

I was usually so grim and serious that Lyle's family rarely missed an opportunity to have a laugh at my expense. I was sitting with them in their living room one night when little Bucky, who was maybe three years old or so, maybe four at the outside, came running into the room buck naked. I didn't say anything, but I didn't have to. I was so embarrassed my face turned as red as a stop light. The whole family roared with laughter at my reaction. Which made me turn even redder. Even little Bucky laughed at me. You know something? I really didn't mind them laughing at me. They were family.

Lyle had a hobby melting down lead and making fishing line sinkers. I don't know where he got the lead, and in those days we had no idea how big a health hazard lead was. He also put it to another good use. It was traditional at Halloween to carve Jack O' Lanterns out of pumpkins, stick a candle inside, and set them outside. One Halloween somebody – probably one of the hoods – was engaging in a little vandalism. He'd sneak into people's yards at night and kick their Jack O' Lanterns apart. Considering it was usually the little kids who carved the pumpkins and made the Jack O' Lanterns, it was a mean, rotten thing to do. Lyle had just the right remedy. He filled the bottom of their Jack O' Lantern with lead and set it out in a nice enticing spot. It *looked* like a regular Jack O' Lantern from the outside, but it weighed a ton and it wasn't going to move an inch if somebody came running up and kicked it. It was a broken toe waiting to happen. The next day, sure enough, there were marks on it where it had been kicked. Once. Maybe it was coincidence, but the Jack O' Lantern vandalism stopped after that. □



Observing fire fighting drills at Chanute AFB (1968)

The fact I opposed the war in Vietnam did not mean I was against the military or service in the armed forces any more than it meant I was against my country. The three just aren't the same thing. The military doesn't start wars. The people who serve in it didn't cause Vietnam. There was no conflict in my mind, no contradiction between knowing the war was wrong and being a CAP cadet. 'The individual who refuses to defend his rights when called by his Government deserves to be a slave and must be punished as an enemy of his country and a friend to her foe.' Andrew Jackson said that. 'I cannot ask of heaven success, even for my country, in a cause where she should be in the wrong. . . My toast would be, may our country always be successful, but whether successful or otherwise, always right.' John Quincy Adams said that. They were both right. It never entered my mind to quit the CAP just because the President and the Congress were breaking their oaths to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. I blamed the people who were to blame, not the ones who weren't. Only an ignorant person doesn't know the difference.

In the summer of '68 the Iowa wing of the CAP went on summer encampment to Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. Cadets aren't required to go on these encampments. Encampments were something you *got* to do, not something you *had* to do. They were adventures just as much as training experiences. So one day that summer I and a whole plane load of other boys from all over got on board a C-119 (which they nicknamed 'the dollar nineteen') and we took off for Chanute AFB.

Everything about it – from flying in an airplane to being immersed in military life to all the different training activities – was completely new to me. There was so much new in it that the whole thing was kind of a blur. Everything I saw, everything I did, I was seeing and doing for the first time. Chanute was a training base, not a combat base. We attended lectures on different subjects every day, got to observe different Air Force exercises being carried out by real Air Force guys, and we ourselves got to learn first hand what drill and ceremonies were like when the whole wing was gathered together as a unit.

There was so much we did that my memories of that encampment come in little flashes. I didn't have any rank to speak of yet and so I only had to go where they told me to go and do what they told me to do.

I was free to just be and do and feel and thoroughly enjoy myself. The coolest thing I remember was watching the fire fighting drills. They had guys in fireproof white suits who almost looked like astronauts and who could actually charge right through enormous roaring fires. The Air Force guys wouldn't let us try that, but if they had I'd have been the first volunteer. It was just amazing to see.

We attended lectures on strategic doctrines of force, counterforce, and counterinsurgency, and these were fascinating to listen to. During the question and answer period, I remember one kid asking the officer who had given the lecture how big an atomic bomb was. The officer hesitated for just a second and then said, "Bigger than a bread basket and smaller than this room."



A few of the guys in our squadron en route to Chanute

We lived in our own barracks they had set aside for us and did a lot of drilling and marching. They had gotten a band from somewhere that marched with us and blared out the music for all to hear. Having the band made it easy to stay in step and keep time, but even more important, it put a *soul* into the marching and passing in review. There was a lot of ceremony built right into all of this, and I just loved that. I know a lot of people who don't like ceremony and who say it's all pointless and just for show. They're part right. It is for show. But it's not pointless. It's hard to describe, but the point is all in how it makes you *feel*. It lets you know that as different as all of us were from one another, we all had something important in common, we were all *comrades*, and we were all part of something bigger and grander than any one

of us by ourselves. It helped me understand in my *gut* what it meant to be an *American*. One person, keeping all to himself and alone, can never be an American. Not really. It takes *all* of us for *any* of us to *fully* be an American. The drill and ceremonies helped me understand, in a way words never could, what a French guy named Rousseau had called 'the social contract.' Rousseau's idea was so supremely important the Founding Fathers used it as a keystone in setting up the Constitution in the first place. All this was a lot to live, and the Chanute encampment came to its end way too soon as far as I was concerned. □

Lyle and I were always trying to figure out ways to built bigger and grander rockets. Our biggest problem in doing this was fuel. It was illegal to possess rocket fuel of any kind. That meant we couldn't buy any from anybody from anywhere. There wasn't a black market in rocket fuel the way there was for fireworks and bottle rockets. However, it wasn't illegal to buy the individual chemicals you could use to *make* rocket fuel. That gave us an idea. We did some research to find out how rocket propellant was made and what chemicals went into it. And pharmacies carried chemicals.

Armed with this knowledge, I went down to one of the local pharmacies and told the man there I needed some chemicals. He asked what kind and I handed him my list. He read it silently and an amused little smile slowly spread across his face. "You boys planning to make some rockets, are you?" he asked. I was stunned. How did he know that? I denied it, nervously, and he just laughed. And refused to sell me any chemicals.

Checked in our attempt to become rocket fuel manufacturers, Lyle and I went back to figuring out new and different things we could do with bottle rockets to give them more pizzazz. We figured one good way to built a bigger rocket was to put together a whole bunch of smaller ones. After all, the Saturn V rocket used multiple rocket engines and it was the biggest rocket anyone had ever seen. Why not do the same thing with bottle rockets?

So one warm summer afternoon we set to work in Lyle's back yard to build our first multi-rocket rocket. Brian and Steve and Bucky gathered round to watch as we methodically began tying bottle rockets together. By the time we were done we had assembled something like twelve of them together to make a

single, very fat rocket. We tied the fuses so they would all burn together at the same time and set up our creation on a specially constructed launch pad. Lyle lit the fuses.

Normally a bottle rocket goes up *swoosh!* so fast you can't see it. The Big Rocket didn't. What we hadn't counted on was that the fuses burned at different rates and all the rocket engines didn't fire at the same time or at the same rate. Anything could have happened. What did happen was the Big Rocket stayed on the pad for a couple of seconds hissing and spitting and then began to rise ever so slowly. In a few seconds it had lifted about a dozen feet straight up from the ground and then went no further. It hovered there like some kind of improbable helicopter, quivering and shaking. All of us except Bucky dived for cover as our straps holding the rockets together started coming apart. The Big Rocket flew apart, individual rockets flipping over and fanning out in all directions. They all came crashing in, engines smoking, in a big circle, at the center of which sat Bucky.

"Ooh! Neat!" she cried, delighted. "Do it again!" □

Also that summer I had come across an ad for a 'mechanical computer.' It was irresistible if a little pricey so I sent away for one. When it came I was a bit disappointed. One of the key components in a computer is a thing called a 'flipflop.' Flipflops are what a computer uses for "memory" and, like the name implies, they flip and flop from one state – representing '0' – to another – representing '1' – or vice versa. A real computer at that time had thousands and thousands of these.

This one had three. They were each made of a flat plastic plate with pairs of stubs sticking out at fixed intervals. You 'programmed' it – set it up to do what you wanted – by slipping little plastic tubes over one or the other of these pairs of stubs. You operated it by cycling a metal rod back and forth, which in turn moved another metal rod, which in turn would move or not move the flipflops left ('0') or right ('1') depending on where you put the plastic tubes. It actually was quite a clever little gizmo, as I could tell while I was putting it together, but with only three flipflops it was pretty limited in what it could do.

Still, it could do some things. It came with a little pamphlet explaining how to make it do a number of different example 'computations' in arithmetic and logic. It could, for example, count from 0 ('000') to seven ('111') in order and then start all over again. It could add or subtract a pair of binary numbers and give you the correct answer ('0' + '0' = '00'; '0' + '1' = '01'; '1' + '0' = '01'; '1' + '1' = '10'). It could also solve simple riddles. One of them was this one: *There are two islands in the Pacific called Ho and Hum. The natives of Ho always tell the truth. The natives of Hum always lie. You see two natives on the beach and you ask the first one, 'Where are you from?' He answers, 'Blahbablaba!' You don't speak his language so you ask the second native, 'What did he say?' He answers, 'He say he come from Ho.' What island is the second native from?* The answer to the riddle is 'Ho' and the computer could figure that out once I put the little tubes in the right places.

Even though my little plastic computer was disappointingly simple, it still was very useful in understanding what computer people meant when they said computer circuits were 'logic' circuits. You see, the plastic 'flipflop' plates *moved* as I cycled the machine and so I could vividly see the *patterns* it went through as it operated. That just made a lot more intuitive sense to me than the mathematical stuff I'd been reading about in the encyclopedia. By watching how the mechanics worked I was getting a feel for how the math/logic stuff worked, not just what the answers should come out to be. With a mechanical gadget – whether it was my little computer, Mom's stylus-operated mechanical calculator, or even just an abacus – I could *see* the patterns in the mathematics at work, and that made the math real and meaningful. Without being able to see the patterns, all I could do was try to memorize everything and nobody can do that. There's just too much to remember. Want your little kid to be good at math? Buy him or her an abacus, not an electronic calculator. □

As the long summer finally faded into fall, I was determined that this year I was going to make them let me take part in sports again. Dad was in my corner on this, I hadn't had any more of those weird spells since the chiropractor had worked me over, and even Dr. Duh had to admit there was nothing wrong with

me now. Like most medical doctors, he didn't like chiropractors; he would say they weren't really doctors and that what they did didn't really work. *That's the pot calling the kettle black*, I thought to myself. Mom was outnumbered and gave in and so, at long last, I finally had a signature on that blasted medical form the school required. Finally I was an athlete again.

Our new house was right next to Goodenow Field where football games and track meets were held. The field was surrounded by one of those high metal fences and the gates were always locked except when a sporting event was being held. But Lyle and I would just climb over that fence so we could use the field. We would run on the cinder track, use the high jump gear they would just leave sitting out there all summer, practice doing long jumps in the sandy long jump pit, throw shot puts, and practice kicking field goals on the football field. Sometimes they would leave the hurdles out and when they did we'd set those up and run high hurdle races. And, of course, we'd get a few guys together and play football there too. It also occurred to us that the football field would be a great place for launching bottle rockets at each other from opposite goal lines and we did lay some plans for having a Great Bottle Rocket War there, but we never did. Nobody seemed to mind it when we'd climb over the fence and use the field for sports, but we figured the Maquoketa police would take a dim view of the Great Bottle Rocket War.

Lyle's sport was cross country, which never interested me because I didn't like running just for the sake of running. Plus, I already knew I wasn't the fastest kid by a long shot so there wasn't much chance I'd win any races. My idea of running involved a forty yard dash with a ball carrier to hit at the end of it. *That* I knew I could do. I was happy to race with Lyle when he wanted to run 440-yard dashes around the cinder track because he was my brother. I never once beat him in one of those sprints but I would usually lose by a small enough margin to keep it interesting. I suspect, though, that was more Lyle's doing than mine. He could run like a gazelle when he wanted to. He would have made a great wide receiver.

Dick Fosbury had electrified everybody in the '68 Olympics by winning the high jump with his new and very unorthodox style of jumping. Lyle was the first kid in Maquoketa to copy the 'Fosbury flop' and I was the first kid to copy Lyle. In PE I'd never been a very good high jumper and it was just amazing how much higher I could jump using Fosbury's new method. With it I could almost high jump my own height, which I'd never even come close to before. Lyle, who was a much better jumper than me, could out jump his own height.

Grass drills for football started a couple of weeks before school began. Maquoketa High School was as long a walk from our new house as the junior high had been from our house on Niagara Street and so I had to set out early in order to dress and get out onto the practice field in time. I knew I was really going to have my work cut out for me that fall. I'd missed two whole years of football and I figured the boys who had those extra two years of experience were going to be very hard to beat out for any of the starter spots on the junior varsity team.

Grass drills involved a *lot* of running. There were two drills a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon with a lunch break in between. The main purpose, of course, was to get us into top physical shape. I heard the coaches chew out a couple of guys for not staying in shape over the summer. They were guys who had played all the way through junior high, had been told to keep running all summer, and hadn't. But the second purpose of grass drills was to get kids to quit. Anybody could try out for the team, and when the drills started there were probably three times more the number of guys on the field than could possibly make the team. By the time grass drills were over, we were almost down to squad strength. We would run and run and run some more and most of the boys just couldn't handle the physical demands. My friend Dave tried out for the team, and toward the end of the first morning I saw him bent over and throwing up from all the running they had us doing. Dave was one of the guys who ended up dropping out.

After morning drills we'd run back to the high school building, shower, dress in street clothes, take the salt tablets they gave us, and suck the drinking fountains dry. All that running had me sweating so much I couldn't have been more soaked if somebody had tossed me into the Maquoketa River. Then we'd line up

along the hallways waiting for the coaches to come and give us chalk talks in one of the classrooms. Guys would just collapse in rows along the hallway waiting for coach. Chalk talk went probably about an hour and then they let us go home for lunch. It was a much longer walk going home than it ever was going to school in the morning, believe you me. When I got home I wouldn't have any appetite at all and I'd just collapse on the couch in the living room until it was time to go back for afternoon grass drills. In the beginning there were so many of us they didn't have enough lockers for us all so they didn't assign lockers to anybody. We carried our gym clothes back and forth in our gym bags. They'd get so soaked with sweat you had to wash them every night, which was how and why I first learned how to use our washer and dryer. I didn't dare let Mom see how tired I was when she got home from work; she wasn't the least bit happy about me playing football anyway and she was alarmed when she heard about how much distance we were running every single day. "Ah, it's not *that* bad," I told her.

My height had started to shoot up when I was thirteen and my weight hadn't kept up. I was not the Bubba I had been anymore, and by the time grass drills were over I was almost skinny. Not really an advantage for a football player, especially for a linebacker. After a little over a week, so many guys had dropped out that there were few enough of us so they could issue practice uniforms, pads, and a helmet. Then we ran grass drills in full gear. More guys dropped out. Finally, at long last, all that running started giving way to contact drills – blocking sleds, tackling dummies, and 'live bait,' i.e. we got to start hitting each other. More guys dropped out and finally we were down to squad strength. You might think that moment – that is, making the team – would have been a big event but it wasn't for me. I never had a moment of doubt that I was going to make the team. I was determined to either make it or die trying. There were times during grass drills, though, where I wouldn't have laid odds on which of the two it was going to turn out to be. The really big prize – nailing down a starting position on the squad – hadn't been accomplished yet. *That* was what I knew was going to be the toughest thing.

After grass drills were over they divided us into three groups for practice: the backs; the quarterbacks and ends; and 'the fat linemen.' Naturally, I was one of the fat linemen; all one hundred thirty-five pounds of me. If I wasn't the smallest guy on the team, I couldn't tell you who was. Maybe one of the freshman quarterbacks. Maybe. After school started and before the first game we had football practice after school every afternoon. Practice always started out with calisthenics and then some running. We'd do some one hundred yard dashes followed by an endless series of 440-yard dashes before the actual hitting drills began. I hated those 440s. The coach would have us run in our three groups. The first group would be the quarterbacks and ends, who were generally the speediest kids on the team. When they were halfway around the track the backs would go. As soon as the quarterbacks and ends got back to the starting line, we – the fat linemen – would go. The only rest break we got was the few seconds between the time we got back to the starting line and the time the first guys from the next group got there. Then off we'd go again. If the quarterbacks and ends were the fastest guys, you won't be surprised to find out the fat linemen were the slowest guys on the squad. The order in which we ran was set up so the quarterbacks and ends were always chasing us. As we'd run, the coach would yell, "C'mon, fat linemen! You're dogging it! You better not let them catch you! . . ." – inspirational stuff like that. Our breaks always seemed like I'd only have time to gasp in about a dozen deep lungfuls of air and *tweet!* it would be time to run again. The backs weren't as fast as the quarterbacks and ends – although they were faster than us fat linemen – so those pussy quarterbacks always had it easy during the 440-yard dashes.

My quest to win a starting position on the JV squad wasn't going too well and I knew it. Part of it was my small size, but most of it was my lack of playing experience. My teammates who had played during eighth and ninth grade had learned how to do a lot of things second-nature that I was now trying to learn for the first time. I just had to try harder. Sometimes, though, I'd get to trying so hard I'd forget some of the things I was supposed to do as a linebacker. For example, we had a set defensive system such that if the quarterback dropped straight back or rolled away from my side, I'd drop back into a zone defense position and pick up any back who came out of the backfield into my zone. If the quarterback rolled to my side, it was an automatic red dog. The term 'blitz' hadn't become common at the high school level yet

– I don't even remember if the pros were using that term or not yet – but a 'red dog' was basically a blitz. The idea was you attacked the quarterback like a red dog. I loved being a red dog. I didn't much like quarterbacks anyway – they were all smug, snobby characters who thought the team revolved around them – and nothing made my day more than getting my hands on one and slamming him into the ground. *Any* quarterback. Ours just as much as another team's. Like my hero Dick Butkus, I played no favorites.

BUT there was an exception to the red dog play. If one of the backs drifted out wide to the sidelines and the quarterback rolled out my way, I was supposed to pick up the back instead. I almost never remembered to do that. I'd get so charged up about getting to the quarterback I'd completely miss that back sneaking out wide. He'd be wide open and Coach would chew my hind end out pretty good. In a lot of ways you could say I was a dumb football player. Probably the dumbest on the squad.

That might have had something to do with my playing nose tackle. Normally we played a 4-4-3 formation on defense – four guys on the line, four linebackers, and three backs. But sometimes we played a 5-3-3 or even an 8-3 formation and when we did one of the linebackers lined up in the four-point stance right across from the center's nose – hence 'nose tackle.' I was the smallest nose tackle in the conference but it was a position that didn't take much in the way of brains or skill. Just aggression. And *that* I had in plentiful supply. Every offensive center and guard in the universe was bigger and stronger than me. But a center has one really important thing to do first, namely hike the ball. The instant I'd see that ball start to move, I'd bash the center along one side of the head or the other – it's called a forearm shiver – and bolt for the hole that would leave. There wasn't anything wrong with my reflexes and if they were bigger than me, at least I was faster than them. Well, most of them anyway. One time I got through into the backfield so fast the quarterback hadn't gone more than a couple steps before I got my arms around him and planted his face in the field's nice grass and dirt. As we re-huddled I saw him pointing me out to his linemen and the next play the center and both guards just buried me. I was awfully proud of that. They'd had to triple-team *me*. The pride was worth getting squashed like a bug. It was a *good* hurt.

Anyway, during the practices working up to our first game I was trying really hard to learn the skills and improve enough to win that coveted starter position. Then a little over a week before our first game disaster struck. We were scrimmaging and the offense ran a sweep around my side. In this play, one of the halfbacks carries the ball and the fullback is assigned to take out the linebacker. Our fullback was a big kid named Don, who was possibly the best athlete in the conference and was certainly the best player on our team. He was also one of the nicest kids anywhere off the field, but on the field he was all business. Don and I collided head on and I went flying. I most have flown ten feet straight backward and I landed on my hind end with my right foot tucked up underneath it. I'd hardly hit the ground when Don smashed into me again. He drove me at least another five yards up field with my cleats stuck in the ground like the blade of a plow. I could feel my ankle ripping apart. When Don finally released me and went charging off looking for somebody else to kill, I didn't even try to stand up. My ankle was twice as big around as it usually was and it really hurt like all get out. One of our tackles helped me limp over to the sidelines on one foot and after practice was over I went to the hospital again to have my ankle x-rayed.

It turned out nothing was broken or so torn up that surgery was needed. It was just a really, really bad sprain. They wrapped it in an Ace bandage and sent me home. I was out on crutches for three weeks. When I finally could stand to put any weight on my right foot, my heel felt like I was standing on a red-hot spike. But as soon as I could limp I got rid of those crutches and went right back to football practice. By then the starter spots were gone and I knew it. But I'd been a long-shot at best and I wasn't about to quit the team. Coach didn't exactly greet my return as the season's salvation; surprise and astonishment probably better describe his reaction. But I think he was at least a little impressed that I came back and was trying just as hard as before, even if my limp now rendered me the slowest guy on the squad as well as the smallest. And the dumbest. At practice during a scrimmage if somebody just planted me during a play, Coach would yell, "Are you gonna take that from him, Wells?" "No, sir!" I'd yell back and I'd put my nose right in there again even harder on the next play. The other guys had more size; they had more speed; most of them had more skills; what I had going for me was guts and determination. That was all I

had, so that's what I used. I think Coach respected me for that at least a little. I think maybe the guys did too. They didn't treat me like I was the team mascot; they treated me like I was one of *us*.

I suited up for every game after I came back and I even got some playing time, although not nearly enough to suit me. Of course, anything less than playing every defensive play of every game wouldn't have been nearly enough. I was stoic about it, though. Next season. Next season I'd win a starting spot. On the Varsity. As a junior. All I had to do was get about ten times better. If you don't convince yourself you can do it when the odds are against you, you'll never do it. I was completely convinced I could win a starting spot next year. I'd do it or die trying.

One reason I thought I could do it was our Varsity wasn't having all that good a season. Our JV team, on the other hand, was in a race for the conference championship. We just barely failed, losing a heartbreaker to the team from Marion the second to last game of the season. I played in that game during the fourth quarter, when we were behind, and I was playing in such a rage at losing that a couple of my teammates had to start telling me to cool it. They didn't want things to get worse by having us get penalized for unnecessary roughness, and the way I was hitting everything I could hit that wasn't wearing our uniform, I was definitely just an inch away from getting called for it. All in vain, though. Marion ran the clock out on us and went on to take the JV championship that year. We played one more game after that, an away game, and football season was over. I was never so proud of anything in my life as the little M – the JV letter – they gave me at the end of the season. □

1968 was an election year and there were three candidates for President: Vice President Humphrey, Nixon, and the racist from Alabama, George Wallace. '68 had turned into the worst year for America I'd ever seen; I think maybe it was the worst year anybody alive had ever seen. It had become a year dominated by Vietnam on the one hand and the radical revolutionaries – black and white – on the other hand. It seemed like the country was polarized right to the extremes on both ends. The Republicans were all 'law and order' and out to crush the 'long haired hippies' they blamed for all the domestic trouble. The Democrats weren't democrats any more. They had become dominated by the liberals and while they were against the war in Vietnam, they weren't interested in the Great Society and fixing the real problems. They seemed instead to be on the side of the radicals, who in their own way were just as bad as the Selma police had been, or the rioters who had burned out their own neighbors in Watts and other cities. I wasn't on anybody's side that year because there wasn't anybody who was on my side. Everybody had forgotten all about the New Frontier. Everybody, it seemed, but me.

Although I wasn't too keen on the poetry we had to read every once in awhile in English class, there was a stanza from a poem by a guy named Yeats I had taken notice of:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

That was America in 1968.

I figured things would get better no matter who won as long as it wasn't Wallace. The way I saw it, things really couldn't get any worse. But better wouldn't mean 'alright.' The way I saw it, Republicans basically wanted to deal with things by making more people criminals, putting more people in jail, and cutting back on the very parts of the Great Society programs that were *right*. The liberals – I really had a hard time seeing them as Democrats – seemed bent on helping some people by hurting others and it looked to me like they had people like us – people like me and my family – in mind as the ones they were going to hurt in order to help the radicals. We couldn't expect any good from the Republicans either. Their attitude seemed to be: if you weren't rich you weren't anything. Both sides were against the space program, both sides were against all the best parts of President Kennedy's New Frontier. The best men

weren't going to win this time. The best men were dead. In Dallas, in Memphis, and in Los Angeles.

It wasn't hard to stop paying attention to the election in 1968. They wouldn't let me vote and my side was going to lose no matter who won. □

High school had a whole different feel to it than junior high. It was something that was hard to put my finger on. It was regimented, but not as regimented as junior high had been. In junior high I felt like a kid; in high school I didn't feel like a kid *as much*. Teachers seemed to talk *with* us more than before, rather than just talking *to* us. My favorite classes were chemistry and geometry. Chemistry because it was interesting and the teacher, Mr. Dickinson, had a way of making it even more interesting. Mr. Dickinson was much older than Mr. Bittner had been. Sherri told me he'd been the science teacher when *she* was in high school. Geometry was interesting because it was just interesting and because Coach was the teacher. There were a few of us from the football team in the geometry class, and when he called on us Coach invariably referred to us as 'you knuckleheads.' That always got a chuckle from the other kids, and from us too. We knew Coach liked us.

The class I most dreaded that year was speech. The reason was simple. In that class we had to get up in front of everybody and make speeches. I didn't mind talking to people one on one or in small groups, but there was something about standing up there with all those people looking at me while I gave a speech that felt very, very uncomfortable. After all, I hadn't done much talking at school since Miss Young's first grade class. Even worse was what came after the speech. Then you had to listen while the other kids told everybody what they had thought of your speech.

One of the boys in my speech class was the boy from the Zioners who had pulled the knife on me outside the church in Fulton that one time. It turned out he was actually a pretty smart kid and he seemed very confident and self-assured when his turns came to get up and make speeches. The fact that he was smart and not the hood I'd originally taken him for made it all the more mysterious how he could have done such a dumb thing as pull a knife on me in the first place. After all, what if I'd had one, too?

I was a little wary of him at first, given our history, but we had no problems with each other at all. We weren't chums by a long shot, but he treated me with the sort of casual friendliness you'd use with any neighbor you didn't know too well and I treated him the same way. I guess he figured we were even and he was willing to let bygones be bygones. That was fine by me. I envied how self-assured he looked when he gave speeches and began trying to copy some of the mannerisms and gestures he'd use during his speeches. It wasn't easy, but by the end of the school year I'd at least learned how not to show how petrified I felt every time I had to make a speech. Sometimes you learn things from the most unexpected teachers.

Part of the reason high school felt different was probably because *I* was different. There's a lot of horseplay that goes on in a football team's locker room and this had a kind of socializing effect on me. I wasn't as outwardly grim and serious after I started playing football. Inwardly I was still pretty serious, but I had learned how to laugh again and tell jokes and, basically, be a more regular kid. I talked to people more often in the hallways and generally just became friendlier. At the same time, there's a kind of status that goes with being a football player. Kids who aren't athletes treat you differently in a nice way. I don't really know why they do, but they do. If you're an athlete, you're a celebrity of sorts and I found I sort of liked being a celebrity. I didn't let it go to my head – after all, I wasn't a starter yet – but it made me feel at ease in school, which was another new experience for me. That old smoldering rage I'd carried inside me for such a long time had finally started to go out.

Something else new about high school were the hoods (hoodlums). There had always been boys in school who were basically bad kids. I'd known most of them since I was in kindergarten. Individually they had never been anything to worry about in the lower grades. In high school, though, they had started to socialize into a kind of gang. They weren't the Hells Angels by a long shot, but they tended to travel in a pack and liked to gang up on smaller boys or boys who were scared of them when they could catch

somebody alone in the hallways or the bathrooms. Individually they were cowards. In a gang of seven or eight, you needed to watch out for them. But they never gave me any kind of trouble. I was a football player. My gang was bigger than theirs and a lot tougher and they knew it. □

After football season I needed a new sport for the winter and the choices were wrestling or basketball. The head football coach was also the wrestling coach, and he pretty much made it plain that wrestling rather than ‘round ball’ was the only manly sport for any self-respecting football player. On the other hand, there were a *lot* of really good wrestlers and not all of them were on the football team. There’s a big difference between tackling and wrestling. I didn’t have any illusions about my ability as a wrestler. PE class in junior high had given me all the evidence I needed to know my chances of making the wrestling squad were slightly poorer than my chances of being elected mayor of Maquoketa. In basketball, on the other hand, I might have a shot at making the team. I chose basketball.

I’d never had the same passion for basketball that I had for football. In my heart of hearts I actually agreed with Coach about wrestling being intrinsically superior. But you use the talents you have and whatever talent I might lack in basketball, the lack was even bigger in wrestling. I *did* enjoy playing basketball and after football season the running and jumping and conditioning they put us through during basketball practice wasn’t all that bad. If I remember correctly, I was the only football player who chose basketball over wrestling.

There were a dozen spots available on the JV basketball team, although during games a team was only allowed to let ten players dress. The five guys who made the starting squad were much better basketball players than I was, no doubt about it. Shooting, ball handling, defense – you name it. The margin between me and the next five guys was smaller, though, and I did manage to make the team. My big weakness was accuracy. You don’t score points unless you put the ball through the hoop and we had ten guys who did this more often than I did. Adding to this was the fact that I was one of the short guys so I played guard. The lanky behemoths who played forward and center didn’t have to have really great ball handling skill, but a guard did and the other shorter guys on the squad were just that much better at ball handling than me. The coach said I played basketball like a football player and I couldn’t really argue with that.

Consequently, I made the team but couldn’t break into the top ten. One of the starting guards would have to get injured before I’d see any game action and, fortunately, none of them ever did. Not enough, anyway, to not be able to play. I didn’t have any hard feelings about being third string; none at all. These guys were my friends, this was *their* Big Sport, and I was happy just to be on the squad. Like I said, I never had the same passion for basketball as for football. And it was better to be third string with the team than to be a spectator in the stands. That’s the way I felt about it. A sport is, at the end of the day, just a game. The important part about a sport is *taking part* in it. Everything else is icing on the cake. □

V. The Nixon Years

Nixon won the presidency and the liberals won control of the Congress. Since I didn’t like either one of them, and since what each of them wanted to do was wrong but in opposite directions, I figured it was about as good an outcome as could be hoped for in 1968. Maybe the extremes would cancel each other out. I had some hope that the center *would* hold as a consequence.

Turned out that was wrong. 1969 was the start of something nobody had ever seen before: a recession *and* inflation both going on at the exact same time. With all the uproar still going strong over Vietnam and Black Power and the radicals and, something else we started hearing more and more about, drugs, this new economic wonder was hard to see for awhile. It would eventually become known as Nixonomics and it would get worse for a long time before it got better and it would lead to still worse things to come.

1968 had ended up being an awful year for America but a pretty good year for me personally. It ended in what was probably the best way that star-crossed year could have ended: the Christmas orbiting of the moon by Apollo 8. We were getting close at last.

It is possible to hide from the big world inside the world of athletics, and if ever there had been a time when the big world needed to be hidden from, it had been 1968. Not that the big world was trying to make this easy. 1968 was a year when the extremists from both sides were trying to rally supporters to their respective causes. But there was no choice to be had here; both sides were just *wrong*. No matter which side I might have picked, I'd be enlisting to hurt somebody. America's social contract was in shreds and nobody seemed to remember the important aims, the things that *should* have been what we came together to do something about. It all made me feel very, very small and very, very insignificant and I shut that world out by immersing myself in all the things closer to home. It was at this time that I was taking the moral leadership lessons that were part of the CAP education program, and from these lessons I was starting to learn about great men who had a lot to say about *right* and *duty* and what it meant to be a *citizen* of your country. There was an American philosopher, George Santayana, who had said,

Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.

I saw fanaticism at work in the tumult of 1968. But an even bigger impression was made on me by something a man named John Stuart Mill had written:

A state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.

To me this seemed to be exactly what Nixon and his Republicans and what the liberals who called themselves Democrats wanted to do. They each, in their own way, had their ideas about what to do about all the troubles and they each wanted to just force everyone to do as they wanted. How very different this was from President Kennedy's *ask what you can do for your country*. It was the difference between wanting to *rule* us and wanting to *lead* us. I would have been happy to follow a wise leader who was seeking to accomplish the six true and only aims of American government, which are

To form a more perfect union
To establish justice
To ensure domestic tranquility
To provide for the common defense
To promote the general welfare
To secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

But these men who would be our rulers did not seem interested in doing *all* these things and doing them all together. The liberals were the worst of the two because nothing they wanted to do would do all of these things for all of us; they would take some of it away from some of us to give it to others of us. And I wasn't so sure the Republicans would do *any* of them. I *was* sure they would *not* do some of these things even at best. Between my parents, coaches, and teachers I had all the rulers I needed. I was not in the mood for any more of them. □

There was still that unsettled affair of honor hanging between me and Rusty. We didn't run into each other very often; unlike junior high, the high school building was pretty spread out and I don't remember he and I being in any of the same classes at the same time. Whenever I did see him, I'd remind him what I thought about him and he'd usually lip off right back at me. But I couldn't goad him into moving past the posturing and name-calling stage of the ritual. I couldn't initiate the next step because I was an athlete and he wasn't. There was kind of an unwritten rule that someone who was on the team couldn't start a fight, especially with somebody who wasn't on the team. Technically, though, posturing and name-calling wasn't fighting; it was arguing. Rusty was still taller than me and, now that I'd dropped so much weight, he had a pretty fair size advantage. If *he* was the one who got physical first, we could have our fight without me disgracing myself or the team. But he just wouldn't do it.

We got close just one time though. It was at the end of the school day and I happened to run into him in the crowded hallway near the front door. As usual, I had some things to say about him I thought he

ought to know. He lipped back and the name calling escalated in full view of an amused audience of boys. We were about thirty feet down the hall from the Principal's office. I don't know if it was the presence of all those spectators or if Rusty had just had enough of me, but I called him something, his face reddened, he called me something back and then he flipped his fingers up, thumbing me under the nose.

At last! At long last! He had put his hands on me and taken that next step in the fight ritual. Thumbing somebody's nose wasn't actually shoving, but it counted just the same. In fact, it was worse because that gesture was a well-recognized insult that as much as said, 'let's fight.' *Now* I could hit him. I shoved him backwards hard with both fists to his chest and went after him.

But, oops, I'd forgotten something. We were standing right in the middle of the school hallway and there was another unwritten rule that said you could *never* have a fight in the hallway. When there was a fight in the hallway *everybody* who was there got into trouble. Not just the combatants; everybody. The innocent with the guilty. It was one of the ways teachers had of discouraging trouble on the school grounds. What we were supposed to do was take the fight someplace else.

But in the heat of the moment, I'd forgotten about that rule and I'd forgotten we were only thirty feet from the Principal's office. As I lunged at Rusty, a half dozen boys grabbed me and held me back. Two more stepped between Rusty and me to make sure he didn't try anything. Rusty walked away. Quickly.

The guys wouldn't let go of me until he was out the door and out of sight and they were sure I'd calmed down enough that I wouldn't go straight after him. One of the boys was the kid from the Zionees. He watched Rusty disappear then turned to me and remarked in a calm voice, "It would appear Rusty is afraid."

"He's a gutless so-and-so," I said.

We never again came close to having a fight. In fact, I don't remember whether or not I ever saw him again after that one. But I was finally satisfied. By starting a fight – which technically he had – and then running away instead of arranging a more suitable place for a duel, he had disgraced himself in front of that whole crowd of boys. The scales of honor were balanced now. Of course, he'd also – probably without even knowing it – made it so I *couldn't* pick on him anymore. You see, it is disgraceful to pick on a coward. Anyone who did was marked down as being a lousy bully. That was the code we lived by.

There was one interesting final note about the Rusty affair. That summer his family moved away somewhere. When I say moved, I mean *moved*. They even took their house with them. That was pretty amazing. I didn't even know they could move a whole house. But they can. A huge machine came one day and lifted the whole house right off its foundations, leaving nothing but a hole in the ground. Everybody in the neighborhood came and watched. I never found out where they had gone and I never really even wanted to know. I was pretty sure it didn't have anything to do with me. Pretty sure. I never saw him again after that. □

After basketball season ended and spring came, I found myself without a sport to participate in. The only thing available in the spring was track and field, which I had no interest in at all. I'd go to the track meets when they were in town, and I'd cheer for our team. But track and field just wasn't for me. In those days soccer was nothing. It would make its appearance every once in awhile in PE, but nobody took it as a serious sport. It ranked two or three notches below dodge ball – which was some fiendish invention that was probably dreamed up by an adult who liked to watch boys hurt each other as much as possible. In theory the object of soccer was to kick the ball into this big net. In practice, it seemed like the real object of the game was to kick as many people in the shins as possible. I hated soccer.

And so it was that I didn't have practice after school in the spring. Larry, the older boy who had introduced me to the CAP, suggested I should come with him and audition for a part in the school play. There was a high school drama club; it was called The Thespians. Larry belonged to it and for some reason he thought I should give it a try too. I wasn't so sure about that. It didn't seem like the kind of

thing a football player should do. “There’s girls there,” Larry said. Oh. Well, in that case . . .

The Thespians club was run by our English teacher, Mr. Railsbach. He was an interesting character. I’d never had another teacher quite like him. Prim and a bit prissy, he was a very small man and always kind of seemed like he never thought you measured up to some standard. At first I got the idea he was a pretty unfriendly guy. But it turned out he had kind of a subtle sense of dead-pan humor. He could make me laugh at the most unexpected times, and when he did there’d be this ghost of a smile on his face and his eyes would twinkle. As different as he was from anyone else I knew, I came to like and respect him quite a bit. Mr. Railsbach was the producer and director of the spring play the Thespians would put on every year. That night he was casting director.

There were a lot of kids there that night at the ‘tryouts’ – as I thought of it – and, just like Larry had promised, there were a lot of girls. Most of the kids were juniors and seniors, but I wasn’t the only sophomore there. I hadn’t had any idea the Thespians was such a popular activity. Not all the kids were there looking for a spot as one of the actors. I found out in talking to some of the girls that there were a lot of ways to participate besides acting. They needed kids to design and build sets, make costumes, be makeup artists, manage the set, run the stage lights and curtains – all kinds of stuff. Apparently Mr. Railsbach’s productions rivaled Broadway. The Thespians were an excited, happy group.

I didn’t know it, but I’d happened to sit down with the group who were there specifically to audition for the cast. I’d just basically followed Larry and sat down where the prettiest girls were sitting. I didn’t even know what the play was going to be. We were told the play was going to be a Peter Ustinov comedy called *Romanov and Juliet*, which I’d never heard of. I found out I was auditioning when Mr. Railsbach handed me something to read.

I’d just been watching the auditions after the meeting started. Kids would stand up one by one in front of the room and read whatever Mr. Railsbach had handed them. They were given a couple minutes to look over whatever it was and then they’d act out whatever it said. I thought most of them were pretty good, too. In Mr. Railsbach’s English class he made us read stuff out loud a lot and always made *how* we read it a big point. It was pretty obvious these kids had soaked up his lessons well when they had been in his class. He had the older kids audition first, so when, to my surprise, he handed me something to read I had a pretty good idea of what I supposed to do. I don’t remember any more exactly what I was asked to read, but whatever it was I got up and gamely did my best to imitate what the other kids had been doing. I wasn’t actually expecting or even particularly looking to be cast for the play but I didn’t want to embarrass myself, especially in front of the girls.

After everyone who wanted to audition had auditioned, Mr. Railsbach announced, one by one, who had gotten which part. Each time a kid’s name was announced there was a happy buzz and he or she would be congratulated by the other kids. The Thespians, I decided, had pretty good team spirit. Then, to my amazement, Mr. Railsbach announced *my* name. I was to be ‘the Archbishop,’ a speaking part. I was the only sophomore there to get a speaking part.

Before I could get over being flabbergasted, I found myself being hugged and congratulated by all the girls sitting around me. They thought it was just *wonderful* a little *sophomore* had been picked for one of the cast. I was so surprised at being hugged that even though I was grinning, my face turned all red. The girls thought *that* was *so adorable* and they kind of adopted me right then and there. That made me forget about any idea of turning down the part. The senior who had been cast in the lead role of Juliet was the prettiest girl in high school, and if she wanted to make me her pet boy – well, that was A-Okay with me. For her I’d gladly brave getting up on a stage in front of a whole auditorium of strangers.

After the cast had been selected the remaining kids signed up for doing the many and various other jobs that were essential to putting on one of Mr. Railsbach’s productions. Not surprisingly, the boys tended to want to build sets and manage the stage, while the girls tended to want to be the makeup artists or design and create the costumes. Some of the kids were ‘understudies’ – backup actors who could step

in if for any reason one of the main cast members couldn't perform the night of the play. I had thought some of the plays in our playbook on the football team had been complicated; that was nothing compared to how complicated all this was.

Larry had gotten a part too. He was 'the Russian Spy.' I was glad of that, not only because he was my friend but also because I barely knew – or didn't know at all – most of the other kids. It was good to have a comrade in the cast because I was slowly starting to appreciate just what I'd gotten myself into. And not just 'into.' I'd come to this meeting just to meet some girls and all of a sudden I wasn't only a Thespian; I was in the 'starting lineup.' *Rick*, I thought to myself, *you sure better not screw this up*. All of a sudden facing a whole squad of charging fullbacks seemed less intimidating than being a Thespian.

I went home that night carrying a script, which I'd have to learn before the rehearsals started in a couple of days. Mom greeted the news I was in the school play with a kind of mild surprise and casual approval. Melody was a bit more expressive. "You?" she said. She walked away laughing and shaking her head. I didn't tell Dad about it; I had a pretty good idea of what he'd think about the whole thing. I just hoped Coach and the guys on the football team didn't go to school plays.

Fortunately, my part was the smallest speaking role in the play. I would only have to appear in two scenes. If you're not familiar with *Romanov and Juliet*, it's a spoof on *Romeo and Juliet*. It takes place in 'The Smallest Country Left in Europe' and the lead character, the General – who was the latest leader of the country after the latest of their on-going revolutions – spends the play trying to figure out how to keep the country from having to become allied with either the United States or with Russia. He hits on the idea that the only way to do this is to get the American ambassador's daughter, Juliet, and the Russian ambassador's son, Romanov, to get married. My character, the Archbishop, is a super old and somewhat senile guy with an interesting hearing problem. He can hear just fine if you speak to him in a soft whisper, but he's deaf as a post if you yell. He's pretty much in his own world and unaware of anything that's really going on around him, and the General decides the way to get the ambassadors' kids married is to substitute them for a couple of statues during a ceremonial 'wedding' I was to perform in the last act. The senile old Archbishop would never notice the difference. It's a pretty funny play.

We rehearsed every night for about a month before the scheduled night of the play. Mr. Railsbach proved to be a tough, demanding, exacting director and he got us whipped into shape pretty good. By the time 'opening night' arrived, he had us as ready as anybody could possibly be. I don't think anybody blew even a single line during the performance.

I did have one big question about my part during rehearsals. In the big wedding scene I'm performing the ceremony kind of in the background while all kinds of uproar is breaking out all around me. The ambassadors are shouting to stop the ceremony and soldiers with guns are forcing them to stand back and not interfere. The General shouts at the top of his lungs, "The Archbishop is stone deaf!" and, of course, I can't hear any of the commotion, still think Romanov and Juliet are statues, and when he kisses the bride I proclaim it to be a miracle – which was one of the biggest laugh lines in the play. The problem was there were no lines for my character during the actual ceremony. The script just said to ad lib it.

I asked Mr. Railsbach what that meant and he said I was to just fake it but under no circumstance was I to use any real Catholic mass stuff. He didn't want to offend anybody in the audience. His suggestion was that I kind of go 'blah, blah, blah' during the ceremony, but that sounded awful dorky to me. What I did instead was translate the words to 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' into Latin and work them into kind of a chant. I figured nobody in the audience except the Latin teacher and the odd priest or nun here and there would know what I was saying anyway, and this way it *sounded* like a real ceremony. It worked so well that after the play a couple of the Catholic guys I knew asked me if I wasn't worried about being excommunicated. The first time I did it during rehearsal, Mr. Railsbach demanded to know just exactly what I thought I was doing, but he calmed down and even thought it was funny when he found out it was just 'My Country 'Tis of Thee.'

The kids who built the sets and made the costumes and did the makeup work were just amazing. They certainly rose to meet Mr. Railsbach's exacting standards. I mean, there just wasn't anything *amateur* about any of it. For the first full dress rehearsal, the girls who put the makeup on me outfitted me with a long white beard, sprayed stuff in my hair that turned it snowy white, and put makeup on my face that made me really look like I was about two hundred years old. Looking in the mirror, *I* couldn't recognize me, so I knew nobody in the audience was going to recognize me either. I had a perfect disguise, and that made me a lot less nervous about the looming prospect of standing up there in front of the whole town. I was jittery enough about that as it was, and when the play went on I tried very hard to ignore all those people sitting out there in the dark and just focused on what I was doing.

One thing nearly did go wrong, though. Larry, the Russian Spy, has an attack of conscience during the play and becomes a monk. During my first appearance, he shows up walking on his knees behind me and lifting this enormous cape I was wearing. The cape was sprinkled with thousands and thousands of these tiny little paper glitter things. At one point where I'm talking to the General – who is astonished to see the Spy now serving as one of my monks – I'm telling him about what a good monk Larry is. I even hint that I think he could be the next Archbishop. At my big line, "*Maybe, when I am gone . . .*" Larry was supposed to cry out, "*Oh, no!*" and kiss that cape. He did, and he got about a hundred of those little glitter things in his mouth. Through the rest of the scene I could hear him quietly going, "ptui, ptui" as he tried to spit them out. It was so funny the General and I had all we could do to keep from laughing out loud, but somehow we managed it and got through the scene.

Backstage right after the last act and before curtain call, 'Juliet' came rushing up to me all happy and smiling and telling me how wonderfully I'd done. She gave me a giant hug and a great big kiss on the cheek that made me blush cherry-red. I felt thrilled right down to my toes.

This acting stuff was alright. Definitely. □



Cadets Wells (left) and Tim Schroeder (right) at a monument near Kirtland AFB (1969)

For CAP encampment in the summer of '69 the Iowa wing went to Kirtland Air Force Base near Albuquerque, New Mexico. KAFB was home to the 377th Air Base Wing as well as to the 150th Fighter Wing of the New Mexico Air National Guard. As such, it was an all around cooler place than Chanute had been and New Mexico was definitely a cooler place to visit than Illinois. It was my first trip out west and I loved every minute of it.

The training program they had for us at KAFB was better organized and more comprehensive than the previous year's program at Chanute had been. We all had classes in The United States Air Force, Civil Air Patrol and the United States Air Force, Moral Leadership Lectures, Small Arms Firing, and a Leadership Laboratory. I also signed up for two elective courses, the B-52 Laboratory and Weather Squadron. In addition, we had numerous physical activities, marching, and parade to keep us busy.

They housed us guys in a couple of two-story barracks on the base. One very nice addition to the encampment that summer was a squadron of female CAP cadets. Unfortunately, they were housed in a third nearby barracks and cadet sentries were posted at night to see to it the girls' barracks did not find a way to go co-ed after dark. Similar sentries were posted outside the boys' barracks for pretty much the same reason. Naturally, this was not the reason given for our having to pull sentry duty. In fact, no reason was ever actually given to any of us who weren't cadet officers. But I figured the odds were heavily

stacked against KAFB being invaded by either Russians, VC, or coyotes at night.

The sentries weren't armed, of course, except with great big flashlights. Nobody was nuts enough to place firearms in the hands of a bunch of teenagers. I was a cadet tech sergeant by then and NCO of one of the flights in my squadron. Among other things, this meant I had the fun of being Sergeant of the Guard one night while we were there. KAFB at night was big and dark and quiet. With the New Mexico desert stretching out flat all around us and the clear, star-speckled sky above, I had a keen sense of how vast the world can seem at night. You never get this same sense of vastness in Iowa because all the hills make everything seem pretty close. But in New Mexico everything always looks very far away. Sentry duty was mostly pretty dull, more so for the guys posted at specific spots than for me because at least I got to roam around a little from post to post. The night I had the duty we did have one brief flurry of excitement when five guys tried to sneak over to the girls' barracks. We chased them back to our own barracks before they could reach their objective. I recognized them; they were all members of my squadron. But I didn't turn them in with an official report. Instead I told our squadron leader, Cadet Lt. Ball, about it, and he and I had a quiet word with these fellows the next day. Lt. Ball was a very big guy and there weren't any repetitions of the incident after that.



Cadets Wells (top) and Hilyard (bottom) discussing the theory of chain-of-command in the barracks at KAFB (1969)

Although as CAP cadets we belonged to a quasi-military organization, in point of fact we were civilians and teenagers, and some of what you might call the fine points of military order and discipline were lost from time to time on a few of the guys. The officers largely expected us sergeants to see to it that some semblance of military protocol was followed more or less all the time. Barracks horseplay usually proved to be a pretty effective means of accomplishing this. With some guys the fact I could out-wrestle them carried a lot more weight – so to speak – than the stripes on my sleeve did. And word gets around.



Cadet Colonel Nash, our wing commander at KAFB. He was popularly known as Col. Cuddles.

For the most part our officers were older guys, as you would expect from the fact they had been in the CAP longer than those of us in the lower ranks. But not all of them were older than, say, me. This had a tendency to puzzle the airmen serving in the real Air Force that we'd encounter from time to time. These guys generally had no idea who the heck these kids were or what we were doing there. They knew we weren't Air Force and consequently they weren't too sure whether they had to salute our officers or what. One day I overheard two curious airmen ask one of our guys, "How old are you, Lieutenant?" When he answered, "Fifteen," they both just looked at each other with a sort of 'what's this country coming to?' expression on their faces.

One of the boys in my flight was a very young kid who hadn't been in the CAP very long. He was just

a little guy, and I'm pretty sure this was probably the first time he'd ever been away from home because he was awfully homesick the entire time we were at Kirtland. The poor little guy was just as blue as blue could be. I don't remember hearing him say one single word all the time we were there. I felt pretty sorry for him and kind of took him under my wing, watched out for him, kept him company as much as I could, and made sure none of the guys picked on him. After encampment was over he sat next to me on the plane coming back to Iowa. I'd have been happy to stay at Kirtland awhile longer, say about fifty years, but I suspect that for him KAFB probably seemed like fifty years. When the wheels hit the ground and the door of the plane opened, he turned to me with the biggest, happiest, most animated grin I've ever seen and wordlessly pumped my hand up and down with everything he had. He was Home! You've never seen anybody as overjoyed as he was at that moment and I couldn't help but feel happy for him. I could tell from the look on his face that I'd succeeded in being a good buddy to him during encampment. I never saw him again after that, but I've never forgotten him either. He was a neat little kid and I liked him.



Scenes of the runways across from our barracks. Left: a B-52 begins rolling for takeoff. Right: an Air National Guard fighter comes in for a landing.

Flight operations at Kirtland went on regularly pretty much all the time day or night. Our barracks was across a street and a small field from the runway, which might have had something to do with why they were available to house a bunch of cadets from Iowa. The Air National Guard jet fighters only operated during the day, but the B-52s came and went all the time. They never disturbed my sleep at night; we were kept pretty busy and on the go all the time, so when my head hit the pillow I was out like a light. I never heard any of the guys complain about the noise from screaming jet engines. As far as we were concerned, our barracks were in the perfect spot. You couldn't *get* any closer to the jets without actually being in the Air Force and that was the way we liked it.

The B-52 was an awesome machine. It defied belief anything so huge could actually fly. But they could; I saw it with my own eyes. I got to see one up close – I mean actually touching it close – in one of my training classes. The *wheels* were bigger around than I was tall. Its wing span was incredible. The wings were so long they actually drooped when the plane was sitting still on the ground. A football thrown from one wingtip to the other would have made a pretty exciting long distance pass. The cockpit stood so far off the ground the pilot could have gone eyeball to eyeball with a dinosaur if there'd been any around. I would have dearly loved to have the chance to actually go up in one of them but, unfortunately, our training didn't go quite that far.

One exercise that was hugely popular with everybody – or at least with all the boys; the girls weren't into it – was small arms firing. Small arms in this case meant the M1 rifle. They took us to a firing range where an Air Force sergeant gave us instructions on the M1. The only weapon I'd ever fired was Dad's

small 22 caliber single-shot squirrel rifle. The M1 was bigger, heavier, and packed a lot more of a kick when it was fired. It took a little getting used to. After the sergeant had instructed us, including some helpful tips for avoiding having your shoulder knocked off when you fired, he let us cut loose and scare the targets. We fired from the prone position and my first several shots went all over the place. But gradually I got used to the sighting and the feel of the weapon and my shots became better grouped and closer to the center. I even managed to put one round through the bull's-eye. They let us have our targets after we were through scaring them as souvenirs. The grand finale was a demonstration of the M16. The sergeant showed one to us and demonstrated it in both semi-automatic and full automatic modes. When he cut loose on full automatic it was pretty awesome. The M16 fires a *very* nasty bullet. It's designed so that after it penetrates the human body it just tumbles around inside, ripping its victim's internal organs to shreds. Anybody shot in the torso with an M16 round is going down and he isn't getting up again.



My pal Alan from Waterloo, IA. Left: horsing around in the barracks. Right: sightseeing in the mountains near Albuquerque.



View from the mountains near Albuquerque.

I had been the only cadet from Maquoketa to go on the Kirtland encampment and had expected that fact to put something of a damper on the fun. But I hadn't counted on meeting Alan. Alan was a cadet from the Waterloo flight. He was the same age as me and was one of those kind of kids you meet and just immediately take a liking to. As a rule I made friends pretty slowly, but Alan and I became pals before the first day at Kirtland was done. He was in my squadron but in a different flight. We just hit it off right away and spent what little free time they did let us have chumming around together.

Albuquerque isn't far from a small mountain range and one day they let us pile aboard a couple of Air Force busses and go sightseeing. I had seen mountains before, during the drive to Alabama. But those could not hold a candle to the rough scenic beauty of New Mexico. Our time was our own for this sightseeing

trip so long as we got back to the bus on time, and Alan and I clambered around all over the place drinking in the views. I had thought the desert had looked incredibly vast; it was nothing against the splendor of the High View, from which the countryside receded endlessly, turning more and more blue until finally it blended with the sky and the clouds on the far horizon. It was impossible to tell where in the far distance the earth ended and the clouds began. In elementary school they had taught us ‘America the Beautiful’ and I had sung the line ‘purple mountain’s majesty’ many times. I had always assumed that was just poetry. No. In the distance they really are purple and they really are majestic. New Mexico shared its enchantments with Alan and me one warm summer day in 1969 and for a few brief hours banished the troubles of the world to somewhere far, far away. God had another special place. After Kirtland I never saw New Mexico again and I never saw Alan again. They were summer friends. But sometimes summer friends last a lifetime. □

Bill was doing well with IBM and when he came home for a visit that summer he was driving something new and exciting: an MGB sports car. I had my instruction permit by then, which allowed me to drive provided an adult was with me. Good old Bill. It took him about two seconds to see I wanted to get behind the wheel of that car pretty bad. We climbed in and off we went.

Driving an MGB feels like you’re sitting on the ground. I took it pretty easy at first, getting a feel for the car and figuring out how to run through the gears. Then it was time to *drive*. An MGB isn’t meant to sit still and look pretty. It’s meant to break the sound barrier. I suspect it didn’t take Bill too long to start having second thoughts about how good an idea this had been. I’m not a reckless driver, you understand. Never have been. But speed limits? Speed limits are for pussies and old men. Move over, Chuck Yeager. The Wells brothers are coming. Somehow Bill forgot to let me drive his car again after that.

A couple days later I was stretched out on the couch in the living room reading something when Bill came in and sat down. He asked me what I planned to study in college. I still didn’t know if I’d even be able to go to college, but I knew what I wanted to learn about if I did get to go. “Computer science,” I answered. The University of Iowa had a program in computer science; it was part of their math department. Bill frowned at me. “Why do you want to study something so limited?” he asked.

Limited? How could computer science be limited? What I didn’t know was that at that time ‘computer science’ really meant nothing more than ‘computer programming,’ which was not at all what I had in mind. I wanted to know how these things *worked* and that’s what I told him.

“Then you should study electrical engineering,” Bill said. “Those are the guys who design computers.”

I hadn’t known that. Okay. Bill would know better than I would about this sort of thing. After all, he’d already been to college. Electrical engineering at the University of Iowa it would be. But he shook his head again. “The engineering school at Iowa City isn’t very good,” Bill said. “You should go to Iowa State. That’s where the good engineering program is.” I hadn’t even known there *was* an Iowa State University. The Hawkeyes ruled eastern Iowa. But, again, Bill would know better than I. He’d not only already been to college. He worked for IBM, the biggest and best computer company in the world. If this Iowa State place was good enough for IBM, it was good enough for me. Just like that, my college plans were finalized.

But, “I’m not sure I’ll be able to go,” I said. He asked why not and I told him about how worried I was we couldn’t afford for me to go to college. “You don’t worry about that,” he said. “You’re going.”

I felt like a giant weight had been lifted off my shoulders. My brother always kept his promises. □

Since he had gotten out of the Army, Bill had started to put on a little extra weight and that really bugged him. Secretly, I was very amused by this. When I’d been a Bubba, he’d ridden me mercilessly about it, calling me “fat brother” in a pidgin Indian accent. I’d hated that. Now *I* was in the best physical condition in my life and *he* was “fat brother.” The irony was so sweet I could taste it. And it got better.

“You know,” I said casually when he mentioned something about his own weight, “there’s a cinder

track just outside.”

He got my point and outside we went. Goodenow Field was locked up, but we climbed over the fence, just like Lyle and I usually did, and around the track we went. Once around. One and a half times. Bill slowed to a walk and I kept going. As I started my third lap I noticed he was jogging again. I caught up to him at the start of my fourth lap. “Something wrong?” I asked him as I came up beside him.

“Had a rock in my shoe,” he replied. I noticed he was puffing quite a little. “Is it still in there?” I asked him as I went on by him.

He started pushing himself and caught up to me. He kept up for another half a lap. Then he broke and started walking again. I waited for him back at our starting line as he walked across the football field. He was really puffing now. “Maybe you shouldn’t over do it,” I suggested. He nodded and we climbed the fence again to go back to the house. I was grinning from ear to ear.

Mom was in the kitchen when we came in. “How was your run, boys?” she asked.

Bill replied, “I had to stop twice. The first time because of a rock. The second time because I was dying.”

Butter would have melted in my mouth. □

Six days after I returned home from Kirtland, I was doing the same thing the entire rest of the world was doing. I was fixed to the television set as a spidery looking spacecraft touched down on a sea of gray dust and we all heard the words, “Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.” We were on the moon. At long last. We were on the moon. I felt so proud of my country and all of us in that moment I thought my chest would explode. *We* had done it. We had gone to the moon. We had answered President Kennedy’s call, the decade of the sixties wasn’t over yet, and *we* had gone to the moon.

Lao Tzu, a great Chinese philosopher who had lived six hundred years before Christ, said, “When the best leader’s job is done, the people say, ‘We did it ourselves.’” We had done it ourselves.

We had reached the moon. □



Bellevue, IA, on the Mississippi River.

In August of ’69 I was sitting on top of my world and happier than I’d been in years. I had a lot of big plans for my upcoming junior year at Maquoketa High. That was why I was dumbstruck when Dad made an announcement from out of the blue: We were all moving to Bellevue and starting a bakery.

I was shocked. Move to Bellevue? Why? Maquoketa was a small town, but Bellevue was even smaller, around two thousand people. It sat on the banks of the Mississippi River and had a reputation, like most river

towns, for being a rough, uncouth place. Everybody I knew thought it was a nothing town and I didn’t know a single one of the ‘river rats’ who lived there. In an instant, my world was crashing down around me. Why did we have to move to Bellevue? I demanded an answer.

Dad tried to explain how the recession had wrecked the housing market and we had to do this. I couldn’t believe it. Hadn’t we just barely gotten done building a new house of our own? Dad must have known from the look on my face how I felt about this. He tried to soften the blow by telling me how in a small town I’d have a better chance of making the team – which was completely illogical since I *had* made the team. Somehow he’d managed to not know that? Shock started giving way to anger.

Besides, Bellevue didn't even *have* a football team. He didn't know that either?

Adding to the shock was the way this had come from out of nowhere. I hadn't heard one word about it, hadn't even known Dad was thinking about it, until he told me. He and Mom *must* have at least discussed it. How could I not have even had a clue what Dad was thinking until now? How could he just pull the ground out from under my feet like this and not even ask me how I felt about it?

But he wasn't asking me, even now. He was telling me. We were moving to Bellevue and there wasn't a single thing I could do about it. I was a kid and kids were property with no rights at all. There wasn't any justice to it, but that was the way things were. If an adult decided to ruin your life, it was ruined and that was that. The shock was so great I didn't even know what I felt at first. But the dead ashes of my old smoldering inner anger would soon rekindle and return to be my constant companion again.



My view of Bellevue from my room above the bakery.

Nobody even bothered to tell me *when* this awful thing was going to happen. It turned out to be almost immediately. I found out when Mom came home from work a day later and got mad at me when she found I hadn't started packing my things for the move, which was to be in two days. What? I should have taken a class in mind reading last year? It turned out Mom hated the whole idea at least as much as I did. I guess Dad had discussed it with her the same way he had with me. The only person who wasn't projecting how she felt about all this was Melody. I never did know whether she was happy, mad, or indifferent about it.

There didn't seem to be much point in trying to take everything I owned with me. We weren't even going to live in a house in Bellevue. We were going to live in a crummy apartment above the bakery. My room overlooked an alley and the ugly, squat buildings of downtown Bellevue. It was barely big enough for me, much less big enough to hold the things I owned. I gave a lot of stuff to Lyle's little brother Steve and threw away most of the rest of it, including all my models. About the only things I kept were my clothes and my books. And my football letter. It was like going to prison and that was pretty much exactly the way I felt about it.

The bakery part of the building downstairs hadn't been a bakery before Dad bought it. It had been a doctor's office or something. It was congested with a lot of interior walls and small, useless rooms that made it hard to run the baking operations. Over the course of the next few months, Dad had all these interior walls ripped out, leaving only a single wall separating the front room and its display cases from the bakery itself in the back. He didn't ask for my help in doing any of this, and I didn't volunteer it. I didn't want to have anything to do with this cursed place. Being here wasn't *my* idea. When we first moved in, the downstairs was already set up as a bakery, with oven, proof box, mixers, the donut fryer, work benches, etc. tucked into wherever they'd fit and all ready to go. It was immediately obvious to me Dad had been planning this for quite some time. That made me even more resentful.

But I was going to have something to do with this cursed place whether I liked it or not. Dad made that clear from day one. When I wasn't actually going to school, I was going to be working in the bakery. That meant every day including Saturdays and Sunday mornings, although on Sunday morning there wasn't anything to do other than run the front room and sell whatever was left over from Saturday. Apparently Dad expected me to rebel against all this and efficiently cut out the middle man by having his argument with me all in his own head before he told me. As a result, when he did tell me he was already mad at me for arguing with him about it. I didn't say a word, but inside I was seething.

I guess he didn't expect me to be all that useful anyway because he hired a local kid named Kennard to help him with the actual baking that August. My duties were limited to slicing bread in the bread slicing machine, lugging hundred pound sacks of flour and fifty pound boxes of shortening up from the basement, and manning the sales counter out front. It turned out Kennard was going to be one of my class mates when school started. He was a tough but likable kid and I guess he must have been a good worker because Dad didn't lose an opportunity to tell everyone what a good kid he was. Usually in front of me. How I ever managed not to end up hating Kennard I don't know. But I didn't blame him. I blamed Dad.

Unfortunately for Dad, Kennard quit just as soon as school started and he didn't have any choice but to have me start helping with the baking. Baking is pretty much a night job. Dad usually went to work around midnight or 1 A.M. and normally he'd be through by one or two in the afternoon. I'm pretty sure he'd have made me go to work right when he did but Mom would have had a fit about that. In her mind, my doing well in school was infinitely more important than any of Dad's 'family business' fantasies. It's pretty tough to do well in school if you're asleep in your seat.

Consequently, I didn't have to report for work until usually around five o'clock. My actual starting time varied a bit because it was driven by when the donuts were ready for frying. There was a sheet metal ductwork pipe running up from the bakery to my room, and when Dad was ready for me he'd pound on that pipe to wake me up. I'd climb out of bed, thrown on my white baker's uniform, and troop downstairs to fry to the donuts. I'd work until it was time to go to school. Then I had to race back upstairs, change into my school clothes, and hurry to catch the bus to school. Even though Bellevue was a tiny little speck on the map, the high school was located on the highway clear out at the very edge of the city limits and it was too far to walk. I wouldn't even have time to properly wash up, so I'd go to school smelling of bakery odors and with my hair greasy from the fumes of the donut fryer. Even after I got my driver's license a few weeks later and starting driving our car – a little blue Ford Falcon – out to school, I still didn't have time to clean up first because having my license just meant I had to work a little later every morning. I came to wish I had PE first thing in the morning every day so I could at least have a shower.

To say I was in a constant bad mood from all this would be like saying Attila the Hun wasn't the friendliest neighbor you could have. I expected to be challenged by somebody out at school within the first few days. After all, I was 'that Maquoketa kid' and I didn't have one single friend in that town. The new boy always gets challenged. The other boys want to know where he's going to be in the social hierarchy. They want to know what he's made of. In my case, the Bellevue kids didn't like Maquoketa kids anyway. They knew we didn't think much of them, and they sure didn't think much of us. Some kind of confrontation was inevitable.

It came the very first day on the bus before it even got all the way out to the school. Some boy made an insulting remark about me with me sitting just a couple of seats away. He meant for me to overhear it. I got up, grabbed him by the hair and shoved my face right into his, nose to nose. I snarled at him, asking if he wanted to die right now or after we got off the bus. Either way was fine with me.

The bus driver yelled back at me to sit down, so I gave this kid a good long glare, let go of him and returned to my seat. I guess all the rage I was feeling about even being here must have shown in my face because when the bus rolled to a stop next to Bellevue High that kid bolted off it so fast you'd have thought he was being chased by wolves. Word of the bus incident must have gotten around pretty fast, because the other kids treaded pretty warily around me for the next few weeks. Not the seniors, of course. But I was a junior and therefore unworthy of their slightest notice. I didn't bother them and they didn't bother me.

I quickly picked up a few facts about my new school. For one thing, none of the kids called it Bellevue High. It was known as P.S. 1 (Public School 1). This was kind of a local joke. There was a Catholic high school, Marquette, and a Catholic lower school, St. Joe's, in town. Bellevue had a very large Catholic population and the cross town rivalry between the schools was pretty much on par with the way the French and the Germans had felt about each other in 1913. Academically, Marquette was by far the

superior school. The only Catholic boys who went to P.S. 1 were either the ones who weren't good enough to pass the classes at Marquette, or whose parents couldn't afford to send them there, or who had reputations for being troublemakers. Not infrequently, I found all three traits in the same kid.

The next thing I found out was that, despite the fact the school was so small compared to Maquoketa, the kids segregated themselves even further into social cliques. The main division was the one between the Putman clan and everybody else. The extended Putman family occupied much of the south side of town. Almost everybody down there, it seemed, was either a Putman or a cousin to a Putman. Although in fact the family was into a lot of different trades, most people described them as being commercial fishermen who wrested a living from the Mississippi. This reputation was in fact being overstated, but what wasn't overstated was that their family did spring from a commercial fishing background, and in a river town commercial fishermen were generally known to be the toughest of the tough. It's a hard life.

The Putman boys were Catholics and, not surprisingly, every one of them had a reputation for being a very tough kid nobody wanted to mess with. That little incident on the school bus had thrown me into the 'tough kid' clique in the eyes of the other kids, so I knew I'd have to do something pretty fast to establish myself with the Putmans or there was going to be big trouble. The Putman clan stuck together and I sure didn't want half the boys in Bellevue out for my hide. I also knew the first move was going to be up to me. I was 'that Maquoketa kid' and either I made friends with the Putmans or they would be coming after me. That much nobody had to tell me. I was sure of it.

The third day or so, I saw one of the Putman boys, Danny, shooting baskets by himself in the gym during the lunch hour. Bellevue didn't have a football team, but they did have a basketball team and the whole town was nuts for basketball. That wasn't too surprising. The only other sports they had were track and field, baseball, and golf. Basketball was the big deal in Bellevue twelve months a year.

Anyway, here was Danny by himself shooting baskets. He was a pretty big kid. Not fat; just big. I strolled over to where he was and, sure enough, pretty soon he missed a shot and the ball bounced my way. I caught it, tossed it back to him, and asked if he minded if I joined him. From his reaction I got the idea not too many kids hung around with Danny other than his brother and his cousins. Danny didn't talk much and he wasn't much of a scholar. That made most of the other kids think he was dumb, which he wasn't. Danny's knowledge was practical knowledge, not book knowledge, and – as I came to find out later – he had a lot of people knowledge. Danny was a mighty good judge of character and I came to find out later on that he was awfully particular about who he'd associate with. If he thought somebody was a bum or a hood or a snob, he wouldn't have anything to do with them and they'd best not try to force themselves on him. Danny was awfully strong even for his size and he had great big fists that he knew how to use. But, like a lot of big guys, Danny was a peaceful guy at heart and pretty much all he wanted was for people he didn't like to leave him alone. Danny was as choosy about his friends as a gourmet is about food.

But I'd find all this out later. That day he gave me a hard, searching look then nodded his assent. We shot baskets and chatted until it was time to go back to class. Turned out I did most of the chatting. Danny only talked when he had something to say. He must have decided I was alright, because he let me chum around with him from that day on. In pretty much no time at all, he was my best friend at P.S. 1. Of course, for awhile he was my *only* friend. We started hanging around together after school. My first meeting with his brother Ricky a few weeks later didn't start out as well.

If you saw Danny and Ricky standing side by side you might not know they were brothers. Danny was tall, big-boned, and pacific. Ricky was short, wiry, and fiery. Like with Danny, I met Ricky on the basketball court. This was during a pickup game a bunch of us were having during the lunch hour. I was on one side, Ricky on the other. The other boys on my team were reluctant to guard Ricky on defense, so I found myself guarding him.

Like a lot of tough kids who didn't go out for athletics, Ricky wasn't as skilled at dribbling, passing,

or ball handling as someone who competed in the sport and practiced a lot would be. I had a pretty easy time guarding him and, I admit it, after the competitive juices started flowing I was starting to show off a bit. Stealing the ball from him, blocking shots, intercepting passes meant for him – I was doing a pretty good job of showing him up and he didn't like it. Finally, I intercepted a pass meant for him and was on my way to making an easy lay up when suddenly there was a hairy, muscular arm wrapped tightly around my neck and somebody riding on my back.

It was Ricky, of course. I stopped dribbling and gave kind of a twist and he hopped off. We stood there about five feet apart, glaring at each other. This being just a pickup game, there was no referee to call the foul and everybody in the gym was just standing there waiting to see what would happen. This was *the* confrontation and everybody knew it. I was still holding the ball in my hands, Ricky was standing there waiting to see what I was going to do. It was my move. I wound back and threw the ball at his feet, hitting him with it in the shins. Challenge accepted.

But my throw didn't knock him down. Ricky immediately began walking toward me with his fists clenched, and I stepped forward to meet him. It looked like we were going to have it out right in the middle of the basketball court, but the coach saw what was happening and yelled, *Put!* – short for Putman. There was no mistaking the warning in his voice and both of us stopped and turned to face him. He made Ricky leave the gym to go cool off, and he made me stay right where I was until Ricky was out of sight and I'd cooled down. It stopped the fight before it had started and the pickup game as well.

As the crowd of kids started to break up, I happened to walk past Ricky's cousin, John. Danny, Ricky, and John Putman were all sophomores, although Danny and Ricky were both a little older than me. John was a tall, gangly, good looking kid who was a year younger than me. He looked down at me – I was quite a bit shorter than he was – and remarked in a strangely casual voice, "You picked the wrong guy to mess with today, Wells." It wasn't a friendly warning, nor, oddly enough, an unfriendly one. But it was a warning nonetheless, spoken in a tone that pretty much said he planned to have fun watching me get what was coming to me.

There was only one thing I could say in reply to it, though. I looked up at him and said, "So did he."

I fully expected to find Ricky waiting for me in the parking lot after school. That's the way it would have played out in Maquoketa. The coach had only postponed the fight, not stopped it. I wasn't scared about what I figured was going to happen, but that didn't mean I wasn't worried about it. In those few minutes in the gym Ricky had looked like he knew how to handle himself in a fight and he *did* have the reputation of being a guy you didn't want to mess with. I noticed that for the rest of the day the other kids kind of kept their distance from me while trying not to *look* like they were keeping their distance. It wasn't a good sign.

After the last class was over, I didn't hurry to leave the building but I didn't dawdle either. I just acted as casually as I normally did, as though nothing in the world was wrong. To do anything else would have been read by everybody as a sign that I was scared, and that would have been the worst possible thing that could happen. Whatever was going to go down in the parking lot, it was better to just face it and get it over with than to give anybody the idea I was intimidated and thereby stretch one incident into a way of life in this town. So I followed my same end-of-the-day routine and walked out into the parking lot like I didn't have a worry in the world.

He wasn't out there. I looked around, and he was just nowhere to be seen. *That* bothered me because I didn't know what it meant. I wasn't idiot enough to think Ricky was scared of *me*. And I wasn't optimistic enough to think this meant the entire incident was all over. It wouldn't have been in Maquoketa. Ricky hadn't walked away from me in the gym; the coach had *made* him walk away. There was a big difference. So when he wasn't in the parking lot where I expected him to be, and he didn't show up before I had to get on the bus, I didn't know *what* was going on. Maybe he wasn't the kind of guy who held a grudge. Or maybe he had something in mind for me you couldn't do out in public in the middle of a parking lot. I just

didn't know. I didn't know how to read these Bellevue kids yet.

The next morning when I met Danny at school, he acted like nothing at all had happened between his brother and me the day before. He didn't bring it up, which meant I couldn't either, and he didn't behave like anything at all had changed between us. I already knew Danny was no actor – with Danny what you saw was what it was – so at least this meant one thing: I didn't have to worry about getting jumped by three or four guys on some deserted street, or in some alley, or at the public basketball courts. If there was anything like that in the works, I was sure Danny would have been in on it. After all, Ricky was his brother. So there weren't any plans to gang up on me in the works.

Another cousin of theirs, Steve Putman, was a junior and in one of my morning classes. Steve had the reputation of being the very toughest guy in that very tough clan. He was the one guy *nobody* messed with, period. But when he saw me, Steve just gave me a casual nod, neither friendly nor unfriendly. Again, it was like the day before had never happened.

Later that day, I happened to come upon Ricky himself in the hallway. His manner toward me was definitely chilly and unfriendly, but he didn't do or say anything impolite or aggressive and I didn't either. I sure didn't want Ricky Putman for an enemy if there was any honorable way to avoid it.

It was kind of hard for me to believe, but it turned out the incident on the basketball court really was over. No winner. No loser. Honor intact on both sides. It had been just something that had happened in the heat of competition when tempers flared briefly. Over time I would gradually come to learn that to the Putmans something like that was 'just one of them things' and of no real importance at all. Once tempers cooled off, they just forgot about it and life went on. *That's* the kind of self respect *truly* tough guys have.

But if the confrontation in the gym was a matter of no importance to the Putmans, the same turned out not to be the case in the eyes of the other kids. I found out later there were quite a few of them who had kind of been looking forward to seeing 'that Maquoketa kid' get his at the hands of the Putman clan. When it didn't turn out that way they didn't quite know what to make of it. Eventually I guess a lot of them figured that since Ricky and I hadn't gone to war over it, and since Danny and I were pals, that could only mean I was one of 'them' – not actually a Putman, but no longer 'that Maquoketa kid.' I was now a 'south side kid.' My place in the Bellevue social culture had been settled because I was a show off, Ricky lost his temper, and the coach prevented a fight. Sometimes life *is* stranger than fiction. □

I was sixteen now and after taking the brief obligatory course in driver's ed obtained my first driver's license. The driver's ed training was pretty simple. Mr. Janssen, the driver's ed instructor, had us learn the various traffic laws and watch a horror flick or two featuring bad highway crashes. We practiced driving in the driver's ed car, which had an automatic transmission. I kind of wondered at the usefulness of that; our Ford Falcon had a manual transmission. Finally we got the go-ahead to take the actual driving test required to get our licenses. The test had three parts – a written test, an eye test, and a driving test. The written part was easy. It was a multiple-choice test and the answer was always the civics book answer. All you had to do to pass the eye test was be able to see and know the alphabet. With my glasses on that one was no sweat. The nice lady who gave the eye test then asked me to take it again without wearing my glasses. I told her that wouldn't work very well, but she insisted. I took my glasses off, couldn't see anything but blurs except on the top line where the blurs had some kind of shape, and so my license would carry a little notation "restricted to corrective lenses." The actual driving test made everyone a little tense because it was a 'no mistakes' test. If you did anything wrong at all, you failed. But this, too, ended up not being too tough. All you had to do was drive wherever the examiner told you to, demonstrate you knew all the hand signals, not break any traffic laws, and prove you could parallel park.

So far as I know, everyone who had been in my driver's ed group passed all the tests so we all got our licenses on the same day. For sixteen year olds these licenses were probationary. That meant if you got a ticket for any kind of moving violation your license would be suspended for six months. The next day at school, I found out that six of my driver's ed classmates had been caught doing donuts in the school

parking lot the night before and all six had lost their licenses. They were licensed drivers for less than twelve hours and then went back to being bus riders for another six months.

Aside from not being a bus rider anymore, when I got to use the car that is, there were two main consequences of having a driver's license. One was that I found myself being Dad's chauffeur whenever the two of us went anywhere together in the car. Maybe some small part of this might have been that he wanted to make sure I wasn't a careless driver, but I doubt it. More of it had to do with two other things. One, of course, was he knew I preferred to drive rather than just be a passenger. But the other reason surprised me. It turned out that Dad was actually always pretty nervous about driving in traffic for some reason. I realized this for myself, and later quietly confirmed it with Mom. This nervousness had a lot to do with the fact that on long trips Dad had a habit of losing his temper pretty easily if the least little thing went wrong, which was the main reason Mom didn't like to go on long car trips with him. Why he would have been less nervous about riding as a passenger with his Mario Andretti teenager than doing the driving himself remains a mystery to this day. Maybe it was because driving in traffic, no matter how heavy, has never bothered me. I always kept up pretty good other-traffic awareness, always expected other drivers to do something stupid, and knew in advance what I'd do when they did. They call it 'defensive driving' but I sort of thought of it as boxing taken to a new level. What makes *me* nervous is drivers who keep turning their head to look at everything *but* the road right in front of them.

Mom, on the other hand, was a bit less relaxed about riding with me. She'd always ask me if I wanted to drive, I'd always say 'yes,' and she'd always kind of wince a little bit. She was an awful back seat driver. For that matter, she was an awful passenger seat driver, too. If there was one other car five miles ahead and going in the same direction we were, she'd make sure to point it out to me. "Yeah, I see it," I'd growl. Since she never saw anything I hadn't already seen, it got to be pretty irritating. As a back seat driver, Melody was even worse. Her way of making sure I'd see something was to suddenly yell, "Look out!" in my ear, which is about the worst possible thing anybody can do unless they *want* you to lose control of the car. I never let Melody ride with me anywhere if I could possibly help it.

The second consequence of having my driver's license was I could get the heck out of Bellevue when I wanted to, and that first year I wanted to a lot. Does a convict miss an opportunity to get out of prison if he has the chance? I tried to keep up the close ties I had with my old friends in Maquoketa – which was twenty miles away – and especially with Lyle and my 'second family' over there. But, sadly, this ended up not being very practical. Aside from the fact that such long gaps inevitably existed between when we'd see each other, the plain fact was I wasn't one of 'us' any more. I was a Bellevue river rat now. Nobody said that to my face, of course, but the feeling was there. I was out of the happenings in Maquoketa and it didn't take long for a kind of uncomfortable awkwardness to develop. Eventually I just stopped trying.

I was also trying to keep up my participation in the CAP, but this proved difficult too and eventually proved impossible. I blamed this on all the anti-war sentiment, which continued to rise steadily all during 1969 and beyond. I did manage to pass my "Billy Mitchell" exam and become a cadet second lieutenant. But the unpopularity of the war was spilling over and becoming an unpopularity of all things connected to the military in any way, and this included the CAP. New kids weren't coming in to replace the older ones who were leaving it, and the program in my part of Iowa just basically disintegrated. The Maquoketa flight disappeared first. I tried for awhile to hook up with the Dubuque squadron, where I knew some of the kids from different activities we'd done together, including the Kirtland encampment and the fly in breakfasts we used to raise money for the Maquoketa flight. Dubuque was a co-ed squadron and one of the girls in it – her name was Patty – was, for a number of reasons, my favorite person in CAP. But the disintegration was affecting them, too, and before the end of my first year in Bellevue the CAP just wasn't functioning anymore. To my eyes, it all looked like nobody remembered President Kennedy any more and there didn't seem to be any Kennedy Democrats left, not even Teddy Kennedy. As far as I knew, I was the only one and I couldn't even vote yet. It went way beyond being a terrible shame.

Athletics was another disappointment. I missed football terribly, of course. The only football I could

find was the occasional pickup game at one of the parks on the north side of town, which was how I came to meet some of the kids who went to Marquette and St. Joe's. I never did share Bellevue's passion for basketball, but initially I thought about going out for the team anyway. The problem here was that the basketball team was entirely made up of 'north side' kids. There were a lot of them who were good kids and I liked them. One guy in particular – his name was Mort – was a great guy. But there were also a lot of them I didn't like at all and the feeling was mutual. You can't have that kind of ill feeling on a team; it hurts the team and ends up making the sport not much fun for anybody. So, after a brief time, I decided that, all things considered, it just wasn't worth the effort and I dropped out of organized sports. My all-too-few days as an athlete were over forever. This was something else I blamed on Dad because I really did miss it. A lot. Like it says in a Whittier poem somewhere, *For all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: "It might have been!"* □

There isn't any school on Sunday and for me that meant a full day's work in the bakery on Saturday. I didn't have any enthusiasm for it, of course. My working there was Duty. The fact that I was harboring a lot of resentment toward Dad didn't change the fact that I felt it was my duty to our family. There had been a time – long ago it seemed, but real nonetheless – when this man hadn't been Dad. He'd been Daddy and we had loved each other. To me that did count for something. So it was that while Dad had a sullen teenager on his hands, at least he didn't have a rebellious one. Well, not openly rebellious anyway. I just did what he told me to do and when he started teaching me more about how to be a baker I listened, learned, and did that too. To me it was just my job. Besides, baking isn't rocket science and the only thing hard about it is the physical labor. If you don't think baking involves much physical labor, *you* lug a few hundred-pound sacks of flour up a flight of stairs or hoist a few more-than-shoulder-width-diameter steel mixing bowls full of bread dough from the floor to the top of a work bench. Then talk to me about how it isn't all that physical.

The better baker I became, the earlier my Saturday starting time became. In what seemed like no time at all, I was down there at work at three o'clock in the morning. In the summer, of course, that would be my start time every day from Monday through Saturday. It meant I didn't have to pull Sunday morning counter duty in the front room anymore, but it didn't leave a lot of room for any Friday night social life. Like dating. At around four o'clock or so, Dad would cook up some bacon and eggs and we'd have breakfast. We'd time this to coincide with when the first loaves of hot bread would be out of the oven and be getting just cool enough to be able to slice. That was also about the time the first hot Danish rolls would be ready too. There's one good thing about being a baker: You eat a more delicious breakfast than anybody else on earth. Eldon, Bellevue's night shift cop, learned to time his patrol rounds so that he'd come by the bakery just about the time breakfast was served. One thing I never did have to put up with as a teenager was being hassled at night by the Bellevue police the way most of my friends were.

The Mississippi carries a lot of barge traffic day and night until the river freezes over in the winter. Sometimes during a rare lull in the work pace, I'd step outside in the cool pre-dawn darkness and watch the barges feeling their way with their spotlights up the river. Every now and again one would get out of the channel and run aground. I could tell when that happened because the spotlight would be swinging around here and there but the barge wouldn't be moving. On a few rare occasions one would bump into the concrete lock at Lock & Dam Number 12, which was pretty much right across the street from the bakery, and then there'd be this big *boom* and the walls would tremble a little.

Around ten in the morning Dad and I would take a break and go next door to the pharmacy for a root beer. We'd sit at the counter, drink our root beers, and chat with each other and with the other people who came by. Dad was apparently surprised and pleased that I'd turned out to be a good baker because he soon started bragging to people about what a good worker I'd turned out to be. That didn't win him any points with me, though. I already knew that I knew how to work; why hadn't he before now? Plus, he lost points with me for sounding surprised about it at first. It was about that time he started hinting at the possibility of me taking over the business after he retired. I know he wanted that. *Fat chance*, I'd think to myself. My prison sentence in Bellevue was only two years. After that would be college and I'd be getting out of here

for good and never coming back. Knowing I wasn't facing a life sentence here was what kept me going.

I remember staying up New Year's Eve of 1969 to witness the 1970s begin. I wasn't celebrating that night. My mood was a mixture of melancholy and hope. The 1960s had begun alive with hope and promise and optimism that for a time had seemed to brighten the world. Then the troubles had come and deepened and brought growing darkness. Now the sixties were over and I deeply hoped the dark times would end with those awful last years. I didn't have any reason for thinking they would. Just a few weeks before we had all heard about the worst thing yet. The newspapers and the television had told us about a place called My Lai where *our army* had gone in and massacred hundreds of people in cold blood. They had even killed all the little children. They had murdered an entire village of unarmed people and nobody was even punished for it. In July I had never been prouder of my country. Now I had never been more ashamed. So I didn't have any reason to think the evil times would end just because of a calendar.

But I hoped they would. □

Without sports I had a lot of empty time on my hands when I wasn't working or in school. We used to hang around the Hotel on the corner a few doors down from our bakery. It wasn't much of a hotel, really just a small diner and adjoining bar with a few rooms upstairs. It was the usual hangout for south side kids for two main reasons. First, it had the only pinball machine in town. Second, the fat woman who ran the diner didn't like us just hanging out there. It was okay with her when we were actually buying things or playing the pinball machine, but she basically just wanted us to drink our sodas or play the machine and then get out immediately when we were through. So, naturally, we'd hang out there all the time just to annoy her. The owner of the Hotel was an equally unfriendly man who would later become a state representative. He wasn't around all that often, but when he was he'd usually kick us out on sight if we weren't actually buying anything right then and there.

Early in the winter of '70 he kicked me out for no particular reason other than that I was a kid, and I treated him to some lip as I left. I went as far as the sidewalk just outside the door, where my continued presence was visible to all inside. Seeing my impertinent show of contempt for his god-like authority, he came outside after me. He grabbed me by my coat then shoved me up against the wall of the Hotel, my feet sliding on the icy sidewalk so much I couldn't fight back. I don't know what he thought he was going to achieve by this. Beat up a kid? Once he had me pinned against the wall he didn't seem to know what to do next. As he was trying to figure out his next move, I knocked his hands away and stood chin to chin with him giving him some more lip. If his plan had been to scare me off, it wasn't going too well for him. His face began to turn red and all he could think of to say was, "How would you like me to tell your father about you?"

Tell him what? That I blew quarters in his dumb pinball machine? "Why don't you?" I brayed in his face. "I'll take you to him and you can tell him everything. Let's go!"

I set off for the bakery, where I knew Dad was still finishing up some end of the day this-or-that, with the Hotel's proprietor kind of trailing along behind me. He must have been wondering just how and when he'd lost control of the situation. He followed me into the bakery and I stuck my head through the doorway into the back and called out, making sure the Hotel man could hear me, "Dad, this S.O.B. wants to tell you something!" I didn't use the abbreviation.

Dad looked up in surprise and came out just as the Hotelier's face flushed purple and he came charging around the counter calling me names and more or less promising me a good beating. Dad, who wasn't known for keeping control of his own temper, intercepted him and added some colorful language of his own. Before he knew what was going on, Mr. Hotel Bigshot found out for himself what it was like to be unceremoniously kicked out onto the sidewalk.

Outside, a crowd of my friends, who had tagged along to watch the show, were screaming with laughter. Over the next few days at school the story didn't lose anything in the telling as they told and retold it, and for awhile I was kind of a minor hero to the other kids. Even the teachers were overheard

laughing about it in the teachers' lounge. Nobody liked the Hotel man.

Dad never said a cross word to me about the incident, beyond a clear instruction that I wasn't to "take any guff from that S.O.B." I continued to hang out at the Hotel. □

The river was a big part of our lives for a lot of the south side kids. Florida and California kids have their beaches. We had the Mississippi, the Great Father of Waters. For the commercial fishermen the river was their whole livelihood and they fished it twelve months out of the year. In the winter they'd drive their pickup trucks out onto the ice and cut big holes in it so they could continue to fish it. Late in the winter, one of them drove out there, parked his pickup, and walked off a ways and cut a hole. While he was laying his net, there was a huge *crack!* everybody heard all up and down Riverview Street. Everybody looked out on the river just in time to see the ice give way and the pickup truck drop into the water. Fortunately nobody went down with it, but the fisherman lost his truck. The general feeling on the south side was that he should have known better than to drive out there this late in the season.

A lot of us kids lived out there on that river from spring to fall. Most of the south side kids had flat bottom boats we'd go out in. In the spring of '70 Dad came home one day bringing with him a wondrous surprise: A sleek, fast speedboat. Why he'd decided to buy it all of a sudden nobody knew except him. I didn't care why. I was just thrilled to overflowing that he had. She could seat six with no problem at all and she was the MGB of the waves. We couldn't get her in the water fast enough to suit me.

From the very beginning she was practically my boat. Dad hardly ever took her out, but I did all the time. Looking back, I'm not so sure that wasn't what Dad had in mind in the first place. He knew I wasn't happy about living in Bellevue. There was no name painted on her stern, but I called her the *Cindy*. Danny and I took the *Cindy* on expeditions as far down the river as we had gas to get us there and back. Well south of Bellevue we found a little stretch of sandy beach far away from everything that made a perfect spot to anchor and knock back a few beers. Just four to six of us kids at a time, which was what the *Cindy* could carry. It wasn't all that hard for us to get beer; like bottle rockets, there was a black market for that, too. Most of us got to be pretty good little bootleggers, much better than Maquoketa kids.

Bellevue made a lot of its money from the thousands of tourists who would come every year, spring through fall, to enjoy the river and the many pretty little parks and campgrounds that surrounded Bellevue like a necklace. River people know the river, know how to handle boats, and respect the power of the water. A lot of tourists, though, didn't have the first clue that the Mississippi can bite if you don't know what you're doing. Every summer some tourist would manage to kill himself out there. In every case I knew of, they died of stupidity. One dummy had put in north of the lock and dam and decided it would be fun to get a close look at the spillway. He got a close look alright. The river took him backwards right through the spillway, his motor going full throttle, and dragged him under, boat and all, on the other side. They didn't find him or his boat for several days. Another guy wanted to get a nice close look at one of the big barges. Everybody that knows anything about the Mississippi knows you give the barges a wide, wide berth and you *never* come up on the stern of one where its powerful engines create one of the worst undertows imaginable. Everybody on the river that day was screaming and yelling and waving at this moron to veer off. He just grinned and waved back – right up to the second he and his boat disappeared under the water. They didn't find him for awhile either.

Spruce Creek, about seven miles or so north of Bellevue, was one of the nicest parks and trailer campgrounds in the area. The old Spruce Creek Lodge had a big pool table and it was one of the most unlevel pool tables anyone's ever seen. There was pretty much no such thing as a straight shot on that table. Danny and I played that table all the time and knew every curvy inch of it. We'd go out there in the afternoons or evenings to shoot pool and hustle the tourists. □

My New Year's Eve hope that 1970 would bring better times didn't live through the spring. Grandma Wells, my last grandparent, died in the middle of March. I'd never seen Dad so sad. Then came Cambodia. When Nixon had run for the presidency he had promised he would end the war in Vietnam.

But in April he told all of us he had ordered the invasion of Cambodia. He even tried to lie about that by calling it an ‘incursion.’ Nixon wasn’t ending the war; he was making it bigger. He had looked the other way and condoned the hideous murders at My Lai, and now he was breaking the promise he had made to all of us to end the immoral war in Vietnam.

The invasion of Cambodia sparked massive, angry protests at colleges all across the country. At the same time, almost all the older people didn’t seem to care. Nixon called the college students ‘bums’ and a lot of the older people agreed with him. The world was upside down. Young people, just a few years older than me, were demanding the end of an illegal and immoral war that was destroying our country, and older people, the very ones we should have been able to look to for leadership and who should have been demanding that our Government do its duty under the Constitution, were willing to just stand by and let our rulers destroy *everything* America stood for. It had stopped seeming strange to me that nobody recited the Pledge of Allegiance anymore. We weren’t one nation any more; we weren’t indivisible any more. Then on the first Monday in May, they sent the National Guard to Kent State University in Ohio, and the National Guard opened fire on a crowd of unarmed students, killing four of them.

Now the Government was murdering America’s own children. Nixon said the murders ‘should remind us all once again that when dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy.’ I thought that message was pretty clear: If we didn’t knuckle under and crawl and do what our rulers told us to do, it was alright for them to kill us. If we didn’t do as they commanded, it was the same as ‘inviting’ them to murder us. Thomas Jefferson had written, *The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.*

Well, at least *patriots* didn’t have to find a rice paddy to die in anymore. *Screw you, Nixon!* □

That summer there was a nice surprise. My old friend Steve from Maquoketa – the boy whose fight Dad had praised so much so many years ago and whose dad had set me straight about those lawnmowers – came to Bellevue with his folks on vacation. It had been eons since the last time we’d chummed around and I was delighted to see him again. Steve hadn’t changed much except for being taller and a little more serious than I’d remembered him being.

One day he and I and another Bellevue friend of mine named Gary decided to go rabbit hunting. Gary was a distant cousin of mine on Grandma Wells’ side of the extended family. He lived quite a ways out of town, a couple of miles or so past Spruce Creek, and as a result he was neither a ‘north side’ nor a ‘south side’ kid. Instead he was one of the very few kids who could probably best be described as an ‘outlaw spirit.’ If there had been anyone in eastern Iowa who could have been even remotely compared to James Dean, Gary would be it. The Putmans didn’t like him because they thought he was involved with drugs, a reputation Gary liked to encourage. I thought this was pretty much all just empty big talk. *I* never saw him use any drugs. Beer, yes. Drugs, no.

Gary’s self-styled outlaw reputation almost got him beat up once. They had showed this horror flick at school about the bad things drugs did to people, and the movie had deeply impressed the Putmans, especially Steve Putman. By now Steve was also a casual friend of mine and I’d had a first-hand chance to learn why he had such an awesome reputation as being the best fighter in Bellevue. He and I happened to get into a discussion about boxing one time and Steve had flatly told me I didn’t know what I was talking about. That was something I didn’t buy at all, but he was certain of it. My style of boxing was one where there was a pretty clear distinction between defense and offense. Steve’s position was that defense *was* offense. He didn’t mean ‘don’t protect yourself’ by this. He meant every defensive move you make should be an offensive move at the same time.

He offered to demonstrate this to me. Because we didn’t have any boxing gloves handy right then and there – the discussion was taking place in the Hotel next to the pinball machine – we first agreed we’d pull our punches so nobody would get hurt. Thank goodness! We squared off and began to slowly circle each other. I box southpaw, and I threw the first exploratory jab with my right hand. It hadn’t gone three

inches when Steve counterpunched with his left. His move knocked my right completely to the side and his big left fist went whistling past my left ear. His follow through pinned my left arm at the same time, opening me up completely, and then his right fist went whistling by my right ear. He'd thrown both punches in less time than it takes to blink. I've never seen anyone else – including pros – whose hands were that fast. If we'd really been boxing, my head would have gone bouncing across the room like a basketball. That was all it took for me to know I wasn't even in the same universe with Steve when it came to boxing. I wouldn't fight him for real armed with anything less than a machine gun.

Anyway, Steve took it upon himself to see to it that nobody tried to push drugs to the younger kids. He had a little brother named Larry – a very cool kid in Melody's grade – who hung around with us a lot at the Hotel. All the older members of the Clan thought Larry was the brightest kid in the whole family, and they were expecting great things from him, including his being the first in the family to go to college. Although I think the Clan's vigilante movement was probably prompted by Steve's concern to keep Larry safe from any and all pushers, the movement rather quickly spread beyond just this. What happened was: Steve gathered up the Clan and they paid a visit to every guy in high school who they even suspected of being involved with drugs. Steve was the spokesman and his promise was the same to every guy they talked to: If he even *heard* you were giving drugs to Larry, you were going to be beaten until there was nothing left of you but bloody pulp. Somehow nobody wanted to take the chance this was really confined to just Larry and it was generally presumed Steve really meant *any* of the younger kids. He even gave *me* this warning – probably because he knew I hung out with Gary sometimes – although in my case it took the form of a chillingly casual evening front porch conversation down in the south end. The basic gist of it was along the lines of 'You're smart enough to know this already, but if you ever . . .' He didn't leave any doubt at all in my mind that he'd already voted Gary 'the kid most likely to be reduced to pulp product.' If anybody had even suggested to Steve – even if it was a flat out lie – that Gary had slipped any drugs to anybody, they'd have gone after Gary and there would have been no trial. All loose talk of drugs dried up almost overnight at the high school.

But getting back to the other Steve, the one from Maquoketa: One morning I picked up Steve and then we went out to get Gary and set off to try and find some rabbits. All three of us sat in the front seat of the Falcon; across the back seat we laid two rifles and a shotgun. Gary insisted on taking the center seat, claiming it was the safest place to ride 'because you had padding' – meaning Steve and me – 'on both sides.' We took a gravel road way back into the countryside, parked, and started hiking along the railroad tracks looking for rabbits. Our hunting expedition lasted about two hours, during which time we saw a sum total of exactly one rabbit. That one moved so fast, and with so many hairpin changes in direction, that none of us got off even a single shot. What we'd have done with it if we *had* managed to shoot it I don't know. None of us was exactly a Great White Hunter. Still, we had a good time.

After we finally gave up on the rabbits, we unloaded our weapons and put them back across the back seat again. We piled back into the car – same seating order as before – and decided to head back to Spruce Creek to shoot some pool. We were flying down the gravel road at about sixty miles an hour. What most people did on those kinds of roads was drive right down the center unless another car was coming head on. Then both cars would move over to their respective sides and they passed each other.

We were approaching the turn that led to the road to Spruce Creek when another car came around the bend ahead of us. Like us, he was going right down the middle and, also like us, he was going fifty or sixty miles an hour. I moved us to our right and expected him to do the same.

He didn't.

Two cars could pass on that gravel road if they were both on their proper sides, but not if one of them was in the middle of the road. When he didn't move, I jerked the wheel and took us further over onto the shoulder. The shoulder wasn't graveled; it was soft sand and just like that we started skidding. The other car flashed by us and vanished down the road without even slowing down.

I had my hands full trying to control that skid and slow down. It was a regular roller coaster ride at the county fair for the next few seconds. Gary, with an unaccountable tone of happy excitement, called out to me, “Hang in there, Wells!” The sharp curve in the road was coming up fast.

If we’d had another fifteen feet of road, we’d have been okay. But we didn’t. As the car started to cross the roadway toward the ten foot drop off on the other side, I desperately jammed my foot on the brake just as hard as I could. I knew we weren’t going to make it, and I wanted to lose as much speed as possible before we ran out of road. This wasn’t panic; my mind was icy calm. A strange and marvelous thing happened then: Time slowed down. Everything looked like it was going in slow motion. I could clearly perceive every detail of what was happening. The car slid right across the road and the front tilted down as we went over the embankment. Directly below and in front of us was a big old tree stump, the only one within a hundred feet of where we were. A barbed wire fence with wooden fence posts ran along the bottom of the ditch. I felt my body fly off the seat, and the side of my face hit the corner of the front windshield. There was an incredibly slow-sounding *boom!* as the front of the car hit that stump, and then, still in slow motion, the car rolled upside down and came to rest against the fence. Oil began to come pouring into the car from all over the place.

I don’t know how it happened, but after we stopped rolling I was on the passenger side of the car with my feet still under the steering wheel. Steve was on the driver’s side with *his* feet still under the glove compartment. Gary was still in the middle, locked into position by our legs. The passenger side window was open to the outside, but the driver’s side window was blocked off by the embankment. As the oil came running down inside, Steve yelled, “Let’s get out of here!” and jerked his legs free, which dropped all three of us straight down to the roof of the car. He scrambled out on all fours right over the top of Gary and me. I climbed out right behind him, and Gary climbed out last.

Steve and I scooted up the embankment back to the road lickety split. Gary came up more slowly. At first I thought all three of us were okay, but then Gary, wearing a silly little grin, said, “Oh, wow!” and his knees buckled, dropping him right down on his bottom on the road. Steve and I ran over to him.

It turned out he *was* hurt. Not deadly seriously hurt, but fast-trip-to-the-hospital hurt. He’d hit his head on the steering wheel when we rammed the stump, and when he bounced back from that impact he’d straightened up just in time to catch two rifles and a shotgun across the back of his head as they had come flying out of the backseat. Then when the car rolled over he’d hit the top of his head on the dome light. Finally, as Steve had come scrambling over him, he’d taken a knee in the side and broken one of his ribs. So much for the ‘safest seat’ theory. Neither Steve nor I had so much as a scratch.

Steve ran off down the road to summon help from a nearby house while I stayed with Gary. He was conscious, able to talk to me and mostly make sense. He said he was okay except for a headache and sore ribs, but he had a goofy-looking expression on his face and it was pretty clear he wasn’t okay and he wasn’t going to be going anywhere under his own steam. Later at the hospital they confirmed that he’d suffered a mild concussion.

Steve came back and said help was on the way. In not more than a few minutes people were arriving from all over the place, followed by a highway patrolman, an ambulance, Steve’s dad, and my dad. They loaded Gary onto the ambulance and blasted off for Bellevue with him. The highway patrolman questioned me and also Steve about what had happened and examined the car and the skid marks in the road. Finally he announced that we couldn’t have been going more than ten or fifteen miles an hour when the car left the road. He made it a point to let Steve and me know how lucky we were to be alive, gave me a ticket for ‘failure to have vehicle under control,’ and that was that. I was a little put out that he didn’t seem to be very interested in identifying the other driver; in my mind *he* was the one who caused the accident. But that was my car down there upside down in the ditch, so it was kind of hard to argue with the logic that I hadn’t had it under control.

When the patrolman left I expected to get the hind-end chewing to end all hind-end chewings, but it

didn't happen. Our two dads were just happy to have three live teenagers instead of three dead ones, and I guess they figured I'd done everything anybody could do under the circumstances to prevent worse from happening. I felt awful about Gary getting hurt and I went to see him at the hospital as soon as they'd let anybody see him. He was propped up in bed, really looking none the worse for wear, and he actually seemed cheerful about the whole thing. He told me he'd thought about suing me but decided against it when the doctors gave him a huge jar of pain pills to take home. He claimed I'd been the instrument for getting him a legal supply of enough downers to last him for a year. Of course, I didn't actually see this famous gumball-machine-sized jar of pills with my own eyes.

My car was totaled and, of course, I lost my driver's license. I had to appear before a judge to plead to the 'failure to have vehicle under control' charge, and somehow nobody mentioned I might possibly want a lawyer with me. It was just me and the judge all alone in the room. Because it seemed absurd to me to try to claim I had not failed to control my vehicle, I naively pled guilty, expecting I would then get to tell the judge about that other driver. It seemed to me that being forced off the road by the other car ought to be at least a mitigating circumstance.

The judge immediately revoked my license.

My motoring activities were confined to the *Cindy* for the rest of the summer. I was a pedestrian again until my seventeenth birthday that September. Then they allowed me to re-take all the exams and I got my permanent driver's license. Nobody brought up the minor technicality that my old temporary license had been suspended for six months, and I didn't see any reason to ask them about that. By the time I got my license back I even had a new vehicle to drive. It was an old telephone company utility truck we were converting to be a bakery delivery truck. It was an under-powered old rattletrap of a truck, but it was wheels and it would get me anyplace I needed to go.

Just not very fast. □



The P.S. 1 National Honor Society for 1970-71. I'm the short guy with the wet hair in the middle of the back row. Karen Stachura is on the right, center row.

Although I mostly looked at my last year of high school as something I couldn't wait to get through with, I managed to have a lot of fun along the way. Although my place in the order of things was as a 'south side' kid, a number of the 'north side' kids as well as kids from other cliques had become my friends too. Of course, a number of them thought of me as kind of a character. I still was in the habit of not paying any attention at all to what my grades were; everybody else in school seemed to know more about them than I did. How I have no idea. Maybe it was the National Honor Society thing.

Sometime that year – I don't remember when exactly – somebody – I can't remember who – informed me that I had been named a member of the National Honor Society – which I had never heard of. It had to be explained to me that this was a 'recognition' of high school students who were considered by somebody – I don't know who – to be 'top students.' There were fifteen of us at P.S. 1 (eight seniors, five juniors, and two sophomores) who were members. The ones I knew fairly well I also knew to be serious, excellent students who worked hard, so I did feel honored to be associated with them. Other than the fact that I still knocked off my daily school work during study hall, the rest of the time I was kind of a goof-off, so I was surprised somebody would pick me to be in the same group with them. I had to spend so much time working in the bakery that school was about the only chance I had to socialize with most of the kids, and that's where my time there went when we weren't actually sitting in a classroom.

Some classes, though, seemed more like forums than classes. Government class, for example. Mr. Fenton, who taught government and was also the PE coach who had prevented the fight with Ricky the year before, liked to stimulate a lot of classroom discussions and debates about government. With all the bad things going on everywhere that were weighing on my mind, about all he had to do to stimulate a discussion from me was look in my general direction. I'd take it from there. I guess I must have talked a lot more than I realized judging from some of the things my classmates wrote in my Yearbook at the end of our senior year:

Rick – To a fellow senior who has always kept Mr. Fenton on his toes in gov. (You've also ruined the curve in grading). Best of luck at Ames – Karen

Rick – To a real sweet guy in our great Senior Class. Always stay as smart and talkative as you are right now. Who knows, maybe you'll be our next President. Be good, Rick, and if you can't be good be careful. Good luck – Ellen

Rick, Good luck in your years of the Presidency. Be good and keep arguing. It might get you someplace – Marlene

Rick – Good luck when you get on welfare – Steve

Mr. Fenton was a regular guy. Mr. Strissel, our math teacher, was sort of different. Kind of like you might expect a math teacher to be. In an era where people were no longer using any kind of hair cream, Mr. Strissel wore his hair slicked straight back with no part in it at all. He could have starred in a Brylcreem ad. There were a few of the guys who tended to harass him a bit about that with what passed as witty observations about his hair grooming. 'Grease ball!' was probably the most common heckling he was subjected to, and one of the guys managed to learn to say it without actually moving his lips so that even when Mr. Strissel looked up as fast as he could, he still couldn't tell who had said it.

Math isn't a subject that involves a lot of great oratory; most of the time it is pedantic and very step-by-step, and this suited Mr. Strissel's style to a Tee. He never wrote on the chalkboard. Instead he always used an overhead projector and a grease-marker to write down what he was saying. When the projection area was full, he used a little squirt bottle full of water to clean it so he could get on with the next part of the lesson. The seniors had math just before the lunch hour, and the juniors had it just after the lunch hour. One day some of the guys sneaked back into Mr. Strissel's class room during lunch and stole that water bottle. They took it to the boy's restroom, poured out all the water, and replenished it with urine. I have no idea how many guys were in on it, but it had to be more than one because one guy couldn't fill that whole bottle. They also must have diluted it with water just enough to make it colorless. Then they put the bottle back in Mr. Strissel's classroom. As you might guess, the combination of a hot overhead projector surface and diluted urine produced an awful stench that made pretty much everybody in the juniors' math class that day sick, including Mr. Strissel himself. I had nothing at all to do with it, but I did think it was awfully funny. And, yeah, if somebody had told me about it, I would've been in on it. Despite all the heckling and pranks, though, I thought Mr. Strissel was a good math teacher.

P.S. I didn't have a drama club but it did have a tradition of having the seniors put on an annual class play. It was directed by Miss LeMasters, a young fresh-out-of-college teacher who was one of the two English teachers at the school. After my pleasant experience with the Thespians, I was happy to take part in this one too, and for the same reason. That year the play Miss LeMasters chose was a comedy called 'The Curious Savage.' It takes place in a mental institution and revolves around the attempts of Mrs. Savage's three children to get her committed. I landed the role of Senator Savage, who was more or less one of the villains in this play. The production was nowhere near as grand as those Mr. Railsbach put on. We had to supply our own costumes, there wasn't much in the way of makeup, and the stage settings were very simple. But it was still a lot of fun and the town seemed to enjoy it quite a bit.

On a much sadder note, that year was a year that saw an unusual number of auto accidents. One of them led to Ricky and me finally becoming friends, the others were very sad. Just before school started there was a car crash out on the highway that killed five teenagers. I didn't know them but my friends did.

Much closer to home was the death of John Putman late in the school year. Stereo equipment, both car and home, was relatively new on the scene and John had been one of the first to equip his car with a new car stereo system. He was out on the highway one night, driving back to Bellevue from somewhere, when somehow the wiring of his stereo shorted out his car headlights. In the dark he rammed into a bridge and was killed. John was well-liked, the youngest except for Larry of the five Putman boys in high school, and his death was a terrible tragedy for all of us.

I was working in the bakery one Saturday when word came that Lyle had been hurt in a car accident the night before. I don't know the details of this one, but he'd been a passenger in a car with some other Maquoketa high school kids when the accident happened. The word we received was that he was in the hospital with a broken back.

When I heard this, I immediately left work and drove over to Maquoketa. Maquoketa is twenty miles from Bellevue, and all the way over I was sick with worry. I didn't know what I'd see when I got there, but I was fearing the worst. When I finally got to Lyle's room, I found him in great pain and he was suffering as well from nausea caused by his back injury. You see, all the nerves that control the inner organs and bring information about them back to the brain travel through the spinal cord. That is why anything that injures or irritates the spinal cord (without actually severing it) can produce an array of symptoms that look and feel like something is wrong elsewhere in the body. In Lyle's case, his back injury was making him throw up every few minutes.

As bad a shape as he was in, and as awful as he looked, I felt a great relief when I saw him. He was conscious and he was able to move his arms and legs, so my worst fears about how badly he was hurt were laid to rest. He would recover and he would not be left an invalid. It turned out he had only cracked a vertebra and, while this is nothing to take lightly, as back injuries go things could have been much, much worse. I visited him while he was in the hospital when I could as much as I could. The old Lyle returned by the next day, as they got the pain from his injury under control, and he was even able to find a silver lining in all this. "At least now I'm 4F," he said to me cheerfully. This referred to the selective service classification system, i.e. the draft. With the war in Vietnam still raging in full fury, the draft was very much on the minds of all boys our age. Classification 4F meant 'unfit for military service' and having a broken back certainly qualifies for that. No matter what else happened, Lyle would not be going to Vietnam, and we were both happy about that. It turned out, though, that a rich irony was in store for him. When the draft lottery for our age group was finally held, Lyle's lottery number turned out to be 365, the very last number.

It was another accident that led to Ricky and I finally becoming friends. This one developed out of an odd series of events that in an indirect way had started with me. Danny and I had driven over to Maquoketa one afternoon to shoot a little pool and take in the county fair later that night. While we were at the pool hall, a kid I had known from my Maquoketa days walked in with a couple of pals. He and I had a history. When we were both little boys we had played on the same Little League team and had been casual friends. Later, though, he had started hanging out with some of the hoods I detested so much and as a result our friendship ended. This day we got into a fight and the pool hall guy told us to take it outside into the alley.

As he and I were walking back there, his two pals came out behind us. I didn't like the looks of that at all, so I sneered at him, "You need your friends to come along and help?" He had a big grin on his face, but it vanished when he glanced back at his friends. I looked back, too, and here was Danny following the other two guys. Great Big Danny. He had my back. My opponent said to me nervously, "They don't have to come if your friend doesn't."

The fight itself isn't worth talking about very much. About all that needs to be said about it is that it turned into a dirty fight – a street brawl as pointless as it was devoid of honor. Danny thought the both of us were morons for even engaging in it. His actual language was a bit more colorful than this, and when all is said and done, he was right. When it was over I'd come out on top, although I'd gotten careless and

taken a couple of shots that made my cheeks swell up over night. Dad noticed that right away at work the next morning and gave me heck about it. To his way of looking at it, if you let yourself get hit hard enough to leave marks like that, you'd lost no matter what else happened. "If you won," he remarked sarcastically, "the other guy must be in the hospital." I am happy to say this fight turned out to be the last one I was ever in.

The only thing important about that fight was that when it was over one of those two guys who had come in with my former friend stayed behind with Danny and me. His name was Alan and, as it turned out, he wasn't from Maquoketa. He'd just been in town and hooked up by chance with the other two guys. Now he hooked up with Danny and me. Alan rode a motorcycle and he started coming over to Bellevue and hanging out on the south side. That was how he and Ricky met.

Ricky and Alan were out on the highway south of town on Alan's motorcycle one afternoon or evening – I don't remember which it was – when the accident happened. Alan was making a left turn off the highway when his motorcycle was rammed from behind by a Clinton County Sheriff's Office patrol car. I don't actually know who was driving that car, but word around town made it the Sheriff himself. Whether it was or wasn't, it made for a better story that way. "The Sheriff" was passing illegally when the accident happened. Alan wasn't hurt, aside from getting scratched up a bit, but the Sheriff's car hit Ricky and broke his leg.

I heard about it later that night from someone. Ricky and I weren't pals then, but Danny was my best friend in Bellevue so I went over to the hospital to see how Ricky was doing. That's what you do for a friend. Besides, I saw it as an opportunity to patch things up with Ricky over that old incident on the basketball court. I liked and respected him anyway, and here was a chance to show it.

Ricky was alone in his hospital room and looking pretty glum when I got there. He couldn't have been more startled when I walked in. I could see the question in his eyes, *What's HE doing here?* "I thought I'd come see how you were doing," I said before he could ask. "How do you feel?" I pulled up a chair, sat down and listened while he told me what they'd told him about his broken leg. Then he told me about the accident. Before too long we were chatting like next door neighbors. I started telling him jokes and stories and pretty soon I had him laughing. We visited until the nurse finally came and told me visiting hours were over and I had to leave. "I'll drop by tomorrow," I said as I left. I knew first hand what a miserable place a hospital is. By the time they let him go home, Ricky and I were pals. The duo of Danny-and-Rick became a trio, Danny-and-Rick-and-Ricky, after that. □

I've already mentioned how I was letting my political opinions be known in government class. Danny and Ricky were juniors but that didn't spare Danny from getting to listen to my opinions. Oh, no. We chummed around together all the time. As I said earlier, Danny pretty much only talked when he had something to say, and he put up with listening to all my theories with Job-like patience. But that didn't mean he agreed with everything – or even with most of what – I was saying. And I have always tended to be easily carried away by the sound of my own voice. We were walking down the street one afternoon while I was treating him to some socio-political idea of mine. In the middle of it he looked down at me – Danny was pretty tall and I've always been kind of short – and interrupted the lecture. "You know what your problem is?" he said bluntly. "You're book-smart and life-dumb."

I was startled for a second, then I broke out in a big grin. Book-smart and life-dumb. I thought that was one of the most profound things I'd ever heard. Books can tell you theories, but theories by themselves don't do anything unless they're put into practice. And that meant making them practical. You can't be practical and life-dumb at the same time because eventually *everything* always comes back to people and what theories mean in terms of their actual real lives. I was going to have to work on that life-dumb part. Over the years, I've found out a lot of people need to work on that part and they don't even know it. It's too bad all of us can't have a Danny for a best friend. □

Outside of school, there weren't really any organized youth things set up to keep youths occupied in

Bellevue. Nevertheless, there was surprisingly little in the way of juvenile delinquency in Bellevue. You'd think a tough town like that would have had a lot more. Certainly there were plenty of adults who seemed to think there had to be *some* kind of nefarious deeds going on. After all, this was a time when the news was full of items about exploding drug usage by young people, where kids were defying barbershop convention and letting their hair grow down over their ears – sometimes quite a bit down – and when kids one and all were generally suspected of being rebellious and part of the 'turn on, tune in, drop out' movement (either actually or any second now).

Hair length seemed to agitate the adults more than anything else. Despite the urban legend my generation invented, I never heard any adult refer to any of us as a "long-haired hippy freak." They just used the term "long-haired hippy," inevitably accompanied by the sneering insult, "Is that a boy or a girl?" The word 'freak' was a romanticism kids added. In actual fact, there wasn't anybody in all of Jackson County, not even Gary the Outlaw, who could legitimately be called a hippy with the possible exception of Norval, one of my Marquette friends. But even in Norval's case there wasn't anything remotely political or socio-revolutionary about him. All he wanted was for other people to mind their own business and let him mind his. He was an introverted farm kid who lived near Spragueville, extremely smart, and he just happened to be the only kid in Bellevue capable of growing a full, thick, mountain-man-style beard while still in high school. Next to his, anybody else's beard was a sad, pathetic thing. I couldn't grow even a trace of one. Norval ended up going to Iowa State, graduating with distinction in electrical engineering, and taking a job with the Naval Weapons Laboratory in China Lake.

As for drugs, I'm pretty sure there were some around but I also think 90% or more of all drug talk that went around was empty hot air. I do know some kids who experienced the psychedelic wonders of oregano. Most of them never did get wise to what it was they were really smoking. Since I wasn't an athlete any more, I'd taken up smoking cigarettes every now and again. Actual cigarettes I found a bit hard to come by on our local black market, but pouch tobacco wasn't too hard to obtain and anybody could buy cigarette paper. I obtained a little cigarette-making gizmo and mostly rolled my own cigarettes. I'm sure some of the kids thought it was pot and I was mischievous enough to let them think what they wanted. Of course, that was also one of the reasons Steve had seen fit to warn me of certain health hazards attaching to my little habit that could potentially involve me being turned into pulp product.

There was a lot of heat and very little light cast by all the controversy that went around involving drugs. I was curious what the real story was, so I did a little library research on the matter. The anti-drug material put out by the school was one source. I also read some other books on the subject, including *LSD*, *The Problem-Solving Psychedelic* and *Narcotics: Nature's Dangerous Gifts*. The conclusions I reached were: (1) Pot was about on par with alcohol; it wasn't until later in college when I met some people who abused pot that I learned if you smoke too much of it, you get stupid; I got to watch that happen to a couple of people; (2) heroin and cocaine were too dangerous to mess with because they were so incredibly addictive; no high was worth becoming a slave to a drug; (3) mescaline and LSD were too dangerous to screw around with because sometimes they damaged your brain very badly; I liked my brain and wanted to keep it in good working order.

The only thing I wasn't sure about was amphetamine. Dad was in the process of quitting smoking right at that time, and to keep himself from over-eating – always an occupational hazard in a bakery – he was taking amphetamine-based diet pills. I sneaked half a dozen of these and tried them for myself. At first, no effect. A little later, they kicked in full force. I was wide awake, hyper, and talking non-stop for the next twenty-four hours. Then, just as abruptly, they wore off in the middle of a Sunday afternoon and sleep came crashing down on me right on the park bench where I was sitting. After I woke up I thought, sarcastically, *My, wasn't that fun?* I figured I was hyper enough and talkative enough in my natural state; I sure didn't find anything attractive in getting boosted into peg-the-dial overdrive in that department. So 'uppers' were out, too. My drug of choice remained cold beer.

Ricky and I did do some whiskey one time. I was able to procure two fifths of some fairly cheap rot-

gut, figuring there were two of us, and we mixed it with coca cola. I wouldn't advise doing this. We hadn't even gotten through the first bottle before I was so blotto I could barely sit in a chair down at the pizza place. Ricky had had enough by then, too. Steve was down there at the pizza place and greatly enjoying the show I was putting on. He asked me if I had any of that whiskey left and I happily cried, "Shhure! Wait right here!" I stumbled out to the truck, fetched the remaining bottle, and weaved right back into the pizza place waving it like a flag. Steve's eyes got as big around as saucers; Iowa was still a 'twenty-one' state at that time and here I was waving that whiskey bottle around for all the world to see. He grabbed the bottle, put it under his coat, and hastily left the establishment.

The remaining details of that evening somehow escape me, but I do remember being helped home by Ricky and Deb, one of my fellow seniors. Something was wrong with my feet. They just wanted to drag behind me on the sidewalk. I had the worst hangover in history for the next *three days*, which I had to carefully conceal from Mom and Dad. They were both dead set against drinking. To this day just the smell of whiskey makes me feel like my body is turning inside out. That's its little way of saying, *Hey, we're not doing THAT again are we?* Nope. We're not. Never ever.

What we did most often to pass the time in Bellevue was play basketball. One-on-one, two-on-two, whatever we could put together on any given day or evening. There were outside basketball courts in several different places in town inside of easy walking distance from anywhere. It could get a little tricky getting up a game when the snows began to fall in winter. However, then Father Knipper would usually let us into the gym at St. Joe's and we'd just move the game inside. If the padre's idea was to keep us off the street and out of mischief, it worked. Bellevue was one basketball-crazy town. Probably because we didn't have a football team. □

Once I had my license back, Dad came to me with a deal. During the Great Depression one of the things he and his brothers had done was carry bakery goods to the several small little towns around Maquoketa. They equipped a truck with a musical horn that the driver could play using buttons mounted on the steering column. The truck would drive slowly down the street playing that horn and the housewives would come right out of their houses and stand at the curb to buy bakery goods. It had worked in the thirties, and Dad figured it still would. That was why he bought and refitted my truck.

The deal he offered me was this. I could get off bakery detail at ten on Saturday mornings, load up that truck, and take it over to the towns whose residents tended to take their bakery business to Maquoketa. After I'd covered the costs of the bakery goods, all the profits would be mine on the condition that I used them to help pay for college. Dad had sort of become resigned to the fact I was determined to go rather than stay around to run the bakery. It sounded to me like a good deal, so I agreed.

Turned out it was a great deal. I learned to play several three-note songs on the truck's horn, and things happened just the way Dad said they would. Occasionally someone who worked nights would complain about my horn playing a little, but they never swore out any complaints with the police. In pretty quick order I'd figured out good routes and times and pretty much always managed to sell everything I'd loaded on the truck. There were two regular calls I'd always be sure to make. One was a little tavern out at the edge of Preston. It was run by an earthy woman in her mid-thirties or so. I'd pull into the parking lot and stick my head in the door to let her know I was there. She'd come out to the truck with me, put her arm around my waist, and snuggle up while she was choosing her bakery goods. I don't think she was flirting so much as trying to embarrass the teenager but I didn't embarrass so easy. Not that way at least. After awhile it sort of became a game with us. But she did get me thinking.

My other regular stop was a house where the woman had a habit of waving to me to come up to the door to take her order. I didn't mind doing that either. The reason she wouldn't come down to the curb was because she was invariably dressed in a pretty revealing little negligee. Hey, if she didn't mind, I sure didn't. A grandma she wasn't. She never did invite me in for a lemonade, though.

I kind of figured it was a good idea not to say very much about my customers back in Bellevue. □



The high school senior (spring 1971, age 17)

As spring of '71 arrived I started receiving all kinds of different brochures from a bunch of different colleges. I'd look them over even though I'd already made up my mind to go to Iowa State. For one thing, I had it straight from Bill that ISU was the place to go for electrical engineering. For another, these other colleges were out of state and there was simply no way I could afford the extra tuition they charged out of state students. There was one brochure I remember in particular, though. It was from some tiny liberal arts college in southern California and their catalog was laid out in psychedelic artwork. Their pitch wasn't too inspiring, though. Boiled down to the essentials, it basically said, 'We're just looking for bodies to fill the seats.' I couldn't imagine anybody being attracted by that pitch, but I was wrong. One of my friends from Marquette thought they were so weird they were cool and he did decide to go there. I'm sure old Father Schmidt over at Marquette must have had an attack of indigestion when he heard about that decision.

I didn't know Father Schmidt all that well. Melody knew him a lot better than I did. Just as Danny and Ricky were my friends, Melody's best pal was their little sister Doris. I have a hunch Doris might have been a more regular Catholic than her brothers were, and maybe that's how Melody came to know Father Schmidt. Even though Melody had already been baptized into Mom's church, she eventually converted and became a Catholic. But while I didn't really know Father Schmidt, he knew me. That didn't surprise me all that much. I was 'the baker's boy' and everybody in town seemed to know me. But I came to find out from Melody a number of years later that Father Schmidt was always worrying that I wasn't getting a good enough education at P.S. 1. It was mighty nice of him to care. I'm not even Catholic. Now, if Marquette had had a football team . . .

My Marquette pal who ended up going to the psychedelic college and I were over at Marquette a couple of days after graduation. There was something he needed to get from his locker there. As we were walking down the deserted hallway a voice from the briny deep issued from Father Schmidt's office: *Wells, get in here.*

Curious, I stepped inside his door and gave him a friendly, "Hi, Padre. How're you doing?" He gave me what passes as a friendly look from a priest, leaned back in his chair, and growled, "What are you going to be doing with yourself now?" I told him I was going to Iowa State to study electrical engineering. He frowned. Senior priests really know how to frown, too. He looked me straight in the eye and said, "Do you know what you're getting into?" I was a bit taken aback, but I replied that I thought I did. He snorted and waved me out of his office.

I said to my friend, "I wonder what that was about?" He just laughed. About six months later I thought maybe I had a pretty good idea about what Father Schmidt was probably getting at. □

My senior year seemed to pass with lightning speed. My junior year had seemed to last forever, and I'd expected my last year of high school to do the same. I guess it is true that time flies when you're having fun. Almost before I knew it, it was graduation time and there I was getting my high school diploma. I'd been accepted at Iowa State and would be starting there at the end of August. Only one last Bellevue summer remained, and I'd be spending most of that working and trying to scrape up enough money to pay for that first year of college.

For quite some time, one of the anti-war slogans had been 'Old enough to fight, old enough to vote.' I was a hundred percent in favor of that one. I was plain tired of not having any rights at all under the Constitution. On March 23rd Congress had passed the twenty-sixth amendment: *The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.* The amendment was ratified on July 1, 1971 – just three days before Independence Day. Suddenly there was a huge new block of voters and come September I'd be one of them. I'd also be registering for the draft. And there was an election coming up in 1972. Maybe

at last something could be done to put an end to the war in Vietnam.

An unexpected benefit of the twenty-sixth amendment was the lowering of the drinking age by a number of states. Iowa changed its law by lowering the legal drinking age from twenty-one to nineteen. Being seventeen, I was going to have to wait awhile longer to benefit from that. On the other hand, it happened there was a very strange fringe benefit from having gone to P.S. 1. Most people in town seemed to take it as a matter of course that most of the graduating seniors had taken a little longer than normal to make it through school – especially those of us ‘south side’ seniors. Consequently, just about every tavern in town took it for granted I must already be nineteen because I had just graduated. They didn’t even bother to ask me for ID. That made those ten cent drafts of beer, consumed while sitting right on a bar stool in the tavern, taste extra good. And it beat black market prices to boot. □



The fraternity pledge (fall, 1971)

I had started a growth spurt about midway through my senior year and so by the time I arrived in Ames, IA, to begin college I was almost five feet nine inches in height and weighed in at one hundred fifty-five pounds. I had also started wearing contact lenses and shaving every couple of days. Since it was unthinkable, for a number of reasons, to take my truck with me to college, I scraped up three hundred dollars and was now driving a used 1966 Buick LeSabre. The bakery truck would stay a bakery truck. In addition to being large enough to hold everything I owned, my ‘new’ Buick was also able to thumb its nose at speed limit signs so it only took just a tad more than three hours to drive from Bellevue to Ames, rather than the four-plus hours it would have taken the truck.

Bill was still with IBM and had been promoted to their office in Des Moines. He had gotten married when I was sixteen and since Des Moines is only thirty miles south of Ames I came to visit him and my new sister-in-law, Maryann, when I came out for a summer orientation trip to Iowa State. Bill took one look at my wardrobe and pronounced it unsuitable for a college man. He insisted on hauling me down to a clothing store and supervised my re-outfitting. I protested that I couldn’t afford it, but he waved that aside by simply paying for everything himself. No brother of his was going to appear at college looking like a Bellevue river rat. I began to get the idea school at the college level wasn’t going to be much like high school.

One of the main purposes in my trip to Ames was to decide on a place to live. Bill had been a member of a fraternity, Sigma Nu, when he was in college and he sold me on the idea that belonging to a fraternity was infinitely superior to all other forms of college life. So when I went up to Ames and succeeded in being accepted as a pledge at the Sigma Nu chapter there, he was absolutely delighted. I have no doubt he credited my sartorial renovation as playing the central role in this success.

The fact that Bill was a member of Sigma Nu was one factor in my choice to pledge that fraternity, but it wasn’t the only factor. A more important factor was that the ISU chapter’s members were mostly science and engineering students and the guys there had emphasized to me how big an advantage that was going to be for me. Then as now, electrical engineering was loaded to the gills with tough science, math, and engineering courses, and in the Sigma Nu house I would find plenty of older guys who had already been through the same courses I would be taking and who could tutor me when necessary. Another factor, not quite as important but a factor nonetheless, was the location of the Sigma Nu house. It was the one and only fraternity house on what was known as ‘sorority circle.’ Back when the house was first built at the start of the twentieth century, the original guys had owned all the land around the house and over the years had sold off lots exclusively to sororities. Any outfit that demonstrated that kind of sage planning for the future had my complete respect.

Of course, it would not have been possible for me to join a fraternity if the cost had not been more or less equal to the cost of living in a dormitory. Iowa State prided itself on having one of the strongest

dormitory systems in the country and the fraternities and sororities had to compete with the various dorm houses economically. Snob factor just didn't play any important role in this. Not for most of us, anyway. Room and board for living in the frat came to just under \$1000 per year and tuition at ISU was another \$600 per year. Then came the cost of textbooks, which averaged about \$20 each in the campus bookstore. For my freshman year that added up to about another \$200. Total damage: \$1800 per year. It doesn't sound like much by today's standards, but in 1971-72 that was a lot. It was going to take every penny I had saved up for college just to pay for that first year. Naturally, I did go and apply for financial aid at the University's financial aid office, but they told me my family wasn't poor enough to qualify. Nixon and his Republicans had taken dead aim at the Great Society's education programs. They didn't have the votes in the Democrat-controlled Congress to do away with them entirely, but they would have if they could have. They still had an illegal and immoral war to pay for and college students weren't their favorite people just then. Or now, for that matter. It's easier to rule an uneducated citizenry.

There were nine of us in my original pledge class. A fraternity has two classes of citizens. The active members or 'actives' are the full-fledged members. The pledges are the probationary not-members-yet class. Basically, we were the serfs. One of the guys in my pledge class was a holdover from the previous year. He was still a pledge because his grades hadn't been high enough the year before. That was my first clue that I was going to have to at least start paying attention to what my own grades were. ISU was on the quarter system – that is, the school year was divided into three 'quarters' rather than two semesters – and John had been able to get his grades up high enough the previous spring to become an active during fall quarter of '71. That was why, although he was a great guy, we didn't really count him as one of the members of 'our' pledge class. Another guy, Jerry, was majoring in mechanical engineering because he thought 'mechanical engineering' meant 'auto mechanics.' I don't know what kind of chimpanzee he must have had for a high school guidance counselor. Not too surprisingly, he didn't make it through the first quarter of school and dropped out of college.

That left seven of us. I didn't realize it when we started out, but my six fellow pledges were to become my brothers in a very real sense and my dearest friends in life. In all the years since, only one other guy has joined their ranks as my brother and best friend. My new brothers were and are: Glen Wazny, a civil engineering major from Des Moines; Al Welch, a zoology major from the little Iowa town of Jefferson; Jerry Pribyl, a pre-veterinary medicine major from Omaha; Scott Morrison, an electrical engineering major from Des Moines, who would eventually switch majors and get degrees in architecture and civil engineering; Steve McCulloch, a landscape architecture major from Eden Prairie, Minnesota; and Rick Lyons, an industrial engineering major from Libertyville, Illinois. We began our freshman year as total strangers; we ended it as brothers for life. These six plus Bill plus Lyle plus one more guy we'll talk about later are the only people in my life who occupy that place in my heart. Of course, *all* the members of a house are one's fraternity brothers; 'brother' is what the Latin word *frater* means. They, too, become very special friends, just as your teammates on the football team do. But these six are extra special to me.

The Sigma Nu house turned out to be neither animal house nor study grind house. In a peculiar way, it was both and it was neither. Iowa State's full name is Iowa State University of Science & Technology, and most of the guys in the house were studying in the most difficult fields ISU had to offer. If we had had an official motto, it would have been *Work hard, play hard*. For most days of the week, the guys cracked the books hard and in the hallways of the house there would hang a tomb-like silence only occasionally disturbed by some raucous outbreak of horseplay. Of course, it takes some freshmen awhile to adjust to this regimen; it didn't take anyone longer than it took me to make the adjustment. But the actives had their ways of disciplining pledges who didn't quite get it yet and by the end of the first two quarters I wasn't much of a goof-off anymore. Learning *how* to be a serious student took me just a little bit longer and required guidance from two important people, one a great teacher and the other a great leader and motivator who was a sophomore studying civil engineering. His name is Don Munksgaard.

That was the 'work hard' part of the fraternity's character. The 'play hard' part kicked in as soon as classes were done on Friday and roared with full youthful red-blooded energy and passion into the wee

hours of Sunday morning. By the time it ended, the tensions and stresses of the week would be burned away and we were ready to be students again. The rest of the day on Sunday was usually given over to recovery, and right after supper ('dinner') Sunday evening the 'work hard' cycle started all over again.

For pledges the 'play hard' part did not begin on Friday – or at least was not supposed to begin – until we had attended to the cleaning of the fraternity house. The house had four floors: basement, main, second, and third. The basement held the kitchen, chapter room/dining room, furnace room, and a little room that had once served as the cook's room but was unassigned to anything the year I joined. We would later convert that room into a lounge. The main floor had a large ante way, living room, TV room, a corridor where the mail boxes and phone desk were, a guest toilet, and another private room that had once served as the House Mother's room but was now used by our cook. The second and third floors were where the study rooms were located. These floors each also had a bathroom with toilets, sinks and showers. The second floor was where the sleeping porch was located. The study rooms held three or four people, usually two actives and one pledge. They contained desks and a closet but no beds.

We had a number of pledge duties we had to carry out on a rotating basis all week, but Friday night was when we all turned to and did the cleaning. The individual study rooms were the responsibility of their occupants, but all the common areas – kitchen, dining room, main floor, second and third floor hallways and bathrooms – were mopped, scrubbed, and cleaned weekly by the pledge class, nominally under the supervision of a house officer known as the Pledge Marshal. In reality, one of the pledges was assigned to act as 'pledge house manager' and was made responsible for seeing to it this was done. For reasons I no longer remember – probably because no one really wanted the job – my new pledge brothers elected me to act as pledge house manager. It might sound impressive, but all it really meant was if any active was displeased about anything I was the one he yelled at about it. The pledge system worked by peer pressure and, on the infrequent occasions when that didn't work, by disciplinary punishments meted out by the actives through the Pledge Marshal.

Once the Friday night house cleaning was done, we were free to do whatever we felt like. In point of theory it really only took a couple of hours for the group of us to clean the entire house, but in point of fact we usually did a lot of goofing around that stretched things out a lot longer than this, sometimes even late into the night. We would nominally divide up the different cleaning tasks among ourselves; after the first few weeks different guys developed preferences for different jobs. But regardless of who was assigned to do what, the pledge class as a whole was held responsible for the job as a whole. Because none of us were really all that thrilled to be mop jockeys, horseplay could break out at any time. One night I remember the basement crew instigated a long, noisy, boisterous water fight. Everybody in the house could hear it, but I wasn't paying all that much attention to it since I was cleaning the main floor toilet at the time. As far as I was concerned, if my three brothers downstairs wanted to screw around all night, that was fine so long as eventually the job got done. Mop water was mop water no matter how it got on the floor.

Unfortunately, the senior who was serving as vice president of the chapter – officially that office was known as the Lieutenant Commander or LC – did not share my lack of concern about the rowdy uproar emanating from the basement. I guess he thought mopping floors and cleaning sinks should be done with more dignity and decorum, or at least considerably more quietly. Whatever his reason, he did what actives usually did in cases like this: He came downstairs, yelled at me about it, and ordered me to go put a stop to it. Then he left for his date.

I reluctantly went down the stairs into the basement. There were three of the guys, happy as larks and soaking wet from head to foot, standing in the very soggy kitchen. They stopped screwing around as I entered. "I'm sorry to have to do this," I said, "but Carl said you guys have to stop messing around and get on with the job."

Jerry snuck up on me from behind and dumped a mop bucket full of water over my head. I turned and starting chasing him around and around the basement, with him screaming with laughter as he ran. The

water fight erupted all over again. Now there were four of us screwing around down there. The job got done eventually.

During the week we had different small jobs to do. None of them took all that much time because we had studies to attend to as well. One of them was kitchen/waiter duty. The whole house ate in the big basement dining room, which also served for chapter meetings and for parties with sorority guests. The guys on waiter duty did what waiters do. They set up and removed the tables, set out the plates and silverware, brought out the food, and fetched whatever somebody might request in the way of beverages, more bread, etc. They helped our cook, Millie, in the kitchen and saw to the cleanup after the meals. This all happened twice a day, at noon and at five o'clock. Breakfast was self-service. One of the favorite little tricks the guys would play was 'run the waiter.' One guy would ask for something – say a glass of water – and the waiter would bring it. As soon as he did, another guy would ask for something else. When that came, another would ask for something else. You could keep a pledge running back and forth to and from the kitchen the whole time that way.

Another regular job was phone duty. All the study rooms had telephones with five lines you selected with push buttons. However, none of the study room phones had bells in them; it was too noisy and distracted people from studying. The one phone in the house that had a bell was located in a hallway on the main floor. Whoever had phone duty would sit at a little table by that phone and answer it when it rang. He'd find out who the call was for, put the caller on hold, and bong whoever the call was for. The house had a bong system and everybody had their own bong number – a kind of Morse code. If you heard your number being binged, you knew you had a phone call and you'd pick it up. Phone duty ran from about six to ten in the evenings, Sunday through Thursday. The pledge on phone duty would take his books with him and study at that little table in between phone calls. Phone duty rotated and nobody had to do it more than once a week. Friday and Saturday there was nobody on phone duty and whoever saw or heard the phone ringing was supposed to answer it. The whole idea of this system was to let everybody else concentrate on their studies.

The job everybody hated the most was call boy duty. All the beds in the frat were located in the big sleeping porch on the second floor. This was basically just one big room crammed with bunk beds from one end to the other. Because there was some sort of state code that said there had to be so much volume of air per person in a room, and because so many guys slept in that one room, the only way to meet the code was to open all the windows in the sleeping porch. That way you had all the air on earth. It also meant there were no heating ducts or radiators in the sleeping porch and it would get mighty cold in there in the winter time. The answer to that problem was electric blankets and plenty of covers. Absolutely no alarm clocks were allowed in the sleeping porch.

Because no one could use an alarm clock in there another way had to be found to wake people up in the early hours of the morning in time for early classes. That's where the call boy came in. Every night Sunday through Thursday, one of the pledges had to sleep on the floor in his study room with an alarm clock. It was his job to get up before six, go check a signup sheet hanging in the second floor head, and wake up whoever had signed up for a wakeup call. Hence, 'call boy.' You could sign up to get a wakeup call at either six, six-thirty, or seven. You could also add the notation OOA beside your name, which stood for 'out on ass.' That notation meant the call boy had to either see your feet hit the floor or else get you to sign the call sheet that you'd changed your mind and weren't going to get up. Otherwise the call boy was expected to use any means necessary to get you out of bed. However, 'any means' meant 'any means that didn't wake everybody else up.' Dousing a sleeper with water was frowned upon because of those electric blankets. If you signed up, you got three calls at five minute intervals, e.g. "Carl, first call, six o'clock; second call, six-five; third call, six-ten, c'mon Carl, OOA. Get up." Pulling a two hundred twenty pound senior out of bed *quietly* presented its challenges for a hundred fifty-five pound call boy.

Naturally, a favorite practical joke was to wait until somebody had gone to bed and then sign his name to the call list for a six o'clock OOA call. The victim never knew who had signed him up, but he always

knew who the call boy was and sometimes took it out on him instead. When I had the call boy duty and if some active had been riding me too much lately, it wasn't beneath me to be the one who'd sign him up for a six o'clock OOA call, especially if his first class wasn't until ten o'clock. Another favorite trick in the winter was to wait until he was snoring and then quietly turn off his electric blanket.

We had joined a fraternity in transition. The seniors were guys who had started college in the fall of '68 and had gone through the center of the storms of protests that swept all college campuses over the years since then. Iowa State could not be remotely compared to Berkeley or Stanford when it came to radicalism, but it had its own vigorous if somewhat polite form of anti-war activism. I noticed there were a lot more seniors pictured on the house photograph than there were living in the house, and we did have a lot of vacancies that year. It hinted at some sort of schism that must have taken place, but nobody ever talked about such a thing. The seniors tended to be more the traditionalists, the slightly larger number of juniors less so, and the still slightly larger number of sophomores even less so. We pledges, of course, had no traditions at all to go by. That was one of the things we were expected to learn about the house before we became actives. In a way you could say the seniors were the disciplinarians of the house, the juniors its conscience and moral compass, and the sophomores its fire and passion. My pledge brothers and I tended to follow the lead of the sophomores, listen to the juniors, and stay out of the way of the seniors as much as possible.

One tradition the movies invariably love to portray about fraternities was utterly absent in our house: There was no hazing of the pledges. Absolutely none. None of that stupid business of having to bend over and receive a whack on the fanny from a pledge paddle and say, "Thank you, sir. May I have another?" Of course the national fraternity had always banned hazing, but I knew that rule had been routinely violated by the chapters for years. Bill had told me a story or two about that from his college days. But at our house there was none of that at all. Discipline, yes; hazing, no. Sigma Nu called itself *The Legion of Honor* and every active in the house believed in the high ideals reflected in the creed of the fraternity:

To believe in the Life of Love . . .
To walk in the Way of Honor . . .
To serve in the Light of Truth.

They saw to it that we learned what these noble words meant and learned to make it our creed too. This doesn't mean the 'play hard' aspect of fraternity life was ice cream and lollipops. Drinking, other violations of the blue laws, and general pranksterism were normal parts of the process of blowing off steam for us, and the younger the brother the more steam there was to blow off. We could get pretty wild and most of the things we did would mortally offend all the bible-thumping scolds out there who are never happy unless they can run everybody's lives and make the rest of us as unhappy as they are. I don't think I'd be too wrong in saying that knowing they *would* be offended added to the fun. What we did really was harmless fun and there was a moral center that limited the extent of our wildness. Each pledge had a 'pledge dad' – an active who took it on himself to serve as a mentor and an example to follow. I had a good one. His name is Kevin Wand, known to everybody as Kip. Kip was also from Jefferson, a junior, and a member of Navy ROTC. He was the kind of guy people used to call an All American Boy and was exactly the kind of role model a wild river rat from Bellevue needed. There were, I admit, plenty of times when I was a strain on Kip's patience, but he never gave up on me. Thanks, Kip. □

The fraternity house was the center of my social world and an island of moral values and social duty at a time when the great national social contract that binds society together was being ripped to shreds by the upheavals rocking America. The other part of my college life was, naturally, college itself.

In comparison to anything I had known before, Iowa State was a huge place. Twenty thousand students went to school there; that was ten Bellevue-sized towns or three and a third Maquoketa-sized towns. The city of Ames had half again as big a population. The ISU campus was as majestic as it was beautiful. Its centerpiece was the large, park-like central campus surrounded on all sides by magnificent buildings, many of which at least looked like they'd been constructed from marble. Especially in the

evening, I found central campus utterly enchanting. At night the play of shadows and light on the buildings gave the entire place an almost faerie-like character. Campus was almost deserted at night and the peace and silence of the place combining with the sight of it stirred very primitive feelings in me. It *felt* like a place of reverence and deep knowledge, a feeling so palpable I imagined I could sense it in the very air around me, as if ghosts of great and wise men of the past lingered there. Central campus didn't feel that way during the day. But at night it was for me another special place. In all the years I lived in Ames, it was a place I could come when I was depressed or worried or simply worn out and feel my burdens and problems slowly evaporate in the peace of the night air. It was a place where I could go when I needed to let God sooth my heart.

My heart needed a lot of soothing that first year. In addition to having to prove my worth to the actives – there was a statement right at the beginning of our pledge manual that said, 'You were *given* your Pledge Button. You must *earn* the Badge of an Initiate' – I found college courses to be unexpectedly difficult. I was used to making an occasional mistake on my school assignments in grade school, junior high, and high school, learning what it was, and fixing it. I wasn't used to making the number of mistakes I was seeing when my college assignments were returned to me. Part of the problem was simply the much higher caliber and content of what was being presented in lecture. Before college, the learning pace was much easier and I could just soak things up as we went. In college subjects I was finding layer upon layer of consequences and deductions not immediately obvious from what was presented in lecture. Another part of the problem, closely related to this one, was that I simply didn't know how to do homework. I'd never had to do homework before in my entire life. I was learning – very painfully – that here I had to. I was learning the hard way what the difference is between being a *pupil* and being a *student*.

I'm pretty sure this was what Father Schmidt was thinking about that day over at Marquette. I have to admit it: I *didn't* know what I was getting into. This was school at the pro level. I'd come to college cocky and arrogant and ready to beat the world. Now I was learning what was meant by the old Greeks when they warned, '*Hubris is followed inexorably and inevitably by Nemesis,*' and by the words of Proverbs 16:18, '*Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.*' It wasn't my grades that worried me; grades still meant nothing to me. It was the fact that I was making *so many* mistakes, which meant there was *so much* I was failing to understand. Probably my academic low point the first quarter came when I got a chemistry assignment back. Written across the top in red ink was a single word: redo. "Red oh?" I thought to myself. "What the heck is 'red oh'?" I went to see the instructor in his office and asked him. He glared at me and said, "*Re-do.*" Oh. I walked back to the frat house humiliated and depressed. I had to pay a long visit to central campus that night.

Calculus was another unexpected and very nasty shock. Not long after I had been admitted to ISU, I received a letter from the math department telling me my math scores on the ACT were so good they wanted me to take a special section of calculus, Math 490P. Well, that sure enough tickled my ego in just the right spot. I was so good they wanted me to start math in a course for college *seniors*. What I didn't know was that '490' was the number ISU gave to *all* experimental courses. Math 490P was a freshman calculus course designed for math majors – people who were going to spend their careers proving theorems. And that's all it was: definition – theorem – proof, over and over and over. There were almost no actual calculus *problems* to work, nothing that would pull things down from the blue sky of abstract thinking and put it on a practical plane where I could *see* what was going on. To me it looked like the proofs in the book were just a series of unrelated tricks of memorization. For the first time in my life, I just couldn't spot the *patterns* in mathematics that I so much relied on. Nobody else had ever taken that course before; it was brand new and there was nobody in the house I could go to with questions. Don told me I was out of my mind to be taking that calculus course. "You should get your dumb butt over into the regular calculus course," he told me. My pledge brother Scott had also started out in that course, but he saw the light – or listened to Don's advice – almost right away and bailed out. Me? I rode that flaming, wingless aircraft all the way, right into the ground: Five credits of C.

If I'm nothing else, I'm stubborn. The next quarter I signed up for the next course in that same

sequence. The first day of class I was sitting in the third row when the instructor came in. He was one of the big name professors in the math department; I had heard that he was world famous. I never saw an odder character in my life. He walked into class down the middle aisle, a vacant smile on his face, his eyes turning from side to side and staring at something on the far away horizon. When he got to the front, he introduced himself, wrote his office number on the blackboard, and said, "Let's review." Those were the last words out of his mouth I understood for the rest of the period. As soon as the class ended, I made a beeline straight to the registrar's office, dropped that class, and got my dumb butt into the second calculus course in the regular sequence. That course, as it happened, wasn't as far along as my 490P course had ended up, so I got to see again for the first time the material we had zoomed through the previous quarter. The big difference was *this time* the course involved working problem after problem after problem. *Now* I could find the patterns again. *Now* it made sense. After that, even the proofs of the theorems started making sense and I could start to find some patterns in them, too. I went back to being an A student in math.

A week later, I happened to see my former math professor cutting across central campus on the way back to his office. He still wore the same vacant smile, his eyes still turned from side to side staring off into the distance at something only he could see. I watched in fascination as he walked right into a tree. He bounced off it, his eyes unglazed just a little, and he said to the tree, "Oh, excuse me." He walked around it, eyes scanning the horizon again, and continued on his way. I just stood there watching him go and shaking my head. At that moment, I was sure glad I wasn't trying to become a mathematician. □

Actives had permanent study rooms in the frat house, but the pledges were moved from room to room each new quarter. The idea was so we could get to know more of the actives better. My first quarter I was assigned to Kip's room. My study habits were non-existent and Kip, bless his heart, rode me with spurs trying to get me to properly study and do my homework. I improved a little, although not nearly enough. One challenge that was almost insurmountable was the dryness of the writing style in which chemistry, economics, and mathematics textbooks are written. The Sahara desert isn't as dry as my books were. Pharmaceutical companies don't make sleeping pills as potent as those books. On top of this, I was habitually staying up until midnight and then having to get up at six the next morning to have time to shower, eat breakfast, and catch my five-days-a-week eight o'clock calculus class. I was constantly short on sleep. We had been seated alphabetically – which meant I was in the back row about fifteen miles from the blackboard and the droning, soft-spoken graduate student with the tiny handwriting who was teaching the class. The room was hot and, inevitably, I couldn't keep my eyes open. Economics class, which was held immediately after lunch, was just as bad. I ended up my first quarter with a 2.61 GPA, out of a possible 4.00. My grades of C in math and the sciences were offset only by an A in English and in labs.

The next quarter I was assigned to the room that belonged to Don Munksgaard and Steve Linduska. Lindy was tall, laid back, and a natural athlete – the ISU coaches had been very disappointed he had decided not to play for the school's team – and, like Kip and Al, hailed from Jefferson. Don was short, slender, and a spirit of fire from eastern Iowa. They made kind of an odd couple, but of course they were best friends. Don, as I mentioned before, was studying civil engineering. He was one of those guys who had to study his rear end off to get B grades and during study hours he'd chain himself to his desk and just attack his assignments. Don succeeds through sheer determination that nothing is going to beat him. Lindy, on the other hand, was one of the few guys in the house who wasn't studying science or engineering. He was a telecommunicative arts major, and Don routinely referred to Lindy's courses as 'Cut and Paste 101, Cut and Paste 102' etc.

On any normal evening during the week, the scene in the room featured Lindy reclined in the easy chair listening to the stereo, which he either turned down to a soft level or silenced altogether by using the headphones out of deference to Don. Don would be hunched over his books, silently and savagely doing battle with the evil spirits of Engineering Mechanics. If Lindy wasn't wearing the headphones, the odds were very good that *I'd* be lounged back in my chair listening to tunes right along with him.

That was the situation one night when I had just gotten up to go off somewhere and screw around. Don looked up from his desk and snapped at me, “Don’t you have a physics test tomorrow?” I did, but I hadn’t told either of them that. I don’t know how Don knew about it. I acknowledged it, and Don said, “Then don’t you think you ought to be studying for it? How do you expect to get a decent grade if you don’t study?”

I made the mistake of waving him off with a laconic, “Grades don’t matter.”

You’d have thought I’d insulted his mother. Don sprang out of his chair like a Jack in the Box, shoved his face right up in mine, and started reading me the riot act. I’m not that big, but Don was even shorter than I am and it gave the whole thing kind of a funny-but-serious air. I didn’t get a word in edgewise. Don threw one question at me after another, answering each one himself before I could even open my mouth. “*What are you studying? Engineering! What do engineers do? They solve problems! What do you think your grades are? They’re an indication of how well you solve problems!*” All the while he was doing this, he was waving his arms like Leo Durocher arguing with an umpire. If anybody else had yelled at me like that I’d have gotten madder than heck. But somehow, with Don, I didn’t feel angry at all. The more I listened, the more sense it all made. I actually started grinning, and the more sense it made the more I had to grin. He was completely, totally right. It hadn’t even occurred to me that when it came time to look for my first engineering job companies were going to go right to my GPA and look at it first thing. I hadn’t had the first clue that low grades would block me from getting into graduate school. I was screwing up badly and, even worse, I hadn’t even known I was screwing up.

Don turned me around completely that night. I began watching how he studied and started trying to copy how he did it. I wouldn’t take a break unless Don took one. I also slowly figured out that, so far as those eight o’clock classes went – it was physics that quarter – I was going to have to find some way to stay awake in them or I was going to flunk out of this place. My solution to that problem turned out to be No Doz, the little caffeine pills they sell over-the-counter. I wouldn’t use them to stay up at night; I used them to stay awake in lecture. Eventually I was able to condition myself to staying awake, regardless of how droning the professor’s voice was, and didn’t need them anymore. It was already too late to salvage much of my grades that quarter; I got a 2.73. But the third quarter I pulled in a 3.67 – which boosted my cumulative GPA all the way up to a 3.02 – and never got less than a 3.43 ever after that. When I graduated, my cumulative GPA was 3.53, high enough to graduate with distinction. I owe that to Don. □

The biggest event on television in the winter of 1972 – so far as eighteen year old males were concerned – was the draft lottery. I gathered along with my pledge brothers on February 2nd to discover what our fates were going to be. Only the other Rick, Rick Lyons, wasn’t personally concerned how it came out. He was in Navy ROTC, intended to stay in ROTC, and go on to service in the Navy after he graduated. As an ROTC cadet, he had a student deferment from the draft. Although all of us were classified as 2S (college student), Nixon had canceled student deferments some time earlier for all college students except those in ROTC, and all the rest of us were eligible to be drafted.

Everybody knew the days of the draft were numbered. The end-the-draft movement was having an effect and in 1971 a senator, Mike Gravel, had filibustered against renewing the draft. What none of us knew yet was just exactly *when* it would end. It was widely expected that this draft lottery was going to be the very last one, and just as widely expected that meant my age group – those born in 1953 – would be the last group who would ever *be* drafted. After all, why would they hold a lottery if they didn’t expect to use it? The most optimistic estimate was they would draft only about the first thirty-five numbers; the most pessimistic was that Nixon would find some way to keep the war and the draft going. Pretty much only the diehard radicals thought the latter, but *none* of us expected the draft to actually end as soon as it eventually did. We were all certain numbers one through thirty-five were goners for sure.

I had done a lot of agonized soul searching about what I was going to do personally if my number was called up. In the summer of ’70, when I was sixteen and before I knew the extent of the army’s My Lai cover-up, before I knew only one man would ever stand trial for it, before I knew even that man would be

pardoned by Nixon, I had found myself caught in between my conviction that the war was wrong and my equal conviction that it was my duty to serve my country in the armed forces. Bill, cousin Brent, and many of my cousins on Mom's side of the family had served, and it seemed right that I should too. I did a lot of soul searching and had tentatively decided that what I should do was enlist first and, if I lived all the way through my service, have the GI Bill help pay for college. But I still wasn't quite sure.

One afternoon while I was chauffeuring Dad from Maquoketa back to Bellevue – this was before I wrecked the car – I decided to discuss the problem with him. “Dad,” I said to him out of the clear blue, “I think I'm going to enlist after I graduate.”

That was as far as I got. I was surprised by the vehemence of his reaction. “*By God, you'll do no such thing!*” he thundered. You see, Dad was conflicted about the war too. He hated the war and thought America had no business fighting in Vietnam or anywhere else in the world. But at the same time he had nothing but hate and contempt for those people who were evading the draft or burning their draft cards. In his eyes, they were traitors to their country. That did *not* mean he wanted his youngest son to volunteer and be sent to Vietnam. If I was drafted, that was one thing. Jumping the gun, so to speak, by volunteering was something else altogether. He had already sweated through the worry that Bill would end up being shipped over there. He wasn't about to go through that a second time. He made me promise I would not voluntarily enlist. Dad was a veteran, had seen first-hand what war was like, and in this matter what he thought carried a lot of weight with me. I promised him I would not volunteer.

Now on February 2nd, 1972, I was waiting along with all the other guys to find out what was going to happen to us. I had made my decision about what I would do if I caught one of the unlucky first thirty-five numbers. If I was drafted, I would go. I would not flee to Canada, as many did. I would not try to hide and wait out the draft by enrolling in ROTC. I thought that would be the same as breaking my promise to Dad. I *couldn't* bring myself to use ROTC just to hide from the draft for up to two years, the amount of time you could belong to it without incurring a military obligation. If I joined, I'd have to go the full distance. And *that* would break my promise to Dad. At the same time, My Lai and the army's failure to punish anyone for that hideous crime and their attempt to cover it up had rendered its leaders, and Nixon, dishonorable and despicable in my eyes. So, I could not flee the draft; but I could also not keep my personal honor *and* participate in waging an immoral war. There was, as I saw it, only one way to keep my honor if I was drafted. I could not fight this war for my country, but I *could* go and die for her. For me Vietnam would be a death sentence. There was no other way out of my moral dilemma.

So I waited with dread and in torturous suspense for them to pull the numbers one by one. When I learned what my number was, I almost jumped out of my skin with relief. One hundred seventy-three. They would have to draft almost half the eighteen-year-olds in the United States before they got to this number, and *nobody* thought the draft could possibly go that high in its waning days. I made a silent prayer of thanks to God in my heart. It wasn't going to be necessary for me to die for my country.

None of my brothers got one of the goner numbers either, and so we were all pretty overjoyed for ourselves and for each other. My friend Norval, on the other hand, wasn't so lucky. Norval was going to school here, too, and living in Friley Hall, which at that time was reported to be the third largest dorm in the United States. His number, if I remember correctly, was seventeen. He and I were both certain he was a goner. Norval was on his way to Vietnam. It was just a matter of time now.

He was despondent over it, and I thought it was the cruelest of ironies. Here was this quiet, gentle soul, this not-quite-hippy who never talked about politics, never marched in protests, never smoked, never drank or did drugs, this peaceful young man who just wanted to live his life for himself and let others do the same, and he was the one who was going to be made to go.

“I don't know what to do, Rick,” he told me sadly. He had a decision to make, and he was in misery over it. “Do you think I should go to Canada? I don't know what to do.”

No one can impose a duty or an obligation on another person. It has to come from inside, from your

own heart, or it isn't a duty and it isn't an obligation. *You* have to take it on *of your own free will* or it isn't a moral choice. No preacher, no book, no parent, no person can force a moral choice on another person. Society can make certain actions crimes; society can punish its criminals. But society cannot dictate what morality is to any single person. If you don't know in your own heart something is right or wrong, if you don't *feel* the rightness or wrongness in that inner place where God will touch you if you let Him, nobody else can make it right or wrong for you. Norval was face to face with making the most awful decision of his life. I thought I knew exactly how he was feeling. I had had to make *my* choice and it had been terrible and painful and frightening. *I* wasn't going to judge his choice. I might agree it was the right thing, or I might disagree with his choice, but I wasn't going to pass moral judgment on his choice whatever it turned out to be. Something else John Stuart Mill had written came to my mind as we talked:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

I could not make Norval's choice for him, but he had a right to know what his options might be. He was asking for my advice as a friend, and I knew something he did not. "You could get a draft deferment, Norval," I told him. He looked at me with a flicker of anger, thinking I was teasing him. "Very funny," he shot back. "Nixon canceled all the deferments."

"All but one," I said. "ROTC. If you're in ROTC, you're deferred and you don't have an obligation to go into the army for the first two years. By then the draft will probably be gone." He looked very thoughtful after I said this, and some of the hopelessness left his eyes.

A few days later I was walking along the main street on campus heading back to the frat house when I saw a diminutive Army ROTC cadet walking toward me. I didn't pay any attention to him, but just as we met up I heard a familiar voice say, "Hi, Rick."

I stopped in my tracks and stared at him. "Norval?" I couldn't recognize him at all. His long, shoulder-length hair was gone, replaced by a neat short crop. The mountain man's beard was gone; only a trim little mustache was left. I'd never seen Norval's face clean-shaven before. In his new uniform he looked just like one of those little British army majors you see in the movies. And he was smiling. The gloom, desperation and despair were gone. Over the next year when we'd see each other now and then, he'd often complain about all the 'Mickey Mouse' ROTC put him through, but he stayed in it until the draft ended in 1973. Then he went back to being Norval again. He graduated with distinction in electrical engineering the same year I did and ended up serving our country by working at China Lake as a civilian.

There are two other guys I want to mention in connection with the draft. I never actually knew their names. They were in several of the same classes I was, and I'd often see them together on campus. They must have been close friends because where I'd see one of them I'd also see the other. They always sat next to each other in class and I never heard either of them speak very much except to each other. I thought of them as 'Frick' and 'Frack' just to keep them straight in my own mind. On February 2nd, Frick's draft number came up one, Frack's came up two. They both disappeared from campus on the same day less than about a week later and I never saw or heard about them again. I assumed they'd fled to Canada, and I didn't judge them for that choice either. The draft ended in 1973 without calling up a single one of us born in 1953. It turned out all that worry and heartache had been for nothing. □

We didn't talk about the war inside the frat house, and the house took no active part either against it or supporting it. We couldn't. Some of the guys were in ROTC and planned on serving our country as officers after graduation. Others of us, like me, thought it was an immoral war and our country was in the wrong for being part of it. Still others had even more radical leanings, although no one actually went so far as to *be* a radical. Nobody among us had started the war, nobody among us could stop the war, nobody among us would have been anything but elated if the war did stop. Arguing about it among ourselves would serve no purpose whatsoever because there was no way whatsoever we could all be united under one opinion except for all of us wishing it would end.

There *was* a large and vocal anti-war movement on campus and some people in it did think of themselves as radicals and anti-establishment. Next to Berkeley, or even Iowa City, it was a pretty peaceful and tame anti-war movement. No sit-ins. No public draft card burnings. No riots. One day in the spring of '72 I was coming out of the gym after PE and found the four lane road between the gym and the Navy ROTC building packed with hundreds and hundreds of protesters. I don't remember exactly what Nixon had done to set us off; he did so many things that outraged us it would be impossible to remember what this one was all about. But Navy ROTC was the strongest and most visible ROTC program on campus and whenever Nixon stirred anything up, Navy ROTC was always the first to hear about it. People were shoulder to shoulder in the street, some were waving signs, others trying to get a chant going amidst the incomprehensible angry rumble of the crowd. I quietly found an available spot and joined the crowd, ready to do my part in whatever it was we were doing. I had a voice and intended to use it.

The Navy ROTC commander came out of his building. He was wearing his dress whites and carrying a box in one hand and a megaphone in the other. He set his box down and stood on it where we all could see him, a lone, unarmed figure facing a passionate multitude. He lifted the megaphone to his lips and his amplified voice carried across the campus: "What do you want?"

The angry crowd responded in a single primal roar: "STOP THE WAAAAAAAAR!"

He waited until the echoes died down, then raised his megaphone again. "Who? ME?"

The crowd went dead silent. People began looking at each other, and the next thing I knew the crowd just started melting away. It was the greatest example of leadership psychology I've ever seen. □

It took our pledge class what seemed to us to be an unusually long time to satisfy the actives enough for them to concede we could stay and be initiated into full-fledged membership in the fraternity. Our general assumption was initiation should take place some time during the winter quarter. The actives did not share this opinion. My own belief is there was a very large gulf between the traditional views and values of the seniors and the more, shall we say, wild west values of the pledge class. Perhaps we didn't quite exhibit the same kind of freshman spirit classes in the past had exhibited, although it's hard for me to envision the sophomores in the house as having been all that different from us.

In any case, winter quarter in Ames is a trying time for everyone. In the first place, it's very cold and very snowy – or at least was in those days. After wearing contact lenses for about a year, I finally gave them up and returned to wearing glasses after I got tired of having my contacts fog over right in my eyes when I stepped out into the freezing winter blast on route to eight o'clock physics class. The physics building was about a mile and a half away from the house, and at times it was a regular Antarctic expedition just getting there. The journey was made a bit more challenging still by the ice polishers.

The university used these little gizmos that were basically riding lawn mowers with a big circular plate covered with bristles under it in place of lawn mower blades. Their purpose was to brush the thick snow off all the various campus sidewalks. Unfortunately, there was usually ice beneath the snow and those bristles would polish it to a fine slippery sheen. Hence their popular name: ice polishers. It was an unusual winter morning indeed when I wouldn't see at least one person's feet shoot out from under him and down he'd crash, books, pencils, and everything else flying in all directions. Students didn't have back packs yet in those days and we carried everything under one arm.

They would also use the ice polishers to remove the snow from Lake Laverne, a little man-made lake that sat between Friley Hall and the Student Union Building. If anyone was inclined to doubt the ice polishers were well named, all they had to do was watch them preparing Lake Laverne so students could ice skate on it and no doubt at all would remain. In very early spring of '72, one of the ice polishers was out there doing its thing when the ice broke, dropping half the ice polisher into the water. There was always a huge crowd of students coming and going from Friley, and when the ice polisher broke through there was a resounding cheer that probably could have been heard in downtown Ames.

The normal winter day in Ames was gray, cloudy and gloomy. In midwinter it would often get down to twenty degrees below zero and the brisk winds that swept over Ames would often contribute a wind chill factor that could take it down as far as seventy below. In short, winter in Ames was generally awful and everyone – pledges, actives, dormies (students who lived in the dorms), professors – spent a lot of the winter quarter in very bad moods. Most dropouts at ISU seemed to happen during winter quarter.

At one point that winter things degenerated to the point where tempers flared and the entire pledge class came within an inch of walking out *en masse* with the idea of forming our own living group. I would say there was plenty of blame to go around for the incident that sparked our near rebellion. It involved a bad old tradition called a ‘pledge skip’ that got out of control and culminated in the only incident of hazing that ever happened as long as I was living in the house. Al and Jerry were the leaders of our revolt – Al had been the victim of the hazing – and only some very skilled mediation by Don and a couple other guys stopped us from quitting the house. If I remember correctly, the ‘pledge skip’ tradition ended that winter, a long overdue casualty of changing times. Part of the reason for having the distinction between pledges and actives is that overcoming shared hardships promotes the development of strong bonds of friendship among the members of the pledge class. I think the actives were surprised that winter by how strong the bonds that developed in our pledge class had become in such a short period of time. As we looked at it, hazing one of us was the same as hazing all of us, and after all the high talk from the actives about hazing having no place in *our* chapter, just one incident of hypocrisy coming in the middle of the crummy winter was enough to ignite the fuse of insurrection in all of us.

It’s a simple principle, really: Don’t make promises casually and never break the ones you do make. Breach of faith is always the most deadly dissolver of the ties that bind any society together.

Whether the winter rebellion had anything to do with our not being initiated that quarter – and I think it did – we began the spring pledges still. There was some grumbling about that in our ranks, but all such grumbling ceased abruptly in the predawn hours of a Monday in early spring when we were all suddenly roused out of our bunks and herded down into the basement, actives shouting orders at us from all sides. Hell Week had begun.

Hell Week is another old fraternity tradition. Unlike the ‘pledge skip’ though, I think it is one of the finest old traditions for reasons I’ll try to make clear. We all knew what was happening immediately; we’d seen John go through it earlier. As they lined us up downstairs, all of us found it nearly impossible to keep big delighted grins from breaking out on our faces, even though every time one of us did grin there were three actives in his face yelling harshly to ‘wipe off that grin!’

Hell Week is called that because its main characteristic is very, very little sleep. There is a purpose for this. By the time you get to the end of the week, you’re in such a high state of exhaustion that the actual initiation rituals and ceremony penetrates right down to your soul. It’s a transformation. You don’t really join your fraternity; you *become* your fraternity and the men in it become as family to you. That’s something no one can really understand until he actually goes through the experience. Combat veterans, it is said, come to feel the same way about the men in their unit and for a pretty similar psychological reason. Lao Tzu could have been describing this transformation process when he wrote,

*Yield and overcome;
Bend and be straight;
Empty and be full;
Wear out and be new.*

This is the gift the tradition gives you.

They ran us around until we had to go to class, and then off to class we went. Going to class was required, even though after a day or so very little of what went on there could penetrate our sleepy minds. Actives roamed the campus, armed with our class schedules, to make sure we didn’t cut. They also roamed the library and other well-known spots to make sure we didn’t sneak off to catch some sleep. Of

course, all of us did manage to sneak in little cat naps whenever and wherever we could.

After classes they ran us around again all night long. Most of that week is a thick fog to me, but not the rituals and ceremony at its conclusion. I will not describe them here; they are very, very special and, to put it bluntly, not for the uninitiated. They are to be lived and experienced, not described; they are to be felt, not explained. The closest I can come to sharing the experience is to quote Lao Tzu again:

*Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
In the silence and the void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion,
Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
I do not know its name.
Call it The Way.
For lack of a better word, I call it great.*

At the end of the ceremony we were initiates, active members of the fraternity. They packed us off to get some sleep and each of us just face planted in our bunks. Several hours later, and greatly refreshed, we went to the celebration party our brothers threw for us, glorying in the day before again having to crash and get some more sleep. It was the highlight of our freshman year. □

Our new status as actives wasn't the only change that took place in spring '72. Spring is when the new house officers take office and the elections had ushered a primal force of nature into our house presidency (officially called the Eminent Commander or EC). His name is G. Alan "Large Al" Peterson.

Everything about Large Al is larger than life – that's why we nicknamed him Large. You've heard of the 'Big Man On Campus'? Forget about it. We had the Large Man On Campus. If you don't think leadership makes all the difference there is, you've just never met anyone like Large Al.

The previous officers had been relatively quiet, placid guys who were content to more or less let things take their course. If the number of unoccupied desks in the study rooms of the house is any indicator, the frat had been languishing on their watch. Quiet, placid, and laid back were unknown adjectives to Large. He was the volcano in a corn field, combining the won't-take-no-for-an-answer drive of the Lyndon Johnson of the pre-war Great Society days with the get-the-country-moving-again inspirational qualities of President Kennedy. He came into office determined to take us in a new direction, and was famous for meeting any hint or inclination by anyone to do anything less than their full part in making it happen with his watchword phrase, *Get with the program!* And everybody did. We all got with the program. When I severely sprained my ankle playing basketball that quarter, and was hobbling around on crutches so badly I had to have someone get copies of the lecture notes from my professors to keep from falling hopelessly far behind, Large helpfully pointed out many things even a one-legged man could do for his fraternity.

His presidency marked the decisive moment when the last traces of the sixties really ended at our frat and the seventies really began. He was a never-look-back kind of leader. His number one priority was Rush, which is the name given to the recruiting of new members, and his goal was nothing less than filling every single vacancy in the house. Part of making this happen was a top-to-bottom renovation of the house itself – carpets, furniture, new paint, you name it. He launched a massive fund raising drive reaching out to our alums to pay for the renovation, and Rush became a year-round activity rather than a once-a-year thing. The frat ceased to be a place to live and became instead a Way of Life.

When I say 'year-round' I mean year-round. Summer wasn't excluded. I had hoped to find some sort of a summer job to avoid returning to Bellevue, but economic times weren't so good under Nixon and I could only come up with an offer for a book-peddling job on commission. My lack of enthusiasm for it was matched only by Dad's lack of enthusiasm for it. When I told him about it over the phone, his reply was he needed me back there. I don't think he actually did, but it was a way to keep me from making a summer job blunder while letting me save face about being back in the bakery again. So when summer

came there I was back in eastern Iowa working in the bakery again.

My old Bellevue friends were graduated and gone now, although the younger kids who had hung around us were still around. It would have been pretty much a summer-to-forget except for one thing. Large Al had carved up the state of Iowa like Caesar Augustus dividing the empire into provinces, and there were three of us living in eastern Iowa: myself, Don, and Dennis “Cattail” Keitel from Delmar. Large Al’s expectations for us weren’t unreasonable. All we had to do was scour the eastern province for the best of ISU’s next crop of incoming freshmen and bring them all back with us when school started. Our legions in the other provinces would do the same. It worked, and the pledge class of ’72-73 was one of the best we ever had. We didn’t quite make the goal of filling every vacancy, but the momentum Large Al built up carried over and the next year we did fill the house with another very fine and very large pledge class. Lao Tzu would have been proud of Large. □



Young Steve Thompson: future chess champion.

The summer of ’72 was The Summer of Bobby Fisher. College hadn’t left me with much time for playing chess, although I did manage to make it into the semi-finals at a chess tournament ISU had my freshman year. When I lived in Bellevue there was hardly another soul there who played chess. But the summer of ’72 was altogether different. Bobby Fisher’s brilliant victory over Boris Spassky to win the world chess championship touched off a chess craze all across the country, and I returned to find a Bellevue that had gone mad for chess. While I’d been away someone had opened a Youth Center on Riverview Street a block down from the bakery, and that summer they held an open chess tournament. The turnout was amazing.

Naturally, I entered it and I don’t think anyone was too surprised when I won it. Being the local ‘chess nut’ had also been part of my reputation when I’d lived in Bellevue. The real tension and excitement for most folks was focused on the question of who my opponent would be in the finals. That was the person who would actually be the local reigning champion after I went back to college. I thought the best of the new crop of Bellevue chess players was a terrific kid named Steve Thompson, who had been a freshman the year I was a senior. It was clear to me that all he lacked was experience and if he kept it up the day would come when I wouldn’t be able to beat him. That day turned out to be called ‘1973.’ It was lucky for me Fisher won when he did. A year later Steve would have cleaned my clock.

My biggest thrill in that tournament was getting to meet *two* Grand Masters. They were the father and uncle of Karen Stachura, one of my classmates from the Class of ’71. I sure wish Karen had mentioned her dad and uncle were Grand Masters when we were in high school. I’d have been over at her house all the time and she and I would probably have gotten to know each other much better. The Stachura brothers weren’t competing in the tournament; there wasn’t anybody in town who could have beaten either of them. What they did do was come down to the tournament and play side games with kids. Karen’s dad would lose on purpose. You’d make a move, he’d look at it and a little smile would play across his face. Then he’d make exactly the move you’d have wanted him to make. I would have preferred it if he’d played me for real, but I’m sure the outcome would have been the same as when I played her uncle. Karen’s uncle *was* playing for keeps. I’d been having a lot of success with a queen’s pawn opening during the chess tournament up to that point. I played it against him and almost before I knew what was happening he had me so tied up in knots all was hopelessly lost. I stopped using that opening after I saw how effortlessly he had demolished it. Grand Masters are just absolutely amazing players. □

Another election was coming that year, and all through the summer it became more and more clear that Nixon was going to be re-elected. Earlier in the spring he had gone to China and Russia and even I had to admit those had been spectacular achievements. I deeply wanted the Nixon years to be over and for honor and leadership to return to the presidency, but I wasn’t kidding myself. George McGovern, the Democratic candidate, was waging a campaign of incredible blundering and ineffectiveness. Dad thought

he was a pussy and, to be honest about it, so did I. American troops were being gradually pulled out of Vietnam – although we all knew that could be turned around in an instant by one order from Nixon – and there was a lot of talk about peace negotiations aimed at ending the war – at long, overdue last.

The liberals were being pounded by the issue of busing, which they deserved to be. I understood what they were trying to do in their ‘we know better than you’ ruler’s fashion. They were trying to give kids stuck in bad schools a chance for a better education. I was all for that objective. But you don’t do it by depriving other kids of that same better education, and the way I saw it that’s what the liberals were doing. You give kids stuck in bad schools a better education by fixing bad schools, not inflicting them on other kids. Education, I felt then and I know now, really is the magic bullet. It is the *central public good* needed to achieve four out of the six fundamental tasks of government: establishing justice, ensuring domestic tranquility, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty. The liberals weren’t helping education, as much as they might have thought they were. They were screwing it up.

The only good thing I had to say about them was that, bad as they were, they were better than the Republicans. The Republicans didn’t want to improve education at all. They were the mortal enemies of the education programs of the Great Society and they thought of education as a *private* good – which is another way of saying ‘if you can afford it, fine; otherwise shut up and keep that number 9 coal coming.’ They had forgotten, if ever there was a time they even knew, the truth Goethe penned when he wrote,

Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action.

The problem with liberals is their hearts are in the right place on the issues but they latch onto the first simple-minded, unworkable idea they come up, try to order everybody into going along with it instead of providing the leadership needed to find a way that does work, and end up making the problem worse instead of better. They’re almost as bad as preachers in this respect. The busing issue had catapulted George Wallace back into the national race until another S.O.B. with a handgun named Arthur Bremer shot him down that previous May. There was nothing about Wallace I liked, but I felt only burning rage that assassinations and attempted assassinations were destroying the electoral process, the very foundation of our liberty. More than once I asked myself, *Where have our best men gone? Where are our leaders? These clowns surely aren’t them.*

No, it was becoming more and more obvious that summer we were going to be stuck with Nixon – condoner of the Kent State murders and the My Lai massacre – for four more years. In early summer, on June 17th, a strange little story bobbed up briefly in the news. Six men had been caught burglarizing the Democratic National Committee Headquarters in some Washington, D.C. hotel called The Watergate. What? They wanted to steal the Democrats’ mailing lists or something? Maybe they wanted to know who did George McGovern’s hair? Idiots. What the heck was there in Larry O’Brien’s office to steal? The Handbook of How to Blow Elections? The Moe, Larry, and Curly Guide for Developing Candidates? I remember just shaking my head in contempt when I heard the story. The story promptly sank out of sight again and I forgot about it. □

Fall quarter finally arrived and I returned to Ames. Rush went extremely well that August and we pledged a great class of fine young men, one of whom was Glen’s younger brother Lorne. I’d gotten to know and love the Wazny family during our freshman year: Mr. and Mrs. Waz, Lorne, and Glen’s darling little sister, Iris. Glen and I were roommates now, up on the third floor just at the head of the stairs. Also on the third floor at the far end of the hallway were Al and Rick, while Jerry and Scott had teamed up to room together on the second floor across the hall from Don and Lindy. Steve, our seventh brother, had ended up being the odd man out when we paired off into roommates, so he had the fun of helping to mentor a pair of pledges each quarter, rather than the one pledge roommate the rest of us had.

The new pledge class included five legacies – younger brothers of guys already in the house. There were a dozen more guys in addition, including a couple of second-year guys we had pledged the previous spring when Large Al’s program got rolling. I really liked all these guys. One of the things I noticed about them within about the first week or so was, unlike my pledge brothers and I had, they formed a cohesive –

and very clever – team almost right away. How did I find out? Chess.

There were almost always guys coming through Rush who liked to play chess, and we were ready for them. We'd have two guys designated to be available to play chess with any prospective pledge who happened to mention he liked a good game. One of our guys was designated to take it easy on them, let them win if possible without making it obvious. The other guy – me – had the job of beating them at chess. *Throw down a challenge*, Andrew Carnegie had said. I was there to give them that challenge, a temptation to seek out after they pledged.

About a week or so after Rush ended, there came a knock on our door one evening. It opened and through it came one of our new pledges, a bottle of beer in each hand. Iowa had turned into an eighteen state for drinking, so it was perfectly okay for our pledges to drink in the house now. "How 'bout a game of chess?" he asked.

No one ever had to ask me that question twice. He handed me one of the beers, we set up the board, and had a game. Just one. I won, he thanked me politely for a good game and left. A second one came in, a bottle of beer in each hand. "Feel like a game of chess?" he asked.

It was a setup. Every time I beat one of them, another one would come in, carrying two more bottles of beer. Long before I worked through the entire pledge class, I was getting pretty sloshed. It was a mighty clever plan on their part, but they made one mistake: They sent in all their best players to face me first while I was still sober. By the time all those beers were taking effect, they were down to the guys who barely knew how to move the pieces. I beat the entire pledge class and none of them would ever play me again. If they'd juggled their lineup a little, it would have been a real different story. □

Glen and I were in complete agreement that our room was going to be a serious study room. Both of us were coming into the courses in our majors, civil engineering for Glen and electrical engineering for me, and we both wanted to do well in them. We set up a room rule that six o'clock onward every evening from Sunday through Thursday was quiet time in our room when the first and only order of business was going to be studying. My own 'work hard' routine on those days would usually go something like this: dinner from five to five-thirty; a little basketball or volleyball in the small court in the back yard of the house from five-thirty to six; hit the books from six to midnight; hit the bunk at midnight with a wakeup call on the call sheet. About the only variation in this routine happened once a week when both of us went to the house's weekly chapter meetings, which were held right after dinner and usually didn't last more than about an hour unless something out of the ordinary was up. After chapter, it was straight to the books.

Once in awhile this routine was disrupted by outside events. The evening of November 7th, 1972, was one of these. It was election day, the first election where I was old enough to vote. Like many other students, I was registered in Ames and earlier that day I had been down to the polling place and cast my first-ever ballot. It had been twelve years since that night in 1960 when Dad had let me pull the levers to vote for the best men. Voting isn't a privilege; it is the most fundamental duty an American citizen has. Everything else in our country, all our checks and balances, turns on what happens in those thousands of voting booths all across the country on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years. I felt that way in 1972; I feel that way today. 1972 was the first time I ever got to stand up and be counted; I've never missed or skipped a first Tuesday after a first Monday in November since that day. Too much depends on it. Just one time in my life I was out of the country on election day, and that year I cast an absentee ballot before leaving on my trip.

The excitement of that first time, the satisfaction of this affirming act that at last said for all the world to hear, *I am an American*, was tempered by my certainty that the presidential election was a foregone conclusion. George McGovern certainly wasn't a best man; surely in all of America there still had to be far better *leaders* somewhere. But Nixon was a *wrong* man. The fact that he was good when it came to international affairs – I admitted that in 1972 and I admit that today – didn't make up for the war he

waged against Americans protesting Vietnam, for the murders at Kent State, for his pardoning of the only man they ever tried for the My Lai abomination. He was a *tyrant*; that's what I thought of him in 1972, and that's what I think of him today. The choice we had that November day sucked, but the *ethical* choice couldn't have been more clear in my mind. I voted for the pussy, George McGovern.

Don, who was an enthusiastic Democrat, had managed to convince himself that McGovern actually had a chance to win. This was about the only bad judgment call I've ever seen him make, although this one was a lulu. He and I had talked about the politics of that year more than once, and I had said every time that McGovern had *no* chance of beating Nixon. The only thing his campaign had managed to do with consistency all year was convince almost everyone he was a feckless moron. Don accused me of being a Republican.

Now that evening a group of us were gathered together around the TV to watch the election results come in. Don began to look more and more shocked as state after state after state went to Nixon. The only thing about those results that surprised me was that Nixon didn't win *every* state. He only won forty-nine of them. It was one of the biggest landslides in the history of American politics. For every two of us who voted for McGovern there had been three who voted for Nixon. Don looked at me, his face a study in bewilderment. "Geez," he said (actually, a word to that effect), "I never thought it would be this bad."

The only bright spot in that dark night for America was that the Nixon landslide was only that, a *Nixon* landslide. Congress remained firmly in the hands of the Democrats. True, those hands were liberal hands, which I didn't particularly like. But better to suffer honest fools than outright enemies of the principles I believe in. My judgment about these Republicans, harsh as it may sound, was confirmed just a couple of months later. In his inaugural address, Nixon announced he was cutting the Great Society programs right down to the bone and that is exactly what he did do to the fullest extent he could get away with. The Office of Economic Opportunity was dismantled and other programs in education, public television, consumer protection, and environmental protection have been under siege by the Republicans ever since.

Three other things Nixon did were also to soon come together and set off an economic catastrophe, although nobody saw it coming at the time. Nixon had earlier devalued the dollar to an unprecedented degree, and had controlled the inflation brought on by the Vietnam war through wage and price controls. I had had misgivings about wage and price controls; I didn't really see how the federal government, in particular the executive branch all by itself, was empowered to do this. Dad, on the other hand, was convinced that wage and price controls were absolutely necessary in the emergencies of the times to head off conditions like those he had seen during the Great Depression. I knew I didn't know enough about it to trust my own opinions, and the wage and price controls must have done some good because the economy just wasn't an issue in the 1972 elections.

Now Nixon announced that peace was at hand in Vietnam, and not too long after that, in 1973, it really happened. The war in Vietnam was over and *everyone*, no one more so than me, was glad of that. But Nixon also abolished his wage and price controls immediately after his second term began and the aftermath was a huge recession *with* out of control inflation that would hit double digits within three years. These conditions would last for another decade. But no hint of what was to come was seen as 1973 began. □

On the personal level, fall quarter of 1972 was my best quarter yet for academics. I was on my way to acing my courses in math, physics, and economics. A big part of this was due to Don setting me straight on things the year before, and the rest of it was due to Dr. Stan Williams, my physics professor from my freshman year. His contribution, interestingly enough, came less from the physics I learned from him and more from the fact he was a dynamo on wheels. Professor Williams was a short, intense guy. His field was astronomy and when he talked about 'astronomical distances' he meant it literally. But he also had the amazing ability to write on the blackboard just as fast as he could talk, and he talked *fast*. The first time I ever saw him, he lit off filling the blackboard with equations so fast it was amazing sonic booms didn't come flying out of the chalk. It was eight o'clock in the morning and I was slouched sleepily in

about the third row of the lecture auditorium. As the chalk began to fly I jerked straight up in my seat, *Whoa!* and tried desperately to keep up in taking down what he was writing. I never did succeed in keeping up with his pace, and it didn't take more than a few seconds for me to start missing what he was saying *now* just from the sheer effort of trying to take notes on what he'd already said. I couldn't have kept up with him even if I'd known shorthand, which I didn't.

However, I *did* learn how to write fast with enough legibility that I could still make out what I'd written if I didn't wait until the next day to go back over my notes and clean them up. After two quarters of lectures from Professor Williams, every other professor's lectures in the university were a piece of cake. I could take down everything they said word for word, sometimes anticipate where they were going and get there first, and even make on-the-fly comments, questions, and notes in the margins of my notebooks. I might not have learned as much physics from my man Stan as I would have liked, but he certainly equipped me with turbo-charged fingers, ears, and mind. Now as a sophomore I was putting them to good use. My physics professor that quarter, for example, was a normal human being – well, as physicists go anyway – and for the first time in my life I was soaking up the ideas and principles of physics like I was a sponge. At the final exam in that course I ripped through all sixteen physics problems in about twenty minutes, looked them over one last time to check for mistakes, and then – having nothing else to do there – walked up to the front of the auditorium, where he was standing, and handed in my exam. He couldn't have been more surprised. He thought I was coming up to ask him a question. He looked at me quizzically, I smiled and shrugged, turned around and left. My score: 100%. Bless you, Stan, and thanks.

Ironically, the one course I was having a tough time with was my one and only EE (electrical engineering) course: Basic electric circuit analysis I. And for the life of me, I couldn't figure out *why* I was having a tough time with it. There was no one in the frat house who could help Scott and me with this course. We were the only EE students there; all the older guys who were in engineering were in its other disciplines, particularly civil engineering and mechanical engineering. Scott and I were on our own, and he was having just as much trouble with it as I was.

It really and truly isn't very difficult material. Honest. But for some strange reason a lot of EE students find that first circuits course very tough and I was one of them. One thing I can say about it now, with the benefit of hindsight, is that it is the first course an EE student takes that has for its *real* objective the development of pure problem-solving *technique*. All of us thought the course was about figuring out what a circuit is going to do, but that isn't really the central important thing. *Practical* technique is the central important thing. You can write down the entire theory for that topic on one side of one sheet of standard notebook paper; it takes an entire year to master the techniques and the technical definitions that accompany them. I guess I was just unprepared for the idea of a college course being practical. And since it wasn't really a theory course, it was the one course where 'the Stan effect' couldn't really help me. I wasn't having any problem with the theory, but I was missing the main point and note taking never helps solve *that*. It was like having a batting coach who just says, "Here, watch how *I* do it." Hmm. . . Nice hit, coach. How'd you do that?

There was another thing that was bothering me about that course. I'd expected to be meeting up with my first real EE professor in that course. In fact, the guy I'd expected to have for an instructor was none other than my own academic advisor, Dr. C.J. Triska. Instead, the instructor turned out to be a young professor from the physics department, Dr. Benjamin Cooper. The EE department and the physics department had decided it would be good experience for physicists to try teaching EE students and for EE professors to try their hand at teaching physics students. The result was this unexpected swap in instructors. I was irritated by that. I didn't appreciate being a practice student for some kind of professor exchange program. What I didn't know at the time was that I was meeting the guy who would end up being the most important teacher I would have at Iowa State. He would turn out to be, for me, the greatest teacher I'd had since Mr. Bittner in eighth grade six years before.

The unanimous consensus of my classmates was that Ben was a “tough teacher.” The reason we thought so was because he gave us quizzes where we couldn’t just parrot back solutions we’d worked in doing homework problems. There was always some little twist, something that made the problem just a tiny bit different, so that no rote homework answer was right. In other words, his quizzes were designed to make us think, and that’s never popular with undergraduate students. His exams were the same, only even more so. But, you see, that’s *exactly* what we needed to learn to do – to see different problems in the light of *common methods for deducing answers*. It turns out that developing this skill is what makes all of science and all of engineering work. Parrots don’t make good scientists or engineers. At the time I didn’t know this; I didn’t even suspect it. Like the rest of my classmates, I thought I supposed to be a parrot, pretty blue feathers and all. But it is the practical skill that underlies everything else.

AN ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE ENERGY
EMERGENCY
A Staff Analysis
PREPARED BY
BENJAMIN COOPER
Professional Staff Member
AT THE REQUEST OF
SENATOR HENRY M. JACKSON, *Chairman*
COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
PURSUANT TO S. RES. 45
A NATIONAL FUELS AND ENERGY POLICY STUDY
DECEMBER 4, 1973

Cover page of the report Dr. Cooper wrote on the energy crisis for Senator Jackson in 1973

Ben was my teacher in EE courses throughout my entire sophomore year, and by the end of that time he had managed to teach me, by means as painful as they were relentless, this most important of all lessons. That is why he stands side by side with Mr. Bittner tied for the best and most influential teacher I’ve ever had. Mr. Bittner taught me to love science; Ben taught me how to *do* science. When he left Iowa State on a leave of absence at the end of my sophomore year to work as a Congressional Scientist Fellow of the American Physical Society, I felt both like I was losing a friend and like an apprentice losing his Master. It turned out

that Ben wrote the staff analysis on the effects of the Arab oil embargo for Senator Henry Jackson that was used by the government to respond to the energy crisis the embargo had caused. He sent me a copy of it later, with a brief handwritten personal note to me in blue ink, and I still have it. It is my only memento from this man whose teaching profoundly changed my life.

But it took him awhile to change this nineteen year old parrot with pretty blue feathers into a scientist. I got a B in his course and blew my first real shot at getting a 4.00 at ISU. His final was my last one during finals week that quarter, and when it was done I knew I hadn’t done well enough to make an A. When I got back to the house, my brothers looked at me expectantly, wanting to know how I’d done. When I shook my head, ‘no, I didn’t pull it off,’ they all gave a rousing cheer. I did really resent that. But they did console me with plenty of beer at our end-of-finals decompression party, so I forgave them. They didn’t know how much making that 4.00 meant to me after all the horrible humiliations of my first year.

I had a moment of profound satisfaction that quarter when advising time came around. You see, they had written somewhere – I think it was probably in the university’s general catalog – that just before registration time for the next quarter’s classes every student was supposed to go and make an appointment to see his academic advisor, Dr. Triska in my case. For lower-division students (freshmen and sophomores) in the College of Engineering this always seemed to me like a pretty pointless exercise unless you were actually flunking courses. Every single course we were supposed to take and exactly when we were supposed to take them was already spelled out in the engineering curricula for the different departments. All you had to do was follow the plan and not flunk anything. I didn’t see what there was for Dr. Triska to give me advice about.

But rules are rules, so I’d signed up for an advising appointment and showed up at his door at the appointed time. Triska hadn’t seen me since spring quarter advising the year before, and he hadn’t been impressed with me very much the two times I had seen him before. A 2.61 and a 2.73 doesn’t exactly make a professor start scheming how to recruit you into his research program. So when he said, “Come in,” and I walked into his office, he greeted me with, “Well, what do you want?”

I didn't think his tone was very friendly. "Well," I responded, "they said I had to come see my advisor so I'm here."

"Okay," he said. "What's your question?"

"I don't have any," I replied.

"Then why are you here?"

"Because they said I had to come see you." Geez! If this guy doesn't know why we have to do this, why are we doing it at all?

A look came over his face that as plain as day said, 'Why do I get all the dumb ones?' But here I was and I was here for advising so I guess he felt he owed me some. He opened one of his desk drawers and pulled out my file. At least he knew who I was. "Well," he said in a resigned voice, "let's see how you're doing." He opened my file and took a look at it. His eyes fell on my spring '72 grades and he did a double take. He looked at my face, then looked back at the file again, then looked at me again. Now he was wearing a look of amazement on his face. He cleared his throat and managed to say, "Well, it looks like you had a pretty good quarter last time."

"Yeah, I guess so," I said. "This one should be better, though."

He looked in my file again, thumbing through it to find out what courses I was taking. He looked up at me again, and now he was starting to actually look friendly. He invited me to sit down. He hadn't done that either time before. He started asking me stuff like how things were going, was I enjoying my classes, was I having any problems, and so on. Things were fine; yes, I was; circuits was a little tough but I thought I was starting to get on top of it. We ended up having a pleasant conversation for a change and after that day he always seemed happy to see me and interested in how I was doing whenever we'd run into each other.

I always feel good, in a vindictive kind of way, when I show somebody he was wrong to write me off too soon. There's an old song – I think Bertolt Brecht, the guy who wrote *Mack the Knife*, wrote it – that goes,

Alas we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness,
Could not ourselves be kind.
But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.

Uh-huh. I'll think about it, Buckwheat. □



At the White Rose Formal (1973)

I didn't date very much in college. Part of the reason, of course, was that between studies and house activities I was always so busy. One purpose of house functions – 'function' being what we called parties at which the girls from one of the sororities were guests – was, naturally, to meet girls. These functions were in most ways the collegiate counterpart to the cocktail party, the main difference being the age of the party-goers and the fact that no one was married. The girls would drink wine coolers and most of the guys would drink beer.

Despite the much acclaimed 'sexual revolution' of the sixties, these functions very rarely led to any hanky panky. Neither I nor any of my brothers would have objected if they had, but somehow I don't think there

was anything ‘revolutionary’ in our attitude about this. If anything was different it was the casual attitude young men and women adopted toward sex, and this attitude more or less was that if two people you knew did end up sleeping together it was no big deal and no social stigma attached to it. It did *not* mean parties were places where everyone was on the deliberate prowl for a sex partner for that evening.

A better description of house functions was that they were intended to provide the opportunity for young men and women to meet and possibly get to know each other well enough to decide to get to know each other better through the more traditional avenue of dating. I always thought there was something kind of stiff, ritualistic, unnatural, and often not all that different from the ‘meat market’ bar scene about these functions. I’ve never been comfortable in big crowds of strangers and tend to make friends with people with whom I share some common interest or experience. That’s why I liked organizations like the Thespians when I was in high school. I always knew of at least one common interest I could count on the girls in that club sharing with me. It gave us something natural to talk about right from the start.

If you’ve ever roamed the bar scene, you know how inane conversations are there compared to just about any other kind of conversation. Look at the kind of pathetic icebreakers people use there. “What’s your sign?” Puleeease. I was born under the sign of Daffy the Duck. Conversations at house functions tended to be like this too. My freshman year ‘American Pie’ was a hit song and talking about what the lyrics meant was always a good icebreaker. But more generally, what was an engineering student going to use to break the ice with a home economics major? “Hey, baby, what’s cooking?” In my graduating class there were exactly seven women graduating from the College of Engineering and all but one of them were architects. The remaining woman was in metallurgical engineering. After my freshman year I could have counted the women in all of my classes put together on the fingers of one hand. “What did you think of what Professor so-and-so did today?” would have been a good icebreaker if only there were any girls in Professor so-and-so’s class.

It didn’t escape my notice that most of my brothers who had more or less steady girlfriends knew them from their hometowns already. Norval and I were the only two people from Bellevue who went to ISU. This didn’t mean there weren’t guys who were good at picking up girls. We had a few guys in the house who attracted young women like magnets. We called them ‘the face men.’ I wasn’t a face man. Kip knew a lot of girls – how and from where was never that clear to me – and every once in awhile he’d try to set me up with one of their friends. They were nice girls, but none of them ever shared any kind of common interest with me. Before too long I got to hate the very concept of the blind date. For me the most important part of the word ‘girlfriend’ is ‘friend,’ and if that part wasn’t in the picture somewhere I didn’t much care about the other part no matter how nice looking she might be. I think the carnal pleasures are pleasurable, of course, and I’ve rarely been known to turn them down if offered. Well, not very often anyway; I *do* have *some* standards. But the fact is sex by itself isn’t enough to anchor a friendship if there isn’t anything else there to nourish it. I’ve always held friendship to be one of the most important things in life and building a lasting friendship takes a lot of time and effort. When the foundations for friendship and love are there between a man and a woman, sex makes it even more wonderful. But I never confused sex with love. The two aren’t the same and only one of them is important. I never had enough time in college to squander it on unimportant things. □

A family tragedy struck unexpectedly in April of ‘73. I learned of it from a phone call. My brother-in-law, Gary, had been killed. Sherri and Gary, apart from the TV and appliance store, had started buying up and fixing up old houses in Maquoketa starting in the middle sixties. They had jumped into the real estate bonanza before most people even knew there was going to be one. Gary was a first-rate carpenter, Sherri has always been able to do anything she put her mind to, and they had been very successful in their real estate and rental ventures. So much so that they bought ten acres of land just south of Maquoketa in a place called Reynerville and were building their dream house on it.

There was a rotting old farmhouse on their land that they wanted to get rid of. It was too far gone to be fixed up. Gary had asked the Maquoketa fire department if they wanted to come out and burn down that

house for practice, but the firemen had declined. So he had set about to burn it down himself. From what I was told, he had poured gasoline around inside the house and tossed a burning rag or something in to set it off. He and my two nephews, Bryon and Scotty, had stood off at a safe distance waiting for the house to catch fire.

Many, many minutes passed and nothing happened. Gary wasn't a reckless guy. He waited and waited and waited, and then he finally decided something had gone wrong and the fire hadn't caught. He walked back up to that house to see what had happened and just as he walked through the doorway the entire house exploded. I was a pallbearer at his funeral, and it was one of the saddest days of my life. □

Winter quarter of 1973 was just as crummy and miserable as winter '72 had been. I pulled an A from Ben that quarter and another one from an engineering mechanics course, but my other three courses all came in with B grades. Except for my freshman year, it was my poorest academic quarter. It was hard to concentrate because my mood pretty much matched the weather. I suspect the weather was a factor for my other brothers as well because the house politics leading up to new officer elections for the spring turned a bit nasty and that just added to the overall winter doldrums. If I remember correctly, that was the quarter when Scott switched from EE over to architecture, and I came within a hair of changing majors myself. There seemed to be a high level of attrition among my classmates that quarter, which reflected a common observation that if someone was going to abandon engineering studies, winter quarter sophomore year was the most likely time for it to happen. The common folklore was if you made it through that quarter, you were going to sail on to graduation. I made it through, but it was a very, very near thing. In the end it was Bill who convinced me to hang in there.

Even the longest winter ends eventually and spring brought better times. Money was a problem for me that quarter. I hadn't been able to make enough to last the entire school year the summer before and for awhile the financial situation looked pretty desperate. But Bill saved the day there, too, by loaning me five hundred dollars. That's five hundred 1973 dollars. It took me a long time before I could pay him back, but in all those years he never once mentioned it.

I was determined to not have to work in the bakery again when summer came and so I was thrilled when I learned there was something called a co-op program, officially sanctioned by the college, where a student could actually work for a company doing pre-engineering or engineering work. You would work for them for one quarter in the school year plus the summer. It added a year to the time required to graduate, but money would no longer be a problem. I would have junior standing after spring quarter, I had a respectable GPA (3.25 at the end of winter quarter), and all I had to do to be eligible was take some aptitude tests the psychologists at the placement office administered. I didn't lose any time getting over there and signing up for them.

I don't remember any specific details about those tests. All I remember was the written test took about an hour or so and was followed by an interview with one of their staff psychologists. I'd never *really* talked to a psychologist before, so I was a little nervous about that, but he was a pleasant man and we ended up having a nice conversation. There wasn't any weird stuff about my mother or anything like that – which I'd heard somewhere was something shrinks liked to ask people.

When I got my test results back a week or so later I thought they were pretty interesting. One of the things they gave me was a list of careers they said my aptitude and other stuff closely matched compared to people who worked in those fields. They also provided a list of careers for which I was least like the people who worked in them. Bottom of the list, job I was most unsuited for: Bricklayer. Next up: Truck driver. No surprise there as far as I was concerned. But the other list was surprising and very interesting. Number 1 best match: Professor of psychology (!). Number 2: Psychiatrist (!). Number 3: Psychologist (!). I began to wonder if the placement office was running some sort of clandestine recruiting drive. Electrical engineer showed up tenth on the list. As I thought about it some more, it kind of made sense. I was an EE because I wanted to work on electronic brains. If I wanted to work on electronic brains, it made sense I ought to have something in common with psychologists.

But the professor of psychology thing made me start to think. It had never entered my mind to become a professor some day. But I was starting to understand that professors were more than teachers. Teaching is a big part of what a professor does, but the other big part is research. Hmm. I thought about my new buddy, Dr. Triska. It didn't look to me like anything he did was all that strenuous or required some ability I wouldn't be able to acquire in time. Become a professor? Hmm. So I strolled over to his office after my last class one day and happened to catch him while he was in there. He smiled warmly.

"What does it take to become a college professor?" I asked him without any warm up. The question must have taken him off guard because a bewildered look passed over his face. He kind of tugged on his chin for a minute and then said, "Well, it's pretty much established that you have to have a Ph.D."

"Is that all?" I chimed right back. Another look passed over his face, kind of a *What do you mean, 'Is that all?'* look. "Yes," he said finally. "That's all."

"Okay, thanks!" I said perkily. I gave him a friendly wave and off I went. I had a refinement on my mission now. Yes, electronic brains, of course. But now I wanted Triska's job someday too.

But, of course, that goal was far away into the future. In the meantime there was the more urgent task of landing a co-op job. The placement office had a sign up sheet for students interested in going co-op. I put my name on it and not longer afterwards I found myself sitting in a little room with a representative of the Collins Radio Company in Cedar Rapids. We had a nice conversation, the interview went well, and at the end of it he said he was going to recommend me for one of their positions starting that summer. It would take a little over a month for them to do all the paperwork and send me the actual offer letter, but that was all just a formality. The money was good, the job sounded great, and I said I was looking forward to working for them. We shook on it. There! Mission accomplished. No more bakery.

What I hadn't counted on was Nixonomics. The economy was just then sliding into a deep hole, with raging inflation to keep it company, and it turned out Collins was to be one of its victims. Just before the end of the quarter, the long-awaited letter from Collins arrived at the frat house. I eagerly tore open the envelope and started to read. 'We regret to inform you . . .' it started out. Collins was cutting costs and my co-op job had been axed. I was furious. *We shook hands on it! We had a deal! How could they do this now?* I'd stopped interviewing as soon as the Collins interview was over, and now I was stuck high and dry with no time to find any other job. I was on my way back to the bakery again. I'm sure Mr. Collins' mother was really a much nicer and more respectable lady than the way I described her to Glen that afternoon. But I never forgave the Collins Radio Company for breaking our deal. □

As spring quarter unrolled, it was time to start thinking about elective courses in the humanities and the social sciences. The first two years of the EE curriculum were carved in stone, as I mentioned earlier. My junior year would be almost as rigidly structured, but it would also be the first year in which I got to choose at least some of the parts of my education. My senior year would have even more choices. I knew the science and engineering parts of my training were on solid ground; the College of Engineering saw to that. But the grander part, the *core* of what it means to be educated, was about to start. I had been reading little snippets of the great ideas of western civilization since I was a kid. We got a tiny bit of it in junior high and high school. I had gotten more of it through the CAP moral leadership course. Nothing in any depth, you understand. Just soul-stirring synopses of it and exposure to the names of the great thinkers whose works were often quoted. I was eager to know these great works in detail, to really know and understand all the ideas and principles the Founding Fathers had leaned on during the original Constitutional Convention. I wanted to be part of The Great Conversation of Western Civilization.

And so I cracked open the university's catalog of courses and began looking for the ones that would bring this so-central knowledge to me. Then I looked some more. Then some more. Where were they? Why couldn't I find them? What course did I take to learn about John Stuart Mill? About Rousseau and the social contract? About *The Federalist* and the reasoning that went into our Constitution? About the great philosophers and the great statesmen? Why weren't they in here? I was only nineteen, but that was

old enough to know something was basically wrong if I could learn these ideas existed when I was in the CAP but could not learn what these ideas really were when I was in college.

But they weren't there. Not anywhere. Where had they gone? I was disappointed, and I felt cheated.

What I didn't know then was just how badly the troubles in the sixties had gutted the soul of liberal education. Not just at Iowa State; the damage was everywhere. The riots and then the war had radicalized so many of the professors, in the humanities especially, that the most important core pieces of a liberal education had been tossed aside and replaced by radical and rad-lib theses that owed more to the spleen than the brain. What did I care about Marshall McLuhan and 'the medium is the message'? It's cheap hogwash. When the student radicals had challenged their professors to say how nineteenth and eighteenth and seventeenth century ideas were relevant to our times, the professors had failed to answer. When the crucial time came to *apply* the subjects they were supposed to be the masters of, they hadn't known how.

The men and women entrusted to pass this precious knowledge down to the next generation failed in their trust, and they failed so completely there is *no* liberal education in American universities today. The ideas that built our country are not taught anymore. Today if you want to learn these things, if you want to be educated and not merely trained, you're on your own. The professors of the sixties failed us and left the generations to come unarmed and vulnerable against the demagogues, the tyrants, and the robber barons to come. When they retired or died, they left a vacuum because they did not teach the future teachers about these things. When education is smashed and broken, it isn't for a year or the span of a degree. The damage lasts for generations. It took me a great many years to replace what the radicals had stolen from me when they threw out the accumulated wisdom of Western civilization and replaced it with their own glandular pulp. What an irony it was that liberals joined hands and marched with the deadly enemies of liberty and justice! I spit on them for that and do not forgive it. □



Brothers: Me, Al, Jerry, and Rick (1973)

House elections put a young slate of officers-elect in charge of running the frat during the coming year. The top three offices went to my pledge brothers, Jerry (Commander), Rick (Lt. Commander), and Al (Treasurer). Considering we would only be juniors next year, and that guys who would be seniors had been losing candidates for the positions, this was nothing short of amazing. I could hardly believe it myself, especially when I remembered how close all of us had come to walking out of the house in '72.

But our local politics, strange as they seemed to me at the time, had nothing on what was about to explode onto the national scene.

In the latter half of March, headlines and TV news told an astonished country that one of the Watergate burglars, James McCord, had written a letter to Judge John J. Sirica – 'Maximum John' as the press had dubbed him – saying White House officials had been involved in the Watergate break-in and had ever since been covering up the White House role in it. Three days later, Nixon's nominee to head the FBI, L. Patrick Gray, told a Senate committee that White House counsel John W. Dean – Nixon's own lawyer in the White House – had 'probably lied' during the FBI's Watergate investigation. The Watergate scandal – later the Watergate crisis, later the biggest Constitutional crisis America had ever faced – had begun. And once the flood of revelations began, it didn't stop. They kept coming and coming and coming. Jeb Stuart Magruder, the number two guy in Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President; John Mitchell, the former Attorney General of the United States; H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's Chief of Staff; John D. Ehrlichman, Nixon's top White House domestic policy guy: It looked like every single one of Nixon's top men in the White House were involved. If they were involved, I had no doubt in my mind at all Nixon

himself must also be involved. Now I knew who the idiot had been; I was certain of it.

Just before I got back to Bellevue that summer, the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was gaveled into daily sessions by its chairman, Senator Sam Ervin. The hearings began on May 17th and lasted through the first week of August. As soon as I'd get off work in the bakery I'd go straight upstairs, turn on the TV, and watch the hearings.

At first I could hardly believe the things I was hearing people testify about. As the stream of witnesses continued, my anger and outrage built up, every day of the hearings notching it up to ever higher levels. Watergate wasn't primarily about that clownish break-in at DNC headquarters. The Watergate burglary itself became almost nothing but a sideshow. The White House cover-up wasn't even really about the break-in; the cover up was to protect a host of other unbelievable and systematic illegal activities.

Today there are a lot of younger people who either weren't born yet or simply weren't old enough to understand what Watergate was really about. There are plenty of books around that can lay down the sordid details of who did what to whom and when, but when all is said and done it can all be summed up by one thing: Nixon had tried to seize for himself powers the Constitution delegates to Congress and to the Supreme Court. He had broken his oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States and had, in effect, tried to overthrow our system of government. I've never seen anybody just come out and say it this way, but that's what he had tried to do. He was a traitor to his country and he betrayed every single one of us. He was the Benedict Arnold of our times. If his burglars hadn't been caught in that stupid, moronic break-in at the DNC, who knows if we would have found out about it before it was too late? I never forgot for a second that the President is commander in chief of the armed forces. Once separation of powers and checks and balances break down, dictatorship becomes possible. That's why Watergate is important, kids. We almost lost the United States of America to what was nothing less than an attempted coup d'etat. *That's* what Watergate was about. It *can* happen here. It almost did in 1972. □



Bill, Sherri, and me in Bellevue (spring break '74). The other guy is a failed suitor who had been courting Sherri. I'm laughing because she blocked him out of the picture.

I spent time with Sherri and my nephews, Bryon and Scotty, when I could that summer. Bryon was twelve years old then – he would turn thirteen in August – and Scotty turned ten in late July. Sherri had gone ahead and completed the building of their house on the acreage and, to everyone's surprise, had decided to go into the business of being an income tax preparer. The TV and appliance store had been sold, and Sherri had taught herself tax law by a combination of self-study and attending a tax school somebody puts on once a year. She really knew her stuff, too, as she proved by taking and passing the examination to become an

Enrolled Agent. That means she is licensed to represent people in tax court. You see, if the IRS decides to take you to court, the court is a special court run by the IRS itself and it's one where regular constitutional guarantees, like that pesky right to be represented by an attorney, don't exist. An EA is the tax court equivalent of an attorney. Sherri was now one of those. The IRS soon learned not to mess with her or with her clients. Sherri believes you should pay every penny you owe the tax man – and not one penny more. If the IRS slips up and gives her a chance to re-open a client's back taxes, she'll go after getting back every penny that client might have ever overpaid in taxes over his entire life. Sherri wages a kind of holy war against the IRS fought with tax records and adding machines. □

One of my fraternity brothers got married that summer over in Delmar, a town about thirty miles from Bellevue. Along with all the other brothers in the area, I attended a pre-wedding celebration being thrown in Delmar for him one evening. Because I had to make a long drive back to Bellevue afterwards to go to work at three o'clock, I was careful not to drink very much at the festivities and gave myself a good, long

time for what little alcohol effects there were to wear off before heading back to Bellevue. Unfortunately, I gave myself *too* long a good long time and it was after two in the morning before I set off on the drive back. What I hadn't thought about was what the combination of not getting any sleep and the hypnotic highway driving conditions of the nighttime would be like. Most of that drive was over monotonous stretches of two lane highway with nothing but darkness beyond the headlights. There weren't even any other cars on the road at that time of night. By the time I reached the little town of Andrew, still thirteen miles from Bellevue, I was fighting to stay awake, and at the east edge of town I lost that fight.

At the east edge of Andrew the highway curves gently to the left in a thirty-five mile per hour zone. When I started that turn I was awake; by the end of it, I wasn't. I'd fallen asleep at the wheel and when the highway straightened out I just kept turning. The gentle *thud* of my front wheels running off the pavement onto the grass brought me right back to full wakefulness. I immediately knew what had happened. I'd driven all the way across the other lane and off the road.

Fortunately, I was moving pretty slowly and was able to assess the situation in a flash. There were no oncoming headlights up ahead, and all I had to do was let a telephone pole go by on my right and I could just drive right back onto the road, no harm done.

What I didn't know about was the under-the-highway cattle crossing and its concrete culvert set flush at ground level just on the other side of the telephone pole. In the dark it was completely invisible.

It became *real* visible as soon as I passed the telephone pole and the ground dropped out from under the car. The steering doesn't work too good when the car is airborne. I experienced again that eerie feeling of time slowing down to a crawl. There was a wooden fence with great big wooden posts coming up at me, and the concrete retaining wall of the culvert just beyond it. My immediate and only thought was, *Oh, no. Not again!* The car hurtled right in between two of those huge fence posts and the headlights shattered against the fence with a musical little *tinkle*. Their light faded to black with what seemed like unbelievable slowness. In the next moment there was a great metallic *boom* as the car hit the concrete.

Then time sped up again. I was wearing my seatbelt, but the Buick didn't come equipped with a shoulder harness. The car stopped immediately but I didn't. The seatbelt around my waist made my body pivot around it, my head flew back, and my chin smashed right into the steering wheel, cushioned only by my left thumb.

I don't know how long I was unconscious. To me it was a case of 'bash into the steering wheel then sit up.' But I knew I had been knocked out as soon as I looked at the front of my shirt. I was wearing a yellow shirt only now it wasn't yellow any more. It was dyed red. I'd sliced open the bottom of my chin and my shirt was soaking in my own blood.

Still, except for the fact that I was bleeding, my jaw was so swollen I could barely move it, and my thumb was broken, I was in good shape. I couldn't get either door open because they were pinned by those big fence posts on either side. I'd have to climb out a window. There wasn't much room to do that on the driver's side, so I undid my seatbelt and slid over to the passenger side. It was a hot night and I'd had the windows rolled down, so all I had to do was crawl through and then pull myself out of the ditch. I stood there for a moment or two, sadly looking back down into the ditch at my poor car. The car's front end was kind of crumpled in, so it was obvious she was a total loss. *Well, Wells*, I scolded myself, *when you wreck a car you sure don't screw around*. I was pretty ticked off at myself.

Well, now wasn't the time to stand around moaning about it. I'd have to find some place with a phone so I could let Dad know what had happened. There was a farmhouse right there nearby; I was practically in their front yard. Their dog was going crazy, but he was on a leash and nothing for me to worry about. I walked up to their door and rang the doorbell.

The farmer's wife answered it. Her hair was all up in curlers and her eyes got as big as saucers when she saw this apparition standing at her doorway in his blood-soaked shirt. By this time the blood was

running down my pant legs pretty good too. “Can I use your phone?” I asked. I had trouble getting the words out clearly because my jaw was so swollen. She hesitated just for a second then opened the door and let me in. They had a phone in the kitchen and as I was dialing she handed me a big roll of paper towels. I thanked her and pressed a big wad of them hard underneath my chin. That stopped me from bleeding all over her floor. I noticed she wasn’t much of a talker and she sort of kept her distance from me after handing me the paper towels. I can’t say I blamed her. I must have been some sight.

Dad answered the phone at the bakery on the second ring. “Dad,” I said, “I’ve had an accident.”

“I knew it! I knew it!” he shouted.

“Don’t get bent out of shape,” I said irritably. I wasn’t in much of a mood to get yelled at. “I’m all right. But I need you to come get me.” I told him where I was and about twenty minutes later he arrived with the bakery truck. While I was waiting, I wrote down my name and address for the farmer’s wife, told her I appreciated her help, that I’d wait outside so I wouldn’t mess up her floor any worse, and apologized for getting blood on it. She just kind of nodded. Not much of a talker, I guess.

Legally you’re not supposed to leave the scene of an accident before the police arrive. But I was less concerned about that than I was about getting something done to take care of my chin. The paper towels I had pressed into the wound were doing the job of slowing down the bleeding, and by the time we got back to Bellevue the bleeding had actually stopped. But I thought it might be nice to have the doctor sew my skin back over my jawbone again as soon as possible. While Dad was calling Doc Michaelson I went into the bakery’s head to look at the wound in the mirror. It didn’t look too great, but to my surprise I didn’t find it too gross looking either. It was actually kind of fascinating. Turns out there’s all kinds of strange looking stuff between the outer skin and the jawbone. Butchers are probably used to looking at stuff like this, but I’d never seen it before. I’m not so sure I could have looked at a wound like this on anyone else’s face without feeling sick, but somehow because I was looking at *my* face it didn’t seem to bother me very much. After all, appearances notwithstanding, it really didn’t hurt too bad, and if it didn’t hurt too bad then it wasn’t all that bad.

Doc sent word to meet him at his office, which wasn’t very far from the bakery. While I walked over there to meet him, Dad got in touch with Eldon, the night cop, and reported the accident. I knew Doc fairly well. He’d been my doctor since we’d moved to Bellevue. I’d gone to high school with his older son and knew his younger one casually. His younger son, Jim, was in Melody’s class. Doc arrived very quickly and we went into his office. As I sat on one of those examining tables, he had me tilt my head back and injected some stuff into the wound to anesthetize it while he stitched me up. I don’t remember how many stitches he had to use; it probably wasn’t more than about a half dozen or so. He’d just finished up when Eldon arrived.

Eldon said he needed to ask me some questions, so I sat there in Doc’s office and told him the whole story of what had happened. When I finished, Eldon said he wanted to give me a sobriety test, but Doc said he’d be wasting his time. The drug he’d injected me with would have the same symptoms as alcohol and the test would be worthless. Eldon wrote that down and said I could go home. I thanked Doc, said good night to Eldon, and went back to the bakery. Dad told me to hit the sack, and that’s what I did.

When I got up again a few hours later I found, as I’d expected, that I’d been charged with failure to have my vehicle under control. It seemed the highway patrol had insisted. I had to go see the same judge in the same little room, again by myself. This time, though, I knew better. I pleaded not guilty. The way I saw it, I’d had everything under control right up until the second the earth fell out from under me. The judge asked me when I was going back to school. I told him, and he said they’d set the trial for sometime after I got back on the next school break. He said they’d let me know when that would be.

The surprise was they also charged *Dad*, not *me*, with leaving the scene of an accident. That was a considerably more serious charge and Dad really blew up. He ended up getting a lawyer, fighting it, and was acquitted. Somehow in all that uproar they forgot all about me and I never did have to stand trial. □

My '66 Buick was, of course, a total loss and I had to get another car. It took some looking, but I finally found a '64 Buick I could buy for only three hundred dollars. Still, this was a lot of money and with Nixon's inflation surging ahead I was coming up well short on money for the next year of college. Sherri's father-in-law, Darrell (the same Darrell I went with on that fishing trip to Red Lake years before), was now working in the Maquoketa State Bank and he told me he could fix me up with a 7% student loan. The student loan program was one of the things that had survived out of the Great Society programs, and the sweet part of it was that I wouldn't have to pay it back or accrue interest on the loan until after I graduated. I hated borrowing money – I still do – but sometimes there just isn't any other option. With Darrell's help I got a loan for fifteen hundred dollars. That plus my summer earnings would get me through school for another year.

I did get to see a few old friends and younger acquaintances before the summer of '73 ended. One of them was Steve Thompson, the kid who had impressed me with his chess playing the year before. I don't remember exactly where I bumped into him. It was probably the pizza place or maybe the basketball court. He'd shot up in height since the last time I'd seen him. We chatted for a bit, then he asked me if I'd be interested in a game of chess.

Naturally.

We played three tough games. Tough on me, that is. Steve had mastered what is known as the 'hypermodern' game, a style of chess that, so far as I know, wasn't even around back when I'd learned how to play. When I'd learned how to play, the accepted wisdom was that you controlled the center of the board. That gave you maximum flexibility to attack. The hypermodern is very different. Its strategy is that you *give up* control of the center in order to attack it later. I'd never played against the hypermodern before and it just overwhelmed me. First I lost the first game. Then I lost the second game. Then I lost the third game. I wasn't used to losing at all, much less three times in a row.

After the third game I looked at Steve with kind of a bittersweet smile. "You've gotten pretty good, kid," I said – grudgingly, I admit. "You're not *too* bad yourself, *man*," he replied. Then he gave me an elfish grin and I found myself grinning right back at him. We both knew who the new amateur chess champion of Bellevue was. The torch had just been passed, and to a great kid.

I also ran into a couple old classmates and found out people were still talking about my adventures with the owner of the Hotel. I say 'adventures' because the incident I related earlier wasn't the end of the story. I mentioned before that this guy – we'll call him R.N., understanding this doesn't stand for Richard Nixon – became a state representative. Our senior year of high school a bunch of us had gotten to go on a field trip to Des Moines to see the Iowa legislature in action. Two of us, myself and Chris, had wangled an invitation to go down to the house floor and join R.N. during the session. There are some extra seats down there where pages and so on can sit behind the elected official to run errands for him. R.N. was explaining to us how the house worked and waved us an invitation to sit down in those seats.

I sat down in his.

He was a bit taken aback by this, but what was he going to do about it right there on the house floor in the middle of a session? *He* sat down in the other page seat. Butter would have melted in my mouth.

I'd forgotten all about that incident but, after being reminded of it by my friends, I dug out my old yearbook and, sure enough, found a couple of mentions of it:

Rick, To the only guy I know who can cut down R.N. and still get to sit at his desk in Des Moines.
Best of luck – Chris '71

Some day I hope you get N.'s job. Rick, don't argue so much – Candy

That first summer of Watergate finally drew to a close and it was time for school again. By and large, it turned out to be an excellent year for the house and for me academically. I had to admire Jerry for taking on the responsibilities of house president when he still had vet school to get into. Jerry turned out

to be the kind of leader who listened to advice and wasn't afraid to take it if it was sound. With Large Al still in the house, I'm sure he must have gotten plenty of advice. During Rush that year we filled the house to capacity for the first time since I'd been there. We did well on the athletics front – intramural athletics, that is; we weren't a jock house – and on the social front as well. One of our guys was even going steady with the daughter of the president of the university. As for me, I was about to turn in the three best quarters I ever had at ISU, including back-to-back four points in winter and spring. I ended that year with a 3.50 GPA and just had to hold that to graduate with distinction the next year. □



My nephews Bryon (left) and Scotty (right) with Chris Taylor (fall, 1973).

Sherri drove out to Ames with the boys for a visit one Saturday that September. Bryon was thirteen and in eighth grade, Scotty was ten and in fifth grade. I would have liked to have taken the boys to the football game – the Cyclones were playing at home that day – but they wouldn't be arriving in time to make the start of the game. So I did the next best thing. I picked up the phone and called Chris Taylor.

Chris was a casual pal of mine, which isn't really saying much because Chris had a legion of casual pals. He stood six feet five inches and weighed in at just over four hundred pounds. He was the 1972 NCAA heavyweight wrestling champion and had won the super heavyweight bronze medal in freestyle wrestling at the '72 Summer Olympics in Munich.

Chris was more than happy to come over and give the boys the thrill of their lives. There isn't an Iowa boy alive who isn't interested in wrestling, and Chris Taylor pretty much stood at the right hand of God in Iowa. When Bryon and Scotty found out they were actually going to have their picture taken with *Chris Taylor!* they were so excited I worried a little about whether we might be looking at an embarrassing plumbing accident or two. But the boys were little troopers and no spare clothing was required.

If you live to be two hundred, you will never meet a nicer guy than Chris Taylor. He was so big he was the only man I know who could walk around outside in Ames in the winter in a short-sleeved shirt without a coat and not get cold. Chris worked part time as a bouncer in a downtown club called the Peanut Tree. One night I was down there and, shall we say, in my cups and for some reason I started giving Chris a ration of B.S. about something. I have no idea why. I won't say I don't know what I was thinking because obviously I wasn't thinking at all. Any other bouncer would have dribbled me out of there like a basketball. Chris could have picked me up with one hand and thrown me so far I'd have been making a landing on the north-south runway at the Des Moines airport.

What he did instead was pick me up, set me back down on my feet with my face to the wall, then he turned around and just leaned on me. Well, I wasn't going anywhere for awhile. I also wasn't giving him or anyone else any more B.S. I had my hands full just trying to breathe and not turn into wall paper. Chris kept me pinned against that wall until he was satisfied I was going to be a good boy from now on, then he let me out. Okay, Chris. No problem, buddy. Buy you a beer? I thought the world of Chris, and when he died six years later of a heart attack at age 29 it was a very, very sad day. □

Nothing much had been in the news since the close of the Ervin Committee hearings at the end of the first week of August. The committee and the special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, had both subpoenaed Nixon's tapes and he had refused, claiming 'executive privilege' made the subpoenas illegal. That fight was making its way through the courts and in the meantime August and September had passed just as if nothing in the world was going on.

All that tranquility ended in an eruption of Halloween madness with the coming of October. First came the sudden eruption of the October War – also called the Yom Kippur War – on October 6th when Egypt and Syria made a surprise attack on Israel in the Sinai and the Golan Heights. The first two days looked pretty bad for Israel but then the tide began to shift the other way. We were following the war on the nightly news broadcasts with mixed feelings. On the one hand, none of us wanted to see Israel destroyed by the Arabs. On the other hand, we weren't without sympathy for the Arabs as well. The last time the two sides had fought had been in 1967, the famous Six Day War, when Israel had been the first to strike. The land being fought over now had been Arab land prior to that war. After the second day, it looked to us like Israel was going to win this one too, which was something Jerry wasn't too pleased about. His family came from Syrian ancestry. "Stupid," he said, referring to the Arabs' decision to attack Israel. "All they've got are camels." What he meant was the Arab armies were too badly outmatched by Israel's. We all expected the Arabs to get their behinds kicked in this war and Jerry didn't like it. No one in the public knew at that time how close the Israelis had come to being routed and defeated, nor that Nixon ordered an airlift of military supplies be sent to help Israel, nor that the conflict was threatening to bring us face to face with the Soviet Union in the most dangerous nuclear confrontation since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

None of the sympathy we did feel toward the Arabs extended to Yasser Arafat and his Palestinian terrorist group. We all still remembered very well the outrage and tragedy of the Munich Summer Olympics when Black September terrorists had invaded the Olympic Village and taken members of Israel's Olympic team hostage. The Olympic Games are the one thing on earth that is supposed to be free of politics, free of conflicts, and free of the deadly grudges nations hold against one another. *Anyone* who violated the sanctity of the Olympic Games we held an enemy of all mankind. We hadn't forgotten, either, that eleven athletes and coaches had been murdered. The hostages had been murdered on my nineteenth birthday. No, Arafat and his thugs were hated by us and that fact more than anything kept us mostly on Israel's side in 1973. Mostly.

Then right in the midst of all this, on October 10th, came the electrifying news that Agnew, Nixon's Vice President, had resigned his office and pleaded no contest to criminal charges of tax evasion and money laundering stemming from bribes he had received while governor of Maryland and had, it seemed, continued to receive while he was Vice President. None of us were sorry to see him go; in the increasingly likely event Nixon himself would be impeached, the prospect of 'President Agnew' lacked any sort of appeal as far as we were concerned. But the news still came as a shock because up until then none of the Watergate horrors had touched Agnew. On October 12, Nixon nominated Congressman Jerry Ford to replace Agnew under the twenty-fifth amendment. That had never been done before. That very same evening, the Court of Appeals handed down a decision supporting an earlier order by Judge Sirica that Nixon had to turn over the subpoenaed White House tapes to Archibald Cox. He had until October 19th to do it.

Then on October 19th came the Arab oil embargo. Until then none of us had ever paid much attention to OPEC. It was an acronym that floated across the news every once in awhile, but now it was suddenly a lot more than that. Saudi Arabia and the other OPEC countries had slapped the embargo on the United States as a direct response to our active support of Israel in the October War. The energy crisis had begun. The move took us – and I think most Americans – by surprise. We weren't combatants and we, like most Americans, knew nothing about the U.S. airlift of emergency military supplies to Israel that had begun on October 13th. The immediate effect of the embargo on us was anger at the Arabs. The longer term effects were going to linger into the following March. In all the uproar over the embargo, hardly anyone noticed that Nixon's deadline had come and gone and he still hadn't turned over the tapes.

The next night, October 20th, Al, Jerry, Glen and I were out gallivanting on the freeway. If I remember correctly, we were on our way back to Ames after some sort of lark in Jerry's home town of Omaha. Why we were even there I no longer remember, but I do remember the stunning news that all of a sudden was coming over the radio. Attorney General Richardson and Deputy Attorney General

Ruckelshaus had been forced to resign by Nixon, Solicitor General Robert Bork had assumed the duties of Attorney General temporarily, and, under Nixon's orders, had just fired Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor. This would come to be known as The Saturday Night Massacre. It set off a national firestorm and for the first time there were nationwide protests demanding the impeachment of Nixon. Finally. It was the beginning of the end for Richard Nixon.

In the heat and passion that followed The Saturday Night Massacre, anything short of all-out war with the Russians was bound to be anticlimactic. And that was the way it was on October 26th when a U.N. ceasefire went into effect, ending the October War. We noted it in passing. Like most of the country, we were caught up in the raging inferno of Watergate. The shooting war ended; the oil embargo continued.

That was the October Madness of 1973. How any of us got through exams that month is a mystery.

For me and my fraternity brothers, the most visible impact of the oil embargo was the gasoline shortage. My freshman year one of the things I could count on was the gas war that always broke out among the gas stations in Ames whenever quarter breaks rolled around. Pump prices would drop from about thirty cents a gallon down to ten cents a gallon. My sophomore year the local gas stations stopped doing this, to my disappointment, but there was still plenty of gasoline to be had at the stations. After the embargo, there were raging gas shortages everywhere. Gas stations frequently ran out of gas and at those stations where they hadn't run out yet long lines of cars would queue up, hoping the station wouldn't run out before their turn came. At the time there were government price controls on gasoline that required 'old oil' to be sold at prices reflecting what it had cost the oil companies to obtain their oil. When the embargo happened, the oil companies simply withheld their 'old oil' and the result was an immediate gas shortage. In a time of national crisis, the oil companies had seen a chance to make money and they took it.

All this didn't have much of an immediate effect on me personally. ISU was a pedestrian and bicycle campus and my Buick spent most of its time sitting in the house parking lot anyway. It cut back on going to the bars in downtown Ames a little, but the Cave Inn in Dogtown was still within easy walking distance and our house keggers were held at the house anyway. The guy most adversely affected by the gas shortage was Large Al. He had bought a brand new car and since Des Moines was his home town he went down there fairly often. Not long after he got his new car, he filled it up at a gas station where they had mixed water with the gasoline and this really screwed up his car. Large was, to put it mildly, largely upset about that.

There were a few things that did affect everybody. Nixon ordered that the national speed limit on all federal highways be reduced to fifty-five miles an hour. I hated that. The Buick cruised very nicely at eighty miles per hour and the new speed limit added over an hour to the time it took me to drive from Ames to Bellevue or vice versa on breaks. I responded to that by not going home on breaks as often. I also soon learned to get in behind the big semi trucks and follow them on the interstate. The truckers used their CB radios to warn each other where the highway patrol cars and speed traps were, so when I saw a truck zooming along at warp speed I knew it was safe to crank it up and stay with him.

They also tried going to year-round Daylight Savings Time, which they started in January '74. *That* I liked. It meant we had a little more sunlight in the afternoons during winter. If it was up to me, we'd be on DST forever. Unfortunately, a great number of people complained about little kids having to go to school in the morning while it was still dark out. Well boo hoo hoo. I never minded delivering papers in the dark; I minded having to get up so early to do it. They killed year-round DST the following October and winter went back to being the usual crummy dark-all-the-time season it had always been.

The war and the embargo put the Arabs in the spotlight like never before, and this led to an interesting conversational innovation. I'm not sure if Jerry started it or if Al did, but all of us soon developed the habit of pointing out beautiful co-eds – previously called 'goddesses' – with the phrase, "Oh, man! I'd sell my mother to the Arabs for that girl!" It turned out this led me to accidentally commit a small international *faux pas* one afternoon.

One of my out-of-the-house friends was my lab partner in our machines classes, Ahmad “call me Al” Al-Sarraf. Al was from Kuwait, although most of the guys mistakenly thought he was from Saudi Arabia and, equally mistakenly, thought he was part of the Saudi royal family. Al was a great guy and he was a young man with a Mission in Life. After he graduated and went home, his Mission was to help electrify his country, much as the Tennessee Valley Authority had once brought electricity to that part of the U.S. The reason people thought Al was in the Saudi royal family was because he rather frequently bought himself new cars – there wasn’t much doubt that Al’s family had to be well-heeled. We used to accuse him of buying a new car whenever the old one ran out of gas. “Al, we have these things called ‘gas stations’ in this country,” we’d tell him. But Al had a good sense of humor and took this all in stride. He spoke perfect English except for the fact that he pronounced my name “Reeek” instead of “Rick.”

Our labs ran from 3:00 to 6:00 and that meant they got out too late for me to eat at the house. Instead I’d usually stop by the Burger and Brew on the way home and grab a burger for supper. They made the best burgers in the world there, excepting only the burgers Mom made. One evening Al and I were walking down to the Burger and Brew when he nudged my arm and said, “Hey, Reeek, look over there.” I looked, and across the street was one of the most beautiful co-eds I’d ever seen. She was art perfected in the flesh. Automatically, I said it: “Oh, man! I’d sell my mother to the Arabs for that girl!”

Then I remembered who I was with. My face turned all red with embarrassment and I turned to Al to apologize. Al was looking at me a little funny. Then he said, “We don’t want your mother. How about your sister?” That made me laugh and Al gave me a grin.

He was a great guy. One of the best. □

My junior year was the year when my mission to work on and contribute to electronic brains hit a major snag. I was finally getting to study and learn how computers are built, what they do, and how they work. This was what I had come to college for! This was what I had majored in EE for! Now I was finally starting to learn all the things I hadn’t been able to figure out as a kid. Now I finally knew . . .

That computers were not electronic brains at all.

It had all been a lie. What the newspapers had said. What the magazines had said. What the sign at the Museum of Science and Industry had said. What Walter Cronkite had said. It had all been poetry. It had all been romantic science fiction. Everything I had believed about computers since junior high was false.

Have you ever had your entire life disintegrate into fairy dust around you?

The realization didn’t come all in a flash. It built up slowly as a mounting series of inconsistencies that finally added up to the undeniable truth during the spring quarter. That was the quarter when my courses were really diving into the guts of what the machine did, into how computer professionals looked at the machines. Along with this, I was also now getting to study introductory psychology, which *is* about brains and minds – regardless of how much psychologists in the 1970s tiptoed around this description. My junior year was also when I was a subscriber to magazines like *Science* and *The Smithsonian*. By the time of the first round of exams that spring I *knew*. Everything I had been pursuing since I was a kid was only a poem, a dream. It had never really existed at all.

Spiritualists sometimes speak of a ‘dark night of the soul.’ What I was feeling wasn’t exactly what they mean by this, but the phrase still comes mighty close to describing it. What was I going to do now? My Holy Grail, the compass that had directed so much of my life, the purpose in what I was doing was suddenly and irretrievably gone and I felt very empty. What was I going to do now?

I spent some long hours for four nights in a row pacing the long walkways of central campus. I went to that so special place to search inside myself, to find some light, some inspiration, some definition. I needed to sort things out, to sort myself out. And for this I needed my special place. And, as always, slowly, slowly, slowly I began to find it.

'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.'

This was the heart of the matter. This was the Promise I had made. Everything I had pursued for half my life, and that had brought me to where I now stood, was for the sake of honoring this pledge. Santayana had written, *Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.* I remembered my aim. My aim was not wrong. Only what I thought I was aiming at had been wrong.

But what, then? There were so many ways I could conceivably try to fulfill my Promise. Should I throw away all that I had done up to now and start all over? That couldn't be practical. I was too far along now in my studies and too bare in the pocketbook to just throw it all away. If I had been mediocre in my studies, in my learning, that would have been one thing. But I *wasn't*. I had worked hard to *make* myself good at this stuff, and I *was* good now, and I knew it. Not just from my grades. I *liked* the theory; I *liked* the design process I was learning. You can't *like* something that took this much work to acquire and *not* be good at it. I can't, anyway. There had to be some way I could use it if I was to *do* and not just to *ask*.

For two more nights this was all the further I got. Thinking practically was taking me no further. On the fourth night I sat under the stars on a little bench near the walkway, just within the shadows beyond the walkway lamp, and I tried to clear my mind and just feel. I let myself just drift with an open heart. The night deepened, the silence thickened. After I had sat there for perhaps an hour peace and calm slowly mastered me. And when it had, it quietly and gently came to my mind: the words of George Bernard Shaw that Ted Kennedy paraphrased in Bobby's eulogy,

You see things; and you say, "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say, "Why not?"

Then I knew. Electronic brains weren't a lie; they were a dream. The fact they were a dream did not negate all the reasons I had had in the beginning – all the potential for good I had seen in them when I did not know they were only a dream. *Could* they be real some day? *Why not?*

But was this wisdom or only stubbornness? There might be a 'why not' waiting for me, a fundamental barrier of some kind that commanded *this dream will stay a dream*. I didn't know. I didn't think anyone knew. The laser was a dream when it was nothing more than Wells' Martian heat ray. Now they were real. And the electronic brain was a dream less fanciful because *real brains existed*. But it seemed a risky thing. Who was I to think *I* might find a secret wiser and more experienced men had not? Who was I, a twenty year old kid, to have the arrogance to even try such a thing? But then I remembered Robert Frost,

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

A road less traveled by. Maybe electronic brains would always be a fantasy. What if they were? I had a useful skill – or would have in another year's time – that I could put to use. It said in the ISU catalog in the section on the College of Engineering that engineers produced goods and services for the benefit of mankind. I could still do that. I could still do *something* that in however small a way would be doing something for my country. And when I wasn't busy with that I could be learning whatever I had to learn to discover if the big dream could be more than a dream. And if it could be *more* than a dream . . .

I understood. My life had not disintegrated. It had coalesced. No matter which way it happened to turn out in the end *I could not fail*. The only question was *how much* I could do, not what I *might or might not* do. And if the great dream should be realizable, could this be without at the same time helping us to understand *our own* brains and *our own* minds better? I couldn't see how the one was possible without the other hand in hand.

Everything I had thought was my aim since boyhood had been founded on naivety, but it had turned out to lead me anyway to a new and better beginning for what I might do as a man. I felt something

sublime in this, and I thought that for the first time I *really* understood something St. Thomas Aquinas had written seven hundred years earlier: *Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do.*

I walked back to the house that night in peace. I knew what I believed, desired, and ought to do. □

The house elections that year returned a more traditional mix of officers. My brother Rick became house president and Glen was elected to the office of treasurer. A likeable junior, Bryan Martin, was Lt. Commander and one of my own pledge sons was elected as recorder, which is an office like that of secretary (the official, not the administrative assistant). Jerry had applied for admission to vet school, which you could do after three years, but had not been accepted. We felt bad for him, but he had always said it was a long shot because he was from out of state and the number of admissions for students from Nebraska fell under a severe quota. Jerry decided to finish out his fourth year and get a degree in zoology. He would apply again then, and if that didn't succeed he would live in Ames for a year after his graduation, become an Iowa resident, and apply again. The Vet College might not have known it, but I was pretty sure eventually Jerry was going to get in. Smart *and* tenacious is a tough combination to beat.

The upcoming year did have one thing in store that wasn't the way I would have liked. It looked to all of us like Rush for next year was going to easily bring in enough new pledges to overfill the capacity of the house. We had a rule for that eventuality. The younger guys are the blood of the house; they are its future. The seniors, on the other hand, usually have a lot of calls they have to answer, such as finding a job after graduation, that takes them out of a lot of the mainstream activities that go into making a fraternity house work. Seniors, in other words, are expendable. The "age" of a senior is determined by his house number – a number you receive when you are initiated that counts how many men the chapter has initiated in its history. The guy with the lowest house number is, by definition, the "oldest" guy in the house. When Rush brings in more pledges than we have room to house, the rule says the oldest guys who are not elected officers have to live somewhere else. If nobody volunteers, the lowest house number goes first. Next year I would be the lowest house number. I would still be an active member. I would still be going to all the house functions. I would still take my place in chapter meetings. Indeed, by virtue of my low house number I automatically held the office of Sentinel, a purely ceremonial office for which otherwise the only duty was to keep the pledges from sneaking downstairs and eavesdropping on the chapter meetings. But I would not be able to live with my brothers. I would not be able to really get to know the new pledges very well. It would be a long, lonely year.

On a brighter note, I had a summer job – an *engineering* job – with Northwestern Bell Telephone Company in the Des Moines office. The job was part of the phone company's 'Management Development Program' – MDP, pronounced "M-dip." I was an "M-dipper." The job only paid six hundred dollars a month before taxes, which was less than I could have made at the bakery. But it would be enough, along with a second \$1500 student loan Darrell helped me get, to get me through one last year of school. Just barely. And *this* time I had the offer letter in my hand. There would be no last minute yanking of the rug out from under my feet.



Bill Miller, my fraternity brother with whom I stayed in Des Moines in the summer of '74 while working for the phone company.

My older (blood) brother Bill no longer lived in Des Moines. He had been promoted again and he and Maryann had moved to IBM's office in Austin, Texas, so I couldn't stay with him that summer. But one of my younger brothers, Bill Miller, invited me to stay with him at his parents' house in Des Moines, and Mr. and Mrs. Miller were kind enough to put me up and wouldn't take any room or board money from me. It's something I'm grateful to all of them for to this day.

The Millers were a great family. Mr. Miller was a mechanical engineer. You know how some people whistle or hum when they're thinking? Mr. Miller would make motor noises instead. Mrs. Miller was vibrant and just terrific. They also had

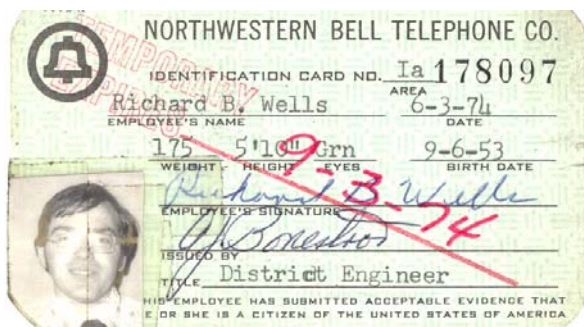
a ten year old son who was serious, hardworking, and in some ways reminded me of me.

Bill had been a swimmer in high school and it showed. He wasn't a very big guy, but he was fit and very active, although from time to time he tended to get the blues pretty bad. This was the era of disco music, and most evenings Bill would head down to one of the Des Moines discos to do some dancing and otherwise have fun. Once in awhile I'd go down with him, but not a lot because I intensely disliked disco music. My tastes over my years of high school and college ran more to Simon & Garfunkel, Credence Clearwater Revival, Elton John, John Denver, Crosby, Stills & Nash, The Mamas and the Pappas, Jefferson Airplane, Jim Croce, occasionally some Motown, and, just for variety, Black Sabbath and Steppenwolf. Glen introduced me to the music of The Moody Blues, which I also liked a lot. There wasn't a lot of new folk music around during those years but I continued to love Peter, Paul & Mary as well as The Kingston Trio. It goes without saying that I liked the Beatles. Disco music with its incessant *thumpa, thumpa, thumpa* and meat market lyrics was just plain irritating. It's possible I might have been the first person in America to say, "I'd rather eat barbed wire than listen to disco."

One night down at the disco I happened to see my pledge brother Scott there with a date. She was a short and a bit heavyset young gal. I didn't recognize her from campus, so I assumed she must have been a friend from Scott's high school days. Scott was the kind of person who tended to oscillate between being fun-loving and a good companion to being overly serious and a little bit self-righteous. This particular night I noticed that he'd seen Bill and me but was pretending he hadn't. I guess he didn't want to introduce his date to his brothers. Well, we can't let that pass now, can we?

Discos employed a disk jockey who played the records – ask your grandparents what records were, kids – and I kind of drifted over to the DJ and requested, "Can you play *Tiny Dancer* for Scott Morrison, please?" He was happy to, so a couple of songs later he announced over the PA, *This song goes out to Scott Morrison!* The Elton John song followed immediately. Well, Scott's date loved it and gave him a big hug. She thought he'd requested it for them; it was 'their song.' While she was hugging him, Scott looked over the top of her head to where I was sitting at one of the little tables. I grinned and raised my beer glass in salute; yep, it was me. Scott gave me a dirty look and I laughed. I never did meet his date.

The Miller's TV set went on the fritz while I was staying with them that summer and Mrs. Miller asked me if I could fix it. If you're an EE you get asked that a lot. I said I'd give it a shot, but secretly I didn't have much confidence I could do it. To my relief, when I opened up the back of the set I found it was one of the old vacuum tube TVs that were still around in pretty decent numbers. Now, my junior year had been the first year they stopped teaching about vacuum tubes in electronics. My freshman year had been the first year EE students weren't required to take a course in glass blowing. But they still had vacuum tube testers around in some hardware stores, right next to replacement vacuum tubes, so I did what Gary used to do in the TV and appliance store. I took my best guesses at which tubes might be bad from the symptoms the TV had been displaying. I marked each one with a piece of masking tape and also marked where it went in the set, removed them, and took them down to one of the stores where they had a tube tester. Sure enough, one of the tubes was bad. I replaced it with a new tube, went back to their house, and next thing we knew the TV was working just fine again. The ISU Electrical Engineering Department's reputation was saved. □



My phone company ID card.

I really enjoyed working for the phone company that summer. They had three fairly big, interconnected skyscrapers in the middle of downtown Des Moines, and the Outside Plant Engineering department was on the twelfth floor – the top floor – of one of these. Outside plant engineering takes care of – you guessed it – telephone gear located outside of buildings. This includes aerial

as well as buried and underground telephone cables and also those little green telephone boxes you see along the roadside. They gave me a phone company employee ID card, which let me pass the security guard in the lobby, showed me where my desk was, and put me to work.

Except for the boss, the guys who worked in Outside Plant Engineering weren't actually degreed engineers. Without exception, they had risen through the ranks of the union to become top craftsmen and then had been promoted into 'management' as what was known as a 'level 1'. This way their wages and working hours no longer fell under the protection of the union contract. Among other things, this meant the company didn't have to pay them overtime, and I noticed all these guys were pretty punctual so far as coming to work and going home was concerned. They did design work using a library of thick three ring binders called The Bell System Practices (the BSP) that had been written at Bell Telephone Laboratories. Their immediate supervisor was a level 2 named Ron, who had been promoted to his position from their ranks. The boss of it all, the district engineer or level 3, was an electrical engineer named Al Bonestro. Someplace higher up still in the phone company's hierarchy was Scott's dad, but I wasn't too clear on what he did and I only saw him once that summer. If you're wondering, no, he didn't have anything to do with me getting that job. He didn't even know I was working there until the summer was fairly far along. In the grand scheme of things I was a 'level one-half' which was about as low as you could go and not be in the union.

The job they had in mind for me was a study of the cable pressure monitoring system for Des Moines' downtown telephone loop. Before I could do much more than learn what a cable pressure monitoring system was, the job was preempted by one of those little corporate emergencies that pop up fairly often in a big company. If you take a close look at those little green telephone boxes along the roadside, you'll notice they all have some kind of alphanumeric code stenciled on them. You are supposed to be able to tell from this code how far away and in what direction the nearest phone company central office is. The CO is the building where all the telephone cables come together and are integrated into the overall phone network. A vice president from Omaha had come out to the Altoona rural section – named after the nearby town of Altoona – and had gotten himself lost. He tried to find his way back to the CO by following the codes on the green boxes, but it turned out that for some reason nobody had bothered to make sure the right codes were stenciled on the boxes. As a result, he had just gotten more and more lost and finally had to plug into one of those boxes with his hand set, call Des Moines, and have somebody come get him and lead him back to civilization. Now, Altoona isn't exactly darkest Africa. The gravel roads are laid out in neat one mile square grids and all you have to do is look at the sun to figure out which direction is which. It's hard to see how anybody could get lost out there; the VP must have been a city boy. Needless to say, he found the episode to be embarrassing. Next thing we knew, there was a top priority order from headquarters to renumber all the green boxes in the Altoona rural section *right now*.

Al handed the 'emergency' to me. I spent about half a morning consulting the BSP to learn what the code was and how to use it. Then I spent roughly the rest of the week going over all the plat drawings for the Altoona rural section and assigning new numbers to all the little green boxes. It wasn't up to me to actually go out and renumber them; one of the union guys would do that. All I had to do was supply the information for the work order.

When I told Al the job was done, he said I should take a car, go out there, and verify by sight that all the little green boxes really were where the plat drawing said they were. The project engineer, a level one-and-a-half, overheard this and said to me, "As long as you're out there, you can make me a dot map."

"What's a dot map?" I asked. He explained that whenever I saw a house I should put a dot on the map of the Altoona area. He would use this for calculating how much telephone cable was needed to supply service to the Altoona area. The rule he used was one-and-a-half pairs of cable for every house. This ensured that if the population grew out there, there would be plenty of cable to supply phone service. It cost the phone company about twenty thousand dollars per mile to lay telephone cable, so this was something they didn't like to do more often than they had to.

Before I could take a company car out to Altoona, I first had to obtain a phone company driver's license. The phone company self-insured their auto fleet and because of this they required anyone who would be driving a company vehicle to pass a driver's test. There was nothing to this, though, and soon I was spending my days cruising around rural Altoona looking at little green boxes and putting dots on a map. The car was a brand new compact car, so new they hadn't even had time to stencil 'Northwestern Bell Telephone' on its doors yet. It was pretty sporty, had a nice air conditioner – which was something my Buick didn't have – and sported a little orange flashing light dome on top. Whenever I had to pull over and get out of the car to schlep through the weeds and look at the number on a green box, I had to make sure this light was on and flashing to warn other vehicles my car was parked on the road. The car radio had a really good sound system and since what I was doing wasn't rocket science I'd listen to music while I was going about the job. At noon I'd drive over to this little diner in Bondurant where they served great home-cooked pork tenderloins with mashed potatoes and gravy. Two dollars a plate. *I can't believe they're actually paying me to do this*, I thought to myself more than once. It sure didn't feel like work.

I had been told that if I ran into any problems I should use my handset and call the engineer who was responsible for Altoona back in Des Moines. One day some kind of problem did crop up – what it was I don't remember anymore – so I got out of the car, opened up a green box, tapped in with my handset and called it in. While I was doing this a tractor came driving by. The farmer was looking at me curiously and it was easy to see why. Here was this guy dressed in a sport jacket and tie, standing up to his knees in weeds, and tapping into the green box with a handset. It probably looked like I was bugging somebody's phone line. He drove by, then drove by again a minute or so later, then came back a third time. The third time he stopped and I just couldn't resist. I flashed my phone company ID in my wallet at him and said, "FBI. Move along, please." He took off like the commies were right on his tail. Or Nixon. Same difference. I was chuckling over that for about the next hour.

A couple days later I was driving along slowly looking for my next green box when a lady came charging out of a farmhouse, waving at me to stop. I did and rolled down the window. "Are you the county engineer?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," I said. "I'm with the phone company."

"*You're the one!*" she snarled with angry heat. I'm the one? The one what? It turned out her basement had flooded and because there was some phone cable work going on nearby she assumed we were the ones who had caused her basement to flood.

I had no idea if that was the case or not, but the problem was easy enough to fix. "Let me get a crew out here, ma'am," I said. I got out of the car with my handset, tapped into the nearest green box, and called the work crew number in Altoona. A guy came out there inside of ten minutes. He took over from there and I went on about my business of visiting little green boxes. The lady had calmed down as soon as I'd said I'd get some help, and she was practically cooing as I left. □

It would have been a pretty idyllic summer if I could have spent the whole time doing the Altoona rural section renumber, but soon enough I'd run out of green boxes to look at and houses to dot on my map. Then it was back to the Des Moines office to get started on that cable pressure monitoring system study again. But before I could really get going on that, the union went out on strike.

Phone service doesn't stop when the union goes out on strike. Instead, the phone company uses 'management' personnel to fill vital jobs needed to keep the phones working. In summer of '74 this included me. The day before the strike was set to happen we were all sent to a training room in one of the other skyscrapers to learn how to be operators. When the union went out, I was going to be a switchboard operator. You know, "Number, please?" and all that. Our trainer was a stern-faced, bad-tempered operator supervisor. You could tell she was less than thrilled at the prospect of having the bunch of us try to fill in for the skilled personnel. Anyway, she taught us how to do all the various things an operator is expected to be able to do. The next morning we'd get our specific assignments about where we were supposed to

go to play operator.

The union went out just as predicted, and when I came in the next day the picket lines were already all around the buildings. I had to cross them to enter the building, which I felt bad about doing. But I was even more uncomfortable seeing the silent, hostile glares the union guys were giving me. I wanted to say, *Hey, guys, don't blame me!* But I knew how they felt. To them, I was a scab. Of course, while all of us were playing operator or messing up other vital jobs, the ones we normally did weren't being done by anyone. So it wasn't as if the phone company could just cruise through a strike with no ill effects.

But, as it turned out, by the time I got to where I supposed to go the word came the strike had been settled. The union guys and gals promptly came back in and I never did have a chance to mess up somebody's long distance phone call. □

Finally, then, I could get to work on the project they'd planned to have me do that summer. The phone cables that run through conduits under the street are called 'underground' cables, to distinguish them from the ones that are just dumped in a trench and covered with dirt (which are called 'buried' cables). The wires in high capacity underground cables are insulated by paper insulation and then the whole bundle is surrounded by an outer plastic sheath. Paper is used in order to pack more pairs of wires in the cable bundle. But if a crack develops in the outer sheath, water can get in and destroy the paper insulation, which results in short circuits in the phone lines. To prevent this, the phone company pumps dry air under a lot of pressure into the cable sheath. The air is supposed to blow out and keep the water from coming in. The air is supplied by pressure pipes with regularly spaced manifolds. That's the cable pressure system.

The cable pressure monitoring system consists of – or is supposed to consist of – regularly spaced sensors that monitor the air pressure in the cable. When the sheath cracks someplace, the air pressure drops and it's possible to calculate from two or three separate sensor readings where the break has occurred. A crew is then dispatched to repair it.

That works in theory, but it does depend on the sensors being placed in the right places and in sufficient numbers. The downtown loop was a mess. Most of it didn't have any sensors at all, too few pressure pipes were being used to pressurize the cables, and so much dry air was having to be pumped into the overloaded pressure pipes that the pressure alarms down in the basement – actually the third sub-basement, a very spooky place – were constantly tripped. The purpose of these alarms was to alert people to a break in the pressure pipe itself. The union guys had finally just turned the alarm off altogether to escape the non-stop blaring. I ended up submitting a full-scale design proposal for completely re-doing the downtown loop's system since it was completely inoperable the way it was. I did manage to get this done and turn it in by the end of the summer. It was my first real professional design. Whether or not they actually ever implemented it I never found out. □

The weather that summer was typical Iowa weather: one hundred and five degrees by afternoon and ninety-nine percent relative humidity. One evening after work, shortly after I got back to the Miller's house, the temperature began to drop like a rock. In something like twenty minutes it fell from over a hundred degrees to about sixty-five degrees. It chilled so fast my teeth were actually chattering and I had to put a jacket on. Racing in from the south was this perfectly smooth line of clouds, tinted with that very peculiar greenish tint that in Iowa means, 'Uh-oh. Look out!' Leading this eerily smooth line of clouds was a little finger-shaped funnel that I could easily imagine was pointing the way and saying to the rest of the clouds *this way, boys!*

The clouds went sailing overhead and once past Des Moines that funnel turned and came diving down on the bedroom community of Ankeny. Two more arrived at the same time from two other directions. It was probably the worst tornado storm in the town's history.

The next day I was up there with another guy taking a survey of the damage so repair crews could be dispatched to start restoring phone service. Large chunks of Ankeny had just been flattened. One sight I'll never forget was this house that had been completely blown up by the tornado. There was absolutely

nothing left of it but the floor and one little table sitting dead center in the middle of what had been the house. A telephone was sitting on this table and it was ringing. The owners were nowhere to be seen. □

On July 24th the Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous vote that Nixon must turn over sixty-four subpoenaed tapes, utterly rejecting the executive privilege claims he had been hiding behind for months. On Saturday evening, in front of live TV cameras, the House Judiciary Committee voted 27-to-11 for the first article of impeachment. On Monday the 29th the second article of impeachment was passed 28-to-10. On Tuesday the 30th it passed the third and last article of impeachment 21-to-17. At long last – far too long in my opinion – Richard Nixon was being impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors. All three articles charged him with violating his Constitutional oath to faithfully execute the office of President of the United States and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

Article I dealt with the Watergate break-in itself and the cover-up that followed. There were nine counts of impeachable offenses in this article.

Article II contained five counts of abuse of power, including misusing the IRS ‘for purposes not authorized by law,’ misusing the FBI to conduct illegal surveillances of U.S. citizens, of creating a secret ‘investigative unit’ for the purposes of prejudicing ‘the constitutional right of an accused to a fair trial,’ of failing to act ‘when he knew or had reason to know’ that his subordinates were engaged in obstruction of justice, illegal wiretaps, illegal break-ins in the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychiatrist, violations of campaign finance laws (money laundering), and, finally, of personally acting to obstruct justice.

Article III was a single count of failing to produce ‘papers and things’ lawfully subpoenaed by the House Judiciary Committee itself.

On August 5th the evening news erupted with the story that Nixon’s tape of his oval office conversation of June 23rd, 1972, recorded him personally ordering the CIA to halt the FBI investigation of the Watergate break-in. The ‘smoking gun’ had been found. Nixon himself had been criminally involved a mere six days after the Watergate break-in. He stood convicted by his own words. The story enraged the entire country and our foot-dragging Congress. On August 9th the tyrant Richard Nixon appeared on television and resigned the Office of President in disgrace before the entire country.

The long, dark Nixon years were finally over. □

VI. The Years of Ford and Carter



The college senior (fall 1974, age 21).

When I returned to Ames in fall ’74 America had a new President and I had a new place to live. I rented a dingy little one bedroom apartment near the stadium in an old wooden complex called the Lincoln Apartments because it was located on Lincoln Way, the main road passing by the university. Because I was no longer paying for board at the frat house, I was on my own so far as cooking was concerned. My apartment was on the top floor and consisted of the one bedroom, a small living room I used as a study room, a tiny little kitchen and a bathroom with a shower. I was not then nor have I ever been much of a cook, and I would spend that last year eating frozen TV dinners until I was sick of them. For a treat I’d occasionally trot down to the Burger and Brew for a burger or a pizza.

I still paid a small amount of money to the house so I could attend house functions. I also got a pleasant surprise from the university. It seemed that my GPA combined with the fact I was now three thousand dollars in debt from student loans had made me the recipient of a full year scholarship. The scholarship covered my tuition for the year, which added up to six hundred dollars. It turned out I needed every penny that scholarship saved me because the Buick decided it was time to go through a series of expensive breakdowns that started draining off my savings for auto repair bills. The scholarship was a surprise because I hadn’t applied for one. Somebody Up There somewhere over at the university must

have been keeping an eye on me. Why? Who knows. I wasn't about to question this gift. No, sir.

Lincoln Apartments approximated being fairly clean and was free of rodents. The heating system left a little to be desired – namely heat – during the winter. As for cooling, well that's what windows are for. At night I could listen to the rumble of endless traffic roaring by on Lincoln Way. I couldn't make up my mind which my landlord more closely resembled: a gray-haired hippy or a drug dealer. All in all, my apartment had everything your typical Russian immigrant could ask for. At least it was furnished. Technically speaking. I had a bed, a desk, a chair, a couch, a table, and a pile of cinder blocks with a plank to put my books on. Most of the windows had thin little curtains on them. It turned out not to be necessary to be armed when I went down to use the laundry room, but I still didn't want to leave my clothes unattended down there. Somehow the Cyclone cheerleader squad managed to resist the temptation of dropping by my place to party. Except for occasional dates, I didn't have any guests.

Still, even with all this, I was looking forward to a good year. All my courses were electives. I had decided to focus on electronics, electromagnetics, and communication systems theory within my major. Since there were zero humanities courses worth taking, my other electives were mostly made up of psychology and economics courses. I ended up taking seventeen credits both fall and spring quarters and eighteen credits during winter quarter. One of my fall courses was a three-credit special topics course, practice in teaching, where I *taught* the introductory sophomore circuit analysis course under supervision of a faculty member, Professor Fouad. One thing I didn't know was my choice to take the full sequence in communication system theory would end up introducing me to the bigger world of general system theory, which would turn out to be essential in the years to come for pursuing the dream of electronic brains and for giving me the background I would need to eventually enter the field of neuroscience and become a neuroscientist. At the time I had no idea that decision would be opening up the whole world for me. □



My brother Rick Lyons (fall, 1974).

The year did indeed get off to a very good start despite my Russian immigrant's abode. Then one day my phone rang. It was Scott on the other end of the line. I was surprised and delighted to hear him call, but then he said, "I've got some bad news, and I don't know how to say it except to just say it." Rick Lyons, our brother since we were freshmen, my brother in every way but blood, was dead. There had been a one-car accident in Illinois the night before. Rick was the driver and sole occupant of the car. Now he was gone.

I felt that old, familiar feeling rising up, that awful, icy crushing feeling of grief and hollowness. All I could say to Scott was, "Oh, no. Oh, no," over and over. I couldn't even bring myself to ask how it happened. I knew there was no asking why it had happened. There is no why. There never is. After Scott hung up, I waited only long enough to compose myself and then I went straight to the fraternity house.

The house was in a somber state of shock. Little by little we learned a few details, the most important one being that the funeral would be in Rick's hometown of Libertyville, just outside Chicago. Even before we knew when it would be and where, we began preparing to go to Libertyville. I don't remember how many carloads of us there were. I drove the Buick with four of my brothers riding with me. We stopped just once, briefly in Davenport, on the trip from Ames to Libertyville. Rick's pledge brothers would be his pallbearers at the funeral. His comrades in Navy ROTC came to the funeral too.

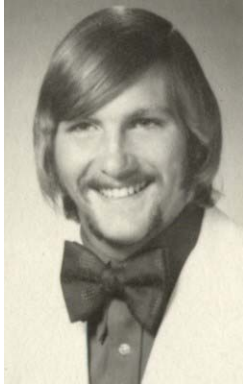
The little funeral cards paraphrased Donne:

*No man is an island unto himself alone.
Every man's death diminishes me.
Never send to ask for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee.*

It's only partly true, you know. Not every man's death diminishes me. But Rick's did. And when the bell

did toll its slow and somber note it sounded in my ears like *doom; doom; doom*. We sang the beautiful but oh, so sad Navy Hymn for Rick: *Eternal Father strong to save, whose arm has bound the restless wave . . . Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril on the sea.*

From the time Scott telephoned me until after we were all back in Ames and I was alone again in my apartment, sleep could not touch me. How long was it? Two days? More? I honestly do not know. I could not tell you what the weather was like at the funeral. To me the world in all that time was gray and dark and not to be remembered. I put Rick into the sacred place in my heart, but for a long time he would not stay there. A sight, a sound, a sudden memory and the gate would open up again and the crushing sadness would return. He was too young to be in that place. □



My brother Greg Garvey (fall, 1974).

The mind has strange ways of coping with grief. The shock of losing Rick had not yet worn off when we lost another brother to another car accident. Greg Garvey was one of our younger brothers who had pledged during my junior year. He was a walk-on on the ISU football team, which means he was a non-scholarship athlete. I remember him coming home from practice covered in bruises because the scholarship players tend to be a bit extra rough on walk-ons. I remember Al asking him one time, “Garve, why do you do this to yourself?” He had answered, “Well, I kind of like pain.” We teased him a lot about that answer. Greg’s death came, if I remember correctly, during one of the breaks. He was driving on the highway and another car had pulled out onto the road right in front of him. My mind was just not ready to accept another loss of a brother coming so soon after Rick’s death, and almost everything about Greg’s death and funeral is blank to me. The only detail I remember is Al saying to me during all this, “Another sad day.” You want to hear something strange? After losing two of us like that, there was probably a vacancy somewhere in the house and I could have probably moved out of that detestable apartment and back in with my brothers. But that thought never even occurred to me. In my mind there were no vacancies; in my mind, my two brothers were still in the house. □

President Ford did two things almost right away after he took office. Both of them caused an uproar. Of the two, I was happy about the one and angry about the other. He did them both on the same day, two days after my twenty-first birthday.

One of them was the amnesty program for the people who had fled the draft during the Vietnam war. It was a conditional amnesty, but it was still an amnesty. I thought about Frick and Frack, the two boys who had disappeared from campus after pulling numbers one and two in the draft lottery. Had they gone to Canada? Had they come home after the draft ended without any of us being called or were they still there? If they were still there, would they be coming home and trying to put their lives back together? Or had they already built new lives for themselves somewhere? I never knew the answers to any of these questions, but I hoped things had worked out for them somehow.

The other thing he did was pardon Nixon.

I was rabid about that. After all the foul, evil things Nixon had done, after the way he’d trampled on our system of government, I wanted his butt in jail and I wanted it there for as long as humanly possible. Pardon Nixon? It smacked of a new conspiracy. But you know something? In time I felt less passionate about it. I still think Nixon belonged in jail. But I came later to understand two things I didn’t understand the day President Ford did that. The first was how much the aftermath of Watergate was still bogging down the running of the government. We had serious, serious problems that only the government could do something about – if anybody could. The country had slid into a crushing recession while inflation was going wild at the same time. Probably the *only* reason there had been a job for me with the phone company that past summer was because the phone company was a regulated monopoly and because even in the hardest times people needed telephones. People’s lives were being destroyed by the economic disaster Nixon had left us with.

The second thing I came to understand I didn't think of myself. Somebody else – who I don't remember anymore – pointed out something I hadn't known. It was *Burdick v. United States*, a case that had been decided by the Supreme Court in 1915. The Supreme Court had ruled that a pardon indicated a presumption of guilt and *accepting* a pardon was the same thing as a confession of guilt. Nixon never owned up to being guilty of anything. Not in his resignation speech, not later. But by accepting the pardon President Ford offered him, he had admitted guilt. That, at least, was better than nothing. Not much. But a little. Furthermore, President Ford went before Congress that October and gave them sworn testimony on the matter of the pardon. No President had ever done that before while he was still in office. No President has done it since. It took me awhile, but sometime before the 1976 election I had reconciled one thing at least: Whatever else his politics might be, President Ford himself was a good and honorable man. □

Because I was teaching a class that fall, the EE department had provided me with space and a desk in a graduate students' office so I could hold office hours and be available to my students when they had questions. Strictly speaking, I was only entitled to that space during the fall quarter while I was actually teaching. But somehow or other the department managed to overlook that fact and I kept using that space all during the year. It made a good place to study away from my apartment and since I was spending most of the daytime on campus, including the intervals between classes, it was very convenient.

I was sharing that office with three graduate students, one of whom was studying biomedical engineering while the other two were studying more traditional specialist areas of electrical engineering. They were a fun bunch and I had a good opportunity to learn a few things I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise just by being around them. I especially found some of the things that Woody, the biomedical engineering student, was doing to be very interesting. Another thing I was exposed to by associating with them was the revolution in very small scale electronics – known as microelectronics and also called the integrated circuit revolution. For the past few years, electronics companies known as 'semiconductor houses' had been finding ways to put more and more transistors on a single tiny piece of silicon. The era of the discrete transistor was rapidly drawing to a close, swept away by advances in manufacturing technology. The era of the 'microcomputer chip' had not quite arrived yet but it was beginning. Even though I knew now that computers were not electronic brains, I was certain that if there were ever to be such a thing, it would require vast numbers of transistors to build, so the IC (integrated circuit) revolution that was just then gathering steam was very exciting and swollen with possibilities. One sign of things to come was the publication by a company named Texas Instruments of a little book, *The TTL Data Book*, that was basically a catalog of many different kinds of integrated circuit 'chips' that could be purchased off the shelf and used to design and build almost anything you could imagine. Like the name implied, the book contained all the information you needed for every one of the parts it cataloged. The grad students led a quick fundraising campaign to pull together enough people so that we could buy copies of this book from Texas Instruments. I got in on it and soon owned a first edition of *The TTL Data Book*.

My teaching was being done for college credit – what was known as a 'special problems' class – and my supervisor and mentor for it was Dr. Fouad. Professor Fouad was from Egypt originally and, although I didn't know it, was already an internationally recognized scholar in the field of electric power systems. The big machines lab in the building where my lab partner Al and I had spent so many hours the year before was Fouad's lab. Now, as it happened none of my three office mates were pursuing power systems as their area of specialization. However, this did not prevent them from playing philosopher about it, and one night it got them into some very hot water with my boss, Dr. Fouad.

I would go 'home' at the end of the school day, either back to my apartment or over to the frat house. My officemates, on the other hand, often hung around in the office until late into the evening. Usually this was to study or to work on their research projects, but sometimes it was just to shoot the bull. It was a bull shooting session that got them into trouble. You see, Fouad's power lab was equipped with about a dozen motor-generator sets. These consist of an electric motor mechanically bolted to an electric generator. The motor would draw electric power from a long panel like the ones you saw in the Jane Fonda movie a few years later, *The China Syndrome*. The power would turn the motor, which would then turn the generator,

which would then generate electric power. The setup was used to teach us about electric motors and generators.

Well, the three Aristotles in our office got to talking one night about how silly it was to draw electric power from the power lines outside the building, transformer it down to 110 volts or 220 volts, bring it into the lab, transform it back up to the higher voltage used by the motors, then use the motors to turn a generator that produced yet another voltage level at its output. Apparently they carried their bull session into the realm of what is called the *reductio ad absurdum*, ‘reduction to the absurd.’ Carried away by the grandeur of their discourse, they went into Fouad’s laboratory and proceeded to hook six motor-generator sets up in series: first generator used to power second motor, second motor used to run second generator, second generator used to power third motor, etc. They really should have known this was a bad idea if any of them had remembered what he should have learned in junior year electric machinery class. If they’d told me what they were planning, I would have warned them off. But they didn’t.

You see, motors are basically just coils of wire wrapped around a rotating magnetic core. You already know what would happen if you just stuck a piece of wire between the two slots of an electric wall outlet. One of my pledge sons at the house used to use the large amount of electric current from doing this to cook hot dogs. The only reason this doesn’t happen to motors is because when a motor rotates at high speed it produces what is known as a ‘back electromagnetic force’ or ‘back emf’ which then limits the amount of current it draws. But the more mechanical energy you draw from an electric motor, the slower it turns and the less back emf it produces. My officemates apparently didn’t realize how badly their little experiment was going to overload the motors in Fouad’s lab.

So they went merrily ahead with their hookups and threw the switch. The big motors – each one was about five feet long, two and a half feet high, and bolted into the concrete floor with huge steel bolts – began turning ever-so-slowly, much slower than was safe. The guys were standing around watching this and giggling until *kaboom!* a huge section of the control panel exploded from all the excessive current flowing through it.

The next morning I stopped at Professor Fouad’s office to make my weekly report on how my class was going. When I stuck my head in, my three officemates were standing at attention in a line in front of Fouad’s desk, looking for all the world like condemned prisoners. Fouad in the best of moods was a pretty ferocious-looking man and that morning he was definitely not in the best of moods. He was frowning at these guys and, believe me, he was one guy who *really* knew how to frown. Father Schmidt could have taken frowning lessons from him. Compared to him that morning, I’d say medieval torturers had sunnier dispositions. As I stuck my head in, he glared at me and snapped, “*WHAT!?*”

“It can wait!” I yelled and got the heck out of there as fast as I could. I never asked the guys what penalty they had to suffer for wrecking Fouad’s lab, but they were lucky not to be expelled. □

A pretty fair amount of my time that fall went into interviewing for jobs. One thing I wanted was a job that would let me go to grad school while I was working. At that time I knew nothing about the existence of these things called ‘graduate assistantships.’ I’d never heard of them, and nobody had ever told me about them. I naturally assumed grad school was like undergraduate college, something you had to pay for out of your own pocket. I knew I was going to finish the year pretty much flat broke, so obviously I needed a job and just as naturally it had to be an engineering job. That was what I had been trained to do.

I also wanted the kind of job where I would be doing design work and which would complement my extracurricular pursuit of what I needed to learn to chase my dream of electronic brains. Most kinds of engineering jobs fell short of that requirement. What I wanted most was a job at Bell Telephone Labs or, failing that, IBM’s Watson Labs. But with the economy on the rocks, neither place was interviewing or hiring that year. In fact, *any* available jobs that year seemed to fall short of what I was looking for. To improve my chances if and when I *did* find a suitable opportunity, I decided I would front load the job interviewing process with a few ‘practice interviews’ – interviews with companies I didn’t plan to work

for but would give me enough interviewing experience to improve my chances with companies I would like to work for. Companies always interview people they don't plan to hire but whom they don't tell they aren't planning to hire, so I didn't see any ethical conflict in me interviewing companies I didn't think I'd want to work for. Turnabout was fair play as I saw it. Collins Radio had taught me that.

I don't remember Collins Radio being on the list of interviewing companies, but even if they had been I wouldn't have signed up for an interview with *them*. I did interview both Kodak and Honeywell, although nothing came out of either interview. One of my practice interviews was with a consulting firm named Black & Veatch in Kansas City. I did have some curiosity at least as to what a consulting firm did, plus both Don and Dennis had gone to work for them when they had graduated. When that interview later resulted in an invitation to visit B&V in Kansas City – all expenses paid – I took them up on it. Mostly this was for the opportunity to pay a visit to Don and Dennis, but also to verify my impression from the campus interview that the work would not in fact be what I wanted to do. The visit to Kansas City was successful both socially and financially inasmuch as my first job offer that year was from B&V. They offered one thousand and forty dollars per month salary, which turned out to be the lowest offer I was to receive. The job itself, in addition, looked like it would be very unfulfilling.

Another practice interview was with Youngstown Sheet & Tube, a steel mill in East Chicago. I was pretty sure I didn't want to work for a steel company, but I'd never seen a steel mill and was very curious. Again there was also a social motivation for going on that plant interview. It would give me the chance to see and have dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Lyons, Rick's parents. I doubted very much that I would ever see them again after graduation, and I wanted to see them one last time before then. The steel mill did turn out to be a very interesting place, and very enormous. I saw a lot of fascinating things there, but I also saw the dirty, sooty city of East Chicago. I never really appreciated what the word 'slum' meant before that trip. The job they had in mind was also very unattractive and not really an engineering job at all. It was a management job. They did make me an offer, eleven hundred twenty dollars a month, but I turned that one down without much hesitation. My dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Lyons was a comfort for me and, I think, for them as well. The conversation was in many ways very melancholy, as should be expected, but it was also part of the healing process for them and for me, and it helped us remember and celebrate Rick's life instead of only mourning his death. And, as I had sadly predicted, it was indeed the last time I ever saw them. But I was happy at least that this last time wasn't at a funeral.

One interview that started out as a practice interview but turned into a serious one was with Dupont. The on-campus interview resulted in an interview trip to the Sabine River Works, a plastics manufacturing plant in Orange, Texas. Orange is near Beaumont and Port Arthur, which was where the final leg of the flight landed, and everything about that trip was memorable from the second I hit Texas.

The flight from Des Moines to Texas landed first in Dallas, and from there I had to make a connecting flight to Houston. From Houston it was on to Beaumont-Port Arthur via puddle hopper, and that's where things really started to get interesting. The Houston Metro puddle hopper was an old World War II vintage twin engine prop plane used by parachute jumpers. The 'seats' were straps of canvass strung along both sides of the fuselage. Luggage went in a back compartment and passengers boarded through a wide doorway where the paratroopers used to make their jumps.

Everyone boarded the plane and the pilots started the starboard engine. However, they didn't close the door and the port engine didn't start. We waited there for about five minutes just like that. Then through the open hatchway, I saw a mob of people coming out of the terminal. Everyone in that mob save one person was a handsome muscle beach type carrying assorted luggage. Two of these muscle beach guys were helping a little old lady walk to the plane, one supporting each arm, although it was clear to me this was a spry old gal who didn't need any help walking from anyone. To my twenty-one-year-old eyes she looked like she was about two hundred years old, and she was decked out in gold, diamond, and pearl jewelry without end. Her gold bracelets alone must have weighed ten pounds each. She was wearing an expensive fur coat and it was obvious to anybody that here was somebody who was rich beyond belief.

They seated the little old lady next to me, the two muscle beach types hopped out of the plane, they slammed the hatch closed, the port side engine started, and off we zoomed into the night. The little old lady chatted with the guy to her left for the first part of the flight. Then she turned to me.

“And whut pa’t of Po’t Ah-thu’ are you f’om?” she asked me. I explained I wasn’t from Port Arthur, and that I was from Iowa flying down to interview Dupont. I admitted it was my first time in Texas.

“Oh!” she cried, delighted. She twisted around and began pointing out the plane’s window. “Well, you see those lights o’vah they-er?” she said. “Tha’s Standa’d All.” (“That’s Standard Oil”). She proceeded to name one by one all the oil fields and refineries whose lights were twinkling on the ground in the darkness. She named every single patch of lights all the way to Beaumont-Port Arthur.

As the plane began to descend she asked me, “Whey you stayin’ in Po’t Ah-thu’?” I replied I wasn’t staying there, that somebody from Dupont was meeting me and we were going on to Orange. “Oh, tha’s too bad!” she said. “If you was stayin’ in Po’t Ah-thu’ ah’d inta’duce you to mah neighbo’s dauttah. He’s a millionaire!” (“I’d introduce you to my neighbor’s daughter. He’s a millionaire”). It was all I could do to stammer I was sorry, too. Just then the wheels touched down, and as we rolled to a stop she reached down, squeezed my knee, and stroked the inside of my thigh with her fingers. Conspiratorially, she whispered in a stage whisper, “You know, if you wazn’t so young, ah’d give you mah numbah.” Now I was speechless. As I sat there with my mouth open, the hatch flew open and two new muscle beach guys bounded in and escorted the little old lady off into the night. Outside, another mob was carting off her luggage. I just sat there dumbfounded for a minute or more.

I had just met my first Texan.

A young man and his wife were waiting for me inside the terminal. He was an electrical engineer at the Dupont plant, and he was maybe three years or so older than me. We exchanged the usual pleasantries and then off we went for dinner. He drove us across the state line into Louisiana and we ate at a fancy Cajun restaurant. They brought course after course after course of food in an endless stream. One of the best dinners I’ve ever had in my life. *Really* beat eating frozen TV dinners. We chatted some more as we ate and after dinner they dropped me off at a hotel. The plant interview started the next day.

The Sabine River Works was huge and sprawling. Tanks, towers, pipes and plumbing stretched out as far as I could see across the Texas prairie. They showed me so much stuff that after awhile my head was buzzing trying to keep track of it all. As the day went on, I was passed to successively higher managers, my young host escorting me to each new stop. Each time the guy’s office was a little bigger and a little more elaborately furnished than the last guy’s office had been. My young host’s office was a two-man office he shared with another guy as young as himself. His boss’ office was the same except only the boss occupied it. From there the grandeur just grew in stages. The Plant Manager’s office, the top of the food chain, was a palace Nero would have envied.

I was being interviewed for a job as a control systems designer. The control system of a processing plant like that is the system that makes sure everything operates just the way it’s supposed to so that the end product – plastics in this case – comes out just the way it should. I noticed that most of their control equipment was pneumatic – used pressurized air, valves, and so on – rather than electronic. I asked one of the guys I was interviewed by why this was so. He leaned back, took a great big puff on his cigar and said, “Son, ‘round heah we don’ think too hahly of spa’ks” (“Son, around here we don’t think too highly of sparks”). Looking out his window at all those endless miles of chemical reactors and pipelines, I could appreciate that.

They ended up giving me a job offer for eleven hundred eighty dollars a month, and allowed me a generous amount of time to think about it before I had to give them an answer. It was very tempting. The work sounded interesting, the money was the best so far, and I liked the Texans. I thought they were wildly exotic. There were two big problems though. The first was there wasn’t any support they mentioned by which I could get any graduate school education. That was a big strike against the job. The

other was that it was pretty clear the chemical engineers were the varsity here and the role of electrical engineers was subordinate to them. Belonging to the second string wasn't at all appealing.

Even though IBM wasn't hiring that year at all, Bill wanted me to come to work for them very badly. So much so that he pulled a few strings and got me invited for an interview down in Austin. I seriously doubted any job offer would come out of this; my guess was the guy in charge of engineering down there was just doing him a favor or humoring him by letting his brother come down. But, still, it was a chance to see Bill and Maryann and my new nephew, Nick, who had been born in February. IBM, like all the other companies, had a stack of forms I had to fill out prior to the trip. I'd been filling out a lot of these kinds of forms, and every single one of them was different. I commented on this lack of efficiency to Bill over the phone. "Why don't you industry guys get together and standardize these forms?" I complained. "That way a guy could fill them out once and then just Xerox them."

There was a pause. Then Bill said, "Xerox, eh, turkey?" IBM made copiers too.

Anyway, I flew down to Austin and had both a nice visit with family and a good interview experience with IBM. Unlike the other companies so far, the engineers at IBM gave me technical interviews. This means they posed engineering analysis and design problems and told me to work them right then and there. The problems weren't particularly hard; they were the sort of things a guy in my position ought to be able to work if he'd mastered his lessons. I was able to handle all of them and the IBM guys were impressed. Bill told me later the guy in charge of engineering down there said I'd done better on their interviews than anybody they'd seen in a long time. Of course, I suspect he might have just been stroking Bill when he said that. Like I said, anybody who'd mastered his lessons should have been able to do those problems. Still, I'm not immune to flattery. Good interview performance or not, though, the simple fact was that IBM wasn't hiring *anybody* that year, and that included the brothers of IBM employees. No job offer came out of it.

Nepotism didn't work with Bell Labs either. My cousin Corky, who was a lawyer by training, was at that time a high placed executive with AT&T in New York. I'd mentioned to him that I really wanted to work at Bell Labs, and he got in touch with some people he knew back there. No dice, though. Bell Labs didn't hire anyone that year either. I didn't get so much as a shot at an interview with them.

Northwestern Bell, on the other hand, did have a job available and they invited me back down to Des Moines for an interview. I guess they must have liked my work that past summer. The interview down there was the antithesis of the IBM interview so far as technical questions went. The most strenuous written answer I had to give anyone there was to spell my name. They really gave me more of a sales pitch – come work for us – than an interview. They capped it off with a nice salary offer, twelve hundred dollars a month, which was the largest salary offer I would receive from anyone. I liked the phone company, I liked the people there, including the union guys. But the job was really a segue into management and not actually an engineering job. And no support for graduate school. So, in the balance, it was the phone company vs. Dupont at that point. Twenty bucks a month isn't what you'd call a very significant salary difference. At that point, it looked like I could get a job. But not one that met the key things I was looking for in a job.

Then Hewlett Packard came to campus.

Hewlett Packard Company – HP as it is more widely known – was famous among us students for being the inventor of the pocket scientific calculator. Texas Instruments later became more successful in this particular market, but HP invented it and by doing so made obsolete the slide rules engineers had always been known for using. I had a slide rule, of course, but I'd also scrimped and used an income tax refund to buy an HP-35 calculator, the first model they came out with. But HP was also well known as a manufacturer of electronic test and measurement equipment *and* as a maker of minicomputers. Among the high tech companies of the day, they had a reputation for being the very best.

However, it was well known that HP wasn't hiring that year either. So what were they doing here

holding interviews? There was only one way to find out and that was to sign up for one.

The man from HP had the unlikely sounding name Del Bothoff (pronounced ‘butt off’) and he was from one of HP’s tiniest divisions, called the Delcon Division, in Mountain View, California. They made test and measurement instruments used by the telephone company. And they had received permission from HP’s headquarters to hire *two* engineers. Del and I had a nice conversation, and he was especially happy when he learned I had experience working for the telephone company. That turned out to be a key edge I had over all the guys who had flocked down to the placement office to try to get on at HP. Like I said, HP was regarded as the top of the mountain, *the* place for an EE to work.

I received an invitation for a plant visit to Delcon for a series of technical interviews. The day I flew out of Des Moines there was a raging blizzard – par for the course during an Iowa winter in those days. I was barely able to get to the Des Moines airport. When I arrived in San Francisco and was met at the airport by an HP guy – whose name, by coincidence, was Al Peterson – there was a light drizzle falling and it continued to fall the next day. Everybody I met apologized over and over again, saying how sorry they were I had to suffer through such bad weather during my first trip to California. Bad weather? You could walk through this stuff and not even get wet. If this was their idea of bad weather, what must the good weather be like?

The job was a design engineer’s job in their Research and Development (“R&D”) laboratory at Delcon. Furthermore, they were right then engaged in designing some of the first electronic products that would incorporate that new revolutionary invention, the microcomputer. Just then companies could buy these chips in sample quantities for four hundred dollars apiece. The semiconductor houses that produced them weren’t yet able to make them in very large quantities. But everybody knew they soon would be able to mass produce them, and when they did the price tag would plummet. (Within a year, they would be selling for ten dollars apiece). *This* was the kind of work I’d been looking for.

On top of this, they would not only support my getting a graduate degree, they pretty much insisted that I get one. I’d get paid time off during the day to attend classes and HP would pick up half the tab for my graduate education. I could take my pick of which university to attend – subject to getting admitted by the university, of course – but they suggested Stanford University would be the preferred school they’d like me to attend. Stanford was only the best graduate school in the country – just ask anybody at Stanford. (MIT? Oh, you mean that little job shop in Massachusetts?).

This really was my dream job if I could land it. The technical interviews they put me through were brutal. By comparison IBM had been a piece of cake. If I answered a question, they’d ask me a harder one. If I answered that one, they’d ask me an even harder one. They kept it up until they found one I couldn’t answer. They wanted to find out what I *knew* and I guess they did. I learned that I didn’t know everything yet. By the end of the day I felt like the tackling dummy at a Chicago Bears training camp.

At the very end of the day they had me meet and talk to the R&D manager, a tall red-headed guy named Bob Allen. Bob talked about the company, about the employee benefits it offered, about the products they built, about what an R&D engineer did, what opportunities for advancement there were. *Then he said they wanted me!* The salary offer was eleven hundred dollars a month.

I asked him if I could have a little time to think about it. He seemed surprised but said that would be okay. It was a big decision. The reason I hesitated was the salary offer. It was the lowest offer I’d gotten except for the one from B&V. Even the steel mill had offered a little more money than that. I thought about the job and the offer all the way back to Des Moines on the plane. I thought about it all through the drive from Des Moines back to Ames. When I got to my apartment, I picked up the phone and called Bob back in California. The conversation was brief. “Hi, Bob. This is Rick Wells. I accept.” I was an HP-er. □

Universities, colleges, and sometimes even departments have chapters of national organizations known as ‘honor societies.’ These honor societies frequently have Greek letter names, similar to fraternities and sororities, and their stated purpose is, like the name implies, to honor the scholastic

achievements of students. By the time graduation arrived I was a member of three such societies: Eta Kappa Nu (HKN) for electrical engineering, Tau Beta Pi (TBPi) for engineering, and Phi Kappa Phi (ΦΚΦ) for higher education in general. I had been inducted into HKN in the fall of my junior year, TBPi in the spring of that year, and would be inducted into ΦΚΦ in April of my senior year.

In addition to bearing Greek letter names, some of these societies also have a kind of initiation week for new inductees that bears a facile resemblance to fraternity initiation, although it comes nowhere near the intensity of Hell Week and at most usually requires nothing more than a bit of arts and crafts and maybe a little costume party dress-up. Those that do have no real purpose for it other than tradition and their initiation week amounts to nothing more than a bit of mild, harmless hazing. In addition to recognizing a student's scholarship, some also claim their members have shown exemplary character, although in fact they have no way to know if a student is a saint or a sinner. Most of them charge a modest fee for membership, which goes to supporting the local chapter's expenses, and many students decline the invitation for membership in part because of this fee or because the student doesn't see the point of being made a member of the society. Many who do accept the invitation do so because it will look good on their resumes at job-hunting time.

In point of fact these societies do recognize a student's hard work scholastically. You can't just stroll down to an office somewhere and say, 'Hey, I'd like to join.' Membership is by invitation only and the GPA required to receive such an invitation takes a lot of hard work to achieve and maintain. But after being made a member of three such honor societies, I found it a bit hard to see why these organizations were called 'societies.' The word 'society' comes from the Latin word *societas*, which is in turn derived from the word *socius*, which means 'a companion.' My dictionary listed nine definitions for 'society' and the one that applied to these organizations was "any organized group of people joined together because of some interest in common." I found it hard to see what interest there was in common among the members of the honor societies I belonged to other than belonging to the same college or having an 'interest' in getting good grades. It's a pretty vague definition anyway. Under it Little League or a chess club or even Rusty's abortive chemistry club – up to our third meeting anyway – would qualify as being a 'society.'

Certainly there wasn't any common social interest manifested by any of them. Of the three I belonged to, only HKN had occasional chapter meetings and engaged in a few extracurricular activities. It was the most 'social' of the three and even in HKN most members never attended a chapter meeting or took part in its activities other than the obligatory one at which they were made members. I did attend meetings and take part after being inducted in October of '73. It wasn't a big drain on my time and I've always thought that if you join an organization you accept an obligation to take part in it. It was probably this attitude that led to my being nominated and then elected to serve as our HKN chapter president in the spring of my junior year. It wasn't an office I sought, nor did I campaign for it. In fact, it all happened very suddenly at one chapter meeting. One of the officers nominated me, another member seconded, and when the vote came around I found myself elected. I didn't even make a speech. I didn't want the responsibility, but if you belong to a society you accept an obligation to take part in it. It's called 'being a republic.'

A fraternity is a society under anybody's definition of the word. We lived together, we worked together, we engaged in activities together. Except for the voluntary nature of our association, we were a kind of family. I didn't see anything like this in any of the honor societies I belonged to. Of course, by the early years of the seventies so many of the finest traditional college and university social structures had collapsed from the tumult of the sixties and the Nixon years it is possible the honor societies were really in a state of decline from some more significant and glorious past. Whether or not this is the case I don't know. None of the 'societies' offered any lessons in the society's history or traditions. In contrast we were taught a great deal about the fraternity's history and traditions as pledges. If the honor societies were in decline from some better past, they have never recovered from it. Those societies still function today in exactly the same way they did when I was a student. Any high school in the country has more 'spirit' than the Greek letter honor societies. When you consider the people these societies induct as members, this is a real shame and a lost opportunity. On the collapse of societies, historian Arnold Toynbee wrote,

We have found that the successive stages of the disintegration-phase [of a society] are marked by repeated presentations of an identical challenge which continues to recur because the disintegrating society continues to fail to meet it; and we have also found that, in all past cases of social disintegration that we have mustered, the same successive stages inevitably occur in the same order . . . so that the disintegration-phase, as a whole, presents the picture of a uniform process with a uniform duration in each case. . .

This striking contrast between the regularity and uniformity of the phenomenon of social disintegration and the irregularity and diversity of the phenomenon of social growth has been frequently noted in this Study as a matter of historical fact. . . The distinctive power conferred in the gift of consciousness is a freedom to make choices; and, considering that a relative freedom is one of the characteristics of the growth-phase [of societies], it is only to be expected that, in so far as human beings are free in these circumstances to determine their own future, the course which they follow should be in truth as it appears to be, a wayward one in the sense of being recalcitrant to the rules of 'laws of Nature'. The reign of Freedom, which thus keeps the 'laws of Nature' at bay, is, however, precarious inasmuch as it depends on the fulfillment of two exacting conditions. The first condition is that the conscious personality must keep the subconscious underworld of the Psyche under the will's reason and control. The second condition is that it must also strive to 'dwell together in unity' with the other conscious personalities with which it has to dwell together on some terms or other . . . These two necessary conditions for the exercise of Freedom are actually inseparable from one another; for, if it is true that 'when knaves fall out honest men come by their own', it is no less true that, when persons fall out, the Subconscious Psyche escapes from the control of each and all of them.

I would not be surprised if Toynbee's assessment of the collapse of societies in general was equally a dead-on assessment of the honor societies I knew in college. Certainly the members of the honor societies I belonged to did not 'dwell together in unity' in any way. If ever there was a time they served some greater purpose, by the time I knew them they were merely flickering candles in the wind. □

Although I may have left the impression I was having a lot of fun fall and winter quarters gallivanting around on job interviews, in fact the winter quarter of '74-75 was the most depressing time I experienced in college. Part of this was, of course, due to grief over the appalling tragedies that struck that year. Part of it was due to the usual crummy and depressing weather. But there also seemed to be a widespread melancholy blanketing everything. The music that quarter, for example, tended to be gloomy and sad. Many of the hits were written in minor keys – which almost always are inimical to 'feel good' music – and a great many of these hits were about disappointment and loss. It's hard to see how they would have become hits if they didn't strike a chord with what a lot of people were feeling at that time.

I was alright when I was around other people. But every night I eventually ended up back in my apartment and then the blues would really hit me. My studies certainly fell off during that quarter. My grades ended up being okay – 3.50 – but that was due only to the strength and discipline of thinking Dr. Cooper had taught me as a sophomore and the fact I had learned the general principles and techniques of my field in prior years and under much happier circumstances. It was sheer scholastic momentum that got me through the winter of '74-75. Aside from getting a job with HP for after I graduated, the only bright moment that quarter was the birth of my nephew Nick down in Texas.

By the time spring quarter finally arrived, I was ready to be done with college. Of the members of my pledge class, three of us were graduating at the end of that quarter: Steve in landscape architecture, Jerry in zoology, and me in electrical engineering. Al had just a bit more to do yet, and he was going to be doing it as a married man. He had found a wonderful girl, Kathy, and his freewheeling bachelor days were coming to an end. Scott had changed majors and so he wasn't done yet either. He would eventually get his degree in architecture and go on to get a master's degree in civil engineering. Glen was going to take a little longer too. He had thrown himself into serving the house with great dedication during our years together even though the price he paid personally for this service was delaying his own graduation. But he would graduate in civil engineering and go on to enjoy a happy career of service in the public

sector of his field. He is still serving the public today. After getting his zoology degree, Al went on to study pharmacy at the University of Iowa. He became a pharmacist and he and Kathy live in Wisconsin now. I lost touch with Steve after graduation, but I believe he returned to Eden Prairie, MN and took up putting his degree in landscape architecture to work. Jerry stayed in Ames for a year after graduation supporting himself by painting houses and taking graduate courses in microbiology. After a year for establishing his Iowa residence, he got into vet school, married, and today has his own veterinary practice down in Las Vegas.



Commencement Day, May 24, 1975. Left: Sherri, Dad, me, Melody, and Melody's first husband, Kenny, outside Hilton Coliseum after the ceremony. Right: Post-graduation family picnic in the park. From left to right, Melody, Kenny, Sherri, Lorne Wazny, Glen Wazny, me. Glen and Lorne are part of my family, too, in everything but blood.

Commencement day came on May 24. Mom, Dad, Sherri, Melody, and Melody's new husband Kenny all came out to Ames for the ceremony. Melody and Kenny had gotten married in January. I was happy Melody came out to Ames for my big day, but I never liked Kenny very much and would have preferred it if he hadn't inserted himself into the graduation day pictures that were being taken. But, for the time being, he was family so . . .

The fraternity house served as a kind of central gathering place that day, both before and after the commencement ceremony. Sherri knew where it was so she was able to guide my family to it without any problems. I wanted to be around my brothers that day as much as possible because we all knew a special time in our lives together was coming to an end and afterwards we wouldn't often see each other again all together in one place. The house, not that crummy apartment, was my home in Ames. Commencement is a day of festivity and happiness, but it does mingle a little bitter with the sweet. It did for me anyway.

At the house before it was time to go over to Hilton Coliseum for the ceremony, Dad started talking to me about my future. He had heard that the occupation 'safety engineer' was an up and coming thing. I sort of cut him off before he got going by telling him I already had a good job lined up in California. Seems it somehow failed to occur to me before to tell him about that. I admit to feeling offended that Dad still automatically assumed I couldn't take care of myself. But he'd been doing that since the day I first came home wearing glasses and by now I'd come to expect nothing else.

Still, it came out a little colder than I wanted it to, especially on that day, so to mend fences a little I told him about a term project I had done in one of my econ courses. I'd done an economic analysis of our bakery business in Bellevue. My thinking at the time was I might be able to give Dad some pointers on how to make more money out of his business. To my surprise, though, after all my analysis it turned out that Dad was already doing everything an economist would say he should be doing. When I'd completed the project, I remember thinking to myself, *Well, I'll be darned*. The old man was smarter than I'd

thought he was. Now I told him about that project and summarized it with, “And you know what? It turns out you’ve been doing everything right all along.”

“I knew that,” Dad snorted. Now it was his turn to be a little offended.

Commencement ceremonies began at nine-thirty. I don’t remember how many people graduated that day, but it had to be at least two or three thousand. The graduating class of 1975 filled the whole center floor of the Coliseum and we were packed in like sardines. I sat there with my classmates and sort of drifted through the ceremony. There were so many undergraduates that they didn’t have us individually go up and cross the stage to receive our diplomas. In point of fact, they didn’t actually hand out our sheepskins that day; they wanted to verify we’d passed our final exams and had really graduated first. The only time I got out of my chair during the whole thing was when President Parks had everybody who was graduating with distinction stand up and be recognized. This followed the commencement address, which was given by the Honorable Harold E. Hughes, Iowa’s former Governor and a former U.S. Senator. The graduate students, however, did get to walk across the stage and be individually presented. There weren’t nearly as many of them as there were of the rest of us. Large Al received his master’s degree in sanitary engineering that day, and it looked to me like he enjoyed every second of it. Two more of my older brothers, Craig Stanley and Ron Hammond, also received their M.S. degrees that day.

One other fellow, Bob Brown, received his master of engineering degree that day. I had met Bob that spring when he looked me up in my office. It turned out he was the second of HP’s two hires and we would be working together at Delcon Division. Bob and I had seen each other only twice before commencement day. The first time, of course, was when he hunted me down in my office. The second time had been in one of Ames’ more, shall we say, spirited downtown bars when Al, Jerry, Glen, and I were standing on top of one of the tables waving our shirts in circles over our heads. I’m pretty sure Bob expected our association out in California might turn out to be an interesting one after that night.

After commencement Glen and Lorne joined the rest of my family and we went to one of the parks for a post-graduation picnic. It was a good way to both celebrate and to come down gradually from the rush of graduation. I don’t remember much of what we did there because I was in kind of a daze, not quite yet fully internalizing that after four years college was finally over for me – well, at least until grad school started anyway. I guess I felt emotionally as grainy as some of the commencement day pictures we took turned out. As a boy in junior high school I hadn’t thought I’d get to go to college at all. As a college student, there were times I didn’t think I’d make it through. Now I finally had and it was all behind me. Ahead was the unknown future. And that’s why they call it ‘commencement.’ □

I didn’t leave Ames right away after commencement. My rent was paid through the end of the month and there were details to be attended to and some goodbyes yet to be said. The day after commencement – or to be more precise, the evening of the day after – Jerry, Glen, Lorne, and I gathered at one of the little bars in Dogtown to have a few last beers together and swap remembrances of our college days one last time. It wasn’t intended to be a long night, but it turned out we had a lot of remembering to do and it took a lot of beer to fuel the storytelling. By the time we’d all had enough it was very late and all that beer had pretty well taken care of all our inhibitions. When we finally did call it a night everybody was in a pretty emotional state and we did something we *never* did in all our college days: we hugged each other. Men just didn’t do that in those days – unless they were Italians – but that night we did. And we weren’t embarrassed. Glen, Jerry, and I had just been through four years – three of them with Lorne – of highs and lows, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies, comedies and dramas, uncertainties and accomplishments. We had begun four years before as complete strangers, ages seventeen and eighteen, and in the time since had truly become brothers and family, the bonds between us forged in the fires of shared experience, shared adversity, and shared comradeship. Those days were a unique and precious time in the passage through life that really only happens with that kind of intensity no more than once. I think all of us knew instinctively we would never pass this way again.

The movers came later in the week to take my worldly possessions, except for those clothes I was

taking with me for the trip, to California. HP was paying all the costs of my relocation. They didn't have too much to move: a few clothes, my books, a cheap stereo, some knives, forks, spoons and plates, a few pots and pans, and the odd knickknacks I'd accumulated during my college years. On Friday I went to a bank and cashed a check to myself to empty out my bank account back in Maquoketa. There wasn't much left in it by then; I found out later I'd made an error in balancing my checkbook and I actually overdrew my account by twelve dollars. The bank in Maquoketa told Mom and Dad and they covered it for me. I didn't find out until several months later.

On Saturday morning, May 31, my landlord came to inspect the apartment and take my key. I had a fifty dollar damage deposit I wanted back. He looked the place over then asked me, "How do *you* think it looks?"

"I think it looks just like it did when I moved in here," I replied. That wasn't saying much, but it was true. He asked me how much of my damage deposit I thought I was entitled to get back. "All of it," I said. Fifty bucks isn't much unless you're broke. I needed every cent I had just to get to my new home-to-be. Reluctantly, he returned my money. Then I walked out of the Lincoln Apartments one last time, got in my car, and headed south toward Interstate 80. I was twenty-one and on my way to California and my future.

I figured I could make it from Ames to the San Francisco Bay area in three days. My goal for the first day was Cheyenne, Wyoming. It's not really a one day drive at fifty-five miles per hour, but I didn't plan on spending much time going fifty-five. I drove non-stop except when I had to stop for gas. For the Buick, that was about every two hundred ten to two hundred thirty miles, depending on where towns and gas stations were. When I stopped for gas I'd stretch my legs awhile, refill my water bottle and, if it was around noon and there was a MacDonal'd's anywhere nearby, I'd have a one dollar hamburger for lunch.

I made only one sightseeing stop the whole trip. That was in Paxton, Nebraska, just off I-80. Jerry had told me I *had* to stop there and see Ollie's Big Game Bar. Ollie had been a big game hunter and his bar was packed with hunting trophies. When I opened the door to the place and walked in, the first thing I saw was a snarling ten-foot-tall polar bear reared up on its hind legs with its front paws raised and ready to strike. It was hidden just perfectly so I couldn't see it until I almost walked into it. I almost jumped out of my skin when I saw the thing towering over me. The rest of Ollie's was just as amazing. Jerry had been right. It was worth the detour. I bought a twenty-five cent draft and a small sandwich, mostly to be polite, looked the place over, then got back on the road. I made Cheyenne after dark and stayed the night in a Motel 6.

The next morning I got back on the road early. My goal for the day was Elko, Nevada. As I headed west, the mountains came into sight in the distance. It was purple mountain's majesty all over again, although Wyoming had nothing resembling fruited plains. That day's trip ended up taking more time than expected because in western Wyoming I ran into a brief blizzard and had to pull over and wait it out. I didn't have snow tires with me, nor chains. *What kind of place has a blizzard on the first of June?* I kept asking myself while I waited. It stopped after about an hour, give or take, and I was able to be on my way again. From western Wyoming I-80 curls southward to Salt Lake City. I stopped to gas up at the western edge of the city because the next leg was a ninety mile, straight as an arrow shot across nothing. This particular nothing is called the Great Salt Lake Desert, and it's one of the most forsaken places you can imagine. It's a bad place to run out of gas in. The gas station attendant came over to me and said, "Did you know you're missing a gas cap?" The gas station attendant at my previous fueling stop hadn't put my gas cap back on.

I let out a impolite phrase, unintentionally offending the attendant. I'd forgotten for a second where I was and that this guy was most likely a Mormon. Maybe not. After all, he *was* working on a Sunday. I apologized for my language. He didn't entirely forgive me for my moral lapse, but he did grudgingly sell me a new gas cap. Then I was off to the Great Salt Lake Desert. It's well named. About the best thing I can say about it is it's a great place to see from your rear view mirror. But, to be fair about it, there's really no such thing as a speed limit on I-80 during that stretch. There's nothing out there except a lone

gas station about halfway across. It's flat as a pancake, straight as an arrow, and there's absolutely no place along it to hide a speed trap. The semi trucks I did see out there all had their afterburners lit. It ends at the little town of Wendover, where I arrived as the sun was setting behind the mountains.

I topped off the gas tank there because night was falling fast and I wasn't sure I'd be able to find another open gas station in the sparsely scattered little towns of Nevada on a Sunday night. I probably still had enough gas to make Elko even without topping off, but I didn't want to take the chance. There's nowhere I've ever seen that's darker at night than eastern Nevada. Towns are few and far between and I traveled through some very rugged terrain, often with sheer cliffs rising up on either side of I-80. It was so deserted out there, so far as I could see from my car, that I thought to myself, *They used to test atom bombs in places like this.*

It was very late by the time I reached Elko. I found a city – I use the term loosely – lit up and alive with activity. It was Sunday night in Elko and every living being in eastern and central Nevada must have been whooping it up at the casinos. I started looking for a motel but everywhere the story was the same: No Vacancy. If you're ever planning to overnight in Elko, don't pick a weekend. I was starting to think I was going to have to spend the night sleeping in my car when I finally found a room I could rent overnight above one of the rattier downtown casinos. From the look and smell of the place, I figured its usual occupants were probably what New Yorkers call 'gentlemen of the Bowery.' Either that or it was a working girl's office. The bathroom was at the end of the hallway. But it was a room and it beat sleeping in the car. I figured I could survive driving dirty for one day, although I was going to need a shower pretty badly once I reached Mountain View. Before hitting the sack for the night, I did go back downstairs and go tourist gawking at the casino. I'd never seen one before. I wouldn't have minded trying out some of the games of chance, but I didn't have a nickel to waste so I had to let that experience wait for another day.

When I set off again the next morning I was planning on a nice, easy drive to the Bay Area and arriving in Mountain View probably by the early afternoon. Around noon I came to Reno and got off the interstate to gas up and stuff myself on a one dollar MacDonalD's hamburger. That done, I headed back to I-80. There was an intersection with a stop light just before the on ramp and the light turned red as I rolled up. I stopped at the light, a line of cars forming up behind me.

And my engine died.

The car wouldn't start again and a couple of nice people helped me push it off the street and into a gas station that just happened to be right at that intersection. These were the days before convenience stores so 'gas station' meant you could not only buy gas there but you could have your car serviced too. The mechanic at the gas station took a look under the hood. "Your alternator's frozen up," he said.

"How much to fix it?" I asked.

He did some figuring and mumbling then said, "Seventy dollars."

I didn't have that much.

Okay, this was a problem. I thought about it for a minute then decided the best thing to do was come clean with the man. "Look," I said, "I don't have that much. But I'm on my way to start a new job in California. How about if I call my boss and see if I can get some money wired out here?" He shrugged. Fine. "Can I use your phone?"

"Local?" he asked. "Collect," I replied.

I put in a collect call to Del Bothoff at HP and, to my relief, he accepted the charges. He knew it was me calling because the operator had told him when she asked if he'd accept the charges. He asked me how I was doing.

"Well, Del," I explained, "I'm on my way out there but I've had a problem. My car's broken down and

I don't have enough money to get it fixed. I was wondering if there's any chance I could get a salary advance to pay for it?"

"Where are you?" he asked. "Reno." Del started to laugh.

I could feel my face turning red. I knew perfectly well how all this sounded. *Hi, Del. I'm in Reno where all the casinos are and I need money.* I started thinking I was in trouble. But Del's laughter faded to a chuckle and he asked, "Would two hundred dollars be enough?" *Plenty!* That was more than I'd started the trip with. He asked me what the address of the gas station was and said the money would be coming by Western Union in a little while. I thanked him, profusely, and said I'd see him tomorrow.

After I hung up I told the gas station man the money was on its way via Western Union. "Any chance you could fix it now and I'll pay you when the money gets here?" He sort of shrugged and smiled. "Sure," he said. "After all, I've got your car." Good point. I wasn't going anywhere and the Buick as collateral was worth more than seventy dollars. Not a lot more, but more.

It took him a lot less time to fix the car than it took the money to get there. I sat around that gas station for another couple of hours until the Western Union guy finally arrived with the money. Then I was able to pay the man and be on my way with an extra one hundred thirty dollars in my pocket. Soon I was crossing over the mountains and into the Golden State.

It turns out you have to go through customs to enter California. They call it an agricultural inspection station, but it looked for all the world like the customs stop on the Canadian border I'd been through so many years before. The only difference was they didn't care if you were leaving the state, only if you were coming in. Since I wasn't carrying any fruits, animals, or other contraband, they let me in. I was now in California!

From the customs station I-80 bends south and runs through Sacramento and on down to the Bay Area. The further south I traveled, the heavier the traffic got. Pretty soon I was traveling in heavier traffic than I'd ever seen in my life. Dad would have had a conniption if he'd been driving. I figured the best thing was to just blend in with the herd and do what everybody else was doing. I'd always heard California drivers were very courteous and it was true. When a car turned on its blinker to signal it wanted to change lanes, the other drivers would make a hole, just a little bigger than one car length, and the car that wanted to change lanes would just merge into that hole. Try that in Iowa and the car behind speeds up to make sure you don't pull in front of him. Soon I was loving driving in California. I did notice, though, that when the other drivers got a look at my beat-up old Buick with its Iowa license plates they'd make a *three* car length hole for me.

I had a very pleasant drive all the way down to San Francisco. It didn't take long to see why they called California 'the Golden State.' The grass in the foothills was bleached so yellow it looked like wheat. I crossed over the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco, where I-80 came to an end and turned into I-101, the Bayshore Freeway. This took me straight down to Mountain View, where I arrived just as dusk was settling in. It took a bit of driving around once I got there, but I finally found a motel I could afford and checked in. It was Monday night, June 2nd, 1975 and I was now a Californian. □

My report-for-work date at HP was June 3rd and I showed up promptly at eight o'clock to report in. Delcon Division was located in a small complex of buildings on Middlefield Road near the Mountain View-Alviso Road. The specific building it was in was called Building 30. I had no trouble finding it at all. One thing that was totally brand new to my experience, though, was the morning traffic. By sheer accident, the street was deserted in the direction I was going, but the other side of the street was a bumper-to-bumper parking lot as far as the eye could see. I had to turn left across that traffic line to get to Building 30, and I was having visions of sitting there in my lane for about fifty years waiting for a chance to turn. But California courtesy came to the rescue again. As soon as I put my left turn signal on, the on-coming cars waited, a hole opened up, and they let me turn. As soon as I was across, the hole vanished like it had never even been there.

The entry to the building was a small lobby with a receptionist sitting at the desk. I told her who I was and who I wanted to see and she called Del on the phone. In less than a minute he came out, greeted me warmly, and took me inside. The R&D lab was just off the inside doorway. It consisted of a single hallway with work benches and desks with bookcases rising to five feet constituting the walls. The entire lab, including Lab Manager Bob Allen, consisted of twenty-four engineers, counting me. When Bob Brown reported in a couple weeks or so later, there were twenty-five.



Bob Allen (standing) and Erhard Ketelsen (sitting). Bob was the R&D Lab Manager at HP's Delcon Division, and Erhard was my Project Leader, first boss, and mentor when I first came to work there.

That first morning was a whirlwind of orientations and introductions. Del wasn't my immediate boss. He was our Group Leader and had a pair of Project Leaders working under him. Or should have. In fact, he was short one Project Leader and so was wearing two hats by managing one of our two projects, the main one, himself. I was being assigned to a new project just starting up and was the first guy reporting to its Project Leader, a jovial, warm and lovable German named Erhard Ketelsen. Erhard was to be my boss, mentor, and Father Confessor for the next two years and my friend for all the days after that.

An awful lot of that first day was nothing but a blur. I was introduced to so many different people that inside of about ten minutes names were dripping out my left ear just as fast as they were flooding into my right, the newest names replacing the older ones. Fortunately, everybody was wearing name tags.

One thing I do remember was that the first stop on the tour was to show me where the bathrooms were. The second stop was Personnel. I thought that was an interesting ordering. I met a very nice woman in Personnel – whose name, unfortunately, was flooded out a bit later by other names – who re-explained the employee benefits, told me that HP had flexible work hours – meaning I could come in any time I wanted between 6:30 and 8:30 in the morning and go home anytime after putting in eight hours – bragged about how everybody at HP was on a first-name basis, and after taking a significant if amused look at my sport jacket and tie, made it a point to let me know suits and ties weren't required at HP. I'd kind of figured that out already; I was the only jacket and tie I'd seen in the whole building. I didn't listen very closely when she explained the retirement and life insurance benefits – after all, I was twenty-one and flush with the immortality of the summertime of my life – but I did listen when she explained the medical and dental benefits. I was immortal but not invulnerable. My ears really picked up when she explained the Employee Stock Purchase Plan. I wouldn't be eligible for that until after six months – December of '75 – but the basic deal was it was a payroll withholding plan in which for every three dollars I contributed HP would toss in another dollar on top. I could invest up to ten percent of my salary in this when I became eligible. It was an automatic thirty-three percent return on investment, give or take stock market moves. Another benefit I would be eligible for after six months was Profit Sharing. HP kicked back part of their profits to the employees. She told me that historically this added up to just about the equivalent of one extra month's salary per year.

Hmm. . . If Bob had told me that on my interview day I'd have accepted on the spot.

Nobody needed to tell me what the 'six months' clause meant. For the first sixth months, I'd be on probation and if it turned out I couldn't do the job they'd fire me and find someone else who could. They didn't wave that particular stick around, but I didn't go to school just to eat my lunch.

There were also sick leave and vacation benefits. The vacation benefits began at two weeks a year and

then became longer as you put in more time with the company. And there was no pre-set or prescribed time of year when I had to take vacation. I could do it whenever I wanted subject only to letting Erhard know when I planned to want it.

Then came the forms. A mountain of forms. Almost all of them I just signed after she told me what they were for. These were, after all, benefits forms and the benefits package was the benefits package. There was nothing to negotiate and no fine print. One form I did take notice of, though, was the one where I signed over everything I might invent to HP. If I figured out how to build a better mousetrap, it would be the company's mousetrap. I thought about that one for a second and then decided it was reasonable and totally fair. After all, if I never did come up with a better mousetrap the company would still feed me *my* cheese in the form of two steady paychecks a month. I had been *hired* to invent things for them. That was my job. I understood very, very well the concept of *team*.

Then there was the credit union. The HP Employees Federal Credit Union wasn't legally a part of HP, but I could direct any portion of my salary I wanted – including none – to go into direct deposit in a savings account at the CU in my name. Bill had a book in his personal library I had read one time. It was called *The Richest Man in Babylon* and it was about how to become wealthy. Its central precept had been 'ten percent of all you make is yours to keep.' I signed up to have ten percent of my salary go straight into the CU. It was the start of what would be a lifetime habit for me. Ten percent – at least – of all I make is mine to keep. I started that in June 1975 and have never deviated from it. It works, too. This habit would eventually help make me a millionaire, dependent on no one. Not bad for the baker's boy from Bellevue.

After finishing in Personnel, Erhard took me on the whirlwind tour of the division: the marketing department, the admin department (where the accountants worked), the lab (again), and production. That was when the names avalanche really got going. He introduced me to the Production Manager as, "the crack new analog designer we hired." The word 'analog' is a technical term that refers to the parts of EE that go beyond the zeroes and ones of computer hardware. I was a little nervous about getting such a big buildup from my boss right away on the first day. After all, hardly more than a week ago I'd been a student and I didn't feel any different on June 3rd than I had on May 23rd. These guys thought I was an engineer instead of an engineering student. I silently hoped they wouldn't find out any different. So when the Production Manager shook my hand, I said, "Well, I'm new anyway." He thought I was just being modest. I'm actually not known for my modesty by anybody who really knows me. Arrogant maybe, at least sometimes. But modest? *Ooh, no*. Erhard introduced me to the Division Manager, a guy named Brian Moore, the same way. I was 'modest' with him, too.

After the tour I was back with Del again, who started explaining to me HP's style of 'management by objectives.' Today pretty much all the business world knows about MBO, but in '75 the word hadn't really gotten around all that much and HP was *the* company that started it. The way it works is that each level in the organization has a set of objectives to meet. The higher you go, the broader and more abstract these become, the lower you go the more detailed and specific they become. What makes it work is that at every level the objectives directly support the achievement of the objectives at the next rung up. At the top of the heap were the HP Corporate Objectives. There were seven of them:

1. **Profit.** To recognize that profit is the best single measure of our contribution to society and the ultimate source of our corporate strength. We should attempt to achieve the maximum possible profit consistent with our other objectives.
2. **Customers.** To strive for continual improvement in the quality, usefulness, and value of the products and services we offer our customers.
3. **Field of Interest.** To concentrate our efforts, continually seeking new opportunities for growth but limiting our involvement to fields in which we have capability and can make a contribution.
4. **Growth.** To emphasize growth as a measure of strength and a requirement for survival.
5. **Employees.** To provide employment opportunities for HP people that include the opportunity to share in

the company's success, which they help make possible. To provide for them job security based on performance, and to provide the opportunity for personal satisfaction that comes from a sense of accomplishment in their work.

6. **Organization.** To maintain an organizational environment that fosters individual motivation, initiative and creativity, and a wide latitude of freedom in working toward established objectives and goals.
7. **Citizenship.** To meet the obligations of good citizenship by making contributions to the community and to the institutions in our society which generate the environment in which we operate.

I was starting to get the idea I had come to work for a very special company. In time I would have direct proof that the seven objectives weren't just mom-and-apple-pie lip service. The company really meant it. And it was run accordingly for almost all the years I worked there. *This corporation had a soul.*

Del asked me where I was staying and I told him about the motel. "You can use the rest of this week to find a place to live," he said. "When you get settled in somewhere then we'll get you started on your project." I really, really appreciated that. He told me where I could find some information about places to live. It turned out that Mountain View had more apartment complexes in it than it did houses. That's what I was going to be looking for. I knew a house was out of the question for awhile. I had nothing to make any down payments on one with. I figured a couple of years of apartment dwelling and I could start looking for a more permanent place to live.

Then Del said the division was having a celebration about something. It wasn't clear to me what it was exactly they – no, *we* – were celebrating, but he said I should come along and join in. This was my first day of work and I was being invited to a party nearly first thing? It was mind blowing. I hadn't realized HP stood for 'Have Parties.' This wasn't California; I was living in Shangri La.

The celebration itself took place in a small little park. By fraternity standards it was a tame little affair, happy but not especially boisterous. Of course, most of the people there were considerably older than me and the pace of the party suited the age of the group. Since I knew almost no one there, I had a few polite conversations with some of my new coworkers but in fact I still felt pretty much like an outsider. I think Erhard might have noticed this because he introduced me to the three other bachelors who worked in the lab (no women worked in the lab at that time, which was a pity). I've always suspected he might have asked them to make me feel at home in my new setting. Certainly he knew I'd take to people closer to my own age more than to, say, the middle aged members of Delcon. Their names were Dick Fowles, Rich Page, and Al Howard.

Dick was the oldest of the three, about twenty-six or seven at the time. Strictly speaking, he was single but not a bachelor since he had been married and divorced. Dick stood a little over six feet tall, had an inclination to often be a bit overly serious, and had the kind of quality of character you find in men who younger men naturally take to as leaders. He was kind of the 'big brother' figure among the four of us. He was originally from Wisconsin. Rich was a year, perhaps two, older than me and had been with HP about a year at that time. He was about my height, fairly skinny, and tended to be intense and, I thought, not as self-assured inside as he projected on the outside. He came from southern California in the LA area and had gotten his degree at Cal Poly Pomona. Both Dick and Rich were electrical engineers and both had specialized in the 'digital' – that is, the computer – aspects of EE. Al was also a native Californian, although I'm not sure from precisely which part of California, and he was a 'mechanical' engineer, which is to say he designed the non-electrical parts of our products such as the package, the panel displays, and so on. If I remember correctly, his degree was in industrial engineering rather than mechanical engineering proper, but I'm not entirely sure I'm remembering this correctly. He was two, maybe three, years older than me and was the most social of the three guys.

The celebration had kind of the feeling of being pretty much an outdoor cocktail party. After awhile Al and Rich suggested we all adjourn to a bar for a few beers and some real conversation. That was fine with me, so I followed them in my car to some place they had picked out, the name of which I don't remember. They were curious to find out more about who I was, what my background was, and so on. We had hardly

sat down at the table with our beer glasses when Al asked me, “So, where are you from?”

I didn’t figure any of the three of them would have ever heard of Maquoketa, so I replied I was from the Midwest. Judging from the sardonic smile Al gave me at hearing this answer, that wasn’t specific enough. “*Where* in the Midwest?” he persisted. Iowa, I replied.

“Iowa?” He sounded puzzled. “I don’t think of *Iowa* as being in the Midwest.”

Oh? Where did he think of it as being?

“I think of Iowa as part of the East,” he said. It was my turn to be puzzled. The East? “Yes,” he continued. “When I think of the Midwest I think of places like Ohio.” Dick chuckled.

So much for the study of U.S. geography in the California school system, I thought. I pointed out that Iowa was *west* of the Mississippi River. Al was surprised to learn that. I was later to come to find out that a surprisingly large number of native Californians know very little about anything in the U.S. beyond the borders of California. A lot of them know a great number of things that aren’t true. For example, some of them think Des Moines is the capital of Idaho, or Boise is the capital of Iowa, or Chicago is within easy commuting distance of New York City. I even met a few who thought you needed a visa and shots to visit New Mexico. I was to find I was now living in a very self-absorbed state.

Al said he thought my Iowa accent was cool. Iowa accent? What accent? Well, I guess I must have one because Rich agreed with Al. But for the life of me I couldn’t hear any difference between the way I pronounced things and the way they did. *Texans* have an accent. *Bostonians* have an accent. Folks from Alabama have an accent. People from Brooklyn have an accent. But an Iowa accent? That was a new one on me. Still, Al and Rich both insisted they could hear an accent when I talked. I decided to take comfort that if I had an accent at least it was ‘cool.’ I noticed they both knew how to correctly pronounce ‘Iowa.’ If you’re wondering, it’s I’-oh-wa, not Ah-wa.

In the weeks to come, Rich, Dick, and I became pretty close chums. It turned out Rich loved sailing and I’ve always liked being out on the water. There was a charter association, the Northern California Sailing and Charter Association, in the Bay Area and the three of us would often rent a sailboat and do a little day sailing in the Bay on weekends. I would have loved to take the boat out under the Golden Gate Bridge and into the Pacific Ocean proper, but the Association’s insurance wouldn’t allow that. On occasion Al would come along with us, but for the most part Al had his own interests. Rich, Dick, and I chummed around so much that the rest of the division started thinking of us as a kind of team, The Three Richards. Nobody, so far as I know, ever referred to us as the Three Stooges. The three techno-geeks maybe. There isn’t much doubt that the three of us were the most aggressive when it came to jumping on top of the new technologies that began pouring out onto the scene one after another during those years. There was a technological revolution just beginning to roll when I arrived at HP and I was getting in on the ground floor of it. □

The next day my first order of business was finding a permanent place to live. The information they had supplied me with was a big help and in very little time I found a nice one-bedroom unfurnished apartment on Cypress Point Drive, just off where Moffett Boulevard turned into Castro Street. The apartment belonged to the Cypress Point Apartments complex, which had a common room, a pool, and a laundry building. It was a much nicer place by far than the Lincoln Apartments had been and had a bedroom, a bathroom with tub shower, a living room with a nice balcony (mine was a second-floor apartment), a kitchen, and a dining area. It was half-again or more larger than my apartment in Ames had been. Rent was two hundred thirty dollars a month, including utilities, and, fortunately for me, the rent wasn’t due until the end of the month. If they’d charged the rent in advance, like they had done at the Lincoln Apartments, I wouldn’t have had the money for the first month’s rent. As it was, I had enough for the ‘cleaning deposit’ – the new term for damage deposit – and was able to move in that day. I hadn’t forgotten that I was already two hundred bucks into HP for that salary advance, so meeting the rent at the end of the first month was going to be close. But I’d have enough, just barely, to meet it and after that

there wouldn't be a problem. Now the movers had an address they could deliver my stuff to.

'My stuff' did not include any furniture, so that was the next order of business. The Cypress Point folks recommended a place called GranTree Furniture Rental as a good place to rent some furniture. They were my next stop. GranTree turned out to not be a very friendly business. Before they'd deliver the furniture I wanted to rent they insisted they'd have to do a credit check on me. I got this from a pompous young man a couple years older than me who wore a cheap polyester suit. The process would take three days and I could come back then to close the deal. I wasn't too happy about that; it meant I'd be sleeping on the floor for the next three days. You'd think I was asking them for a loan instead of renting a few pieces of furniture. But, a little foolishly as it turned out, I agreed to their terms.

When I came back on Saturday, my 'loan officer' was very unfriendly. They weren't going to rent any furniture to me. "We called your bank," he said accusingly, "and they never heard of you."

What? "Who'd you call?" I asked. He just said, "We called Maquoketa, Idaho, and they never heard of you."

"It's Maquoketa, IOWA," I said. Was I going to have to spell it for him? He just glared at me with suspicion and ended the conversation. Since there is no "Maquoketa, Idaho" I doubted if they'd actually called anybody. I was pretty mad when I left GranTree. I'd have to find another place to rent furniture, and that probably would mean more nights sleeping on the floor. The floor of my apartment wasn't exactly comfortable either. However, it just happened the next furniture place I found didn't think it was a bank and they were happy to rent me all the stuff I needed. They even delivered it that very same day. It was fairly cheap furniture, true, but part of the deal was that I could apply part of the rental money to eventually buying that furniture outright, which I later did. My furniture rental was forty-eight dollars a month, which effectively made my overall rent two hundred seventy-eight dollars a month. My finances were strained pretty tight at this point, especially since the apartment rent and the furniture rent fell on the same day of the month. My total take home pay after taxes and various withholdings was about four hundred sixty dollars a month, not counting the money being steered into my new account at the CU. But it still beat the Russian immigrant lifestyle of a college student by a long way. □

At work I soon found out that my engineering education at Iowa State had left me well prepared to deal with the theoretical aspects of design but there were a great many practical things I still had to learn. That first year with HP was in many ways like a fifth year of college.

Del's group was responsible for the division's top-of-the-line product family, the Transmission Impairment Measuring Sets, commonly called the TIMS product line. A TIMS was a very specialized measurement instrument used mainly by the telephone company to ascertain the quality and capability of telephone lines to carry computer data from a computer in one location to a second computer in some other location. Delcon had introduced the first TIMS product, the HP 4940, in 1974. Most of our group was now working on a lower cost version that did not provide all the measurement capabilities of the original TIMS but would be significantly less costly. Appropriately enough, this project was code named Mini-TIMS. It would be officially known to the world in less than one more year's time as the HP 4942. The older TIMS predated the microprocessor – as microcomputer chips were called at the time – and the Mini-TIMS would be one of the first products anywhere to use a true microprocessor. As I mentioned before, these new and revolutionary devices were available only in sample quantities the day I arrived at HP, but in only a few more months they would be available in mass quantities. There had, of course, been products available for a couple of years that used the first not-quite-a-microprocessor-yet integrated circuit, Intel's 8008 'microprocessor.' But that chip fell short of being a true microcomputer chip. The decision had been made that TIMS would not use one. But Mini-TIMS was a different story altogether. The microprocessor chip it was using was produced by Motorola and was called the M6800. This chip was the closest approximation to a real computer – the Digital Equipment Corporation's PDP-11 computer to be precise – that had yet appeared. Intel was at the same time in the process of bringing out its improved 8008 design, which was called the Intel 8080.