

God Shoves Me: Growing Up in Michigan, 1949–1974

Robert L. Wardrop

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Chapter 1

Foreward

Reagan remembered three things from childhood: that his father was a drunk, that his mother was a saint, and that his ability to make an audience laugh afforded an antidote to life's insecurities and embarrassments.

So begins Chapter 1 of *Reagan: The Life* by H.W. Brands, a book I just began reading today (June 13, 2015). Part 1 of this biography, *Prairie Idyll*, consists of two (unnamed) chapters and covers the years 1911–1934, just two fewer years than I relate in this tome. Part 1 comprises 26 pages of the total of 737 pages in Brands' biography. My memoirs—whose length remains undetermined at this time, but surely will run well over two hundred pages—is a more nuanced recounting of a childhood than that undertaken by Brands. Obviously, Reagan's adult life was more accomplished, noteworthy and interesting than mine, although the zero pages I devote to my life after age 25 do, perhaps, miss some fascinating events.

I am quite looking forward to reading Brands' biography of our 40th President. I have read two earlier works of his (*The first American: The life and times of Benjamin Franklin* and *Lone star nation*) and find him to be entertaining, informative and enthusiastic about his topics. I have seen him appear in several programs on the *History Channel* and what sets Brands apart from the other experts is his enthusiasm. I have tried to be enthusiastic in my presentation of the first 25 years of my life, although I doubt that I have achieved a Brandsian level.

At the end of the Reagan biography, Brands presents a four page discussion of his sources, 33 pages of chapter notes and a 25 page index. Being curious, I will read about the sources; being forgetful, I will often refer to the index; not being a scholar, I might never check a chapter note.

My sources? Primarily my memory and those of my relatives, notably my son Roger and my niece Karen, and my childhood friends, notably my basketball teammates and Jordy Tisdale. The retelling of the basketball exploits of teams are taken from local newspapers of the day (The Detroit News and Redford Observer) and the occasionally conflicting memories of my numerous teammates and myself.

These memoirs contain no chapter notes and I don't plan to create an index. This document is most definitely **not** a scholarly work, nor is it intended for anyone other than my friends and relatives especially my grandchildren: Skylie Grace, Corbin Grant and Breyton Garrett Wardrop.

I have shown drafts of this work to several friends and relatives. My basketball teammates, in

particular, have marveled at my memory. But not for long. After a lengthy discussion with, for example, my funniest teammate Roger Steffen, we found that I have a huge number of memories and Roger has a huge number of memories, but even though he was my teammate for four years, our specific memories rarely overlap.

The fact that *Bob Wardrop scored 24 points in a basketball game at North Farmington High School in 1966* can be authenticated from newspaper accounts, but the huge majority of the tales in these memoirs cannot be verified and, indeed, many of them may be *false memories*.

I don't worry about false memories. Why? I leave that explanation to a Nobel Prize winning author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who said:

The life of a person is not what happened, but what he remembers and how he remembers it.

Chapter 2

God Shoves Me

The best day of my life? That's easy: June 15, 1972, the day my only child, Roger, was born. The most important day of my life? Tuesday, May 30, 1967, Memorial Day, the day God intervened and changed the course of my life.

July 1, 1949, marked the birth of the second and final child to soul-mates Helen and Harold Wardrop, a baby boy named Robert Lee. As they gazed upon the helpless, ignorant child in Helen's arms, they vowed to raise Bob according to the same four principles they had followed for 5.5 years with his sister Geri:

1. This child will not grow up to be conceited.
2. This child will not grow up to be lazy.
3. The primary technique for molding this child into the person we want him to be is shame.
4. The intellectual growth of this child will be actively limited. He must always understand that his parents know best on every topic.

Regarding the fourth item, as a child, I learned that whenever I deviated from the beliefs or pronouncements of my parents, one or both of them would always have the same response: **Who gave you that idea?** Apparently, no original thought or notion would ever materialize between my ears.

In retrospect, it seems totally predictable that young Bob would quickly develop a love of mathematics. In math, problems have unique correct answers that are independent of Helen and Harold. In math, my responses could not be dismissed for violating the Wardrop doctrine. In short, in math I had accomplishments that could be neither discounted nor denied.

Beginning in ninth grade, for four years my life revolved around playing basketball. My basketball career was full of highlights for the first three years: I made the team; I became a starter; and I amassed an impressive list of accomplishments, both as an individual player and as a member of three very successful teams. My parents took obvious pride in my achievements, but could never praise or even compliment my play. Remember rule 1: Bob must not become conceited. Instead, they would constantly criticize our star player, Reggie: "Everybody thinks Reggie is so good. He's

not. He shoots too much.” (Almost 50 years later, Reggie told me that his father would say that I shot too much. But Reggie’s father also praised him.)

Before my senior year of basketball, I became obsessed with dunking. The previous year, several boys on our team could dunk the basketball, but all were at least three inches taller than I. I could almost dunk, and my near-misses were respected by my taller teammates. I realized that if I could become the shortest boy, by far, to dunk, I would have a distinction, much like my triumphs in math, that could never be denied.

I spent hundreds of hours in my basement, doing toe rises to strengthen my calf muscles. Finally, by the beginning of my senior year in high school, I could dunk a basketball!

As I met my friends at Will Rogers Elementary School on Memorial Day, 1967, the weather was perfect. In just a few days I would attend my high school prom and a few days later I would graduate. At my school there was a tradition that on Memorial Day you would go to a beach with your prom date. This begs the question: Why wasn’t I at a beach? My date, Chris, had been my steady for a couple of months until she dumped me for another boy just a few days earlier. Chris, a junior who would have a future opportunity to go to a prom with someone she actually cared for, was a true humanitarian. She announced that she would attend prom with me because she didn’t want me to go through life with the memory of her breaking my heart. These were, perhaps, not her exact words.

My friends and I proceeded to play a long game of softball. After the game was over, a few guys went home and five of us headed over to the adjacent basketball court and started shooting baskets. We noticed a group of old guys and their wives and families having a barbecue in a backyard that abutted the schoolyard. They noticed us. Perhaps because they had seen how inept we were at softball, they challenged us to a game of basketball. “Sure,” I said, “Let’s play full-court.” On closer inspection, our challengers appeared to be in their mid-twenties; yep, old guys.

There were two reasons I wanted to play full-court basketball. First, we had to be in better shape than our opponents; we would run them ragged! Second, I wanted to flex my leg muscles and slam home a few dunks, which is much easier to accomplish in a full-court game. Dunking always made me happy. With Chris dumping me, my impending graduation and my poor showing at softball, I needed something to make me feel happy. Plus, perhaps Chris and her new boyfriend would walk by the court and they would see what she was missing!

Well, everything went according to plan. The old guys were no match for us. I repeatedly stole the ball, drove the length of the court and Blam! threw the ball down through the hoop. Indeed, I remember five steals, five trips down the court and five glorious dunks! On my sixth breakaway down the court, God shoved me and I fell.

If God had chosen to shove me while I was dribbling down the court, I would have escaped with scraped elbows and knees, with the loss of a bit of blood. But God had a plan. On this sixth trip down the court, feeling quite full of myself, I was careless and misplanned my steps, forcing me to jump either too early or too late. Too late was not an option; to leap into the air and smash into the underside of the basket would have been extremely embarrassing. Thus, my only option was to leave the ground too early—that is, too far from the hoop—and try to hang in the air long enough to complete my dunk.

(Aside: The careful reader may have thought of a third option: I could have given up on a dunk

and simply made a lay-up. Either way is two points, right? I opine that this careful reader has never been a teenage boy.)

There I was flying through the air, my right arm stretched to its limit, my right hand holding onto the ball, getting ready to slam it home. But I couldn't quite hang long enough; on my way back to earth, my wrist slammed into the rim and the ball went sailing wide of its target. At this point in time, no problem. Over the previous 15 months, I had failed on dunk attempts hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times and never suffered a mishap. In those hundreds or thousands of previous failures, however, God was off doing something else. But on May 30, 1967, as my wrist hit the rim, God decided to give me a shove.

Off-balance because of the Divine nudge, I hit the asphalt awkwardly, with my left leg bent under me unnaturally. My knee was ruined.

Chapter 3

The Child is the Father of the Man

First of all, let me state that my name should be Robert Lee Wardrobe. Why? Well, according to

<http://www.ancestry.com/>

the origin of *Wardrop* is:

Scottish: metonymic occupational name for someone who was in charge of the garments worn by a feudal lord and his household, from Norman-French *ward(e)* “to keep or guard” plus *robe* “garment.”

Would I have liked *Wardrobe* as a surname? Who knows?

With *Wardrop* I endured many comments of the form “Why do you hate peace?” which I heard frequently during the unpopular Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s. Also, some interpreted my name as a reference to *the act of releasing a bomb from a plane*. During junior high school, my nicknames included *Drop*, *Drip-Drop* and, my least favorite, *Drip*. With lots of effort I was able to convince myself that *Drop* or *Drip-Drop* could be said with affection; I never was able to believe that *Drip* was anything but derogatory.

Of course, with a surname of *Wardrobe* there would have been other taunts because, hey, that’s what kids do. I dated an Elizabeth for a length of time that could only be explained by my being more stubborn than sensible, and the *only* good thing—not hyperbole, she was truly awful—I got out of the relationship was to learn that her nickname as a child had been *Lizard Breath*. I guess that kids have a remarkable ability to make names humorous.

I was born on Friday, July 1, 1949, at Florence Crittendon Hospital in downtown Detroit. When I was eight years old I had the following conversation with my parents.

- Me: I know I was born in Detroit, but in which hospital?
- Both parents, in unison: Don’t tell anyone where you were born!
- Me: Why not?
- Both parents, in unison: Why not! Who has been giving you such ideas?

- Me: Nobody, sometimes ...
- Mom, interrupting: I don't know who it could be; he don't (sic) get out much.
- Me: ... I get ...
- Dad, interrupting: Well, find out who it was, Helen. I hope he isn't like his sister, Geri.
- Mom: Yes, sometimes it's like that girl has a mind of her own.
- Me, after my parents have left the room: ... ideas of my own.

A few years later, when they seemed to believe that I shared some of their white supremacy beliefs, my parents said, "We don't tell people where you were born because it was a **bad** part of town." This left me confused; how could a parcel of land be bad? "It's bad because black people live there," they patiently explained as if I was the mental defective they had always assumed me to be. (I never did tell them that my son was delivered by a black man, in 1972, in Ann Arbor Michigan. Presumably, it was a bad delivery room. Or a bad hospital. Or both.)

There is a subtle point in the above exchange. Possibly you missed it, possibly you saw it and concluded that my presentation was flawed. What was this point?

My parents became angry with me not because I questioned their reasoning, but simply because I inquired about their pronouncement. Wanting to know a reason behind a pronouncement was not allowed. As I grew older and realized how very strange this behavior was, I, of course, wondered why they were the way they were. I have never determined, to my satisfaction, why my parents had this attitude; the best I have are two theories, one for each of them.

My father had served in the army during the second World War. I never served in the military, but am familiar, from popular culture, with the notion, "When your sergeant says 'Jump,' you say, 'How high?'" My mother was the seventh of eight children (or eighth of nine, move on this later) in a family with a violent alcoholic father. I believe that she left home at 16 after he punched her in the face. Perhaps she had learned to never question her father about anything.

Back to my birth. Well, actually, on second thought, I will discuss my first six years of life in the next chapter. In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to provide an overview of the motivation for and methods of this document.

I love to write. When I was younger I loved to sing along with the radio. Perhaps the best I can say about my writing is that it's better than my singing.

I am perhaps being a bit too modest. I have had some success with the two *Statistics* textbooks I have written, garnering comments such as

This text makes an incredibly boring subject almost entertaining. And Wardrop is *funny*.

I have always chosen to view the use of the adjective *funny* as a compliment. But who knows?

It has been my experience that whenever I have started a large project or journey or relationship, I have thought to myself, "I am doing this for reason X." In other words, I always seem to begin by identifying one *thing* as being **the reason**. Before long, however, other reasons cascade into the

picture. Keeping with this tradition, I will say that I decided to write my memoirs for the benefit of my three sensational grandchildren:

1. Skylie Grace Wardrop, born August 26, 2003.
2. Corbin Grant Wardrop, born February 26, 2005. (How many *features* can you detect in common in these two names? Parents love common features in children's names.)
3. Breyton Garrett Wardrop, born August 17, 2006. (The common features have all (?) disappeared.)

I know almost nothing about my grandparents and absolutely nothing, zero, about those on my family tree who came earlier. I want my grandchildren to know about me and, if they choose to pass this document along, perhaps my great-grandchildren and others will have some idea who I was.

My original plan was to have these memoirs end when my son Roger was born and I was just 16 days shy of turning 23. Then I realized that the first two years of Roger's life were quite entertaining and I had to include them. Besides, of the many characters who appear on the following pages, Roger is, of course, the one best known to my grandchildren.

Therefore, I changed the ending date to coincide with my completing my Ph.D. and moving to Wisconsin in July, 1974, shortly after I had turned 25. At the end of these memoirs I will present a rather lengthy *epilogue* that will provide some highlights of what happened to several of my main characters—mother, father and sister primarily—after 1974. Consider it my attempt at some kind of Wardrop-history-completeness.

The obvious question, of course, is, "Why do these memoirs end so long before my death?" (I am 65 years, 11 months and 3 days old, as of today.) I have read a number of biographies of famous men (sorry, no famous women yet) and, in every case, the man's childhood is relegated to a very short chapter. This annoys me. For as long as I can remember, I have believed in the message of the following poem. Indeed, I held my belief before I read the poem. I could never, however, have expressed it so well as Wordsworth did in 1802 in *My heart leaps up when I behold*,

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

In other words, my *reason* for ending these memoirs at the termination of my formal education—which is, arguably, as good a definition as end of childhood as any—is because, well, my childhood created who I became. Only partially, of course. The path my adult life has taken has been influenced, but not determined by my childhood. Thus, my reason for stopping at age 25 is weak. But

as discussed earlier in this chapter, believing there is **a reason**, singular, that something happens is almost always an oversimplification.

While writing these memoirs—I completed a rough draft of it before returning to this arduous task of *getting started*—I discovered that the first 25 years of my life were, frankly, a great deal more exciting and interesting than the last 41 have been. (This is largely due to the fact that I have been a Statistics professor.) Thus, another *reason* I end these memoirs at age 25 is an attempt to keep them more entertaining.

I have one last large comment to make before I move on to the next chapter and the first six years of my life.

My parents loved me. I loved my parents and still do. My parents, however, were not perfect, just like all parents everywhere. Upon reading segments of these memoirs, my son Roger has said to me, “You are kind of rough on grandpa Wardrop.” I am.

As you will learn in the epilogue, my father died angry with me. Indeed, he had been angry at me for several months before he died. A few years earlier, he had said to me, “I regret ever having had children.” He never took this back, never said, “I didn’t really mean it.” He never apologized.

By contrast, when my Mother died at age 93 years, 3 months and 14 days, we were good.

In these memoirs I have chosen to present my parents as real people, not an idealized version of whom they were.

Having my *one last large comment* out of the way, I end this chapter with a smaller one, almost a disclaimer.

I have shown excerpts of these memoirs to several of my childhood friends and their reactions are almost universally the same, “Bob, you have an amazing memory!” When subsequently we have talked about our childhoods, however, we quickly realize that I have a huge number of memories and each of them has a huge number of memories and these numerous huge sets of memories only occasionally overlap. I visualize this whole phenomenon as my life being the surface of the Pacific Ocean. The few things I remember coincide with the islands that infrequently appear in the Ocean. Other people have their own islands. And, of course, there is the ever present problem that some of these islands might, indeed, be false islands.

I choose not to worry about the gaps in my memories; I prefer to think of it the following way:

The life of a person is not what happened, but what he remembers and how he remembers it—Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Chapter 4

Genesis: Life on Westwood, 1949–55

My parents brought me home to our humble house on a street called Westwood on the far west side of Detroit. This was to be my home until August, 1955, when we moved to 9647 Nathaline in South Redford Township, Michigan. The little white house with aluminum siding was to remain my home until I married at age 20 in 1969.

I don't remember much about life on Westwood.

The first floor of the house had the bathroom, living room, kitchen and my parents' bedroom. The second floor had a bedroom and an unfinished room. I shared the bedroom with my sister Geri who was 5.5 years older than I. I have vague recollections of my father working on converting the unfinished room into a second bedroom, but I don't recall any substantial progress being made.

The house had no basement and in the middle of the first floor (the living room? the dining room?) was a big hole, covered by a metal grate, in which the furnace sat. My guess—and it's only a guess—is that the large grate aided the distribution of heat throughout the house; I am pretty sure there were no air ducts or any similar devices. I remember that the hole and the grate played a big role in my parents' approach to teaching me to behave: alternatively I was going to be placed under the grate or the monster living in the furnace was going to come after me. Ahhh, the stuff of children's nightmares!

I remember that I had a nervous habit of sticking my finger into my hair, twirling my finger and then yanking out my hair. (I can't imagine why I would be anxious; well, except for the furnace-grate-monster.) I had many large bald spots on my head, but given that I was hereditarily completely bald by age 25, it probably didn't matter much. I remember that I fell down the stairs quite often, but, no appreciable damage occurred.

In my early-twenties I visited a physician because of chronic back pain. He took an x-ray, examined it and told me, "One of your vertebra is fused. Did you ever have a broken back?"

"Not that I remember," was my reply.

I was married at this time and living in Ann Arbor. Several years later I, very casually, asked my mother about any possible back injuries I had had as a young child. I was careful not to mention the theorized broken back and especially careful not to sound the least bit accusatory.

She smile wistfully and said, "You were such a little monkey. You were always climbing up into the kitchen cupboards. One day when you were about one year old, you fell. You lay on the floor crying and you couldn't move. So, your father and I took you to the chiropractor; he snapped

your back, and you never had trouble with it again!” (Note: During my entire childhood and well into my 20s I had recurring back trouble; apparently, my mother didn’t notice it.)

Years later, in an argument with my mother, I blurted out what bad parents they had been; first, for letting me ‘climb in the cupboards all the time’ like a ‘monkey’ and then for taking me to a quack for medical care. My mother denied everything: No monkey behavior, no fall, no chiropractor. I would be open to the possibility that I dreamt the whole episode (after all, one can’t dream about furnace-grate-monsters exclusively) except for two facts. First, I definitely had back damage. Second, as I progressed through adulthood, I learned that my mother never took responsibility for anything. This second fact is not meant to sound so harsh; it is, in my mind, undoubtedly her legacy of growing up in a house with a violent alcoholic father.

Before I continue, please allow a brief aside. I think a great deal—obsess would be too strong a word, but isn’t that what obsessives always say—about the question of *Nature versus Nurture*. For example, throughout my remembered life I have always feared—and avoided—amusement park rides that go high and/or turn one upside-down. I have *never* ridden on a full-sized roller coaster. I often managed to ride—with substantial anxiety—on a simple Ferris wheel, but the first time I saw a double Ferris wheel, I thought, “No way. There is nothing that would get me on that ride!”

When I was in elementary school I would always attend the Saint Robert’s carnival when it came to town each September. I would give in to peer pressure and manage a few rides on the Rock-O-Plane, but always did my utmost to prevent the cage from putting me *heels-over-head*. For information on the Rock-O-Plane ride, see

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock-O-Plane>.

I have often pondered the question, “Is it my nature to be cowed by these rides or is my fear based on a particular experience?” Prior to the *you were such a little monkey* conversation with my mother, I felt certain it was my nature. Now, I lean towards nurture. My pre-memory kitchen fall helps explain to me—no student of the analysis of dreams—why I had several recurring dreams of falling throughout childhood and well into adulthood.

Another recurring dream of my early childhood was that I would be playing in the area between the sidewalk and the street’s curb. Suddenly, in the dream, I would fall to the ground and start rolling towards the curb. Beyond the curb, of course, cars were speeding down the street with nary a gap between them. Try as I might in the dream, I could neither halt nor even slow my inevitable roll to certain death. Many a nights I would awake, afraid and sweaty—*drenched in sweat* would be hyperbole—but relieved to find myself safe in my bed. What was the origin of this dream? I do not know. I cannot explain it with an accident followed by a trip to a quack. Perhaps it grew out of my parents repeated admonitions, “Do not play in the street, Bobby!”

Now I will return to the story of this chapter, my life on Westwood.

The lots on Westwood were 40 feet wide. There was an alley behind our yard and, most likely, a garage with an alley entrance, which was common in those days. Standing on Westwood and looking towards our house, our property included an undeveloped lot to the left of the house; 40 feet of bonus play area. To the left of our bonus land was an older couple—remember I was six or younger, so they might have been in their 50’s—Mr. and Mrs. Roach. I recall that they were very kind to me and that they had one or more adult children who, this being the 1950s, did not live with their parents and were married.

I remember making a baseball diamond on the extra lot. One day there were four of us and we wanted to play baseball. (The worst feature of baseball is that one never had enough players and, if one ever did, one would die of boredom from all the standing around.) One of the four, let's call him Tommy, challenged the three of us; him versus us. His only stipulation was that he would bat first.

It didn't take long for Tommy to be dispatched. After all, with no teammates, each of his at-bats resulted in a home run or an out, perforce. And Tommy was not a power hitter. Anyways, in our turn to bat, I was up first and, of course, being a one man team, Tommy was pitching. He looked in to where his catcher would be waiting—well, if he had a catcher—and let the pitch fly. I took a mighty swing, but barely ticked the ball which caromed off my bat and bounced slowly to Tommy. In the following, say, 20 seconds, three facts became apparent.

First, Tommy was no mental giant. As he fielded the ball, I was about one-fourth of the way to first. With a bit of tenth-grade geometry, you can determine that Tommy and I were roughly equal distance from first base, with him being a bit closer. Imagine, two five year-olds, hell-bent on reaching the base first. Think of the collision, the scraped knees, Bobby running in the house crying (I was a bit of a cry baby). But the collision never was.

Tommy fielded the ball and started running straight towards me. Somewhere between first and second base, I realized that Tommy was going to chase me, with the determination of a heat seeking missile, all around the bases. I ran to second; Tommy, on my heels, touched second base too. I rounded third; close behind me Tommy rounded third too. Seconds later I crossed home plate (an old piece of cardboard) and then Tommy did too. The only difference was that Tommy's team did not score a run on the play.

The second thing I learned? Well, rather obviously, that without trying much, I was faster than Tommy. After I crossed home plate and before my first teammate got to bat, I learned my third fact. Once he had fallen behind on the scoreboard, Tommy quit the game and went home angry.

On my sixth birthday, my parents gave me a croquet set. The next day, a Saturday, my father and Mr. Roach were home from work and I had my first croquet game. All six of us played—the Wardrops and the Roaches—which matched neatly with the six colors of balls and mallets. I recall absolutely no details of the match; only that I can't remember a happier time on Westwood. Tellingly, we never played croquet again. Neither of my parents believed in playing with their children. Yes, we would play once with the gifts on Christmas and our birthdays, but that was it. And while it might amaze my child and grandchildren to hear this, it was the norm in the 1950s and 1960s—well, in my neighborhoods anyways—that parents had their world and kids had their world, and the two only rarely interacted.

The best Christmas gift I received while living on Westwood? Without a doubt, my electric train set. When I was either 4.5 or 5.5 years of age, I awoke on Christmas morning, went down stairs and found my train running around the Christmas tree! Santa had been quite clever and creative! The track was set up encircling the base of the tree; so cool! The next several days I played non-stop with my train and then, of course, the tree had to come down. My father then bought a piece of plywood and fastened the train track to it. With screws.

This plywood-and-screws story typifies my difficulty in connecting with my father. To Harold, by permanently fastening the track to the wood, he was saving me the trouble of taking the track

apart and then putting it back together. I should have been very grateful for this. To me, I was denied the joy and *creativity* of putting the track together in different ways. This was pretty standard for my father; he had no understanding of the need for play or of learning through our errors. Even though my father was manually very adept, he never taught me to hammer a nail or saw a board or fasten a screw. Well, he would give me a chance and then immediately note that I was inept and that everything would go faster if he just did it himself!

One day my father was sitting on the couch reading and I asked whether I could watch TV. He said ok and I turned on *The Micky Mouse Club* and was quickly enthralled. After a minute or two, my father announced, “That is the stupidest show I have ever seen,” and turned off the TV.

Across the street from our house was Vetal Elementary School. There was, by today’s standards, a funny practice in the Detroit school system in the 1950s. The elementary and secondary schools had half-years. I don’t know the exact details, but basically, school ‘years’ began in both September and January, and a child would start school at the first ‘beginning’ after turning five years of age. Thus, with my July birthday, I began kindergarten, at Vetal, in September, 1954. My sister, born December 13, 1943, began kindergarten in January, 1949. Thus, when we moved to Nathaline in August, 1955, I had completed my year of kindergarten and Geri had completed one-half of sixth grade. This fact turned out to have a huge impact on Geri’s life, as you will learn later.

I attended or worked at a number of schools in my life, beginning with Vetal and ending with the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Only two of these institutions cowed me with their size and the first to do so, not surprisingly, was Vetal. Vetal was huge! Two stories tall and it went on for miles. If the Great Wall of China was an elementary school, its name would be Vetal. I went to kindergarten at Vetal and remember virtually nothing of the experience. I vaguely remember that: we met for half-days; and there was a story period, a play period and a nap period. Life was good at Vetal.

My next strong memory from life on Westwood, is one that is key to understanding the remainder of this document. I have no memory of my mother hugging me after our move to Nathaline in 1955. I have one memory of her hugging me on Westwood.

From 1946–1952 there was a television show called *Lights Out*. Note that I was almost three years old when it went off the air in 1952. Suffice to say, the purpose of *Lights Out* was to scare, perhaps terrify, its viewers. I have a very vivid memory of sitting on our couch, next to my mother, as the show would come on. The narrator, in an incredibly creepy voice, would say, “Lights out,” which was my cue to bury my face in my mother’s lap. This is my only memory of her hugging me on Westwood.

To be sure, before I became mobile my mother no doubt held me; and where exactly does one draw the line between holding and hugging? I suspect you are thinking, “Surely, all mothers hug their preschool children. Why should I believe the memory of a 65 year-old man?” I offer three reasons.

1. I *know* that I was not hugged after the move to Nathaline. You can believe that a mother would hug her child of three, four or five years, but not her six year-old? I find this difficult to imagine.

2. For years my mother would speak of how I would ‘cuddle’ with her during this show; speaking in a manner that made it clear that this cuddling was unusual, if not unique.
3. In 1987 I drove to Michigan to spend time with my rapidly declining father, who would be dead within a few days. My mother came out to greet me as I emerged from my car. I took her into my arms and hugged her—something that we did not do during my adulthood—and in less than one second, she was pushing me away.

My theory is that my mother never liked being touched or touching others. Also, remember that she never took responsibility for anything in her life. I am quite sure that she blamed little Bobby for never hugging his mother except during the introduction to *Lights Out*.

The human mind is very resilient. Given the message from his mother that he was unhuggable and, hence, unlovable, little Bobby decided that it was she who was unlovable. Throughout elementary school there were field trips that needed chaperones, but I never asked my mother. I did not want my classmates to see how unlovable she was. My mother was overweight, not obese, but a little chubby and, as a result, for years I could not be attracted to women who were the least bit heavy. I eventually got over this mindset and learned that heavy women can, indeed, be very loving, kind, nice and pretty.

This brings us to my last strong memory from life on Westwood: the mysterious disappearance of *Petey the Bear*.

First, I must acknowledge that, in hindsight, I am amazed that I was allowed to have a stuffed animal. To my father, my having a stuffed animal was one-step away from dressing in my mother’s clothes and playing with dolls. Thus, Petey’s existence was always a precarious thing.

I don’t remember how I came to have Petey as a companion. My guess is that it was a gift from my Aunt Kay in Chicago; Aunt Kay always gave me the most awesome gifts. I remember that when I was about seven Aunt Kay sent me a scale model of an actual flying saucer! It was not one of those pretend ones that so many kids were getting. Mine was real! Anyways, back to Petey.

I loved Petey so much. He would cuddle with me (see above). He played with me. He let me practice my furnace-grate-monster fighting moves on him. Then one day, I could not find Petey, which led to the following conversation with my mother.

- Me: Mom! I can’t find Petey!
- Mother: Well, he must be gone.
- Me: What? Why do you think he’s gone? I just can’t find him.
- Mother (nervously): OK. He’s lost. I am sure you left him somewhere and you can’t remember where.
- Me: Let’s look for him!
- Mother (recovering): No. He is gone. There is no point in looking for him.
- Me (pleading now): Won’t you please help me look for him?

- Mother: No. I won't waste my time. He is gone. You need to learn to take better care of your things!

Many years later, I had another conversation with my mother:

- Me (musing wistfully): I wonder what ever happened to Petey.
- Mother (without remembering our conversation years earlier): Don't you remember, Bob? The bear was dirty so we threw it away.
- Me: What!
- Mother: Don't you remember? You decided you were too old to play with a bear and we threw him away. Anyways, he was very dirty.

There are two things to learn from the above.

1. It is dangerous to tell lies. When you tell a lie you must remember it forever.
2. Lies from long ago still hurt. The *liar* will say, "How can you be angry, this event occurred years ago." The recipient of the lie will think, "You have been lying to me every day for years."

Chapter 5

Genesis: Life on Westwood, 1949–55

A few days after my birth at Florence Crittendon Hospital in downtown Detroit, my parents brought me home to our humble house on a street called Westwood on the far west side of Detroit.

As an adult I have frequently puzzled people by announcing, “I was born north of Canada!” Indeed, if one starts at the site of FC Hospital and heads south, one will cross over into Canada after a few miles of travel.

I want to thank a favorite author of mine, Lawrence Block, for introducing me to the old English lullaby, *Naughty Baby*, presented below. (Block begins his novel *A Walk Among the Tombstones* with it.)

Baby, baby, naughty baby,
Hush, you squalling thing, I say,
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe
Bonaparte will pass this way.

Baby, baby, he’s a giant,
Tall and black as Monmouth steeple,
And he breakfasts, dines and suppers,
Every day on naughty people.

Baby, baby, if he hears you,
As he gallops past the house,
Limb from limb at once he’ll tear you,
Just as pussy tears a mouse.

And he’ll beat you, beat you, beat you,
And he’ll beat you all to pap,
And he’ll eat you, eat you, eat you,
Every morsel snap, snap, snap.

To be clear; my parents **never** sang this lullaby to me. Why? Perhaps because our home on

Westwood also housed *the Furnace Monster*.

The first floor of the house had the bathroom and four small rooms: the living room, dining room, kitchen and my parents' bedroom. The second floor had a bedroom and an unfinished room. I shared the bedroom with my sister Geri who was 5.5 years older than I. I have vague recollections of my father working on converting the unfinished room into a second bedroom, but I don't recall any substantial progress being made.

The house had no basement and in the middle of the first floor in the dining room was a big hole, covered by a metal grate, in which the furnace sat. My guess—and it's only a guess—is that the large grate aided the distribution of heat throughout the house; I am pretty sure there were no air ducts or any similar devices.

No doubt my parents were afraid that I would hurt myself on the grate or, worse yet, manage to somehow lift it and fall into the furnace space. Thus, as I approached the age of three years, they told me the story of the Furnace Monster who lived below the grate. He was no Bonaparte, but to preschool Bobby he was pretty fearsome. "What!" I exclaimed when I first heard the story, "We gotta get out of this house!"

"Don't worry," my parents reassured me, "If you don't fool with the grate, the monster won't eat us."

"What?" I thought to myself, but kept quiet. "This makes no sense! Doesn't the monster get hungry?" For the first time I began to doubt whether my parents were qualified for the job of keeping my sister Geri and I alive and safe.

As it turned out, perhaps my parents were correct. I never fooled with the grate and the Monster never ate any of us! Years later we moved to our house on Nathalie Street, which had a basement. The basement was divided into halves. The north half was a *finished rec room* of which you will learn more later. The south half held the fruit cellar, the washer and dryer, my father's work bench and *the furnace*. There was no space for a Furnace Monster, but my parents assured me that if I ever kicked the little rectangle protruding from the bottom of the furnace the whole house would explode. (As Dave Barry the writer frequently types, "I am not making this up!") Until I moved out of the house for good when I was 20 years old, I always was careful when I walked past the furnace.

Shortly after I learned the story of the Furnace Monster, I developed a nervous habit of sticking my finger into my hair, twirling it and then yanking out my hair. I had many large bald spots on my head, but given that I was hereditarily completely bald by age 25, it probably didn't matter much.

I frequently fell down the stairs, but, no appreciable damage occurred. I recall that I was working on exiting the house as rapidly as possible—in case the Monster got loose—and would sometimes trip on the stairs.

In my early-twenties I visited a physician because of chronic back pain. He took an x-ray, examined it and told me, "One of your vertebra is fused. Did you ever have a broken back?"

"Not that I remember," was my reply.

I was married at this time and living in Ann Arbor. On my next visit to my parents' house I asked my mother, very casually, about any possible back injuries I had had as a young child. I was careful not to mention the theorized broken back and especially careful not to sound the least bit accusatory.

She smile wistfully and said, “You were such a little monkey. You were always climbing up into the kitchen cupboards. One day when you were about one year old, you fell. You lay on the floor crying and you couldn’t move. So, your father and I took you to the chiropractor; he snapped your back, and you never had trouble with it again!” (Note: During my entire childhood and well into my 20s I had recurring back trouble; apparently, my mother didn’t notice it.)

Years later, in an argument with my mother, I blurted out what bad parents they had been; first, for letting me *climb in the cupboards all the time* like a *monkey* and then for taking me to a quack for medical care. My mother denied everything: No monkey behavior, no fall, no chiropractor. I would be open to the possibility that I dreamt the whole episode—after all, one can’t dream exclusively about Furnace Monsters—except for two facts. First, I definitely had back damage. Second, as I progressed through adulthood, I learned that my mother never took responsibility for anything. This second fact is not meant to sound so harsh; it is, in my mind, undoubtedly her legacy of growing up in a house with a violent alcoholic father.

Before I continue, please allow a brief aside. I think a great deal—obsess would be too strong a word, but isn’t that what obsessives always say—about the question of *Nature versus Nurture*. Throughout my remembered life I have always feared—and avoided—amusement park rides that go high and/or turn one upside-down. For example, I have *never* ridden on a full-sized roller coaster. I often managed to ride—with substantial anxiety—on a simple Ferris wheel, but the first time I saw a double Ferris wheel, I thought, “No way. There is nothing that would get me on that ride!”

When I was in elementary school I would always attend the Saint Robert’s carnival when it came to town each September. I would give in to peer pressure and manage a few rides on the Rock-O-Plane, but always did my utmost to prevent the cage from putting me *heels-over-head*. For information on the Rock-O-Plane ride, see

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock-O-Plane>.

I have often pondered the question, “Is it my nature to be cowed by these rides or is my fear based on a particular experience?” Prior to the *you were such a little monkey* conversation with my mother, I felt certain it was my nature. Now, I lean towards nurture. My unremembered kitchen fall helps explain to me—no student of the analysis of dreams—why I had several recurring dreams of falling throughout childhood and well into adulthood.

Another recurring dream of my early childhood was that I would be playing in the area between the sidewalk and the street’s curb. Suddenly, in the dream, I would fall to the ground and start rolling towards the curb. Beyond the curb, of course, cars were speeding down the street with nary a gap between them. Try as I might in the dream, I could neither halt nor even slow my inevitable roll to certain death. Many a nights I would awake, afraid and sweaty—*drenched in sweat* would be hyperbole—but relieved to find myself safe in my bed. What was the origin of this dream? I do not know. I cannot explain it with an accident followed by a trip to a quack. Perhaps it grew out of my parents repeated admonitions, “Do not play in the street, Bobby!”

The lots on Westwood were 40 feet wide. There was an alley behind our yard and, most likely, a garage with an alley entrance, which was common in those days. Standing on Westwood and looking towards our house, our property included an undeveloped lot to the left of the house; 40

feet of bonus play area. To the left of our bonus land was an older couple—remember I was six or younger, so they might have been in their 50's—Mr. and Mrs. Roach. I recall that they were very kind to me and that they had two adult children who, this being the 1950s, did not live with their parents and were married.

I remember making a baseball diamond on the extra lot. One day there were four of us and we wanted to play baseball. (The worst feature of baseball is that one never had enough players and, if one ever did, one would die of boredom from all the standing around.) One of the four, let's call him Tommy, challenged the three of us; him versus us. His only stipulation was that he would bat first.

It didn't take long for Tommy to be dispatched. After all, with no teammates, each of his at-bats resulted in a home run or an out, perforce. And Tommy was not a power hitter. Anyways, in our turn to bat, I was up first and, of course, being a one man team, Tommy was pitching. He looked in to where his catcher would be waiting—well, if he had a catcher—and let the pitch fly. I took a mighty swing, but barely ticked the ball which caromed off my bat and bounced slowly to Tommy. In the following, say, 20 seconds, three facts became apparent.

First, Tommy was no mental giant. As he fielded the ball, I was about one-fourth of the way to first. With a bit of tenth-grade geometry, you can determine that Tommy and I were roughly equal distance from first base, with him being a bit closer. Imagine, two five year-olds, hell-bent on reaching the base first. Think of the collision, the scraped knees, Bobby running in the house crying (I was a bit of a cry baby). But the collision never was.

Tommy fielded the ball and started running straight towards me. Somewhere between first and second base, I realized that Tommy was going to chase me, with the determination of a heat-seeking missile, all around the bases. I ran to second; Tommy, on my heels, touched second base too. I rounded third; close behind me Tommy rounded third too. Seconds later I crossed home plate (an old piece of cardboard) and then Tommy did too. The only difference was that Tommy's team did not score a run on the play.

The second thing I learned? Well, rather obviously, that without trying much, I was faster than Tommy. After I crossed home plate and before my first teammate got to bat, I learned my third fact. Once he had fallen behind on the scoreboard, Tommy quit the game and went home angry.

On my sixth birthday, my parents gave me a croquet set. The next day, a Saturday, my father and Mr. Roach were home from work and I had my first croquet game. All six of us played—the Wardrops and the Roaches—which matched neatly with the six colors of balls and mallets. I recall absolutely no details of the match; only that I can't remember a happier time on Westwood. Tellingly, we never played croquet again. Neither of my parents believed in playing with their children. Yes, we would play once with the gifts on Christmas and our birthdays, but that was it. And while it might amaze my child and grandchildren to hear this, it was the norm in the 1950s and 1960s—well, in my neighborhoods anyways—that parents had their world and kids had their world, and the two only rarely interacted.

The best Christmas gift I received while living on Westwood? Without a doubt, my electric train set. When I was either 4.5 or 5.5 years of age, I awoke on Christmas morning, went down stairs and found my train running around the Christmas tree! Santa had been quite clever and creative! The track was set up encircling the base of the tree; so cool! The next several days I

played non-stop with my train and then, of course, the tree had to come down. My father then bought a piece of plywood and fastened the train track to it. With screws.

This plywood-and-screws story typifies my difficulty in connecting with my father. To Harold, by permanently fastening the track to the wood, he was saving me the trouble of taking the track apart and then putting it back together. I should have been very grateful for this. To me, I was denied the joy and *creativity* of putting the track together in different ways. This was pretty standard for my father; he had no understanding of the need for play or of learning through our errors. Even though my father was manually very adept, he never taught me to hammer a nail or saw a board or fasten a screw. Well, he would give me a chance and then immediately note that I was inept and that everything would go faster if he just did it himself!

One day my father was sitting on the couch reading and I asked whether I could watch TV. He said ok and I turned on *The Micky Mouse Club*; I was quickly enthralled. After a minute or two, my father announced, “That is the stupidest show I have ever seen,” and turned off the TV.

Across the street from our house was Vetal Elementary School. There was, by today’s standards, a funny practice in the Detroit school system in the 1950s. The elementary and secondary schools had half-years. School ‘years’ would begin in both September and January, and a child would start school at the first ‘beginning’ after turning five years of age. Thus, with my July birthday, I began kindergarten, at Vetal, in September, 1954. My sister, born December 13, 1943, began kindergarten in January, 1949. Thus, when we moved to Nathaline in August, 1955, I had completed my year of kindergarten and Geri had completed one-half of sixth grade. This fact turned out to have a huge impact on Geri’s life, as you will learn later.

I attended or worked at a number of schools in my life, beginning with Vetal and ending with the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Only two of these institutions cowed me with their size and the first to do so, not surprisingly, was Vetal. Vetal was huge! Two stories tall and it went on for miles. If the Great Wall of China was an elementary school, its name would be Vetal. I went to kindergarten at Vetal and remember virtually nothing of the experience. I vaguely remember that: we met for half-days; and there was a story period, a play period and a nap period. Life was good at Vetal.

My next strong memory from life on Westwood, is one that is key to understanding the remainder of this document. I have no memory of my mother hugging me after our move to Nathaline in 1955. I have one memory of her hugging me on Westwood.

From 1946–1952 there was a television show called *Lights Out*. Note that I was almost three years old when it went off the air in 1952. Suffice to say, the purpose of *Lights Out* was to scare, perhaps terrify, its viewers. I have a very vivid memory of sitting on our couch, next to my mother, as the show would come on. The narrator, in an incredibly creepy voice, would say, “Lights out,” which was my cue to bury my face in my mother’s lap. This is my only memory of her hugging me on Westwood.

To be sure, before I became mobile my mother no doubt held me; and where exactly does one draw the line between holding and hugging? I suspect you are thinking, “Surely, all mothers hug their preschool children. Why should I believe the memory of a 65 year-old man?” I offer three reasons.

1. I *know* that I was not hugged after the move to Nathaline. You can believe that a mother would hug her child of three, four or five years, but not her six year-old? I find this difficult to imagine.
2. For years my mother would speak of how I would ‘cuddle’ with her during this show; speaking in a manner that made it clear that this cuddling was unusual, if not unique.
3. In 1987 I drove to Michigan to spend time with my rapidly declining father, who would be dead within a few days. My mother came out to greet me as I emerged from my car. I took her into my arms and hugged her—something that we did not do during my adulthood—and in less than one second, she was pushing me away.

My theory is that my mother never liked being touched or touching others. Also, remember that she never took responsibility for anything in her life. I am quite sure that she blamed little Bobby for never hugging his mother except during the introduction to *Lights Out*.

The human mind is very resilient. Given the message from his mother that he was unhuggable and, hence, unlovable, little Bobby decided that it was she who was unlovable. Throughout elementary school there were field trips that needed chaperons, but I never asked my mother. I did not want my classmates to see how unlovable she was. My mother was overweight, not obese, but a little chubby and, as a result, for years I could not be attracted to women who were the least bit heavy. I eventually got over this mindset and learned that heavy women can, indeed, be very loving, kind, nice and pretty.

This brings us to my last strong memory from life on Westwood: the mysterious disappearance of *Petey the Bear*.

First, I must acknowledge that, in hindsight, I am amazed that I was allowed to have a stuffed animal. To my father, my having a stuffed animal was one-step away from dressing in my mother’s clothes and playing with dolls. Thus, Petey’s existence was always a precarious thing.

I don’t remember how I came to have Petey as a companion. My guess is that it was a gift from my Aunt Kay in Chicago; Aunt Kay always gave me the most awesome gifts. I remember that when I was about seven Aunt Kay sent me a scale model of an actual flying saucer! It was not one of those pretend ones that so many kids were getting. Mine was real! Anyway, back to Petey.

I loved Petey so much. He would cuddle with me (see above). He played with me. He let me practice my Furnace Monster fighting moves on him. Then one day, I could not find Petey, which led to the following conversation with my mother.

- Me: Mom! I can’t find Petey!
- Mother: Well, he must be gone.
- Me: What? Why do you think he’s gone? I just can’t find him.
- Mother (nervously): OK. He’s lost. I am sure you left him somewhere and you can’t remember where.
- Me: Let’s look for him!

- Mother (recovering): No. He is gone. There is no point in looking for him.
- Me (pleading now): Won't you please help me look for him?
- Mother: No. I won't waste my time. He is gone. You need to learn to take better care of your things!

Many years later, I had another conversation with my mother:

- Me (musing wistfully): I wonder what ever happened to Petey.
- Mother (without remembering our conversation years earlier): Don't you remember, Bob? The bear was dirty so we threw it away.
- Me: What!
- Mother: Don't you remember? You decided you were too old to play with a bear and we threw him away. Anyways, he was very dirty.

There are two things to learn from the above.

1. It is dangerous to tell lies. When you tell a lie you must remember it forever.
2. Lies from long ago still hurt. The *liar* will say, "How can you be angry, this event occurred years ago." The recipient of the lie will think, "You have been lying to me every day for years."

Chapter 6

Exodus: Arriving on Nathaline Street

On August 27, 1955, at the age of six years, one month and 26 days, I moved into my new home at 9647 Nathaline, located in South Redford Township on the western border of Detroit. Also, on that day my mother turned 34 years old. A few days later I began first grade at Ashcroft Elementary School, located two blocks away on a street named Sioux. (Our neighborhood had a definite Native American theme, with streets named Columbia, Tecumseh and Seminole, in addition to Sioux.)

It will be helpful if you can visualize my neighborhood. Go to

`https://maps.google.com/`.

Next, type

9647 Nathaline, Redford Charter Township, MI

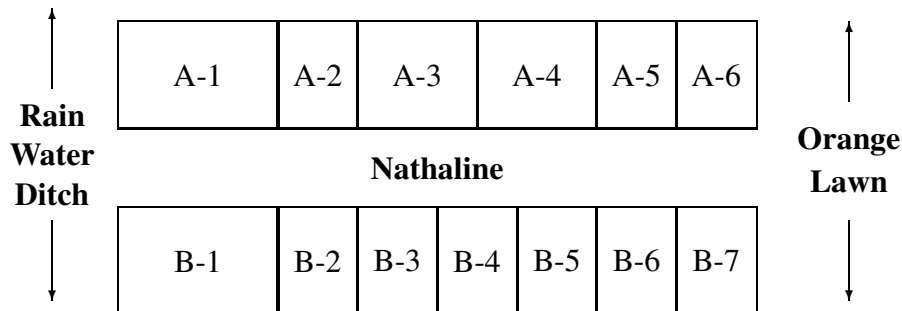
into the google search box and click on the magnifying glass icon. This will, of course, take you to a street map; click on the 'A' and then on the street view. You will see a picture of my home as immortalized by googlemaps.

The house looks remarkably as it did in 1955. It is a small house, facing east. The biggest change is that the house now appears to have a partially finished attic, as evidenced by the window emerging from the roof. During my childhood, the yard was enclosed with a metal fence, the remnants of which can be seen separating our house from the properties on either side. In fact, all that appears to be missing is the fence which ran from the front left corner of the house, across the driveway to the boundary of the property to the left. (By left, I mean from the perspective of the street, as google displays.)

You can see that the house has aluminum siding and that at the end of a long driveway sits a two-car garage, also sided with aluminum. My father was extremely proud of the aluminum siding and protected it fiercely, as you will learn later. It wasn't until I was an adult and had seen the movie *Tin Men* in 1987 that I realized that the world does not share my father's reverence for aluminum siding.

Just like our house on Westwood, our new home was blessed with a wider than usual lot. In this case, 60 feet wide instead of the norm of 40 feet. For future reference, I have created a crude map of the properties in my neighborhood, given in Figure 6.1. Let me say a bit about the families

Figure 6.1: My Neighborhood. Partial key: **A-3**, Douglas; **A-4**, Wardrop; **A-5**, Goulah; **A-6**, Madley; **B-1**, Locke; **B-2**, Berry; **B-5**, K's; **B-6**, Pingelly.



that lived at these various properties. Given that 9647 Nathaline was my home from 1955 to 1969, not surprisingly there were some changes in my neighbors during my sojourn there.

My house is at A-4 in the map. Immediately to its left (I will always use the perspective of one looking at the map) in A-3 lived Archie and Lucy Douglas. Archie and Lucy were really old when we arrived in 1955; I would guess that they were both in their 60s. Lucy was Archie's second wife and their arguments would become quite loud on occasion. The confrontations were loud, in part, because Archie wore a hearing aid. My father and Archie were great friends, frequently drinking beer together in our backyard. For years afterwards, my father would tell (nearly) everyone he met, "When Archie and Lucy argued, he would switch off his hearing aid!" Telling this story always made my father laugh hysterically.

Archie was a bricklayer. One of my favorite features in our new home was a large beautiful brick fireplace in the basement that Archie had built for the home's previous owner. I spent many hundreds of hours enjoying that fireplace! I also had a very rewarding relationship with Lucy. For years I would go to her house and we would play Parcheesi. I loved playing Parcheesi with Lucy. (Remember: My parents never played games with me.)

Before moving on, let me point out a feature of the map that you probably have noticed. Properties A-3 and A-4 are 60 foot (wide) lots; A-1 and B-1 are 80 foot lots; and the remaining properties are 40 foot lots.

To the left of the Douglas house is the property labeled A-2 in the map. Note that I don't mention its occupants in the key in Figure 6.1. Either my first or second day on Nathaline street, I met two beautiful little girls who lived in the house at A-2. Their names were Stacy J. and Shelly J. Busetto. They had two other sisters and (remember this was 1955) two parents. All six of the Busetto's had the initials SJB. (Again, it was the 1950s!) In any event, if not completely in love, I was quite smitten with these two girls. The next day, a boy in my new neighborhood told me they

were gross (or the 1950s equivalent, I can't recall for sure) and that no real boy would play with them. So, shallow creature that I was at age six, I never played with Stacy or Shelly again. In the long run, it probably didn't matter much, because they soon moved away. But if either Stacy or Shelly happen upon this document: "I am sorry I was mean to you!"

After the Busetto moved, nobody of note lived at A-2; thus, it is not mentioned in my map's key.

Properties A-1 and B-1 abutted one of most exciting—for a young boy—features of our neighborhood: the rain water ditch. This ditch was quite gross and it ran east to west (perpendicular to the north to south Nathaline) for several blocks. Its banks were quite steep and on more than one occasion I would slip and fall while negotiating said banks, which, of course, got me in trouble when I returned home covered in mud. The ditch was the home to frogs, toads (I could not distinguish frogs from toads), lots of gross bugs and the occasional garter snake.

When we moved to Nathaline it was an unpaved street, with no rain water sewers. As a result there were shallow ditches on either side of Nathaline that collected rain water which then was fed into our big ditch next to A-1 and B-1. On a few occasions we had big rains and all the ditches overflowed! It was a wonderful time for a little boy!

Eventually, Nathaline was paved, curbs and everything, with ditches no longer occupying the space between the sidewalk and the street. My beloved rain water ditch survived the paving, but was eventually covered over too.

The Lockes, at B-1, had two children: Judy, a few years younger than I, and Jerry, who was two years older than I. Jerry and I were never really friends and I have only five memories of him, one of which I will save for a later chapter.

1. Jerry and I were playing baseball in my driveway when I was seven years old. After hitting a ball, I rounded first and realized I could not make it to second safely. (Unlike my game two years earlier on Westwood with Tommy, on Nathaline all of our baseball games utilized *invisible men* as baserunners. Don't ask me about the arguments over whether or not an invisible man got tagged out!) I hustled back to first base and, being seven, slid into the base, landing on my stomach with my right arm under my body. Jerry apparently wanted me to stay put and jumped on me with all his might. (Did I mention that Jerry was a bit of a bully?) The result: I suffered a broken wrist and had to wear a plaster cast for the next several weeks.
2. Jerry is the only person from my childhood who was obsessed with my middle name, Lee. For years, whenever he saw me on the street he would squeal, "There goes **Robert E. Lee**." I was so happy that Jerry never played sports—other than the day he broke my arm; it would have been so annoying to play with him.
3. As he got older, Jerry became obsessed with automobiles. He would get very excited when he heard an unmuffled car (not having a muffler was very cool in the 1960s) shifting gears. "Grind me a pound," he would shout gleefully any time he labeled the use of the clutch unsatisfactory. I am certain that a major regret of his childhood was that he was never able to squeal, "Grind me a pound, Robert E. Lee."

4. One day Jerry saw me throw a rock into the rain water ditch. He yelled at me. Remembering my broken arm from a few years earlier, I tried to defuse the situation and replied, "I only threw two rocks into it!" "Do you know what would happen if someone threw two rocks into it every day?" he shouted. "Well, after a year, there would be 730 rocks in it," I replied calmly. Jerry walked away, muttering to himself, "How can you reason with a kid who can do complex arithmetic in his head!" Yes indeed, the intellectual level on Nathaline Street was not very high.

Let's cross Nathaline and move north to my next door neighbors at A-5: Dorian and Lil Goulah.

Dorian was French Canadian and one of the nicest persons I have ever known. He was a wonderful positive influence on my childhood. Lil was a very nice person, but she definitely had serious issues. Nowadays, she would no doubt be highly medicated; in the 1950s and 1960s, she sat at home all day, self-medicating with a steady diet of coffee, coca-cola and cigarettes. (Many years later my adult niece Karen told me that, according to her mom and my sister Geri, Lil's cokes contained more than coke.)

Dorian's occupation was driving a truck. He must have driven locally because I remember him coming home from work every day. Dorian and Lil struggled to have a baby and eventually adopted Greg; a few years later Lil gave birth to Ann Marie. Both Greg and Ann Marie were substantially younger than I, and I don't have many memories that include them.

When I was feeling down, I could always go next door and know that Dorian, and to a lesser extent Lil—she really tried and was at her core, a very nice person—would treat me nicely and cheer me up. The Goulahs had the best basement I had ever seen—it actually had a wet bar. (It helps if you remember that South Redford was a very blue collar, lower middle class neighborhood. We all viewed my friend Reggie Barringer—much, much more on Reggie later—as the elite because his father was an insurance agent.) Dorian was a great entertainer. He constantly had friends over for parties, light drinking and, especially, poker.

One of my strongest memories of childhood occurred when I was eight years-old. I went next door into the basement where Dorian, my father and three or four of Dorian's friends were playing poker. One friend had little or no experience with poker and was losing badly. "Bob will help you," Dorian announced and, sure enough, for the next couple of hours, with my help the friend managed to stay even.

I am not a card savant; indeed, my son Roger will find it hilarious that I ever gave welcomed advice on card playing, but I did achieve my level of mediocrity early in life. More importantly, of course, the occasion described above was key in my ever improving self-image.

When I had my broken arm at age seven, Dorian convinced me that people should pay me for the privilege of signing my cast. Thus, over the next few weeks I came into a couple of extra dollars cash, always much needed by young Bob. More importantly, of course, Dorian's kind suggestion helped me to feel special as I went through this difficult period.

Two more cast-related memories. At seven I, not surprisingly, kept away from girls as much as possible. Dorian opined that someday my attitude would change. Characteristic of my species, I could not fathom that beliefs held so strongly one day could ever change. As a result, Dorian and I made a wager: A \$20 bet on whether or not I would still be single twenty years hence. I lost the bet when I married Debbie at age 20, but Dorian pretended he had forgotten. As a result, I still

owe him \$20.

The second memory involves the removal of my cast. The doctor brought out a big saw and a mini crowbar. I suspect that this doctor was not familiar with the work of Lister, because the crowbar was quite gnarly looking. Anyway, while prying away at the cast, the doctor broke the skin on the back of my right hand with the pointy-end of the crowbar. I did not mention this incident at the time. After all, I knew that real men don't complain about minor scrapes and, secondly, after seeing his power saw, I was happy to escape with my arm intact. In any event, within a few days my hand swelled up, but eventually, with the help of penicillin, I got better.

Next door to Dorian and Lil lived Ed and Louise Madley. Like my father, Ed worked in an auto factory; in his case, I believe it was Ford's. Louise was a housewife—all the women in my neighborhood were housewives—and she had the air of a woman who had been quite attractive when she was younger.

(Author's note: I recently was talking with my mother on the phone and told her that I was working on a book about my life in Michigan. I commented to her that this activity had made me recall long forgotten facts. "As an example," I said, "I remembered that all of the women in our neighborhood on Nathaline were housewives."

"No they weren't," she yelled at me—to be fair, she yells almost always because she is nearly deaf—"Edith Block was a teacher!"

"Well, that is true, but Edith Block lived one mile away. I never said that every woman in the state of Michigan was a housewife!"

You might be thinking, "Hey, Bob, she is 92 years-old; cut her some slack!" I have two reactions to this comment.

1. The above exchange is a perfect-example of the dual aspects of Helen-logic; logic which has nothing to do with her age, logic that she practiced throughout my lifetime. First, when presented with a true statement that she wants to rebut; change the statement. Thus, she expanded the domain of my statement—our neighborhood on Nathaline—enough to find a counterexample. Second, there are no *statistical truths* to Helen; the existence of even one counterexample negates any argument of mine.

My favorite—actually, most frustrating—example is my mother's attitude about gambling at casinos. Before I finally gave up on this, I frequently would state, "Casino owners get rich from gamblers; hence, gamblers lose more money than they win." Her response? "You are wrong." "Why do you say that?" "Because on my visit to a casino with Karen six months ago I won \$500."

2. My mother is mentally very sharp at 92; she is, indeed very impressive. The above is Helen-logic; it is not senility in any form.

I am not stating that Helen-logic has been exclusively a negative force in my life; it is perhaps one of the reasons I chose a career as a statistician.)

When I moved to Nathaline, the Madleys had three children: Eddie, who was four years older than I, Ronny who was three years younger than Eddie and Ricky who was two years younger than Ronny. Thus, while I was starting first grade soon after arriving at Nathaline, Ronny was

starting second grade and Ricky was starting kindergarten. I never interacted much with Eddie. After Ronny failed fourth grade we were in the same grade for three years. When I went off to junior high school, Ronny was sent to catholic school. Eddie, very attractive and athletic, attended a catholic high school and was a star football player. Ronny was very attractive too, but athletics and school were a distant second to Ronny's true calling, the pursuit of girls. Ricky was another matter.

A few years after my arrival on Nathaline, Ed and Louise had their fourth and final child, a beautiful girl named Becky. Three out of their four kids were extremely attractive like their parents.

Ricky was always difficult. Looking back, I realized later than when I first met Ricky he was noticeably less attractive than anyone else in his family. (I did not pay much attention to attractiveness, except for the Busetto girls, when I was six years-old.) Ricky was indeed not handsome, but his unattractiveness was in large part due to his illness. Well, his illness and how his family dealt with it.

I never learned exactly what was wrong with Ricky. His mother would euphemistically say, "Ricky has thin skin." She meant this literally. It didn't take much to get Ricky to bleed and when he bled—I never saw him bleed—reportedly it was difficult to stop the bleeding. As I got older I wondered, of course, "Did Ricky have hemophilia?" My guess is no; his situation did not seem to be that severe, but I really don't know.

Because of Ricky's condition he was not allowed to play rough, which was a huge contrast from his two older brothers. This meant, in addition, that when Ricky would become frustrated, he had no socially acceptable way to deal with his feelings. Ricky resolved this problem by spitting. I don't want to recall how many times in the middle of playing, Ricky would stop what he was doing, get right up in my face and start spitting. Not on my shoes, not on my body, but right in my face! It was not a pleasant experience. And there was nothing I could do but walk away and wipe his grossness off my face. I couldn't *do* anything to Ricky because, if I did, Ronny would beat the crap out of me.

Years later as my high school days were ending, I would occasionally run into Ricky (he was at a catholic high school too) and he had transformed into a reasonably nice teenage boy. A couple of years later, Ricky was dead. I don't know how he died; rumor was that it was related to his *condition*.

Ronny was a proximity-friend; if I had known him only from school, we would have never hung-out together. I have four major memories of Ronny.

1. His mother, Louise, would lock herself out of the house approximately three times per week; 52 weeks a year. Her solution? "Go get Bobby," she would yell to Ronny. After being located, I would go with Ronny; climb through the milkchute into the house; and unlock the door.

Why me through the milkchute? Ronny was too big to fit (all those muscles), Eddie was even larger than Ronny and Ricky was too fragile for the task. Eventually, I no longer had the job. I suppose that this coincided with Louise learning *the key under a rock* tactic.

2. Ed Madley, the father, bought himself an inexpensive pool table and put it in his basement.

He very generously allowed his boys—including Ricky and his violent temper—and me—a young boy with no pool skills—to play on it. I had many happy hours of playing pool on that table, but my skill never improved beyond my being horrible.

3. Ronny was quite a destructive little boy. Ronny and I would spend hours building something out of a dirt pile—a city, a fort, a dam, all those things that fascinated little boys in the 1950s—and when it was time for Ronny to go home, he would destroy it.
4. In seventh grade Ronny went off to catholic school and I didn't see him much after that. All I remember is a few times hanging out after dark and Ronny regaling all of us boys with tales of his *going places* with girls from his church or school. (By *going places*, I don't mean field trips or destinations for dates. I mean any place young kids would go enroute to *going all the way*.)

“How do you manage it, Ronny?” we all wondered. After all, in junior high school the most I could dream of was holding hands with a girl. (Do you think I exaggerate? I was the Beatles singing, “I want to hold your hand,” while Ronny was Mick Jagger singing, “Let's spend the night together,” or the most famous dirty song of the day, “Gloria.”)

“Easy,” Ronny would reply, “Catholics girls will do anything because they know they can go to confession and all will be forgiven!” I never believed this; I knew catholic girls and they wouldn't even hold my hand. I think that Ronnie was being modest.

Let's move back across the street to lots B-5 and B-6 in Figure 6.1. When I moved to Nathaline in 1955, there was no lot B-6; it was the side yard for the house at B-5. The residents of B-5 were old and I don't remember their name. I remember two things about them.

1. They had the first outdoor brick fireplace I had ever seen, sitting near the rear of what would become lot B-6. It was awesome; imagine having a kitchen outdoors!
2. They had two cocker spaniels, a breed of dog I had never seen outside of the movie *Lady and the Tramp* (1955). (If you haven't seen this classic; Lady is an extremely beautiful cocker spaniel—with ears to die for—and the Tramp is, well, a mutt.)

In the late 1950s, a family with two male children moved into the house: Dennis K, a year older than I and Carey, two years younger than I. Neither of these boys was much of an athlete, so our play time was mostly directed by Dennis' apprenticeship for being a juvenile delinquent. (It is a bit unkind, although totally justified by experience, to speculate that Dennis would end up in prison some day. It is for this reason that I do not type the family's surname.) I recall that his father frequently yelled at Dennis—and was perhaps violent with him—and this usually resulted in Dennis beating on Carey. Ah, life on Nathaline! When he was 13, Dennis had a girlfriend who would come to his house to play with us. We played a version of tag in which Dennis would whip his girlfriend with a belt—repeatedly—instead of tagging her with his hand. Then Dennis started to use the belt on Carey. This was when I stopped being friends with Dennis.

Sometime when I was in Junior High School (1961–64) the K's sold the extra lot (B-6), a new house was built and the Pingellys moved into it. Mike Pingelly was one year younger than I. He

had a sister perhaps two years younger than he; I didn't interact with her much. I remember that she was cute, but got Mike into trouble a lot.

Mike was my closest friend for the longest time of any of the kids on Nathaline. We played one-on-one: whiffle ball tournaments in my front yard; tackle football in my backyard; and our version of soccer in his backyard. Mike taught me that if you hold a cat upside down and let it go, it will, almost instantaneously flip over and land on its feet. (My cousin Susie had previously taught me that cats have claws.) Mike and I learned to smoke cigarettes together in his basement when his parents were away. I couldn't stand getting smoke in my eyes, so we moved our smoking to a playground outside a Lutheran Church/School a few blocks away. (There seemingly were hundreds of Catholic schools and scores of Lutheran schools in the Detroit area.) Neither of us liked smoking very much and our total consumption was less than one pack (20 cigarettes) between us. Like our 42nd President's comments about marijuana, I never inhaled my cigarettes. The only difference—other than the obvious difference between marijuana and tobacco—is that I am telling the truth.

Mike was a good guy. I was a better athlete and, more importantly, I was one year older. Thus, I usually won our athletic competitions, but Mike kept playing. I appreciated that.

Garland Berry was two years older than I and, in many ways, was the anti-Mike. The Berrys lived at B-2 in Figure 6.1. The Berrys migrated to the Detroit area from Alabama and Mr. Berry worked in the printing factory of one of daily newspapers in Detroit. The Berrys had three sons and three daughters. The first son, Wally, was mentally slow and lived at home into his 20s. The second son, Larry, graduated from Thurston in 1961 and was a star pitcher on the baseball team. Rumor was that he was good enough to pitch professionally, but he never did and I don't know why. Larry also played on the varsity basketball team and ran cross country.

Garland was the youngest of the six Berry children and by the time he arrived, I believe his parents were a bit tired of, well, parenting. Garland was a good athlete, but was never encouraged to be on a 'real' team as Larry had been.

I remember many years of playing ping-pong with Garland in his basement. I never won. Indeed, for many years my best performance was losing by only nine points, 12–21. Then, finally, when I was 15 years-old I beat Garland at ping-pong! Was it a fluke? Or did I go on to beat him occasionally or even regularly? I cannot answer these questions for the simple reason that after I won that one game, Garland refused to ever play ping-pong with me again. Sometime in 10th grade I was able to beat Garland in basketball—one-on-one, which was never my strength—and, you guessed it, we never played again. Without games to play, my friendship with Garland disappeared.

I want to mention another friend on Nathaline, Jordy Tisdale. Jordy lived on Nathaline, but because his house was across Orange Lawn, it is not shown in Figure 6.1. Jordy was almost one year older than I and was one year ahead of me in school. After I finished third grade, Jordy's family moved to California, but we reconnected seven years later, as you will read about later.

Jordy was my main playmate in two of my major pastimes during my early years in South Redford. The first was our playing *against the steps*.

The first great thing about *against the steps* was that I could play it by myself or, if Jordy was

available, we could play it one-on-one.

Let me describe *solitaire against the steps*. I would stand on the sidewalk, baseball glove on my left hand and my best solid rubber ball in my right hand. Approximately 15 feet in front of me were the steps to the front porch of our house. I would throw the ball at the steps as hard as I could, aiming for the *pointy part* where a riser meets a tread. If I managed to hit the pointy part, then the ball would sail back towards me in the air. Of course, the *pointy part* was a small target; thus, more often the ball would strike a tread or a riser. To summarize,

- If the ball hit the *pointy part*, it would be returned to me in the air, perhaps at chest-height, perhaps well over my head.
- Because the ball was traveling downward when it hit, if the ball hit a riser—the most common occurrence—it would then bounce off the tread in front of said riser and, generally, return to me as a fairly *hard-hit* ground ball.
- If the ball hit a tread, it would continue its forward motion, bounce off a riser and then return to me, as either a soft liner or a soft ground ball.

When the ball came back to me, I would attempt to catch it. Any caught ball was an out. Any ball I dropped would be a one-base error. If the ball bounced past me, it was a single, except that if it was moving fast enough to reach the middle of the street, in which case it was a double. (The ditch was a major force in slowing down the ball.)

If the ball flew past me and reached the street—without touching the ground enroute—it was a home run. If the ball flew past me in the air and fell into the area between the sidewalk and the street, it was a double, unless it traveled on to the middle of the street, in which case it became a triple.

In this way, I could—and did—spend hours playing out entire baseball games, double-headers or the World Series. With a bit of fluctuation in the effort I expended, I could arrange for my beloved Tigers to beat those Damned Yankees.

Two-player *against the steps* was as described above, but the batter would stand right next to the steps, greatly increasing the chance that he would hit the *pointy part* of the concrete steps.

I loved playing *against the steps*, but there was a natural problem. Occasionally, instead of returning towards the thrower, the ball would deflect into the aluminum screen door, resulting in a loud noise, if not actual damage to the door. These occurrences enraged the mothers on Nathaline Street, including one Helen Wardrop. The final straw, occurred when my neighbor Dave Kirby told me that *against the steps* became way more exciting when one replaced the solid rubber ball with a golf ball. Dave was correct; that golf ball shot off the steps, resulting in a huge increase in runs scored in a typical game of *against the steps*. Sadly, the first time my golf ball hit—and dented—our aluminum door, marked the last time I ever played *against the steps*.

The second pastime for Jordy and me was seasonal—ice hockey. Each winter my father would wait for a very cold day and head into our backyard with the garden hose. He would mark-off an area the shape of a rectangle, roughly measuring 30 feet by 12 feet. He would proceed to spray a layer of water onto the hibernating lawn. The first year my father behaved in this way, I was puzzled. “What are you doing?” I demanded. “The grass doesn’t grow in winter.”

“What have we told you about asking questions?” my father replied. After I was silent and looked contrite for a few minutes, my father continued, “No, I am not watering the grass. I am building an ice rink for you and your sister Geri.”

By this time he had stopped spraying the yard. I looked around; I could barely see any water. “Why have you stopped spraying?” I asked, despite my recent warning about questions. “Don’t you need to flood the yard?” “Two questions!” I thought to myself, “I am headed for big trouble!” Fortunately, my father saw the situation as an opportunity to inform his ignorant child.

“If I flood the yard, the water will just drain away. I know what I am doing.”

Sure enough he did know what he was doing; my father was always very good at problem solving. Barely 30 minutes later, he was out in the yard again, spraying another layer of water onto the, by then, barely visible minute layer of ice. And so it went all day and the next day too: every 30 minutes my father would lie down another layer of water and by the end of the next day we had ice on which we could skate.

After the first snowfall after the ice rink was created, we shoveled the snow into piles to form our own boundary for our hockey arena. My father hosed down the snowpiles and when they solidified we were in business to play hockey.

The only problem was that I was a horrible skater and I never got better. My ineptitude at skating hardly mattered. Jordy and other friends would visit with their skates and we played many spirited games of hockey. Every few days, my father would return to the yard with his hose and put a new layer of ice on our rink. After all, it was too small for a Zamboni!

The annual creation of our back yard ice rink, which continued for three or four years, was one of the best gifts my father ever gave to me.

The summer I turned seven, a married couple and their four year-old son, Tommy, came to visit the Wardrops on a Sunday afternoon. The husband worked with my father. As the adults socialized, it became my job to entertain Tommy. First, we went to the basement. Almost immediately, Tommy spotted a one gallon can of paint. He then found a long screwdriver and started to pry the lid off the paint can. As he got the lid off, I grabbed the screwdriver and pulled Tommy away from the paint can; God only knows what he was planning to do next!

“What the hell are you doing?” I yelled at Tommy, pushing him farther away from the still open paint can while putting the screwdriver on a shelf high above little Tommy’s reach.

Tommy began screaming and before I knew it, we were upstairs trying to explain why I had been yelling and Tommy had been screaming. Tommy stood there mute, looking innocent. “He pried the lid off a can of paint!” I stated.

“Well, that’s not right,” my father said, looking at his friend for an explanation.

With idiotic grins on both of their faces, Tommy’s parents said, in unison, “A four year-old is not responsible for his actions.”

“Huh?” said my father.

“Oh yes,” the wife exclaimed enthusiastically. “We read a book on parenting and that’s what it said.”

Tommy and I returned to the basement. Near the paint cans was the pile of firewood for our basement fireplace. Before I knew what was happening, Tommy whipped out his *thing* and started urinating on the firewood. “What the hell are you doing?” I shouted. “Couldn’t you wait?”

“I don’t like to wait,” replied the four year-old miniature devil.

Tommy and I went upstairs and, once again, I had to explain all the noise coming from the basement.

I explained what had happened and—you guessed it—in unison Tommy’s parents again exclaimed, “A four year-old is not responsible for his actions.”

At this point, my parents decided that Tommy and Bobby should go outside to play. Before long, Tommy was pinching, punching and pushing me—the three p’s of (extremely) juvenile delinquency. I shoved him back, he fell and started to cry with the volume of a 1950’s air raid siren. All of the adults rushed outside to see what was going on.

I was explaining what had happened and got to the part of my shoving Tommy—in self-defense—when his mother erupted, “You must never restrain or be violent with a four year-old!” She grabbed Tommy and the three of them rushed to their car and drove away.

I figured that I was in big trouble. I started to apologize for ruining my parents’ time with their friends. My father interrupted me saying, “That’s ok,” with a smile on his face. I never saw Tommy again.

We had a strange ritual for calling on our friends on Nathaline. If, for example, I wanted to play with Ronny Madley, I would approach his side-door. But instead of knocking or ringing the bell, I would stand there, yell, “Ron-ny,” and wait. If nobody came to the door I would yell, “Ron-ny,” again. Eventually, with no answer, I would go home.

I mention this method of inquiry as an introduction to the annual visits of Al and Joey. Al and Joey were the nephews of next-door neighbor Dorian. They lived in Peterborough, Ontario, and once each summer their parents would drive to Redford to visit brother and brother-in-law Dorian and his wife Lil. Al was my age and Joey was about four years older, making him almost as old as my sister Geri. (I am quite sure that Geri had a crush on Joey.)

Things were very festive when Al and Joey came to visit. The Goulahs, my parents, Dorian’s brother and wife and the four kids would hang out in Dorian’s driveway, late into the night telling stories, laughing and drinking copious amounts of beer or soft drinks. I remember that one year, Joey was sick the entire next day after drinking 15 bottles of Doctor Pepper.

If Al had lived on Nathaline he would have definitely been my best friend. He was, by far, the best I have ever seen at playing hide-and-seek, which was weird because it wasn’t his neighborhood; how did he discover the best places to hide? When Al would come to my house to visit he would stand at my side door and yell, “Hey-on Bob.” All of us kids on Nathaline found it hilarious that somebody would yell “Hey-on Bob,” rather than obviously more chic, “Bob-by.” Go figure.

In this chapter I have focused on my neighbors on Nathaline Street. I will eventually reveal more facets of life on that street, but, first, in the next few chapters I will introduce you to my parents.

Chapter 7

William Harold Wardrop

My father, William Harold Wardrop, was born on January 12, 1919, in Jasonville, Indiana. He was the fourth, and last, child of Sam and Suzi Wardrop. Their first two children, Jim and Nellie, were born circa 1905, and their third child, Sam, was born in 1917.

Early in her youngest child's life, Suzi learned that Bill was a common nickname for a William. Suzi hated the name Bill and William Harold forever after became Harold.

Nicknames in the 1920s and 30s were the rage in Jasonville. For example, Harold was lifelong friends with the Swan boys: Jim (Crick), Ray (Red), Floyd (Derb) and (Dink). I can't recall Dink's given name; my father always referred to him as Dink. For many years I incorrectly believed that there were seven Swan boys. Then I learned that Crick and Jim were the same person; on so on.

Before I get too far into my father's early life (and my mother's early life in the next chapter) let me make one thing, as Richard Nixon liked to say, "Perfectly clear." I know very little of my parents early lives. They never sat me down and said, "Hey Bob, listen to this story of my youth." The narratives of this chapter and the next have been pieced together with very little direct evidence.

Sam—my grandfather, not my uncle—was born in Scotland in 1881 and was employed briefly as a police officer before moving to the United States. Suzi was born in Ireland and grew up in one of that country's infamous orphanages. A large number of these *orphans* were taken from their unmarried mothers who were, in those days, considered morally unfit. I don't know Suzi's situation.

Eventually, Sam and Suzi moved to America and settled in Jasonville. Sam worked as a coal miner. In southern Indiana coal was obtained from strip-mining; thus, there are no stories of Sam being deep underground developing black lung disease. Sam died at age 87 when I was in college, in 1968. My memories of Sam are that he loved to watch wrestling and stock car racing on television. I don't recall ever having a conversation with him. I remember no evidence that he liked me, my sister Geri, or, indeed, any children in his neighborhood.

My only memory of Suzi is playing catch with her in her yard when I was approximately seven years-old. Suzi died when I was 10 and her funeral was the only time I ever saw my father cry. And it wasn't a few tears down his cheeks; it was uncontrollable (to the eyes of a 10 year-old) sobbing that lasted for several minutes. My guess is that Suzi hugged Harold as a child and that, had he been wounded during his time in the army, she would have been foremost in his thoughts. In later

years, every time I got in an argument with my mother my father would say to me, “Someday you won’t have a mother and you will be sorry that you treated yours so badly!”

Grandpa Sam had horrible arthritis and, indeed, in his late 60s there were a few years when he could not walk. His arthritis improved, however, and he was reasonably mobile the last 10–15 years of his life. I remember that his fingers were horribly crooked and he ate peas—apparently one of his favorite foods—by piling them onto his knife. He was amazingly adept at lifting the knife to his mouth without any peas rolling off!

A few years after Suzi died, a woman named Lena moved in with Sam and cooked and cleaned for him. She had her bedroom and Sam had his. I have no idea whether there was any hanky-panky going on between them. (Hanky-panky was, without a doubt, the most ridiculous euphemism of my youth.) I do know that on our annual one-week visits to Jasonville, my parents were extremely angry about the situation, for reasons I couldn’t even imagine. Indeed, even now as an old man, I have no notion why Lena’s presence was so disturbing. On our first post-Lena visit, my parents were unbelievably nasty to her. On every subsequent visit, Lena had the good sense to leave before we arrived and you know what? Yep, my parents complained about how rude she was for not sticking around for their abuse.

I loved our visits to Jasonville. And not just for the Lena-inspired-drama. There were several reasons.

For a boy who lived his whole life in a large metropolitan area, it was so cool to visit a small town. My sister and I would go into town and visit the one drug store and have exotic drinks, like Coca-Cola with **real cherry juice added**, something that would not appear in Michigan for many years. There were not many people in the town, so the neighborhood kids were always excited when I would visit. Having one more kid to play with is a significant increase when there are only, say, five kids your age in your town.

Also, while it was *in town*, my Grandpa’s house was also in the country. There were fireflies in his yard! I had never seen fireflies in Michigan. There were little snakes that lived in the outhouse; that was so cool. (I must admit that as a young boy I loved the outhouse primarily because it made my mother, and especially my sister, freak out.) We built fires in the yard, had sparklers and roasted marshmallows. My Grandpa had fly swatters and a porch swing; I spent hours on that swing killing flies. With nothing on television, save wrestling and car racing, I read books. During one visit I read the entire *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

After my identity officially changed to **Bob Wardrop, basketball player**, I loved visiting Jasonville even more. Every boy in Jasonville, it seemed, played basketball. There was never any trouble getting a game together. I would out-hustle them, out-jump them, out-defend them, but there was one thing I could never do: out-shoot them. It seemed that every boy in Jasonville was a better basketball shooter than every boy in Redford.

I don’t recall my parents ever phoning Sam from Michigan, but there were occasional letters. One day, a letter arrived from Sam stating that, to make Lena happy, he had had an indoor bathroom built. My sister had left home by then, but the rest of us rejoiced. Better yet, this bit of home improvement by Sam resulted in the funniest episode in all my visits to Jasonville.

The following summer, we were all excited about getting to Sam’s house and using the indoor facilities. We walked into the house; “Where is the bathroom?” we asked.

“It’s in Lena’s room,” Sam replied.

Now Lena’s room was roughly a fifteen foot by fifteen foot square, with its entry door to the far right. We walked into Lena’s room (remember she had left to stay with a friend). Immediately to the left upon entering was the door to the new bathroom. It was a standard 36 inch wide door leading into the bathroom, or should I call it the bath-tunnel, with dimensions of 12 feet by 4 feet. It possessed a toilet, a sink and a tub. I judged the floor plan to be hilariously bad. My parents, however, paid no attention to the floor plan. Their eyes were riveted on the bathroom door, the clear glass, transparent, bathroom door! It is no hyperbole to say that they went crazy! A major freak out. The biggest freak out of theirs that I ever saw!

After a few minutes of my father yelling at his father something to the effect, “How could you be so stupid, yadda, yadda, yadda,” my father sped into town and returned shortly with a paint brush and a can of paint, while my mother waited with her legs crossed. (Okay, I might be misremembering the leg crossing.) My father quickly painted the glass with a hideous aluminum colored paint and all was well.

My father’s brother Sam was just two years his senior. When, as a small child, I first met my uncle Sam, I remember thinking to myself, “This man is really ugly!” And, indeed, Sam was difficult to look at. Sam’s cheeks were puffy and heavily scarred. My parents told me that Sam suffered from some genetic condition, but my cousin Danny—Jim’s only child—told me that Sam had had some form of thyroid surgery in which his face was opened up from ear to ear. I believe Danny’s version.

To make matters worse, Sam’s two brothers were extremely handsome. I last saw uncle Jim when he was in his 80s and he was still a really good-looking man.

Reportedly, the other children in Jasonville would ridicule Sam incessantly for being so ugly. Sam was passive by nature and suffered the abuse without fighting back. Sam’s younger brother Harold, however, was not so tolerant. Whenever a boy would ridicule Sam, Harold would hit him. Most of these boys were Sam’s age or older and, hence, were at least two years older than Harold. As a result, Harold lost a lot of fights. Eventually the other boys learned that whether he would win or lose, Harold was going to fight. There is nothing scarier to a boy than another boy who will fight a battle he cannot win. Thus, eventually kids stopped picking on Sam and Harold had to find other reasons to fight.

Harold remained a tough guy his whole life, as evidenced by the following story told to me by my cousin Danny. I must have been approximately five years old, which would make Danny about eight, my father 35 and Jim 50. Our two families went to a park, set our picnic basket and other possessions on a table in a really nice location and went off to fish or hike or some such activity.

When we returned, we found that our table had been taken by another group and our stuff had been moved. My father went up to the man who appeared to be the leader of the group. This leader was younger than my father, much larger and well-muscled. The following conversation ensued.

My father: Excuse me, but this is our table; we had our stuff on it.

Man: Yes, well *had* is the operative word here. You had the table now we have it.

The man turned to his friends and laughed. When he turned back towards my father, the man seemed surprised to see that Harold had not moved.

Man: You are still here? Time to move on buddy.

My father: Let me explain something. We are not moving. This is our table. You and I are going to settle this right now. I'll let you decide how we settle it.

The man, looking into my father's eyes for perhaps the first time, sees the steel and determination there.

Man: What are you talking about? This is our table!

My father: How do you want to settle this?

After a moment of hesitation, the man turns to his friends and says, "Hey guys, these people have this table, let's move over there," pointing at a table far away.

By contrast, I was never a fighter as a child. I believe that my passiveness disappointed my father deeply.

Harold, like his only son, grew to a height of 72 inches in high school. This made him the tallest boy in Jasonville High School and he was recruited to the basketball team to jump center. I probably should put basketball in italics—*basketball*—because the game they played bore little resemblance to what my teammates and I played 30 years later. Indeed, based on my father's stories, his game had little in common with the early 1950s version of small town Indiana basketball that was immortalized in the movie *Hoosiers*.

Let me give you a basic rundown. There was a center jump after every basket. (Hence, the importance of Harold to his team.) A typical game score was 9–7 or 11–8. The only acceptable shot was the two handed chest shot. Jump shots were invented in the 1930s, but they were not accepted in Jasonville and its surrounding communities. My father told the story of a teammate being kicked off the team for attempting a one-handed shot! Years later, when I was 15 and my father was an old man of 45, he occasionally would shoot baskets with me. He had the funniest shot I had ever seen; one that I could never replicate. Think about his dilemma: You have the ball and you want to score. You are not allowed to jump; you are not allowed to shoot with one hand; you are not allowed to shoot as if you were doing a soccer throw in. You were required to shoot the ball with two hands, with the shot beginning at the front of your chest. If you stand there and shoot and I am guarding you, I could, without jumping, block your shot with my forehead! So what did my father (and presumably all of his teammates) do? As Sherlock Holmes famously said, "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever is left, no matter how improbable, must be true." As he prepared to shoot, my father would quickly—one might say lightning-like—shuffle to his right and launch the ball in one motion. It is now widely agreed that moving to your left or right as you shoot is the worst possible technique. Perhaps this sideways shooting motion was the reason the game score of the losing team only occasionally cracked double digits.

Harold graduated from high school, and then what? It was 1937. The country was in a huge depression. Even in a boom economy, Jasonville was depressed. For years I had no idea what my father did from 1937 until he moved to Detroit to work in an auto factory in 1940.

When I was a child, the expression *the seven seas* was common. I have checked on the internet and learned, not surprisingly, that the expression has been in use for thousands of years. Again,

not surprisingly, as the *known world* expanded the bodies of water described by this term changed. Currently, the consensus—according to my internet source—is that the seven seas are: The North and South Atlantic; the North and South Pacific; the Arctic; the Indian; and the Southern oceans. My guess is that this is a pretty reasonable list for circa 1959 too. Anyway, my father frequently would speak of his time “In the three seas.” He never mentioned what he did in the three seas, so I imagined it was swabbing the deck or peeling potatoes during his time in the army. (I knew that he had fought in the South Pacific and he had to get there somehow!) Well, it turns out that he was likely clearing brush, creating paths, cutting trees and hauling garbage, because when Harold left high school, the only opportunity available to him was in the Civilian Conservation Corps, abbreviated the CCC, or in the vernacular of its time, the three C’s.

The World War began in 1939 and a few months later, 21 year-old Harold moved to Detroit to work at Detroit Universal, a company that made universal joints for autos. He chose that particular factory because it was where all the Swan boys—Crick, Red, Derb and Dink—worked. On weekends, Harold would drive to Chicago to visit his sweetheart, Helen Ladika, who was in the Windy City working on her career as a waitress and living with a sister. You will learn about Helen and this courtship in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Helen Mary Wardrop

For years I was told that Helen was the seventh of eight children. She had three older sisters—Ann, Elizabeth (Betty) and Katherine (Kay)—three older brothers—Joseph (Joe), Albert (Al) and Paul—and a younger brother William (Bill). Eventually, I was told there was another sister, Mary, who lived at home for years, but eventually was placed in some kind of an institution, where she remained an unknown number of years until her death. I have absolutely no idea why Mary lived and died in an institution; I have no idea of her position in the family, except that she was born before Helen.

Helen's parents were named John and Susan. She would tell me they came to the U.S. circa 1900 from Czechoslovakia. When I learned in school that Czechoslovakia was not a country until 1919, she reluctantly admit that her parents "Were Slovaks." They were definitely Catholics.

I know nothing about Helen's parents. In addition, I have no memory of ever seeing either of them. In fact, I do not know whether either of them was alive when I was born.

Over the years I received very inconsistent stories about her childhood from Helen. Mostly she spoke of how *dirt poor* her family was, but at other times she stated that they had a great property, which included a large lake, that became the major part of Shakamak State Park. By contrast, *Wikipedia* states:

Shakamak State Park was dedicated on September 3, 1928. The land was donated for a state park from the counties of Clay, Greene and Sullivan. The name *Shakamak* was chosen by the park's founders. The word is said to mean "river of the long fish" in the language of either the Delaware (Lenape) or Kickapoo Indians, and was said to be used by them to describe the nearby Eel River. The park founders simply adopted the name for the park long after any Delaware departed the area well over 100 years before in 1819.

My mother finished the ninth grade of school in 1937 and then, just before she turned 16, moved to Chicago, lived with her sister Kay and became a waitress. She never told me why she left home. When the subject came up she would say, "I got an A in algebra, but then I had to leave school."

What is beyond doubt is that her father was an alcoholic. Indeed, one winter morning he was found just a few feet from the front door, on the ground, frozen and dead. The previous night he

had gone into town for a round of drinking with his buddies.

From other stories I know that he was violent when he had been drinking, which pretty much meant he was almost always violent. My best guess is that when Helen was almost 16, in 1937, and her father was in one of his rages, she tried to protect her mother and took a fist to the face. Then she moved to Chicago.

My mother enjoyed living in Chicago as a teenager and young woman. She lived with her sister Kay and her older sister Ann was in Chicago too. Apparently, she started tenth grade in fall, 1937, but money was tight and Helen had to quit school.

During his senior year in high school, Harold Wardrop noticed a particularly pretty ninth grade girl named Helen Ladika. He sent her a note, asking her for a date. Her reply was, "I am not allowed to date."

A few years later, as luck would have it, Harold was home in Jasonville from Detroit on the same weekend Helen was home from Chicago. Driving around town on Saturday, Harold spotted Helen and pulled over. "Will you go out with me tonight?" Harold asked.

"Yes, I will," the big city waitress replied.

Harold sped off to find Lulu (OK, I am making up this name!) to cancel his Saturday night date with her. Apparently the first date of Harold with Helen went well. Some time later when Helen learned that Harold had broken a date with Lulu to see her, she thought, "That wasn't very nice, but I never liked Lulu. She is conceited."

My parents started dating long distance, with Harold driving from Detroit to Chicago for weekends. Their relationship moved into a higher gear when Harold was laid off from Detroit Universal and his brother Sam found him a job in the sewers of Gary, Indiana.

I doubt that many people of my generation understand what it was like to be young in America in 1942. I know that I don't. My father turned 23 in January and my mother would turn 21 in August. This was well before the sexual revolution of the 1960s and I am quite sure that my mother and most of her friends were *good girls*. (Granted men from time immemorial have believed that their mothers were good girls, and some of us had to be correct!) Men like my father knew that they would soon be going into battle and they wanted something other than mom and apple pie to think about as they ran across a battlefield. In short, there were, no doubt, a lot of hasty marriage proposals.

Harold almost was too late in acting. While she was waiting for Harold to speak up, in early 1942, childhood friend Mark showed up in his army uniform and asked Helen to marry him. She was quite flattered, but said no. Helen was a bit less flattered when she discovered that she was not his first choice; just a few days earlier another girl from *down home* had rejected Mark's proposal of marriage. Helen did not dwell on exactly how high she rated on Mark's list and preferred to be sure that she was second. Fortunately, for Mark, *number three was a charm* and the next woman he asked said yes. Many years later, after my mother was a widow and Mark was a widower, he looked her up and tried to rekindle the romance that never was. My mother seemed to consider this option, but called an end to it when she learned that Mark, who lived in Cincinnati, spent the whole winter living in his basement to save on heating. Helen Ladika was not raised to be cheap!

Eventually, Harold got his act together and he and Helen were married on September 7, 1942. I don't know when my father was shipped off to the South Pacific to fight, but he was in the U.S.

long enough for my sister Geri to be conceived circa March, 1943, given that she was born on December 13, 1943. After Geri was born, she and Helen had a room near Jasonville in the home of Mrs. Neal, who my mother always described as a saint.

Despite her aversion to hugging me, fortunately my mother liked breast feeding and it saved young Geri's life. Apparently, the hospital got a bad batch of formula and several babies died. Being breast fed, Geri was not given any of the tainted formula.

By all accounts Geri was a brilliant baby and much pampered. Indeed, upon meeting her father on his 27th birthday, January 12, 1946, she told him, "Why don't you go back to Japan!" an impressive sentence for a 25 month old child. (The story goes that Geri did not like sharing attention.)

This was the lot of Harold, Helen and Geri Wardrop in January 1946: They had little money and no place to live. In addition, Harold had to decide on a job. He could see two options for employment.

The first was to go back to Detroit Universal where his military service would count towards his seniority. More seniority meant he would have an advantage over other workers in qualifying for better jobs and higher pay. He had to weigh this, of course, against the knowledge that working at Detroit Universal would be incredibly tedious and not very rewarding.

The second option was to take a chance; to step into the unknown. He could go to college on the GI bill. He could take a job in which he could develop skills. In later years, I learned that the biggest step he could imagine was to work for the phone company, which, indeed, would have been a huge improvement over factory work. My father was hardworking and smart; two characteristics that would not be rewarded at Detroit Universal.

He chose to go back to Detroit Universal. A decision that I heard him regret repeatedly during the 38 years he and I coexisted on earth. Indeed, while my father had several admirable traits which I will discuss later in this document—honesty, integrity, loyalty to friends, and others—the trait that comes first to my mind is that he was a person who had regrets. Also, I must note that I have never understood how someone who was so brave physically, could be so cautious in every other area of life.

While he was still alive, I often felt that my father literally (and, yes, this is the correct use of literally) regretted every decision he made from the day he was born until yesterday. This is a powerful statement. I realize that you might think me to be very mean spirited. I cannot be objective on this and I will tell you why.

When I was in my late twenties or early thirties (my father died when I was 38), he said to me, "I regret having had children. If I could live my life again, I would never have children."

Wow. I have a child who I love dearly, though not always well. I love my three grandchildren. I cannot imagine ever feeling that way about any of them. If somehow I was nasty enough to feel this way, I would never, never, never in one billion years say it to them. It is the most destructive thing anyone ever said to me in my life. I can't even think what the second most destructive thing is, but it can't compare, even remotely, to what my father said to me.

My father never asked my forgiveness for saying this. He never said, "Hey, I didn't mean it." He never mentioned it again, nor did I. I had lived through our many fights about the Vietnam war. My father, who had always said to me, "I want you to have a better life than I had," suddenly turned into a man who said, "I want you to be sent to Vietnam because I was sent to the South Pacific."

But I am getting ahead of my story.

I never told my mother of my father's "Regret you were born," statement. There was no point in telling her; in fact, it would have been cruel. I suspect she knew better than I what a regretter her husband was. In her later years when I brought up the arguments that my father and I had had over Vietnam, she would get sad and say, "I don't know why your father became that way. I am sorry for it; I didn't know what to do."

I do have a theory; it will be presented later in this document.

Chapter 9

Harold and Helen Wardrop

As an adult, I read a wonderful novel by Ruth Rendell. In this novel a married couple loved each other obsessively and compulsively. Their daughter was simply a nuisance that interfered with their lives together. So much so that when she disappeared and was eventually found dead, they barely noticed. It is only a bit of hyperbole to say that this novel could have featured Harold and Helen in the role of the parents.

My parents did love each other very much. Much more than any outsider could believe, but isn't that often the case in a truly happy marriage?

I believe that Harold fell for Helen when he saw her in high school. After that she was the only woman he loved, the only woman he could possibly have loved.

When I was 18 and went to work at Detroit Universal the summer before I started college, I had the opportunity to observe my father's interactions with the (few) women who worked in the factory. He was hopeless. He had no idea how to talk to a woman. He would become all giggly and goofy. I swear that if the women had had pigtails and there had been an inkwell present, Harold would have been dipping hair, as kids no doubt did in the 1920s. The thought of him even flirting with another woman was beyond imagining.

When I was in elementary school, my father frequently would spank me with his belt. (I learned early on that the beating would continue until I cried, but I had to be careful to make it believable. If I cried with the first smack he would know I was faking. I learned that it took about eight smacks for his anger to diminish to the point that he would believe my tears. If I didn't cry until, say, the 20th smack, then there would be 20 smacks.) Despite his controlled (?) violence with me, he never raised his voice or his hand to my mother. (Also, I am pretty sure he never spanked Geri.)

Throughout elementary school, almost every Saturday night my parents would go out with friends, leaving Geri and me at home. I would watch "Hockey Night in Canada" on the Windsor, Ontario, local television station and Geri would pop corn on the stove and talk on the phone with friends. It was the most fun she and I had together as children. When Geri had dates and later after she got married and left home at 19, I would fend for myself on my parents' date night.

Thus, on a positive note, my father gave me a good role model for unconditionally loving one's wife. There was, however, an extremely destructive aspect of my father's behavior towards my mother. I will explain what I mean by relating several stories from my childhood.

From ages 12–17, every summer my parents and I would rent a cottage for two weeks on Long Lake, a beautiful inland lake southwest of Traverse City, Michigan, and north of Interlochen. For future reference, I will note that the cottage was 240 miles from our home on Nathaline. Even though I could not swim—more on this later—I loved our time on Long Lake. One of my favorite activities was fishing.

Fishing from shore was not an option. The cottage had 90 feet of shoreline; a nice sand beach; and the lake had a very gradual drop off for which one could wade out 80 feet and the water would be only chest high. The bottom of the lake was firm sand: no sinking into muck; no bruising my feet on rocks; and no unpleasant plant-life to avoid. In other words, the nature of the lake in front of our cottage was not conducive to attracting fish. As a result, if one wanted to go fishing—which I did very much—one had to go out onto the lake in a boat.

The cottage came with a small fishing boat with three benches for seating. My father owned a five horsepower motor that we would haul up to the lake, put it on the boat and putter around the lake hitting, perhaps, a top speed of three miles per hour. Every morning, my parents and I would go off fishing. My father always sat in the back because, being the man, he was the boat's driver. Never mind that with a five horsepower motor, in anything less than a hurricane, not even a maniacal teenager could have capsized that boat: My father was the man and men drove boats!

With my father and the motor in the back of the boat, we needed some weight up front so that the front of the boat would not be too high above the water. When I was 12, my mother weighed much more than I, so I sat on the middle bench and she sat in front.

Eventually we would chug around an island and find a good spot to drop anchor and fish. Both my father and I would use a rod and reel, but my mother insisted on using her 12 foot long bamboo fishing pole.

Let me say a bit about our fishing technique. At the end of the fishing line we had a hook and sinker (weight). We would decide how deep we wanted our hook to sit below the surface of the water. If, for example, we wanted the hook 10 feet below the surface, then we would place a plastic *bobber* on the line 10 feet above the hook. I would take my rod and cast my line out, perhaps 20 feet from the boat. The bobber would settle on the surface of the lake, floating and bobbing in the waves. Then I would wait.

Fishing is all about waiting. If you have no patience, you should not fish. So, I would sit there patiently waiting for something to happen. Ideally a fish would grab the bait—usually a worm—and begin to swim away. This would pull the bobber underwater and I would give a *mild* jerk (note the word mild) of my line to set the hook. Then I would reel in my line. Sometimes there would be a fish on the hook and sometimes not. In either event, after removing the fish, if there was one, and rebaiting the hook, I would repeat the whole process. My father fished like I did; not surprisingly, because he had taught me.

Note that if one remains calm, there is nothing dangerous about fishing as I describe it above. Sadly, this was not the case with my mother's fishing.

First of all, my mother should never have been allowed to fish. She had absolutely no patience for it. After a few minutes of fishing without a strike on her line she would become impatient and start complaining. Shortly after the complaining began she would begin to hallucinate. Not a major hallucination, but every time the bobber would bob in a wave—which after all is what bobbies do;

hence their name—she would shriek, “I’ve got one!” and, with all of her strength—definitely not mildly—jerk her pole straight overhead so that the pole was perpendicular to the bottom of the boat.

There she sat. The bottom of the pole in her lap. The pole 12 feet straight up in the air. Swinging wildly from the top of the pole was 15 feet of fishing line with a hook at its end. Usually, a bare hook swinging through the air, going who knows where at a very rapid pace. Well, not infrequently the hook would be flying right towards my face, seemingly honing in on one of my eyeballs. I would duck; I would dive for the floor; I would put up my arms in defense. Then the following conversation would ensue:

- Me: Hey! Cut it out! Are you trying to maim me?
- My father: Don’t talk to your mother like that!
- Me: But she’s trying to kill me!
- My father: Don’t be ridiculous; you aren’t even bleeding.
- Me: But her hook almost caught me in my face!
- My father: It didn’t; so, why are you complaining?
- Me (after thinking about it briefly): So, Dad, what you are saying is that because I have yet to be blinded or disfigured, it is perfectly safe for me to sit here and fish; correct?
- My father: Yes, that is exactly what I mean.
- Me: OK, Dad. Then let’s change seats; you and I.
- My father (sputtering): No, no! We can’t do that!
- Me: Why not?
- My father: Well, I am the boat’s driver and the driver has to sit in the back.
- Me: But the boat is anchored and the motor is turned off; you are not currently driving the boat.
- My father: It doesn’t matter. The driver must sit in the back of the boat.
- Me: But
- My father (interrupting): Shut-up Bob; you will scare away the fish.

So what was going on here? Below is my interpretation of this event—which was repeated often—and other similar events that I will describe later in this chapter.

My mother frequently would behave in a way that was dangerous, destructive, or perhaps only rude to others. Why? Well like the punch line to the old joke that asks “Why did the dog lick

herself?” the answer is “Because she could.” My father enabled this behavior of my mother’s. To make matters much worse, my father always arranged it so that it was his children, not he, who would suffer any consequences of my mother’s aberrant behavior. Do you doubt this statement? If so, reread the above dialogue.

I have a postscript to the fishing story, one that might seem rather trivial, but one that affected me greatly. When I finally decided that the risk of disfigurement outweighed the pleasure of fishing I stopped going fishing those mornings with my parents. My father’s reaction to my decision was to tell everyone—friends, relatives, strangers—with great disdain that “Bob lost interest in fishing.” In other words, my rational response to my father’s enabling my mother’s reckless behavior was characterized—even though my father had to know better—as somehow a flaw in me!

After my father retired from Detroit Universal, by then a division of Chrysler Corporation, he and my mother bought a home near my sister in Livingston County, Michigan. My mother wanted to play bingo twice a week or more in town. Bingo games were sponsored by the local schools, the American Legion, the VFW and perhaps other groups. When I would phone home from Wisconsin, my father would constantly complain about what a horrible daughter Geri was because she would accompany her mother to bingo only once per week.

On a subsequent trip to Michigan I decided to check out this whole bingo experience. So, I took my mother to bingo. Below is an accurate description of what ensued.

My mother was quite the bingo expert. She would routinely play 25–35 cards at-a-time. Meanwhile, I played only five cards, just enough to keep me from falling asleep from boredom. Except I would not have fallen asleep because my mother, sitting next to me, carried on a constant monologue that went something like the following:

- Announcer: N-41.
- My mother: He always calls that damn number. I never have it on my cards. I bet Shirley has it. Look at her; she is daubing all of her cards. (Author’s note: Serious bingo players daub their paper cards with a transparent colored ink; daubing is much faster than placing buttons.) She is so damn lucky.
- Announcer: G-58.
- My mother: Damn! I have three G-59s and five G-57s; why the hell won’t he call those!

A bit later in the same game.

- My mother: All I need for bingo is B-9. Please, please, please call B-9.
- Announcer: G-51.
- My mother: Damn it! He never calls my numbers. Now I need B-9, I-21 or G-50 for a bingo.
- Announcer: 0-75.
- Someone in the audience: Bingo!

- My mother: Shit! Shirley won again. I just hate her; she always wins.

You think I exaggerate? Ask my niece Karen—who also accompanied Helen to bingo—and she will affirm that the above represents one of Helen’s milder days.

To summarize, my father could have accompanied Helen to bingo. In fact, I am sure that he did at least once and found that he could not stand her negativity. So, did he confront Helen on her behavior? Of course not. Did he realize that it would be cruel and unusual punishment for anyone to accompany Helen and listen to her diatribes? No again. Instead he chose to ignore Helen’s behavior and berate his daughter for not wanting to submit herself to this more than once a week. Hey, in my opinion Geri deserved a medal for taking my mother to bingo once per month, let alone once per week!

My father absolutely loved to play cards. He was a wonderfully happy winner and a cheerful loser. He loved playing so much that almost nothing could ruin his card playing experience. Well, Helen could.

When I would visit my parents after my divorce, we would play a three-handed card game. Because my mother didn’t have the patience to remember cards or develop a strategy, we were forced to play quite simple games. We played a game we called 31, which is also called scat. For a description of this game go to

<http://www.pagat.com/draw/scat.html>.

The three of us would begin to play and before long my mother would start her incessant complaining. It was really quite sad. I could see the joy of playing slowly ebb out of my father’s face. Like any normal human, he could not tolerate my mother’s behavior. Yet he never said anything to her about it! We would play and he would become more and more miserable until finally he would quit, again without admitting why.

The nature of 31 is that we would start with three players and eventually one would be eliminated. If my mother was the one eliminated, then the game would continue as a contest between father and son. Whenever this occurred, which was quite frequent because my mother was truly bad at the game, my father would be transformed back into his usual gregarious card playing self and we had quite a good time. But then one of us would win—usually him—and we would be forced to return to the three player game and the misery would begin again.

In spite of my mother’s complaining, the three of us had a lot of fun playing 31. It allowed us to communicate without the seriousness of sitting around having an actual conversation. Also, it allowed me to play my favorite trick on my mother.

One day as I was shuffling the cards, my mother arose and said she needed to go to the bathroom. This would give us a short break until we resumed play. As luck would have it, my mother was sitting to my left which meant that it would be her play when we began. As soon as she left the room, I got an idea. “Play along with me on this,” I said to my father. I quickly searched through the deck to find three cards that would constitute a perfect hand: two 10-point (a 10 or a face card) cards plus an ace, all in the same suit. I took the perfect hand, and placed the cards at my mother’s place on the table, as if they had been dealt. I then found perfect hands for both my father and I and placed them in our spots, again face-down as if they had been dealt.

As my mother returned to her chair, my father announced, “Bob has dealt the hands, but we were waiting for you to return before we look at ours.”

My mother proceeded to pick up her cards one-at-a-time. With her second card, a smile began to appear on her face as she gazed upon two-thirds of a perfect hand. Immediately upon viewing her third card, a huge smile appeared on her face. She slammed her cards onto the table, face-up, and shouted, “I got 31! You both lose!”

“Wait a moment, Helen,” my father said, “Bob and I need to look at our cards.” Harold proceeded to draw the cards slowly, one-at-a-time while Helen literally was bouncing with excitement. “Well, look here,” Harold said slyly as he laid down his cards, “I have 31 too.”

My mother couldn’t believe it! This was horrible. Finally, recovering, she managed to say, “Well, at least Bob loses!”

“Not so fast,” I said as I revealed my own perfect hand to the world. “I also have 31. The only loser this hand is you, Mother!” (This was a long-standing Wardrop variation on the rules in which the knocker—my mother in this case—is the loser when there is a three way tie.)

To say my mother was upset would be a huge understatement. She became incensed as my father and I broke into hysterical laughter. Mercifully, we quickly told her it was a trick. She wasn’t too happy to learn of our trick, but was delighted that she did not have to put money in the pot.

My mother never had many friends, if any. Why? Because nobody is perfect and Helen felt it was her duty to tell everyone, in great detail, exactly how they failed to achieve perfection. When she did this to me, our conversation went, roughly, as follows:

- My mother: Well, Bob, you can’t do this; . . . you are no good at that; . . . you shouldn’t have done that; . . . you should do what I tell you to do; and so on.
- Me: Mom, you are being rude.
- My mother (laughing maniacally): What’s the matter; can’t you take it? **I am just telling it like it is!**

Without doubt, **I am just telling it like it is!** was my mother’s favorite pop-culture expression. Ever. The expression in second place is light-years behind. And if my sister or I would criticize her in any way (it goes without saying that my father never did this), what would be her reaction? Would she reply as follows?

Well, I don’t agree with what you say, but I realize that you are just **telling it like it is!**

As my son Roger likes to say at times like this, “That’s funny.”

Of course my mother never said this; instead she would burst into tears. “You are so mean. Why do you treat your mother like this?” she would sob. And, if he was around, you know who would come running to her defense.

By contrast, almost everyone adored my father. Harold was a lot of fun and funny. He would never hesitate to help a friend. After he retired, Harold bought a lawn tractor, put a snow blower on it and, after any measurable snowfall, would proceed to clear all of the driveways in the neighborhood.

When my sister and I were adults but still quite young—before it became clear that our father would succumb to cancer at age 68—we would talk about what would happen if one of parents died before the other. We were not sure what would happen if our father was the survivor, but we were certain that our mother would have a difficult time after her *enabler* was gone. After all, she had married the one person on earth who would put up with her behavior.

Although Geri and I were certain, it turns out that we were wrong. (Why am I thinking of George W. Bush?) Our father died in 1987 and, for almost 27 years, until her death in 2014, our mother did fine. I will discuss her later years in the epilogue.

Chapter 10

Ashcroft Elementary School

During my adult life, a number of women have said to me, “Bob, you are so negative.” Too many, in fact, to label them all demented or delusional; or even mistaken. As a result, I am happy to begin by saying categorically, “I loved attending Ashcroft Elementary School.”

A few days after we moved into our new home on Nathaline in South Redford, I began the first grade at Ashcroft. My first grade teacher’s name was Mrs. MacIntosh and that is one of two specific memories I have from our year together. The other memory is that one day I had gotten a classmate, Ronnie O’Grady, angry with me and I concluded that he was going to beat me up after school. As soon as the bell rang, I ran like the wind, out of the classroom, down the hall, out the door and all the way home without looking behind me. By the next day, Ronnie wasn’t angry at me and seemed to have no awareness of my choice of flight over fight.

Second grade is even blurrier than first grade. I don’t remember my teacher’s name, but I do remember that she was unmarried, was much younger than the other teachers at Ashcroft, and that I was madly in love with her. She had this wonderful Texas accent and the highlight of my summer after second grade (i.e., the summer of 1957) was when she sent me—only me, I was sure—a postcard from her home in Texas, where she was spending the summer. I later learned that all of my classmates had received a similar postcard and that she did not return to teach that fall because over the summer she had married a Texan!

Although I was heartbroken at losing my first *older woman*, no patriotic American boy of age eight could be mad for long at a Texan in 1957. Why? Because by 1957 we were all crazy about (Texan) Fess Parker’s portrayal of Davy Crockett on Walt Disney’s *Wonderful World of Color* television show. The show culminated with the tragic third episode in which Davy dies heroically at the Alamo (located in San Antonio, Texas) fighting the dastardly Mexican leader, Santa Ana.

If you check imdb, you will find that due to the amazing success of Davy Crockett, Disney resurrected Parker’s character for two prequels to the Alamo.

On the topic of childhood heroes of mine dying, it was a shock to me and all my 10 year-old friends to learn that TV’s *Superman*, George Reeves, had died of a bullet to his head in June, 1959. After all, how could Superman die? Finally, in 2006, I saw the excellent movie *Hollywoodland* with Ben Affleck and Adrien Brody and learned *what really had happened* to Mr. Reeves.

Whereas I lack specific memories of events during my first two years at Ashcroft, I have a strong

general memory: Ashcroft was no Vetat. As I mentioned earlier, kindergarten at Vetat consisted of: play time, story time and nap time. At Ashcroft, my serious education began. During my first two years at Ashcroft *I was learning stuff!* To be sure, much of what I learned consisted of facts dictated to me—much in spirit practiced by Helen and Harold Wardrop. After all, we learned the alphabet and how to read; we were not asked, “Bob, what do you think of the alphabet?” or, “What do the letters c-a-t mean to you, Bob?” But the tone was different; I was not treated as a dummy.

In particular, I noticed that math was different. In math, I was not simply given facts, I was taught *techniques* that I could then apply to a variety of problems. I loved it!

In addition, I was given a head start in math by my first great teacher, my sister Geri. Geri taught me basic arithmetic before I started first grade, giving me a head start on the other kids. Thus, right from the start in school I was *the kid who was good at math* and, especially in the 1950s, being good at math was highly respected. Indeed, throughout school my older sister often helped me.

My next great teacher was Mrs. Barkley in third grade at Ashcroft. Mrs. Barkley seemed to me to be in her fifties. Remember that I was only eight years-old when I started third grade, so perhaps she was in her 30s. In any event Mrs. Barkley was the first teacher who made me feel that I had a special brain; that I could learn some things faster and do some things better than other kids my age. In fact, there was one event in third grade that I have always remembered vividly.

One day third and fourth graders from many schools, including Ashcroft, visited the planetarium at the Cranbrook Institute. This was 1958 and Americans were getting more and more interested in outer space. The guide stood on a circular stage in the middle of a round auditorium. Hundreds of kids sat there. The room was dark except for the various replicas of stars and planets in the ceiling. The guide had our rapt attention. She was talking about some space phenomenon—remember, I was into math, not science—and stated that it took two minutes for something to happen. She then asked the audience, “How many seconds is that (referring to the two minutes)?” Without even thinking what I was doing, I yelled out, “One hundred twenty!” I immediately thought to myself, “Oh, crap! I am in trouble. I need to learn to keep quiet.”

I did not, however, get into trouble. The guide simply stated, “That is correct; very good,” and continued with her presentation.

This whole incident was soon forgotten by me until the next day. Mrs. Barkley took me aside and said, “I recognized your voice yesterday at the planetarium, Bob. I am very proud of you.” Wow! I had never had a teacher or parent or any adult say anything like that to me! I was walking on air for quite some time!

Mrs. Barkley’s compliment was definitely a turning point for my education. I began to see school as a place where I could excel and my accomplishments would be recognized, respected and rewarded, the real three R’s of my education. Indeed, I was so excited by Mrs. Barkley’s attention, that I made a major error that evening at home when I had the following conversation with my parents.

- Me: I know I was born in Detroit, but in which hospital?
- Both parents, in unison: Don’t tell anyone where you were born!

- Me: Why not?
- Both parents, in unison: Why not! Who has been giving you such ideas?
- Me: Nobody, sometimes . . .
- Mom, interrupting: I don't know who it could be; he don't (sic) get out much.
- Me: . . . I get . . .
- Dad, interrupting: Well, find out who it was, Helen. I hope he isn't like his sister, Geri.
- Mom: Yes, sometimes it's like that girl has a mind of her own.
- Me, after my parents have left the room: . . . ideas of my own.

A few years later, my parents told me, "We don't tell people where you were born because it was a **bad** part of town." This left me confused; how could a parcel of land be bad? "It's bad because black people live there," they patiently explained as if I was the mental defective they had always assumed me to be. (I never did tell them that my son was delivered by a black man, in 1972, in Ann Arbor Michigan. Presumably, it was a bad delivery room. Or a bad hospital. Or both.)

There is a subtle point in the above exchange. Possibly you missed it, possibly you saw it and concluded that my presentation was flawed. What was this point?

My parents became angry with me not because I questioned their reasoning, but simply because I inquired about their pronouncement. Wanting to know a reason behind a pronouncement was not allowed. As I grew older and realized how very strange this behavior was, I, of course, wondered why they were the way they were. I have never determined, to my satisfaction, why my parents had this attitude; the best I have are two theories, one for each of them.

My father had served in the army during the second World War. I never served in the military, but am familiar, from popular culture, with the notion, "When your sergeant says 'Jump,' you say, 'How high?'" My mother was the seventh of eight children (or eighth of nine, move on this later) in a family with a violent alcoholic father. I believe that she left home at 16 after he punched her in the face. Perhaps she had learned to never question her father about anything.

Third grade is also the earliest I remember taking the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*. I remember thinking to myself, "There must be a lot of really smart people in Iowa." Of course, later I learned that this was not the case.

As I recall, the *Iowa* test proceeded as follows. The teacher would have us open the test book to, say, page 8 and she would tell us to begin with question 36 which was immediately below the heading "Third graders begin here." I was off to the races! Plowing thru those questions, I would pass the various milestones: fourth graders begin here; fifth graders begin here; . . . ; college professors begin here. Well, of course, in third grade I had no idea that college professors existed. A few years later I would learn from *Gilligan's Island* that professors are the smartest people on earth! Later, a short time into my 32 years as a professor at the University of Wisconsin, I learned that *Gilligan's* had exaggerated a bit.

Also, quite obviously, college professors did not take the Iowa Test of basic skills. Sometime before I got to the marker “tenth graders begin here,” my fun ended when the book said, “Third graders stop here.” I didn’t want to stop! Every time I passed a “. . . begins here” sign, I thought to myself, “I am moving beyond myself.” Every time I passed a “. . . stop here,, sign, ... “Bye-bye little guys; you can’t keep up with me!”

The funniest thing I remember is when we got our reports. It would say something like, “You are working at the level of grade 7.6 in math.” I had no idea what this really meant; but I interpreted it to mean that I, being in third grade, didn’t need to do any work at all in math for the next 4.6 years! That sounded good to me! Except, of course, it didn’t sound good to me. Working in school was how I grew my self-confidence and self-concept.

I remember my fourth grade teacher was named Mrs. McGuire. My most vivid academic memory of fourth grade was the class spelling bee. The only similarity between our spelling bee and the Scripps National Spelling Bee that is televised on ESPN is that in both bees, kids spell. In our class we could not ask anything about the word and, important for this story, we could not ask our teacher to give us a sentence which uses the word.

Eventually, the competition was down to two children, Sally and yours truly. Sally missed her word, making me the winner. Mrs. McGuire announced, “According to the rules, Bob Wardrop (remember there were five Bobs in the class) is the winner. I for one, however, would like to know whether Bob can spell the word that eliminated Sally.”

If I had been able to ask my teacher to use Sally’s word in a sentence, she might have responded:

This sentence uses Sally’s word.

Huh? Well, Sally’s word was *uses*. Given this sentence, I could have easily spelled my word correctly. But without the sentence, it seemed that Mrs. McGuire was spouting gibberish.

After much deep thought, along the line, “What the hell is Mrs. McGuire saying? I know how my parents use (see how close I was!) this word, but she *can’t* mean that.” So I thought and I thought until finally, my teacher announced, “Let’s go Bob, you are holding up recess!”

I proceeded to spell *uses* in the way my parents used it:

Y-O-U-S-E-S.

You know, as in the sentence,

Speaking to Geri and me, my mother said, “When are youses going to wash the dishes?”

In fourth grade the school started separating the *smart kids* from the *dumb kids*. Fortunately, I was placed in the former grouping and, thus, encouraged to take on additional challenges in, as it turned out, foreign language and music.

Midway through fourth grade I was placed in a special Spanish class. For the next 5.5 years of school (through the end of ninth grade) I studied Spanish. I have little aptitude for foreign languages and learned almost nothing during these 5.5 years. Consider this last sentence; how could I stay in a class for 5.5 years without learning anything? Well, the answer, which seems

obvious, is that my teachers in these classes had no standards! Spanish was considered a *fun class* and how can we fail somebody when the goal is to have fun? With no fear of failure—or even a poor grade—I had no reason to apply myself in Spanish class. At the end of 5.5 years I knew my Spanish numbers (big surprise for a math-o-phile!) and my Spanish colors and not much else.

By contrast, I took one year of Russian my senior year in high school and had a wonderful teacher, Mr. Koljonen. He demanded we work hard and I did. When I went to college the next year, I found that all of my first semester of Russian had been covered in Mr. Koljonen's class.

At the beginning of fourth grade, all of the children learned to play a small musical instrument called a tonette. Despite the fact that I was horrible on the tonette, my music teacher recommended that I be in the band! For some long forgotten reason I was assigned to play the coronet. Three children were assigned to the coronet and within the first few days of class, I had settled into my position as third chair (the worst) on coronet. One week later, the boy who was second chair left school for a lengthy illness and I was promoted to second chair. He returned to school, fully recovered, nine weeks later and, within days, I was back at third chair.

Fortunately, my father could see that I had no interest in the coronet, and even less talent, and I was allowed to quit band at the end of fourth grade. The fact that the family needed to spend money to *rent* my coronet no doubt played a role in my father's decision. If only we had to rent a Spanish book my life would have been much happier.

In fifth and sixth grades we children continued to be put into groups based on our ability. I was placed in the top group in all areas: math, reading, English, history. After all, I was killing those national tests, at least by the standards of my community.

Sports were always way more important to me than school. Therefore, the story of my six years at Ashcroft would be very incomplete without talking about my favorite class—recess is not a class: physical education, taught all six years by my favorite teacher, Miss Lewis. (Nobody was called Ms. in the 1950s in South Redford.)

Of course, my gym classes over six years blur together: we ran; we jumped; we threw balls; we caught balls; we kicked balls; we dodged balls; we tagged each other; we avoided tags; and so on. Two events stand out in my mind. First, our introduction to track and field in fourth grade and, second, our basketball tournament at the end of sixth grade. The latter of these will be covered in a later chapter; for now, I will talk about track and field.

There were eight elementary schools in the South Redford School District and at the end of the 1959 school year (my fourth grade) the District held a track meet at Thurston High School for all boys (big surprise there!) in fourth, fifth or sixth grade. These track meets were repeated in 1960 and 1961, but my strongest memories are from 1959 and fourth grade.

My main memory involves our preparation for the track meet, not so much the actual track meet. For several weeks in gym class, whenever we could go outside Miss Lewis would have us practicing sprinting, hurdling, long jumping and baton passing. These choices of activities reflected the fact that the District Track Meet was going to have a very small number of events: a 50 yard dash; a 75 yard dash; the 440 yard relay (with eight runners per team!); some short low-hurdle race; the long jump; and, finally, the one activity we trained for indoors, the high jump.

I was very fast in fourth grade. (An advantage that disappeared quickly as I aged.) I was the fastest at Ashcroft in the 50 yard dash and finished tied for second in that event at the District

Meet. (This was second in the fourth graders' race; we competed within our grade. For many years I cherished the ribbon that I won!) I was also a member of our relay team, but we did not place in the top three at the Meet.

I was, however, sorely disappointed because I did not represent Ashcroft at the meet in the premier event in fourth grade: the high jump. For some reason, the event we boys cared about the most was the high jump. I don't know why, but I will share with you my guess.

We had the tryouts for the high jump in the gymnasium instead of outdoors. Because of this, the girls were forced to sit and watch the boys perform; and there was nothing we boys liked better than performing for the girls. When we had tryouts outdoors, the girls could remain in-sight of Miss Lewis, running around, playing *and* ignoring the boys.

We all used the scissors-style of high jumping. (There is a wonderful video on the history of high jumping; see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OtkrNq1fZg>.)

Scissors-style is a horrible method for jumping, but it's saving grace is that the jumper lands on his feet—an important feature if the landing area is concrete or a gymnasium floor.

Only the top two boys would go to the Meet in each event and I finished fourth in the high jump. Ronny Madley, my neighbor on Nathaline, was the winner—being one year older really helped him; and, of course, Ronny always performed better when girls were watching.

The high jump tryouts had a life-altering effect on me. I went home and, with the help of my father, built my own high jumping apparatus. I subsequently spent countless hours attempting to improve my jumping abilities. My love affair with jumping got me into the situation in which God shoved me and it lasted for years after that Divine-induced injury.

In early November of 1956, when I was in 2nd grade, we had a mock election for President of the United States. Because my father was a staunch union man, he would always vote Democratic. Thus, I cast my mock vote for Adlai Stevenson only to be dismayed when the tally turned out: Eisenhower 25, Stevenson 6. Even in our lower middle class, blue collar South Redford neighborhood, war hero trumped the union. Four years later, in 1960 and 6th grade, our mock election gave a narrow victory to Kennedy over Nixon. One of my bad-loser classmates—Really? Can anybody be surprised for a bad loser to be a Nixon supporter—said, “Yeah, but I am happy because Kennedy will die in office?” Huh?

Given that Reagan (elected in 1980) survived an assassination attempt, extreme old age and—how can I say this in a nice way—diminishing mental skills; given that W (elected in 2000) survived, well, extreme stupidity; it is likely that my reader has forgotten, or never knew, that from 1840 through 1960, every man elected President in a year ending in a zero had died in office. When Kennedy was shot in Dallas in 1963, that brought the total to seven the string of Presidents elected in a year ending in ‘0’ who had died in office, whether it was health—Harrison, Harding and Roosevelt—or assassination—Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley and Kennedy—that caused their demise.

My years at Ashcroft were marked by many fads. Some fads were at the national level: the hoola-hoop and the Davy Crockett inspired *coon-skin caps* come to mind.

By the way, the coon-skin cap was not overtly racist to us; in my neighborhood we barely knew that black people existed. If you doubt this, try to find blacks on television or in the movies in the 1950s; yes, there were a few, but sightings were so rare that it was easy for a white elementary school kid in an all white neighborhood to overlook them. We were enthralled with the tail that hung down from the back of the cap; the tail came from a raccoon. Hence a coon-skin cap.

The most notable annual fads were yo-yos and marbles. Every year—I can't remember the season—yo-yos would be pulled out of drawers and become the obsession for a fortnight and then placed back in their drawers. Every spring, our marbles would come out of another drawer and for another fortnight's obsession. Kites were not very popular in the late 1950s in South Redford, largely because the area was too urbanized to possess the large open areas needed for novice kite fliers.

Some fads were just weird. In, I believe, fifth grade we had an epidemic of *tacks on chairs*. It seemed that every time a classmate would leave his seat (the victims were overwhelmingly male) somebody else would place a tack on it. There were many yelps followed by large outbursts of sadistic laughter. But, of course, this fad couldn't last; it got so that nobody would sit in a chair without first checking for a tack.

I mention the tack fad because it culminated in a watershed moment in my life; the first time I decided to hurt a good friend simply to impress a girl. Sadly, I can't recall which girl encouraged my foul deed. My good friend, Rick Craven, sat in the chair in front of me. Somehow, I had a straight pin in my hand. The temptress to my left suggested I stick the pin in Rick's butt. I knew it was wrong, but her smile was so alluring So, I did it.

Rick let out a yell and jumped out of his chair. He turned to me, his eyes brimming with tears—though none escaped to his cheek—and punched me really hard in my left shoulder. Rick was very strong and it really hurt, bring tears to my eyes too. I was fortunate that Rick showed such restraint; I deserved much worse.

Ashcroft served students in a neighborhood of 320 acres of small houses, with most every house having several children. Many of the houses in the area had very deep front yards. This wasn't the case on Nathaline, but it was for a friend of mine who lived almost one mile away on Fordson Highway. (Despite the lofty aspirations of its name, Fordson was an ordinary residential street.) Actually, I had several friends on that street, but the only one whose name I remember is Carol.

In the fall of 6th grade, 1960, we would gather in Carol's neighborhood after school almost every day to play tackle football. We had a very large field; its width was the depth of the front yards mentioned above and the length was 40 yards—three contiguous 40 foot lots. We wore no equipment at all, not even helmets, yet, miraculously, there were no serious injuries that I can remember.

Carol was one of the very best players, which, naturally, made her an extremely attractive female to the 11 year-old boys in the game. In particular, Larry Procopio and I were the main rivals for her attention. Larry had the strongest arm of any 11 year-old I have ever seen, but, as often was the case in South Redford, he never played organized sports. I didn't know Larry well enough to know for sure, but my leading theories are: (a) His Dad thought sports were dumb and (b) Larry was a budding greaser and greasers, for the most part, did not play sports. In those days, being a greaser seemed to be linked to having a dad who didn't care.

After football season was over in 6th grade, a new phenomenon occurred: Friday (or Saturday) night parties with both boys and girls in attendance. There was music, food and dancing. The theme of a party was usually a birthday, but the purpose was to be able to hold each other and move around the dance floor. These parties were always in the basement. The aforementioned Larry was not invited to any of these parties—or, if he was, he was too cool to attend—presumably because he was not a member of the *in crowd*. Carol and I were. Because we were football buddies, almost by default, nearly all of my slow dances were with Carol.

The last of these parties was in my basement, circa July 1, 1961, nominally to celebrate my 12th birthday. I had tried to explain the logistics of these parties to my parents and my mother got the message, but my father did not. As a result, my two main memories is that at my party:

1. My father spent the entire evening in the basement entertaining—his word, not mine—all of my friends with his wonderfully hilarious stories; and
2. Carol became Rick Craven’s girlfriend. (Revenge of the pin? Who knows?)

Rick was a very handsome boy with big muscles (think Ron Madley, but a much better student) and seemed to have a lot of great romantic adventures before he left high school. I didn’t see Carol again until 10th grade, at which time one would never have guessed that she had relatively recently been a football-playing heart-breaker.

Two blocks east of Nathaline was a street called Hemingway. Hemingway was definitely my favorite street in the neighborhood for, admittedly, rather strange reasons.

I knew that there was a famous writer named Hemingway. As I child I had not read any of his books, but I assumed—correctly or not, who knows—that the street was named for him. (I have read several of Hemingway’s books as an adult and especially love *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.)

After I moved to Nathaline in 1955, some neighborhood kids told me to check out the corner of Orange Lawn and Hemingway, slightly more than two short blocks away. I did. What I found was amazing. There was a huge field (well, huge to a six year-old) with a barn, a rail fence and . . . two real horses! Right there in lower middle class South Redford, with the norm of tiny houses on 40 foot lots, were two real horses. It’s important to remember that everything I watched on television in the mid-1950s was either:

- A situation comedy—*Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best* and so on; or
- A Western with real men riding horses everywhere they went!

As a result, having real horses in my neighborhood was totally awesome!

I was told that the people who lived with the horses were allowed to have them because of a *grandfather clause*; of course, I had no idea what this meant. Sadly, a few years later the horses were gone.

The second cool thing about Hemingway is that it was the only street in our subdivision that was a blacktop. Nathaline was a gravel road and eventually was paved with cement and curbs and everything. When I moved to Nathaline in 1955, the nicer areas to the west and south had paved

concrete streets, again with curbs. Paved streets, of course, were wide enough for three cars plus, to allow parking on both sides plus a lane for traffic. In the 1950s everyone had a driveway and a garage and nobody had two cars, so there were only rarely cars parked in the street, which made it much easier for us to play touch football or whiffle ball baseball.

Hemingway had two lanes of blacktop, period. If you wanted to park a car on Hemingway, you had to pull entirely onto someone's lawn. Suffice to say, I *never* saw a parked car on Hemingway. Also—and this was the coolest part—Hemingway had a dashed white line down its center. In other words, Hemingway looked exactly like one of the thousands of two-lane, shoulder-less roads that crisscrossed America. I spent many happy hours biking on Hemingway, pretending that I was on my way to Texas or California.

Finally, the houses on Hemingway were simply a lot neater than the houses on other streets. I had a good friend in elementary school, Stu Pettitt, who lived in this awesome big brick house on Hemingway, close to West Chicago, which is one-sixth of a mile south of Orange Lawn, in Figure 6.1 on page 26. Stu's backyard was full of huge trees. He and I spent many joyful hours playing two-boy whiffle ball in his backyard. In our version, we didn't run bases or do much fielding. The main rule was that any fly ball, line drive or ground ball that hit a tree trunk was an out. Any hit ball that managed to avoid a tree trunk—which was no mean feat—was a hit and whether it was a single, double, triple or home run depended on how far the ball traveled.

I learned recently on *Facebook* that Stu became an architect. This was no surprise. Stu was very smart and he grew up in an awesome house; what else would he become?

One of my favorite times of year was Halloween. I would get together with one or two buddies—having more than three kids would definitely slow us down—and we would literally run from house to house. We would all bring pillowcases to hold our loot—no small plastic pumpkins for us—and I would bring home a huge amount of candy. Fortunately, we didn't have any health-conscious neighbors; thus, all of our *treats* contained lots of sugar. Unfortunately, we lived in a lower middle class neighborhood where kids were not coddled; thus, the modal category (I can't suppress the statistician in me forever) of candy was those small suckers. A *Tootsie Roll Pop* was reason for jubilant celebration!

Also, we were a pretty lowbrow group. Shouting *Trick or treat* was too sophisticated for us; thus, we rarely said it. Almost always we would run onto the porch and yell, *Help the poor!* If the occupant was slow to arrive at the door, we would burst into the longer version, *Help the poor; our pants our tore; give us some money to buy some more!*

After collecting enough candy to hold us until spring, we would return our pillowcases to our respective homes and take the one-half mile hike to the parking lot of the local IGA grocery store. I was quite old before I learned that IGA stood for *Independent Grocers' Association* or some such thing; I had always hoped to meet the owner, presumably Mr. Iga, and ask him,

Hey, why all the capitals? You better not let my parents see your sign. They will decide you are conceited!

In its parking lot, the store manager put up a screen, say 15' by 15,' and projected an old movie onto it. We sat on the cold concrete mesmerized by the antics of Laurel and Hardy or Buster Keaton. In the era of the 1950's television, this was a big deal!

In the summer after fourth grade, my parents bought me an incredible Schwinn bicycle for my birthday. I need to explain a few things about bicycles in South Redford in 1959.

My bike weighed about 50 pounds. This lofty weight was considered a good feature; I would have been even happier if it had weighed more. By the 1970s—if not earlier—everybody wanted a bike that was as light as possible, but this was not the case in 1959 in my world. The top-bar of the frame of my bike, for example, consisted of two metal tubes, not one. The two top-bar tubes were about five inches apart—one above the other—at the steering tube and intersected at the seat tube. The top-bar tubes were connected by curved, bulging, decorative metal on each side; sort of like fins on a car, which were very popular in 1959. The *fins* on my bike said *Schwinn* in a stylish script and housed the lone factory installed extra feature on my bike—a battery powered beeping horn.

My bike was put together solidly; there were no parts that *snapped* into place. For example, one needed a screw driver to remove a fin to change the batteries on my horn. My bike—like all of the bikes of my friends—had a single speed. There were a few exotic *3-speed* bikes around town, but they were not owned by kids in my cohort. Ten-speed bikes were unheard of in South Redford for at least a few more years.

My main biking buddies in 1959 were the aforementioned Ronny Madley and Mark Schindler. Mark lived a few blocks away and was my best non-Nathaline friend at Ashcroft—barely edging out Stu Pettitt. I mentioned that I wanted a red bike because both Ronny and Mark had red bikes. The salesman opined that if I had a blue bike I would become the leader of the group. I decided on the blue bike, but never became the leader.

The best thing about having a bike was that I could explore my world much more easily. Between 1959 and 1965—when I obtained my driver’s license—I spent hundreds of hours biking around South Redford.

The second best thing about having a bike was that I could customize it. I never had much money and, as a result, my most common way of customizing was to fasten a playing card with a clothespin to the bike so that the spokes hitting the card would make a clop-clop-clop sound. The faster I rode the louder and faster the clops!

When I could, I added many store-bought features to my bike: mud flaps to attach to my fenders; a mechanical bell on the handlebar (I quickly got rid of this because it seemed *too girly*); and the two best accessories ever: a generator-powered head and tail light, and my most favorite ever, a speedometer/odometer.

On occasion I would reach a speed of 27 miles per hour on my Schwinn, which was pretty good for a skinny 11 year-old on a 50-pound, one-speed bike. By the time I was old enough to bike the two miles to the only hill in South Redford, my speedometer was broken. Thus, I never discovered how fast I could ride down a decent hill. My odometer showed several hundred miles before it died, which seemed very impressive to me.

In sixth grade I was on the Ashcroft Safety Patrol. We would be assigned duty at the various intersections where kids would cross en route to Ashcroft. Essentially, we were miniature-sized crossing guards.

Mark Schindler, Reggie Barringer, Bill Scott and I were the safety patrol *officers* at Ashcroft. This was a really big deal in sixth grade. In addition to being a lieutenant of the Safety Patrol, I

was the cashier at the school lunch line. (In 1960–61 everyone paid the same for lunch, I think it was 35 cents, and everyone got exactly the same food.) My perk was a free hot lunch, making sixth grade the only year I ate a hot lunch at school. Before fifth grade, I always went home for lunch and after sixth grade my mother always packed me a lunch.

Whereas Mark was one of my best friends in fourth grade, I began to tire of him by the end of sixth grade. Basically, he was receiving a lot of privileges—see my chapter on Little League Baseball—and earning distinctions—he was voted *Captain* of the Safety Patrol while we other three were merely lieutenants. This would have been ok, except that Mark became very full of himself and, dare I say, conceited. Thus, when I entered Marshall in seventh grade and had no classes with Mark, I was happy to leave his friendship behind. This led to quite a bit of guilt when, in ninth grade, Mark died after a lengthy and painful battle with a brain tumor.

Chapter 11

My Father and Sports

As I progressed through elementary school my father saw fit to take me to a few live sporting events. The trips were infrequent, but memorable.

Our first adventure was on Saturday, November 8, 1958, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I was nine years old and in the fourth grade. My father was taking me to see the University of Michigan play football against the University of Illinois.

The 1958 season was the 11th year for Michigan coach Bennie Oosterbaan. Oosterbaan had been an incredible athlete at U of M from 1925–28, winning nine varsity letters—three each in football, basketball and baseball. His first year as football coach—1948—Oosterbaan led Michigan to a 9–0 record and won the mythical national championship. (In the old days, college football did not even *pretend* to have a system to determine, on the field, the country’s best team. As a result, by some extremely politicized procedure, one—or more—schools was deemed the mythical national champion. I must admit that *mythical* has a nice ring to it!) He proceeded to repeat as Big 10 champion the next two years, including a win in the Rose Bowl after the 1950 season. (Also, in the old days, schools were not allowed to play in the Rose Bowl in consecutive years; hence, the Michigan team did not play in it after their Big 10 championship in 1949.)

In 1951, Michigan finished fourth in the Big 10—which actually had only nine teams—with a conference record of 4–2. Oosterbaan’s 1951 Michigan team lost its three nonconference games to Stanford, Cornell and National Champion Michigan State. (After winning another National Championship in 1952, Michigan State finally entered the Big 10 in 1953.) The 1951 team was Oosterbaan’s only one to have an overall losing record, 4-5, until his 1958 team went 2-6-1 (1-5-1 in conference) and he was fired.

November 8, 1958, turned out to be a miserable day in Ann Arbor. I recall that we sat through a solid rain during the entire first half. Michigan’s team looked pathetic; Illinois totally dominated the game and jumped off to a 7-0 lead. Miraculously, Michigan showed a bit of life and scored a touchdown to bring the score to 7-6. Perhaps sensing that not much more in the good category was going to occur that day, Oosterbaan opted for a two point conversion and it succeeded! The score was now 8-7 in favor of Michigan. At this point Michigan was leading, but, as it turned out—despite the popularity of this form of misspeak—Michigan was not winning. Illinois scored two more touchdowns, Michigan’s offense showed no further signs of life and the visitors left with a 21-8 victory.

Curiously, 104 weeks later, on November 5, 1960, Illinois visited Michigan again and an Oosterbaan-like gambit succeeded and Michigan won the game, 8-7.

Back to the game in 1958. I recall seeing all four touchdowns and I recall that my father, mercifully, left the game at halftime so that I would neither drown nor develop pneumonia.

I remember my father taking me to East Lansing in the 1960s to see Michigan State win a football game, but I don't recall any details.

My father took me to see several Detroit Tiger baseball games at the olds Brigg's Stadium, later Tiger Stadium and later still, torn down. The most memorable game, by far, was my first which occurred on the evening of June 17, 1961, shortly after I had finished sixth grade and just two weeks before I turned 12.

This was the second game of a three game series between the Tigers and Yankees. The Tigers had last won the American League pennant in 1945; since that time the Yankees had won the AL pennant 11 times! Every year of my life, except for 1954, when I was too young to follow baseball, and 1959, which was a fluke, the Yankees had won the AL pennant. I grew up thinking that there were only two questions to be answered in each baseball season:

1. Who would the Yankees play in the World Series?
2. Who would win the World Series?

To an 11 year-old boy who ate, slept and breathed Tiger baseball, the situation was unbearable.

But 1961 seemed different. The Tigers had, by far, their best team of my life. When the Yankees came to town on June 16, the two teams were virtually tied for first place; the Tigers record was 38-22 and the Yankees were 37-21. The Tigers won the opening game of the series, 4-2; thus, my father and I arrived at the stadium on that Saturday evening to see the first place Tigers take on the dreaded Yankees.

The game started out great. The Tigers scored four runs in the first inning; three in the second; and one in the third. The Yankees did not score until the top of the fourth inning when, highlighted by Roger Maris' 23rd home run of the season, they cut the lead to 8-5. The Tigers scored in the fourth, sixth and eighth innings and entered the top of the ninth with a lead of 12-5.

The first two Yankee batters made outs. Hundreds of people were leaving the stadium, getting a head-start on finding their cars. Light hitting Clete Boyer was coming to bat against Tiger relief pitcher Paul Foytack. Foytack had been great, pitching 5.0 innings and not yielding a single run.

To the surprise of everyone in attendance, Boyer hit his third home run of the season to cut the lead to 12-6. Tony Kubek and Roger Maris got on base, bringing Mickey Mantle to the plate. Mantle promptly hit his 20th home run of the year; the score was now 12-9. The Tigers manager decided Foytack was worn out and brought in Fischer to face Yankee catcher Elston Howard, who immediately hit his first home run of the season!

A new pitcher, named Fox, was brought in to face Yankee first baseman, Bill (Moose) Skowron. If you don't know much about baseball, in 1961 you could rely on a first baseman to be a power hitter. Especially if he played for the Yankees. Especially if his nickname was Moose. On what I recall was the first pitch to him, Moose hit a rocket right at the Tigers' shortstop Chico Fernandez. If Chico had failed to catch it, it would have put him in the hospital. He did catch it and the Tigers were in first place by two games! I went home very happy that night.

Sadly, good times were not to last; the next day the Yankees won 9-0 and left town. By the end of the year the Tigers had won 101 games, a huge number. The Yankees, however, had won 109 games and went on to beat the Cincinnati Reds 4 games to 1 in the World Series. I would have to wait seven long years until the Tigers finally won the pennant in 1968.

I will now make a lengthy presentation on the topic of my father's love/hate relationship with the Detroit Lions football team.

Writing these memoirs in 2014, I find myself in a world in which many young people seem to believe that the birth of sports in America coincided *exactly* with the launch of ESPN on September 7, 1979. Yes, I realize that this makes me sound like an old fart, I mean old fogey. If, like me, you have watched a great deal of ESPN over the past, say, 20 years **and** you personally recall sports before September 7, 1979, then I *defy* you to contradict me!

OK, I will concede a bit. ESPN occasionally talks about the great Steelers and Raiders teams of the 1970s. (Thankfully, for my neighbors to the north and west ESPN does not speak of the Vikings' teams of the 1970s.) Occasionally, ESPN will refer to the Super Bowl era, while pointing out that these games did not become important until the Jets upset the Colts in January, 1969.

Some mention is made of the great Packers' teams of the 1960s, teams that won three consecutive NFL titles, a feat that has not been matched since then. Teams that won five NFL titles in seven years, also not matched since then. If you talk to long-time professional football fans in either New York or Baltimore, you will learn that the *Greatest Football Game Ever Played* took place on December 28, 1958, when the visiting Colts beat the Giants in the first overtime championship game ever. I cannot disagree with the summary of this game in *Wikipedia*:

The game marked the beginning of the NFL's popularity surge, and eventual rise to the top of the United States sports market.

This begs the questions: What happened in the NFL before the 1958 season?

My Green Bay Packers won six titles, in the years 1929–31, 1936, 1939 and 1944. These six titles contribute mightily to our being number one overall in most titles won, 13. With all of the success Green Bay had in the 1960s and then winning Super Bowls in 1996 and 2010, we don't dwell on the fact that our pre-1958 glory is largely ignored.

After the Packers' 13 titles, second in line is the Chicago Bears with a total of nine. The Bears have won only one Super Bowl title, with its earlier championships occurring in 1921, 1932, 1933, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1946 and 1963. It would seem that Bears' fans would have reason to be miffed at the phenomenon of ignoring the pre-Super Bowl era. I have two explanations for why these fans don't seem to be that annoyed about it:

1. The Bears achieved maximum notoriety for winning their one Super Bowl, in 1985. Indeed, in my experience, Bears' fans seem to believe that they were *the team* of the 1980s, ignoring that fact that the 49ers (four Super Bowl wins) and the Redskins and Raiders (two Super Bowl wins each) each had more success during that decade.
2. Again in my experience, many Bears' fans are also Cubs' fans and don't seem to react to massive failure in the way ordinary people do.

I could continue down the list of the 10 teams that have won four or more NFL titles. You can do it yourself with the help of *Wikipedia*. What you will find is that two teams stand out as being unusual: the Detroit Lions and the Cleveland Browns. The Lions won titles in 1935, 1952, 1953 and 1957, with the last three over the Browns.

During the eight seasons, 1950–1957, the Browns won the NFL title three times (1950, 1954 and 1955) and lost the title game four times (1951–1953 and 1957). They missed the championship game only once in eight years! This becomes really amazing when you consider the question:

Where were the Cleveland Browns before 1950?

Answer: They were winning every championship, 1946–49, in the history of the All-America Football Conference.

Arguably, no team has ever come close to matching the sustained excellence of the Browns during the 12 seasons from 1946–1957.

The Browns won their fourth and final NFL title in 1964.

My guess is that if you asked young football fans today to name the two most pathetic franchises in the NFL, the Lions and Browns would both receive many votes. Neither team has ever been to a Super Bowl. In fact, if you look at the list of teams in the NFL in 1966—the first Super Bowl season—every team except for the Lions and the Browns has played in at least one Super Bowl. This summary is a bit unfair to the Browns because after the 1995 season the team moved to Baltimore, changed its name to the Ravens and won two Super Bowl titles, in 2000 and 2012. Cleveland was without a team from 1996–98 and then was resurrected as an expansion team in 1999. It is difficult to argue with my assertion that since 1957, the Detroit Lions has been the most pathetic team in the NFL. Well, if you think that *most pathetic* is a bit mean-spirited, substitute *least successful*.

The above lengthy discussion of the NFL, in particular the Browns and the Lions, is a prelude to my story below.

The 1957 NFL season was when I started watching the Lions with my father. Perhaps *following* is a more accurate verb than *watching* because, with the exception of the season ending championship game, the Lions' home games were not televised.

The NFL in 1957 was, much like major league baseball that same year, a league that existed primarily in the north and east of the United States. The *Western Conference* consisted of teams in Baltimore (!), Detroit, Chicago and Green Bay—all well east of the Mississippi River, with one, Baltimore, on the Atlantic coast—along with Pacific coast teams Los Angeles and San Francisco. The season was incredibly competitive, with the final standings given below.

Team	W	L
Detroit Lions	8	4
San Francisco 49ers	8	4
Baltimore Colts	7	5
Los Angeles Rams	6	6
Chicago Bears	5	7
Green Bay Packers	3	9

Within the Western Conference teams played a double round-robin, with one home and one road game against each of the other five teams in the conference. Each teams' remaining two games were played—one at home, one on the road—against two different teams from the Eastern Conference.

The Rams and Lions both played the best team—by far—in the East, the 9-2-1 Cleveland Browns along with the 4-8 Philadelphia Eagles. The 49ers had the easiest schedule, drawing the 3-9 Cardinals and 7-5 Giants. Baltimore's also had a favorable draw, facing 6-6 Steelers and 5-6-1 Redskins.

The Colts were led by their second year quarterback—first year regular—Johnny Unitas who would lead the Colts to titles in 1958 and 1959. Perhaps Unitas's inexperience contributed to the Colts erratic season in which they won their first three games, only to lose their next three, including back-to-back home losses to the mediocre Steelers and the very weak Packers. The Colts then won their next four games and had a one game lead over the Lions and 49ers. The last two weeks of the season saw the Colts on the West coast for both games, which they lost.

The Lions swept the East, including a 20-7 victory over the Browns in Detroit; swept the almost hapless Packers; and split their series with everyone else.

Against the West, the 49ers swept the Bears and Packers and split against everyone else. Their undoing was a first week loss to the horrible Cardinals.

Finally, the Rams split their games with the top three—Lions, 49ers and Colts—but were swept by the Bears and lost to the Browns.

The Lions and 49ers played two epic games in San Francisco in 1957, both of which I saw on television. First, I should mention that the 49ers had a *special weapon* in the person of second year wide receiver R.C. Owens.

Owens was a first year player from the College of Idaho. He caught 27 passes during the 1957 season, which was good for fourth highest on the team, far behind the team high 52 receptions for Billy Wilson. Owens stood 6'3" tall and had been a basketball player; indeed, he had been teammates with future NBA superstar Elgin Baylor.

During the 1957 season, Owens gained renown for a particular play that featured him. Owens would run to a back corner of the end zone, stand there and wait for the ball. The 49ers quarterback, usually Y.A. Tittle, would heave the ball towards Owens in such a way that he would need to leap high into the air to catch it, which he did several times that year. The entire operation was referred to as the *Alley Oop play*; I have no idea why. (Alley Oop was a comic strip character introduced in 1932. I am unaware of him having any unusual leaping ability. One theory is that *Alley Oop* had been Owens' nickname before the 1957 season.)

In week 6, the 3-2 Lions visited the 4-1 49ers and I was watching the game. Early in the fourth quarter the 49ers scored a touchdown to take a seemingly insurmountable 28-10 lead. Somehow, the Lions fought back and scored three touchdowns to take a 31-28 lead. Sadly, however, just before the game ended, Tittle and Owens hooked up on a 41 yard *Alley Oop* play and the Lions lost, 35-31.

Two weeks later, back in Detroit, the Lions clobbered the 49ers, 31-10.

When the season ended, as noted above, the Lions and 49ers were tied for first, both with records of 8-4. By some procedure, the NFL decided that their one game playoff to decide the

Western Conference champion would be played in San Francisco on December 22.

The game started very badly with Tittle and Owens hooking up for a 34 yard *Alley Oop* play in the first quarter. By halftime, 49ers had a 24-7 lead. In the third quarter a field goal extended the lead to 27-7. Befitting their mascot, the Lions roared back with three rushing touchdowns to take a 28-27 lead. Much to the delight of 8 year-old Bobby Wardrop, Tittle and Owens were out of magic and a Lions' field goal brought the final score to 31-27.

The following week, December 29, the Lions were hosting the Browns for the NFL title. Yes, the Lions had home field advantage and, yes, they had beaten the Browns on December 8, but consider the following facts.

When the Giants lost to the Steelers on Saturday, December 7, the Browns clinched the Eastern Conference and had absolutely no motivation to beat the Lions the next day. The Browns entered the championship game after a week of rest, whereas the Lions had had the long trip to San Francisco for a very difficult game. The Lions and Browns had last met in the championship game in 1954, which the Browns won by the score of 56-10.

After their destruction of the Lions after the 1954 season, the Browns repeated as NFL champs in 1955 with a big victory over the Rams, but then their star quarterback, Otto Graham, retired. Without Graham, the 1956 Browns slumped to 5-7. In 1957 the Browns were still searching for a replacement for Graham (some might say that they are still searching). Their great success in 1957 was due, in large part, to rookie running back Jim Brown, who led the league in rushing.

In the 1957 championship game, the Lions focused entirely on stopping Jim Brown, which they did. Excepting a 29 yard touchdown run, Brown gained 40 yards on 19 carries and the Lions routed the Browns by the score of 59-14. The Lions' cause was greatly helped by the Browns losing two fumbles and their two quarterbacks combining to throw four interceptions.

Detroit Lions' fans Harold and Bobby Wardrop were on top of the world as 1957 drew to an end. At the age of 8, I could say that the Lions had won three championships during my life. (I could have said it if I had known, but I knew nothing about football before 1957.) The Lions had overwhelmed their opponent in the 1957 championship game; surely many more championships were destined to follow.

In the 1958 season the Lions fell to fifth place in the six team conference and repeated that performance in 1959. Their fortune turned around and the Lions finished second in three consecutive years, 1960-62.

In fact, in the last 30 seasons of my father's life, 1958-87, the Lions finished second in 13 seasons, including seven consecutive second place finishes at one time, but finished in first place only once, 1983, when they won the pathetic Central Division with a record of 9-7, one game ahead of three teams at 8-8. The Lions played—and lost—three playoff games in those 30 years, which includes the strike-shortened 1982 season in which almost every team made the playoffs. (The Lions were fourth in a five team league and made the playoffs!) Three playoff games in 30 years! By comparison, my Packers played four playoff games in their 2010 run to winning the Super Bowl.

It is not hyperbole to say that these 30 years of frustration contributed mightily to my father becoming more and more bitter as he grew older.

As implied above, in the late 1950s and into the 1960s the home games of an NFL team would

be *blacked-out*; i.e., not shown on local television. Thus, my father, perforce, was unable to see one-half of his beloved Lions' football games. The only possible solution was to pick-up the signal from the nearest city with a CBS channel, which happened to be Lansing, Michigan, some 80 miles away. Thus, sometime after the 1957 season, my father purchased a large antenna and put it on the roof of our house, pointed towards Lansing. This created a new problem. An antenna pointed towards Lansing was less than ideal for receiving television shows from Detroit and, my favorite, Windsor, Ontario.

My father's solution was to purchase a motor—designed for just such a purpose—and attach it to our antenna. He ran a wire from the motor to a dial that sat on top of our television. As a result, with the turn of a knob we could rotate our antenna to a good position for whichever channel we were watching.

My father's solution to the NFL *black-out* rule was clever and determined, but not horribly effective. Even in early autumn, all of the Lions home games appeared, on our TV, as if they were being played in a snowstorm. And it was a strange snowstorm: large white circles would descend from the top of the TV screen, not unlike those bombs that would be dropped by the future, circa 1980, video game *Space Invaders*. Even on windy days, the snow fell straight down to the bottom of the screen and it never accumulated.

It was frustrating to watch one-half of the football games being played in a snowstorm. It was frustrating to watch the Lions never quite be good enough. Combined, these two frustrations took a huge toll on my father.

On six Sundays every year, plus Thanksgiving Day, several of my father's friends would gather in our small living room to watch the Lions play. My father would get very worked up while watching the Lions and he would start yelling and screaming at the players, coaches and referees.

One good thing came out of these football games. I learned the expression that became the favorite of all of my father's expressions. Talking about a player he did not like, my father would say, "We ought to trade him for a dog and then shoot the dog!" (Note: My father actually liked dogs and would never shoot one unless it was absolutely necessary.)

I was frequently embarrassed by my father's outbursts. He was not a violent man and he was neither a cruel nor mean man, but he had demons that expressed themselves from time to time. Let me give some examples.

When I went to college, I became the first person who lived in our house on Nathaline to have a checking account. My parents lived in a totally cash society. On Friday afternoon, my father would rush home from work and head to the bank with his check. He would sign his check and hand it over to the teller, who would then give him his cash. If it was the first of the month, he would then hand back to the teller the mortgage payment. As a child, I was frequently sent to the neighborhood pharmacy with cash to pay the water, gas, electric and phone bills.

With so many cash transactions, occasionally a mishap would occur in the making of change. There were two ways my father would handle such mishaps, one for each possible type.

Suppose my father gave a clerk a \$20 bill for a \$6 dollar purchase and the clerk returned \$4 to him. Let's see whether you can guess my father's response from the two given below.

1. Excuse me, I gave you twenty dollars, not ten. Therefore, you owe me another ten dollars.

2. (Yelling loudly) You must think I am really stupid! You can't cheat me! I won't let you get away with it!

I know from personal experience that the first response works; I don't believe my father ever tried it.

For an example of the other possibility, suppose we are back at the bank and my father has just signed over a paycheck for \$105. The teller counts out five twenties and a five and hands them to my father. My father recounts the money and discovers that he has been given six twenties; apparently two of them stuck together when the teller was counting. The following conversation ensued.

- **Harold:** Well, you made a big mistake, Miss. (Tellers were typically young women.) You must think I am pretty dumb!
- **Teller:** I am sorry, Sir. Let me count the money again. (Harold hands over the money and the teller recounts it.) Oh, I have given you too much money!
- **Harold:** Gotchya!

How, you might ask, do I know these stories? How do I know the exact dialogue? Surely, I must be embellishing these memoirs. In the former case, I know the story because I had the misfortune of being present and for both cases I know these stories because of the many times my father *proudly* told them.

My earliest memory of the telephone was that we had a party line. I probably need to explain this to my younger readers. There would be one physical line that would serve two phone customers. Thus, the Wardrops on Nathaline shared their phone line with family X. I never knew who family X was: The people behind us? Two houses away?

The system wasn't as primitive as it might sound. If somebody called the Wardrops then only the Wardrop's phone would ring; X's phone would not ring. If, however, I picked up the phone while X was using their phone, I would hear their conversation and, of course, not be able to use my phone.

I conjecture that in the early days of phone service everyone—except the very rich, as Fitzgerald said, the rich are different from you and I—had a party line. But as time passed, party lines were phased out across the United States. When individual phone lines became available I asked my parents to switch over. “No. It's too expensive,” my father would say. The real reason? Well, periodically, my father would pick up the phone to make a call only to discover that the phone line was being used by X. Now, Harold could have inquired politely as to when the phone would be available, but I never heard him do so. Instead, he would hang up the phone and then pick it up again, say, 30 seconds later. If X was still on the phone, my father would start yelling and screaming, sometimes swearing. I always wondered whether the X family knew with whom it shared its phone line. I always hoped not.

Chapter 12

Little League Baseball

There was big excitement in Redford Township in Spring 1958: Little League baseball had arrived. I would turn nine on July 1, 1958. A boy's Little League age was his age on August 1 of that year. Thus, to Little League I was nine years old, but among the youngest nine years olds. Eight year-olds were not allowed in Little League; Little League was strictly for boys aged 9–12, inclusive. Thus, I didn't care that nearly everyone in the league was older than I; I could play! And in 1958 there was no sport I loved more than baseball.

The first season of Little League in a community is quite chaotic. Once a league is even one year old, then for most of the 10, 11 and 12 year old boys who sign-up there will be a record of how he did the previous year. But in 1958 there was a one-day tryout on a Saturday in April and approximately 300 boys, aged 9-12 attended. The adults in charge had no data on any of these boys' skill level. Based on a few hours of watching us play catch, shag flies, field grounders and bat, each child had to be placed on a team.

Well, I am getting ahead of myself. First, the boys were divided into three leagues, with quite judgmental names, in my humble opinion. At the top was the Major League. Boys in the Major League were issued a real baseball jersey—complete with buttons on the front and a number on the back—real baseball socks and real baseball pants, complete with those so-cool stirrups. One step down was the Minor League where the uniform was the same as the Majors **except** that in the Minor League the team jersey was replaced by a colored T-shirt with the team name on front, but no number on the back. Finally, the worst of the players, including yours truly, were assigned to the Farm League. Our uniform? The colored T-shirt. Oh yeah, I almost forgot; every player was assigned a baseball cap, which was always worn brim forward, except when the catcher was wearing his mask. My team was the Pirates. It was awesome that all teams, even us lowly farm dwellers, were given a name of a real professional major league baseball team.

Being assigned to a team named the Pirates was a major disappointment for me. By 1958, I was a rabid follower of major league baseball. How had our namesake been doing recently? In the year of my birth, 1949, the Pirates managed to finish in sixth place in the eight team National League. In the next eight seasons, 1950–57, they had finished in eighth, last, place in five years. Being in last place was referred to as being in the cellar; frequently, the Pirates were buried very deep in the cellar. In 1957, the Pirates tied for seventh, which is a nicer way of saying they were tied in the cellar. The other two years, 1951 and 1956, then manages to finish in seventh place.

Amazingly, spurred on, no doubt, by the success of my team in the Farm League in Redford, the 1958 Major League Baseball Pirates finished in second place! And just two years later, in 1960, they won their first World Series since 1925! I am, once again, getting ahead of my story.

After the adults had designated the roughly 100 boys to the Farm League, we were somehow divided into six teams, of which, as mentioned above, I was assigned to the Pirates.

Before our first practice my father provided the best sports advice he ever gave to me. Heck, it was his best advice to me, period, in all categories of human endeavor. He told me, “Bob, tell the coach you play first base. There is always a lot of action at first base.”

The 17 nine and ten year-old Pirates showed up for their first practice. Mr. Vilade, our manager—not coach, remember this is baseball and Mr. Adamson was the coach—gathered us near home plate and said, “Who plays shortstop?” Fifteen hands shot into the air. Looking perplexed, Mr. Vilade said, “OK, all of you guys go out to the shortstop position and form a line.” He looked at the remaining kids, Roger Sims and I, and asked “What positions do you boys play?”

Roger said, “I am a pitcher,” and I said, “First base.” Mr. Vilade told me to go to first base and for Roger to go play catch with Mr. Adamson.

For the next 15–20 minutes Mr. Vilade hit groundballs to the boys. If the boy was able to field the ball, he would then throw it to me at first base and, fortunately, if the ball came anywhere near me, I caught it. At the end of this activity, Mr. Vilade announced, “Tom Adamson is the shortstop.” (Tom really was the best of the boys; this was not a case of coach’s kid getting an advantage.) Some other boy—I can’t remember everyone’s name—who wasn’t as good as Tom at catching the ball, but had a decent arm became the third baseman. Ronny Backus became the second baseman. Ronny was a really good fielder, but Mr. Vilade thought his arm was too weak for third. By the end of the season I had had many sore, red hands testifying to Mr. Vilade’s misjudging Ronny’s arm.

The rest of the boys were sent to become outfielders except for one lucky one who had to learn how to be a catcher. Because I was a decent hitter and caught almost everything thrown to first, I played almost every inning of the season. Little League baseball in 1958 in Redford, even in the Farm League, was about winning.

We had a really good team, mostly because Roger Sims was indeed a good pitcher. In fact, he was the star pitcher on my high school team the year he and I graduated. Nevertheless, the Pirates lost their first game. Of the remaining nine games we won eight. The only game we lost was when both Roger and I were away on family vacations the same week. We lost by a score of something like 30–20, whereas when Roger was pitching we would usually win, say, 15–6. Hmmm, 30–20; I would say the Pirates missed their pitcher more than they missed me.

We finished the season with a record of 8–2 which put us in second place. In early August, the first year of Little League baseball in Redford was celebrated with a picnic at Rouge Park, featuring championship games for the three leagues. We played the first place team—they had beaten us the first game of the season, but we had gotten revenge later in the year—and beat them soundly, although I do not recall the score.

The highlights of my season, on a personal level, was that I hit home runs in two different games. Don’t misinterpret this. These were not towering drives over a distant fence. Our fields had no fences. My home runs were hits in which I rounded the bases on my own, with the help of one or more errors by the other side. This was, after all, the Farm League. Both of my home runs

left the infield as ground balls, but in my defense, they were rolling quite fast. An embarrassing moment occurred when I got to the bench after one of my home runs and started crying. It wasn't sobbing or screaming, just an emotional release, one which many women seem to have felt the adult Bob was incapable of experiencing. But, hey, this was 1958 and not even nine year-old real men cried. Thus, when a teammate asked what the hell was going on, I said, "The catcher hit me as I ran past him." The catcher for the Senators did look like a nasty piece of work and as I ran towards the plate, he was standing there, partially blocking the basepath, still wearing his mask—so that if he did hit me, I couldn't punch him back in his face—and in a nasty crouch, looking as if the ball was about to arrive at which time he would heroically tag me out! He wasn't some Tommy I could outsmart and outrun, he was a junior Johnny Bench or even Ted Simmons—he was the right age and in the right county to be Ted Simmons.

In 1959 I signed up for Little League baseball again. This year I moved up to the Minor League and again played first base. I did not hit as well as I had for the Pirates; after all, I was no longer on the farm. But I had a decent year. I don't think our team was very good. Indeed, I have only vivid memory of the entire year and I remember it, mostly, because I was really really disappointed with my ice cream.

The pitcher on our team was named Brian Hayes and our manager was Brian's father. Brian had one shining moment; he pitched a no hitter that also was a shut out. Brian was really on that afternoon. These were six inning games and he struck out 12 batters. The remaining six outs were achieved as follows (it is amazing the details we can remember!):

- A routine ground ball to Brian, that he tossed to me at first for a force out.
- A routine ground ball to me at first.
- A high pop-up to me. Our opponents had a base runner—via a walk—on first and at the crack of the bat on the ball he took off for second. He had reached third base by the time I caught the pop up and stepped on first base—double play. (Again, these are little kids in the Minor League.)

The remaining two outs were really remarkable.

- The other team's best hitter hit an absolute rocket, one-hop into our second baseman's glove. Once he realized he had the ball and was not going to be killed by a missile, it was easy for the second baseman to toss the ball over to me at first for the out. The only other time this particular opponent batted, Brian had the good sense to walk him.
- A solid line drive was sailing towards right field, sure to pass between our first and second baseman. I lunged to my right, my arm across my body, twisted into a backhand position. Somehow, I caught the line drive, preserving Brian's big moment in life. (Somewhere right now Brian is writing his memoirs recalling that he struck out 18 batters and, no doubt, does not remember my name.)

I met Brian again in high school and one would never believe that for one shining moment he was an awesome 10 year-old pitcher.

After the game, Brian's father took the whole team to *Dairy Queen* to celebrate Brian's masterpiece. Recall that South Redford was a lower middle class community; thus, the manager said we could each buy anything we wanted, provided it cost 25 cents or less! This was my neighborhood DQ and I knew that there was nothing worth eating that cost less than 30 cents! Now you know why I was so disappointed about the ice cream.

For my third year of Little League baseball, in 1960, I was 11 years old and still in the Minor League. It is by far my most memorable year of baseball. I had a manager—name forgotten—who was an idiot and treated me very unfairly. I had a coach—Mr. Harry Johnson—who was very nice to me and was the father of Harry Junior who was in the Minor League at age 12, which meant, of course, that he wasn't very good at baseball.

I showed up for the first practice and told the manager I played first base. He replied, "Not on my team. The tallest player on the team plays first base."

I have had a long career as a teacher, much beloved by many of my students. In 1996 I won a campus teaching award, my proudest professional moment. I became a good teacher through a combination of my hard work and my following the examples set by the many good teachers I was fortunate to have during my life. But that is not the whole story. I also learned a huge amount from the many horrible teachers and coaches that I suffered during my life. This manager is a member of this *Hall of Shame*.

I have been amazed with how many truly bad coaches I have seen in my life. In many cases, a large part of the problem is that the coach has a fixed idea, such as the notion that the tallest player must play first base. Humans love to theorize, and nobody loves this more than a bad coach. Here is the theory.

Balls are thrown towards first base. The tallest boy can reach the highest and stretch the farthest to the left or right to catch errant throws. Hence, the tallest boy will be the best first baseman.

Not a bad theory, but a theory always needs to be tested against reality. An important step is to make explicit all of the assumptions behind a theory. If enough assumptions fall, then the theory is demolished.

Let's see how DM's (Dumb Manager's) theory holds up with TB (Tall Boy).

1. Being able to reach high and stretch far is valuable only if TB can catch the ball; he routinely did not.
2. The relationship between being tall and being able to stretch far assumes a certain flexibility and athleticism, both of which were lacking with TB.
3. Being able to reach high is important only if there are some high throws. The infielders played in the Minor League. They did not have great arms. Their misthrows were almost always too low or wide and rarely were too high.
4. Returning to low throws, it could be argued—in theory—that the shortest boy on the team would be the best in digging low throws out of the dirt.

In fairness, I do thank DM for this early lesson in the absurdity of believing a theory without examining the real world. DM perhaps started me on my career as a statistician!

Throughout the season, Mr. Johnson, our coach, was always trying to get my role on the team increased. I would play one-half of each game and that was all, while TB and other coach favorites would play the whole game. (For the season, I batted 0.500, the second highest on the team. Also, as you will see below, I was the team's best pitcher; I definitely should have been playing more than three innings per game.)

About halfway through the season, DM decided that I could play first base because what our team needed was for TB to be the pitcher.

Well, suffice to say, TB was a horrible pitcher. In the top of the first inning of the first game he pitched, TB gave up five runs. In our half of the first we scored six runs. In the top of the second, within moments, TB had loaded the bases with one out. DM decided we needed a new pitcher; but what to do with TB? Put him at first, of course. Well, it was too early to take me out of the game so DM told me to pitch, something I had never done before.

The first batter took a mighty swing, ticked the ball and it rolled to me. I threw it to the catcher for a force out. Two away. I struck out the next batter. All told, I pitched four and two-thirds innings, yielding one run and we won the game 13-6. By contrast, TB pitched one and one-third inning and gave up five runs. He left the bases full with one out; thus, it was only my excellence that day that prevented his pitching line being even worse. Unfortunately for me, the other team never tied up the game. In other words (baseball fans can see where I am going with this), TB left the game with the lead and the lead was never surrendered. In real major league baseball, a nine inning game, TB would be the winning pitcher if he had pitched at least five innings, i.e., five-ninths of the game. TB had pitched exactly two-ninths of the game. In the weekly stats for the team, DM declared TB the winning pitcher.

Let me be clear. It would be incredibly childish for a 65 year-old man to be angry about who was credited with a win in a baseball game 54 years ago. I agree. I am not angry. But 11 year old Bob was very angry and I believe he had a right to be! Children expect to be treated fairly and DM was not treating me fairly. And remember, I am not writing this as a 65 year-old man; I am writing the feelings and experiences of a boy growing up.

Professionally, I am a statistician and statisticians are known for their dislike of variation. (Sometimes this dislike is irrational, but that is a topic for a different time.) I am thinking of variation because my 1960 Minor League season was quite remarkable statistically. The four teams in our league—my Braves, the Cubs, Giants and Cardinals—played each other six times, for a total of an 18 game season (that's a lot of games!). In higher levels of sports—college, professional—such familiarity often breeds animosity acted out violently. Fortunately, we were a nice bunch of kids and no problems arose.

The season was divided into two halves of nine games each. The standings for the first and second halves are below, along with the combined standings for the entire season.

First Half			Second Half			Combined		
Team	W	L	Team	W	L	Team	W (Wins)	L (Losses)
Cubs	6	3	Giants	6	3	Braves	10	8
Braves	5	4	Braves	5	4	Giants	9	9
Cardinals	4	5	Cardinals	4	5	Cubs	9	9
Giants	3	6	Cubs	3	6	Cardinals	8	10

What do we see above? (Sorry, I am regressing into my role of the past 40 years, Stats teacher.)

1. Overall, the four teams had nearly identical records; only 2 games separated the first place Braves (Hooray! My team) and the last place Cardinals. It seems that the men in charge did, indeed, do a very good job at dividing the talent evenly among the teams.
2. The Braves and Cardinals showed no variation from the first to second halves of the season.
3. The Cubs went from best to worst and the Giants made the reverse trip from the first to second halves of the season. I have no idea why this happened.

When the season ended, the winner from the first half, the now horrible Cubs, played the winner from the second half, the surging Giants, to decide which team would move on in the playoffs as the representative of our division. To nobody's surprise, the Giants clobbered the Cubs and moved on.

Notice that the Braves, the team with the best overall record, had no opportunity to advance in the playoffs. Somebody noticed it in 1960, namely the manager of the division champion Giants. He was a good guy and after dispatching the Cubs, he offered to play us in a scrimmage to determine the *unofficial champion* of our division.

During the second half of the season, DM came to recognize, grudgingly, that I was the team's best pitcher, but he never wanted me to play more than one-half of a game. The routine was that I would pitch the first three innings of a game and somebody else would pitch the last three innings. By the end of the season, my record was 3 wins and 0 losses. (Of course, in my mind, I had four wins because I should have been credited with the win in the game I pitched 4 and two-thirds innings, as detailed earlier.)

Mr. Johnson, remember he was our coach, not our manager, kept trying to persuade the manager to let me pitch an entire game, which is what most teams did. Finally, in the scrimmage, the manager said I could pitch the whole game. I did, I pitched well and we won.

This third year of Little League was my most successful year personally—I was a good pitcher who was undefeated and I had a great batting average. (As a team member, the championship my first year was the best.) Despite my complaining above, I enjoyed this third year a great deal. Also, I learned from DM that even if I did something well it might not be appreciated by the person in power.

As I grew older, I became more internally driven and less reliant on the praise of others. This was partly, of course, for survival given my parents determination that I not grow up to be conceited. As much as we can say we are happy to have a particular personality trait, I am glad that I am this way. The success I have had professionally as a teacher is in large part due to my ability to swim against the current and develop my unique view of teaching my subject.

In my fourth year of Little League, I finally made it to the Major League. My best teammate was my Ashcroft classmate, my Pierce rival and my Thurston teammate, Reggie Barringer. Even at 12, Reggie was an extremely talented baseball player. I had an ok season; I was probably at or near the median in skill and accomplishments on my team. I did hit my third and final Little League home run in the Major League; that was pretty cool. Two memories of the season stand out.

First, before the games began we, of course, had practices. The manager needed to find a collection of pitchers. Given my great success the previous season, albeit at the lower Minor League level, I was given a tryout. After I threw, say, five pitches, the manager stated, “You aren’t a pitcher, you don’t throw hard enough.”

I thought to myself, “Last year I wasn’t tall enough; this year I don’t throw hard enough. God deliver me from managers who have a fixed idea of what makes a good player!”

The second memory sticks with me because it was the result of a new rule, one that was monumentally stupid.

If you watch the Little League World Series in August on ESPN, you will note that today the Little League rules for substitutions are incredibly complex. In particular, players are allowed to be in the game, then leave the game and then reenter again. This is **not** allowed in Professional Major League Baseball, but it is a reasonable solution to a myriad of problems that can arise in Little League baseball. You don’t want teams to forfeit games because: Tommy had to leave for dance class or Ralph had to leave for karate class or Bobby suffered a minor injury and just wants to go home.

In 1961, Little League Baseball in South Redford (perhaps nationally? I don’t know) introduced a new rule. At the beginning of every game each manager must name one player—who must be present—who will **not be allowed to play**. As Dave Barry frequently writes, *I am not making this up!* The idea behind the rule was: suppose it’s late in the game and Jimmy gets injured and must be replaced. No problem, little-boy-who-is-designated-not-to-play will go into the game for Jimmy.

Here are two fun and one heartbreaking outcomes to this rule on my team in 1961.

1. In all of our games that season, there was **never** a game in which an injury forced the emergency boy into the game. For either team.
2. One of my teammates, and also a classmate at Ashcroft, was Paul Mough. Paul had the distinction that his mother was unmarried (which, in my era, meant we assumed she was a widow), a kindergarten teacher and really attractive. After a particular game was over, the manager went up to Mrs. Mough—who wouldn’t want to chat up a hot single mom?—and for some reason—did I mention that she was really attractive?—told her that Paul was the designated non-player for the next game. At which point a hilarious conversation ensued:
 - Mrs. Mough: Oh, that’s good to know; I won’t need to bring Paul to the game.
 - The manager: No, no, no. He needs to come to the game.
 - Mrs. Mough (confused): I don’t understand. You are saying that he needs to come to the game and not play?
 - The manager: Yes. It is essential that he comes to the game and not play.
 - Mrs. Mough: Huh? That makes no sense! Why don’t you just pretend he is there and not play the pretend Paul?
 - The manager (starting to panic): I can’t do that! Pretending Paul is here would be ... absurd.

- Mrs. Mough: More absurd than making him come and not play? (Mrs. Mough leaves.)
 - The manager (muttering to himself): Women! They just can't understand anything!
3. All of the baseball fields in South Redford were more or less the same, except for the baseball field at Manning Park. Every baseball field had a backstop behind the catcher to contain errant pitches and throws to the plate. I will first describe the remaining features of all fields not at Manning Park.

The infield was dirt and the outfield was grass. Both the infield and outfield had many potholes and were not maintained very well. Finally, there was no outfield fence.

The infield at Manning Park was well groomed; almost as smooth as a clay tennis court at the French Open. The outfield was smooth and the grass was kept cut; similar to the fairways at a nice golf course. There were no *dugouts*, but each team had a nice bench for its players to sit on, separated from the field of play by a fence. (The other fields usually had some kind of bench, but no separating fence.) Finally—and most awesomely to a 12 year-old boy—Manning Park had a *home run fence* with two well-marked foul poles.

Every team in the Major League had one game scheduled at Manning Park so that every boy could have the experience of playing there. Well, except for the boys who were designated not to play that game. You can probably see where this is going; my manager designated me to be the non-player for our game at Manning. Having my team play at Manning and not being able to play myself was, without doubt, the worst experience of my entire sports career.

I sort of wished that my father had pulled a *Mrs. Mough* and kept me from attending the game, because then I would not have had to experience, first hand, the agony of not playing at Manning. On balance, however, I was glad that he did not do this because then one of my teammates would have become the designated nonplayer; he would no doubt have accurately blamed me and I would have felt bad about it.

Chapter 13

Culture in the 1950s

By now the reader has a pretty good picture of my life during my years at Ashcroft Elementary School. When not in class, I played sports with my neighbors, played Little League Baseball and took part in several other activities, many of which were described in Chapter 10. In this brief chapter I will discuss the few remaining activities that I can recall.

I loved to watch television. My absolutely favorite show was *Leave it to Beaver* (1957–1963) a situation comedy—sit com—about the Cleaver family: Mom, Dad, Theodore (Beaver) and older brother Wally. Beaver was my age in the show and I identified with him and his various challenges.

Another sit com that I absolutely adored was *The Donna Reed Show* (1958–1966), this one with Mom, Dad, Jeff and older sister Mary Stone. Jeff was several years older than I, so I did not really identify much with him. When I first saw the show at age nine, I immediately fell madly in love with Mrs. Stone, played by Donna Reed. By the time the show went off the air in 1966, my passions had shifted to older sister Mary, played by Shelley Fabares. Always awkward around real girls of my age, I developed all of my crushes on actresses who were several years older than I.

I am now going to depart from the decade of this chapter, the 1950s. On the topic of actresses I adored, at the top of the list, by far, was Patty Duke, who starred in—what else—*The Patty Duke Show* from 1963–1966. Born in December, 1946, Ms. Duke was barely two years older than I, making her quite young to be the object of my desires.

In the 1962 movie, *The Miracle Worker*, Patty Duke played young Helen Keller. Duke's performance was nothing short of sensational and she won the Academy Award for *Best Supporting Actress*. No doubt her TV show was created to take full advantage of its young star's rapid rise to international fame.

I found the following description of *The Patty Duke Show*, on the internet (the imdb plot summary) and I can't really improve upon it:

Cathy Lane, teen-aged daughter of a globe-trotting journalist, comes to live at the home of her uncle, a newspaper editor in New York City. Curiously, Cathy is the spitting image of her uncle's daughter, Patty. Appearances aside, however, the urbane Cathy is nothing like her cousin Patty, who is the typical American teenager.

Thus, when I wanted to fantasize the existence of a girl friend who appreciated my intellect, I would choose Cathy Lane, played by Patty Duke. If I wanted to pretend that I could be a fun-

loving teenage boy, I would choose Patty Lane, also played by Patty Duke. What more could a boy want from a TV show?

The fourth, and final, sit com on my list of memorable TV shows was *The Many Loves of Dobey Gillis* (1959–1963). I will discuss the ways Dobey affected my life in future Chapter 25.

When I wasn't watching a sit com, chances were that I was watching a western. For some strange reason, my favorite western was *The Rebel* (1959–1961). The imdb description of the show is

After the end of the American Civil War, a former Confederate Army private roams the Wild West and, as a rogue drifter, gets involved in helping out various settlers threatened by various bad guys.

This is pretty much how I remember the show. *The Rebel's* name was Johnny Yuma; what I liked most about the show was its theme song, the lyrics of which are presented in Table 13.1. Please take a minute and read these lyrics. They are somewhat tedious, I know, but please bear with me.

At my current age of 65, I am trying to understand why 10 year-old Bob was so enraptured by this show. I will offer a theory as to why.

I have always been somewhat introverted. Thus, the idea of someone who *wandered alone* must have appealed to me. Also, in the show, Johnny always wore his Confederate Army cap, which made everyone think we had dumb or somehow morally inferior. Gee, why would that appeal to young Bob?

A good friend of mine in adulthood, Kam Tsui, has commented that I have a strong sense of justice; if true, this might explain the appeal of a character who reacted to injustices by becoming *fightin' mad*. Finally, for a 10 year-old boy, what is there not to like about being *panther quick and leather tough*?

The other westerns I enjoyed were *Wagon Train* (1957–1965) and *Sugarfoot* (1957–1961).

The last two categories of TV series that I watched were detective shows, of which my favorite was *77 Sunset Strip* (1958–1964), and shows about the supernatural. In this latter category, my favorite shows were *One Step Beyond* (1959–1961), *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964) and *The Outer Limits* 1963–1965. I had to sneak around to watch the supernatural shows because my parents did not approve; they gave Bob *weird ideas*.

When one hears the word *culture* it is natural to think of art and music. In the 1950s I virtually had neither art nor music in my life.

I was always horrible in art class. I never progressed beyond drawing people as stick figures. In music class at Ashcroft, all I can remember is singing *The Yellow Rose of Texas*. Repeatedly. I had no music at home. Yes, we had a record player, but my family had only three albums, one each by: *The Mills Brothers*, *The Harmonicats* and a strangely out-of-place album of calypso music. The only song I remember is *Rum and Coca-Cola*, the lyrics of which are in Table 13.2. Take a minute and read these lyrics. Wow. This song was very wild! Thank goodness 1950's Bob had no idea what these words meant!

My sister Geri turned 16 as 1959 came to an end and she was, no doubt, heavily into that new music form, *Rock and Roll*, but I was totally oblivious to what she was listening to in her bedroom.

Table 13.1: The Lyrics of the Theme Song for the TV Show *The Rebel*.

Away, away, away rode the rebel, Johnny Yuma

Johnny Yuma, was a rebel,
He roamed, through the west.
And Johnny Yuma, was a rebel,
He wandered alone.

He got fightin' mad,
This rebel lad,
He packed his star as he wandered far
Where the only law was a hook and a draw, the rebel.

(Away, away, away rode the rebel.)

He searched the land,
This restless lad,
He was panther quick and leather tough
Cause he had figured that he'd been pushed enough, the rebel.

(Away, away, away rode the rebel.) Johnny Yuma.

He was fightin' mad,
This rebel lad,
With a dream he would hold until his dying breath
He would search his soul and gamble with death.

Away, away, away rode the rebel, Johnny Yuma.

Table 13.2: The Lyrics of *Rum and Coca-Cola*.

If you ever go down Trinidad
They make you feel so very glad
Calypso sing and make up rhyme
Guarantee you one real good fine time

Drinkin' rum and Coca-Cola
Go down Point Koomahnah
Both mother and daughter
Workin' for the Yankee dollar

Oh, beat it man, beat it

Since the Yankee come to Trinidad
They got the young girls all goin' mad
Young girls say they treat 'em nice
Make Trinidad like paradise

Oh, you vex me, you vex me

From Chicachicaree to Mona's Isle
Native girls all dance and smile
Help soldier celebrate his leave
Make every day like New Year's Eve

It's a fact, man, it's a fact

In old Trinidad, I also fear
The situation is mighty queer
Like the Yankee girl, the native swoon
When she hear der Bingo croon

Out on Manzanella Beach
G.I. romance with native peach
All night long, make tropic love
Next day, sit in hot sun and cool off

It's a fact, man, it's a fact

Rum and Coca-Cola
Rum and Coca-Cola
Workin' for the Yankee dollar

My final thought associated with the word *culture* is the printed word. We subscribed to *The Detroit News* as our daily newspaper. The Wardrop family subscribed to no news magazines. My sister purchased teen magazines, but, again, I was unaware of what happened in her world. My mother would purchase magazines with titles *True Story* and *True Romance*, copies of which she would occasionally leave in the bathroom—I assumed they were primarily housed in my parents’ bedroom, a place I dare never enter. During several particularly long session on the family toilet, I learned that these magazines consisted of numerous soft love stories all with the same theme: a lonely, sheltered young woman would meet a man whose touch set her on fire. These stories, of course, set the bar pretty high for any future interactions I might have with girls. To this day, I have yet to have a female spontaneously combust at my touch. This, of course, is a good thing, although it does make me feel somewhat inadequate.

When I wasn’t sneaking a look at one of my mother’s magazines, I spent many happy hours reading either *Sports Illustrated* or *Mad Magazine*. I cannot say enough good things about *Mad Magazine*. Instead of trying, I will present the following material I found in Wikipedia:

In 1977, Tony Hiss and Jeff Lewis wrote in The New York Times about the then 25-year-old publication’s initial effect:

The skeptical generation of kids it shaped in the 1950s is the same generation that, in the 1960s, opposed a war and didn’t feel bad when the United States lost for the first time and in the 1970s helped turn out an Administration and didn’t feel bad about that either It was magical, objective proof to kids that they weren’t alone, that in New York City on Lafayette Street, if nowhere else, there were people who knew that there was something wrong, phony and funny about a world of bomb shelters, brinkmanship and toothpaste smiles. *Mad*’s consciousness of itself, as trash, as comic book, as enemy of parents and teachers, even as money-making enterprise, thrilled kids. In 1955, such consciousness was possibly nowhere else to be found.

I am amazed at the number of stories in *Mad* that have spoken to me my entire life. I will give you just one example, an example which helped me to become a much better teacher of Statistics.

The *Mad* feature in question was an excerpt from a magazine designed for children. An ad featured a large picture of a hand gun with, roughly, the following copy:

Kids: Are you tired of playing with phony-looking plastic or wooden hand guns? If so, consider purchasing a real hand gun from Acme Novelty Company! Yes, boys and girls, these are real, authentic metal hand guns! Only \$9.99, plus shipping and handling.

Mom and Dad: Don’t worry, these guns are perfectly safe because their firing pins have been removed.

Then on the next page of the same mock-children’s-magazine, a large ad read:

Firing Pins: Easy to install! Just send 10 cents, plus shipping and handling, to Acme Novelty Company for your own firing pin and easy to follow installation instructions!

Finally, during my years at Ashcroft, I would spend most of my spare money on comic books. I really loved *Superman* and *Archie*, a curious combination that reflected my twin desires to be heroic and a boy that girls couldn't resist.

I end this chapter with two stories, the first from the 1950's and the second from the early 1990's. You will see the theme that is common to them.

On Friday evenings my parents would do their weekly grocery shopping, at a store called *Kroger's*. If my sister Geri was occupied and, thus, unable to babysit me, they would make me go along, but I was not allowed/forced to enter the store. Instead I would sit and wait in the car while my parents shopped. After the usual warning that the car would explode if I touched the steering wheel, the foot pedals or anything on the dashboard, I was left to my imagination and any comic books I might have remembered to bring along.

For smaller shopping trips my parents would go to the *IGA Food Market*, which was similar to Kroger's but much smaller. (You might recall that *IGA* was the store that showed movies in its parking lot on Halloween.) For an even smaller shopping trip—say, for some subset of bread, milk, cheese and lunchmeat—my parents would send me on my bike to make the purchases. To where did they send me? That is the theme of this story.

Less than one-half mile from our home on Nathaline was a small store with two features that I recall. First, on the side of the building was a huge painted ad that read, "We Feature Kowalski's Authentic Polish Sausage." To be fair, the word *Kowalski's* was much larger than the accompanying words in the ad. Second, above the entrance to the store was a sign that identified it as *E & G Superette*.

My parents always referred to the store as *Kowalski's*, as in "Hey, Bob, ride your bike to *Kowalski's* and buy some milk."

"Do you mean ride my bike to the *E & G Superette*?" I would (almost) always reply.

"No!" the parent would respond, "Go to *Kowalski's* and don't be a smart aleck!" (Note: Smart aleck was a common pejorative in the 1950's; it was used to describe *an obnoxiously conceited person*.)

In the 1990's, my mother and I were talking about a friend of hers, Marge, who had recently moved to Mesa, Arizona.

- My mother: I received a phone call from Marge. She loves living in Me-saw, Arizona.
- Me: That's great Mom. By the way, the name of the city is pronounced May-saw. It is a Spanish word for a geological formation.
- My mother (over the next several months): Me-saw, Me-saw, Me-saw, Me-saw, Me-saw!
- Me (for awhile and then I gave up): May-saw, May-saw, May-saw.

Then my mother traveled to Arizona to visit Marge. After she returned, we had the following brief conversation.

- Me: How was your trip?

- My mother: It was great. I loved May-saw.
- Me (muttering to myself before saying): That's nice, Mom.

My initial thought was to end the chapter before this sentence and let the reader decide the significance, or lack thereof, to the stories of *Kowalski's* and *Mesa*. I have, however, reconsidered.

The *Kowalski's* story marked a turning point or watershed moment in my relationship with my father. It is difficult to believe, but we argued about this for years. "How can he not tell the difference between an advertisement and a shop's sign?" I often asked myself. After all, he never referred to the *IGA Food Market* as *Kellogg's* or *Green Giant's* even though ads for these company's products often appeared in its window. "Perhaps it's the permanence of paint that influences my father," I often conjectured to myself.

With 55 years' hindsight I now think of the whole issue differently. I believe that to my father, his capitulation on *Kowalski's* would be his own version of the *domino theory*.

The following description of the *domino theory* is taken from Wikipedia:

The domino theory was a theory prominent from the 1950s to the 1980s, that speculated that if one country in a region came under the influence of communism, then the surrounding countries would follow in a domino effect. The domino theory was used by successive United States administrations during the Cold War to justify the need for American intervention around the world.

Though he never directly used the term *domino theory*, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower put the theory into words during an April 7, 1954, news conference, when referring to communism in Indochina:

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the *falling domino* principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

In short, if my father ever acknowledged that I was correct about the name of the *E & G Superette*, then rule 4 would be destroyed. Rule 4, recall, stated:

4. The intellectual growth of this child will be actively limited. He must always understand that his parents know best on every topic.

My mother was different. I believe that she figured out fairly quickly the actual name of *Kowalski's*, but she would neither contradict my father nor affirm my correctness. This latter characteristic continued until her death as the story about *Mesa* confirms. Somehow, in Arizona, my mother learned the correct pronunciation of *Mesa*—either directly from her friend Marge or confirmed by Marge—yet she could never bring herself to admit to me that I had been correct.

After *Kowalski's* I had to admit that my father was not the omnipotent creature we all briefly believe our fathers to be. Far from all-knowing and wise, my father was either incredibly stubborn or stupid; or both.

To make matters worse, this was the time in my life when we would spend part of our summers visiting relatives. My father would brag about how well I was doing in school. This bragging was not congruent with his everyday treatment of me, in which I was deemed quite stupid. I came to see his bragging as a way to convey to my uncles, aunts and much older cousins that I was superior to their children. As would happen again in high school, it would always incense me that my father, who would never compliment me directly for my basketball accomplishments, would brag to everyone else about what a *star* I was. Perhaps I am being too harsh with my father, but it is how I felt.

I am **not** saying that I had a horrible father. I know that he loved me and, indeed, performed several acts of kindness: the ice rinks in the backyard, taking me to sporting events and many other things you will read about later in these memoirs. But he had no concept of the myriad things I *needed* that he was not able to give, basically the scrapping of the four rules of raising kids.

As an adult, I read an outstanding novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, by Mark Haddon. In this novel, Haddon describes the life of a young teen boy with Asperger syndrome (AS). One story in the novel has always stuck with me. Haddon is describing a feature of people with AS with a story that goes something like the following.

In a room are three people, A, B and C, a small ball and two inverted opaque drinking glasses, one red and one blue. A is a boy with AS. B leaves the room and C, with A watching, places the ball under the red glass. B returns to the room and asks where the ball is. This blows away A; obviously, the ball is under the red glass.

In words, a person with AS has difficulty distinguishing what he has observed from what another has observed.

I am **not** saying that my father had AS. Nor am I saying he did not. I don't know. After all, AS is an autism *spectrum* disorder, so one might argue that many people are at some point of the spectrum other than 'zero.' My point is that my father always had a profound inability to see the world from any perspective other than his own.

One of my favorite examples of this feature of my father involved his friend Bill McVicar and Bill's son Eddie. Eddie was my sister Geri's age and, as adults, she and I—and Eddie too, when he was around—would laugh about the sainted Eddie McVicar.

Whenever I would visit my parents from my home in Wisconsin, my father would eventually get around to his favorite topic. "You know," he would begin, "Some parents don't do anything for their kids, but when those kids grow up, they do everything for their parents."

"This doesn't seem right," I would reply, "Do you have an example of this?" I would ask, even though years of hearing this introduction had left no doubt where he was going.

"Eddie McVicar!" my father would almost shout. "His parents did nothing for him when he was a kid and now he does everything for them!" My father would then go on for several minutes listing all the ways in which Eddie was a saint.

"Wow," I would respond. "Do you have any other thoughts on this?"

"Yes! On the other hand, there are parents, like your mother and me, who did everything for their kids and now their kids treat them horribly."

"I guess life isn't fair, Dad."

Here is my point. I am not arguing against sainthood for Eddie. I am not defending Eddie's parents. I am not saying that Geri and I properly appreciated our parents or that we treated them well when we became adults. I have my beliefs on the topic of my parents, but they are not my point right now. My point is the following:

My father seemed unable to understand that Geri and I might have our own opinions on our childhoods. To my father, whatever he believed to be true was the only possible reality.

He satisfied the needs he perceived us to have. I am not blaming him for not perceiving other needs of ours, but it would have been nice if he had been open to the possibility of their existence.

This helps explain why Rule 4 was needed.

Chapter 14

My Introduction to Basketball

I showed a draft of this document to my son, Roger, who, in fact, writes much better than I do. He said something to the effect, “It’s pretty good, but it sounds like you are bragging too much.” Perhaps seeing bragging everywhere is a basic feature of being a Wardrop; or perhaps I was/am bragging too much. Well, I am going to brag now, for sure.

During my four year basketball career, grades nine through twelve, my teams had a combined record of 49 wins and 16 losses. I started 62 of those games. And—here is the bragging part—I never touched a basketball until the end of sixth grade and never tried out for a team until ninth grade.

I have told you a bit about the wonderful gym teacher at Ashcroft, Miss Lewis. As sixth grade drew to an end, Miss Lewis decided that what we needed was a basketball tournament. This being 1961, this meant that the *boys* would have a basketball tournament and the girls could cheer for us. And the most amazing fact was that, as best I could tell, nobody said anything about this gross injustice. There were three home room classes at Ashcroft and each class had a team. A total of three games were played, round-robin style so that every pair of classes played. I don’t remember who coached the various teams—I am guessing our teachers, but who knows? The following facts stand out in my memory.

1. The most amazing thing occurred when we were warming up. Nearly all of us would grab a ball, dribble—head down, eyes fixed on the bouncing ball—as best we could to some spot away from the basket and heave up what we picturesquely called our shot. We would jump at our release, but these were not jump shots.

The amazing thing is that one kid, I will always remember it was Chris LaTour, did this incredible maneuver where he was dribbling while he was running and, without breaking stride, he was jumping and shooting! It was the most incredible act of human speed and coordination I had ever seen. Sometime later I learned that there was a name for what Chris was doing: he was shooting a lay-up. The fact that I had never seen a lay-up before in my life strongly suggests that not only had I never played basketball, but I had never seen anyone play basketball, not even on television. (Westerns and Superman on TV were big in the 1950s; sports on TV were not.)

2. My neighbor and friend Ronny Madley had a unique way of warming up. He walked over

to where the girls were seated getting ready to watch and cheer. Ronnie dropped down and started doing push-ups. The sight of his bulging biceps started the girls swooning. Ronnie might not have put the ball through the basket that day, but I am pretty sure that he scored later.

3. My class won both of its games and were crowned the champions of Ashcroft Elementary School. I believe that we won because we had most of the good players—Don Block, Reggie Barringer, Rick Roe and Don Kopec come to mind—from the sixth grade. I can state categorically that Bob Wardrop played no role in our victory.

I would like to report that this tournament inspired me to become a basketball player, that afterward I spent every free moment practicing. In reality, however, this tournament had no effect whatsoever on me. In the spring of 1961 I was totally committed to baseball. Why would I be interested in a sport in which I had absolutely no ability?

Not until the end of eighth grade did I play basketball again; this time in a tournament in my gym class. My gym teacher, Mr. McDonald, thought I showed potential and encouraged me to attend Coach Riehl's summer basketball camp, which I did.

Chapter 15

Marshall Junior High School

In the fall of 1961, for the first time in my life, I was not able to walk to school. My new school, George C. Marshall Junior High, was a 2.5 mile walk from my home on Nathaline (2.0 miles if one climbed a fence and trespassed over some railroad tracks). Definitely too far to walk; thus, I had to take the bus.

On the first day of school, I climbed out of my bus and entered Marshall for the first time. It was huge; like my kindergarten school, Vetal, on steroids. I walked into a large entrance hall. To its left was a gigantic cafeteria, with a stage at the far end. Straight ahead and to the right were hallways, leading on forever. I was really freaking out.

I had a course schedule which told me which rooms to go to at which times, but that was no help. After all, how could one find: room 153? room 87? the music room? the big gym? (What? There are two gyms?)

Well, if I hadn't figured it out I would not be writing this document now. I would be a feral-senior citizen living somewhere in the wilds of Michigan with only a sixth grade education. (Well, the Iowa tests would say I had a 9.7 grade education, but you get my point.)

Fortunately, that first day at Marshall I met John Mutch and Barry Simescu and they helped me find my classes. I have no idea how, at age 12, they were both so brilliant. I learned quickly that John and Barry, in that order, would become the king and vice-king of Marshall. They were kind enough to let me part of their entourage—in today's language, posse—and I loved my role. My elevated status had its costs, the most notable of which is that John nicknamed me Drip-Drop, or Drip for short. Hey! If my father could have a friend who did not mind being called Dink, I could be Drip.

On the first day of seventh grade math class my teacher, Mrs. Grossman, had each student write his/her name on a 3×5 index card. I dutifully wrote Robert Wardrop. For the next three years Mrs. Grossman called me Robert. On every assignment for three years, I would write *Bob Wardrop*, but she always called me Robert. In retrospect, I conjecture that Mrs. Grossman's reasoning was something like: Bob is a fun name; Robert is a serious name; when you are in my class you will be serious—every minute of every class.

Without a doubt, Mrs. Grossman is the best teacher I ever had. My three years in her class set a very strong foundation for everything I achieved in future math and statistics classes; i.e., for almost everything I achieved academically. In 10th grade I signed up for the *Michigan Math*

Competition. Only the best high school math students sign up for this exam and only 4%—one in 25—of those who take its first exam qualify for its final exam. Despite having had only two years of algebra with Mrs. Grossman and part of one year of geometry with Mr. Bennett, as a 10th grader I qualified for the final exam. When Mr. Bennett discovered my accomplishment, he asked me, “Did you guess on those questions?” I don’t know whether he was joking. Indeed, only one other student at Thurston, a senior, qualified for the finals in 1965 when I was a sophomore. I was the lone Thurston student to qualify for the finals in both 1966 and 1967 and Mr. Bennett did not ask me his rude/funny question again. Mr. Bennett, who was again my math teacher in grade 12 *Solid Geometry and Trigonometry*, was a good math teacher, but Mrs. Grossman was the one who helped me the most, by far. In fact, given his relative inexperience when he taught me, Mr. Bennett was indeed an excellent teacher.

On the first day of seventh grade physical education, our teacher, Mr. Bill McDonald, told us that we were not in elementary school anymore! We would no longer wear our street clothes in gym class. We would each have a locker where we would keep our gym clothes: a t-shirt, short shorts (all shorts were short in 1961), white socks, gym shoes and (drum roll) a jock strap. When he said jock strap, several of my classmates giggled. “What the hell is a jock strap?” I thought to myself.

Mr. McDonald then said, “If you don’t have a jock strap, go to a store and ask for an athletic supporter.” (What? This sounds like a kick stand; you know, a bicycle supporter.) Somehow this all got straightened out—I don’t know how—and before long I had all the proper equipment for gym class.

In retrospect, I realized that I was very fortunate that I could not see my future on my first day of science class in seventh grade. If I could have, I would have been very anxious, humiliated, depressed; choose a modifier. Why? Our teacher was Mr. White, whose most notable feature was that he was completely bald. In my first seven years of school I had had only one male teacher, Mr. Burger for math in 6th grade. Mr. Burger had hair. All of the fathers in my neighborhood and on my Little League baseball teams had hair. The only person I could recall in my life who did not have hair was extremely old Archie the next door neighbor bricklayer. I suspect that many of my classmates had similar backgrounds in which baldness was unusual, if even present.

As a result, happily ignorant that I would be bald in less than 15 years, I joined in with all of my classmates who never referred to our science teacher as Mr. White. Rather, he was *Chrome Dome*. I know it’s difficult to imagine, but we thought that the moniker *Chrome Dome* was hilariously funny.

I am saving the worst for last. The South Redford schools were conducting an experiment in which children would no longer have one class on *English* and one class on *Social Studies* (which would include *History*); rather, they would have a two-period class called *Common Learnings*. In theory, the two period block of time would allow the teacher to cover bigger topics without interruption. In practice, it meant that *Social Studies* was over-emphasized and *English* was neglected; after all, a short answer Social Studies exam is easier to grade than an essay exam. Or, if you prefer, mindlessly teaching dates in history and locations on a map in geography is easier than teaching a child how to write a sentence and then a paragraph.

Perhaps the worst feature of Common Learnings was illustrated by my seventh grade Common

Learnings teacher, Mr. M (libel laws prevent me from mentioning him by name); namely, if you get a really horrible teacher, then you get that teacher for two hours. Mr. M should have been arrested. I am not exaggerating. His method of controlling his class was unique in my experience. Our desks were arranged in a U-shape; which was good for discussions because you could see the faces of most of your classmates. It was bad because it allowed Mr. M to walk behind everyone in the class. Mr. M wore a really big ring on his hand. If you were misbehaving in any way when he walked behind you, he would smash his fist into your head, yelling gleefully, "It's nougee time!" If he was particularly angry at you, he would smash the ring into your head, which was a bit like being hit with brass knuckles. Really? A concussion for bad behavior? As I said, he should have been arrested.

In September 1962, I started eighth grade at Marshall. Eighth grade would be a pivotal year in my life, perhaps **the** pivotal year.

I had turned 13 two months earlier which meant that I had finished my four years of Little League baseball and had moved on to something called Pony League Baseball. Pony League was for boys aged 13 or 14 and, as with Little League four years earlier, I was among the youngest players in the league, with some boys as much as 23 months older than I. In addition, unlike Little League's three levels of competition, there was only one level in Pony League. Finally, the natural attrition of the weaker players dropping out meant that I was in a league with predominantly strong players and I was among the youngest. I am sure you have guessed where this is going: I was horrible in Pony League and by the end of the 1962 season I had realized that I had no future in organized baseball.

Just how horrible was I? Mercifully, I have forgotten most of the season: most notably, my team's name and its record. In addition, I cannot remember even one teammate's name! Here is what I do remember. I was switched to playing second base. Keeping with the tradition of Little League, neither my manager nor coach spent even one moment instructing me on how to play second base. In particular, I had no idea how to tag a sliding runner and my great humiliation was a play in which I received a throw with time to spare and watched the runner slide under my futile attempt at tagging him. What stands out the most, however, in my memory is that I finally was faced with pitching that I could not hit. The fast balls were too fast and the curves were hopeless. For the entire season I managed only four hits in 32 at-bats, for the woeful batting average of 0.125!

As a result, when I entered Marshall for the beginning of eighth grade I was a boy who very much needed to have a sport who had no sport.

When eighth grade began I was 63 inches tall. When it ended I was 69 inches tall. Thus, it seems fair to conjecture that some of what I describe below is related to my raging hormones. I remember only two teachers from eighth grade: my aforementioned amazing math teacher, Mrs. Grossman, and my Common Learnings teacher, Mr. Barnett.

My two hero friends, John and Barry, were in my Common Learnings class, which was no doubt a contributing factor to my decision to become the class clown. The low point came with a report card on which Mr. Barnett gave me a grade of D and wrote a comment to the effect that I seemed unable to keep my mouth shut. I will always be grateful to Mr. Barnett for not giving up

on me and bringing me back with his academic version of *tough love*.

World events conspired to make life at Marshall even more difficult. In October, 1962, approximately six weeks into my worst year of school ever, the **Cuban Missile Crisis** erupted and held the entire world in a state of extreme terror for two weeks. I have a very strong memory of sitting in Common Learnings and Mr. Barnett trying to calm us down, when the eighth grade king, my friend John Mutch, announced, “When the Soviets attack us, the five cities they will be sure to destroy are Detroit, Chicago, New York, Washington and Los Angeles.” I believe that John was correct about the cities, but, fortunately, incorrect about his use of the word *when*.

Mr. Barnett had served in the Air Force and was in its Reserves in 1962–63. He told us many stories about the excitement of flying a jet and his many adventures. What a man!

To children growing up in South Redford in the early 1960s, flying was very exotic. If you had asked me in eighth grade whether I thought I would ever fly in an airplane, without hesitation I would have answered, “No way.” In high school my friends and I would, on occasion, drive to Detroit Metro Airport and watch for hours as planes would take-off and land. When I finally flew on an airplane, in 1973, I was overwhelmed by the site of clouds from above.

I was deeply saddened when, a few years later, I learned that Mr. Barnett had died in the crash of a jet he was flying.

World events also played a big role during ninth grade, 1963–64. First, just before Thanksgiving President Kennedy was assassinated. Second, even in all-white South Redford it was becoming impossible to ignore the civil rights movement for Americans of African ancestry.

One of my classmates got a brilliant idea. He/she wrote a petition, passed it around and got a sizable proportion of the student body to sign it. We presented the petition to the South Redford School Board, which resulted in the the local weekly newspaper, *The Redford Observer* learning of its existence.

The Observer’s editorial was way over the top. We students were dupes and we were clearly under the influence of communists. (The paper had the good sense not to label communists a group of 12 to 14 years-olds; after all, many of the boys among us would be called upon to fight the North Vietnamese communists in a few short years.)

What did this petition say? What dastardly proposal were we children putting forward? The petition encouraged the school board, if possible, to hire one African-American teacher so that we could learn something, first hand, about the African-American experience in our country. After all, every morning for nine years we had been reciting the *Pledge of Allegiance* and were curious about the expression *with liberty and justice for all*.

I don’t remember much about academics in ninth grade at Marshall. Mrs. Grossman was awesome in Algebra II, as expected, and I had a great biology teacher, Mr. Weber. All that I remember about my English class (was it still part of Common Learnings? I can’t recall) will be presented in the next chapter. By ninth grade I had a full-blown obsession with playing basketball, which will be described in a future chapter.

Chapter 16

Girls at Marshall

Sadly, there is not much to say about my love life in Junior High. As a result, this will be a very short chapter.

In seventh grade I had no girlfriend, by any definition of the term. Grade eight was the same except for two events, the first of which I will label *the phone call*.

There was a pretty girl in one of my classes named Nancy and I decided that I would make a play to be her boyfriend. I decided to make my move by calling her on the phone. One weeknight, the following occurred:

- Me (dialing phone, and when an adult answers): Hello. May I please speak with Nancy?
- Nancy (after coming to the phone): Hello, this is Nancy.
- Me: Hi, Nancy. This is Bob Wardrop.
- Nancy: Hi, Bob.
- Me (after 15 minutes of silence): Well, goodbye Nancy.
- Nancy: Goodbye.

The next day at school, my friend Don Block walked past me and said gleefully, “Hey, it’s the telephone man.” I couldn’t believe that Nancy had told! Thus, before it ever started, my budding relationship with Nancy was over.

Deep in the winter of 1962–63, the eighth graders at Marshall went on a field trip to downtown Detroit to see the Cinemascope movie *How the West Was Won*. The idea of cinemascope was that the movie screen was curved, with its sides closer to the audience than the center. With three projectors operating simultaneously, the movie appeared to be in 3-D.

A few weeks before the movie day, I had started talking with a really pretty girl who sat across the row from me in science, named Sandy. Our talking had progressed to the stage that she had agreed to sit next to me at the movie! This was so exciting! On the bus, I sat with my boyfriends and Sandy was on another bus. I let it slip that Sandy and I would be sitting together at the movie

which, of course, resulted in lots of teasing and laughter. This was awesome! I had never been teased about a girl liking me!

We got to the movie and I made my way to where Sandy was sitting and took an empty seat next to her. (She had saved me a seat!) For the first few minutes, Sandy kept whispering to her girlfriends and looking at me forlornly. Finally, she said, “Bob, you better go sit with Barry because I decided that I like Mike.” I arose and embarked on one of the longest walks of my life. When I arrived at Barry’s area, he and others asked what had happened. I was so upset I couldn’t say anything. It was all I could do to avoid bursting into tears. I am certain that if I had spoken then I would have started crying. Mercifully, my friends could see how destroyed I was and left me alone. It was a very long movie.

In ninth grade I was on the basketball team and was becoming a big shot at Marshall; nothing like John and Barry, but not too shabby either. I decided that I liked a certain cheerleader named Carol, but, given my experience with Nancy, I had the good sense not to phone Carol. (Note: This was not the football-playing Carol from sixth grade; she went to Pierce Junior High.) Instead, after one road game—a victory of course—I sat next to Carol on the bus home. And you guessed it . . . I didn’t talk to her at all. In retrospect, I realized that the whole fantasy of Bob and Carol being a couple was orchestrated by Sandy, who was now the steady of a good friend of mine; Sandy was a nice girl and I think she felt bad that I had been hurt the previous year.

My last interaction with Carol was, again in retrospect, somewhat humorous. I discovered where Carol lived (thank you phone book) and also her birthday (thanks to Sandy, no doubt). Unfortunately, her birthday was in the dead of winter. It was 1964 and all real American girls were mad about the Beatles in particular and the whole *British Invasion* of musicians in general. Not me; I was stuck in 1961 and my favorite singer was Dion Dimucci, a Brooklyn boy, who hit it big as the lead singer of *Dion and the Belmonts*. (Belmont is an avenue in Brooklyn.) By 1964, Dion had struck out on his own, but didn’t have much success as a solo artist until he hit it big with *Abraham, Martin and John* in 1968.

I decided on the perfect gift for Carol: the record album *Dion’s Greatest Hits*. I purchased the album, wrapped it in paper and on a Sunday afternoon—Carol’s birthday—I set off on my bike to deliver my gift to her. I remember biking 1.5 miles, through snow, even carrying my bike over the railroad tracks—no mean feat when one is also carrying a wrapped gift. I found Carol’s house and got off my bike. I walked up on the porch and rang the bell. An adult woman, who I took to be Carol’s mother, answered the door. “Is Carol at home?” I asked.

“Yes,” her mother replied, “But she is taking a bath.”

“Would you please give this to Carol?” I asked, as I shoved the gift towards her.

“Of course,” said her mother, taking the gift and shutting the door on me. I walked back to my bike and pedaled back home through the snow and over the tracks, which were easier to negotiate with both hands free.

Carol never thanked me for the gift. I never learned whether she had received it. After all, we shouldn’t assume that a woman who won’t invite a boy in on a cold winter’s day would hesitate to fail to deliver a present. In fact, I don’t remember speaking with Carol again until twelfth grade. Mercifully, I believed the bath story for years. And, indeed, it might have been true. But it’s also possible that Carol spied me through the window and convinced her mother to tell the bath story.

During my three years at Marshall, on one Friday night per month we had a canteen (dance). I would hang out in the main lobby of the building playing various games and talking with my friends and one of the chaperons, frequently my eighth grade Common Learnings teacher Mr. Barnett. The serious activities were next door in the cafeteria where kids would dance to records. I don't recall dancing at all in seventh or eighth grade.

In ninth grade I continued to attend the monthly canteens at Marshall. Because I still didn't dance, often I would be the DJ, which was a lot of fun. Stevie Wonder—called Little Stevie Wonder then—was the rage as was anything Motown and, of course, anything British or referencing surfing. Near the end of ninth grade there was a girl, Michele, who I danced with a few times at a canteen. Michele might have liked me, but she was not part of my *crowd*, so I never explored the possibility of her being my girlfriend. In addition, of course, I was so shy that even if she was part of my *crowd*, as Carol was, it's unlikely that anything would have happened between Michele and me.

Perhaps you are thinking that I was pretty shallow to let the opinions of my friends decide for me whether I liked a girl. It was probably shallow; what is certain is that it was widespread. Let me give you the strongest example of this phenomenon in my life.

I had a good friend in junior high and high school whom, for reasons that will become obvious, I will refer to by the fictional name Carl. Carl was a good athlete and a nice looking boy. Thus, he could have dated. In high school my group of male friends noticed that Carl never had a girlfriend, but that he was constantly flirting with our girlfriends. I came to believe—and still believe—that Carl suffered from the same ailment that kept me from being with any number of nice girls; namely, Carl was afraid that if he selected a girl, his friends would ridicule his choice. Thus, for the objects of his amorous advances, Carl chose girls who had already been approved by his friends. It was quite simple.

There was another girl at Marshall who had a big impact on me. Charlene was a very pretty girl with incredible long, thick hair. She was in all of my math classes with Mrs. Grossman.

Mrs. Grossman made us sit in the same chairs every day. And I don't mean just every day of a given school year; every day for the entire three years I was in her class! I always sat in the the third seat in the first row of chairs, closest to the wall that held the entrance/exit door. Charlene always sat in the fourth row and the fourth seat. Thus, in order for me to see Charlene, I would need to turn my head approximately 120 degrees to the right from its norm of looking straight ahead. Charlene was very pretty and I was very good at math; thus, turning my head gave me a visual reward and did not impact on my performance in class.

You are not going to believe this next part, and I admit that it sounds unbelievable. But *every time* I turned to look at Charlene, she was looking at me with a big smile on her face. The next part is even more difficult to believe. I never spoke to Charlene at Marshall, nor did I speak to her at Thurston. I remember once running into her in the hallway at Thurston and muttering something about Mrs. Grossman's class. Charlene did give me a school picture, which I cherished for years, and she did sign my yearbook my senior year.

The final girl at Marshall who aroused my interest was Pat who sat behind me in ninth grade English. I remember two things about the class. First, it seemed that we spent months learning how to diagram sentences, another of the many skills I learned that were to prove to be totally

useless in my future life. Second, whenever I tired of listening to my teacher or diagramming sentences, I would turn in my seat and flirt with the lovely girl behind me. Thus, I would flirt with Pat no more than, say, four or five times per day. Sadly, nothing came of this.

I have one last episode of note to report from ninth grade. This episode is a bit like my favorite item in crime fiction: the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime in which Sherlock Holmes deduced that the dog's silence was the clue. While there are no girls involved in the episode below, the entire episode would not have occurred if I had had a girlfriend.

At the end of ninth grade there was a big dance, for which, of course, I did not have a date; in those days, if a boy didn't ask, he never had a date. For some reason my friend John Mutch did not go to the dance either—my guess is that when **every** girl in the school wants to go with you, how do you choose?

John's family was wealthy by South Redford standards—they owned a hardware store—and John had an in-ground swimming pool in his backyard. It was a pretty small pool and because it had a diving board, most of the surface area of the pool was in the deep end. John decided to have a pool party for his friends, me included, who did not go to the dance. I recall that there were four boys at the party. The other boys were diving and jumping into the deep end and I, nonswimmer that I was, inconspicuously splashed around in the small shallow end of the pool.

Ninth grade boys being what they are, the others decided we needed to have a competition. We settled on a version of water polo. I managed to be on the team that was defending the shallow end of the pool and for the first few minutes of the game I hung back on defense; after all, the best offense is a good defense. Eventually, however, I found myself at the edge of the shallow end with the ball just beyond my reach in the deep end. There was no way I could avoid going after that ball; nobody else was near it. So, I lunged for the ball and went under.

I have no idea what transpired next or how long it lasted; 30 seconds? Two minutes? The next thing I knew, literally, is that I was sitting in a chair, bent over, gasping for breath, with John next to me, asking "Are you OK Drip?" Apparently, in addition to being a good friend, a basketball teammate and the king of Marshall, John had saved me from drowning.

The following Monday I was walking down the hall at Marshall and saw John approaching. "Hey, how is the swimmer?" John asked jokingly. I gave John my best evil eye and kept walking without a verbal response. John never mentioned the episode again and, indeed, it seems that none of the boys at the party mentioned it because I never had anyone say anything to me about it. In fact, the typing of these memoirs is the first time I have mentioned this event.

Chapter 17

Basketball at Marshall Junior High

When I entered Marshall, the last thing on my mind was playing basketball. I had and have no idea whether or not there was a seventh grade team. I learned later that there were both eighth and ninth grade teams.

We had a break after lunch every day. In warm weather we would go outside and burn off energy, but never leave the campus. (Well, the bad kids probably left, but I never did. Yep, obedient Bob.) During the winter we would all go to the gym and, mostly, hang out. Most of these days I would crowd, with 20 other boys, under the one basket where shooting was allowed and vie for the one of the four or five balls in play. Periodically after successfully pushing, shoving and jumping—or simply being in the right place for a long rebound or one of the frequent *air balls*—I would take the ball, dribble to about 15 feet from the basket and launch my developing jump shot. My shot was quite ugly with almost no arc to it. After all, as I learned in math, the shortest distance between my hand and the rim was a straight line. Experience taught me that some arc would benefit my shot, but it took me a very long time to put this idea into practice.

Near the end of winter in eighth grade we had a basketball tournament in gym class and I performed well enough for Mr. McDonald, my gym teacher, to recommend I go to Coach Riehl's summer basketball camp. I have no specific memories of being in Coach's camp in the summer of 1963, but when the week was over, nothing in my life mattered as much as basketball.

Henceforth, I will talk about, for example, the 1963–64 basketball team/season as the 1964 season, for ease of exposition. The Marshall 1963 season occurred during my eighth grade. As alluded to above, while I was in eighth grade I had no idea that there was a basketball team. Mr. Riehl coached the ninth grade team and I don't know who coached the eighth grade team. Barry Simescu, my classmate in eighth grade, was a starter on the ninth grade team. I am told that Barry was very talented at that time, but I did not see him play. I learned during the 1964 season that Coach Riehl had a very high opinion of Barry's abilities; indeed, Coach was certain that Barry would be a big star in high school. During our practices on the 1964 team, Coach would often say, "Just wait until your junior year, Barry, you will be a big star." The main players, I learned later, on the 1963 eighth grade team were Don Block, John Mutch, Gary Smith and a seventh grader whose name last name I can't remember, but whose first name was Dave. I will refer to him as Super Dave. The story goes that Super Dave was a super player and would also be a star one day; hence, his role as

a starter on the 8th grade team. Apparently, however, Super Dave was also what we used to call a weasel: Spoiled, obnoxious and full of himself. I am sure you know the type. Anyways, Don, John and Gary did not have any tolerance for weasels and were not the type to hide their feelings.

After a difficult road loss early in the season, the members of Marshall eighth grade boys' basketball team trashed the locker room at Dunkel Junior High School and, as punishment, the remainder of their season was canceled. I don't know what happened and my friends never talked about it, but given the natures of the kids involved, I am pretty certain that my friends Don, John and Gary were acting out their displeasure with having Super Dave on the team. (Aside: Super Dave transferred to Detroit Country Day School and I never saw him play. Decades later, a young man with the same last name as Super Dave's was a star player at Oakland University, where I had attended college.)

As a result of the disaster of the eighth grade team during the 1963 season, Coach Riehl faced a difficult task in 1964. He knew that he had the potential for a very good team, perhaps his best team ever at Marshall. Barry was a star and Don, John and Gary were all very good players. He needed a fifth starter and, most importantly, he needed a team that had good chemistry.

The tryouts began for the 1964 ninth grade team. The much disliked Super Dave had left Marshall or was on the eighth grade team; I didn't know at the time. Several things became apparent very quickly. First, the gulf or gap between the top four players and the others was huge. Also, there were any number of boys who could adequately be the fifth starter. The leading candidates were Bob Rybka, Joe Hodges, Ron Boonstra, Arnie Foess and myself.

Rybka and Hodges were good players, but suffered from the fact that they were new to Marshall, Bob having swum upstream by coming *from* a Catholic school rather than fleeing to one. I don't recall where Joe came from; but he definitely was new to Redford Township. Thus, their effect on chemistry was unknown and neither had had my benefit of attending the summer camp in 1963. Ron was really a greaser (think John Travolta in *Grease*) and Coach must have known that once Ron got to high school—where the greaser and frat camps were clearly separated—he would quit basketball (and he did). Finally, Arnie was just as good a player as I was, perhaps a bit better. But I was very good friends with Barry, Don and John, and I am sure Coach could tell that I would be the best for chemistry. So, I became the fifth starter.

It was clear that Coach Riehl was going to have me develop slowly; another way to put it is that he was not going to let an inexperienced player ruin his team. Gary was the center on the team and probably its third best player. Don was a forward and a very strong player. Barry was a guard and was, indeed, very good in ninth grade. John was not as good in ninth grade, in large part because he had injured his knee at the end of the football season. As a result, John lagged a bit behind Marshall's 1964 version of the big three.

John and I shared the remaining two positions on the court; John would play guard on offense and forward on defense, while I would play forward on offense and guard on defense. Coach's reasoning was quite obvious and, as it turned out, quite sound. The idea is that guards are very important for bringing the ball up the court on offense and forwards are very important for defense. Thus, on both offense and defense I was placed so that I would not mess up the team's performance.

Our first game opponent was a team from North Redford. Its star player was named Leland Bjerke and he did everything on the team. He would bring the ball up the court and took far more shots

than any of his teammates. He was a very good player who would get his revenge on us three years later.

Leland was playing guard and Barry, our best player, was guarding him. Marshall was winning a close game when a violent collision between Bjerke and Barry led to Barry suffering a bloody nose or lip (sorry, I can't remember which). As a result, Coach assigned me to guard Bjerke. I remember that I did fine—which probably only means that Bjerke shot poorly after I started guarding him—and we won the game. I hadn't had much confidence that I could help the team; thus, my small success on defense did a great deal to improve my outlook.

On offense, my teammates didn't know what to expect of me and, my being at forward, it was easy for them to ignore me. I recall touching the ball perhaps four times at the offensive end, shooting three times and making two baskets for a total of four points in my basketball debut.

Our second game was a road trip. We were playing a weak team and Coach decided on a special play to help me get involved with the offense. Periodically when we were on defense, Coach would yell, "Go!" which was my signal to leave the defensive duties to my four teammates and run down the court to stand near the basket. If all went as planned, my teammates would stop the other team and throw me the ball so that I could shoot an uncontested lay-up. My recollection is that this play worked two times, resulting in my scoring four points. The game was, indeed, an easy victory for Marshall.

The *Go!* play suffered from an unforeseen difficulty. This was my first road trip in my entire life and when I packed my gear *I forgot to pack my jock strap!* As a result, I could not concentrate on the game; I was totally focused on whether I was going to *fall out* of my underwear and expose myself! (Remember: Basketball shorts in 1964 were very short!)

I am a little foggy about some details of the 1964 season. I know that we played 10 games, including two against our arch-rival Pierce, the other and older junior high school in South Redford. I can't remember whether we were in a six team league and played each school twice or an eight team league with an unbalanced schedule. My guess is the latter, because I don't remember a second game against Bjerke, but I can't be sure.

Before long our record was four wins and no losses and Pierce's was 3–0. We played one game per week, but not on the same days, so we had the opportunity to watch Pierce play its fourth game of the season. So, Coach took us on a road trip to scout Pierce.

Pierce indeed was very good. The two guards, Reggie Barringer and Paul Santangelo were very quick and very fast. Indeed, they were star halfbacks on the 1966 Thurston High School league co-champion football team. Their center, Gary Schulte, was amazing. He had a beautiful jump shot on which he was deadly from inside 15 feet and he was the best passer, by far, in the league. We knew that we would be in for a battle when we played Pierce!

In game five, Pierce came to our gym to play. The gym was packed! Many more kids attended than at our usual games. This was Pierce! This was the enemy!

A very strange thing happened in game five. I played my best game of the year. Relative to my usual skill level, it was perhaps the best game of my entire career. I have no idea why.

With Paul and Reggie at guard, Pierce liked to press. After the game, friends told me that I had Paul running around in circles trying, unsuccessfully, to steal the ball from me. (Given the pressing, Coach had assigned me the job of helping Barry and John bring the ball up the court.)

With our easily breaking the press, we jumped off to a big early lead, but Pierce fought back. Midway through the 3rd quarter, Pierce had cut our lead to one point, 18–17 and Coach called a timeout.

We huddled up and we were nervous and excited. What I loved most about playing basketball was that often the game would make me, and my teammates, both nervous and excited. Then it all came down to which emotion would win; would the nervousness make me perform poorly or would the excitement allow me to play beyond my normal abilities? Throughout my career, sometimes the nerves won, but, fortunately, mostly I would rise to the occasion.

Coach was trying to calm us down. I didn't need it. "Take your time," he said. "There is no hurry to shoot. Pass the ball around until you have a really easy shot and then take it."

We broke the huddle. I went onto the court and stood exactly in front of the basket; beyond the free throw arc; 21 feet from the basket. I could barely shoot the ball 21 feet! The ball came to me. Without hesitation, I jumped and let the ball fly towards the hoop.

As I just said, I could barely shoot the ball 21 feet. This shot was no different. It was online, but clanged on the front of the rim. But it clanged on the *upper front* of the rim, barely climbed over it and fell, exhausted, into the net. Marshall ahead, 20–17!

Pierce never got closer than three points again and we won 28–21. I was the game's leading scorer with nine points. I had two games later in the year in which I played very badly and scored only one point in each game. (Thank goodness somebody was foolish enough to foul me; in my 65 game career I was never held scoreless.) But those were road games and my classmates never saw them.

As a result of my big game against Pierce many of my classmates came up to me later that year and said, "Bob, you are the best player on the team!" I could only laugh and say, "That is absurd." Kids thought I was being modest. I most certainly was not.

Mr. Riehl was an amazing coach and person. I am certain that he helped hundreds, perhaps thousands, of kids grow through playing basketball. I will always feel indebted to him.

Recently, I communicated with Mr. Riehl via email and the first thing he asked me was whether I remembered the basketball drills he had us run. This is so typical of Mr. Riehl: he was always playing the *long game* rather than the *short game*; i.e., he was interested in our long term growth rather than short term success. Let me give an example of what I mean.

My son Roger was an amazingly good soccer player. He began playing (and I began coaching him) when he was in second grade. If you have ever seen elementary school children play soccer you know that one of their natural characteristics is to run at the point where the ball lies. This is fine and I have no problem with it. What I object to are the coaches who *teach* elementary school kids to rush at the ball. I object to this because it is a technique which has a short half-life; i.e., before long it will need to be unlearned. (Watch any good soccer game at the high school level or higher; nobody runs around rushing the ball.) Mr. Riehl never taught us techniques that would soon lose their relevance; he was always focused on our learning the important skills of basketball, even though they weren't *sexy*.

Before I get back to Marshall basketball, my fatherly pride requires I tell you a brief story about Roger when he was approximately ten years of age.

We lived next door to an elementary school and, beginning at a very early age, Roger would

visit it frequently and kick a ball against its wall for hours on end. Thus, as early as second grade, Roger had an amazingly hard kick.

We were playing a team whose coach was constantly yelling at his players to charge the ball. (It is amazing how many soccer coaches and parents advocate mindless *hustling*.) So, here is the play. The ball is on the ground. Roger is six feet from the ball, approaching it with the aim of kicking it as far down the field as possible. The nearest opponent, Tommy, is approximately 10 yards downfield from where the ball lies. The opposing coach is yelling, “Get the ball, Tommy.” Obediently, Tommy sets off at full speed, running directly towards the ball. Roger is focused on the ball and does not see a mad-boy running towards it. At the moment Roger’s foot hits the ball, Tommy is perhaps seven feet away. The ball explodes off Roger’s foot and, microseconds later, smashes full force into Tommy’s face. At which point the ball bounces off to the side and out-of-bounds and Tommy falls flat on the ground. Fortunately, though dazed, there is no sign that Tommy is seriously hurt and he staggers to his feet.

Meanwhile, Tommy’s idiot coach has run across the field and gotten in my face. “Look what your player did! He shouldn’t be allowed to play like that!” he shouted.

“Hmmm,” I replied, “A soccer player should not kick the ball? Perhaps you should stop telling your players to charge the ball.”

As I said, fortunately Tommy seemed to be ok and the situation was rapidly defused.

After we beat Pierce, our record was 5–0 and grew to 9–0 before our final game rematch with them. Mr. Riehl was concerned with our improvement and realized that kids on an undefeated team could get *full of themselves* and think that no improvement was needed. Coach scheduled two scrimmages to prevent this from happening.

We scrimmaged a team in neighboring Livonia that was not a member of our league. I don’t remember much about the team or the scrimmage—for example, whether or not there was a clear winner—but the Livonia team did have a star player who was quite good. Afterward, Coach told us that this boy would go home after practice, shovel the snow off his driveway—we were led to believe there was snow on his driveway *every day*—turn on the outside light and practice. Coach’s message was clear: you might think you are good, but there are other good players who are practicing as we speak.

Our second scrimmage was against the ninth grade team from River Rouge. I will tell you much more about River Rouge when I relate my high school basketball experiences in later chapters. For now, let me simply say that Rouge’s team was very good and all black. For me, and, I suspect, for all of my teammates, this was my first up-close experience with black people. I was definitely freaked out at playing these guys and we were soundly beaten. As you will read later, this loss was largely revenged in later years.

For our final game of the season, we traveled to Pierce. As I described above, the first Pierce game was, by far, my best game of the year. By contrast, I was not very good in our final game of the year.

The game was down to its last few seconds; we held the lead at 43–42, but Pierce had the ball. We were playing a zone defense to prevent the ball from being passed to Gary Schulte, who was positioned near the basket. In addition, it is difficult to penetrate a zone for a really easy shot, such as a lay-up. Against a zone, Pierce would need to hit a long shot to beat us. We were, of course,

most worried that Reggie would get the ball and score to win the game.

My job in the zone required me to guard anyone who shot from the left wing or the left corner. A Pierce player dribbled into the area of the left wing and I moved to prevent him from having an uncontested shot. He passed the ball to John J, who was standing alone in the left corner. I had never noticed John J before and, hence, quickly decided that he wasn't much of a threat. I stood there, barely six feet away from him, as I watched John J launch an uncontested jump shot.

In the 51 years since I stood there and watched John J shoot, I have often wondered, "If I had given 100% effort, lunged to my right and leapt high into the air, could I have blocked the shot? Or would I have been called for committing a foul and been forced to watch John J make the game-winning free throws?" In other words, if I had acted would I have been the hero or the goat?

Of course, I will never know because I did not act. (In my earlier imagery, this was an example in which my nervousness won out over my excitement.) As I stood there, not acting, only watching John J's surprisingly excellent form, I saw the ball swish through the net, ending Marshall's perfect season.

Our perfect season actually ended a few seconds later. After John J's basket, we inbounded the ball, Barry drove the length of the court and buried a perfect jump shot. Sadly, Barry had shuffled his feet before he got the shot off. In today's NBA, there would have been no call and we would have remained undefeated, but in 1964 in South Redford traveling was still being called by referees.

Barry was a *man* about it and admitted that he took steps. In all of the excitement, nobody but I seemed to realize that it was entirely my fault that we had lost the game.

Chapter 18

Geri Wardrop Pearce

The title of this chapter is not quite accurate. Shortly after her birth, my sister was named Geraldine Wardrop, with no middle name. She really hated the name Geraldine. Her only consolation was that the other possible names being considered by my parents were Gertrude and Prudence. Really? These were the only names they could think of? Given the bizarre set of names considered for my sister, how did I end up being Robert? My typical class in school had 15 girls and 15 boys, five of whom—all boys—were named Robert. In my entire life, I have never met another Geraldine; the high point for Geraldines in my life was 1984, when Geraldine Ferraro was the Democratic Party's candidate for vice-president.

Eventually, Geraldine officially or unofficially became Geri, which is the name of her grave-stone. My dear sister died in July, 2002, and I miss her very much.

My sister was five and one-half years older than I and, after we moved to Nathaline, six years ahead of me in school. As a result, we did not interact a huge amount during my childhood. She graduated from Thurston in June, 1961, and was married and out of the house for good on February 2, 1963.

As I mentioned earlier, Geri was a brilliant and precocious preschooler. Reportedly, family and friends all loved and spoiled her. (*Spoiled* was my mother's description; it is my position that pretty much minimal attention was labeled *spoiling* by her.) Let's just say that pre-school Geri was much loved and received a great deal of attention.

Reportedly, Geri was a very good student at Vetal. In addition, our father would spend time with her, including taking her to professional sporting events. After all, Bob was still a preschooler and not a very attractive companion for Harold. After the family moved to Nathaline, however, Geri's life changed drastically.

In September, 1955, 11 and one-half (ok, two-thirds) year-old Geri was jumped forward one-half grade and entered Thurston High School as a seventh grader. (Neither junior high school in South Redford had yet opened.) She was placed in a huge school run by 17 year-olds, where she knew absolutely nobody. This trauma at school coincided with my father losing interest in her. While Harold did not play with children, he was obsessed with sports and by September, 1955, little Bobby was old enough to learn to play catch and almost old enough to replace his sister at sporting events. Our mother? Sadly, Helen was never able or willing to provide any emotional support to her children. "Do you feel bad, Bobby (or Geri)? Yes? Then I will bake you a cake."

One of the things Geri needed when we lived on Nathaline was a cat. Sadly, however, our father hated cats and we were not allowed to have one. We did, however, twice have a dog. The first dog was a beagle. I don't remember its name, but I remember that when I was approximately age seven, it came to the house as a full grown dog. Well, as full grown as beagles ever get.

I am sure that the dog came from Crick Swan, because our father worshiped Crick who was the owner of lots of beagles. Crick used them for hunting; I didn't know what kind of hunting, but our beagle excelled at rolling around in mud until he (yes, I remember it was a boy dog) was filthy. Nobody in our household became very attached to Mr. Beagle, but I recall that Geri seemed to like him.

A few months after Mr. Beagle had come to live with us, we went on a two-week family vacation. When we returned, Mr. Beagle was gone.

"Where did he go?" I asked. After all, the disappearance of Mr. Beagle seemed eerily similar to the fate of Petey the Bear.

"Well," my parents replied, "We left him in the yard and, see this hole under the gate, we think he escaped through it."

Really? Even as a small child I knew that this was a ridiculous story. Leave a dog alone in a yard for two weeks? A beagle? Have you ever heard a beagle howl?

Approximately one year later we got a puppy. I remember that Geri really loved this puppy, a mutt, and she named her Penny. We had great fun with Penny for about one year and then she died. Our parents told us that she had died of distemper. No autopsy was performed, so I really don't know what happened to Penny. I know that Penny's demise was very hard on Geri and years later when she was an adult, she named her dog Penny. This latter Penny received its shots.

My parents never encouraged Geri's academic development at Thurston; after all, in their minds a girl-child just needed an office job until she became a housewife and mother, hopefully in that order. Because of her skipping the second half of sixth grade, Geri was not yet 17.5 years of age when she graduated from high school. Our parents' attitude (and by our parents' I mean our father's) was that when a child was 18 years of age or had graduated high school, whichever came first, they should be "Kicked out of the house."

The only alternative to being *kicked out* was to pay a hefty amount for room-and-board, which was the option Geri chose. Geri graduated high school in June, 1961. There were no trips with girlfriends to exotic places; there was just a job, 40 hours per week, in the office of Detroit Ball Bearing Company. At some point she started dating John (Jack) Pearce, four years her senior and a veteran of the US Navy. (Thank goodness; thus, Jack never had to worry about going to Vietnam.) Jack and Geri married on February 2, 1963, when she was barely 19 years-old.

Jack and Geri visited us on Long Lake in Summer, 1963, and I have a strong memory of them walking the beach and kissing a lot. I don't remember seeing them kiss again, although they were married until Geri died in July, 2002. Well, at least they kept the romance going for five months!

I adored Jack as a brother-in-law. He was and is a really nice person and an amazing mechanic. He and Geri tried to help me learn to drive, but because their car was a stick shift, the best I could do was bounce down the street, three feet at-a-time until I gave up. (Jack was relieved when I quit trying.)

One day in the summer of 1963 when I was 14 years-old, Jack and Geri picked me up to spend the day with them. “Do you want to see a movie about a French prostitute?” my sister asked me, with a big smile on her face.

My father had trained me well to never ask a question, so I replied, “Sure,” even though I had absolutely no idea what I was agreeing to.

Was a French prostitute animal, vegetable or mineral? I had no idea. After all, I had heard of Italian marble and French toast; were either of these similar to a French prostitute? Was this movie going to be a comedy? A war film? A mystery? What? I started to worry.

“What’s the name of this movie,” I asked, “You know, in case I’ve already seen it.”

“Irma la Douce,” my sister replied, quickly saying the three words, none of which I had ever heard in my life!

“What?” I thought, “What the hell did she just say to me? I better keep quiet.” After a lengthy silence, I replied, “That’s ok; I haven’t seen it yet but I read a good review and it sounds interesting,”

Well, I watched the movie. I found that the French prostitute was a woman played by an actress named Shirley MacClaine, whose character’s name was Irma. I had no idea at the time that *la Douce*—which is French for *the sweet*—was funny because of its similarity to the word *douche*.

Later in life I would decide that Shirley MacClaine had some rather odd beliefs and possessed only moderate acting skills; but at age 14, I was enthralled. She made me imagine Shirley—note the name—Busetto all grown up. In the movie, she had the prettiest hair and a lovely smile. She wore this amazing dress that reached to her ankles, had long sleeves, a high neckline and a high back. (Throw in a large pair of sunglasses and a big hat and this dress would have been ideal attire for fishing with my mother.) The incredible thing about this dress is that it had an amazing zipper; after approximately two seconds of unzipping by Shirley, the dress would fall to the floor leaving her standing there in nothing but panties and a much needed bra. (Close your eyes Bob!)

An extremely shy French policeman, named Nestor and played by Jack Lemon, was in love with Irma, but never kissed her because he wanted to marry her. (Huh?) Nestor disguised himself as a rich old man named Lord X who would give Irma massive amounts of money so that she wouldn’t need any other Johns. (What is a John?) But as her John, Lord X also never kissed Irma because he was saving her for Nestor, who was, after all Lord X. It was very zany, which was Hollywood-speak for nonsensical and confusing.

When Lord X ran short of money, Irma would don her magic dress and quickly befriend some strange man and take him to her room. What did Irma do with these men in her room? I had no idea what happened behind the door because it was left to the viewer’s imagination, this being 1963.

My guess was that Irma demonstrated her zipper to the man and my conclusion was that a prostitute is a salesperson; in Irma’s case for a novelty zipper company. Well, the previous sentence was what I decided to tell my parents if they ever learned that I had seen the movie. After seeing the movie I had some idea—no details, just vague notions—of what a prostitute was. Asleep at night, I dreamt of Irma/Shirley often.

On June 26, 1964, Karen, the first child for Geri and Jack, was born. **On July 10, 1969**, James (Jim) their second and last child was born. Over the years, Geri frequently remarked to me, “Karen

is five years older than Jim, just like you and me.” I did not get as excited as she did about this remarkable similarity.

As my senior year of basketball unfolded, Karen, aged only 30 months, would attend our home games, dressed like a cheerleader and yell loudly—Karen has never had difficulty in being heard—“Go unc-Bob, Go unc-Bob!” She was quite adorable.

Karen was 10 and Jim was only five when I moved to Wisconsin in 1974 and our relationship has been long distance, but warm. Jack was and is quite tall, 76 inches as I recall. Geri was tall too, 69 inches. Both of their children are very tall, Jim at 78 inches and Karen at 71 inches.

Jim has grown up to be an excellent mechanic, as his father was. While Jack chose the standard career for his age group in Detroit—he worked at the Detroit Diesel factory—Jim has taken many chances in life. In addition to serving as a volunteer firefighter in Howell, Michigan, Jim has worked as a carpenter, a handyman and for several years now has been a team leader (mechanic) for a NASCAR racing team.

Karen inherited her mother Geri’s extroversion. As of today, Karen has 688 facebook friends and a similarly impressive number of real-world friends. Karen is a leading citizen in Howell, known, trusted and beloved by many, perhaps most, of its citizens and married to one of the best husbands in Michigan, perhaps the entire world, Troy Clark. Karen’s work has focused on food service—waitress and cook. Her part-time job and hobby was caring for my mother, her grandmother Helen until she passed away at age 93 in December, 2014.

As a boy, Jim was always tall for his age, which caused his grandfather, Harold, to have many dreams of his future athletic achievements. Sadly for Harold, Jim showed little aptitude for, and even less interest in, sports. Jim always loved machines, just like his own father. Fortunately, because I had disappointed my father so much with my athletic career, Harold got over Jim’s lack of achievements in sports rather quickly.

After Karen was born, Jack and Geri purchased a small house in North Redford township. Then came the *big bussing scare of 1969*. After the Detroit race riots in 1967, political and judicial leaders in the tri-county area—Wayne, Oakland and MacComb counties—realized that something had to be done about the blatant racial segregation in the greater Detroit area. As a result, sometime in 1969 a judge decided that school children would be bussed all over the tri-county area—which was geographically huge—to achieve racial balance in the schools. Because of the severity of the segregation, it was obvious that many children would be spending many hours per day on a schoolbus.

Geri and Jack panicked. It would be inaccurate to conclude that Geri was a racist; indeed, she was, in later years, very supportive of the interracial harmony. (I am not condemning Jack with silence; I am simply unaware of his feelings on this issue.) I sincerely believe that what motivated them was a fear of having Karen spending much of her childhood riding a bus. As a result, they quickly sold their house in Redford and bought a house just over the Livingston County line in Howell. They were not alone; the population of Livingston County in general and Howell in particular exploded in 1969 and subsequent years. Many racists did migrate to Howell and, in later years, it pained Geri very much to live in a community with so many racists.

By the way, the decision to have massive bussing of children to achieve racial balance in the schools in the tri-county area was never initiated.

A few years later when my father retired from the factory, my parents built a house a few miles beyond Howell. My parents would never admit that they moved to Fowlerville to be near Geri and her family; it “Just happened.” My mother was not alone in that marriage in being reluctant to take responsibility for decisions.

I will return to the stories of Geri, Jack, Karen and Jim much later in this document, after I have finished high school.

Chapter 19

Teach Your Children

I have borrowed the title of Graham Nash's famous song for the name of this chapter. If you are unfamiliar with the song, go to:

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/crosbystillsnashyoung/teachyourchildren>.

and read its lyrics. Or, if you prefer, listen to it at:

<http://www.youtube.com/>.

My parents did not believe in teaching their children. They simply did not want to get involved. Their style was to make pronouncements that were to be mindlessly obeyed. The most vivid example of this phenomenon was told to me by my sister Geri when we were both adults.

"Do you know how Mother told me the facts of life?" she asked me, as we sat over coffees at a chain restaurant; perhaps *Perkins*, perhaps *Big Boy's*. Such restaurants were a favorite locale for Geri and me to commiserate about our childhoods.

"Uh, no," I replied uncomfortably.

"I was sitting in the bath tub, well, taking a bath and, without knocking, Mom burst into the room. Closing the door behind her and averting her eyes, Mom pointed to below my waist. 'When you start to bleed there, don't worry about it.' She then left the bathroom."

After a few moments of silence, I replied, "Wow, I can't really top that story!"

This was the only story of parental teaching that Geri ever shared with me. Thus, the remainder of this short chapter will present a few stories of mine. Stories of my parents' avoidance of teaching me religion, swimming and driving.

I will begin with a story that perhaps will make some of my adult friends envious. (I am thinking primarily of a subset of those who describe themselves as *recovering Catholics*.)

I received zero religious training as a child. I am not exaggerating: zero. In my childhood world:

- *Jesus Christ* was something my father would shout when, for example, he hit his thumb with a hammer.

- *Holy Moses* was something my father would say whenever something really surprising happened.

I was quite old before I realized that Jesus and Moses were actual people.

- The *Catholic Church* was an evil organization that my mother had to leave in order to marry my father. (Given that my grandmother, Suzi Wardrop, grew up in an Irish orphanage, I cut my father some slack on this one.)
- *Priests and ministers* were lumped together under the pejorative *preacher*. I didn't realize this one until, at age 22, my wife Debbie and I joined a church she had been attending. When she introduced me to the minister I said, "Nice to meet you, preacher." This did *not* go over well.
- *God damn you* and *God damn it* were things my father shouted if he was really angry with someone or with something that had happened.

Let me digress and mention that my father did not swear. Thus, he would say, "Holy Moses," rather than any of the more popular epithets that began with the word *Holy*. In fact, I recall my father saying the *F-word* only once in my life and, sadly, I cannot recall the occasion. When, at age 18, I took a summer job in the auto factory where my father worked, I learned that virtually every other worker used the F-word routinely and a few used it in nearly every sentence they uttered. Working for so long in such an environment, I was amazed at my father's avoidance of the word.

(By the way, for a hilarious take on the F-word, read the lyrics to *A Chat with Your Mother* by Peter Berryman:

<http://mainlynorfolk.info/peter.bellamy/songs/achatwithyourmother.html>.)

I graduated from Oakland University with a BA in Math and from the University of Michigan with a Ph.D. in Statistics. Neither of these accomplishments would have been possible, of course, if I had not graduated from Thurston High School. In order to graduate from Thurston, one had to pass physical education and in order to pass physical education, one had to be able to swim two lengths (50 yards) of the school's pool. When I entered Thurston in 1964 I could not swim.

I could not swim, in part, because my parents never tried to teach me to swim and never sent me to have lessons. To be fair, I never begged to be sent to have lessons, but I did ask my parents on several occasions to teach me to swim. The conversations I remember went as follows:

- Me: I want to learn how to swim.
- My parents, in unison: Why?
- Me: Look around us. We are at a cottage on Long Lake in northern Michigan. We come here every summer for two weeks. There are acres of lake out there. If I fall out of the fishing boat, I will die.
- My parents: So, don't fall out of the boat.

- Me: Swimming looks like fun.
- My parents: Swimming isn't necessary.
- Me: Won't you please teach me to swim?
- My parents: No.
- Me: (After thinking for a moment) Wait a minute. Can either of you swim?
- My parents: Of course we can.
- Me: But I've never seen either of you swim.
- My parents: We don't like to swim. Plus, we have never fallen out of the fishing boat, so why should we swim?

At this point, I gave up. After all, I was a Wardrop and perhaps I could deal with this problem by avoiding falling out of boats.

To summarize, my parents did not teach me about religion and did not teach me how to swim. They also did not teach me the facts of life, but because there was no bleeding involved, I received even less instruction than Geri had. My final story about their lack of teaching involves my learning to drive a car.

When it suited, my father could be the greatest advocate of the rule of law. I pleaded with him, "Teach me to drive."

"No. It's against the law for you to drive without a license."

"Then take me to a big parking lot, on a Sunday, when it's empty and let me practice."

"No. It's against the law for you to drive without a license."

Whatever argument I could dream of was met with, "No. It's against the law for you to drive without a license." As a result, I was probably the only child in the state of Michigan who attended Driver's Ed without having ever driven a car.

Driver's Ed was provided free at Thurston High School, but the class met after school and conflicted with my basketball practice. My father wanted me to be a great basketball player and, hence, very generously agreed to pay for my lessons at a private institution, *The Wall Driving School*.

The course was taught in the evenings by a teacher from Thurston, Mr. Alpine. Mr. Alpine was a good teacher as evidenced by the fact that I still remember the five rules of safe driving:

1. Aim high in steering.
2. Get the big picture.
3. Keep your eyes moving.
4. Cushion yourself with space.

And last, and most important, always

5. Leave yourself an out.

I don't know how much money Mr. Wall paid Mr. Alpine to teach our class, but it wasn't nearly enough. Let me describe the fifteen students in the class.

- A male nerdy strait-laced basketball playing math student.
- Twelve other 'boys.' Years later when I saw the post-apocalyptic motorcycle gang in the movie *Road Warrior*, I thought to myself, "So, this is what happened to the boys from my Driver's Ed class."
- Two beautiful girls from my high school, Linda and Sherry. Linda was the first girl in my school to have a baby—in ninth grade.

Mr. Alpine stood at the front of a classroom that had its entrance near the back of the room. The room had a center aisle, with four rows of large tables on each side. Usually two or three 'students' sat at each table. Not surprisingly for this group, the room filled from back to front; none of my classmates wanted to be teacher's pet and sit in the front row of tables.

We were about five minutes into the third class session and everyone had arrived except for our two girls. Linda and Sherry entered the room. Our two girls obviously had spent some time preparing for class—make-up was very popular with teenage girls in 1965—and were looking very good. Did I mention that they were both quite beautiful?

They sauntered up the aisle towards empty chairs in the first row. (If the empty chairs had been in the back row, I am certain that they would have walked to the front of the room before returning to the empty chairs.) One of my classmates leapt onto his table, crouched down, beat on the table with one hand while he leaned back and howled like a wolf as Linda and Sherry passed.

I have to say that Mr. Alpine handled the situation quite well. Screaming at our wolf-boy, he said "Get down off that table and shut-up! If you ever behave like that again, you are out of this class!" Then he turned to Linda and Sherry and shouted, "You two! If you ever again come to class looking like tramps or flounce down the aisle, you are out of here." (Note: I would **not** have used the pejorative *tramps*. I thought that the girls looked, well, pretty wonderful. It's possible that a 15 year-old boy sees the world differently than a 40 year-old teacher who is trying to keep control.)

Everybody settled down and we had no similar incidents in the remaining class sessions. What helped Mr. Alpine was the fact that he had 12 or 13 students who had never in their lives wanted to pass a course until they took Driver's Ed. As I recall, with passing Driver's Ed, one could get a driver's license at 16; without passing, the age was 18. Too many of my classmates would be in jail or prison before, at or soon after age 18. Thus, they really wanted to pass this class.

This brings us to my first day behind the wheel. In 1965 there were no driving simulators at *The Wall Driving School*; everything was done on the cheap. One Saturday afternoon I waited nervously in my home for the Driver's Ed car to arrive. The car pulled up to the curb in front of my house on Nathaline Street and I went out to it. The previous driver, a nice enough looking boy—not one of the 12 future inmates in Mr. Alpine's class—had climbed into the back seat. In the passenger seat was my teacher, who was not Mr. Alpine and whose name I don't recall; I will refer to him as Mr. DI, for driving instructor.

The Wall driving cars were regular cars. In particular, Mr. DI had neither a steering wheel nor brake pedal in front of him. It is not inaccurate to say that I probably could have killed all of us before Mr. DI could have reacted and taken action.

Upon entering the car, I noted that my luck was holding; the car was running. Thus, I could delay admitting that I had no idea how to start a car. If there is one thing I had learned in my life as a Wardrop, it was to delay anything unappealing. Mr. DI said to me, “Check your mirrors.”

I had no idea what he meant by this. I knew enough to realize that my truthful answer, “Yes, they are where they are supposed to be,” was not what he wanted to hear. Instead, I mumbled, “They are fine.” Did he notice that I had not looked into them?

“You may start driving now,” Mr. DI directed.

My driving career almost ended, literally, before it started. As I pulled away from the curb, Zoom!, a car sped past me, from behind, narrowly missing me. I began to understand the purpose of the car’s mirrors.

After our near-miss I started driving down Nathaline street. Fortunately, I had no difficulty keeping the car heading straight. (Aim high in steering.) As a result, the first 800 feet of my driving—thank you, google maps—went smoothly; well, except for the near-crash at the beginning. Then I came to a stop sign. The first turn of my career was to be a right-hand turn onto West Chicago Road.

I never learned why the road was called West Chicago. Yes, if you turned right onto it, you were headed west towards Chicago, but the street ended just 3.5 miles from Nathaline, which was 265 miles short of the city of Chicago.

West Chicago was a narrow two-lane paved road with two-way traffic, a 35 MPH speed limit and narrow dirt shoulders falling off into, you guessed it, ditches. I had not navigated a right turn in a four-wheeled vehicle since I had given up riding my miniature pedal-powered car at age six. In accordance with my future as a statistician, as I sat at the stop sign I decided to list, mentally, all possible outcomes of my right turn:

- I could *under-turn* which would result, at worst, in a head-on collision with a car traveling east.
- I could *over-turn* which would result, at worst, in my pointing in the correct direction, but stuck in the ditch.
- I could avoid both an under-turn and an over-turn, which would result in my traveling in the proper lane in the proper direction. As my son Roger would say, “That’s funny.”

So I tried for a subtle over-turn and succeeded, coming to rest on the shoulder of the road.

This time, using my mirrors—they were actually placed at the right angles for me; the boy cowering in the back seat was about my height—I safely navigated onto West Chicago and continued to drive the backseat-boy home. Unfortunately for him, it was a long journey to his home. Despite several near disasters, I was somehow able to get him there safely.

Mr. DI then directed me—you guessed it—to a large, mostly empty parking lot where he taught me how to make turns.

To summarize, it is not hyperbole to say that I almost died and innocent others almost died because of my father's refusal to take me to a parking lot to practice driving. I resented him for this attitude for a very long time.

By the way, in case you are thinking, "Hey, Bob! Lighten up! Your father was a man of principle," you might be interested in my little epilogue to this story.

In the summer of 2014, long after my father had died, I was talking with my mother. "Mom," I said, "I recall that you did not obtain your driver's license until you were in your forties. Why did you wait so long?"

"Well," she replied, "I had a bad experience driving when I was young."

"Tell me about it please," I requested.

"Well, I was 19 and your father was visiting me in Chicago and we had the following conversation."

- Harold: Do you want to drive my car?
- Helen: I don't think I should, Harold. I have never driven a car.
- Harold: That's OK. It's easy. I will help you.
- Helen: Perhaps we should go out of the city where there is less traffic.
- Harold: You worry too much Helen; just drive.

Shortly after my Mom started driving she saw a police officer, panicked and smashed the car into a street sign.

Somehow I managed to avoid screaming.

Chapter 20

The 1965 Basketball Season

Summer 1964 marked my transition from Marshall Junior High to Thurston High School. I wasn't worried about the transition academically, but I was very nervous about playing high school basketball. To help prepare myself, I enrolled in the week-long Thurston basketball camp, run by the varsity coach, Michael Pasternak.

For the next three years of my life, no two persons held more sway over my life than Coach Pasternak and the junior varsity coach, Dan Bennett. (Mr. Bennett also served as the assistant coach for the varsity.) I grew to love Mr. Bennett; I had mixed feelings about Mr. Pasternak. I admired Mr. Pasternak; I was grateful to him; I questioned his judgment (frequently), thinking he was often inadvertently unfair to certain players (I don't believe he was ever deliberately unfair); and always there was a bit of fear of him.

Our nickname for Coach was Boris, in honor of the popular-during-the-1960s author Boris Pasternak. More accurately, that was the story I planned to tell if Mr. Pasternak ever caught me calling him Boris. (He never did, thank God.) Personally, he reminded me a great deal of the famous scary actor, Boris Karloff.

Our Boris was a bear of a man. He must have been six feet two inches tall, 250 pounds with broad shoulders, a barrel chest and ample middle. I always had very strong legs, but could not develop any upper body strength. I always wondered how he could look on me favorably as an athlete when I was so totally different from him in body type. I attended three of his summer basketball camps, one before each of my seasons at Thurston.

What do I remember most about these summer camps? This is an easy question to answer: gutter ball. After the day's practice was finished, he let us go into the school swimming pool. Well, *let us* is not quite accurate. The first day he *let us*; after that he made us go to the pool, because I would have been much happier to be somewhere else. I do not believe I was unique in feeling this way.

To be sure, I suspect that some of my teammates enjoyed playing gutter ball—Don Block comes to mind. It would make sense that Don would enjoy gutter ball; he was a bear of a boy and he never laughed more hysterically than he did that day in 1967 on a class trip when he squashed me nearly to death on the Scrambler amusement park ride on Boblo Island.

"What was gutter ball?" you ask. It was played in the shallow end of the pool, fortunately, because in the summer of 1964 I could not swim and had recently had my near-drowning experience

in John Mutch's family pool. The sides of Thurston's pool had big gutters; about eight inches wide and eight inches deep. You can probably guess the purpose of the gutters; with 300+ kids in the pool during community open swim, there were a lot of waves and splashing. The gutters caught this agitated water and prevented it all being lost to the floor surrounding the pool.

Boris had rubber balls of approximately eight inches in diameter that were quite squishy. A gutter ball game consisted of two teams, with each defending an opposite side of the pool. Every day I would pray that I would be put on Boris' team and mostly I was. Why? Well, because Boris was the LeBron James of gutter ball and we were like little children. I was the worst of the little children, so in an attempt to make the game fair (Boris was always fair), he would usually put me on his team.

The supposed objective in gutter ball was to score a goal. A goal was scored whenever the rubber ball went into the gutter. Well, because the ball and the gutter had the same dimensions, it was almost impossible to *throw* the ball into the gutter. Not impossible; I believe that over my three years of playing gutter ball I had approximately two successes in 120 throws. The preferred way to score was to wade across the pool and slam the ball into the gutter. Meanwhile everyone on the other team would try to stop the ball-carrier; we didn't bite and only occasionally—roughly once every 90 seconds—scratched the ball-carrier. Well, suffice to say, Boris was not easy to stop. He would trudge across the pool with the ball held high above his head with one arm, while his other arm would fight off our futile attempts to either: knock the ball out of his hand or drag him under water. What fun for a boy with skinny arms!

There was never any doubt about the outcome. Boris' team would always win. He knew we couldn't stop him, but it was important to convince him that we were trying. I wasn't very convincing.

The school year finally arrived. The awesome 1964 basketball teams from Marshall and Pierce were joined at Thurston. Well, not entirely. You will recall that Marshall and Pierce had, combined, six very good players—Reggie Barringer, Gary Schulte and Paul Santangelo from Pierce and Barry Simescu, Don Block and Gary Smith from Marshall. The first casualty was Paul. Paul was a three sport star. Paul loved football and he loved baseball, but he loved music more than he loved basketball. Thus, Paul did not try out for the Thurston basketball teams; he spent his winter practicing and performing with his band. (They were very good.) Also, John Mutch continued to have knee problems and never played on a school basketball team after 9th grade.

In addition to the *fab five* players mentioned above, the tenth grade class included several other strong players from Marshall and Pierce, including Don Kopec, Rick Roe, Bob Rybka, Roger Steffen and myself. Thurston had a varsity team and a junior varsity team; approximately 24–28 players in a school of approximately 1700 kids, half of whom were boys. Frankly, I just hoped that I would make the team. I didn't even think about being a starter. The *fab five* would start and, if I made the team, I could only hope to be one of the top subs.

Well, a strange thing happened that opened up an opportunity for me. It was a combination of factors beyond my understanding at the time. Before I explain what happened, I need to talk about the 1964 Thurston varsity team.

In 1963, Thurston had finished in last place in something called the mid-Wayne league. (The metro Detroit area consisted of three counties: Wayne, Oakland and Macomb. And you guessed

it; Redford was in Wayne County.) In 1964, Thurston was one of five schools in the newly formed Northwest Suburban sports league. The other schools were Oak Park, Birmingham Groves, North Farmington and Livonia Franklin. In 1965, a new school, Westland John Glenn, would join the conference, making it a six team league.

The Northwest Suburban was a very strange collection of schools. Oak Park was the *Jewish city* on the north border of Detroit. Birmingham Groves was one of two high schools from a nouveau rich community on the northwest boundary of Detroit. Thurston was located in South Redford, sitting on the west boundary of Detroit. The remaining schools were farther-out suburbs, with Farmington the most affluent; Livonia and Westland were close behind and similar to each other. South Redford was lower middle class and blue collar; even compared to Livonia and Westland.

Having Groves and Thurston in the same league was strange. Our fathers worked in the auto factories and their fathers ran the auto companies and even *going into* a factory was beneath them. In addition, of the six suburban communities in the league, all but Oak Park were segregated. The unofficial position in Redford, Birmingham, Livonia, Westland and Farmington was that the communities would be destroyed if any blacks were allowed to live there. Do you think I exaggerate? If so, reread my story (see page 98) of the petition to the School Board about hiring an African-American teacher.

In 1964, Thurston and North Farmington had tied for first place, each with a league record of seven wins and one loss. Early in the year, on its home court, North Farmington had narrowly defeated Thurston. Later in the year, Thurston routed North Farmington 80-46.

Entering the 1965 season, Thurston had a lot of optimism. They appeared to be the strongest team in the league, with North Farmington and Birmingham Groves close behind. Thurston had two strong returning players, both seniors—John Page, a guard/forward, and Rich Stefani, a forward/center. If pre-season all conference teams had existed in 1965, John and Rich would have been placed on the first team. On the other hand, beyond John and Rich, the senior class players at Thurston were weak. Also, the 1964 team had a really good player named Jerry Samuelian who had graduated. (I believe that he held the single game scoring record for Thurston, 38 points.) In addition, although the junior class included two excellent players—Randy Samelson and Gary Knock—and several good players, Boris did not seem to appreciate its potential. As a result of all of this, Coach Pasternak made a surprising roster choice to start the season.

After a few days of tryouts, the varsity and junior varsity rosters were posted. A number of boys did not make either team and the big surprise: two sophomores, Gary Schulte and Barry Simescu, were on the varsity. This did not work out well. Gary was unprepared emotionally for the pressure of playing varsity and Barry, well, despite being placed on varsity as a sophomore, rarely played.

Obviously, with the assignment of Gary and Barry to the varsity, the fab five tenth graders became the talented three, creating an opportunity for me. Thus, when the 1965 season began, I was a starting guard on Thurston's junior varsity team and Reggie Barringer was the other starting guard. At this point, I need to make an embarrassing admission. I really can't remember who the other three starters were.

I know that Don Block was a starter, but I don't recall whether he was playing forward, center or both. I recall that Gary Smith played a great deal, as did the only junior on the JV, Rob Szymanski; they were both front court players. The JV team had great success in 1965; I recall that it lost only

three games—I might be wrong on this, but can't check because records are nonexistent for the JV.

My first game on JV was a home game and we beat Berkley (a suburb of Detroit, not the city near San Francisco) by the score of 52–50, which, coincidentally, was the same score by which our varsity lost its opening game to Berkley.

As I recall, we had a 51–50 lead when, with three seconds remaining in the game, Reggie was fouled. It was a common foul before the bonus. In 1965, such a foul resulted in one free throw attempt; nowadays, it results in a side-out.

Reggie made his free throw and Berkley had the ball out, with three seconds to pass the ball in, traverse the length of the court and throw up a desperation shot for a tie. (There was no three point line in the 1960s.)

Thus, victory seemed reasonably secure. Except that the time keeper, one of Thurston's teachers, was so excited that he forgot to turn the clock on and Berkley had about 15 seconds to set up its last shot. Fortunately, even with the extra time, they failed to score. Hooray! I had won my first high school basketball game. I don't recall how I played, neither great nor horribly, I presume. I had scored six points.

Our next two games in December were victories over Assumption of Windsor, Canada, and North Farmington. I scored only four points in the first of these games, but achieved (to that point in time) my career high of 14 points against North Farmington.

The varsity, meanwhile, was having trouble. They were destroyed by Assumption, 61–33, but then rebounded to beat North Farmington, at home, by three points.

Our fourth game was at Groves. The varsity lost by seven points and the JV lost its first game of the season. I scored 12 points against Groves, but we lost by nine points. This turned out to be the closest I ever came to winning at Groves. The great paradox of my high school basketball career was: How was it that the school district that was, by far, the wealthiest had, again by far, the worst gymnasium for basketball? The lighting was horrible and they had these ridiculous little fan shaped backboards. We played games and scrimmaged in some of the poorest neighborhoods in the Detroit area, and no place had a court as bad as the one at Groves.

We ended the pre-Christmas portion of our schedule by beating Troy at home, a game in which I scored eight points. Troy's varsity clobbered our team by the score of 69–44. This is a big loss to suffer at home!

Boris had some connection with the downriver basketball programs, but I never knew what it was. A consequence of this, however, was that every year for three days between Christmas and New Year's Eve, Thurston, both varsity and JV, would play in the River Rouge Christmas tournament.

River Rouge was coached by a legend—Lofton Greene. With Greene as head coach, River Rouge won the state of Michigan Class B (2nd highest behind Class A, in which Thurston played, in the state tournament) boys' basketball championship in 1954, 1955, 1959, 1961–65, and 1969–72. Twelve state championships in 19 years, including one run of five consecutive titles and another run of four consecutive titles. In addition, Rouge was the state runner-up in 1958 and 1966.

We had a good JV team in 1965 and we easily won our first and last games in the River Rouge Christmas tournament, with me scoring eight points in each of them. In the semifinals, we played the host school. I recognized some of their players as the same kids who had thrashed us one

year earlier in a scrimmage at Marshall. Perhaps they recognized us too and, consequently, were over-confident. But they had not seen Reggie the previous year and black players were no longer a mystery to the rest of us. We played great and with two minutes left in the game, we led by nine points. I scored my (then) career high of 16 points. I have no memory of those last two minutes and how I played. A bit like a car-wreck-induced amnesia, perhaps, because when the final horn sounded, we had lost.

The varsity had less success in the Christmas tournament. In its first game it defeated Northville by 10 points. This put us in a semifinal game versus the host school. Reportedly, the center for River Rouge could dunk from the free throw line and the entire team was amazing. Recall, from above, that the 1965 River Rouge team would go on to win the school's fifth consecutive state title. The final score was: River Rouge 87, Thurston 43. In the game for third-place the following evening, Thurston lost to Monroe by nine points.

I would have **hated** to play for Thurston against that River Rouge varsity team. And I would have especially hated it if I had had to play center. Now that I mention it, the center on Thurston's varsity team was Mike Shaner. Mike was a good guy; he stood six feet, four inches tall; he had a football player's build (he played line); he was not particularly athletic and not much of a jumper. But he was a good sport about it. He did the grunt work; grabbing rebounds, boxing out, committing fouls, so that John and Rich could grab some glory. Personally, I think that Mike deserved a medal, if not a parade, for even *playing* against River Rouge. Boris did not, however, have a medal in mind for Mike.

At the first practice after the Christmas break I was, well, practicing, when the varsity players exited a room in which Coach Pasternak had provided the mid-season review of the team. John and Rich left looking upset. Mike was absolutely fuming. What had Coach said? I don't know the details, but, based on what Coach said one year later—when I was most definitely in the room—I have a pretty good idea.

The bottom line is that Coach criticized Mike's play and he quit the team. How could anyone criticize a football player after what Mike must have endured at River Rouge?

In the aftermath of the *Monday afternoon massacre* Reggie was promoted to varsity. Our next game was at home against Glenn, a woeful team with no senior class, and the varsity cruised to an easy victory, 103–47.

Here is a fact about high school basketball in the 1960s. If you scored 99 points and won, that was great. If you scored 100 points and won, that was a gazillion times better. Everybody's dream was to score 100 points in a game.

After moving to varsity, Reggie tells me he started every game. (Being on JV, we were still getting cleaned up when the varsity game began.) He had a very solid season, averaging almost eight points per game on varsity.

After Reggie moved to varsity, Bob Rybka was promoted to first string. For one of the few times in my career, I was the go-to guard. I blossomed in my new role. And I loved playing along side Bob, with whom I was developing a strong friendship.

During tenth grade I suffered a rash of sprained thumbs. Basketball is a fast game and I would stick my hand into the action and before I knew it, my thumb would get bent back and I would be in great pain. And once the thumb is weakened in such a way, it is even easier to injure it again.

As the Glenn game approached, Coach Bennett knew it would be an easy game, so he decided to tape the thumb on my right hand—the offending thumb and my dominant hand—so tightly that I could not move it. It was literally impossible for me to shoot or do much of anything with my right hand. Despite this handicap I desperately wanted to play and Coach B let me. I managed to play pretty well on defense and even scored two points on a left-handed lay-up. The following night we beat Cherry Hill and, despite my thumb being taped again, I managed to score eight points.

Our next game was at Franklin and my thumb woes were now behind me. For the first time in my career I broke the 20 point barrier, scoring 22 points. (Yes, I probably paid too much attention to how many points I scored!)

At the end of the Christmas tournament, the year was looking pretty bleak for the varsity basketball team. Its record was only two wins and six defeats, with three of the defeats blowouts. The first three games in January were much better. As reported above, there was the 56 point margin of victory over Glenn, which was followed by an 11 point victory over Cherry Hill and a 14 point victory at Franklin. The season record was now 5–6 and the league record was 3–1.

The next week found us visiting Oak Park. The Oak Park JV team was really bad. By the end of the first quarter we had a solid lead and I had scored five points. In the huddle between the first and second quarter, Coach Bennett said, “Kopec, you go in for Wardrop.” The remaining four starters and Don Kopec played the entire second quarter and we went to the half with a very large lead. I sat on the bench the entire second quarter, aching to get back into the game.

At halftime, Coach said, “The starting five will begin the second half, but after two or three minutes, they will come out of the game and everyone else will get a chance to play.”

“What?” I was enraged, though I kept quiet. Don Block, Bob Rybka and the other two starters had played 16 minutes. I had played eight minutes! Where was the fairness in this!

Aside: Yes, this was not my finest moment. In beginning this document I had to decide whether I would present my life honestly or if I would photo-shop it to make me look always heroic. I am trying for honesty and I hope that I am achieving, although I believe intellectually that total honesty about ourselves is not possible.

My attitude was very selfish. I had friends on the second and third string and they deserved a chance to play. They certainly worked hard at practice to help the first string become better. But I wasn’t thinking about the bench players. I was thinking of how coach had separated me from the other starters and was treating me worse. I also ignored the fact that in the previous game, against Franklin, I had had my chance to shine and now it was someone else’s turn.

Nevertheless, I vowed to show Coach Bennett!

The second half began and I was back on the floor. Every time an Oak Park player with the ball got close to me, I would steal the ball and drive down the court for a lay-up. In the two minutes and 33 seconds I remained in the game, I stole the ball four times and scored eight points. My stat line for the game: 10 minutes and 33 seconds played, 13 points. And I was still angry.

One year later I would become similarly angry with Boris and played at a level far beyond my usual abilities. One thing has always stuck with me about these incidents:

- Why didn’t either coach—Boris or Dan—figure out that getting me angry was a good tactic?

The varsity lost at Oak Park by 10 points and then at North Farmington by nine points. With a league record of 3-3, any thoughts of repeating as league champion were gone.

Our game against North Farmington was a loss. This was a team we had beaten back in December on our home court. I always played well at the North Farmington gym, this time scoring 16 points, but we lost. Perhaps our earlier victory made us overconfident or perhaps it inspired our opponent. In any event, this loss really bummed out Don Block and me. The JV team at Groves reportedly was undefeated in league and with our second league loss, there was no reasonable hope of catching them. In fact, Groves was coming to Thurston the following Friday night, which would give us our chance for revenge. Indeed, we had been so excited for so many weeks about our rematch with Groves, that perhaps our sin had been to *look past* our game with North Farmington.

After the North Farmington game, Barry Simescu—presumably tired of not playing—asked Boris to go back to JV and Boris granted the request. Heading into the Groves game, the addition of Barry was a huge psychological boost to me. After all, Groves had handled us earlier when the best tenth grader—Reggie—was on our team; how could we beat them without Reggie? Barry was still an excellent player and his addition made us much stronger.

I was excited about the upcoming game when Coach Bennett called Don Block and me aside. “Do you boys want to go up to varsity?” I thought about Coach’s question. Don appeared to be thinking about it. I said, “I appreciate the offer, but I want to beat the Groves JV this Friday.” Don said, “I agree.” Thus, Don and I delayed moving to varsity for one week.

Barry and I had not played together for almost a year. One year earlier Barry was the star of an almost undefeated team and I was its fifth man. Now Barry was joining a team on which I was the star guard. Thankfully, Barry Simescu, first string quarterback on the varsity as a sophomore, knew about teams and knew about integrity. A lesser person would have said, “Hey, I was on varsity; this is my show now!” But perhaps because of all the drama of the previous months—I don’t for a moment think that Barry ever *wanted* to be on varsity as a sophomore—Barry made it clear that this was our team and he would do whatever we needed to help.

Our game with Groves was ugly. Neither team could shoot worth a damn. I was high scorer with 16 points, but did not shoot well. With 10 seconds left in the game, the score was in the forties and we clung to a one-point lead. Groves was shooting a free throw. On the left side of the lane, lined-up were: closest to the basket, a forgotten Thurston player, probably Don or Gary; Craig Love, Groves’ 78 inch tall sophomore center; and then me. As expected for this game, the free throw missed, clanging off the back of the rim sailing far and in my direction. It flew way beyond the forgotten Thurston player. It flew almost beyond Craig’s outstretched hand; stretching back awkwardly, he was able to get his right hand on the ball. I leapt high and, with two hands, ripped the ball out of Love’s hand.

What was I to do? I was so nervous and excited and there were still 10 seconds to play. I did not want to shoot a free throw! Thus, I needed to get rid of the ball!

I dribbled out of traffic and saw Barry down-court. “Let him figure it out!” I thought as I passed the ball ahead to him. Barry dribbled out the remaining time and we had won! Definitely my most satisfying game of the 1965 season!

After the Groves game, Don and I were promoted to the varsity. We should have been on varsity for five games, but on the last weekend of the regular season there was a big snowstorm and the Friday night game against Oak Park and the Saturday night game against cross-township rival Redford Union were both canceled. The state tournament began the following Tuesday; thus,

there was no opportunity to reschedule these two games.

My experience on varsity consisted of three games. First, we played at Glenn, a team with no seniors that the varsity had beaten 103–47 in early January right after Reggie had been promoted to varsity. Somehow, Coach Pasternak had decided that the starting five for 1966 would be Gary Knock, Randy Samelson, Reggie Barringer, Don Block and me. I have no idea how he reached this decision. I was one year removed from being the weakest starter on Marshall's team and I was being handed a starting job on varsity? Boris started the five of us against Glenn and we didn't do very well. I have no idea how my four teammates performed; I just know that I was super nervous. I remember that I had an attempted lay-up blocked, the only shot of mine that was ever blocked during my career. (This might be a false memory.) I scored two points,

After the *designated five* had played—none too gloriously—Coach went to a more normal player rotation and we won seven points; quite a change from the 56 point victory five weeks earlier.

The next weekend we beat Franklin at home by five points and, mercifully, I did not start the game. I came off the bench and scored five points. The following weekend was the snowstorm and the resultant cancellations. In the middle of the next week, we had our first state tournament game versus Walled Lake on their court and we lost badly, 92–64. My one memory of the game was that when I entered, I was thrown the ball in the back-court and, with no opponent around me, was whistled for traveling; very embarrassing! After that, I played better and actually scored nine points.

To save you the trouble of adding my various point totals, for the season I scored 169 points in 17 games and, because this is my telling of the story, I will round up and say that I averaged in double figures: 10.0 points per game.

For the 1965 season, Thurston's varsity finished in fourth place in the six team league with a record of five wins and four losses. We were one game behind Oak Park, so it's possible that if there had been no snowstorm we could have finished tied for third. Oak Park had beaten our varsity earlier in the year, and that game had been at Oak Park. The overall record was 7 wins and 10 losses, a disappointment for a team that returned two star players from the league co-champion.

I will end this chapter with a few conclusions on the 1965 team based on 49 years' hindsight. Plus I will refer to the varsity team statistics distributed by Boris after the season.

When I look at the team statistics for 1965, the first thing I note is that we shot the ball a huge amount. In 17 games, Thurston's varsity players attempted 1073 shots; which comes to an average of 63.1 shots per game! Remembering that a high school game consists of 32 minutes of playing time, we averaged almost two shots per minute!

A further examination of the team stats shows that we had 233 offensive rebounds, but 407 *turnovers*. Turnover is, perhaps, not the correct word; the stats show 146 bad passes, 125 violations and 136 *fumbles*. I call these turnovers because I am assuming that all bad passes, violations and fumbles resulted in a loss of possession; this assumption may or may not be true, but we do what we can. Thus, my crude analysis states that we had

$$1073 \text{ shots} + 407 \text{ turnovers} - 233 \text{ offensive rebounds} = 1247 \text{ possessions,}$$

which works out to an average of 2.29 possessions per minute. (I subtract the offensive rebounds because they lead to either shots or turnovers, but don't represent a new possession.) Actually, we

undoubtedly had more than 2.29 possessions per minute because some possessions ended with our shooting free throws, which are not included above. It is complicated and the available data are limited.

Speaking of free throws, as a team we attempted 512 free throws, which translates to an average of 30.1 per game, or almost one per minute.

The next feature I note from the statistics is that we shot very poorly. Our field goal percentage was 34.4%, based on 366 baskets in those 1073 shots. This was very bad! By contrast, the 1966 team made 43.3% of its shots. (I have no data on shots attempted for the 1967 team.) We were also poor free throw shooters, making only 297 of our 512 attempts, or 58.0%.

The top scorer on the 1965 team was John Page, with 265 points, an average of 15.6 points per game, which helped him make first team all-league despite being on a fourth-place team. John, however, did not shoot particularly well, making only 37.6% of his attempts. In 1966 the starting guards on Thurston—Reggie and I—made 41.1% and 41.7% of our shots, respectively. Yet, the belief persisted that the best shooter during these years at Thurston was John Page, even though I am quite certain that Reggie and I both shot better in 1967 than we did in 1966. (Sadly, as mentioned above, we have no data on shots attempted in 1967; thus, like President W, it is possible that—despite my being certain—I am mistaken.)

To be fair, John was the one offensive threat on a weak team, whereas Reggie and I had the advantage of being two of many threats on strong teams. John did have a beautiful jump shot and it is not reasonable to base a conclusion on shooting percentages alone. Nevertheless, Reggie and I were pretty good shooters too!

Next, let's use the 1965 team statistics to gauge the prospects for the 1966 team. Among the juniors and sophomores on the 1965 team, the leading scorers were: Gary Knock (137 points), Randy Samelson (79), Gary Schulte (73) and Reggie Barringer (67). Based on these statistics, the 1966 season did not look promising.

Points scored, of course, is one way to measure experience, but we could also look at minutes played; unfortunately, there is no data for this. What we have are the number of quarters played. Again, among the juniors and sophomores on the 1965 team, the leaders in number of quarters played were: Gary Knock (61), Gary Schulte (53), Randy Samelson (44), Fred Koester (37) and Reggie Barringer (36).

As mentioned above, before the second Glenn game, Coach Pasternak seemed to decide that the starting line-up in 1966 would be Gary Knock, Randy Samelson, Reggie Barringer, Don Block and me. When I discuss the 1966 team I will explain my theory on why he did this.

In a recent conversation, my old and dear friend Roger Steffen pointed out that because of my quickness and superior jumping ability I was better than most in getting my shot off in a crowd. (In fact, as stated above, I believe I had only one shot blocked in my career.)

In addition, I believe that I was the most ambidextrous player on every one of my teams. I wrote and ate with my left hand, but threw and shot with my right hand. Even though my right hand was my dominant shooting hand, I was very skilled at shooting left handed from close to the basket.

When I began writing this chapter I planned to end with my bewilderment over and condemnation of Coach's handling of my good friend Barry Simescu. Barry had been placed on varsity at

the beginning of tenth grade and then rarely played. (For the season, Barry played in 24 quarters—compared to Reggie’s 36 and my 11 in shorter stays on varsity—attempted only 14 shots and scored only nine points.) Why did Boris do this? I had no idea; it seemed simply cruel and I don’t think that Boris was ever intentionally cruel. In researching this chapter, however, I came upon a new fact (for me) that perhaps explains Boris’s decision to put Barry on varsity.

My former gym teacher at Marshall, Bill McDonald, was a huge supporter of Barry the quarterback, promoting him to first team as a sophomore. While trying to get a better handle on the history of Thurston basketball, I was paging through the 1961 yearbook; guess what I found? In 1961, Michael Pasternak was the JV basketball coach and the assistant varsity coach. The varsity head coach? Bill McDonald. Based on this newly discovered fact, my *theory* is that Coach McDonald told Boris that Barry was a really sensational basketball player who deserved to be on varsity. This is only my *theory*; I have no idea whether or not it is correct. But, if true, it does make Boris’ decision to put Barry on varsity and then not play him a bit more understandable.

Chapter 21

Tenth Grade Academics and Life

During my three years at Thurston the school-day schedule never varied:

- **First hour:** 8:00–9:00 AM.
- **Second hour:** 9:00–10:00.
- **Third hour:** 10:00–11:00.
- **Fourth hour:** 11:00–12:30. Fourth hour was different. There were too many students at Thurston for everyone to eat lunch at the same time. Thus, the fourth hour classes were divided into three groups, with roughly equal numbers of students per group:
 - **First group:** Lunch 11:00–11:30; and class 11:30–12:30.
 - **Second group:** Class begins 11:00–11:30 AM; lunch 11:30–12:00; and class finishes 12:00–12:30.
 - **Third group:** Class 11:00–12:00; and lunch 12:00–12:30.
- **Fifth hour:** 12:30–1:30.
- **Sixth hour:** 1:30–2:30.

Obviously, the school gave the students a few minutes—I remember it being five—to travel between classes. Thus, our class *hours* were 55 minutes long, but I can't remember whether, for example, first hour began at 8:00 or 8:05. (All these years later it doesn't matter.)

In tenth grade my course schedule was as follows:

- **First and second hours:** Common Learnings.
- **Third hour:** Physical Education (Gym).
- **Fourth hour:** Geometry.
- **Fifth hour:** Chemistry.

- **Sixth hour:** Student Council.

I will describe each of my five classes below. It is a bit strange that for a boy who would grow-up to be a professor at a major university, my most memorable class, by far, was Gym.

I have very little recollection of my two-hour *Common Learnings* class. For example, I have no idea who my teacher was, although I suppose that if I studied my *1965 Thurston Yearbook* I could narrow it down to one of four or five female teachers.

During 1964–65 the Vietnam War was escalating and the Cold War was in full force. Perhaps for these reasons, perhaps for other reasons, our teacher had us read the amazing book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Actually, she had me read it to the class. It started out as one day per week a different student would read a few pages, but before long my teacher settled on me being the best reader and had me read every time. I actually enjoyed doing this very much. I had always been afraid of speaking in front of others, but reading was much easier and, I guess, I was good at it.

Solzhenitsyn would go on to win the 1970 Nobel Prize for Literature. *One Day ...* was an incredible book and Solzhenitsyn a courageous man and talented writer, but, in retrospect, I wonder whether the book was chosen, in part, to motivate a class of boys who might be called upon to fight Communism in South Vietnam in a few months. As an adult, I have read enough about Stalin to convince me that he belongs on the short list of the most evil men of the 20th century, so I don't really argue about being exposed to his depravity at an early age. After all, I had recently read *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* on my own; thus, I apparently had some fascination with maniacal homicidal dictators.

After Common Learnings I went to Gym class. After nine consecutive years of loving gym class, I can categorically state that tenth grade gym class was the worst class of my entire life. Why? I will try to explain the nuances of my hatred below, but nearly all reasons were directly, or indirectly, tied to my gym teacher, Mr. Knotts.

Mr. Knotts was destined to torment me long after I left his class in 1965; indeed he was repeatedly and frequently very annoying for my remaining two years at Thurston. Having said this, I cannot say that he was a bad man. In many ways Jim Knotts was a good man and I learned some things of value from being around him. He was certainly a talented wrestling coach and I understood that his wrestlers absolutely worshipped him.

Mr. Knotts **was** boys' phys ed at Thurston. Everybody had him for Gym class. Mr. Knotts' biggest passion in life, without a doubt, was wrestling. (Mr. Knotts was missing the index finger on his left—nondominant—hand. We were all convinced that he cut it off to *make weight* or a wrestling match. Really. This made him very scary to us.) He was the varsity wrestling coach and he ate, slept and breathed wrestling. I am absolutely certain that, if he had been given freedom to do so, **every day** of phys ed would have involved wrestling.

I read the amazing book, *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand, the life story of 1936 Olympic runner Louis Zamperini. A large part of the story is devoted to Zamperini's time in a Japanese POW camp, where he was tortured mercilessly by the sadistic guard Mutsushiro Watanabe. We later learned that Mutsushiro was ordered to single-out Louis for the most extreme torture because the Japanese knew he was an American celebrity. If the Japanese could break the spirit of an American celebrity—the title gives away the outcome—they could force him to make radio broadcasts to

demoralize American soldiers. That was the theory anyways.

Now I am going to embark on the most shameless of hyperbole. Please allow me some creative license. When I read about Mutsushiro in *Unbroken*, I was reminded of Mr. Knotts. Just reminded. I would never never ever imply that the men were the same.

So, why was I reminded of Mr. Knotts?

The bane of Mr. Knotts' existence was the following. Wrestling was the sport of real men. Basketball was for a bunch of sissies; usually skinny-armed sissies. Of this Jim Knotts had no doubt. The problem was the rest of the world. When the basketball team played home games, the gymnasium was filled with screaming fans who adored their short-pants heroes. When the wrestling team had a home match, the gymnasium was nearly empty. What the hell was wrong with these people?

When I met Jim Knotts he could see I was a gangly skinny-armed boy. That was ok with him. I was probably one of those future professionals who could be useful when Jim needed a physician or dentist. But when he learned I was a basketball player, Jim was on a mission to, if not break me, at least humiliate me at every opportunity.

Interestingly, years later I learned from my friend and teammate Reggie Barringer that Mr. Knotts pulled some of the same crap on Reggie that he pulled on me (to be described below). Reggie's stories surprised me because Reggie was quite manly; he was a star football player—surely, football is a manly sport—with strong arms. To Jim Knotts, however, being a basketball player trumped everything else. If Jim could somehow humiliate every basketball player then people would come to wrestling matches. Or so he seemed to believe.

The Thurston High Gymnasium had a retractable hard wall that separated it into two areas. The area to the north was for girls' Gym and had access to the Girls' Lockerroom and the south end was for the boys. The school year was divided into four nine-week quarters which is relevant to my story because every tenth grader was required to take Gym and every Gym class devoted one quarter to swimming.

In the mid-1960s there was *no way* boys and girls were going to be allowed access to the swimming pool at the same time! (Way too much bare skin visible!) Thus, the rotation went as follows: for the first quarter, one-half of the girls had swimming and the other half had regular Gym. For the second quarter these two groups of girls were flipped. This pattern—girls swim the first semester, boys swim the second—was not restricted to my third hour Gym class; it was true for all of the tenth grade Gym classes at Thurston. Not only were boys and girls not allowed to be in the pool at the same time, there would be no opportunity for them to see each other as one hour transitioned into the next!

The first quarter of Gym was quite fun. After opening the hour with 10 minutes of calisthenics, we would dash out to the playing field for touch football, which we all loved to play. I was quick and well-coordinated and was an excellent touch football player. I could not throw the ball very far, but that was OK because lots of boys could and my skinny arms were not a disadvantage because the game involved no tackling and very little blocking. Gym was fun. Then the second quarter began and Gym moved indoors.

There are, of course, lots of fun options for indoor gym. For example, in addition to my love for basketball, I was quite good at volleyball. I was tall; had quick reflexes and was a better

than average jumper—I was created to play the frontline in volleyball, a position I had enjoyed immensely in Gym at Marshall.

Well, Jim Knotts did not recognize volleyball as a sport. We spent the entire second quarter *wrestling*. As my nine weeks of losing, day after day, unfolded, I prayed that I would be in the swimming group for third quarter, which would allow me to play softball outdoors during the fourth quarter. How, you might ask, could a non-swimmer be eager for swim class? That’s easy; to Jim Knotts the third quarter was nine solid weeks of uninterrupted gymnastics.

Let me recap. I had skinny arms. I had a fear of falling and a strong aversion to being upside-down. How do *you* think I did at gymnastics? To make a long story short, I was horrible and I hated the nine weeks of gymnastics even more than I had hated wrestling.

Jim Knotts was not my swimming teacher; Mr. Mracna was the swimming teacher and the swimming coach. Note that I use the word *teacher* in the most generous of possible ways. I never saw Mr. Mracna in a swim suit; he always wore, gym shoes, sweat pants and a T-shirt, with a whistle around his neck. As a result, I never saw him in the pool. Every day we would go to locker room, put on our swim suits and head to the pool. We would jump in the pool, thrash around for a few minutes until Mr. Mracna would come out of his office. He would proceed to blow the whistle and yell, “Settle down.” We would settle down at which point Mr. Mracna would announce, “OK. Practice swimming,” and head back to his office. We then would return to thrashing around in the pool.

The story went that the previous quarter Mr. Mracna had taken a more hands-on approach to teaching. After his, “Settle down,” he announced to the class, “Do we have any non-swimmers in this group?” When no hands were raised, he instructed, “OK. Everybody jump in the deep end and tread water.” The class complied with this order and all was well for approximately 30 seconds at which time a boy climbed out of the pool, walked over to Mr. Mracna and pointed to Art Wolfe lying motionless at the bottom of the pool. Mr. Mracna looked around at the boys in the pool until he spotted a member of the swimming team and yelled to him, “Hey, Ralph, pull that kid out of the pool,” while pointing towards Art.

At first I loved swimming class because there was no Mr. Knotts. Eventually, however, I had to deal with the fact that I did not know how to swim and that I would never pass gym class unless I learned to swim. Our pool was 25 yards long. The end-of-quarter exam consisted of three parts:

- Swim one length of the pool using the *side stroke*. This was no problem; even non-swimmers can swim the *side stroke*.
- Swim one length of the pool using the *back stroke*. Again, this was no problem; everybody can lie on their back, rotate their arms and kick their feet.
- Swim two lengths of the pool using the *crawl stroke*. Big problem.

The difficulty with the crawl, of course, is that you must start with your face in the water. You are allowed to turn your head to get air, but then you must do the thing that all non-swimmers fear—put your face back in the water. Repeatedly. Over and over again.

On the day of the crawl exam, I got off to a good start. Through a massive show of will—I kept picturing Mr. Knotts telling me to climb the rope without using my legs—I managed to keep

my breathing together for the first length of the pool. Returning towards the starting point, all was well for, say, 10 yards. Then I panicked and thought that I would rather die than put my face into the water again. For the last 15 yards my head thrashed back-and-forth, but my face never was submerged. I completed the test and, by rule, I had passed! Mr. Mracna made a check on his clipboard, looked at me, and said, "That was pathetic." Then he went back to his office.

I have a few more comments to make about Mr. Knotts before I move on to my next class.

In short, during my days at Thurston, whenever Mr. Knotts saw me in a game of pick-up basketball he would perforce replace one of the players on the other team and announce, "I am guarding Wardrop." He would proceed to chase me around the court and, whenever he got within reach of me, would mug me shamelessly. On the one hand, I was much faster and more coordinated than he was, but, on the other hand, basketball courts are small. As a result, I would score some points and he would mug me a few hundred times. I got used to it and I wasn't much of a fighter.

Years later I learned from Reggie that Jim Knotts had tried this mugging behavior on him too. Big mistake. As I will describe later in these memoirs, a big part of what made Reggie such a great teammate was what I would call his *fighting spirit*. Unlike me, Reggie would not take crap from anyone. As a result, Jim tried to mug Reggie, a nasty collision ensued and Jim nearly lost an eye.

My last class of the morning was my favorite and easiest: Geometry taught by Mr. Bennett. I can't say much about Geometry; I loved it, but many students hated it. I couldn't understand why anyone hated it. Forty-plus years later when I was trying to help a tenth grader with his Geometry, I began to realize why it was hated.

Next was lunch. I wolfed-down my daily tuna sandwich with an apple, chips and a cookie. Washed down, of course, with milk. Then it was off to the gym to play as much basketball as possible before fifth hour and chemistry.

My chemistry teacher was Mr. Kiesling. He was a very good teacher; he loved chemistry and forced us to work very hard. In fact, I remember that we all freaked out at the beginning of the year. We had this big chemistry text and on the first day, Mr. Kiesling announced, "Turn to Chapter 21."

I wondered to myself—too big a coward to say it out loud— "Excuse me, when did we do the first twenty chapters? I am pretty sure I didn't miss all of that!" We started in Chapter 21; something about splitting the atom, nuclear power and atomic bombs. Huh? I barely had any idea what an atom was.

We worked like dogs for the first few weeks and then we went to Chapter 1. Mr. Kiesling taught me to **always** challenge my students from day 1.

I remember that Reggie was in my chemistry class and one day, he, I and a couple of other guys were talking about girls that we thought were hot; er, I mean smart. Mr. Kiesling interrupted us, asking, "What are you boys talking about?"

Reggie turned a deep deep red and mumbled, "Nothing." "What?" shouted back Mr. Kiesling, "Do you guys think you invented sex?"

Whoa. I was a couple years away from thinking about actual sex. I was like the Patsy character in *Happy Days*: who, when he first saw a naked woman in a *Playboy* magazine, said to his friends, "Wow. Imagine how she would look in a sweater!"

Anyways, I wanted to say to Mr. Kiesling, “No, but I am pretty sure it was invented after you became a chemistry teacher.” Of course, I did not say this.

My day ended with *Student Council* during sixth hour. At the end of ninth grade at Marshall we had an election to select, I believe, three representatives to serve on *Student Council* as 10th graders the next year at Thurston. I didn’t really want to be on *Student Council*, but I was still smarting from the election, held late in 8th grade, for the officers of the ninth grade *Student Council* at Marshall. I ran on the Mutch/Simescu ticket for the office of treasurer and was thumped by the much more qualified Nancy Greenburg who had a catchy slogan that because money was green you should vote for **Greenburg**,

In any event, I ran and was elected to one of the three spots. I failed to notice that none of the people who had run to be a ninth grade *Student Council* officer were on the ballot. But my oversight was not the biggest. I recall that Chris LaTour, he of sixth grade lay-up fame, and, by ninth grade, a budding greaser, also got elected. (Sorry, I cannot remember the third person elected.) The first day of tenth grade, Chris and I showed up for *Student Council*. Chris looked around the room, noted that he was the only greaser there and left, never to return.

So, you are wondering, “What was *Student Council*?” Good question. It was the executive and legislative branch of student governance. This sounds impressive until you realize that the students had no power to govern. Thus, basically, we pretended that we had power and debated various resolutions, making sure to never pass anything that would be squashed by the administration. We basically passed resolutions such as: “Thurston Eagles are great;” “We should all have school spirit;” and “Teachers are our friends.” I am no doubt exaggerating, but you get the idea.

Do not, however, conclude that I disliked *Student Council*. I enjoyed it very much; below are some of the reasons why:

1. One of the junior class representatives was Linda L, a beautiful and smart girl on whom I had a huge crush. I, of course, never acted on said crush, but it was important to me. Linda was part of my Superman-complex. Huh? Well, if you read Superman comic books you learned that every love of his life had the initials LL: Lucy Lang, Lori Lemaris (the mermaid) and, most famously, Lois Lane. My 11th grade girlfriend was Laney L, my 12th grade girlfriend was Lavon L and my 10th grade crush—I wasn’t yet ready for a real girlfriend—was Linda L. In fact, years later, from 1984–87, I dated, off-and-on, another Linda L. Things never worked out with the LL of the 80’s; her theory was that I was afraid to commit to her because in a former life she and I had been lovers and her then husband had killed me. My theory was that I was afraid to commit to her because of her theory why.
2. We had an exchange day with Oak Park High School. For one day I experienced what high school would be like if I had Mr. Kiesling for all of my classes.
3. Our faculty supervisor, Mr. Brosnan, was totally awesome. Most of the time Mr. Brosnan was one of the boys’ counselors, but I never had him in that role. Mr. Brosnan taught me the value of education through anecdotes. I will always remember Mr. Brosnan’s anti-anti-Semitic story.

When Mr. B was nine years old he loved to swim. On a very hot day he took the city bus to the public pool. As he was entering the pool area, an alert official—thank God for

bureaucrats—spotted him and decided he looked funny. “What’s your name?” the office asked.

“Timmy Brosnan,” my future teacher replied.

“We don’t want your kind here,” the officer said and little Timmy had to stand outside the fence and watch the other kids have fun. Little Timmy had no idea why he had been barred from the pool.

Years later Mr. Brosnan figured out what had happened. As typical for nine year-olds, little Timmy did not enunciate well and the officer heard him say, “Timmy Brosman.” “Hmmm,” the official thought, “Name ends in **man**; he must be Jewish.”

21.1 “Dating”

When I entered Thurston in 1964, I did not have much experience with girls. To summarize, there was my no-talk phone call with Nancy in 8th grade; my 2 minute date at a movie with Sandy, also in 8th grade. In 9th grade there was my very little talking relationship with Carol, culminating in my bike ride through a blizzard. (OK, I am exaggerating about a blizzard, but I did peddle through snow!) Through 8th and 9th grades, Charlene and I smiled goofily at each other across three rows of students in math, but never talked outside of class. Finally, there were a few dances with M at one canteen, followed by one instance of holding hands on the bus, after which I ran home. Later, I snuck one (mouth sealed shut) kiss with her at M’s side door. After that kiss, I had virtually no interaction with M until the 1980s in Wisconsin when we met and went for a walk. (No kissing that day, closed or open mouthed.)

Tenth grade was no different. I had two dates. The first was the Christmas dance in which I invited Diane. This was a big deal—the first time I asked a girl out. I don’t remember much about the date. We went to the dance. Afterwards, Diane’s older sister and her boyfriend drove us to a restaurant for a late dinner (they ate with us). Diane and I sat in the back seat holding hands and barely talked the whole evening. There was no kiss goodnight. Afterwards—and this is a sign of how little I was aware of these things—I decided that the date had gone well and was surprised to learn that Diane had dumped me for an older boy who had a driver’s license.

My second date in 10th grade was with Vicki, who I knew from the Student Council class. Vicki invited me to the Sponge Dance. (The Sponge Dance at Thurston was our version of *Sadie Hawkin’s Day* in the then popular comic strip *L’il Abner*.)

As implied above, girls asked boys to the Sponge Dance; boys were absolutely not allowed to ask girls. The word Sponge was used for two reasons. First, and obviously, because boys would *sponge* off the girls; i.e., unlike all other dates, the girls were expected to pay for everything—tickets to the dance and dinner afterwards. Second, each girl was required to construct a corsage for her date made entirely from sponges.

Vicki was an awesome girl and we had a good time at the dance. As with the Christmas Dance, Vicki’s older sister and boyfriend drove us to dinner afterwards. Then they drove me home. Older sister and boyfriend parked at the curb and Vicki walked me up to my sidedoor. I had had a great time and was hoping for the second kiss in my life. I reached the door and turned towards Vicki.

She went up on her toes, leaning towards me. All right! I was going to get a kiss! I leaned down, my lips sealed tight, puckering for a kiss that most 15 year-old boys would give only to an aunt.

It was horrible! As our faces approached each others, I closed my eyes, waiting for the feel of Vicki's sealed lips on mine. Suddenly, the area around my mouth was covered in saliva! What had happened? I could only think that Vicki must have tripped, her mouth flying open and sliming me. We separated; I felt so sorry for Vicki. She must have been so embarrassed! Strangely, she didn't seem to be embarrassed; she just looked at me with a puzzled expression on her face. We mumbled our good-nights. I watched as she walked back to the car and I entered my home. Vicki and I never spoke to each other again. I guess she was too embarrassed.

When the summer of 1965 arrived, amazingly my father did not force me to get a job. I spent the entire summer hanging-out with friends and spent hundreds of hours practicing basketball. At the beginning of summer, I would ride my bike 2.5 miles to play basketball with my friends Roger Steffen and Bob Rybka. After I turned 16 on July 1, I would sometimes be allowed to drive the family's second car over to Roger's neighborhood.

One day Roger asked me, "Bob, do you know how to play pinocle?"

"Yes," I replied; "Why do you ask?"

"Well, my next door neighbors Laney and Barb want us to come over and play pinocle with them."

"That sounds like fun," I said.

Thus began my 7.5 month long relationship with Laney, the girl who taught me how to kiss with my mouth open—with a small amount of tongue action.

Later in life I felt compelled to number my girlfriends, which, of course, led to the issue, "How does one define a girlfriend?" Do I begin with Stacy and/or Shelly Busetto, who I met when I was six? Do I include my fourth-grade crush Cheryl? Diana and football playing Carol in sixth grade? This seemed impossible!

I finally decided on the following criterion:

- A girlfriend is any girl with whom I shared at least 10 open-mouthed kisses.

By this criterion, Laney was definitely my first girlfriend. I had one more girlfriend, Lavon, my senior year; and another, Kathy, as I transitioned from high school to college. I married my fourth girlfriend, Debbie.

Total disclosure: If I replace the number 10 by the number two in my criterion, I still had the same number of girlfriends.

Sometime during the summer of 1965, I began playing pinocle with Roger, his neighbor Laney and Laney's sister Barb in the basement of Laney's house. Three things became clear rather quickly.

- Laney's family apparently had no funds for refreshments. Every night we played—and we played many nights—we would each be served a large glass of ice cubes on which to chew. And when we would run out of ice cubes, there were always more available!
- Roger was interested in Barb as a potential girlfriend; Barb, not so much.
- Laney was very interested in my becoming her boyfriend.

After many nights of pinocle, one of us—I can't recall who it was—suggested we go to a drive-in movie. Well, I am quite sure that it wasn't Barb's idea!

I managed to get the use of our second car and one evening, Bob and Laney in the front seat and Roger and Barb in the back seat set off for the drive-in movie theater.

The evening was quite fun! For the most part, Laney and I sat with our backs to our respective doors so that we could turn our heads one way to look at Roger and Barb or turn the other way to look at the movie screen. Everytime I looked in the back, Roger had his right arm stretched out on the back of the seat, behind Barb's head. He never tried to hug or squeeze her; Roger seemed happy to simply have his arm hovering above Barb's neck. Well, as I was soon to learn, hovering was not the correct verb.

There was no kissing on this date. We consumed massive amounts of drive-in-movie food, talked and occasionally watched the movies. (All drive-ins showed two movies.)

A few nights later, the four of us reconvened in Laney's basement for more pinocle and ice cubes. I was the last to arrive and immediately noticed that Roger looked upset and Barb looked angry.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Roger and Barb are fighting," replied Laney.

"I can't move my neck; it is sore and stiff!"

"Why blame me?" pleaded Roger.

"Because," replied Barb, trying to stay calm, "It is sore from supporting your arm all night at the drive-in!"

That night, pinocle ended earlier than usual.

Chapter 22

Eleventh Grade Academics and Life

In eleventh grade my course schedule was as follows:

- **First hour:** English Composition.
- **Second hour:** Algebra 2.
- **Third and fourth hours:** Common Learnings.
- **Fifth hour:** Physics.
- **Sixth hour:** Retailing (First semester); and Advertising (Second semester).

I will begin by explaining how I came to have this collection of courses.

There is a two-pronged theme to my childhood. First, my parents worked very hard to control my life; I rarely was allowed to make a decision or figure out an action by myself. Second, as a result of the first prong, when I did make decisions I tended to be rash and choose poorly.

As tenth grade was coming to an end, I was required to select my courses for the following year. Somehow, my parents left this decision to me. What was I to do?

Well, two hours were easy to fill; everyone in eleventh grade was required to enroll in two hours of Common Learnings. My first decision was whether or not to take elective Gym. (Of the six hour school day, the gymnasium was used for four hours for the required tenth grade phys ed and one hour for lunch, leaving one hour for elective gym.) “Let’s see;” I mused, “Do I want another nine weeks of wrestling and gymnastics?” Easy choice.

Next, I had to consider Math. I loved Math. My best subject by far was Math. Sadly, however, the only remaining math classes at Thurston were: Algebra 2, which I had completed in grade nine and Trig/Solid Geometry, a one year course with a semester devoted to each topic. I had two obvious choices: take Trig/Solid in eleventh grade or take it in twelvth grade. My decision?

I could not fathom a year without Math, so I opted to enroll in Algebra 2 (again!) and save the remaining Math course for my senior year.

My choice of an English class for eleventh grade was my justification for enrolling again in Algebra 2. Nearly all college-prep eleventh graders enrolled in *Comparative Literature* and then, as seniors, would take the killer course *English Composition*. *English Comp* was promoted as **the**

course that would prepare one for all of the papers to be written in college. For some bizarre reason that I can no longer recall, I decided to enroll in *English Comp* as a junior.

For my remaining courses I chose one difficult and one easy. The easy course was Retailing (first semester) coupled with Advertising (second semester). The difficult one was physics.

My favorite class, by a light-year, in eleventh grade was Common Learnings. Finally! After one sociopathic CL teacher (seventh grade) and three forgettable ones (sorry), I had one of my best teachers ever, Mrs. Day.

The first thing I loved about CL was the boys in the class: Norman Bolz, Barry Simescu and Paul Santangelo were great pals. I had had an extensive history with Barry; and Norm and I went back to junior high where I remember him as being very smart, very funny, and an incredibly good wrestler for someone who was 76 inches tall and the same weight as I. The real treat was to get to know Paul who was one of the most amazing guys at Thurston: a great athlete, a talented musician, really kind and ridiculously humble.

Mrs. Day was very smart, a gifted teacher and, best of all, had this uncanny ability to make *everyone* in the class feel like they were the most important person alive and deeply loved—in an appropriate way—by her.

Mrs. Day is responsible for my single best day in high school. Ever. In the spring of 1966, she arranged for us to take a day trip to **Niagara Falls, Canada!** I looked it up on Google Maps and found that, today, the drive from my home on Nathaline to Niagra Falls takes four hours. Without the current freeways, the trip in 1966 had to have been longer. So, how did she manage it?

We arose very early on a Saturday morning and met at Thurston. I had my own car by this time and I proceeded to drive Norm, Barry and Paul to the train station in downtown Detroit. We boarded a train and took off into the wilds of Ontario, Canada. We arrived at NF in mid-morning and then scattered for six or seven hours of mostly unsupervised exploration.

If you have ever been to NF you know that it is an amazing place with so much to do. We visited wax museums, we marveled at the Falls, we checked-out Canadian girls. Two events have remained large in my mind these many years later.

First, one of the big decisions was whether to (pay to) go up the elevator to the observation deck of NF's *space needly* building. I was one of the group that did not take the ride; big mistake. I remember that Norm was one of the boys who went to the top. When he returned, he was very excited.

"How was it, Norm?" we all asked.

"Really great. I could see for miles."

"Big deal," one of us replied.

"It was. Way more than you can imagine."

"Yeah, right," one of us replied skeptically.

"Well, one of the things we saw was this big open field. On the field was a man, a woman and a blanket. **We saw them have sex!**"

Whoa! This blew me away! Almost 17 years old, I could barely imagine **ever** seeing someone have sex, let alone have sex myself. (Or, do I mean, I could barely imagine having sex myself, let alone seeing someone have sex. In other words, I was so confused on the whole *having sex* issue that I didn't even know how to rank activities in terms of excitement!)

The second event was quite funny.

Approximately one mile below the Falls was a building that advertised “See the Rapids up Close!” This sounded appealing. Our group of four entered the building, purchased tickets and took the elevator down, say, 75 feet to the level of the river.

We emerged from the elevator to a long walkway that ran parallel to the surging, violent river. These were certainly rapids! The water was moving rapidly in every imaginable direction: down river of course; over the tops or around huge boulders sticking up from the river bottom; high into the air for no visible reason.

We traversed the walkway, placed a safe 20 feet from the edge of the river, with handrails to slow down the truly stupid. The walkway eventually turned to the right and led us to a platform that actually was suspended above the river! It was roughly 25 feet by 15 feet, with its longer sides parallel to the river. The platform had a 42 inch tall chain-link fence to protect us from falling into the river while preserving our ability to see said river.

Stepping onto the platform we all immediately noticed a sign on its fence, in the left corner, downstream and farthest from the shore. The sign read:

DANGER! WET CORNER!

To four teenage boys in a foreign country, this was like waving a red flag in front of a bull!

At first we were cautious. I observed the *corner* from a safe distance and noted that there was a repeating pattern to the river’s behavior. Every 30 seconds a very small wave would wash over the corner, leaving behind a small damp spot. What? This is danger? What kind of people are these Canadians?

Having discovered the river’s pattern, I became brave. I ventured over to the corner and had a good look at the river. No big deal! I lingered in the corner, exhibiting my disdain for all things Canadian. I was so courageous that I even turned my back on the river. My friends had tired of my behavior and had all wandered off to some other section of the platform.

As I stood there, in the danger corner, my back to the river, I heard a small voice in my head that said “Turn around, Bob.” Was it God? Was it my intuition? A first sign of an impending mental disorder? Who knows?

I obeyed the voice, turning just in time to see a ten foot high wave before it hit and left me a very drenched, very embarrassed 17 year-old boy. Fortunately, the day was warm and my clothes dried quickly. More importantly, the river must have been quite clean because I was not left with a bad odor around me for the rest of the day.

In the 1980s I saw a brilliant Scandanavian film about a single mother and her two young boys. The boys were absolute monsters; that’s putting it mildly. They were constantly freaking out, screaming, trying to maim each other, while their mother remained calm and tried to keep them alive. Finally, one day, she snapped, and started crying hysterically.

Here is my point. The boys immediately settled down, totally amazed that their mother had an emotional state other than stoic acceptance. This scene, which I admit I describe poorly, always stuck with me. It speaks to how nearly all (all?) of us, including your dutiful writer, have, as children, ridiculous standards for our parents; standards few, if any, humans can meet.

Here is my point that is relevant to this chapter. Having been blessed with three years of Mrs. Grossman and one year of Mr. Bennett as my math teachers, I took it for granted that my math teachers were better at math than I. My Algebra 2 teacher, Mrs. Doty, dispelled this notion. It took me some time to figure this out and, before I did, I was quite unkind to her.

Not surprisingly, I entered Algebra 2 with a bad attitude. After all, I had aced the same course in ninth grade. And, as you will read about later, as a tenth grader I had gained some distinction state-wide for my performance on *The Michigan Mathematics Competition*. (I would learn in college that my *distinction* was not nearly so grandiose as I had imagined in grade 11.)

Our textbook was deadly boring. The first 40 pages or so included such exciting facts as:

- The natural numbers are 0, 1, 2, ...
- The positive integers are 1, 2, ...
- The integers are . . . , -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, ...
- The set of natural numbers equals the set of nonnegative integers.
- Addition and multiplication are commutative; division and subtraction are not.
- The distributive rule is your friend.

This was so incredibly boring! Math is not *the rules of grammar* or *conjugating verbs* or, my favorite from ninth grade English, *diagraming sentences*! Math is exciting! You take a confusing story problem and you solve the mystery!

To make matters worse, Mrs. Doty was hell-bent on talking about every item in the text. I rebelled. She told me I had a bad attitude.

I was not happy that she hated me. I thought that she was a very nice person and indeed, if she had presented herself differently, potentially quite hot. (Have I mentioned that my romantic life consisted, almost exclusively, of fantasies about my teachers?) We eventually made peace; I realized that I had been behaving like a jerk and she realized that I was better than her at math. The class settled into a routine in which Mrs. Doty would present math that I already had mastered and whenever she got *stuck* would ask, “What do you think comes next, Bob?”

To be honest, my crush on Mrs. Doty was only half-hearted because my Algebra 2 classmates included a Kathy (there were nearly as many Kathys as Bobs and Marys in my classes) who was destined to become my third girlfriend almost two years later. This version of Kathy was very smart, pretty and nice. We became good friends during eleventh grade. (It didn’t hurt that Kathy was a bit of a basketball groupie, which I mean in the nicest possible way.) I certainly would have asked Kathy out, but for two facts:

1. When we met my girlfriend was Laney. I was decades away from imagining the possibility of having two girlfriends at once.
2. Even if Laney was not in my life (which became the situation during second semester), I was still in my stage of development where—with the exception of asking Diane to the Christmas dance a year earlier (and remember how that turned out!)—I waited for girls to chase me down. And Kathy was definitely not a chase-him-down kind of girl.

I was not prepared for English Comp. My writing skills were too undeveloped for this class. If I had only been sensible and delayed it until my senior year, I could have had the writing experiences in Common Learnings and Comparative Literature on which to build. Having said this, I have three strong memories of this class.

1. I enjoyed having a challenging class with all seniors; it was good to make more friends in the class of 1966!
2. The course was team-taught. The segment on poetry was taught by Miss Castleberry for whom, big surprise, I had a huge crush. This crush went a bit beyond my others; I learned—whether this was correct or not I can't say—that she lived in a trailer park just one mile from my home. I used to fantasize riding my bike by her trailer, her seeing me while tending to flowers, her inviting me in for lemonade, ...

Anyway, years later Algebra-2-Kathy told me that Miss Castleberry told her English Comp class that all poems are about sex. I can't remember my teacher saying that, but it goes a long way towards explaining my fantasy that starred her. (Recall too that the other two female teachers I had in eleventh grade were *married*; I was no budding homewrecker!)

I do recall that Miss C had us read the erotic poem *To His Coy Mistress* by 17th century poet Andrew Marvell. (I won't even try to describe or reproduce this amazing work; see Wikipedia for more info on it.) I specifically remember that after she read it she asked us to identify its theme. We all sat there too embarrassed to say anything about SEX. Finally, in frustration, she was forced to explain it to us.

3. Another Comp teacher, Miss Bea Flanagan, gave us an assignment to write a paper that compared two *things*. (Before you jump to any conclusions, I can categorically state that there was never a male at THS who had even the slightest crush on Bea.) I wrote an amazing paper in which I compared two AM rock stations. (In 1966, if you wanted music traveling with you, there were no Ipods or walkmans or CD players or boomboxes; there were transistor radios. Oh, and there was no FM.) Station A played lots of rock music. Station B played much less rock music because it was always running inane contests. I argued, quite persuasively, that A was superior to B and, indeed, only morons or the gambling-addicted would listen to B.

Bea gave me a *B*— on the paper and made absolutely no criticisms of my reasoning or writing. Her only comment:

You neglected to mention the most important point. Rock music sucks. (Not her exact words.)

What an idiot!

In fairness, I must admit that Bea taught me a lot with this episode; namely, to never impose my values onto the work of my students; well, provided they didn't harm others. This lesson served me well as a Statistics professor who assigned students projects. If the student studied Tarot cards (idiotic in my opinion) or studied whether it mattered if a rural housewife shoots

an intruder using her left or right hand to fire the gun, . . . whatever they studied I graded their analysis and did not let my opinions affect my work.

This brings me to Physics. I had a lot of fun in Physics talking to classmates Reggie and Dan Besk. I did not like my teacher, Mr. Thomson, at all. (Although, inexplicably, I see that he signed my yearbook.) Mr. T might have been having personal issues that year; I have no idea. But for some reason he almost never actually taught us. Our classroom was a lab and we sat around our stations reading the book and attempting experiments while Mr. T sat in the back of his room at his desk doing who-knows-what.

I have one strong memory of Physics, which might explain why my memory is that I did not like my teacher. It was early spring and basketball season was finished. Reggie and I were examining the team statistics distributed by Coach Pasternak that showed Reggie was the team's third leading scorer and I was a few points, only a few, behind in fourth place. The two leading scorers were both seniors. Mr. T picked up the sheet, examined it briefly and, totally ignoring me, turned to Reggie and said, "It looks as if you will have no competition for being the star player next year."

It is true that Reggie could have said something like, "Wait a minute, Bob isn't too shabby" but he didn't. Even then, I did not blame Reggie; how could I? He was even more reticent than I. I knew logically that it was possible that Mr. T believed I was a senior—I was, after all, believed, in a very small circle of teachers, to be the best math student at Thurston—but somehow the logic didn't help. All I could feel was: Here's another adult who belittles my accomplishments, abilities and potential. (It is not easy to teach super-sensitive teenagers!)

My final class, Retailing and Advertising, turned out to be an incredibly pleasant surprise. I adored my teacher, Mr. Russell Fancett, and, to this day, still think very fondly of him.

Mr. Fancett looked very much like the famous actor of the time, Walter Matthau, right down to his deep shadows under his eyes. Mr. Fancett came to teaching late in life, after many years working in business. His style of teaching was to assign us a few pages to read in the obligatory text and then ignore that material. He spent class time telling us stories from his career in business and having us discuss various ideas for effective retailing and advertising.

My best friend in the class was Dan Grann and we had lots of fascinating conversations. We both found it hilariously funny that Mr. Fancett would, for example, describe something in his childhood by saying, "When I was between the ages of 0 and 18." Mr. Fancett was and remains the only person I ever knew who routinely referred to the time when he was age 0.

During my senior year, Mr. Fancett started coming to all of our basketball games and actually became friendly with my father.

When I began eleventh grade, Laney was my girlfriend. Earlier in this document, I referred to our 7.5 month relationship, but that was a bit of a misstatement. Laney and I rarely saw each other; we would go out occasionally, practice or French kissing, but nothing more.

Roger Steffen had confided in me that Laney had been attracted to me primarily because of my extremely hairy legs, which were well-displayed by my very short basketball pants. Apparently, Laney had attended a number of my basketball games in tenth grade; a girl will do almost *anything* to get out of the house on a Friday night!

I also came to learn that in order to date me, Laney had dumped a perfectly nice guy, Tony, who was a wrestler. Tony also was much more aggressive than I with girls and, again only reportedly, he and Laney had been having sex regularly. Laney, being basically a very nice 15 year-old girl at the time, was naturally conflicted about the physical intimacy and dumped Tony, in large part, to bring that to an end.

Thus, unbeknownst to me at the time, my first girlfriend Laney had chosen me largely because I was a minor school-celebrity and because I was sexually safe. Note that this is not a criticism; just a description. Hey, the only thing I ever liked about Laney—we had virtually nothing in common—was that she was pretty and a good kisser.

Before I tell you about the break-up, I want to return to the topic of my hairy legs. It might be difficult for my grandchildren to understand, but in the 1960s body hair on a man was a turn-on for many women. There was a famous scene in a James Bond film in which Sean Connery, the actor playing Bond, and a male Japanese agent were bare-chested in the presence of a large number of geishas. Almost all of the women, to the annoyance of the Asian man were fawning on Sean. Finally, extremely frustrated, he blurted out,

These women like you only because of the novelty of your hairy chest. We Japanese men have beautiful hairless bodies.

Without missing a beat, Bond replied,

Are you familiar with the following proverb? Birds don't nest in a tree with no leaves.

Which brings us to the topic of my hairy chest. (After all, I can't write endlessly about my hairy legs.) In eleventh grade, one day after basketball practice, in the locker room, my teammates and I all noticed that I had, by far, the healthiest patch of hair growing in the center of my chest. Way better than anyone else's patch. And, of course, some teammates had to suffer the shame of no hair at all.

Laney broke up with me just before the Sponge Dance and invited Tony the wrestler to be her date. After the dance, my good friend Barry Simescu told me that Laney and Tony were "pawing each other" all night and it made Barry so angry that he wanted to punch Tony. He didn't punch Tony, primarily for two reasons: Star quarterbacks are a lot bigger than most wrestlers and Tony was a low weight class wrestler; also, of course, if there was any blame to how Laney treated me it was, well, Laney's fault. Finally, Laney had dumped Tony to be with me; if Tony could handle that, what right did I have to act out now?

And, of course, I was pretty sure that Laney went back to Tony because she missed having sex.

After Laney broke up with me, I had no girlfriend until basketball season began in 12th grade. I will tell you the story of Lavon L and me later; you will find it is eerily similar to my story of Laney L.

Chapter 23

Twelfth Grade Academics and Life

As I was planning my courses for twelfth grade I realized that Oakland University, as well as, perhaps, every other university, had a foreign language requirement. I decided that I should get a head start on it. As a result, my first hour class was Russian. The teacher for my Russian class was an old Finnish man named Mr. Koljonen. He was a wonderful teacher and very demanding. A highlight of the class was when Mr. Koljonen took us on an evening field trip to the house of a friend of his who had an *actual sauna* in his backyard. This was very exotic for Bob Wardrop from Nathaline Street!

I had virtually no idea of what *taking a sauna* consisted. I was not about to get nude in front of my classmates! Thus, I decided to take my swimsuit, which turned out to be a really good idea. It was a huge amount of fun.

My second hour class was *Comparative Literature* taught by Mrs. Jan Bensmiller. Mrs. Bensmiller was a wonderful person, but a distracted teacher. She suffered from bad headaches and had some moderately serious vision issues. The story going around school—and I had no idea whether it was true—was that her health issues were the result of a nasty divorce that was taking place with—you guessed it—Mr. Bensmiller. What you might not have guessed was that Mr. Bensmiller had been my Spanish teacher for three years at Marshall. I learned nothing from him and actually did not like him at all—which was unusual for me. Perhaps because of my animosity for Mr. Bensmiller, I became very close to Mrs. Bensmiller, although fortunately I did not develop a crush on her. After school I would help her take things to her car and once I even helped her move some furniture in her apartment. Fortunately for overly shy Bob, Mrs. Bensmiller was not a cougar! Just a really nice woman.

One memory stands out from *Comparative Literature*. I had a classmate who, while not quite a greaser, was generally thought to be, at best, of average intelligence. That was his role in his cohort of friends—a nice guy, but not so bright. Let me call him Tommy. Well, Tommy submitted a paper for class and Mrs. Bensmiller was so impressed with it that she read it to all of us. Well, I was no literary critic, but I shared Mrs. Bensmiller's assessment of Tommy's work; his paper *blew me away*. It was beautifully written. And here is the surprising part.

Everybody in the class was quite excited for Tommy **except** for his friends. They totally freaked out at the notion that Tommy could have a hidden talent. No, no, no!

This story of Tommy and his work and especially the reaction of his friends has stuck with me

for almost 50 years; it has had a big influence on how I treat my students. I encourage my students that they might have as yet undiscovered talents and I urge them not to let the judgment of others ruin their dreams. If your dream is medical school and you don't get in the first time, don't give up! On the other hand, if you get rejected 20 years in a row, it might be time to have a back-up plan!

My third hour class was *Notehand* (first semester) and *Psychology* (second semester). *Notehand* was basically a watered-down version of *Shorthand*, which was taken primarily by girls who wanted to work in an office after graduation. But *Notehand* was much cooler, we noted (in note-hand) because it was designed to help us keep up with those rapidly delivered college lectures. I enjoyed it a great deal, but, with being a math major, I never used it much in college. My teacher was a very enthusiastic woman; she had more enthusiasm than what one might think possible for a course in *Notehand*.

Psychology was a different matter altogether. I remember my teacher's name, but I won't give it. The best I can say about her is that she was not aggressively sadistic like my seventh grade CL teacher Mr. M. She was, however, extremely nasty in an extremely passive aggressive way. Also, she put no effort into her teaching and a subject that should have been interesting and/or fun turned out to be horrible. I have one strong memory of the class.

We had an assignment to research a topic and make a presentation to the class. I recall that Don Block was my partner on this task, but I could be mistaken. In any event, my partner and I decided that this was such a horrible class we would not put much effort into our project or into our report. After all, if the teacher didn't give a damn, why should we? We did something where we tossed a coin or cast a die about 100 times, presented our data and looked for patterns. A real nothing.

Meanwhile, there was a Hippy Kid in the class and he did his project with his girlfriend. He was a real Sonny Bono want-a-be, complete with wearing a vest cut from a throw rug—definitely the height of hippy-fashion in 1967. So, Hippy Kid gets up in front of the class, standing next to his girlfriend with her long ironed-straight hair. He proceeded to blow us away. For five minutes he made an incredible presentation on the structure and function of the human brain. Granted, I was pretty ignorant of how my brain worked, but his work sounded sensational to me and my classmates.

After five minutes Hippy Kid looks up from his notes and says to the class, "Oh hell; this class is all just bullshit," and walks out of the classroom, his girlfriend tagging along. A good teacher would have tried to find a way to reach this kid. Our teacher simply failed him. Meanwhile, Don and I, obedient little weasels that we were, got a very good grade for our no-work project.

First semester of fourth hour I had a class that was required of all seniors at Thurston: *American Government*. Alone among my courses at Thurston, I have absolutely no memory of *American Government*. I can only conjecture that it was a last ditch effort by the education establishment to make sure we would be informed, obedient and grateful citizens when, in less than one year, we entered the world of adults. This conjecture is supported by the fact that this course was a graduation requirement in the State of Michigan.

The second semester of fourth hour was study hall. The main benefit of fourth hour study hall is that I could skip out and have up to a 90 minutes lunch hour, which gave me a huge amount of time to play basketball.

Fifth hour was *Recent American History* with Mrs. Fredrickson. My good friend Bob Rybka had had Mrs. Fredrickson for a previous class—probably CL—and recommended her highly. It was a great class. In it I became good friends with our class president and all around great guy Bob Crawford and, of course, it was awesome to have a class with my Will Roger's basketball teammate, Bobby R. Definitely too many Bobs in that class!

We had a beautiful classmate, Sheila, who one day let Bob C and I play tick-tack-toe in ink on her thigh—not too high, just above her knee. Her *fishnet hose* made a perfect venue for t-t-t. There was no danger Sheila would ever *like* either of the Bobs; she had a serious boyfriend who was off at college. But she wasn't above giving two slightly nerdy guys a big thrill!

The best thing I can say about Mrs. Fredrickson's class is that I later came to realize that she taught it as if we were in college. She definitely challenged us to think and not just mindlessly follow the prevailing attitudes in our society.

My extracurricular highlight of twelfth grade was when Mrs. Goodrich took our class for a visit to the small town of Goodrich, Michigan, located one hour north of Thurston by car. Mrs. Fred had a friend from college who taught at Goodrich High School which was the impetus for the visit.

The visit occurred in the fall, before basketball season had begun. We left Thurston on a Thursday right after school. I imagine that we went via schoolbus and arrived at Goodrich High School where each of us met our sponsor family. I was to stay at the house of a girl named Glenda and, just as a few months later I would worry about being nude at a sauna, this time I worried about sharing a room with Glenda. Turned out not to be a problem.

Almost immediately upon meeting me, Glenda started talking endlessly about her wonderful boyfriend who was off at college. Well, not endlessly, obviously; only until she was sure that I got the message that she was definitely not interested in me. (When the Goodrich kids visited Thurston in the spring of 1967, Glenda met Roger Steffen and immediately fell hard for him. I have no idea what had happened to her boyfriend in those six months.) In any event, I had a single bed to myself in the bedroom of Glenda's brother.

We had a lot of fun during our two days at Goodrich. I have two strong memories of the visit.

1. I, Bob Rybka and perhaps Bob Crawford got into a pick-up game with some of Goodrich's varsity basketball players. It was quite clear that if we transferred to Goodrich we would be the stars of the team. Given that Goodrich played in the division of the smallest schools in Michigan, hey, we might even have won a State Championship!

This game was particularly satisfying to me because in her efforts to discourage my nonexistent ardor (Wow! I sound bitter after all these years) Glenda kept telling me how awesome her boyfriend was at basketball. By the apparent standards of Goodrich, his awesomeness would likely translate to mediocrity at Thurston.

2. On Saturday we were having a pleasant day at a farm of one of our hosts. They had two horses, and my classmates, especially the girls, were taking turns riding them. One horse seemed very nice and calm, while the other seemed very nasty and wild. I had no interest at all in riding either horse, but I decided that if I was forced to do so, I would definitely avoid nasty and wild.

Well, things didn't turn out as I planned.

I was so successful at avoiding riding that the following occurred. We reached the point that the two horses needed to be put away in five minutes **and** everyone realized that everyone but I had ridden. I could no longer avoid climbing upon a horse!

Unsurprisingly, the girl on nice and calm wanted to keep riding it and the boy on nasty and wild was only too eager for me to replace him. I climbed on N and W and walked around the yard a bit; so far, no problem. Unfortunately, however, some of my classmates were tossing a football around and an errant toss sailed right past the head of N and W. This event made the horse unhappy and he reared up on his hind legs. Panic time for Bob. Having no idea what to do, I yanked on the reins. Bad move, Bob. N and W, no doubt sick to death of all these strange people annoying him, decided it was time to lie down. He collapsed onto his side, just a microsecond after I had leapt to safety, preventing a truly nasty injury to my right ankle. God had saved me. Or, rather, God wasn't ready for me to be injured.

If questioned on the matter, God might have responded like the Charles Bronson character did in the great movie *Once Upon a Time in the West*:

I didn't save Bob from injury; I just didn't let the horse do it.

My last class of the day was with Mr. Bennett again; my only *repeat teacher* at Thurston. (Recall that he was my *Geometry* teacher in tenth grade.) I really don't remember much about this class other than the realization that an entire semester is, perhaps, too much time to spend studying three dimensional geometric figures. Yes, spheres are awesome and cylinders and cones are pretty neat too, but, still, 18 weeks is a bit much.

When twelfth grade began I had no girlfriend. Indeed, I had not had a date since Laney dumped me in March. This was no big deal.

In the fall, I went to all of the football team's road games, the highlight of which was watching future Major League Baseball star Ted Simmons play running back for Southfield, a team that beat Thurston 6-0. It was clear that Ted was a special athlete.

For the home games I sat in the press box with Mr. Bennett and Mr. Barringer, the latter being, of course, Reggie's father. Mr. Bennett compiled statistics for the team, Mr. Barringer announced the plays over the Public Address system and I ran the scoreboard. The biggest job in running the scoreboard was to make sure that I stopped and started the clock as instructed by the official far away on the field.

The second biggest job was to type in, say, a 2 for down and a 6 for yards if the team on offense faced a *second down and six yards to go*. This seems easy, but I was constantly typing, for example, *third down and four* exactly as Mr. Barringer was saying, *Third down and five to go!*. Fortunately, we always agreed on down and while we almost never agreed on yards, we almost always missed each other by only one yard. I expressed my concern to Mr. Bennett that I wasn't doing a very good job, to which he replied, "Your guess is as good as his." A modest amount of support, but it meant a lot to me.

After losing to Southfield in our opening game, Thurston won its first home game, 12-2, over a Highland Park team whose basketball team would be thrashed by us a few months later. My one memory of the game was that during a Thurston kick-off, one of the HP players sprinter towards the kicker, a tactic that makes no sense whatsoever, knocked him to the ground and then proceeded

to try to twist the kid's leg off! The two or three refs at the game were far down the field, watching the legitimate action, while our kicker continued to be assaulted. Ah, the joy of competition!

The next week, we beat a strong Franklin team, 19–6, and, after that, defeated John Glenn, 26–6. The next week we lost at Groves, 19–7, before finishing our league season with two easy victories: 34–7 over Oak Park and 28–0 over North Farmington. Thurston's team was very strong. Fortunately, Franklin had beaten Groves, leading to a three-way tie for the league championship.

The team was great fun to watch. As the scores indicated, we had a very strong defense. On offense, Barry Simescu was a very good quarterback; but the strength of the team was in the halfback position. Coach McDonald loved running plays and the standard formation was seven linemen packed in tight, a quarterback, a fullback and two halfbacks. Interrupted by the occasional pass—which Coach gave away by finally lining up a split end—the offense consisted of giving the ball to either of the halfbacks: seniors Reggie Barringer or Paul Santangelo. These boys were both incredibly quick, fast and evasive, with Reggie being somewhat stronger and Paul a bit more evasive.

Thurston's most exciting play by far was the punt return. It is standard now to have one player returning the kick, but Coach lined-up both Paul and Reggie deep. Whoever fielded the kick would usually rip off a huge return, featuring many incredible tackle-evading feints.

Having won a share of the league championship, all that remained for Thurston was the rivalry game with the North Redford high school, Redford Union. The game was on a Friday night, which reveals that it was a road game for us. It seemed as if Thurston was the only school in Michigan that did **not** have lights for its football field; as a result, all of our home games were played on Saturday afternoons.

The weather that night was the worst. Heavy rain and warm enough to keep the rain from being snow, but only barely. This was the first huge advantage for RU; as the much weaker team, having everyone slowed by the weather was quite helpful. Each team scored a touchdown, but with the horrible weather, both extra points were missed. Thus, as the clock ran down in the fourth quarter, the score was 6–6. There was hope, however, for the Eagles' fans; as the time remaining ticked away, Thurston was marching down the field. With only a few seconds left to play, Thurston lined-up to attempt, I can't recall the exact distance, let's say a 30 yard field goal that, if good, would win the game.

This brings us to the consequences of a very strange rule in high school and college football. This rule states that when the knee of the player who is holding the ball touches the ground, he is *down* and the play is over. Watch a football game and, if you are attentive, you will notice the exception to this rule.

When a team attempts a field goal or a kicked extra point, the holder positions himself with *one knee on the ground* as he awaits the snap of the football. If all goes as planned, the holder catches the snap, places the ball in position and the kicker kicks and scores. During this entire sequence of events, the holder's knee never separates from the field. In other words, if there was no exception to the *knee-on-the-ground* rule, then **every** attempted kick would be whistled dead because the holder is down.

On this cold, rainy night years ago, our quarterback, Barry Simescu, lined up as the holder. Immediately upon receiving the snap, Barry sprang to his feet and threw a perfect pass to a fellow

Eagle who had snuck behind the unexpecting RU defense. Touchdown, Thurston! Thurston wins, 12–6, because the clock had expired and who cares about a possible extra point! Not so fast.

This brings us to RU's second huge advantage: There was at least one referee who was determined that RU would not lose. This idiot erased the play because *Barry's knee had touched the ground!* Thus, the official result is that the teams played to a 6–6 tie. And at least one fan, yours truly, is still angry about this after 49 years and counting!

As school began in Fall, 1966, my father allowed me to quit my job at the gas station. As a result, free of work, free of a girlfriend, I spent most of my spare time playing basketball, preparing for my final season at Thurston.

As the beginning of the season neared, suddenly there appeared in my life a nice and pretty eleventh grade girl named Lavon. Lavon wanted to be my girlfriend and I thought, "Why not?"

Despite my experience with Laney and Tony the previous year, it never occurred to me to wonder whether Lavon had a boyfriend she had dumped to be with me. Let me be clear; I am not saying that all girls who dump one boy to be with another are evil. (Although if the impetus is that the new boy is a minor celebrity, then my opinion moves substantially towards the categorization of evil. Well, if not evil, certainly unseemly.) I am not saying that it would have been wrong for me to take up with a girl who just dumped another. What I am saying is that, to 66 year-old Bob, it seems very strange that I never wondered about it.

As it turned out, Lavon had broken up with a perfectly good boyfriend named Bill to be with me and the instant basketball season was over, she dumped me and returned to Bill. Mystery writer Robert B. Parker once wrote, "Breakfast doesn't cause lunch;" thus, I might be overstating the importance of Lavon's timing.

While we were together Lavon was very nice to me; I had no complaints with her as a girlfriend. The only negative—and it was a big one that was entirely my fault—with being with Lavon was that after games instead of hanging out with my teammates, I went out with my girl. In the subsequent 50 years I have had many girlfriends (some would say too many!) but never again teammates to hang with.

During the death days of my relationship with Lavon, I began to notice Chris and her boyfriend in the hallways at school. It seemed that he was always trying to hug and kiss her and that Chris would get angry and push him away. The next thing I knew, Chris had broken up with that boy and she and I had started dating.

There is a funny story about my brief (two months? six weeks?) period of dating Chris.

Chris and I held hands, but we never hugged and we most certainly never kissed. One day I almost managed to kiss her, which leads to said funny story.

Chris and I had spent a Saturday afternoon together and had had a good time. As we walked towards the front of her house, I was thinking, "I gotta get a kiss today!" As we climbed on the porch, we could see through the picture window her father asleep in an easy chair. "Wonderful!" I thought, "There is nothing to stop me from kissing Chris!" As I turned towards her, preparing to take her into my arms and plant a big one on her mouth, I saw that Chris had moved over to the picture window. She was pounding on the window, shouting "Hey, Dad! Wake-up! I am home."

Her father arose, rubbing his eyes and looking out the window, with a "What the hell is happening?" look on his face. Chris turned to me and said, "There's my dad. Bye, Bob."

The next time I spoke with Chris she informed me that she had a new boyfriend. I am quite sure that Chris realized that there was no going back after her window pounding performance. The charade of her liking me was over.

“Thank you, God,” I thought to myself, knowing that I did not possess the courage to break up with any girl, no matter how bizarre the relationship.

After Chris and I ended, the reality kicked in that I was about to graduate and leave beloved Thurston behind. In my panic, I had a date with a junior girl named Wendy; the date went well, but because it did not end with a kiss, I did not ask her out again. “I am not falling for that trick again!” I thought to myself, stupidly. I dated one other junior girl, twice I believe, before I figured out that she was really nasty. After this I returned to my girl-free existence, almost until the end of summer.

Chapter 24

The 1966 Basketball Season

Basketball is a fascinating sport. One great player can change dramatically the performance of a team. As I am typing this, the four year tenure of LeBron James in Miami has come to an end. Nobody can deny the incredible talent of James. Few would deny that for the past four years Miami had the world's best player, two other excellent players and a decent supporting cast. Despite all of this, the Heat won only two championships. Indeed, if old-timer Ray Allen doesn't make a desperation three-point shot at the end of game six in the 2013 Finals, the Heat would have won only one championship in four years, despite their overwhelming individual talent. In the 2014 playoffs, the San Antonio team, with less individual talent, was far better than the Miami team. Some of these same issues—individual talent versus the ability to play as a team—were very important at Thurston during my years there.

It has now been one year since I typed the above paragraph. In 2015 the Golden State Warriors won the NBA title over James' Cleveland team behind the leadership of point guard Steph Curry. A big reason for Cleveland's loss was an injury to its point guard, Kyrie Irving. Indeed, there were many great point guards in the NBA in 2015, including: Tony Parker, who contributed mightily to several Spurs' championships; Mike Conley; Damian Lillard; John Wall; Kyle Lowry; Chris Paul; and Russell Westbrook. Try to create a similar list of NBA centers in 2015. I dare you.

It is not hyperbole to say that today's NBA is a point guard league.

In the 1960s the NBA and NCAA basketball was all about centers. Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlin, Lew Alcindor/Kareem Abdul Jabbar and Bill Walton to name a few. Don't forget Willis Reed. This trend continued until Michael Jordan proved one could win consistently without a center in the early 1990s.

High school basketball in 1966 was not that different from the colleges and pros, except I would classify it as a forward/center game. Guards were much less important. Case in point: During the 1966 and 1967 seasons Reggie Barringer was the best guard in our league. The only possible argument is that, perhaps, Eddie Holloman of Oak Park was slightly better than Reggie in 1966. And the only dimensions in which Eddie was better than Reggie were speed and quickness; for example, Eddie was the state champion quarter-miler in 1966. Having the best guard in the league, however, did not lead to even one league championship, because we could never match up against Groves' frontcourt.

When Thurston again won the league title in 1968 it was primarily because of the league-

dominating play of center Dale Joyce.

(Note: I acknowledge that my basketball friends from Thurston may well disagree with my analyses, both above and in this and the remaining chapters. That's a big part of the fun of sports; arguing about these things!)

I ended Chapter ?? by stating that based on the statistical performances of non-seniors in 1965, the prospects for the 1966 Thurston team were not good. Two years later, there was a much stronger argument that based on 1967 statistics, the 1968 team looked nearly hopeless. So, what happened? In my opinion, the 1966 and 1968 teams were the best of the Thurston teams in its first five years (1964–1968) in the Northwest Suburban League. How this happened, for the 1966 team, will be the topic of this chapter. In Chapter 26, I will discuss why the 1967 team, which had so much potential, was such a disappointment. Later, I will have a few comments on what happened to make the 1968 team so successful.

The top returning scores for the 1966 team was Gary Knock. The second top scorer was Randy Samelson, who had averaged a meager 4.2 points per game as a junior in 1965. (Reggie Barringer had a higher average than Randy in 1965, 7.4 points per game, but Randy, on the team all year, had a higher total. In any event, there were not many points returning for 1966.) The other three starters in 1966 were juniors Don Block, Bob Wardrop and Reggie Barringer; of these three, Reggie had been a strong contributor and starter for one-half of the 1965 season, while Don and Bob had been on the JV except for a brief—and highly unspectacular—three games on varsity at the end of the season. (This is a bit unfair; Don actually played quite well, averaging 9.0 points per game, during his three games on varsity.) So, what happened to this team that looked so shaky?

The 1966 team had a great season, rivaling the 1968 team as the most successful of this brief five year era. This is a bit hyperbole; I really didn't know the 1964 team. Also, both the 1964 and 1968 Thurston teams won league titles; in my mind, this puts them ahead of the 1966 team. As a key member of both the 1966 and 1967 teams, I could argue that the Groves' teams of 1966 and 1967 were by far the best teams of this era—this, indeed, is why I even dare to mention 1966 as a competitor to 1964 and 1968. See Chapter 26 for my exclusion of the 1967 team from this list of best teams. (My apologies to Roger Steffen.)

I am going to begin with the second reason the 1966 team was so successful. This, of course, seems strange, but I do this because the first reason doesn't make sense until you know the second reason. The second reason is that Randy Samuelson blossomed into a very good player and a great team leader. The first reason was that Gary Knock *allowed* Randy to do this. Huh?

Gary Knock had the most integrity of any of my teammates. Gary was the best at sacrificing personal accolades for the good of the team. He could have fought for supremacy on the 1966 team and one might even argue that he deserved it. But Gary seemed to instinctively know that the team would be much more successful if he concentrated on doing all the little things a team needs to win and let the others, especially Randy, get the glory.

The best thing I can say about the 1966 team is that we never lost a game that we should have won. Look at our five losses. We lost to five time defending state champion River Rouge on its court. (Rouge in 1966 would be Class B state runner-up. I have more to say about this game later.) We lost a state tournament game to a very strong University of Detroit High School team on their home court. We lost at Groves. In these latter two games, we lost by big scores because

the opponents were much better teams and, in both cases, had the home court advantage. Our other two losses were close games and early in the season: at home against Groves and at Windsor Assumption. In both of these games, our juniors (especially Bob Wardrop) were inexperienced; I believe that later in the season we would have won both of these games.

I want to share a few memories of the loss to River Rouge. It is impossible to write about life in the 1960s in Michigan without talking about race. The historical treatment of blacks in America (I prefer typing blacks over African-Americans; either way I would offend somebody and I am sorry about that) is disgraceful. This does not mean, however, that in every situation blacks suffered at the hands of whites. In fact, if, as a group, blacks never fought back it would be difficult to respect them. They did not, however, always fight back in a reasonable way. Our *loss* to Rouge was **not** a shining moment for black Americans. As a result, in many ways I believe that our record for 1966 was actually 13 wins and four losses, with the Rouge game better left ignored.

In the River Rouge gymnasium, the spectator bleachers were on both sides of the court, with none in the endzones. The bleachers ran up almost to the sidelines of the basketball court—they had to leave some room for teams to sit, the scorer's table and in-bounds passes. The bleachers were elevated, say, 9–10 feet above the floor with railings for safety.

We met Rouge in the finals of their Christmas tournament, a tournament, as I recall, that they had always won. In the first few minutes of the game, Thurston jumped off to a 9–0 lead and River Rouge called timeout. As always with a timeout, the teams went to their benches and the referees went somewhere else to talk. As we huddled up around Boris, a large number of black teenagers standing in the bleachers and leaning over the railing shouted at us, “Hey, Thurston! If you win this game we are going to knife you all in the parking lot. You won’t get out of here alive!” Curiously, I never heard a similar threat at Groves; oh yeah, I always lost big there. Seriously—and isn’t the promise of a violent death always serious—I never heard any threat even remotely like this anywhere.

What failed to occur to me for years was the following: What were these gangsters’ friends yelling at the referees?

The game resumed. Rouge had one excellent player, a 6’2” forward named Frank Price. The other player I remember was a 5’7” guard named ‘Benny’ Benford. I don’t know young Benford’s real first name. Perhaps it was Benny or Benjamin or something else all together. After all, we called Gary Smith ‘Smitty.’

Before I get back to the game, let me digress. I mentioned in Chapter ?? that I remember that only one of my shots was blocked during my career. There are two things to note about this memory:

1. It might be a false memory.
2. Avoiding blocked shots is not entirely a positive feat.

Regarding the second point, my tendency was to pull up and shoot a jump shot rather than drive to the basket, which would risk my shot being blocked. My teammates were much better at driving to the basket than I; as a result, they suffered some blocked shots, but these drives reflected an edge they had over me as a player.

In addition to my memory of not having shots blocked, I recall that whereas Reggie and I on occasion would *travel* or *carry the ball* or make a bad pass, it was very rare indeed for someone to come up to us and take the ball away while we were dribbling. Well, rare except for this game at River Rouge.

The game resumed with Thurston leading 9–0. Our lives had been threatened and who knows what had been said to the referees. Before long I was dribbling the ball with my right hand when, suddenly, ‘Benny’ Benford karate-chopped my right arm, two inches below my elbow. “What the f***?” I thought as the ball went sailing away with Benny in pursuit. I stood there waiting for the ref to blow his whistle; after all this was the most egregious foul I had suffered during my 2.5 year career. As you have probably guessed by now, no whistle was blown.

The above *steal* occurred two, maybe three, more times before I realized that the referee was not going to whistle a foul. Thus, I started to attempt evasive measures; sadly, however, I had had no experience at avoiding karate-chops while dribbling and I was a slow learner.

It is probably just as well that I was a slow learner. I am convinced that if necessary, Benny would have pulled out his brass knuckles and knocked me unconscious to get the ball. And, of course, the ref would not have seen any of it.

When the game ended, as a result of Benny stealing the ball from me five? 10? 42? times, Thurston had lost 71–51. If we had played Rouge on our court and no gangsters had been in attendance, with the referees actually calling fouls, then I sincerely believe that we would have won.

As December 1965, became January 1966, Thurston’s basketball team had a record of six wins and three losses. We had destroyed Cherry Hill at home by 31 points; clobbered John Glenn on the road by 40; beaten Troy on the road by 15; smashed Redford Union at home by 18; and won two games in the Christmas tournament: by 13 over Taylor and 14 over Northville. Our losses were the aforementioned 20 point defeat by Rouge, an eight point loss at Windsor Assumption and a six point home loss to Groves. As we returned to school and practice after New Year’s Day, it was time for the Monday afternoon massacre.

Remember that just 12 months earlier Boris had said something to Mike Shaner that resulted in his quitting the team.

After a few general comments on our first nine games, Boris embarked on comments for individual players. He proceeded to criticize Reggie and Don and Randy and Gary; all of the other starters. (I don’t remember the order in which the players were criticized.) Boris said some nasty things, but, Hey, the team was doing well; much better than the previous year’s team. As Boris individually criticized the other four, I sat there thinking: What will he say about me? When will he say it?

Then a strange thing happened. Without saying anything about me, Boris started to criticize, one-by-one, other boys who had perhaps started a game or were frequent substitutes. In the words of my father, I thought, “Holy Moses! What about me? If he criticizes everyone but me, then my teammates will all hate me.” I needn’t have worried. Boris simply was saving the best for last.

“This brings me to Bob Wardrop,” Boris said, looking very angry. “Bob loves to shoot. Bob shoots constantly. Bob never passes the ball. Yadda, yadda, yadda.” (OK, I admit it; I don’t remember *everything* verbatim. Suffice to say, Boris thought I was shooting too much.)

First of all, let me say that both then and now, I could not and cannot disagree with one of the things Boris said. I liked to shoot. As I will argue later in this chapter, the number of shots I took and the proportion of shots I made were both very similar to the corresponding numbers for my teammates.

My major complaint with what Boris did was the medium, not the message. I absolutely detested being humiliated—for I was totally humiliated, more than ever before in my life—in front of my friends and teammates. Let me make two remarks.

1. Boris could have taken me aside and told me.
2. There was an obvious solution available to Boris for the problem of my shooting too much: bench me.

I left that meeting thinking of quitting the team. I could really understand Mike Shaner's action of one year before. I did not quit for two reasons:

1. Without basketball I would have been lost. I didn't think that Boris would cut me from the team; even if I never played again, I could practice with my friends.
2. I was so angry with Boris. So angry that I wanted to prove him wrong.

I have thought about Boris's verbal attack on me in January 1966 many times in the past 48 years. Thinking back, I am surprised that I came so close to quitting the team. I am surprised for two reasons.

1. I did not play for Boris. I played for myself, my friends, my teammates and my family. Why should I have cared what this man with his passive-aggressive tendencies said to me?
2. I now realize that if one is going to play a team sport, then one must accept that the evaluation of performance will be highly subjective. These evaluations might work to one's advantage or disadvantage; or, as in my case, sometimes to my advantage (being a starter) and sometimes not (being singled out for severe criticism).

If one wants to avoid the subjectivity, there are plenty of individual sports that can be played.

The next game was at home versus Oak Park. I was still a starter, but I refused to shoot any jump shots during the game. We won easily, by the score of 95–82. Randy scored 28 points, Reggie 22 and Gary Knock 15. Don Block had been injured, as I recall in a tobogganing accident, and was replaced by the tandem of Gary Schulte (13 points) and Roger (6 points). I refused to attempt **any** outside shots, but as the game was a track meet with lots of fast breaks, I managed to score 13 points on a combination of lay-ups and free throws. Note that the total points scored by these six named players:

$$28 + 22 + 15 + 13 + 6 + 13 = 97$$

exceeds the team total of 95 points. This is an one example of many inaccuracies in the reporting of the *Redford Observer*. The *Detroit News*, generally a much more reliable source, reported Randy's 28 and Reggie's 22 points; thus, I opine that these are accurate.

After the game I found myself next to Boris as we walked towards the locker room. “Well,” I said, “Are you happy? I didn’t shoot!” Boris muttered something in reply which I didn’t hear, but I could see that he was fuming.

One week later our game was at North Farmington and, amazingly, I was still a starter. Before I describe this game, let me go back to the 1965 season.

In 1965, North Farmington and Groves tied for first place with records of 8–2. They split their two games and, in retrospect, North Farmington had been upset by Thurston and Groves by Oak Park. The all-league team consisted of seniors Dennis Rafferty of Groves, John Page of Thurston and Len Cushingberry of Oak Park, plus juniors Rick Lorenz and Richard Schultz of North Farmington. Thus, entering the 1966 season, North Farmington appeared to be the prohibitive favorite to win the league; instead, they finished in fifth place with a record of 2–8.

We won the North Farmington game by the score of 94–85. Randy was our top scorer with 25 points. I finished with what would turn out to be my career high: 24 points on 8–11 shooting from the floor and 8–9 from the foul line. I was shooting again and Boris and I were on speaking terms. After the game Boris made some comment to me to the effect that he took total credit, through his nasty criticism, for my strong performance. Who knows? Perhaps he was correct.

Our next game was at home against Franklin and we won this not-very-memorable game by 13 points.

The Franklin game brought us to the half-way point of the league season. Our record was 4–1, good for second place behind Groves at 5–0. Groves was very strong and we knew that, if they were to lose, we would need to be the team to beat them.

Our next game was home against John Glenn and we beat them by 12. In December we had won on Glenn’s floor by 40; thus, perhaps winning by only 12 was a bad omen. If so, I did not think about it.

The next week at Groves we played a decent first half. Without checking the box score, I would say that the score was close with both teams in the 30’s. At halftime, Boris got the idea that we should press Groves. Big mistake. They shredded our press, scoring—as I recall—38 points in the third quarter and ended with a victory by the score of 94–63.

The Groves game ended any hope of our winning the league title, but we had three games still to play. These games were all rematches with teams we had beaten earlier in the year—of which two of the games had been at home. Yes, we did manage to win these games, but our margin of victory in each was smaller than it had been in the earlier meeting.

The first of these three games was a trip to Oak Park. Oak Park was quite good that year, finishing with a league record of 5–5, tied for third place with Franklin. This evening marked the most fun we ever had as a team.

Usually, on varsity, we would sit in the stands and watch the JV game. After halftime, when the JV team was back on the court, the varsity players would go to the locker room, dress for the game, stretch, make water (Boris’s euphemism for urinating) and generally get ready to play. But somebody on the team knew something—this will become clearer soon—and we went to the locker room at the beginning of the JV game and dressed.

Let me digress for a moment about an amazing feature of the 1966 team. We had seven players who could dunk a basketball! They were, in alphabetical order:

Don Block, Fred Koester, Dan Morgan, Randy Samelson, Gary Schulte, Roger Steffen and Rob Szymanski.

Please, God, if nothing else in these memoirs is accurate, let this list be. I don't want to face the anger of someone who I inadvertently left off it!

If you are reading this in the year 2014, or later, you probably are thinking, "What's the big deal? I dunk all of the time. *I simply lower my basket to the appropriate height and I start dunking.*" You youngsters are so funny! In the 1960s we walked to school in the snow, uphill in both directions. In addition, the height of a basket could not be changed; they were all 10 feet high, the official height.

I was so jealous of my teammates who could dunk. Yes, Don, Dan, Gary and Roger were all at least four inches taller than I, but Fred, Randy and Rob were only about two inches taller than I. More than wanting to learn how to kiss a girl, I wanted to learn to dunk. I spent hundreds of hours doing toe rises to build up my calf muscles. I would repeatedly go to an outdoor court and, by the hour, dribble up to the basket and try to dunk. During lunch hour as my classmates chatted up each other, I would get a basketball, dribble to the rim and try to dunk. I would become exhausted, but never give up. On February 11, 1966, this all changed.

Everything changed that evening for two reasons:

1. Our locker room (as a visiting team, you always used the girls' locker room) was connected to a second gym (the girls' gym?) in which the baskets were lower than 10 feet.
2. Somebody on our team knew about this second gym; hence, our leaving the stands early to get dressed. Was it Boris?

After dressing we went to this second gym. Our eyes got really big when we saw the low rims. It was, literally, the first time in my life I had been on a court with rims below 10 feet. (The next year, I believe it was, Will Rogers School erected outdoor baskets that were ridiculously low, perhaps eight feet high. A watershed moment in the destruction of standards in America!)

I don't really know how high the rims were; 9 feet? I only recall that they were low enough for our shortest player—Bob Holmes—and everyone else, to dunk. For the next 30–45 minutes we all ran wild, dribbling and dunking, laughing hysterically. It was the first time in my life I could dunk.

Everybody kept shouting, "Watch me!" and then proceeded to execute some amazing dunk. We all became exhausted, which wasn't a problem for the boys who were not going to play, but was a big problem for the others, especially the starters.

To make matters worse, Oak Park had a senior named Eddie Holloman who was perhaps the fastest basketball player in the state, as evidenced by his winning the high school state championship 440 yard dash a few months later. Eddie was a good basketball player too, making the all league team in 1966.

In any event, the game was a track meet. As I recall, we held the lead the whole game, but we never got ahead by very much. The final score was 94–90, but the game was not as close as this score suggests. Think about it: 184 points scored in 32 minutes! And, remember, there was no three point line in the 1960s.

Our next game was the last home game of the year, versus North Farmington. We had beaten them on their court five weeks earlier by nine points and did not expect them to be too much trouble. The game, however, turned out to be a surprise.

The first issue was that the game was senior night, which meant that the five seniors who were not usually starters were the starters for this game. These guys did fine, but the change in routine seemed to affect us. When the regular starters were put into the game we learned that North Farmington was **not** going to *roll over* for us. As noted above, 1966 had been a horrible season for them; coming off a year in which they had been co-champions, with the only returning all league players (two of them!). Perhaps North Farmington's players viewed this game as their shot at redemption; perhaps one big road victory over a better team would make the whole year more palatable for them.

Whatever the reason, we barely hung on for a double overtime victory, 87–83. The highlight of the game was when Richard Schultz—one of the returning all league players who, no doubt, had had a miserable year—got into a fist fight with our Don Block. It wasn't much of a fight; my main memory of it was that my father ran out of the stands in a flash to separate the players.

The next week we finished the regular season at Franklin. After finishing 2–8 the previous year, Franklin came into the game with a record of 5–4, their most wins ever in the short history of the league. They were determined to beat us. They jumped ahead, 18–12, at the end of one quarter. Randy then took over the game; his best game in my memory, and we managed to win by 10 points.

We ended the regular season with an official record of 13 wins and 4 losses. I think we were 13–3 because of the Rouge debacle, but I have said enough about that.

I follow high school basketball in Wisconsin and, come state tournament time, year-to-year pretty much the same teams end up in the same regions (they were called districts in the 1960s in Michigan). Michigan in the 1960s was totally different.

In 1965 we had been sent to Walled Lake, a distant suburb of Detroit—recall that Thurston bordered Detroit—to play the host school. In 1966, we were sent far in the opposite direction. We played at the University of Detroit High School gym, again against the host school and again we lost by a big score, 85–62. As I recall, later in the week, UD beat a very strong Hamtramck team that featured senior and future NBA star and coach Rudy Tomjanovich. Rudy was, by far, the best player I almost played against. In 1967, we were placed in a district with another completely different set of teams: Detroit Catholic Central, Oak Park, Southfield and Redford Union.

So far in this chapter I have focused on a game-by-game inspection of the 1966 season. For the remainder of this chapter I want to make some general comments.

I will begin by returning to Boris's rant directed towards me in early January. Table 24.1 presents selected statistics for the entire 18 game 1966 season. The team launched a huge number of field goal attempts, 1,185, which works out to 65.83 per game. The team shot well, making 43.3% of its field goal attempts. This was a huge increase over the 34.4% shooting percentage for 1965.

Individually, the four top scores each averaged *double figures* in points per game. I am quite sure that Don Block missed a couple of games due to injury; thus, for the games in which he played, he averaged more than 10 points per game. (Given the limitations of the data to which I

Table 24.1: Selected Statistics for the 1966 Season.

Name	Field Goals	FG %	Free Throws	FT %	Rebounds	Points	PPG
Randy Samelson	103-253	40.7	78-132	59.1	171	284	15.8
Gary Knock	98-191	51.3	58-82	70.7	60	254	14.1
Reg Barringer	84-204	41.2	60-80	75.0	36	228	12.7
Bob Wardrop	86-206	41.7	44-65	67.7	37	216	12.0
Don Block	58-126	46.0	49-81	60.5	107	165	9.2
Gary Schulte	27-65	41.5	24-31	77.4	65	78	4.3
Roger Steffen	23-45	51.1	3-13	23.1	22	49	2.7
Others	34-95	35.8	27-48	56.2	61	95	5.3
Totals	513-1185	43.3	343-532	64.5	559	1369	76.1

have access, I am doing the best I can!) Similarly, Gary Schulte and Roger did not play in every game; thus, their true ppg's are larger than the tabulated values. The table is accurate in showing that the *usual* starting five contributed 63.8 ppg and the other players, including the two primary reserves, contributed 12.3 ppg. We scored a lot of points!

You can see that Reggie and I had almost identical offensive numbers for the season, although he was a bit better at shooting free throws. Certainly, there is nothing about the numbers above to justify Boris's complaining about either the frequency or efficacy of my shooting. Of course, Boris attacked me half-way through the season and I do believe that my shooting was better in the second half.

I imagine that more than one reader (assuming these memoirs gets read by more than one person) will wonder why Thurston had so much trouble playing *Canadians*! As noted in the previous chapter, Windsor Assumption beat the 1965 Thurston team by 28 points on Thurston's court; the 1966 Thurston team lost at Assumption by eight points; and the 1968 Thurston team lost at Assumption by one point. The 1967 Thurston team did thrash Assumption by 23 points at home, but, overall, this four year record was pretty dismal.

There were three main reasons for this poor performance.

1. I played on the Assumption home court only once, but it was horrible.
2. Assumption played a much more disciplined and methodical game than we were accustomed to playing. And most importantly,
3. In the 1960s, schools in Canada had 13 grades, with grade 13 being the same as the first year of college in the US. Thus, we were playing the equivalent of a college team, albeit *Canadian* college freshmen.

I remember that the game at Assumption my junior year was my worst shooting performance of my career: 3–18. I got some consolation—misery loves company—by noting that Reggie shot 2–12

in that game; i.e., he shot as poorly as I, but had the good sense to shoot less frequently. Perhaps Boris was thinking of Assumption on the Monday Afternoon Massacre in 1966. (I will note that if you subtract Assumption from my 1966 statistics, you will find that I shot 83–188, or 44.1%, in the United States. This is a very respectable figure for a guard.)

After each season, the awards are given. At the local level, voted by teammates, Randy was voted the most valuable player and the most improved player, while Reggie was voted the best defensive player. These were very reasonable selections; in fact, I am sure that this is how I voted.

The awards selected at the league level are much more political and, consequently, bewildering. The all-star team for the Northwest Suburban League consisted of our Randy from the 8-2 second place team, a player from the 5-5 Franklin team, the previously mentioned Eddie Holloman from the 5-5 Oak Park team, Mike Rafferty from the undefeated Groves team and one other player. Who was this other player?

If you had shown the list of the above four players to everyone on our team, they would have thought, “Sure, this is a reasonable list.” Oak Park and Franklin had pretty good seasons; their best players deserved some props. (I personally, don’t remember the Franklin player—Paul Katosh was his name—but I had no problem with him being named.) In addition, if you had asked my teammates, “Who is the fifth all-star?” the answer would have been near unanimous, if not unanimous: Bob Wardrop. No, of course, I am kidding. It would have been Craig Love, the 6’9” center for Groves.

I played all of these teams twice. In my mind, Craig Love was the best player in the league, although I wouldn’t argue too long with the someone who gave that distinction to Mike Rafferty. After all; they won all of their games! Nearly all of the games were won easily. Do you want to argue that was due to one player?

The whole situation becomes ridiculous when I tell you the fifth all-star: Rick Lorenz of North Farmington. North Farmington with a record of 2–8, whose only victories came over Glenn, a team with no seniors! Really?

In addition to the all-stars, a number of players were given *Honorable Mention*. We never saw a complete list of these players, I only know that from Thurston, only Reggie Barringer received this honor. Personally, I think that Don Block was the second best center in the league and should have received this honor too.

At the end of the 1966 season, the juniors on the team voted for the captains for the 1967 team and had the wisdom to select the two players who were the most talented, the best performers and the best leaders: Reggie Barringer and Don Block. I was sad to not be elected a captain, but, hey, they were the guys I voted for and I have always believed that they were the best choice.

I want to end this chapter with a tribute to my old teammate Reggie. In 1966 and 1967, with the exception of the Senior Night Game in 1966, both Reggie and I started every game. We both played guard except for the first six games of the 1967 season during Boris’s failed attempt to make me a forward—more on this in Chapter 26 . I recently learned from Reggie—and Reggie learned from me—that there was one thing that our fathers—Mr. Wardrop and Mr. Barringer—agreed upon; namely, that both Reggie and I should shoot more and do less passing to that other guard. This was patently silly; as the 1966 and 1967 season statistics show, Reggie and I were very similar in offensive performance.

Despite our similarities offensively, I never had any doubt which of us was the better player. As voted by both the 1966 and 1967 teams, Reggie was our best defensive player.

One of the great things about watching high school basketball is that the kids try really hard. Everybody gives a huge effort. All of us on all of these Thurston teams played hard; Reggie played harder. When Reggie occasionally praised my play—he was not an effusive kid—it meant more to me than praise from Boris, not that Boris praised me much. Even now, when I haven't played with Reggie for 47 years or seen him for 31 years, when he told me he approved of what I had written in these memoirs, it meant everything to me.

I must admit that I had some annoyance with Reggie when we were playing at Thurston. Roger Steffen, Don Block, Gary Schulte, Randy Samelson, Gary Knock and I were *basketball players*. We might dabble in other sports, but nearly all of our sports-thoughts and sports-energy were devoted to basketball. Meanwhile, Reggie, who had the best career of this group, was a star player in baseball and football as well as basketball. So, yes, it was annoying that I couldn't keep up with Reggie in his *third sport*!

One final comment. At the beginning of this chapter I opined that high school basketball in the 1960s was a forward/center league; guards just didn't matter that much. Boris was a big believer that forwards were way more important than guards. For example, on the 1965 team Boris played John Page at forward even though, in my opinion, he was a natural guard. As you will read later, for 1967 Boris moved me to forward even though I had no aptitude for the position. I write all of this because I finally understand why Boris moved Gary Knock to forward, a position where we had at least two other strong players—Rob Syxmanski and Fred Koester—while he promoted me to a starter at a position at which we were thin in bench players that Boris would trust. I believe that Boris moved Gary to forward because he was one of our best players and, if possible, you put your best players in the front court.

In addition, Boris did love to press and run and that only works if you have great athletes—like Gary and Randy—at forward.

The above begs the question: Why wasn't Reggie ever moved to forward? Reggie's only flaw was that, at 70 inches, he was too short to play in the frontcourt. I often tell friends that basketball is a game for whiners; we all say how great we would be if only we were taller. Indeed, Gary Schulte and Don Block were such smart players that at 82–84 inches they might have made the NBA. (For example, Groves' Craig Love, at 82 inches, played one year in the NBA.) Roger and I were too raw as players to speculate how we would have performed if taller. I do believe that if Reggie had been 76 inches tall, he would have been one of the top players in the state in 1967.

Chapter 25

WORK!

Bob Denver (1935–2005) was an American actor much-beloved and mostly remembered for his 98 episodes in the title role on Gilligan’s Island, 1964–67. Before he played Gilligan (did Gilligan have a last name?) I knew Mr. Denver from his four years (1959–1963) playing Beatnik Maynard G. Crebs on my favorite TV show at the time, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*. I adored this show; between the ages of 10 and 14 everything I learned about girls came from Dobie’s experiences. (It is a good time to remember that I knew almost nothing about girls and by the time Dobie went off the air in 1963 I still did not know what a prostitute was.)

Being a Beatnik was, of course, a tribute to the Beat Generation founded by, among others, Jack Kerouac. The Beat Generation was all about free love and dropping out of the rat race. Denver’s character was 1% free love and 99% dropping out. I would make the split 0/100, except I have a vague recollection of one episode (out of 144) in which Maynard had some interest in a girl. He was a good comedic contrast to Dobie (played by Dwayne Hickman) who spent every waking moment trying to get laid, although TV in that era was not as blunt as I am being.

(Let me digress, in part, as an attempt to lift the intellectual level of this tome, if only very briefly. One of the very best books I ever read was *The hearts of men* by Barbara Ehrenreich. In this book, Ehrenreich presents a compelling argument on the battle for the figurative hearts of men in 1950s America. As I recall her argument, Hugh Hefner and Jack Kerouac were trying to convince American men that one need not marry in order to get laid. Kerouac claimed that American women were just as restricted as American men and, thus, argued for love freely given between consenting adults. Hefner, on the other hand, wanted men to spend money for companionship, but not the lifetime commitment of marriage. Instead, he advocated the one night commitment with one of his bunnies which, of course, was bought dearly. In retrospect, I suspect that Maynard was made to be largely asexual as a vote of support for Hefner: See what happens to men who eschew the rat race work ethic? Of course, stating the obvious, neither Hefner nor Kerouac seemed to give much attention to what happens to the children.)

It seems to be a given, that on the first day of the course *Writing TV Comedy 101*, the student learns that a character in a comedy needs a standard line. Some examples that come to mind:

- Fonzie on *Happy Days*: Aaaaay.
- The crowd on *Cheers!*: Norm!

- Ricky Ricardo: You got some splaining to do Lucy.
- Archie Bunker: Meathead!

Maynard's line required some set-up. Somebody would suggest that Maynard get a job or perhaps simply say something general about employment and Maynard would have a *deer in the headlights expression* and mumble, "Work," and then scream, "WORK!" He was hilarious.

As I have implied, I watched Dobie religiously and never missed an episode. I suspect that my father must have seen some of these episodes; how else to explain that he treated me as if I had the work ethic of Maynard?

From an early age I, of course, did chores around the house. It was mostly *manly* stuff like cutting the grass and shoveling snow. For several years I would dry the dishes to my sister's washing, until the day in November, 1960, when I nearly severed my right index finger drying the recently-sharpened-for-Thanksgiving butcher knife. It was definitely an accident and if I had to do over I would be much more careful, but it wasn't all bad: I never dried another dish until after I got married. "I might cut-off my finger," I pleaded to my wife Debbie. She wasn't moved and I have spent a good portion of the past 45 years drying and, more often, washing dishes.

My cutting grass and shoveling snow was not enough for my father! Little Bobby would grow up lazy. I was encouraged to get jobs in the neighborhood cutting the grass and shoveling the snow of others. There were, however, four insurmountable difficulties to my obtaining such work. Usually, several of these difficulties would come into play with any particular potential employer and the first difficulty always was an issue.

1. I was really bad at cutting grass and shoveling snow; no aptitude whatsoever.
2. Most of our neighbors had one or more kids of their own who could be forced to do the work for free.
3. The men in our neighborhood were *manly* working class men who enjoyed this kind of stuff. (A favorite saying among these men was, "Don't call me Mister! I **work** for a living!")
4. Families in our neighborhood did not have much money; certainly there was none extra to devote to Bobby's development.

The first paying job I had was obtained through my neighbor, apprentice criminal Dennis. His father knew some guy who made his living cleaning carpets; as a small business owner, Mr. C. Cleaner needed to advertise his business. He printed approximately 100,000 little pieces of paper, each containing key info about his business, each with its own rubberband for afixing it to the screen door of houses in the targeted neighborhoods.

Mr. Cleaner would come by on a Saturday morning and pick up Dennis, his younger brother Carey and me. He would then drive us to some neighborhood, drop us off with a huge load of flyers and rubberbands and then retreat to a local drinking establishment for about five hours. After five hours of distributing forms and running from dogs and abusive home owners, we would be picked up by Mr. Cleaner who would drive us home and give each of us fifty cents.

This might be a good time to note that my parents did not know Mr. Cleaner and had no idea where he was taking us. What was important to my father was that I was working and not being lazy.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned four things I remembered about my neighbor Jerry Locke (see page 27 if you want a reminder). There was a fifth item, which I actually forgot, but will instead claim that I decided to save it for now because this fits my narrative better.

Jerry Locke had a paper route and when he was 14 he sold it to his neighbor, 12 year-old Bob. For the next two years every weekday afternoon, Saturday midday and Sunday very early I would ride my bike 1.5 miles to pick up my 50-odd newspapers, pedal back one mile to the beginning of my route and after 1.5 more miles of delivering papers—including running up to front doors for customers who did not want the paper thrown onto their porch—I would return home. (My favorite bicycle accessory? That's easy—my odometer!) The whole experience took about 75–90 minutes per day and about 60–90 minutes longer on Fridays when I would make my weekly collection from my customers. For this 10–12 hours of work each week I earned about \$10 per week and about \$20 in Christmas tips.

When the weather was bad on Sunday mornings my father would sometimes drive me on my route, but on the other six days, whatever the weather, I was on my bike. A vivid memory was biking on ice and throwing a newspaper towards a porch. I had not yet studied physics in school, so the whole *every action creates an equal but opposite reaction* was unknown to me. Unknown, that is until, immediately after throwing the paper, I did a perfect 360 on my bike and then continued on my way.

The fact that I had a paper route in grades 7 and 8 was a big reason why I never thought about going out for a school sports team. In ninth grade my father was not the least bit supportive of my playing basketball and he made me keep my route. By necessity, I hired a boy to sub for me on every afternoon in which I had either practice or a game; namely, every weekday. I was reduced to working my route two days per week, on weekends.

I did not see my father much when I was in junior high. Everything in a union factory—which Detroit Universal was—revolved around seniority. Up until 1961 my father had been a worker with a great deal of seniority and, hence, was able to work the day shift. In 1961—or perhaps a few years earlier, I am not certain on this fact—my father was promoted to being a foreman.

The factory was divided into departments and each department was supervised by a foreman. I don't know the distribution of sizes of departments, but based on my two years working there during summer vacations, I would guess that 20 workers per department was typical. When my father became a foreman he was at the bottom of seniority in that job classification and, hence, was placed on the afternoon shift. The shift was typically 3:00–11:30 PM; with a 25 minute drive to work and so on, I was always in bed when my father returned home from work and he was sleeping when I prepared for school. Thus, throughout junior high I only saw my father on weekends. My memory is that we were both pretty happy with this situation.

As related earlier, my ninth grade basketball team was having a lot of success. Because we played all of our games in the late afternoon of a schoolday, my father did not see any of my games as Marshall roared to a perfect record 9–0. My father, of course, heard about our success on the weekends and became interested in how I was doing. After all, in his view one of the jobs for a

male child is to excel in athletics for the entertainment and edification of his father.

For our last game of the year, 9–0 Marshall at 8–1 Pierce, my father took a half-day off work and came to the game. I was very happy to see him in the crowd, but, as related before, I did not play particularly well. I can't really attribute my performance to nerves. In my ninth grade basketball career, I had a good first game, a great game at home against Pierce and eight other poor to unmemorable games.

Seeing me play basketball, however, transformed my father. He decided that he had a basketball star in the making and that he was going to help in whatever way he could. Well, not any way, as you will see.

If you are going to be a basketball star, a necessity is to have a basket at home. With a basket at home you can practice dribbling and shooting for hours and hours everyday. With our 2.5 car garage and wide and long driveway I anticipated having the best home basket in South Redford! (I didn't know about the full court Urbie Rice had at his home!)

With a basket on the garage I could play after a snowfall; just shovel the snow away. I could play after dark; the outdoor lights from the house would provide ample illumination (and one can always add more lights!). After rain, I could sweep away puddles and, for the short time the driveway might be slippery, I could practice skills that did not require starts and stops.

My father announced, "We are going to erect a basket in the yard." I was thrilled. So thrilled I never questioned the use of the words *erect* and *yard*. (And recall, I was never encouraged to question anything.)

Why erect? One would simply nail a small backboard to the front of the garage (there was an awesome place for this right above the double doors). Erect seems kind of overstated for a few nails.

Why yard? I didn't usually think of the driveway as the yard; the driveway was built upon the yard, and I never thought of it as being *in the yard*.

I was so excited, however, that strange, but minor, choices of words were ignored. Ignored until they could not be ignored; which occurred during the following conversation.

- Me: I am so excited about being able to play basketball in our driveway; you are the best father in the world!
- My father: Driveway?
- Me: Of course! You said that you would put up a basket for me!
- My father: Yes, but not in the driveway.
- Me: What? Why not?
- My father: You will ruin my beloved (OK, he didn't actually say beloved) aluminum siding.
- Me: What? Are you kidding?
- My father: No questions, Bob.

- Me (after some thought): OK. You say will ruin; more accurately might damage. I won't damage the aluminum siding; I will be shooting for the basket or the backboard; I won't be hurling the ball at the aluminum siding!
- My father: Shots go awry. (I should cut my father some slack here. After the basket went up and I saw what a horrible shot he was, I concluded that he indeed would have ruined the aluminum siding.)
- Me: I will pay for any damage! I have been saving money from my paper route.
- My father: I thought you were going to give me that money to buy the cottage. (Long story; I will return to it later.)
- Me: Yes! BUT YOU DIDN'T BUY THE COTTAGE!
- Me (after calming down; I got an idea): I see. You are going to put the basket at the other end of the driveway erected (finally, that word becomes clearer) on a pole.
- My father: That's stupid. Then you would hit the aluminum siding on the house!
- Me: What? I would be shooting away from the house and the pole would be 20 feet away from the house.
- My father: Shots go awry.
- Me (finally giving up): OK. Where will this basket be?
- My father (recovering, quite proudly): In the back yard; behind and to the side of the garage and near the fence.
- Me (thinking to myself): Please, please, please God. Don't let him realize that the side of the garage will have a miniscule chance of being hit. As it turned out, my father realized that, in his world, the side of the garage would be hit repeatedly, but—and this is the keypoint—people on the sidewalk or in the street could not see damage to the side of the garage. By the way, I **never** hit the side of the garage, in large part because it was protected by trees; more on the trees soon.

Well, that's probably more than enough recollected dialogue. My father actually worked very hard in putting up a pole and basket for me. He put up the basket in a form similar to the game of hang-man: A steel pole was cemented into the ground to the height of, roughly, 12 feet; and from the top of this first pole, was a four foot pole, parallel to the ground and, thus, perpendicular to the vertical pole. Afixed to the horizontal pole was a 4 feet by 4 feet sheet of pretty thick plywood; the backboard. On the front of the backboard was the basket. This was actually pretty great; a 4 x 4 backboard was a pretty good facsimile of the standard 4 x 6 backboard we used.

My father was most proud of the angled-brace running from the backboard to the vertical pole, without which the whole contraption would have collapsed. All-in-all, it was an awesome basket; well except for the fact it was not on a concrete driveway.

It was, in fact, on grass.

And I am not talking grass on a golf-course green. Or even grass on a golf-course fairway. I am talking grass in the roughest rough on a ill-tended golf course.

The grass was, however, a temporary hardship. After a few weeks of my incessant practicing, all of the grass was destroyed, which revealed the surface I played upon for the next three years: uneven dirt.

It was pretty pointless to do much dribbling on my court; with such an uneven surface, the thought of driving to the basket was pretty much a fantasy. I could and did, however, have hours to stand, take zero or one bounce of the ball, and launch my ever-improving jump shot. Well, I couldn't shoot from anywhere on the left side of the court because of a huge maple tree. Which was ironic because during my basketball career I usually played on the left side. I could shoot anywhere from straight on over to the right corner, up to a distance of about 18 feet.

When it rained, my *court* would be mud. Of course, I couldn't wait for my court to dry, so I played in the mud a great deal, which made the court even more uneven. I could and did shovel snow off the dirt which, because of the cold in winter, was hard and rarely muddy. My father refused to put in a light, but on a clear night there was a 50% chance the moon would be in a phase that would allow me to practice.

Despite all of its obvious and annoying flaws, that basket was the best gift, by far, that my father ever gave me.

After ninth grade I was allowed to sell my paper route to the boy who had been my sub. Thus, the summer before 10th and 11th grades I was able to devote huge blocks of time to improving myself as a basketball player. During the school years of the 10th and 11th grades, when it wasn't basketball season I was free after school to practice for hours before I did my homework. Some teammates and I would head to a basketball court and scrimmage or, if I was alone, I would head to my backyard. I practiced very hard, resulting in huge improvements in my game in both 10th and 11th grades. Then it all changed.

As the 1966 basketball season came to an end, my father seemed to have realized that I had not had a job for two years. This needed to be fixed! So, he got me a job pumping gas at the Coon Brothers Standard Station at the corner of Plymouth and Telegraph Roads.

I started work in March, 1966, and was immediately working 4:00–10:00 four weekday evenings and 10 hours each day on Saturdays and Sundays. If your calculator isn't handy, that is 44 hours of work per week plus taking a full load of courses during the last three months of my junior year. By the time I had gone to school, done my homework and worked at my job, I was too exhausted to do anything other than crawl into bed. When summer started my job became 10 hours per day, six days per week. All so that I could earn \$1.30 per hour with, of course, no extra pay for overtime.

And guess what? After having shown great improvement in both my second and third years of basketball, I did not improve a great deal in my senior year. Yes, there is value in work and arguably teenagers need to have a job, but I ask you: 44 hours per week while in school and 60 hours per week during the summer? A job which one could master in less than one day? Oh, I forgot. It was necessary to do this to make sure that Bob would not be lazy.

Finally, lest you think I was this selfish boy who only wanted to play basketball, as you will learn later in this memoir, my father was very angry with me for not being a better player when I

was a senior. My disappointing him as a senior was the beginning of a long period of verbal and emotional combat between us that was still going strong when he died in 1987.

People have said, “You should forgive your father.” This advice demonstrates that the speaker has no understanding of whom my father was. While he was alive, peace between us was not possible without capitulation on my part. Now that he has been dead for almost 27 years, “Surely,” I am told, “You can forgive him.” I have forgiven him, but that has been for my own mental health; after all, I can’t claim to do it for him because he isn’t here. If I see him in heaven, will he accept that I have forgiven him? I am not sure. To accept that I have forgiven him will require him to acknowledge that he needed forgiveness. The father I had on earth was not able to make such an acknowledgement; but perhaps heaven has mellowed him out a bit.

I leave this chapter with a lengthy reflection. As I have mentioned, I am in contact, via Facebook and email, with several of my friends from basketball. One friend, I will call him Sam, has had a very successful career in business, as evidenced by him retiring at an early age and being quite well off financially. Sam attributes his success to his strong work ethic, which he attributes to his father’s requirement that each of his children would start working at age 14. Thus, I suspect that Sam might not agree with my criticism of my father discussed in this chapter. Fair enough; I am telling *my story* not *all stories*.

Sam’s father was a good man who had a very positive influence on me as a teenager. I suspect—but I could be wrong—that Sam was not required to work 44 hours a week during the school year.

I am reminded of a story from when I began graduate school at age 22. My wife, Debbie, and I were living in a townhouse apartment in a neighborhood designed for lower income families. Our community was a mix of the temporary poor—graduate and professional school students—and the truly poor—persons with few job skills. We became friends with a married couple who were neighbors and who also attended our church. They had a son the same age as Roger, but both Mr. and Mrs. Graduate Student were approximately five years older than Debbie and I. Mr. G. Student was working towards his Ph.D. in history at a pace that seemed glacial to me. I remember very well my strong reaction to Mr. G. Student: How could a man be 27 years old, still be in school and **not** feel guilty about it? This led to my earliest realization that not everyone grows up with the norms of South Redford, where children were encouraged to rush into adult responsibilities. As the reader might well imagine, it has been very difficult for me to *understand* the *slacker mentality* of never wanting to grow up. It never occurred to me that *not growing up* could ever be an option. Yes, I had seen *Peter Pan*, but somehow I had missed its message!

Chapter 26

The 1967 Basketball Season

As with many many other people, my senior year of high school was a watershed year, perhaps *the* watershed year, of my life. My life in July 1967, was so different than it had been just one year earlier. The same could be said for all or nearly all of my friends and teammates. One distinction I had was that by July 1967, because of my knee injury, I would never again be the basketball player I once was. Except for a brief stint—neither terribly noteworthy nor successful—on an intramural team during my sophomore year at Oakland University, I was never a member of a basketball team again, at any level.

Now I don't want you to bring out the hankies. This is not a Jim Valvano moment. My life turned out just fine without basketball. In fact, I strongly believe that the experiences I had with and the lessons I learned from my teammates, opponents and coaches were instrumental in whatever successes I achieved in the rest of my life. This long term happiness, however, does not diminish the fact that losing basketball in 1967 was a very heartbreaking experience for me, as I am sure it was for some of my friends.

Let me recall, briefly, my basketball career, heading into the beginning of my senior year in September, 1966. Everything began with Coach Riehl's summer camp in 1963. From the moment Coach started working with me I became obsessed with basketball and devoted almost all of my spare time to it. By the beginning of the 1964 season I had advanced to the point that I was a starter on Marshall's team and, indeed, started every game. I believe that I improved throughout that season, but, frankly, I was at the part of the learning curve which is almost flat; I was improving, but it didn't necessarily show up in my performances. Indeed, my fifth game in the 10 game season was my strongest by far and the other nine games I was just another player. In Statistics, we would call my fifth game, home against Pierce, an outlier.

When basketball season ended in 1964, I continued to practice as much as possible, thanks, in part, to my father erecting a basket in our backyard. Summer camp with Boris in 1964 moved me ahead further; well, except for the daily games of gutterball, which seemed to make me regress.

And so it went. Every offseason, I practiced a huge amount and achieved great improvement. Every season, my abilities would improve as the season wore on.

The above pattern ended after the 1966 season at Thurston, my junior year. In the previous chapter, I explained the reason why I essentially stopped practicing for six months, from the end of the season in early March until school began again in September. I cannot say with certainty

why I showed so little improvement from my junior to senior years. Perhaps it was due to six months of little practice. Perhaps by the end of my junior year, after climbing that learning curve for three years, I had reached my peak—I had become the best basketball player that I was capable of becoming. Perhaps a little of both; who knows?

I don't recall Boris teaching me even one basketball skill during his two plus years as my coach. This statement is undeniably unfair because I possess virtually no memories of any drills, although I certainly participated in many of them. I do recall that Boris made us run a great deal in practice and during informal lunch hour drills. He whipped us into excellent shape, which made basketball much more fun for me. Even if Boris was a poor teacher of basketball, it is undeniable that I loved playing his style of basketball. Indeed, my best explanation for why he decided, when I was a sophomore, to make me a starter is that he could see that my physical skills—speed, quickness, good reflexes—made me an ideal candidate for his system.

Boris wanted his teams to run, run and then run more. We almost exclusively played zone defense so that we could preserve our energy for offense. This almost total reliance on the zone had to be very frustrating for my two teammates—Reggie and Gary Knock—who were very strong defensive players.

In many ways, the 1966 team was perfect for Coach's system. Reggie and I were fast and quick, but the keys were in our frontcourt. Randy and Gary were very fast and coordinated for forwards and with four players who could run, we were in great shape. Which brings me to Don Block. Our nicknames for Don included *PB* (the atomic symbol for lead, as in lead-butt, as in not moving very fast) and, Roger Steffen's favorite *two-inch block* for Don's jumping ability. Both of these nicknames were grossly unfair. While never fast, Don was very good in our running game and, even at a height of 6'4"—which Don was—one needs to be able to jump a bit to dunk, which Don most certainly could do.

Don was, in my opinion, the ideal center for our 1966 team. Don and Gary Schulte were my two teammates with the highest *basketball IQ* and Don's consistently good decisions helped our team immensely. (At some point in this memoir I need to acknowledge that I had one teammate common to 65 game basketball career—Don Block. I was very fortunate to have such a great teammate.)

One more comment before leaving the 1966 team. I said that the number one reason for our success involved Gary Knock allowing it to be Randy's team. Reason 1-A is that Gary was willing to play forward which allowed me to be a starter at guard. It's not that I was a great player—far from it—but with Gary at forward and me at guard the team was better at Boris Basketball than it might have been with Gary at guard and X at forward. Individually, even with it being Randy's team, Gary would have had more glory playing guard, his natural position. Again, given his integrity, it is no surprise that Gary never complained about how his move to forward diminished his personal achievements.

During my adult life I have read nearly two thousand books. I have read a great deal about American and world history and quite a few biographies, but most of my reading for pleasure has focused on crime fiction. For example, I have read (twice) every Nero Wolfe adventure, written by Rex Stout and, after Stout's death, the continuation of the series by Robert Goldsborough. (Goldsborough wrote his first Wolfe book, *Murder in E minor*, for his mother who was saddened

by the Stout series ending.) Stout seemed fascinated with titles that began *Too many ...* and eventually wrote stories with the titles *Too many cooks; women; clients; and detectives*.

My point? A book about the 1967 Thurston basketball team could be called *Too many centers*; or, it could be called *Too many guards*. Why? Because the senior class had no forwards.

On the 1966 team, with a record of 13–5, the top seven scorers were two seniors and five juniors. Thus, it was accurate to say that the 1967 team returned an abundance of talent. The difficulty lay in the fact that the five returning players consisted of two guards and three centers. This is definitely too many centers; why do I say too many guards? The next two top seniors on the 1967 team were two guards: Bob Holmes and Don Kopec.

In the spring of 1966, I anticipated that Boris would try to mold the 1967 team in the image of the very successful 1966 team. I saw him in school one day and said to him, “Do you plan to play me at forward next year? If so, can you give me some advice on how to prepare for it?”

Boris looked at me and smiled and said, “What makes you think you are even going to play next year?” and turned and walked away. Huh?

I understand that it is unfair to expect a coach to deal with his team as, say, 15 individuals with different personalities, etc. But this was the worst thing he could have said to me. This was how my parents often spoke to me—don’t want Bob to get conceited—and I dealt with it by taking refuge in schoolwork; at school my teachers would praise me when I did well and I needed that recognition. This was, what, three months after he had humiliated me in front of my teammates at the Monday Afternoon Massacre? He thought that sarcasm was appropriate?

When the 1967 season began, Boris clearly was trying to copy the previous year’s success. The starting five were: Don Block at center; Gary Schulte and me at forwards; and Reggie Barringer and Bob Holmes at guard. Roger Steffen and Don Kopec were the first players off the bench; Roger if we needed a frontcourt sub and Don otherwise.

We began the season with three home games. We won all three games with no difficulties at all:

- Thurston 58, Troy 31.
- Thurston 66, Livonia Stevenson 38.
- Thurston 66, Windsor Assumption 43.

I convinced myself that I had made a seamless transition to forward; indeed, I recall hitting double figures in rebounds against Troy.

The next three games were a disaster, but before I get to them, I want to report one of my most memorable accomplishments of the 1967 season, which occurred before our first game of the season.

Before each game we would run onto the court for our *warm-up*. The crowd (if we were the home team) would go wild cheering for its heroes. Our last drill was our lay-up drill; first from the right-hand side and, finally, from the left-hand side. For the last of these drills, We would line-up in a prearranged order to facilitate our *dunking drill*.

From practice we knew that the team had four dunkers: our three tall guys (each 6’4”)—Roger, Gary and Don; and 6’0” Bob Wardrop. Because Roger, Gary and Don had been dunkers

on the 1966 team, they were entitled to the first three positions in the dunking line. I believe that Roger was first in line because he was the most accomplished dunker of the group, but I could be mistaken. I definitely was fourth in line, having no prior experience in dunking before a game.

So, what happened? Well, it was the first game of the last season of our high school careers, so we were a bit excited/nervous. So excited/nervous, in fact, that Roger, Don and Gary all flubbed their attempted dunks. I then dribbled to the basket, leapt into the air and BLAM! slammed home the first dunk of the 1967 season!

After destroying Assumption in our third game, we were riding high and, perhaps, way too confident. Two days later we were at Franklin playing our first league game. We should have taken Franklin seriously for a number of reasons.

1. During the three year existence of the Northwest Suburban League, Franklin had never defeated Thurston. Thus, they were going to be highly motivated to win.
2. The 1966 team was the strongest Franklin team in the aforementioned three years.
3. In our last league game of the 1966 season, Franklin jumped off to an 18–12 lead. As discussed in Chapter 24, we won that game largely because of Randy's great game. Randy had graduated.

I don't have specific memories of this game. Added to that, I almost never noticed if a particular teammate played well or poorly. I would notice if he made five shots in a row or missed five shots in a row or made five bad passes in a row, but, barring such extreme outcomes, I was fairly oblivious to what others were doing.

I remember that I did not play particularly well and we lost 75–73.

Don Block was injured in the Franklin game and Roger Steffen replaced him at center and played well. Roger was rewarded by being named the starting center for the home game one week later against Glenn.

We beat Glenn, 87–74. I scored 14 points, Bob Holmes scored 10 and Reggie scored 25. Reggie's huge game was overshadowed, however, by Roger scoring 30 points in his first game as a starter! As a result of this game—and many additional strong games—Roger was the starting center for the remainder of the season.

Based on the box score, it appears that Don Block started the Glenn game and that Gary Schulte was benched, but it isn't certain; they both played, but didn't score much: Don six points and Gary two.

There was, however, a very troubling feature to the Glenn game, a feature that Coach and the team chose to ignore. Jerry Wright, a Glenn forward/center, had scored 41 points against us. Jerry did not score by hitting lots of long jump shots; he scored his points around the basket and at the foul line. Jerry was not *my man* to guard—we played zone—but clearly our frontcourt zone was unable to stop him. And that included me; I was unable to stop him.

On December 23rd we traveled to Redford Union to play our cross-township rivals. I **know** that we were overconfident for this game. The previous year we had easily handled RU, winning at home by 18 points. The 1967 RU team had not won a game yet. Well, Leland Bjerke (remember

him from when I played at Marshall?) was the star at RU and was now playing forward. He scored 28 points and RU beat us, 69–66.

After the debacle at Redford Union, we had only four days—including Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—to prepare for the River Rouge Christmas tournament. Clearly, our frontcourt defense was very bad. Personally, I felt that moving me to forward was a disaster.

With no time to prepare, Boris made a drastic change to the starting line-up. Bob Holmes and Don Block were benched, I was moved back to guard, Gary Schulte again was made a starting forward and junior Dale Joyce was inserted into the line-up as the other starting forward.

Our first game in the tournament, on December 27, was against the pre-tournament favorite, highly touted Highland Park. A funny thing happened at the start of the game. Without talking about it beforehand, Reggie and I simultaneously decided to trap the Highland Park dribbler as soon as he crossed the center line. This totally surprised their guards and before anyone knew it, we had jumped ahead by the score of 15–2. By halftime our lead had expanded to 35–13 and we coasted to a victory by the score of 72–47.

The next night we were scheduled to play Lincoln Park in the second semifinal. We were standing by the court as the first semifinal ended: Ecorse had defeated the host school! For the first time in the tournament's history, the host school was not going to win it! As Lincoln Park and Thurston moved onto the floor, an Ecorse fan leaned over the bleacher railing and shouted, "We will get you tomorrow night, Lincoln Park." There are three things to note about this prediction.

1. There were no threats of knifings or other ugly demises.
2. It was natural for Ecorse to focus on Lincoln Park; they were members of the same athletic league.
3. This prediction ranked among the worst predictions in the history of sports. Thurston led 22–8 after one quarter; 45–19 at the half; and won by the score of 93–40.

In the Ecorse game, Thurston led by 16 at the end of one quarter. Once, again the trap instituted by Reggie and me was confusing the opponent. By halftime our lead had shrunk to 12 points, 38–26. By the end of the third quarter, however, we led 53–40 and seemed to be in good shape. Ecorse, however, battled back; with 1:26 to go, they trailed by only four points, 65–61, and were shooting a free throw. The free throw missed, I grabbed the rebound and headed upcourt. An Ecorse defender was standing in front of me with his legs spread wide; a no-no for a defender. I deliberately stumbled over his right foot, fell flat on my face and heard the referee blow his whistle.

In retrospect, I have no idea why I took this dive. It was not a soccer-flop; he put his foot out which is asking for a foul. But I was never a very good free throw shooter. I went to the line to shoot one-and-one and, miraculously (OK, that is a bit of hyperbole), made both. Our lead back up to six, Ecorse collapsed and we took over the game, scoring the next eight points and winning by the score of 75–61. In the locker room, Reggie, who was never effusive, yelled, "I could have hugged you when you made those free throws!" (Yes, Reggie understood that I was not a good free throw shooter.)

A popular line in fiction is, "I could have died right then and been happy." Well, at 17 years of age, none of us wanted to die, but for the second time in the one month old season, Thurston had

had a streak of three games in which it had played very well. In retrospect, if the season had ended after the Ecorse game, I would have been very happy.

Reggie and Roger had played great throughout the tournament. Dale made a solid contribution as a new starter and Gary had played well too. I hadn't shot very well, but had played uncharacteristic solid defense. In fact, it was our defense that had won the games.

There was, however, dissension on the team. I always felt horrible that Don Block, who was clearly one of our best players, had to watch our tournament victory from the bench. With my moving back to guard and, given Boris's tendency to *never* remove Reggie or me from a game, our two senior back-up guards, Bob Holmes and Don Kopec, rarely played anymore. I felt bad that Bob had lost his starting spot largely because I could not play forward. Indeed, it was a hopeless situation; I felt that our top six seniors (all but Don Kopec; sorry) plus Dale deserved to be starters. It was unavoidable that two deserving players would not start. If I had been Boris I would have dealt with this problem by having a rotation of seven players; between foul problems and fatigue, we needed more than five players each playing all 32 minutes. That was not, however, Boris's nature. His default strategy was to play each starter the whole game.

An added feature of our winning the Rouge Christmas Tournament is that as January, 1967, began, Boris decided not to have his traditional Monday Afternoon Massacre.

On January 6, 1967, just eight calendar days after our huge victory over Ecorse, we went to Groves and lost 79–49. We were horrible. The next day, *The Detroit News* had a big story about Groves destroying us. It was big news. Groves was undefeated and had been very good in 1966 too. Thus, they were the darlings of suburban Detroit basketball. The fact that Groves was an all-white team was not inconsequential.

There was incredibly great basketball in Michigan in 1967, but it was mostly in the Detroit Public School League. I recently found a website,

GIVE REFERENCE

that listed the top 100 high school basketball players ever in Michigan. Not surprisingly, Earvin (Magic) Johnson is rated as the top player ever. Along with his teammate Jay Vincent (# on the list), their 1977 team arguably was the top high school team ever in Michigan. Second on the lists of greatest teams ever might be

The next week we traveled to Oak Park and won by only 12, 68–56. We ended the first half of the league season the following Friday, crushing North Farmington at home by the score of 96–61. We were in third place in the league, with a record of 3–2, behind Groves at 5–0 and Franklin at 4–1. It was realistic—ok, slightly optimistic—to think that we could run the table and finish with a league record of 8–2; after all, we would get both Groves and Franklin at home. A record of 8–2 would give us sole possession of second place, because nobody else was going to beat Groves.

We should have started the second half of our season at home against Franklin on January 27, but there must have been a snow cancellation (I can't remember) because we had no game that night and our game with Franklin did not occur until Valentine's Day. Instead, after a two week layoff we visited Glenn. The game started and there was no Gerry Wright—he who had scored 41 points against us in December on Thurston's court—on the floor for Glenn. This had to be a relief for us. Such a relief that we proceeded to hand Glenn its first league win ever, 65–61.

The next night we again trounced Livonia Stevenson, 73–52, on its court. The following Friday,

Groves visited Thurston.

At Thurston, we almost never spoke to our opponents before a game. Before the Groves game, however, one of its players came up to me and said, “You lost to Glenn?” with a perfect combination of surprise, disgust and disdain.

I had played very poorly in both of the previous weekend’s games, which seemed a bad omen heading into a game against an opponent that had destroyed us by 30 points just five weeks earlier. Surprisingly, however, I had one of my best games of the year, scoring 21 points. I shot well and played reasonable defense before I fouled out of the game. We had trouble handling Groves’ all-state forward, Mike Rafferty—remember, we had no forwards in our senior class. We resorted to fouling him and he made, as I recall, 19 of 21 free throw attempts. We lost, 80–70.

There is great debate in the sports world about *moral victories*. The conventional wisdom, it seems, is that *real men* don’t have moral victories. Hogwash! Groves had destroyed us two times in a row, by 31 and 30 points. We were seven days removed from losing to Glenn. I was not happy to lose to Groves again, but it was the most satisfying of our six losses that year. We played hard; we played well; and we stayed in the game against an excellent opponent. An opponent with a 6’5” forward who made first team all-state (he wasn’t that good, but he was very good) and a great 6’10” center who played major college basketball and even one year in the NBA.

The week after the Groves game, we got our revenge on Franklin, winning 67–65, in a game in which Don Block was the big star. We then clobbered Oak Park at home, 87–60. We ended the season at North Farmington.

I have complained about the horrible courts at Assumption (where I played once) and Groves (where I played three times); especially noting how I couldn’t shoot worth a damn at either place. I shot well at Thurston and one of my proudest accomplishments is that during my four year basketball career, my teams lost only two home games, both to Groves. Thus, I loved playing on Thurston’s court; but a part of me wished I had attended North Farmington.

I don’t remember much about our trip to North Farmington in 1965 when I was on JV; we lost, but I scored 16 points, which was a large number for me. As a junior, I scored 24 points at North Farmington, on 8–11 shooting from the floor and 8–9 at the foul line. In 1967, I finished my league career by scoring 20 points on perfect shooting: 9–9 from the field (almost all jump shots) and 2–2 from the foul line. Reggie also scored 20 points and we won 72–62.

I cracked the 20-point barrier four times in my career and two of the games were at North Farmington. **I loved that gym.**

The following Thursday, March 2, we met Oak Park for the third time that season in an attempt to win a State Tournament game for the first time in Thurston’s history. Our play was quite lackluster, but we managed a victory by the score of 63–56.

Two nights later, my career came to an end in a 72–53 loss to Catholic Central. We played OK, but the score should have been closer. CC was the better team, having two players—a senior and a junior—who would receive scholarships to play major college basketball.

Table 26.1 presents a few statistics for the 1967 season. I will make a few comments on what this table reveals. First, the source of these data is a handout given to team members after the season. Unlike the previous two years’ handouts, we were not given data on shots attempted; thus, we cannot see who was a good shooter and who wasn’t. This isn’t a problem, because I remember

Table 26.1: Selected Statistics for the 1967 Season.

Name	Field Goals	Free Throws	FT %	Points	PPG
Reg Barringer	107	81-122	66.4	295	14.75
Bob Wardrop	110	37-57	64.9	257	12.85
Roger Steffen	83	44-75	58.7	210	10.50
Don Block	79	27-49	55.1	185	9.25
Gary Schulte	66	26-39	66.7	158	7.90
Bob Holmes	25	4-8	50.0	54	2.70
Dale Joyce	20	12-16	75.0	52	2.60
Rick Wagner	15	14-26	53.8	44	2.20
Others	31	19-37	51.4	81	4.05
Totals	536	264-429	61.5	1336	66.80

that we were all excellent shooters! LOL. Please note the following.

1. The entry for points per game is quite misleading. Reggie and I played every game and, if the game was close, we played nearly every minute, unless we fouled out. Thus, our ppg's are an accurate reflection of our scoring contributions, but others are not.

For example, Roger did not start until the fifth game of the season; thus, his actual ppg is very close to mine; perhaps a bit larger, perhaps a bit smaller.

There were several games during the season when Boris (misguidedly in my opinion) played Don very little. Looking back after all these years I am surprised to see that Don's point total was so high. As with Roger, if we could adjust for actual time played, his scoring stats would be similar to mine.

My comments above for Roger and Don are true down the line. I was similarly impressed with the large number of points Gary scored and his actual ppg should be a bit higher.

2. The 1966 team, which was so good at playing Boris' running game, averaged almost 10 more ppg than the 1967 team.
3. We were very poor free throw shooters. I could say more about this, but it's too depressing.
4. I am impressed to see how many points Bob Holmes scored because he didn't play much after the first six games. Similarly, I am amazed to see how few points Dale scored; he was a key player in our successes over the last 14 games, but—with all the seniors who loved to shoot—my sense is that he did not shoot very much.

Three of the past four chapters have been devoted to an extremely detailed presentation of my basketball career at Thurston. Readers who are **not** obsessed with stories from a regular school

almost 50 years ago will be happy to learn that I am taking a break from basketball until Chapter ??.

I will now turn my attention to life at Thurston.

To my knowledge, Franklin had never beaten Thurston. Certainly not during my two years. The previous year we had beaten Franklin by 13 points at home and 10 on the road. Not blow-outs, but comfortable victories in which we had not felt threatened. Yes, we had lost two very strong players to graduation, Randy and Gary Knock, but, based on my knowledge, Franklin had lost at least as much. Franklin's 1966 team included senior center Al Jose, who while not as strong as our Don Block, was a solid player. The team included senior forward Dale Lee, who I considered their best player. Finally, there was senior Paul Katosh, of whom I had absolutely no memory. I mention Katosh because he was the Franklin player who made first team all conference. Whether he was a guard or a forward, I couldn't guess.

Returning to the 1967 Franklin team were kids named Reich, Wicks, Neely and forward Karl Gulbranson. I remembered nothing about these guys, Lee was the only Franklin player I specifically remembered. I wasn't very good at remembering specific players on teams that we had beaten. Gulbranson had had the most success against us in 1966, scoring 15 and 8 points in the two games.

The game at Franklin began. In the first quarter, Gulbranson was everywhere. He scored 11 points and Wicks add 7. This was countered by Reggie's 7 points and my 6, and the quarter ended with Thurston trailing by 3, 20-17. A close score, but I knew we were in big trouble. One year earlier, I must have been better than Gulbranson and now he was blowing by our entire team. This was my first inkling that my run of making huge improvements in my game from year-to-year was over. Clearly, Gulbranson had overtaken me and left me far behind. Gul added 8 more points in the second quarter and we were blitzed 26-14, bringing the halftime score to 46-31. What was happening?

It was clear that at halftime Franklin realized the enormity of what they were doing. The entire second half they played to hold their lead rather than destroy us. This worked for them in the 3rd quarter which ended with Franklin leading, 63-49. With no shot clock and no three point line, it is nearly impossible to come back from 14 points down in 8 minutes. Roger, Reggie and I each scored six points in the final quarter and we battled back. We were trailing 75-72 with only a few seconds to play when Reggie was fouled while shooting and awarded two free throws. Our only hope was for him to make the first free throw and then deliberately miss the second. If somehow we could quickly grab the rebound and score, then we would force overtime. Reggie missed the first free throw and made the now meaningless second one, and the game ended 75-73.

Gul had an amazing game and scored 29 points. Reggie was a true warrior and valiantly fought for the win and finished with 23 points. At the time, I felt that I had had a horrible game. Almost 50 years later, while looking through my basketball scrapbook for the first time in decades I noticed that I had scored 20 points. Despite my poor game, I could really shoot at the Franklin gym; I had scored 22, 16 and 20 points in my three games there. Twenty-point games were rare in my career. I had these two at Franklin, two at North Farmington and only one at Thurston.

There is a strange footnote to the Franklin loss. The following week, Franklin raced to a 40-22 halftime lead against a very mediocre North Farmington team and, as the week before, had to hang-on for a narrow, 72-68, victory. Carl Gulbronsen apparently had another strong game,

leading Franklin with 26 points. The strange thing? Carl Gulbronsen's name never appeared in the newspapers again during the 1967 season. When we played Franklin again later in the year, Gulbronsen did not play. Was he injured? Kicked off the team? Abducted by aliens? I didn't know and still don't know.

Chapter 27

After the Shove

Let's return to May 30, 1967, right after God shoved me and I injured my knee. As things turned out, the next six plus months would be the most difficult of *my entire life, age 0 to 66*, as my dear teacher Mr. Russell Fancett would say.

After my friend Roger Steffen helped me to my car, I drove home. My father decided to take me to an emergency room to have my knee examined. Given we were Wardrops, medicine meant osteopathy; thus, my father drove me to Garden City Osteopathic Hospital, the closest hospital of osteopathy to our home.

I remember being examined by two *clowns* who claimed to be doctors of osteopathy (D.O.'s as opposed to the more common—and much better trained M.D.'s). They behaved like extras in the movie *Animal House*. Anyways, given their general incompetence, they decided to X-ray my knee.

As the reader may know, an X-ray exam in 1967 could detect neither cartilage nor ligament damage, which were, by far, the most likely injuries to my knee, given the nature of my accident. In honesty, I must admit that in 1967 my knowledge of knee injuries could be summarized with two words: total ignorance. If two people who supposedly were doctors said, "X-ray that knee!" who was I to question it? Added to my ignorance of all things medical was my training to not ask questions. (Admittedly, the fault might have been in my nature, not nurture.)

Anyway, predictably, the X-ray was negative and the two clowns were able to get rid of me as quickly as possible, which seemed to have been their only goal. As a result, I returned home certain in the knowledge that my knee was structurally sound and, like my oft-injured thumb in 10th grade, would soon be as good as new again. I was very wrong.

I hobbled around the halls of Thurston for a few days, but before long I was walking normally and not feeling any pain. Next up: the prom.

Chris and I went to the prom. It was a bit awkward because she would have rather been with her new boyfriend and I would have rather been with, well, just about anyone else. But Chris was not an evil person and neither was I and I had a good time (I won't try to speak for Chris). It was fun to see so many of my friends in tuxedos or fancy dresses. The prom was definitely a good capstone to my three years at Thurston. As an added bonus, I was not much of a dancer in high school and between my sore knee and my date's new boyfriend, I didn't feel obliged to get out on the floor and *do my duty*. I do imagine, however, that Chris and I must have had one dance, but I

really can't recall.

The tradition at Thurston was to go to the beach the day after prom and we did so, along with my friend Don Block and his date Kathy. This was the same Kathy who I had met in 11th grade algebra 2 and on whom I had a major crush. "Why is she at the prom with Don and not me?" I wondered until I realized, "Duh! I invited Chris." Don and Kathy were a fun pair to share my day and I actually forgot the awkwardness of being with Chris.

The final major event of my time at Thurston was graduation. In 1967 at Thurston the norm was to form boy-girl pairs for the walk on stage to receive the diplomas. These pairings were made while I was with Chris and, even though her being a junior prevented us from walking together, it somehow seemed wrong to ask some other girl to walk with me. (What can I say? My father had apparently taught me to be a one-woman-man.)

It is possible I would have eventually approached some female friend and asked her to walk with me, but before I could, I was asked by Laney. Yes, this was the same Laney (how many Laney's can be in one graduating class of 550?) who, barely one year earlier, had unceremoniously dumped me for wrestler Tony and then humiliated me by carrying on with him provocitively at the 1966 *Sponge Dance*.

Actually, I never felt humiliated because I didn't actually witness anything. Interestingly, my good friend Barry Simescu, who had been at the dance, had wanted to punch-out Tony on my behalf, but realized that it would be a bit unsporting for a football quarterback to hit a light-weight wrestler. Besides, less than a year earlier, Laney had dumped Tony for me; thus, how did I have any right to be angry with him?

Laney hadn't approached me for more than one year, let alone spoken to me, so I was flabbergasted when she walked up to me one day in school and simply said, "Hey, Bob, do you want to walk together at graduation?" Days later I had several awesome comebacks at my disposal, including, "Why don't you ask Tony?" which actually doesn't seem that great all these years later. At the time I was so surprised at what was happening that all I could muster was a feeble, "OK."

The day before graduation we had a rehearsal for the big event. Approximately 500 students gathered in the parking lot, finding their walking partner or making last minute arrangements to have a partner. I eyed the crowd, unsuccessfully, looking for Laney. I couldn't see her anywhere.

Meanwhile, the complete pairs were jostling for position. The *royalty of the class*, which included my good friends John Mutch and Barry Simescu along with leading scholars and athletes, were taking positions at the front of the queue. They would sit in the front rows for the ceremony and be among the first to march across the stage, have their names announced and claim their diplomas. Because my partner never showed up for the rehearsal, I was forced to be at the very end of the line.

When the evening of graduation arrived, I was sitting far away from the stage, which I could barely see, alongside Laney who had, somewhat miraculously, actually shown up. By the time Laney and I mounted the steps to the stage everyone in the audience was pretty tired of the whole event and just wanted it to end. I was greatly buoyed, however, when several of my friends, sitting in the front row, gave out some loud cheers when my name was announced! Awesome!

After graduation, I went back to work at the gas station. I played in one summer league basketball game with the seniors-to-be at Thurston, with my left leg taped so tight that I could not fully

extend my lower leg. After gutterball, Boris's best skill was taping injuries. I couldn't play very well with the restricted movement and dunking was out of the question; thus, I only played in the one game that summer. Besides, on July 1, 1967, I turned 18 and officially became a man.

I was not a man as in "men can vote" or "men can drink alcohol." For both of these, I had to wait another three years. I was a man as in "men can be drafted," but thanks to the college deferment in the US at that time, the draft would not officially come into play until I was almost 22. As you will learn, however, the draft was in my mind many times during those next four years.

No, I was a man as in, "Men can work in factories." Immediately after turning 18, I showed up at Detroit Universal auto factory to apply for a job, keeping an appointment arranged by my father. The *personnel people* put me in a room and told me I had 30 minutes to complete the extremely important written exam that would determine whether I was smart enough to work in the factory. It was the second easiest exam I ever took in my life. Indeed, I was quite sure that it was easier than my first Iowa exam in third grade. The easiest exam in my life? The written exam at my army physical; more on it later.

Five minutes after they left me, I exited the room and gave the personnel people my perfect exam. They seemed dumbfounded to be in the presence of such genius and were quite good in keeping secret the fact that nothing on the exam—and especially not my score—had anything to do with the job I would have for the next seven weeks.

For my first job, they had me work at the Popeye machine. I don't know its real name; you will see below why I named it after my favorite cartoon character. There was a table top that came to just below my hips and I had to lean against it with my upper body tilted forward. I would pick up two steel tubes, each one about 15 inches long and quite heavy; I would guess 12–14 pounds each. "Quite heavy?" you are thinking; read on. I would lean forward and slip each tube onto a *male part*. (I am adopting plumbing language of male and female parts for convenience; trust me, I never thought of sex or even romance during these seven weeks of agony.) Next, I would lean back and simultaneously push two large buttons that were situated at the edge of the table top in front. The buttons were about three feet apart; the idea being that my hands would be out-of-the-way when the machine responded to buttons being pushed. In fact, I would push the buttons and hold them for a couple of seconds. While I was holding the buttons the machine sprang into action! (There was nothing exciting about this job, despite my use of an exclamation point!)

A big vice-like machine part (did I mention, I had no mechanical skills?) would lock the tubes in place and some kind of boring thingy would move into the opposite female end of the pipe (Yuck! The imagery!) and do its job, which seemed to be the whole point of my being there.

After the boring thingy was done, the vice would snap open, I would lean forward, remove the pipes from their holders, rotate and dump them into the output basket—a really big basket, perhaps 4 feet by 4 feet and three feet deep. I would then do a 180 and grab two pipes from the input basket and repeat the above process.

Let's leave the Popeye machine for a bit. You may recall my relating my father's referring to his time in the three seas, which turned out to be the three C's' or CCC. In a similar vein, during my childhood I would overhear my father saying things about *peace work*. I had assumed—remember, either by nature or nurture I did not ask questions—that he meant that he was working on consumer goods, rather than tanks, fighters, guns and bombs. I was wrong, he was referring to *piece work* or

production.

Thanks to what the factory workers called *the time-study men*—who, by the way, were much hated—each job in the factory had a standard. For example, later you will learn about my favorite job ever at DUD; a press for which the standard was 500 operations per hour. The standard was referred to as *production* and the foreman of each department was tasked with making sure that all machines made production every day. If a worker made production on a machine, then a good foreman would let him take extra breaks. Indeed, I was so good on my press that I could do eight hours work in 5.5 hours and my (great) foreman let me sleep the remaining 2.5 hours for which I was being paid; more on that later.

I can't recall for sure, but production on the Popeye machine was 250–300 per hour. If you recall my (poor) description of the machine's operation, you will be unsurprised to learn that the primary muscle group used by the worker was his forearms—lifting and manipulating two heavy weights far from his body.

Yes, a 12 pound tube is not heavy, but lift it 250 times per hour for eight hours, using primarily your forearms, and then get back to me about it.

After work I went home exhausted and fell into bed, but I did not get restful sleep. First, I had constant nightmares about working on the Popeye machine. (As if eight hours were not enough punishment!) Second, I frequently awoke because of the painful spasming of my forearm muscles. (See why I called it the Popeye machine? One needed forearms like Popeye's to survive on it.)

After less than a week I was taken off the Popeye machine. I know what you are thinking: “Gosh, Bob's foreman was a compassionate boss.” Not even close. I was taken off the Popeye machine because I could not make production on it. I was thus labeled, not unfairly I must admit although perhaps a bit prematurely, a slow worker. When you are a slow worker, you do not get the jobs where one's goal is to make production. Instead, you get a job which is dirty and nasty, which is what happened to me.

I was transferred to another department and my new foreman was a man named Larry Cathy. Cathy was his last name. The first thing I noticed about Mr. Cathy was that he was black. Soon after our meeting, I witnessed, every day and in a myriad of ways, how difficult it was to be a black foreman at Detroit Universal.

The hierarchy at DU was as follows. The top man, white, was the plant manager. Below him were several general foremen, all of whom were white. My father's friend Crick Swan was one of the general foremen. A general foreman oversaw several departments, linked, I presume, by a similar purpose. Finally, the lowest rung of supervisory work was the foreman, one to each department/shift combination. (For example, the heat-treating department had a foreman for the day shift and a different foreman for the afternoon shift.) All departments worked at least two shifts and a few crucial departments ran on a three shift schedule. As a worker, one's schedule was tied to the number of shifts in one's department.

For example, in a two-shift department, the day shift worked 7:00 AM to 3:30 PM and the afternoon shift worked 3:30 PM to 12:00 AM. Both shifts included a 30 minute unpaid lunch. For lunch, the on-site options were a cafeteria and an area with vending machines. I always opted for a bag lunch—thank you mother—because it gave me maximum time outside. I *really needed* to escape the noise and filth of the factory for a few minutes each day.

In a three-shift department, the shifts were 6:30 AM–2:30 PM, 2:30–10:30 PM and 10:30 PM–6:30 AM; all included a paid 20 minute lunch period.

Let's return to Mr. Cathy and my new department. He was one of the few black foremen in the factory and all of his bosses were white. To say that there was racism in the factory is true, but an understatement. There was a tremendous amount of racism in the factory. Here is a very direct example.

In my second summer at DU, I worked in the drive-shaft department and made good friends a fellow worker named Leroy. Leroy was my age and was a basketball player, as compared to me who had been a basketball player until the day God shoved me. In fact, one night after work, Leroy followed me to Will Rogers Elementary school to shoot baskets on its court. Will Rogers was a 25 minute drive from DU and, I am pretty sure, not in the direction of Leroy's home. That night, from approximately 2:30–3:00 AM, Leroy became, perhaps, the first black person to shoot baskets on that court.

Leroy and I hung out together at breaks. Unlike me, who was at DU for the summer, Leroy was there full-time and probably for life. We were both 19 and the things we had in common outweighed our differences. Besides, neither of us had a lot of desirable alternatives for friendship in the factory.

One day two events occurred which revealed our foreman's racism. Leroy was absent for work and my machine was broken. I did not want to be sent home—a common occurrence for people, like me, who were on probation during our first 90 days of employment—and I did not want to stand around and be bored. "I know how to do Leroy's job." (Leroy's machine had sat idle so far during the shift.) "No, I won't put you on that machine. That's Nigger's work," said my white foreman.

I suppose that there were many courageous responses I could have made to that. "Don't assume I am an ignorant racist, you stupid son of a bitch," or something like it, came to mind. But I wanted to keep my job, so I just said, "Like I said, I can do that job." My foreman walked away and I sat in the break room until my machine was fixed, roughly one hour later.

Except for being a racist, my foreman in the drive shaft department was an ok guy and treated me well. One of the things I learned during my two summers at DU was that my father was a controversial figure. Whenever he saw something he didn't like, he made a stink about it and he didn't care whose feelings he hurt! As a result, for nothing I ever did, some people treated me badly (for example, the foreman who put me on the Popeye machine and then ridiculed me mercilessly for not making production) while many more people treated me well because they knew that my father was a man of integrity. My foreman in drive-shaft liked my father and that is why he cut me some slack over my minor civil disobedience over his use of the N-word.

My year-one foreman Mr. Cathy experienced a whole lot of trouble because he was black. Basically, he got grief from four directions:

1. Most of the big bosses—the plant manager and general foremen—did not like having black supervisors and, thus, wanted him to fail.
2. Most of his fellow foreman did not like having black supervisors and, thus, wanted him to fail.

3. Nearly all white workers absolutely hated taking orders from a black man.
4. Nearly all black workers expected Larry to show them the preferences that white bosses always gave to white workers. Of course, for the three reasons above, Larry could not do this.

Larry's department, per se, did not have machines with production numbers. Instead, there were lines on which a number of finishing operations were performed on tubes. I was on the line finishing the items that had become the tube part of a collapsible steering wheel.

In fact, I was at the end of my line, the ultimate guy. The penultimate guy stood about five feet away from me. He would take each tube off a conveyor belt and set it at his end of an inclined ramp. As the tube would roll down the ramp towards me, he would spray it with a mist of an oil/water mixture. Meanwhile, yours truly standing, as I said, about five feet away would reach down into a cloud of oil and water, pick up the tube and place it in a box. The tubes were not very heavy; thus, my job was not physically taxing. What is was was filthy.

I left work with my hair—I had hair then—face, neck, ears, nostrils, clothes and shoes saturated with oil. For the several weeks I had this job I had the worst case of acne ever!

On Sunday, July 23, the Detroit Race Riot of 1967 began. DU was in the city of Dearborn—which borders on Detroit—and there were no signs of rioting there. I reported to work Monday, July 24, for my shift, which began at 2:30 PM. At 6:30, Mr. Cathy announced that the factory was closing down so that workers could get home before the curfew took effect. Ditto for Tuesday, July 25, except that at 6:30 Mr. Cathy announced a different way to protect our safety: we would all work a double shift. This marked the end of my childhood. I wanted to tell Mr. Cathy, "No, you see, I am a child and I cannot work 16 hours. You must let me go home!" Of course, I could not say this.

As I was leaving my work station—with a world's record amount of oil on and in me—at 6:30 AM on Wednesday, Mr. Cathy said to us, "See you in eight hours. Be ready for another double shift!" I wanted to curl into a fetal position and suck my thumb, but, of course, my thumb was much too oily for that. I returned to work on time, but thankfully the world had returned enough to normality to allow us to go home after eight hours.

The rest of my first summer at DU passed uneventfully, with me absorbing huge amounts of oil.

Chapter 28

Adjusting to College: Social Life

During my junior year at Thurston, I was sitting in my Algebra 2 class. It was the second hour of the school day; the time for morning announcements. One of the announcements was, more or less:

A recruiter from Oakland University is in the counseling office. If you are interested in learning more about Oakland, please come to the office now.

I don't know why, but my hand shot into the air and Mrs. Doty called on me, "I really want to attend Oakland University," I blurted, "May I please go to the counseling office right now?" My teacher said I could and I headed out of my classroom and down the hall. All I remember from the session is that the recruiter said something to the effect, "The proportion of classes taught by a person with a Ph.D. is higher at Oakland than it is at any other university in the state of Michigan."

What did it mean for the teacher to have a Ph.D.? I didn't know, but I liked how it sounded. This episode reminds me of my favorite exchange between Muhammad Ali and know-it-all Howard Cosell.

Remarking on Cosell's toupee, Ali said, "Cosell, you're a phony, and that thing on your head comes from the tail of a pony." (The man loved to rhyme!)

"You're being extremely truculent." Cosell replied. Cosell was obsessed with always being the smartest person in a room and frequently would use his vast vocabulary to humiliate his companion. Such tricks, however, were no match for Ali, who was blessed with the strongest self-image in the world.

Without missing a beat, Ali replied, "Whatever 'truculent' means, if that's good, I'm that."

So, whatever having a teacher with a Ph.D. meant, I wanted it. Also, I got the strong impression that I could be a star on the Oakland men's basketball team. Why? Because the 1967–68 school year, which would be my freshman year, would be the first year that Oakland would have an intercollegiate men's basketball team! I had told Mr. Bennett that my career goal was to teach high school math and be a basketball coach. His advice was that playing in college would greatly improve my prospects as a coach. Thus, Oakland seemed perfect: great teachers; reasonable tuition and a new—and, thus, most likely, weak—basketball team. My senior year, Oakland was the only school to which I applied.

I applied to Oakland, was admitted and in the Spring of 1967 attended freshmen orientation. At orientation I became instant friends with Greg Allar. Greg was graduating from Birmingham Groves and like me was an athlete; he had swum on the Groves team. Also like me, Greg was interested in math and science and planned on a high tech career. During orientation we completed a form stating the courses we wanted, but we were not allowed to select times for our courses. Greg and I naturally both selected calculus and chemistry, two musts for future math or science majors.

The foreign language requirement at Oakland was one year and I wanted to satisfy it before I forgot all of my Russian. Thus, it was a given that I would enroll in Russian, and, in a sign of solidarity, Greg did too.

Oakland was a relatively new university, founded in the early 1960s. It had a young faculty—with lots of Ph.D.'s—that decided to make the curriculum rather quirky. As you will learn, some of the ideas worked great while others were just ok. Greg and I had to select a fourth course and this is where the quirkiness enters the picture.

The norm in 1967 at state schools in Michigan was for freshmen to take two semesters of English Composition. (This is what I was preparing for when I took the course of the same name during my junior year at Thurston.) Oakland had a different idea. I would select from a huge number of *freshmen exploratories*. My first semester I was placed in a freshmen exploratory on economics. The class was small—I remember approximately 20 students—and we read a lot of books on economics. The books were all nontechnical, written for intelligent persons, but not for the budding economist. The professor—from the Economics Department—frequently lamented the fact that he was not allowed to draw any demand-supply curves or write any equations! We would discuss the books during class and wrote a large number of papers on economics. I really loved the class!

Notice that I say that I was placed in my freshmen exploratory because that is how the system worked. At orientation we were given a list of approximately 60 freshmen exploratory topics and told to rank our top five choices. Greg and I both put “Blah, Blah, Blah, Nazi Germany” as our top choice. I don’t recall even seeing economics on the list. Greg was placed in the Nazi class and I, as stated above, was not.

Greg’s first freshmen exploratory turned out to be a great example of the adage, “Be careful what you wish for because you might get it.” I was a pretty average student in my freshmen exploratory and received a grade of 3.0, which is equivalent to a B. Greg was pretty average in his freshmen exploratory and received a bad grade; I don’t remember his exact grade, but it was considerably lower than my 3.0. Greg wasn’t a bad student; indeed, he might have been better in his exploratory than I was in mine, but it turned out that Greg’s professor was a total sadist who had a huge reading list, required lots of papers and graded like a fiend!

At the end of orientation we were given the option of asking for a particular roommate for the dormitory and Greg and I each wrote the other’s name. In the Fall, Greg and I were indeed roommates, assigned to room 101 (first floor) of Van Wagoner Hall for men.

During high school in Common Learnings we talked a great deal about the war in Vietnam, but it all seemed very abstract. For years, boys in the Detroit area had drifted through high school and soon after graduation embarked upon a lucrative—if not very inspiring—career in one of the

many auto factories. But the war and especially the draft changed all that. If a boy did not go to college, he faced the real prospect of being drafted days after turning 18 and then slogging around the jungles of Vietnam before his 19th birthday. Many of my male classmates seemed to realize this fact as their senior years began. I had scores of friends and acquaintances who had never taken a college prep course suddenly applying to college. The colleges, for a myriad of reasons, did not want to turn away any paying customers. As a result, all of the state schools in Michigan were very crowded in the fall of 1967. Thus, it was difficult to get into courses and the dormitories were crowded.

Our room in Van Wagoner was, perhaps, 9 by 18 feet; certainly no more than 200 square feet in size. Joining Greg and me in our room was Marc Weiner, a graduate of Oak Park High School, who was interested in Political Science. Almost immediately, Greg and Marc became best friends and, when a space opened up in January, I moved around the corner to room with sophomore Gordie Tebeau.

After freshman year, Greg left Van Wagoner and I only occasionally saw him on campus. I did, however, have an incredibly positive impact on Greg's life. He never thanked me for it and I doubt he realized it. So, what did I do for Greg?

As mentioned above, Greg got killed in his freshmen exploratory. In addition, it turned out—as it often did in those days—that Greg's career goals were wildly optimistic. He wasn't strong in either calculus or chemistry. In fact, his one great success his first semester was in Russian, the course he took as a result of meeting me at orientation. Greg changed his major to Russian and the last I heard—we were both still undergraduates—he was doing fine with it.

In summary, I gave Greg his career and he dumped me as his friend. but that was ok because I really enjoyed rooming with Gordie.

I now need to weave my friend Kathy into this story. Kathy was in my 11th grade Algebra 2 class and we sat across the aisle from each other. We talked as much as possible because she was really smart, nice, kind and interesting. I didn't think of Kathy as a potential girlfriend—she was certainly pretty enough; I was *so shallow* at 16—for two reasons.

First, beginning with the summer before 11th grade until after the end of basketball season, Laney was my girlfriend. Second, in high school I *became involved* only with girls who *chased me down*. I make this latter statement, not with pride (how could one be proud of being so passive?) and not for sympathy, but simply as a statement of fact. Suffice to say, Kathy never showed any signs of chasing me; I like to think that this fact reflected her personality rather than a disinterest in me as a possible boyfriend.

For three months, from late August to late November, in 1967 Kathy was my girlfriend. Sort of.

The dating of Kathy and me began in August, in the few days after I had quit at Detroit Universal and before I headed off to Oakland. I had not done any dating after the prom, but late in the summer I was talking to my friend Bob Rybka and asked whether he had been dating anyone. “Well, I went out with Kathy a couple of times,” he replied.

“What?” I thought to myself. “Are all of my friends dating Kathy, the girl that I like? First, it was Don Block at the prom and now Bob Rybka while I am soaking in oil at DU?” (It was actually worse than I imagined; Kathy and Roger Steffen had gone on a couple of dates sometime during

the Lavon-Chris period of my life.) I decide right then and there that I could no longer wait for Kathy to track me down; I would ask her on a date.

As it turned out, Kathy was also beginning college at Oakland. (Kathy, recall, was in my 11th grade Algebra 2 class when I decided I was interested in Oakland. Thus, I could, and did, have fantasies that Kathy chose Oakland because she was madly in love with me and just waiting for me to act.)

I had a brief period of time after leaving DU before I had to leave for Oakland. I called Kathy and invited her to go with me to a drive-in movie. She agreed; we went and spent most of the evening kissing in my car. Understand that when I say kissing, I literally mean kissing and nothing else. We didn't even say things like, "Oh, Bob/Kathy, I have wanted to do this for so long." My theory is that we were both simply really shy. Kissing because it was pleasurable was much easier than talking about how we might or might not have felt.

The next week we were both at Oakland. Kathy was majoring in music and wasn't interested in Russian (I believe that German was her language); thus, our only chance for a class together was a freshmen exploratory and that did not happen.

I was very lonely at Oakland. My classes were a lot of work and I was serious about being a good student. Especially after my summer at Detroit Universal, I was determined to be successful in college. There were only about six kids from Thurston who had gone to Oakland and, among them, Kathy was my only friend. I did not make friends with the other men on my dorm floor; as I learned the next semester, they referred to me as *the guy who is always studying*. As I learned during my second year on the floor, they weren't very serious students.

My few social contacts during my first semester centered around people I met in my calculus course. I remember Glen and Mary, two math majors who planned to marry and teach math at the same high school while Glen would also coach basketball. As you have probably deduced; Glen played basketball too. He was about my size and during my two days of practice I noticed that he was quite good; comparable to me before I injured my knee. Glen ended up not playing much for Oakland, so perhaps even without my injury my career of being on a school's basketball team would have been over.

I have a vague memory of another male friend who introduced me to two girls who I will refer to as HG-1 and HG-2 (HG is for Hippy Girl). My friend had a date with HG-1 and then she spread the word that she wouldn't go out with him again because he wasn't able to "Satisfy her." Inexperienced as I was sexually, I wasn't sure what this meant, but I understood it enough to scare me. HG-2 was quite pretty and I remember one conversation I had with her.

Out of the blue one day, after learning I had a car, she said to me, "Do you want to go to Greenwich Village with me over Christmas break?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Where is it?"

Her mouth fell open and she stared at me for a few moments before replying, "It's in New York City."

"Oh, is that where your parents live?"

"No."

"Where will we stay?"

"Oh, there are plenty of places we can crash. You know, smoke dope and have sex."

“Look at the time. I am late for my lobotomy appointment,” I said and then ran off. Literally ran off.

I was definitely not ready for a college woman.

Although I have no memory of why, I rarely saw Kathy during my first semester at Oakland and never saw her during my last seven semesters. For a time, she and I settled into a routine. On Thursday evenings we would meet at the library and study together. After a few hours of studying, we would leave together, go behind the library to the edge of the woods and kiss for about 3–6 minutes. After our kissing was over, I would walk Kathy to her dorm and then neither communicate with nor see her until the following Thursday.

In October, basketball practice began and I went to the try-outs for the Oakland University men’s basketball team. On the first or second day, while performing a simple drill, my knee gave out. The coach said to me—and note this because it is very important—“Bob, I think that you have a damaged cartilage in your knee.”

“What should I do?” I asked.

“See an orthopedic surgeon,” he replied.

I told my father about this and he made an appointment with me to see Dr. Odso. Note that Odso was **not** the doctor’s surname. He was a doctor or osteopathy and an orthopedic surgeon; i.e., a D.O.O.S. I chose Odso by a process of elimination, as discussed below. (Arguments like the one below are particularly popular with people who enjoy mathematics; thus, if it seems tedious to you—no problem!)

There are 12 arrangements of the four initials, O, S, D and O:

- I eliminated three of these arrangements as possible names because I don’t know how to pronounce them: Oosd, Dsoo and Sdoo.
- I eliminated three because they end in *ess*: Doos, Odos and Oods. I don’t like worrying about whether the possessive of Odos should be Odos’ or Odos’s.
- This leaves six possibilities, listed alphabetically: Doso, Odso, Osd, Osod, Sodo and Sood. My friend Nancy Brinkerhoff said that I better check these names on google; I did so and here is what I found:
 - Doso is a language of New Guinea.
 - Odso is actually a word, defined as *a mild oath or an expression of surprise*.
 - OSDO is a rock band; I don’t want to mess with musicians!
 - OSOD is a consulting consortium of internationally recognized experts No good; I don’t want to be sued for libel.
 - SoDo is a neighborhood in Seattle, short for south of the Kingdome. Boring. And an obvious rip-off of SoHo in New York City.
 - Sood is a community in India; I don’t want to alienate an entire community!

The day of my appointment with Dr. Odso arrived and I was called into his office. “What brings you here today, Mr. Wardrop?” he asked.

My reply, as it turned out, might have been a huge error; an error that haunted the next three plus years of my life. “My coach thinks that I have a cartilage injury to my left knee,” I replied.

“Well, let’s see,” he said. I sat on the examination table. Dr. Odso put his hands on my lower left leg and twisted.

“Ouch!” I yelped like a small puppy.

“Yes, your cartilage is torn,” stated Dr. Odso. At this point, Dr. Odso ended his examination of my knee. **He did not look for any other damage to my knee!** In particular, he did not perform an extremely simple test to see whether my ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) was damaged. I cannot help but wonder whether the exam would have played out differently if I had not shared my coach’s diagnosis.

On Sunday, November 19, 1967, I was admitted to Detroit Osteopathic Hospital and on the following day, Dr. Odso removed the torn cartilage from my left knee. I remained in the hospital for nine days, being released on Monday, November 27 and returning to college on Tuesday, November 28. Because Thanksgiving occurred while I was in the hospital, I missed only four days of classes. Also, several friends, including Kathy visited me in the hospital.

I was really happy to see Kathy at the hospital. After her visit, however, I never saw her again except for an accidental meeting on the campus of the University of Michigan five years later.

You might wonder, “What is the most embarrassing fact about your years at Oakland, Bob?” This is an easy question for me to answer: During my two years of living in a dorm at Oakland, *I went home every weekend*. Not most weekends; not nearly every weekend; **every weekend**.

While I was going home every weekend, Kathy was staying on campus and meeting people, including men. Thus, it was natural that we started to drift apart. Besides, HG-2 had convinced me that I wasn’t ready or able to handle a college woman which, after all, is what Kathy had become.

It was no surprise that on Friday, December 1, like clockwork, my father picked me up at my dorm to take me home for the weekend.

On Saturday, I said to my father, “I would like to see Thurston play basketball tonight.” He took me to the game, which was a road game for Thurston. I entered the gym on my crutches, located the seating section for visitors and looked for somebody to sit with. I spotted Dave Day’s girlfriend (sorry, I can’t remember her name) and sat next to her. Dave was a senior forward on Thurston’s team.

Sitting next to Dave’s girlfriend was Debbie Mosteller, a junior at Thurston. Debbie and I were introduced by said girlfriend and years later Debbie’s biggest memory of the evening was that she repeatedly knocked my crutches off their perch on the bleachers. This knocking, of course, caused no damage, but it stuck with Debbie. Two years later, on December 2, 1969, Debbie and I decided to get married, which we did on December 27, 1969. I am, however, getting ahead of my story.

On December 2, of course, I had no idea that I would marry Debbie someday. I understood that I could no longer go out with girls who chased me down; that would lead to somebody like HG-2 or worse. With Debbie I could return to the safety of high school, perhaps for the entire 19 months she had left at Thurston.

In this chapter I have tried to convey the fact that I was unprepared for the social challenges of college. For completeness, I will describe one other area that caused me a great deal of trouble during Fall, 1967.

When I was in high school, on school nights I would always go to bed at 10:30 and then arise at 6:30; a solid eight hours of sleep every night. On a few occasions Bob Rybka and I would stay up late working on a project for *Recent American History*. Because I still needed to arise at 6:30, I had to get by on perhaps only five or six hours of sleep. This was impossible for 17 year-old Bob. After these late nights I would be a zombie and accomplish nothing the next day at school.

My first school night at Oakland, I went to bed at 10:30 in preparation for my 8:00 Chemistry class the next morning. Uncharacteristically, as things turned out, Mark and Greg also retired at 10:30. Sadly, at approximately 11:00, an upperclassman burst into our room—Mark and Greg refused to lock the door—and shouted, “Panty raid!” For the next two hours, a mob of men ran around campus, gathering beneath windows at women’s dorms shouting, “Throw us your panties!” Very few panties were harvested this night—none by me—but the ones that were became prominently displayed in dorm rooms.

The next morning I could barely crawl out of bed to shower, eat and head off to chemistry. “Well,” I thought to myself, “How many panty raids can there be in one semester?” The answer, it turned out, was only one.

Instead I faced a new problem. If you have one roommate who wants to talk, you can ignore him and chances are he will get the message. If you have two roommates who want to talk to each other, but not to you, there is nothing you can do. It turned out that Marc and Greg were endlessly fascinated with the minutia of each other’s lives and started their nightly conversations right after I put my head to pillow in an attempt to sleep. When I would finally fall asleep, at least once per week JUMA—the acronym will be explained later—would enter our room, turn on our light and ask, “What are you guys doing?”

I was very tired my entire first semester. For my next three semesters in the dorm I solved this problem by sleeping through my morning classes.

Chapter 29

Adjusting to College: Academics

One of my goals for these memoirs is to give insight into my career as a university professor. I learned a great deal about teaching from my good teachers and I also learned a great deal from my bad teachers. I want to say a bit about my teachers during my first semester at Oakland.

Most students are familiar with the A, B, C, D and F grading system. Sometimes the grades include a suffix of plus or minus; e.g., *A–* or *C+*. At UW-Madison, where I have worked for 40 years, we have intermediate grades: A, AB, B, BC, C, D and F. Finally, letter grades are transformed to numbers to obtain a grade point average (GPA), with an A corresponding to four points, a B to three points, a C to two points, a D to one point and an F to zero points. Intermediate grades or suffixes are handled by moving from integers to decimals; e.g., an AB is 3.5 points and so on.

As I mentioned above, the faculty at Oakland decided to be quirky, or eccentric. The grades at Oakland, from lowest to highest were:

0.0, 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, . . . , 4.0, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

The idea was that if a student earned an A, then the grade would be 4.0. The higher grades were reserved for truly exceptional performances. For example, in a junior math class I absolutely killed—I was the top student by far—my professor gave me a 4.2, and explained to me, somewhat sheepishly, “I never give 4.3’s because that would denote perfection and none of my students is God.” This was a great professor, a wonderful man who helped my career quite a lot, but his attitude struck and strikes me as quite silly. It reminds me of the famous scene in the movie *Spinal Tap* in which the character Nigel Tufnel explains why his amplifier, which goes up to ‘11,’ is superior to those that go up to only ‘10.’

After May, 1970, Oakland eliminated grades above 4.0; “Why?” you ask. The answer was quite simple; Oakland discovered that when one of its students applied to graduate or professional school, his/her GPA was routinely reduced by 0.3; i.e., the other schools interpreted anything below 4.3 as *less than* an A.

My first class at university was General Chemistry at 8:00 AM on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The course was taught by a team of professors: one for the first few weeks; then replaced by another; and so on. Each professor exuded tremendous enthusiasm for the field of Chemistry. Indeed, all of us students were left with the idea that Chemistry met at 8:00 so that the professors

could finish their teaching early and get back to the lab and have fun for the rest of the day! I loved my chemistry class and, as has always been my wont, if I love something I work hard at it; I received a grade of 4.2 in chemistry.

My Russian teacher was a young man and was very nice. Without learning anything new, and simply regurgitating what Mr. K had taught me at Thurston, I received a grade of 3.7 in Russian. As discussed earlier, I enjoyed my exploratory on Economics and received a grade of 3.0.

This brings us to my calculus class. Remember: I entered college with a string of 12 consecutive years in which math was both my favorite and best subject. I was absolutely certain that I wanted to major in math and become a high school math teacher and basketball coach.

Calculus met at 9:00 AM on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays right after chemistry and, indeed, in the same classroom. I will never forget my first calculus class. I was sitting in my chair, talking to a friend about the awesome chemistry lecture we had just experienced. An Asian man entered the front of the classroom and went to the board. I learned later that he had just arrived in the U.S. from South Vietnam. Without even glancing at us, he went to the board and wrote:

Math 154

and below that his name. (Sorry, I can't remember his name.) As he was writing, he was talking to the board. First, he said, "Math 154," and then he said his name.

He continued writing and talking; writing exactly what he said and saying exactly what he had written. He never looked at the class. After a few minutes of this, I whispered to my friend, "This sounds familiar." I opened our textbook and learned that he was *writing the textbook, verbatim, on the board!* The previous sentence is not an error! His idea of preparation was to memorize the book. He was excellent at his preparation. His idea of teaching was to write the book on the board. His handwriting was excellent.

The above procedure continued for the entire 50 minutes of the class. It was repeated every Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the semester, with the exception noted below. As an aside, years later when I had recovered from this first horrific exposure to college math and I was myself teaching calculus, I looked back at the textbook we had used in this first class. I had two strong reactions to the book. (These might seem to be the same reaction and they almost are, but not quite.)

1. It was the worst calculus textbook, by far, of any I had ever seen. It was worse, indeed, than any textbook I could imagine. (If you have studied calculus and want an example of why I say this, consider the following. The entire book devoted five pages to the integral! I know; this sounds unbelievable and it's ok if you don't believe me.)
2. Even ignoring the content of the book (see item above), it would be impossible to create a book from which it is more difficult to learn by reading.

With a horrible text and, essentially, no professor, how did we learn? Fortunately, the teaching assistants (TAs) were very good. All of learning was possible only because of the discussions.

I continued to attend the calculus *lecture* and you might well wonder why. Two reasons come to mind.

1. For years I had been looking forward to attending college and I was not psychologically ready to accept the idea that a lecture could be totally useless.
2. I had another class at 10:00 (Russian?) and I had to be somewhere between 9:00 and 9:50. The easiest place to be was in calculus; after all, it was the same classroom as my beloved chemistry.

Thus, my routine was to tune out the calculus lecture and use my time to study Russian—even though I *learned* nothing new that semester, I needed to review what I knew—or do my chemistry homework. I had several friends in the room who shared my strategy.

You can imagine our great surprise when one day, soon after our midterm, Professor South Vietnam, entered the classroom and, rather than go directly to the board, faced us and, for the first time since he had given us his name on day one, spoke words that were not from our textbook.

“The class did poorly on the midterm and I have been told to ask whether you have any questions,” he announced, without writing it on the board! We were dumbfounded and sat there silently. Trying to prompt us, he wrote,

$$\int x dx$$

on the board. “Does anyone have a question about this?” he asked, hopefully.

Nobody said a word. I didn’t have any question other than “What the hell does it mean?” (Remember: The textbook devoted five pages to integrals, and what he had written was an integral.) I wanted, however, to help him out, so I raised my hand and he called on me.

“Can you write that stuff after the curvy line as x^2d ?” I inquired. (I admit it; perhaps the dumbest question in the history of mathematics.)

His reply: “No,” he laughed and gave no explanation why not. There were no further questions. After a few moments of awkward silence, he turned to the board and resumed his writing of the text on the board, which he did every day for the remainder of the semester. (Well, I can’t say for sure what happened during the two lectures I ‘missed’ after my surgery.)

Somehow—thank you nameless TA—I earned a 3.0 in calculus. My remaining course was Chemistry lab, in which my grade was 3.1. Overall, I completed 18 of the 120 credits needed for graduation. I was more than one-seventh of the way to completing my bachelor’s degree. With continued hard work, I could be sent to Vietnam a full five months before my classmates! My GPA was 3.47; I had had an excellent start to college.

