to the Showtown Bar and asked the barmaid and two women sitting at the bar whether they knew of a motel anywhere near there. The bartender said she didn't, but one of the other women told me one was in the next town south. So I looked for it, but I was nearly in Sarasota again before I found one, and, though the next morning I looked for Giant's restaurant for breakfast, I saw no evidence that it was ever there. So I returned to the bar.

There I saw a man I thought might be Kokomo Joe and asked the barmaid whether his name was Joe., but she told me his name was something other than Joe, and Joe hadn't replied to my Facebook message. I knew he lived in Tampa and sent him a Facebook message asking him to meet me there for what he called having a couple. But he didn't reply to my message, and the barmaid told me the man's name, but the name she gave me wasn't Joe, and he didn't show. But In Selma I found the Bridge.

A small museum was at one end of it, but, when I arrived no one else was there. So I urinated from the riverbank. As I did that, a carful of African Americans arrived. Not looking at me, they went into the museum, but I drove through Selma looking for a bar, found none, and drove on to Coldwater.

The handyman didn't renew Dewey's lease. He told me he thought one of Dewey's sons was using drugs in the pole barn, and Dewey told me he complained about a friend of his smoking cigarettes on the property. So Dewey found an apartment in Bronson and asked me to lend him the last month's rent the landlord asked him to pay with the first month's rent to move in. I loaned it to him, and he'd pay me him back as soon as he could, but he never did. Less

than a year later I gave him ten thousand dollars for his birthday, enough for him to pay all of his debts with more than five thousand dollars remaining.

But Dewey also called me to tell me Rick Speigle had some sort of cancer and was returning to Michigan for hospice. Charlene was dead. Hummer had told me she drank herself to death. I found Rick's account on Facebook and sent him a Facebook request. He accepted it but didn't reply and hadn't posted recently. Dewey also told me Rick's sister Judy was living in Michigan but had arranged for Rick's daughter to take care of him in her home in Battle Creek. He also told me he'd visited Rick there and that his daughter seemed nice, and he also gave me her address and telephone number.

So I drove there and parked in the front yard beside the drive way, but the house had several apartments, and no doorbell was beside the front door to the house. So I returned to my Mustang and called the number Dewey gave me, and the daughter answered and asked me who I was. But, though I told her only that I was a friend of Rick's and was looking for him, she told me she'd be right out, and, as I stepped out of my Mustang, she stepped out to the porch and beckoned me in.

The apartment was dirty and also otherwise messy. Rick was in an old recliner in the living room. I asked his daughter who her mother was.

"Charlene," she said.

"I was the best man at their wedding," I said.

But she said nothing in reply to that, and Rick could hardly speak or move. She told me he'd run about the apartment the night before, that calming him down was difficult, and that taking care of him was occasionally a struggle. But plain was that seeing me both surprised Rick and pleased him, and he tried to talk to me.

"Cher," he said several times.

I thought he was trying to say Sherry. So, wondering how he knew I had any association with her, I told him I was no longer with her. His daughter told me Cheryl Hurd had been there and said she'd come back with Nancy, but still I didn't understand that he was trying to say Cheryl, and I didn't stay long.

I couldn't make myself and told his daughter I couldn't. He wordlessly but plainly desperately expressed his disappointment I offered. I offered Rick a hand to shake, and he tried to use his right hand for that, but he couldn't lift it. So I picked up his left hand from an arm of the chair and shook it. His left hand was nearer to me than was his right.

"See you down the road," I said.

Shaking, I returned to my Mustang. Feeling I was feeling the desperation Rick felt, I feared I'd suffer the shame of that interminably. I sat in



the Mustang for several minutes before I could start it and drive away. Two days later Dewey told me Rick died the day after I was there.

Rick was a friend of mine.

Part of my reason for moving to Albion was that it had two bars I thought I might enjoy. Cascarelli's was mainly a restaurant, but it had a large bar with stools. Charlie's Tavern was more of a bar, but it had no stools at its bar. Jim Cascarelli owned Cascarelli's. I don't know who owned Charlie's, but I knew his name wasn't Charlie. He also tried to make his business more of a business, but its sign in front continued to say "tavern", and Cascarelli's had a larger dining room and also a banquet room. Originally its bar and restaurant and banquet room were in three separate buildings on Superior Street, Albion's main street. Charlie's was one building a half block from Superior Street.

But both suffered from the recession of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cascarelli told me a legitimate landlord couldn't make a living in Albion. He was referring to the government's subsidizing housing for the people who lost their jobs after the recession closed a foundry that had recruited African Americans during the Great Migration. But a daughter of Charlie's owner's who tended bar at the tavern also made that racial tension evident

"No one can tell me Albion isn't "more than thirty percent black," she replied to my mentioning a Wikipedia article saying Albion's population was about thirty percent African American.

I don't remember why I mentioned that, but, though I barhopped to both bars most Wednesday and Saturday afternoons for more than two years, neither do I remember having a conversation at either I thought was worth having, and, in my in my third year in Albion, I eliminated each of my three remaining reasons to drink alcohol and quit drinking it, and the barhopping was the second of those reason I eliminated, but I didn't plan any of that.

I'd planned for decades to be in New Orleans for its tricentennial. On 7 May 1718, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, then governor of the Louisiana territory, officially moved its capital to New Orleans from what's now Mobile, Alabama. I booked four nights at the Royal Orleans hotel, checking in 4 May and checking out 8 May, and included valet parking in the booking. I felt about letting others drive my Mustang as I'd felt about letting others play Angelina, but the hotel offered no self-parking, and I found on the Web no other way to be sure I could find a parking space in the Quarter during that week, and avoiding expense was contrary to my purpose for that trip. I'd booked cheaper hotels for my previous returns to New Orleans since leaving Boston, but the Royal Orleans was my favorite hotel, and it was three blocks from Jackson Square.

But, in those four days and nights, the only evidence of the tricentennial I saw was the number three hundred in numerals several feet high on the steps to Washington Artillery Park across Decatur street from Jackson Square, and Washington Artillery Park commemorated a Louisiana National Guard unit. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival celebrated New Orleans's birthday every year, but that was from the last weekend of April through the first weekend in May, and it was at the Fairgrounds racetrack, about three miles from the Quarter, and that year the first weekend in May ended the day before 7 May, and the city neither expanded the celebration nor extended the dates. So my most pleasant surprise during that visit was not needing to stand in line for breakfast at the Clover Grill.

Gracie welcomed me as an old friend, but she told me Captain John had died that year. Lucy told me she'd wondered whether she'd ever see me again, but her ordinary Bourbon Street bartending kept her too busy to talk with me much. Tara had become a Facebook friend of mine, but she'd graduated from nursing school and quit Molly's to be a nurse. She told me on Facebook that she'd like to have a drink with me at Molly's while I was there for the tricentennial, but I didn't know how I could coordinate that.

I drank a few beers with Darin. But his mother had died, and his wife had some sort of cancer, and his mother had left him some houses outside the Quarter. So he left his Decatur Street apartment with a View of the French Market statue of Jehanne of Domremy and moved into one of the houses his mother left him. He took the St. Charles Trolley to the Quarter to have a few beers with me, and, though I was at the Apple Barrel when he arrived in the Quarter, he went to the Royal Orleans looking for me. He called me from there and walked to the Apple Barrel, but the Apple Barrell had changed owners. So I didn't know the barmaid, and Darin had lost some teeth, and the barmaid didn't appreciate his rambling, especially his mixing his talk of his wife's cancer with his talk of earlier infidelity and other trouble with her. While he was in the restroom, after I took a trip there, the barmaid told me he told her I was his best friend, but that was 7 May, and, also while he was in the restroom, I told her that was in New Orleans then.

"Is that today?" she said, and Darin and I didn't extend that hopping to any other bar.

I left the Apple Barrel with him, but I didn't feel I could drink any more beer that night, and, when we reached Molly's, I told him that. So we didn't go in, and he didn't complain, and the next morning I left New Orleans, and I never returned to New Orleans. So that trip was the first of my last three reasons to drink alcohol I eliminated.

What eliminated the second was a conversation at Charlie's.

The bar was about eight feet from the wall in front of it, and small tables were along the wall. As I stood at the bar drinking one of my three beers for that afternoon, another a man and his wife and a friend of theirs sat at the table nearest to me. The husband and wife were European American. The friend was African American. The conversation turned to Albion's racial tensions.

Referring to Albion's racist European Americans, I said the "chuck motherfuckers" needed to accept that they were "stuck with" the former employees of the foundry. A woman eating in the dining area came to the bar, told the husband that her children were with her and weren't "used to hearing language like that," and, not looking at me, returned to her table. The husband told me the friend with him was a former employee of the foundry and that I was the most racist person he'd ever met.

"I love you man," he said to the friend, and he rose from his seat and stepped to the bar to pay his bill.

One of my problems with both Charlie's and Cascarelli's was that the bartenders spent no more time at the bar than serving customers at it required. At Cascarelli's they had other duties. At Charlie's they spent their leisure time sitting at a table in the dining area. I had used Microsoft Publisher to print business card to promote my writing, and, during the time the barmaid took to come to the bar to accept the husband's payment, I laid one on the bar in front of him and told him he should look at my website if he thought I was a racist.

"I don't want to look at your racist website," he said, and he asked the African American man whether he wanted the card.

The friend didn't answer, but the husband again told him he loved him.

"I love you too," said the friend, but he didn't say "man", and he'd said nothing at any other time during that conversation.

By then, the barmaid had reached the bar. So then the husband paid his bill and left with his wife and the friend following him, and, after I finished the beer I was drinking, I also left. I had already paid for my beer. But, when I left, the barmaid was smoking a cigarette on the sidewalk in front of the bar, and so was the owner's daughter who told me no one could tell her Albion wasn't "more than thirty percent black."

"He didn't understand what I was saying," I said to the barmaid.

"Did you apologize?" she asked.

The daughter said nothing, and neither did I in reply to that.

I turned away, walked home, and there admitted to myself that I had no reason to return either to Charlie's or to Cascarelli's. So then my only

remaining reason to drink alcohol was that it was a habit I'd developed over seven decades all over earth, and I had little faith in my ability to do that, but that also fell into place quite easily. I did it reasonably and methodically.

I learned in prison that my alcohol habit wasn't physical addiction, and further proof was that I followed the VA's instructions not to drink alcohol for two weeks before my surgeries.

"What's your secret," asked the hospital's substance abuse counselor after my ankle fusion.

Cleve told me that, during prostate surgery, he jumped from the operating table and ran down a hallway, and I also knew that, when I wasn't hungry, I didn't feel like drinking. So I thought the answer to her question was that I was eating three meals a day in the hospital was, as I had in prison. But I didn't tell that to Cleve or the substance abuse counselor.

In Albion, to drink beer from about 9:00 a.m. until about 6:00 p.m., I was eating two meals a day, breakfast at about 7:30 a.m. and supper at about 6:00 p.m. 9:00 a.m. was when I began being hungry after breakfast, and I ended my days between 8:00 and 8:30 p.m., before I was hungry again after supper, and that scheduling already was keep my beer consumption down to about seven cans per day. So all I needed to do, both to eliminate my drinking habit and to change my sleep habits, was to change my eating habits.

I kept my breakfast time the same, but I changed my supper time to 4:30 p.m, and, at about 9:00 a.m. I ate a small oatmeal cookie with peanut butter and either raspberry or apricot preserves on it. At about 11:00 a.m., I ate a banana, and, at about 1:00 p.m., I ate an apple. I also ate a bag of popcorn and drank a can of V8 juice while watching Wheel of Fortune and ate another oatmeal cookie but with nothing on it while watching Jeopardy. Other than news, that was the only broadcast television I watched, but eating while watching evening TV prolonged my hunger longer.

So I extended my days by about three hours, two hours in the evening and an hour in the morning before breakfast. But I'd never compulsively drank beer before breakfast. So, with the other changes, I thought of that as a sort of reward, and another reward was losing weight.

I also drank water all day, a total of a little over a liter and a half, and that and the V8 juice were the only liquid I added to my diet. So, adding up all the calories of both my new diet and my old diet, I found the difference to be a reduction of several hundred calories. So, in my first year of that, I lost about twenty pounds and about an inch in my waste size.

But I also made use of that extra time. I began and ended my days with a half hour of *dhyana yoga*, and, not drinking alcohol not only made that and

*Taijiquan* easier for me but also made my writing and reading easier. So I wrote my book *Angels (summaries of scripture)* in Albion and learned partly through reading those scriptures that the Taijiquan sequence I was learning was bogus. So I also wrote my book *Taijiquan (fundamentally)* there, and I also learned enough Chinese to translate the Taijiquan abiding writings for that book and to write my book *Dao De Jing* (a literal translation).

But *Annie (how children are)* is a product of all of my life from my current point of view, and next will be *Space and Light*. It will point out how time and life are only abstractions from actuality, but so does *Angels* and the introductions to *Tai Ji Quan* and *Dao De Jing*. They point out that, of the six most popular religions, the three dualistic ones foster that abstraction while the three monistic ones offer the alternative, and so will *Space and Light*.

But I've also tried to make that plain on Facebook and Twitter, and I've called the last two Presidents of the United States Dirtbag Drumpf and Bogus Biden, and both David Grace and Vaughn Lowther supported Dirtbag Drumpf, and so did Rick's and Greg's sister Judy.

Rick and Greg were proud of their sister Judy. They expected her to be the only member of their family to graduate from college or to be otherwise generally productive. David, when he was a child, bragged about being from the south and promoted the notion that "the South shall rise again," but I thought his claim to Christianity would at least have kept him from Dirtbag Drumpf's vindictiveness, and nothing Vaughn previously said to me suggested that he was political in any way.

But all three of them used Facebook to support both Dirtbag Drumpf and the political notions such as Throm Thurmond had passed on to the party of Lincoln when he deserted the party of Jefferson Davis in response to such as Johnson's promoting the Voting Rights Act of 1965 for African American votes, and Judy and David did that more than did Vaughn.

David, like my father, liked jokes. But he turned that to posting on Facebook jokes denigrating women and aggrandizing firearms, and both he and Judy argued supported Dirtbag Drumpf in terms of his "evangelical base." But, eventually, telling me he was only trying to keep from going to hell, David unfriended on Facebook for my deprecating Bible Belt Christians in general for their racism and other brands of bigotry.

"Goodbye, old friend," he said, leaving me no time to reply, and, a few weeks later, he died.

I also considered both those questions and the COVID chaos in scriptural terms. But, to me, that craziness only suggested that what one calls reality is only the schizoid delusions Hindu Buddhist Daoist monism says all

differences are. So it wasn't why I read the scriptures I read to write Angels, and, as neither was that my father's 121<sup>st</sup> birthday was during the month I quit drinking alcohol a reason I did that. I didn't think of that until months later, and, for years, before and while I was writing *Angels*, I regularly read the scriptures of each of the six most popular religions, carefully from beginning to end, on daily and weekly schedules, and continued that after publishing *Angels*, until I finished each one more time, and writing *Space and Light* require more attention to the monistic scriptures.

Difference is difference. Delusion is delusion. All is all.

So my last book, in what I imagine to be time and life, will be an anonymous translation of the three *suttas* and two *sutras* that define Buddhism. "*Buddha*" is an inflection of a Sanskrit word meaning "conscious", and in Buddhism it refers to extinguishing the schizoid delusions, to return to the unity that preceded names and all other words or titles, not excepting "God" or "*El*" or "*Allah*" or "*Christ*", or "rabbi" or "priest" or "prophet", or "*Brahman*" or "*atman*", or "*nirvana*" or "*yoga*", or "*tai ji*" or "*wu ji*", or "*dao*", and "*dao*" is a Chinese word meaning "way" that Daoists use to refer to the way to return to the primal unity.

But I consider this book and all the other reading and writing I've imagined my self to do to be *jnana yoga*. "*Yoga*" is a Sanskrit word for union that Hindus use as Buddhists use "*buddha*" and as Daoist use "*dao*", and "*Jnana*" is a Sanskrit word meaning "knowledge". So, in Hinduism, *jnana yoga* is an approach to *yoga* by way of trying to understand how everything relates to everything, and for me it includes watching news and reading and writing.

That is, I'm trying to use what I imagine to be my life as a Zen koan, a public sharing of *non sequiturs* in order to show all that ultimately all is *sequitur*. But, considering the question of why I've imagined myself into doing the horrible things I describe in this book, a question is how one could imagine doing that while also believing in common decency. "*Karma*", in Sanskrit, means "action", and, in Hinduism, it refers to cause and effect, but, considering that the ubiquity of cause and effect makes everything both a cause and an effect of everything, Hindu scripture in various ways says it's evidence of the unity of all. So I hope my books can help do that.

Billy Lee Harman  
or no one or everyone,  
1 November 2021  
if not never or ever,  
etcetera.

Books  
by  
Billy Lee Harman

Dust  
a novel  
2005

Ashes  
some memories  
2015

Angels  
summaries of scripture  
2020

Dao De Jing  
a literal translation  
2021

Tai Ji Quan  
(fundamentally)  
2021

Annie  
(how children are)  
2021

Space and Light  
2023