

THE HAPPY FIDDLER

I have never claimed to be an author. A philosopher, I ain't.

This book has been written for the benefit of my family and is dedicated to the memory of Guy Dewey Stoneman (1915 – 1978), a man who – three days after he died – presented us with the greatest gift of all time.

In writing of typical American influences in our lives, I fully realize that I may be stepping on the proverbial toes of many sacred religious and social institutions. I ask only that you not judge me too harshly. I do hope, however, that you form your own opinion as to the validity of my story.

I humbly thank God for this opportunity.

CONTENTS

I	Heaven Couldn't Be A Happier Place	4
II	Happiness Is A Family Reunion	17
III	There Are No Pinch Hitters For Fathers	32
IV	We Determine Our Own Destiny	45
V	Affluence Can Be Influencing	57
VI	Cemetery Salesmen Should Be Buried	73
VII	Death And Tragedy Are Retarded	90
VIII	The American Dream Can Be A Nightmare	109
IX	Why Me Lord?	147
X	Let's Have Another Go Around!	173
XI	Jesus Did That?	191

CHAPTER I

HEAVEN COULDN'T BE A HAPPIER PLACE

Sue and I finally laid down on the bed about 8:30 in the morning and fell into a heavy sleep. Thirty minutes later we were awakened by Viv's knock on the door which separated our two adjoining rooms in the motel. Sue opened the door just enough to peer around at her sister-in-law.

Viv took one look at her, chuckled and asked, "Are you ready .. What's wrong with you?!"

Sue giggled, "Oh, ... We didn't go to bed until 8:30."

"Why? What for?"

"Oh, we just started talking and sat up all night. Why don't you and Charles go on over to Aunt Thelma's and we'll meet you there as soon as we get dressed."

The rude awakening suddenly brought us back to reality as we tried desperately to regain our composure while we quickly showered and dressed. Bubbling over with excitement, we were well aware that no one would ever believe our incredible all-night experience which had ended just one hour earlier.

I asked, "Do you realize that mankind has been searching for the true meaning of life for thousands of years? And now that we've found it, nobody would ever believe it?! Do you know that we can't tell a soul about

what happened? Even if they believed us, they wouldn't understand it. Us – of all people! Why us? And can you imagine what the reaction would be? They'd say we were either drunk, overly tired, depressed by the funeral, dreaming, hallucinating, or some other damned thing: What are we gonna' do?!"

Sue, "I don't know! But right now we've got to get our act together and get to Aunt 'Thelma's. They're gonna' know we were up all night and expect us to look tired. I can't imagine even thinking about being tired after what happened. Are you tired?"

"Not in the least. I can't believe it but I feel like a million bucks! How do you think he was able to do that?"

Sue, "I don't know. Maybe he somehow entered your body when you sent into that fetal position at the funeral home."

"Maybe I'm the 'Chosen On'! I mean, after all, 'J.C.'" was a carpenter, born on the twenty-fifth, and thirty-three when he died. I come from a long line of carpenters, I'm thirty-three, and today's the 25th!"

"You? RIGHT! You – of all people!" Sue laughed sarcastically. "You – the devout atheist. . . You've embarrassed more 'Jesus Freaks' over the years than the total number of Christians who were thrown to the lions!"

"Yeah, I know. Hell, I would've cheered for the lions! But don't you think that we're the only two people in the world who know the secret? I mean, if we aren't, why haven't we heard about it before? Ya' know, we've got to do something about it!"

"I don't know. We first have to decide what's best – who to tell – and when. We can't tell just anybody!"

You know, what adds even more credibility to this whole thing is that you and Guy are the last two people in the world to believe this stuff – him a Christian, and you and atheist.”

“I know... Can you imagine the ridicule – especially toward the kids? It could be down right dangerous to come out with something like this! Maybe we’ll start our own religion. We can call it ‘The Knowledge’ or ‘Stonemanism’.”

“Oh sure. And we can serve beer for communion.”

“I feel like I just have to do three things – write a book, learn how to play the fiddle, and maybe even become a minister. God, I hope I don’t have to become a minister! Can you imagine that?!”

“Not really.”

“No, I’m serious. I mean it!”

“A book?”

“Yeah. I don’t know how – or why. But it’s something I just have to do.” I paused for a moment. “How the hell could I ever write a book? I’ve got about as much ability to write a book as the man in the moon. In fact, ... I’d do better ‘mooning’ somebody!”

“Ha! You do that well!”

“And the fiddle. I can’t even carry a tune in the shower – much less learn how to play a musical instrument!”

Sue, “You never know. We’re just going to have to take it one step at a time and see what happens from here.”

“Ya’ know – it’s really weird – but I don’t have any more perception of time.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I can’t really explain it. Somehow, I feel that a week, a month, twenty years – a lifetime – is just a drop in the bucket when compared to immortality – infinity – eternity. It’s like the light at the end of the cone that I tried to describe last night. I can’t exactly explain it. But somehow, all of a sudden, I feel as if there’s a clock inside of me and it’s ticking away precious seconds. Even though I can’t conceive of the meaning of time anymore, I feel a tremendous sense of urgency because there’s not enough time to accomplish all the things that I have to do. It’s really strange. The most frustrating thing is that I have to find out everything there is to know!”

I found it difficult to explain to Sue my insatiable – literally indescribable – thirst for knowledge. It was as if time was my worst enemy even though I felt a genuine sense of immortality.

Sue, “C’mon – we better get going. Are you up to this?”

“I guess so. We can’t tell a soul – right?”

“Right. C’mon. We can get by for at least a while without anybody knowing.”

“I hope so! O.K. Let’s go.”

As we drove down Main Street, I considered the irony of beginning life anew in the same town where I had spent the first five years of my childhood. I reflected on the incredible circumstances which preceded our all-night experience and the profound significance of what we had been told. If he was right, all the influences in my life

might have been typical of countless millions of other American war babies of the 1940's who were products of that extremely difficult and demanding era of post depression and a world war. I was the third child born to Ralph and Arline Reavis (rhymes with crevis) and my father, after serving in the army, saw me for the first time when I was about nine months old. Our hometown of Galax, one of the highest elevated cities in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, offered a couple of furniture factories and hosiery mills as the primary means for local residents to seek the American Dream. Most people, however, were full time farmers or at least supplemented their incomes by farming. Since the closest train depot was located over the mountain in Wytheville, a Trailways Bus Station served as the transportation hub of that sleepy little country town.

The American economy at that time apparently was like the proverbial sleeping giant awakening to offer virtually unlimited opportunities for those who were relatively well prepared. The educated veterans were faced with an untapped well of pure materialistic rewards if they were willing to pay the price to infant corporations which were to mature as dominant forces in our emerging oligopoly. However, many veterans were uneducated due to the pre-war depression which forced many young people to drop out of school in an effort to help provide their families with the bare necessities of life. My father was one of the latter in that he did not have the opportunity to complete high school and, as a result, tried various jobs such as selling life insurance and working as a finish carpenter in a local cabinet shop. He was an extremely talented craftsman. My mother also

supplemented the family income by working for awhile in one of the local knitting mills.

We lived happily in the country about twelve miles outside of Galax in a house which offered a total of three rooms. I vaguely remember sleeping in one bed with my sister, Linda, and my brother, Charles, next to my parents' bed in the single bedroom which was separated from the living room only by the kitchen. I can remember some bitterly cold nights when my mother would heat the iron on the stove, wrap it in a blanket and place it at the foot of the bed so that we could warm our feet before going to sleep. We loved that place which came to be known as "Knowledge Knoll" – a name originated by my father whom I grew to truly worship. I suppose we were unaware at the time that we were poor because no one ever told us that we were.

I can remember playing for hours in the nearby woods and exploring the surrounding countryside with its seemingly endless number of small and medium size farms. Little did I realize that those carefree summers of walking barefoot through barnyards represented the closest feeling to absolute perfect freedom that a human being could ever experience in a lifetime. At times we would just sit in total silence and let our imaginations consume us as we gazed at our beautiful surroundings. Only occasionally were our activities interrupted by such cataclysmic occurrences as our mother catching all three of us (ages 4, 6, and 8) smoking cigarettes!

I have many fond memories and lasting impressions of the first five years of my life in that rural setting. I will never forget the sheer ecstasy when my father surprised us by bringing home a popcorn popper – an almost unbelievable modern luxury – complete with

plastic serving bowls of various colors. My bowl was green. I remember how proud I felt when I visited Linda at the small country school house located about five miles away in Baywood and could never forget the excitement of the County Fair which, except for the Old Time Fiddlers Convention, had to be the most important event of the year. We still joke about arguing over whose turn it was to take out the “slop jar” to the outhouse each morning. We made our own baseballs by rolling up a small piece of a rubber inner tube and wrapping strings around it. We played with oatmeal boxes which my mother covered with flowered wall paper. We would pick our own chinquapins and eat them until we were almost green. We squashed the green covers off walnuts, let them dry in the smokehouse, and ate the delectable contents after cracking them with a hammer. The only problem was that the black substance of the exterior of the walnuts would not wash off. It literally had to wear off of our hands over a long period of time.

Many seemingly unimportant recollections remain clear in my mind such as the affection we expressed toward our pet pig, “Pinky.” I will never forget our fear that he would encounter the same fate as our neighbors’ pigs which were scalded and made into various pork products. Entire families would gather and jointly share in the spoils of such a slaughter or congregate for the purpose of making apple-butter in a huge black kettle in which the liquid was stirred with a large L-shaped board. I can vividly picture my aunt as she churned butter in her kitchen, the women who casually breast fed their babies, and my father and brother getting seriously stung by storming bees when they tried to extract the honey from our nearby bee hives.

Saturday was, by far, the best day of the week. Our weekly ritual began when the wash tub was filled with hot water and placed on the kitchen floor where Linda, Charles and I took our baths. The twelve mile trip to town seemed like an eternity as we anticipated the activities of the day on which my parents also did their weekly grocery shopping (for about \$5.00), socialized with friends and relatives, and did whatever parents were supposed to do on Saturdays in town. Much of the socializing was accomplished right on Main Street as people seemed to vie for a good parking space where it was customary to sit for hours in the car and nod to everyone as they passed by. Many young adults spent the better part of most Saturday nights sitting in their cars on Main Street. Sometimes we were lucky enough to be treated to a .10 bag (approximately 18” high) of freshly popped popcorn at the “five and ten” and on occasion I opted for a DIXIE CUP of ice cream whose lid, when licked clean, revealed the picture of a movie star. I will never forget the excitement and joy on those rare occasions when my mother could squeeze out enough money to treat us to a coloring book and a .05 box of crayons.

However, the big event of the day was spending the entire afternoon in the Rex Theatre where we would be completely mesmerized by a double-feature western. The movie stars included such super heroes as Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, Tom Mix, Gene Autry, and Lash LaRu. None compared, however, to my boyhood hero and idol with whom I rode the ranges – Rocky Lane and his horse Blackjack. Together we inevitably suppressed evil by jumping from Blackjack and rolling down a hill with a bad guy who had the audacity to

challenge the American way of law and order. The movies were always preceded by cartoons and a breathtaking serial of Batman, The Three Stooges, or Captain Marvel. (One of Linda's first prized possessions was a Mary Marvel watch).

I remember wondering why the theatre had a separate entrance for "Colored Only" and why only "colored people" sat in the balcony. I also wondered why the "Colored" seemed to congregate on the same street corner in town on Saturdays. Further, it seemed strange to me that most of the black people lived on "Nigger Hill" where my father bought moonshine whiskey from some of his friends. It now seems odd that I accepted all those things without ever asking why.

We would conclude many of our Saturdays by watching my father bowl in a small smoke-filled bowling alley located just off Main Street. The greatest memory I have about that bowling alley was the aroma of hamburgers and hot dogs smothered in onions and relish. To this day, I have never tasted burgers so mouth watering as those. I remember admiring the brave and daring ball boys who perched to the side and about three feet above the duck pins and hustled to clear the "dead wood" or reset the pins for the next bowler. In fact, my father, who apparently was one of the finest bowlers in the area, and Uncle "Pee Wee" had quit school in order to be pin boys in that same bowling alley. I could not be more proud as people congratulated my father for his bowling heroics or when he would bring home a case of COCA-COLA or other winnings from his bowling. No one – not even Rocky Lane – could ever equal my father's greatness in my eyes. I remember riding home some

nights as we all sang “Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy.” Heaven could not possibly have been a happier place.

On Sunday mornings we would awaken to the aroma of hot coffee, eggs, sausage, biscuits and gravy cooking in the kitchen. However, above all, I recall the radio playing the spiritual rhythmic sound of country gospel music which seemed to set the stage for the entire day. Later, my mother would walk us three kids on a three mile pilgrimage down a winding country road to a little white church which could have served as inspiration for a Norman Rockwell Christmas card. I remember that it was heated by a pot-belly stove and music was provided by a huge organ which had to be pumped with the feet. We attended church in the afternoon because the preacher held morning services at his other church in town. Many of the hymns that were sung at those worship services were the same as we heard on the radio on Sunday mornings. I suppose that country gospel music left a lasting impression in those early years of my life in much the same way as today’s T.V. commercials can be recited verbatim by pre-schoolers. My father seldom, if ever, attended church with us as he was not a religious man. I later asked my mother why we walked to church instead of driving the car and she explained that my father spent most Sundays with his own father and two brothers which meant that the car was not available. Little did I realize that the satisfaction my father derived from being with my grandfather and two uncles would lead to domestic problems later in our lives.

I vividly recall scenes from one near disastrous Sunday excursion. We narrowly escaped an attack by a charging bull when we crossed a field near the church on our return from the family cemetery. The only thing that

saved us was Charles' spine chilling screams because every time he yelled, the bull would stop his charge for an instant. He continued his well timed shrills until we all were screaming deliriously as we scurried over, under and through a rail fence.

Like many people I suppose the event that left the most pleasant lasting impression on my life was Christmas. In spite of being relatively poor, my parents always succeeded in assuring that Christmas was a wonderful experience for us. I will never forget the excitement in my mother's voice when she would come into the bedroom and exclaim, "Linda, Charles, Ted... Come see what Santa Claus left under the Christmas tree!" I remember waking up early some Christmas mornings and lying perfectly still while pretending to be asleep so that those words would assuredly be spoken. I almost ruined one Christmas when I lit a Santa Claus candle located directly under the tree and in a flash the entire tree was an inferno. Fortunately my father grabbed the blazing tree and ran outside with it. I remember the toy "six guns" with double holsters (ala Rocky Lane), riding pants, boots, cowboy hat, and a wagon with removable wooden sides of thirty years ago as clearly as last year's electronic games and \$16.00 worth of batteries. That child-hood Christmas tradition is one that I have tried to instill in my children and to this day my wife swears that I still believe in Santa Claus.

When I was three years old a fourth child was born to our family; however, "Little Joe" was with us for only about four months before he died of spinal meningitis. Even though I can only recall bits and pieces of that first real experience with death in my family, those memories remain as clear now as I am sure they will be thirty years

from now. That a death is the major influence in one's life, especially in that rural setting, is an understatement. Nothing – not even the Old Time Fiddlers Convention – could compare with the magnitude of a funeral as THE major event. Photographs were regularly taken at funerals and to this day the only picture we have of our little brother is of him lying in his casket. People came from miles around for funerals that seemed to last for days with food enough to feed the entire population of the county. It was customary for the corpse to lie at rest in the home of the deceased's family as did Little Joe at Granny Reavis' house. I remember when someone forced Linda (age 7) to kiss Little Joe good bye, she reacted violently and almost uncontrollably – screaming for someone to cover him with a blanket because he was terribly cold. Understandably, she has never been able to rid her psyche of that horrible experience. I begged for someone to wake him up and take him home. He looked abnormal to me. In fact, he barely resembled the little brother to whom I once attempted to feed a boiled egg (much to my parents' surprise). Yet people commented about how "good he looked" and "what a good job they did."

Little Joe's burial took place in the family cemetery located atop a steep hill surrounded by cow pastures and the only access was an old dirt road that ended half way up the towering knoll. Because of recent rains, the only vehicles which could scale the summit were equipped with four-wheel drive and I remember riding to the burial with my grandmother and an uncle who drove a JEEP through the muddy terrain. While many people were making their way up the hill to the fenced cemetery, Charles accidentally fell into the grave site. I could never accept the horrible thought of Little Joe being lowered into that

hole in the ground. Immediately after the services, a violent thunderstorm appeared which triggered an old saying that when a truly good person dies, a storm can be expected. We stayed at Granny Reavis' house for four days because my parents could not face returning home without Little Joe. Sometime later when our pet rabbit, "Fluffy," died, we three kids reenacted a similar funeral for that cuddly creature. We buried him in an old tool box, carried wild flowers and cried as we sang Silent Night.

There were too many unanswered questions about my first experience with death. Maybe I doubted for the first time that there really was a God. I mean, if there was, then why would he allow Little Joe to die? If there really was such a wonderful place as Heaven, then why did people cry to a point of literally fainting and grieve for such a long time after a death in the family? Even though Little Joe's death permanently affected me at that early age, little did I realize that a death thirty years later would drastically change my life as well as the lives of those around me.

CHAPTER II

HAPPINESS IS A FAMILY REUNION

The pressure of relatively low wages coupled with a lack of demand for skilled labor in Galax forced many men to commute long distances for employment. My father, along with many others, found work in the Washington, D.C. area and commuted home every other weekend. He worked at one time on the construction of the Pentagon. Eventually, joining millions of others in this country circa 1950 who migrated from rural areas to major cities, we moved to the D.C. suburbs so that we could all be together as a family.

We settled in Beltsville, Maryland in a rented house which to us kids was definitely the most luxurious home we could ever have imagined. It was a three bedroom, full basement house with an exterior of yellow tinted stucco. I remember that we arrived after dark in the dead of winter and the very first things I noticed and questioned were the dark curtains which, as was explained, were World War II black-out curtains used in camouflaging homes from enemy bombers. However, I was frightened and felt terribly insecure even after hearing that there was no longer any threat of enemy attack. Ironically, in the next instant a passenger plane flew directly over the house and that gigantic monster of the sky had its landing lights on! I think that particular moment was the first time that I had ever laid eyes on an airplane – or at least the first that I remember. We

continued to run outside, as each marvel of the industrial revolution periodically thundered overhead. (Little did I realize that Beltsville was a strategic point in the landing path of Washington's National Airport.)

The next day we walked half a block to a drug store located on U.S. Route 1 which was the major north-south thoroughfare on the east coast. I could scarcely believe the traffic – especially the number of tractor-trailer trucks which roared by. In just a few minutes I had been exposed to more vehicles than the sum of all my Saturday nights in Galax!

I remember watching television for the first time in my life at a friend's house. Even though that fuzzy little eight-inch image imbedded in the top of a four foot high cabinet was not Saturday at the Rex Theatre, it most assuredly was entertaining. By the time we finally had our own television, it ranked a close second to the Rex even if it did not show Rocky Lane. The Howdy Doody Show was my favorite program with Buffalo Bob, Flub-a-dub, Finius T. Bluster, Chief Thunderthud, Princess Summer-Fall-Winter-Spring, and of course, all the kids in the Peanut Gallery.

In order to defray expenses and because it was convenient, my Granddaddy Reavis and Uncle "Pee Wee" were among five or six men from the Galax area who boarded with us. Although they slept in the basement, for all intents and purposes they dominated most of our family life. They were present at meal time and during most evening hours. One of the boarders was a man named Guy Dewey Stoneman who was responsible for arranging the first job opportunities in the D.C. area for my father. Even though I had to share my father with Granddaddy (whom we all loved) and the others, the time

that I could steel with Daddy was sacred to me. I tried to emulate him and was constantly reminded by my family that I was a carbon copy of him. We were referred to as “Pete and Repeat.” I loved it and selfishly sensed that I was his favorite. I remember when he lost his temper once and threatened to spank me. When I clicked my heels together and saluted him, he quickly disappeared in an attempt to conceal his laughter. I think his greatest asset was his kind heart. I can remember just trying to sit close to him on many evenings when all the men, while drinking beer, watched the wrestling matches or baseball games on television. I would do everything possible to gain his approval, attention or affection. Those cherished moments at that early age must have initiated my determination to have my own sons someday whom I could shower with fatherly attention.

My exposure to alcohol and alcoholism came at an early age since my father and most of the men around him drank excessively. It was perfectly normal to see “Four Roses” bottles in every conceivable location – especially under the front seat of the car. I suppose the alcohol offered my father an escape from financial pressures as well as freezing him from increasing domestic frustrations. Apparently the satisfaction derived from alcohol and the camaraderie of his father snowballed into a psychological trap and I found it difficult to accept the fact that my father was becoming an alcoholic.

Most kids are perceptive enough to easily sense problems in families. We were no different in that soon after settling in Beltsville our parents began to argue quite frequently and over a period of about three years the disputes increased in frequency and intensity. After witnessing the arguments, we invariably went to bed

crying hysterically and literally trembling from fright. I remember crying for hours on many occasions after going to bed on those frightening, helpless and extremely lonesome nights. I am sure that those horrible experiences encouraged my chronic bed wetting problem and speech defects. I wet the bed from childhood to early teens and stuttered so badly that I was literally ashamed to talk.

Immediately following our move to Beltsville, Linda and Charles resumed school in the fourth and second grades respectively. I entered the first grade the following fall in Beltsville Elementary which was considerably larger than the small school in Baywood which did not even practice those unnerving air raid drills. I soon discovered that I was relatively well coordinated for that young age and relied on athletics as a freedom of expression as well as an escape from a decaying family life. Like most other jocks in the 1960's, I soon became relatively popular in school. At the risk of sounding arrogant, all three of us kids had a knack for making friends easily and exercised leadership abilities at early ages. It was almost as if we were seeking approval or searching for something that was perhaps missing from our lives. Linda was a beautiful girl and rapidly became, by far, the most popular coed in school. Her popularity continued through high school where she was Captain of the Cheerleaders, various beauty queens and eventually honored as Queen of High Point High School as it's most revered senior girl. Charles was equally popular throughout school and was bestowed the honor of King of the same high school two years later. (I was nominated for the honor my senior year but never made it – RATS!!!).

As a result of mandatory integration in 1955, black kids attended our school for the first time when I was in the fifth grade. I now feel extremely fortunate to have experienced at that early age such a drastic change in this country. Since most kids do not really understand ignorant racial hatred, we were able to form our own opinions. Those “colored” kids in my class were equally as smart, well mannered and as normal in every way as all the other kids in school. Some could even run as fast as I could – well, almost as fast! Athletic activities throughout school not only helped in establishing many lifelong friendships but also represented one of the first great racial equalizers in this country. As a result of the national integration movement, I honestly feel that our generation is the first wave of humanity in this country to overwhelmingly reject racial prejudice. Hopefully, the next and subsequent generation will bury it.

Getting into trouble those first few years in Beltsville seemed to come a little too easy for me. My best friend and I ran away from home one morning with a change of clothes, one sleeping bag, a box of cherry flavored cough drops and 37 cents in our possession. We were apprehended about twenty miles away and returned home to a host of police cars, ambulances, firemen and a crowd of people. Our alibi was that we just wanted to go on a hike. That same friend and I also had a lot of fun making bombs out of the contents of shot gun shells which were easily attainable since all the men in the family were avid hunters. I almost received the beating of my life when my father discovered us with the bombs. I escaped the beating (as I usually did) when Uncle “Pee Wee” revealed that the explosives only fizzled when they were ignited. (We never told anyone that a couple of

them had earlier actually exploded!). I know this is hard to believe; however, while sitting in my friend's room one day, a shot gun shell exploded in his left hand when he tapped the end of it with his pen knife. Incredibly, neither of us was hurt – only scared half to death.

Religion continued to play a major role in our lives as my mother insisted that we attend church every Sunday, Bible School in the summers, and Revivals whenever they occurred. I grew to dislike church immensely. I did not like the boring sermons and the frightening threats of hell fire and brimstone to which I was subjected. Neither did I like the guilt feelings of being a filthy sinner and non-tither nor did I care for the holier-than-thou saints of Christianity who berated my father for not accepting Christ as his savior. Besides, I was getting to the point where God and Jesus with his twelve pals were beginning to fall into the same category as the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and the Boogey Man. And what about death? Had it ever been scientifically proven that there really was such a thing as life after death?

I remember another bout with parental discipline when I was caught flying toy airplanes on the church grounds during church services one Sunday morning. A friend and I sneaked away after Sunday School that day and purchased two gorgeous gliders with our church offering. We would have pulled it off without a hitch, were it not for one of the church hypocrites who squealed on us.

I do admit that I was baptized at the vulnerable age of eight or nine. What a terrifying experience! Reasoning that such a gesture would surely gain recognition, I went forward to accept Christ at the close of one particularly

boring Revival meeting. However, I was not about to do it alone. To this day I am sure that Charles has graciously restrained from revealing that I blackmailed him into being saved with me. I threatened to tell my mother that he had looked up Suzanne Rogers' dress if he did not take that walk down the aisle with me! Apparently he opted for the lesser of the two evils and we were baptized a few weeks later in the baptismal pool of the Laurel, Maryland Baptist Church. When my turn came to wade into the water, the minister placed a small cloth over my face and dunked me backwards. Even though the water was only waist high, I swore that the old S.O.B. was surely going to drown me! However, everything went well and we gained approval from everyone. To this day I doubt that my brother has ever forgiven me!

I was in real trouble of a different nature when I was ten years old. I almost died from the bite of an infected tick which we later discovered had lodged itself in the back of my head. I remember lying in bed for a day or two while desperately weak and burning with fever. All I wanted to do was sleep. When a rash appeared on my body, my mother rushed me to a local doctor who, after leafing through a large medical book, diagnosed the disease as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

Within minutes after returning home, an ambulance was carrying me away to the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Since mine was only about the third case of tick fever in the D.C. area (the other victims had died) in recent memory, N.I.H. was anxious to accept me. I was in a coma with extremely high temperatures for days and apparently expected to die; however, after a couple of weeks I was released in good health. The most prevalent memory of that dreadful

experience was having to leave our dog when I was taken to the hospital.

Princess, a small white mongrel with a large black spot on one eye, was about the most faithful friend and companion that I have ever known. Since my father's absence from home increased due to the arguments and since Linda, Charles and I were beginning to fight and argue almost constantly, my reliance on Princess grew rapidly. My personality developed into that of an introvert and I felt that she represented my only ally in life. We dearly loved each other and were virtually inseparable except for one summer that I spent on my grandparents' farm back in Baywood, Virginia. (She had chased Granddaddy's chickens the previous summer). We shared everything including most of my meals that I sneaked outside to her since she was not allowed in the house. She never once disappointed me and was always willing to sit patiently while listening to my problems, frustrations or dreams. At the risk of sounding somewhat melodramatic, she was, in every sense of the word, a true princess to me.

Most of my summers during those formative years were leisurely spent with my Grandmother and Grandfather Hampton who lived about five miles from "Knowledge Knoll" in Baywood. I would sometimes leave the day that school recessed for the summer and return the day before school started in the fall. The thriving metropolis of Baywood consisted of a post office, school, Primitive Baptist Church, and a general store located at the fork in the road. The paved surface actually ended at the fork where two dirt roads offered passageways to either Boyer's Ferry on New River or to Peach Bottom and eventually the North Carolina border.

Much of that land around Baywood was once owned by my Great Grandfather Johnson whose family heritage evolved from deep southern tradition. The relatively small farm which deeply affected and influenced my early life was located directly behind Diamond's General Store.

The white fence which surrounded the farm house was covered with roses, morning glories, sweet peas, and grape vines and the spacious yard, shaded by towering trees, was lined with mature shrubbery and decorated with seemingly endless waves of colorful flowers of all kinds. Even the wide porch which ran the entire length and width of the house was decked with a variety of flowers. The first floor of the wooden two-story house offered a parlor, living room, dining room, utility room, long hallway and a huge kitchen which was the hub of all activity. A winding stairway led from the foyer to two large bedrooms on the second floor of the main section and another stairway from the kitchen opened to two additional rooms above the smaller section of the house. Every room, except for the dining room, was heated via a fireplace.

A variety of furniture lined the porch which offered two cozy swings. The furniture that I best remember from the house was my grandfather's roll-top desk, a large round table in the kitchen, an extremely long table in the dining room, piano in the parlor, hat tree in the foyer, and a bottomless feather bed upstairs. I had to stand on a stool to reach the crank handle on the side of the telephone which was fastened to the dining room wall. I remember the voice of Myrtle, the telephone operator, who connected our occasional calls to the outside world. I was told that, in years past, the long table to the dining room was filled to capacity at "thrashing time" by all the

male thrashers at the annual harvest. An old cow bell hanging from the kitchen wall was once used for calling the workers for dinner.

The wood stove in the kitchen thrived on the contents of the wood box and buckets of chips which were located on one wall of the kitchen. We chopped wood for the stove almost daily in the wood shed which was about 100 feet in back of the house. The out house was not far from the wood shed. Other out buildings which surrounded the barnyard included the smoke house, barn, chicken house, pig pen and corn crib. An adjacent orchard featured chestnut, pear, cherry, walnut, mulberry and a wide variety of apple trees. The entire setting around the farm gave the appearance of a warm, friendly and inviting homestead.

I have many pleasant memories of my summers in Baywood. I remember lying in the swing at the corner of the porch for hours while an ever present breeze cooled us in the summer heat. In that mountainous environment of low humidity, it never seemed to get unbearably hot even on the warmest days. Blankets were always needed at night and I slept on a feather mattress which completely devoured me. When it rained we fell asleep to the rhythmic patter of raindrops on the tin roof. Water was supplied to the house by hand-carrying it from the spring which was located across the dirt road and the spring house, which once stored the milk, cream, and butter in stone jars, at one time served as a rest stop for travelers.

Mornings came early as I awakened to the crowing of roosters or the sounds of my grandmother downstairs in the kitchen. I would join my grandfather in the morning chores of feeding the chickens, milking the cows,

slopping the hogs or simply relishing my time with the man who had the single greatest influence in establishing my character at that early age. We would return to the house to a tremendous breakfast which to me was a royal feast. The largest meal of the day was dinner which was served at noon and supper was served around 6:00 P.M. To this day I have never tasted the likes of Grandmama Hampton's cooking which was well known in the area. (Her only equal to the kitchen was Granny Reavis). Recipes were virtually unheard of and preparations for dinner commenced directly after breakfast. We would go to bed soon after supper but not until the three of us played a game of ROCK or Granddaddy and I had sat at the general store sharing, over a bottle of Orange Crush, conversation with neighboring farmers. Some nights we would just sit on the porch and enjoy the peaceful surroundings.

Granddaddy Hampton (Verdi Isiah Griggs Hampton), known as "V.I.G.", was a tall, slender man who commanded respect from everyone. He was a strict disciplinarian who was a tower of strength to me as well as most others. I learned at an early age to answer "Yes, Sir" and "No, Sir" loudly and clearly and God help the person who interrupted him or displayed manners which were questionable. He was a decisive, opinionated, strict Republican whose two hunting dogs were named IKE and Mamie. He set an example for his dress code and meticulous personal appearance at all times and I can hardly remember ever seeing the man without a tie. Every morning before entering the barnyard he inspected the strings which tied my pants legs above the top of my shoes to insure that neither the dew nor the barnyard would dampen or soil my pants. I can still picture his

stern glances if my shoes were not polished at all times. He cut my hair regularly with an old pair of hand held cutters which more often pulled the hair out by the roots; however, I dared not flinch!

Even though he gave the outward appearance of being cold and hard, he was really an emotional man with a kind heart. It seems somewhat strange to me that I respected him immensely but was never actually afraid of him. He was a deeply religious man who taught me right from wrong and established a code of ethics which left a lasting impression. He taught me the meaning of dignity and integrity and influenced my moral values. He instilled in me a burning desire to strive for a college education, to worship God and to try to succeed at whatever I attempted. Since he was once a semi-pro baseball pitcher, he took special pride and interest in my athletic endeavors. He would spend countless hours coaching me on my hitting stance while I swung a long stick of kindling from the wood shed. I loved every minute of it!

We were virtually inseparable during those summers that I spent in Baywood. We went to the livestock market every Monday morning and attended the Minor League baseball games in Galax about once a week. Since he was a well known citizen in the Galax area, he was chosen to be an annual judge at the Old Time Fiddlers Convention which I attended with him. I remember nudging him gently when he occasionally dozed off during a contestant's performance. I was proud to be seen with him. His old brown Plymouth was equally well known in that he hauled livestock in the back seat and the two doors on the driver's side were roped shut. People literally avoided him on the road since he drove like Fireball Roberts while simultaneously counting

sheep and cattle in adjacent fields. He twice had accidents while Charles and I were riding shotgun. He ran into a tree once and on another occasion ran the right wheels off a cement bridge that crossed New River. On one return trip from the livestock market in Galax, he failed to turn at the exit to Baywood. Because he was engulfed in telling one of his stories, neither Charles nor I dared to interrupt him and we traveled another ten miles before he finally realized his mistake. We quietly retraced our journey after he reprimanded both of us for not reminding him of the proper turn! Meanwhile, the calf which he had purchased at the market had relieved itself all over the back floor of the car!

On Friday nights we would watch the boxing matches on the Diamond's newly acquired television set and I always had to diplomatically awaken him without embarrassment when the fight was over. One entire summer we slept together in the same bed. I loved that man and worshipped him from the bottom of my heart. I suppose he represented the fatherly attention which I desperately craved.

I think the single most difficult task that I have ever attempted has been trying to justifyingly describe Grandmama Hampton. How does one convey in writing his feelings about a person who was clearly the most perfect human being that he has ever known? She epitomized the typical American grandmother in that every member of the family adored her and each felt that he or she was special do her. When she hugged us we knew that it came from the bottom of her heart. She was plump; however, she was not perceived as being overweight. Her gray hair, glasses, apron, reassuring smile and kind face gave the aura of a sincerely warm and loving

person. She was the ideal listener and counselor because she would never judge and offered advice only when it was appropriate. She never violated one's confidence, never had an unkind word to say about anyone, and her kindness returned many fold in that she was loved and admired by everyone who came in contact with her. She was extremely intelligent, even tempered and possessed an unmatched disposition. (Rumor had it that she negated the straight Republican ticket voting habit of my grandfather on many occasions.) She lived by the Golden Rule and dedicated her life to serving others. She gave the outward appearance of knowing the true secret meaning of life – if there was such a thing. She was... well, the perfect human being.

The summers in Baywood offered an escape from the pressures of a decaying home life and represented a Utopia with kind people who returned my love. I have many fond memories of those summers such as skinny dipping with some local farm boys whom I anxiously anticipated revisiting each year. We played baseball for hours in nearby pastures, hiked on all day excursions to New River, and stacked hay for 50 cents per day. However all of those pleasant memories do not compare with the inward glow I felt when the entire Hampton family would gather for a reunion in mid summer in Baywood. The simple pleasure of feeling an integral part of a closely knit family was sheer delight. I remember stealing quiet moments during the height of the activities to reflect on the secure happiness that I felt at the time.

My aunts and uncles in the Hampton family, now highly respected in various professional endeavors including doctors, nurses, engineers, and marketing specialists, instilled in me an insatiable desire not only to

succeed in life but to perpetuate a strong family unity in my own children, nieces and nephews. They represented success in life in general that I was determined to emulate. But more importantly, the value of, and desire for, family unity was deeply imbedded in me. Perhaps it would not have been such a driving force in my life if I had experienced a more normal immediate family environment.

I also spent parts of my summers with Granny Reavis who lived about six miles from Baywood. My cousin, Bobby, and I roamed the countryside fishing and stalking big game with his B.B. gun; however, the resultant untamed devilish energy found us immersed in more trouble than was imaginable. I loved Granny dearly and would have hated to be forced to choose between her cooking and Grandmama Hampton's. The love and devotion of her entire family to whom she dedicated her life is a tribute to her character. I could easily relate to the Reavis family not only because of my devotion to my father, but also because they were simple, unpretentious, loving people whose grass roots were of the salt of the earth. Although I was proud to be a part of their heritage and proud when reminded of my special bond with them, I gradually spent less time at Granny Reavis' house because of increasing tension in my parents' relationship.

CHAPTER III

THERE ARE NO PINCH HITTERS FOR FATHERS

The ride home from Baywood to Beltsville following the summer of 1955 was filled with anticipation of my reunion with Princess since it was only the second time we had been separated. It was the day before school was to begin and I was excited about the usual mini shopping spree for new school supplies that evening and renewing acquaintances again with all of my old friends. After all, since we were entering the sixth grade we were no longer children. I forget now exactly who drove us home on that occasion but it most assuredly was one of the commuters from the Galax area because they were our primary mode of transportation to and from Baywood. I do remember that Linda and Charles were with us. She was returning from a visit with out Aunt Jean, and Charles and I had been together at the farm.

I can only remember bits and pieces of that Black Sunday, but when we arrived in Beltsville I sensed something strange in that we passed the turn to our house and continued about five miles to an area which was vaguely familiar. The car stopped in front of an old box-shaped two-story white building that contained six apartments. I cannot recall any conversation until we entered one of the upstairs apartments where we were greeted by my mother and two other adult visitors. All of the furniture was different. Princess was n where to be found. It quickly became obvious that my father was no

longer a part of our family. I remember getting nothing but non-answers to my questions. The words separation and divorce were frightening and vulgar. Stolen from my life were both my father and my dog – the two primary influences in my life which offered a sense of security or feeling of being wanted or needed. I did not feel like the proverbial black sheep with them as I did with the rest of my family. My whole world had suddenly and brutally been destroyed. I was completely devastated.

It now seems somewhat strange to me that I remember asking about my school supplies. I would not accept hearing that they would be purchased the next day after school. When the lady visitor tried to calm me with further explanations as to stores being closed due to the lateness of the hour, I lashed out at her. She was just a dumb hick anyway and I was the most popular kid in school and Captain of Patrols. What would my friends think if I dared to attend the first day of school without a notebook that zipped on three sides? I mean, I had an image to maintain.

I cried myself to sleep that night in my new surroundings of a four room apartment. I felt that there was no one to whom I could turn for help because there was a tremendous amount of resentment between us three kids even though Linda and Charles were relatively close at times. Charles and I rarely spoke or even acknowledged the other's presence and there was this perception I had of being the black sheep. Linda was the first born, beautiful, and the only girl. Besides, she had a captivating personality. I perceived that Charles was destined to become a lawyer and tall like all the Hamptons. I was short for my age like the Reavis', introverted, and... well, a Reavis. You know, Pete and

Repeat. After all, I was the problem child who had sided with my father during many domestic battles. I detested my mother for what she had done – not just superficial dislike, but unequivocal hate which went to the core of my soul. I vowed that someday, somehow, some way – I would get even with all of them. I'd show 'em!

I rebelled against almost everyone. I became even more introverted and the shell around me quickly became impenetrable. No one would ever be allowed to get close to me again – ever. My bed wetting became a chronic problem and I was ridiculed, embarrassed, and humiliated for it. The speech defect of stuttering increased to a point where I simply shut people out and refused to talk about anything. Charles and I fought bitterly and I grew to hate him. I did not hate Linda although I resented her immensely as I did most everyone. I literally separated myself from my family. I was alone and clearly intended to keep it that way. Someday I would have my own family and I vowed to never associate with my mother, brother, or sister again.

I cried myself to sleep regularly and some days were so depressing and sad that I sat for long periods of time attempting to affix a permanent frown on my forehead. I felt that I suffered so many emotional wounds and hurts that I could never let anyone close to me. I did not trust anyone, I learned to hurt others before they had the opportunity to pull the rug out from under me, and was embarrassed that I was the kid without a father. I was terribly ashamed at the Cub Scout Father and Son Banquet when a man from the church attended with me and, as each Scout introduced his father, I almost could not utter the fact that a friend was substituting for my dad.

My mother had been working full time in the federal government for a few years as a clerk and subsequently a supervisor and earned enough money on which we could survive. Linda worked to supplement many of her needs since she was advancing into high school and Charles worked constantly in an effort to help in every way possible. He was a good kid and gained approval for his efforts. I hated him for it. In fact, I hated the thought of working. Besides, it interfered with my athletics which were becoming increasingly important to me. Even though we were apparently extremely poor, my mother always seemed to manage to provide what we needed at the expense of depriving herself of many basic necessities. I had difficulty accepting the fact that our furniture had been provided to us by the Women's Club of a local Protestant church and the final straw came when those saints of hypocrisy visited our apartment one Christmas with a "goodwill basket" of fruit and canned goods which had been donated by members of the church to a "needy" family. It was almost too much to handle. I vowed at that particular moment in my life to never, ever want for anything again! My pride, which was slowly consuming me, reinforced my bitterness toward everyone and everything – especially toward the church. I became extremely cynical, insanely jealous, overly impatient with people, criticized everyone, grew to be an eternal pessimist, and developed a violent temper. No one could ever measure up to my expectations and I developed a sixth sense for holding a grudge. Nothing was ever forgotten or forgiven and I would always get even – no matter how long it took! Ironically, however, I somehow felt sincere empathy and compassion toward people's problems.

I only spent one or two more summers in Baywood since my baseball extended into June and I worked at odd jobs in an effort to obtain material things which helped to maintain my “image.” One summer I worked until I earned enough money for bus fare to Galax. (I am sure that my family was glad to see me leave anyway.) The summers in Baywood were never quite the same and my time alone was spent crying or trying in vain to recreate things as they had once been. My grandparents had reached the age where it was increasingly difficult for them to adequately maintain the farm and many of the aunts and uncles had relocated from Colorado to Florida which prevented further reunions. I divided my time between my grandparents and Aunt Jean and Uncle Artie who lived about an hour or so from Baywood. They shared unselfish love and compassion for me and rekindled my desire to succeed in someday establishing a happy home of my own.

I saw my father on only a few occasions after the divorce since he moved back to Galax where he stayed with his parents. I think that he honestly felt that we three kids disliked and disowned him. A couple of times I tried in vain to express my feelings to him but experienced great difficulty; however, I felt that he understood because our relationship was one in which we intuitively knew the other’s feelings without the need for much verbal communication. I loved the man and cried desperately after each visit. He seemed to lose interest in life and turned even more to alcohol. Because long intervals elapsed between our infrequent encounters, I could easily see the outward signs of his physical and mental demise and I can never forget the feeling that a part of my own being was simultaneously dying inside.

No one could ever take his place. I felt that both of us were deprived of being together and I constantly vowed that someday I would have my own boys who would not only be given unlimited material things but also a loving father, and above all – no problems!

Eventually, at the age of eleven or twelve I started working after school and on weekends for 50 cents an hour. I worked as a carpenter's helper, plumber's helper, cleaned the incinerator at the apartment building, helped to clean septic tanks and worked at odd jobs for the owner of the apartment building. I graduated to working for a man who started his own business of delivering eggs and airy products on regular routes. Charles had worked for the man, Mr. Frank Gosman of Dawnrose Farms, for quite some time and surely influenced my employment. I performed duties such as loading and unloading trucks, bagging produce, planting and picking tomatoes and cleaning the chicken house every Saturday. The chickens were located on the second floor of the building and we scooped the soupy substance with shovels, splashed it into a wheelbarrow located on the ground, and carted the ammonia-gagging dung away. I worked every night at Dawnrose Farms after school until about 10:00 P.M. and all day on Saturday. We worked six days a week during the summers and developed a sincere appreciation for the work ethic. We cut up chickens twice a week, year round, and because we worked outside the majority of the time even in the winter, I remember my fingers and toes getting so cold at times that I almost cried. We accompanied some of the route men on their deliveries, serving as runners mostly on rainy days; however, in spite of all the hard labor, the job which I detested most was soliciting door to door for new customers. I dreaded the

thought of talking to people, especially strangers, because of my overwhelming sense of insecurity and, oh yes, my embarrassing stuttering. One Saturday I surprised everyone and converted seventeen new customers. (I am convinced the primary motivator was that most of them felt sorry for me.) I developed a competitive attitude to the point where my pride would not allow me to lose at anything and I simply had to be the best at whatever I tried. There was no such thing as mediocrity. As a result, I drove myself to be an overachiever and developed intense inner pressure.

School and athletics represented a release from my anger, frustration and hatred. It was as though they served as substitutes for the approval and recognition that I wanted yet would not accept. My attitude was entirely different in school from that at home in the few years following the separation from my father. I was almost like a Jekyll and Hyde in that at school I was nearly a model student with better than average grades. I was class president on numerous occasions, president of our teen club, and a leader on the athletic field. It was ironic that my scholastic, social and athletic achievements tended to increase my bitterness toward people and influenced my increasingly selfish attitude – especially toward my tumultuous home life. I seldom shared my accomplishments with my family and, like many of today's pampered athletes, advanced to a point where I was convinced that I was the center of the universe.

A succession of “father substitutes” influenced my life in the few years following the divorce. I was grateful to the fathers of many of my best friends for sharing their family life with me and for accompanying me whenever I needed an adult male companion in various activities.

One friend's father who coached our Boy's Club baseball and basketball teams included me with his own son on many outings as he seemed to almost adopt me as his own. I admired his patience, kindness, and understanding as a father and I envied my friend for having such a great dad. A junior high school coach befriended me and was less sympathetic to my whims of self-pity as he drove me relentlessly not only in athletics but personally as well. I also worked for him for awhile in his part time business of laying sod and he badgered me constantly to a point where I learned to appreciate not only my meager wages but also my natural abilities and talents. He also taught me to laugh at myself and instilled a feeling of self respect along with an acute appreciation for a good night's sleep following a slave's day in the field. Though I sincerely appreciated the efforts of those men in my life, I never made the mistake of allowing any of them to get too close to me. As with everyone else, I kept them at arm's length.

Another character took over for awhile as the key male figure in my life – my sister's boyfriend (later to become my brother-in-law) who was probably aware at the time that I idolized him. Jay Montgomery was cool. Hew was a jock and he owned his own car – a dynamite 1949 Ford with a spit shine. Whenever he took me for a ride I encouraged him to take a route where I was sure to be seen by my friends. He even allowed me to use his baseball glove on occasion and I made it a point to always be at home whenever he visited my sister (much to her chagrin). I wanted to be just like him.

One man about whom I had the opposite opinion and with whom I never wanted to be associated was a fellow named Guy Dewey Stoneman whose name occasionally surfaced in conversation at home. I

remembered him from our move to Beltsville when we used his truck to transport our household belongings. He seemed to be very nice when he boarded with us and if my father liked him, well, he was O.K. in my book. He was an uneducated country boy (like my father), of slight build, and only about five feet, eight inches tall. We had shared family outings to the zoo and to Glen Echo Amusement Park with his family a few times when they visited him from Hillsville which is located just outside of Galax. Now, however, things were different. I was no dummy. I knew that he was one of those divorcees himself and I drew the line when he eventually visited my mother on a “date” at our apartment. I mean, sharing family outings was one thing, but he was mistaken if he thought I would ever tolerate his existence with my mother – much less with me! Furthermore, there was no way I would ever accept him as an integral cog in our malfunctioning family machine.

I could not bring myself to look at him the first time that he visited my mother and I ran off to bed where I cried myself to sleep (to which I had become accustomed). I did not like his lousy posture, or his hair, or the way he talked. In fact, I did not like anything at all about him and I even fabricated reasons to further dislike him as the number of visits from him increased. And what would my friends say? By now I was traveling with a very influential crowd of kids whose parents were of substantial means in the surrounding communities which served my junior high school. This little uneducated, dumb-ass hillbilly was an embarrassment to me and my image. I was at a point where I was the starting guard on the basketball team and first string catcher on our school’s baseball team – not to mention the Student Council and

the fact that the girls were crazy about me! (Well, at least I thought so). Who the hell did he think he was? What made him think he could ever take the place of my father anyway?

No matter how hard he tried to be friendly with me, I rejected his every move. Even when he took us for a day of picnicking and fishing I would not acknowledge his kindness. The resentment I felt toward him increased and my harsh feelings about my mother multiplied. The crowning blow came when he drove me home from Baywood about two or three summers after my parents' divorce. We did not talk much but it was a congenial atmosphere and his kindness was gnawing at my conscience. When we arrived in Beltsville we both entered the apartment where my mother was ironing clothes in the living room. When he kissed her gently on the cheek, I exploded. I started screaming and violently darted out the front door. When Guy confronted me outside with concern for my actions, I coldly vowed to him, "I hate you! If you ever do that to my mother again – I'll kill you!" At the time I meant exactly what I said. He did not speak. However, based on the pained expression on his face and our eye contact that seemed to last for an eternity, I think I really did kill a part of the man.

Over the next few years I barely managed to tolerate his presence as I slowly adjusted to the idea that he and my mother were destined to be together no matter what I thought. He lived in an apartment in Beltsville and his two sons, who resided with their mother in Greensboro, visited him often. The resultant revolting development, since we were together much of the time in the summers, was that I had three Stoneman's to contend

with! The oldest, Don, and I were of the same age and even though we were direct opposites in almost every way, always go along famously. However the younger one, Dean, was a different story because that little creep received all the attention and I resented the hell out of him. I hated my mother even more for the love and affection that she expressed for Dean; therefore, I sabotaged the little twerp every chance I had. The greatest part about their visits to Beltsville was that they always left to go back home to Greensboro!

After living in that “cracker box” apartment building for about five years we moved into a small two-story frame house in Beltsville. Although the apartment was the “pits,” we shared mixed emotions about leaving because it was, after all, our home during memorable and formative years – Linda between ages 14 to 19, Charles – 12 to 17, and 10 to 15 for me. We groped with puberty in the 1950’s while swooning and swinging to the new sounds of Rock ‘n Roll and its king – Elvis. The “cool cats” and “daddy-O’s,” sporting pegged pants, white socks and penny loafers (later “bombers” and blue suede shoes), jitterbugged and strolled at sock hops and teen clubs with chicks decked out in bobby socks, saddle shoes, sloppy sweaters, skirts that were sensuous enough to reveal a fraction of the lower calf, and pony tails. The jocks and other male sex symbols usually had “crew cuts” or “flat tops” while the “hoods” sprouted long greasy hair with “duck tails” and symbolized their individual toughness and rebellion against society by rolling up a pack of cigarettes in the left arm of their T-shirts. The grooviest guys drove cars that were either lowered in the rear, raked in the front, had baby moon hub caps, interiors that were rolled and pleated, and a pair of dice or

a graduation tassel dangling from the rear-view mirror. Friday and Saturday nights were spent cruising around the HOT SHOPPES or TOPS Drive-in Restaurants either trying to pick up girls or just acting cool.

Even though my resentment toward Guy Stoneman and the bitterness toward my mother was relentless, he continued his quiet, unassuming, and unlimited kindness toward all of us. He helped my mother in obtaining and moving to that little house and he was beginning to directly influence the decision-making process in the family – especially in helping my mother in her attempt to deal with me. His parental philosophy was that of “spare the rod and spoil the child” and, as a result, it was decided that I would participate in only one sport in my sophomore year in high school since they felt it would be impossible for me to go to school, participate in extracurricular activities, work thirty hours a week, and play three sports. I was absolutely furious at their arbitrary decisions and distraught since athletics had become my whole life and was all that I had to live for. I was being persecuted and felt that horrendous “black sheep” feeling even more. God, I hated that man and woman! Fate had dealt me another severe blow. Instead of fighting them to the death on the issue (I learned that I always lost), I took the avenue of least resistance.

I lied.

I agreed that I would only play football. After the last junior varsity game, I innocently explained that I had quit football a long time ago in order to play basketball. I think that they were so startled at my humane attitude toward them that I was able to pull it off and continued to play basketball. However, when it was discovered in the spring that I was playing baseball and that my grades were

less than adequate, I was yanked from the baseball team after my mother paid a visit to the guidance counselor. I was completely destroyed. To further complicate matters, my whole world caved in when it was also decided in the spring of 1961 that I would not be allowed to obtain my driver's license – the single most important event in a teenager's quest to cross the threshold to the adult world. I felt that it had been stolen away from me as had my father, my dog, my whole life! Why? Linda and Charles were driving on their sixteenth birthdays and my grades were at least equal to theirs. Why me? How many more times could I survive the rug being pulled from under my feet? I further withdrew into my own rebellious world of cynical hatred and resentment. I was totally alone and the frightening thing was that I was beginning to no longer really give a damn about much of anything.

That same spring, 1961, my mother married Guy Stoneman.

CHAPTER IV

WE DETERMINE OUR OWN DESTINY

Grandmama Hampton's death shortly before my mother's marriage to Guy Stoneman, coupled with Granddaddy Hampton's death about a year later signified the end of a beautiful era in our lives. Baywood was only a memory. I remember attending Grandmama's funeral where I did not feel overwhelming grief and sorrow. It was almost as if I had become so hardened to life that I had erected an impenetrable wall around my feelings and emotions. Besides, to me, there was definitely no God, and Heaven was a figment of man's imagination to aid weak people who could not cope with the harsh realities of death. Everything had a life cycle and the important thing was not what was ahead for a dead mass of human cells, but what the person left behind for others to share. Death was the end of the cycle. Period. Man, out of weakness and ignorance, created God. Grandmama and Granddaddy Hampton had left behind so much for people that it would take many years before most of us would realize the significance and realm of their non-materialistic wealth.

Linda, after completing high school, attended the University of Maryland for a while before assuming a career in the federal government and she eventually married Jay Montgomery. Over that period of time she and I gradually grew to be very close friends as she and Jay opened their home to me whenever I needed someone

to whom I could spill my guts. I always turned to them when I needed advice, or simply an understanding and empathetic smile. The gap that they bridged at that particular time in my life prevented me from permanently damaging my chances of achieving what I really desired out of life. I learned to rely on them immensely and they, in turn, never disappointed me. Meanwhile, Charles received a scholarship from the Beltsville Lions Club as a citizenship award and he attended the University of Maryland. Before completing requirements for a degree, he enlisted in the Air Force for four years. Prior to his departure with Uncle Sam, I sensed that the barrier which had separated us for most of our lives was also beginning to erode.

As usual I worked the entire summer after my sophomore year in high school and became extremely independent in providing for myself. I stayed away from home as much as possible and seldom ate my meals there. I bought most of my food (usually cheeseburgers and junk food) or grabbed a bologna sandwich or hot dogs from the house and ate them on the run. Because Guy and Arline (which I came to call my mother) would not even consider allowing me to obtain my driver's license, I walked or hitch-hiked to and from work which was about four miles away. I rationalized away the misery in seeing all my friends driving cars and swallowed my pride as I relied on friends for double dating or attending social functions. Guy and I got along without any major problems and even began to develop a twinge of respect for each other's position as we suffered through my mother's traumatic menopause.

In my junior year I did not play football and was on the verge of "tuning out" the whole world. My grades

were scarcely adequate enough to pass and I found that it was becoming increasingly easy to quit or walk away from difficult situations. I developed a poor attitude toward anything or anyone that mattered to me as my bitter feelings were beginning to show signs of surfacing. I rebelled against all authority and any form of structured establishment of our society as it seemed as though I was begging for someone to pick me up and force me to adhere to the basic sound principles which I felt were suppressed in me. Anyway, who cared? I played basketball and was shocked when the coach demoted me to the junior varsity. I know that it must sound very trite and somewhat shallow when I say that that incident was one of two which sobered me enough to change directions at that point in my life. I had reached rock bottom. All my friends were driving cars, playing varsity and caught up in a whirlwind of success while I was on the verge of being placed in a position of accepting goodwill baskets from the church for the rest of my life. I was balancing on a fulcrum of either copping out or reaching inside for some of Granddaddy Hampton's home remedy of dignity and integrity. He always taught me to "look inside of yourself in the darkest hour" where the right answers were available if you wanted them badly enough. I never really understood the meaning of that advice – yet, I never forgot it either.

I can honestly say that I neither searched my inner being for all the solutions to my problems nor adhered to any one person's advice. It would make a great story to report that something clicked inside, I turned into an honor student, and eventually progressed to the Presidency of the United States thanks to my grandfather. Sorry. However, probably because of stubborn pride, I

was determined to at least make a concerted effort to regain some semblance of order in my life in consideration of my life-long ambition of going to college. I decided that no one, including my parents, would intervene again in the decisions that affected my life. The validity of such a profound philosophical decision was questionable as it triggered the second major mind boggling incident at that time in my life.

Taking matters into my own hands regarding the deprivation of my driver's license and resultant transportation dilemma, I reasoned that a car of my own would logically induce parental consent to drive it. Shortly before George Washington's Birthday a local car dealer advertised to sell, for \$20.00 each, ten cars of varying conditions to the first ten people in line at the dealership at 9:00 A.M. on the day of the holiday sale. I took an advance on my weekly paycheck and conned a friend into driving me to the dealer where we planned to spend the night in his car – thereby assuredly getting first selection the following morning. When we arrived at 6:00 P.M. on the eve of the sale, there were eight people already in line! I quickly assumed the ninth position and settled myself on the sidewalk. The night was bitterly cold and sleet and freezing rain began falling about 9:00 P.M. My friend was kind enough to periodically relieve my position so that I could defrost in his car. All ten of us in line developed a unique bond during the night as we jointly warded off attempts from some people who clearly intended to reap the rewards of our suffering. At 6:00 A.M. our growing excitement led to a verbal countdown as if we were celebrating New Year's Eve at Times Square. At about 8:00 A.M. it suddenly dawned on me that I might be legally ineligible to purchase one of the

cars! I startled “Number Eight” when I grabbed him and demanded to know what the state laws were concerning such a purchase. Key words and phrases such as “insurance,” “licensed driver,” and “eighteen years old” echoed in my head. Oh, No! I was not even seventeen yet and it was too late to forge a license! I frantically summoned my friend to save my place in line from the growing number of human vultures, borrowed a dime from him, and broke the world’s record for the two-block dash to a phone booth where I called – who else – Jay Montgomery. My brother-in-law could be trusted. My hands were numb from the cold and it must have taken five or six attempts to insert the molecular coin and dial the number. I had less than forty-five minutes! I quickly relayed my predicament in spite of my damned frustrating stuttering and shivering from what I was convinced must have been a combination of frost-bite and heart failure. At precisely 9:00 A.M. Jay came roaring into the parking lot of Tom’s Chevrolet in Wheaton, Maryland and signed for the car.

I was the proud owner of a black 1954 Chevrolet with a concave right rear end. To me, the prized possession was a limousine made in Heaven – and it was actually operative! Now my parents’ approval of my driver’s license would be automatic. Wrong, again. It was not only disallowed but I was chastised for my irresponsibility and contempt for their authority. Once again my life had been short-sheeted. The car remained parked at the house and I religiously started it every morning and evening and cleaned it daily – even after the thirty-day temporary tags had expired. I discarded the hub caps and painted the rims bright red. Whenever my parents were not at home I drove it around the block and

once actually skipped school in order to drive a friend to Baltimore. The temptation to drive the car was too great and, besides, it was unbelievably easy to conceal my illegal excursions. One Saturday night I picked up two friends and headed for the HOT SHOPPE Restaurant where, for once, I intended to be the cruiser instead of the “cruisee.” It was dark which meant that no one would notice the expired tags and I would return home long before my parents who had gone out for the evening.

Along the way I unknowingly made an illegal U-turn directly in front of a Maryland State Trooper! I was so scared when he pulled me over that my entire life flashed before me. No driver’s license – expired tags – car registered to a Mr. Montgomery – stolen car? After I convinced the officer that the car was not stolen property, he followed me home where he confiscated the tags for use as incriminating evidence and left me the receipt of a summons to appear in court two weeks hence. I swore my two friends, who were too frightened to speak about the incident anyway, to secrecy. On the day of my trial I skipped school again and hitch-hiked to the Prince Georges County Courthouse where I put to good use my childhood training by Granddaddy Hampton. I answered “Yes, Sir” and “No, Sir” loudly and clearly to the judge who verbally abused me for at least half an hour. He suspended my right to apply for a driver’s license for six months and fined me \$100.00! The only way I could possibly pay the fine was to sell my car – and fast. Later that day, explaining that the car was of no practical use to me and that I needed the money, I persuaded good ol’ Jay into buying my prized limo for precisely \$100.00 which I immediately converted to a money order and signed over to the state. I would rather have died than to part with

the only respite from my miserable world; however, I learned a number of valuable lessons from the haunting experience and vowed to change directions in my degenerating life. My hard core feelings of bitterness and resentment simultaneously reinforced, it was many years before I told anyone of my encounter with the law.

After having previously submitted to pressurized coaxing from the high school guidance counselor, I was taking a Speech class at the time which I absolutely detested. (The perverted counselor felt that it would “expand my horizons” – which translated into “It might rid you of that gawd-awful stuttering, Turkey.”) I translated it into a means by which I could avoid taking an advanced class in world history. It was announced in class that an “A” would be given to all prospective thespians who qualified for a role in the school play. I immediately recognized an opportunity to raise my grade average and was the first to volunteer for a reading. I was shocked to find that I was chosen to play the role of Malcolm in Shakespeare’s Macbeth. I had no idea who the man was or even what team he played for. Maybe Malcolm was a stutterer? During the next six to eight weeks I hustled to nightly rehearsal (6:30 to 9:00 P.M.) immediately following basketball practice, worked from 9:30 to 11:00, and studied either late at night or during physical education class which was a study hall for jocks. On opening night I found myself decked out in skin-tight leotards and make-up, surrounded by “weirdos” who I would not trust in a locker room, and accepted the throne as King of Scotland to the tune of giggles and obscene gestures from most of the basketball players who had perched themselves in the front row! In one way the situation was obviously humiliating and embarrassing;

however, it solidified my conviction, however valid, that I really was alone in determining my future and no one could change that.

I concerned myself with improving my academic standing and gradually progressed to respectability. Meanwhile I was eventually promoted back to the varsity basketball team and I played baseball in the spring without consulting anyone. In the summer I continued my second year in American Legion baseball where our team advanced to the state playoffs. In the process I was selected to the Suburban Maryland All-Star team which traveled to Virginia to compete against that state's team and I was beginning to believe that my aspirations (along with those of probably ten million other boys) of playing professional baseball were at least conceivable as was the remote possibility of attending college. Since I loved kids and related relatively well to them, I felt that a college education would afford me the opportunity to satisfy my desire to be a teacher and athletic coach.

I worked full time again for Mr. Gosman during the summer following my junior year and took no chances of being deprived of playing football in the fall. I hid my new football cleats in the chicken house at Dawnrose Farms where, before and after my daily tasks, I vigorously worked into shape in anticipation of tryouts. Later my parents, after discovering that I was playing football, strangely refrained from reprimanding me. I played quarterback on the football team, guard on the basketball team, catcher on the baseball team and was named Athlete of the Year. The football and baseball teams won county championships and the basketball team missed the state playoffs by one game. During the school year I never ate breakfast, grabbed an occasional ice cream cone

at lunch, practiced after school every day until 6:00 P.M., worked every night until ten or eleven o'clock, and pumped gas at the Beltsville Esso Station every Saturday and Sunday. I stuffed myself at every opportunity with bologna sandwiches, junk food and soft drinks. In the process I developed a strange physique in that I was approaching a height of six feet but only weighed about 130 pounds... fully clothed... and dripping wet! When an unbelievably swelled head is placed on top of such a frame, a uniquely distinguishable profile results! Potential college recruiters, often amazed at such a ... well, interesting body, politely controlled their laughter for fear of insulting any of my husky friends who were legitimate prospective recruits.

I would like to take full credit for the positive change that occurred shortly after I established myself as a “criminal” – but I dare not. I began dating an attractive and popular girl who was much wiser than her seventeen years. She became Homecoming Queen, Captain of the school’s Pom-Pom squad, Sweetheart at the Valentine’s Dance, and a member of the National Honor Society. Our high school romance in our senior year could have served as inspiration for a Hollywood script and would have dazzled even Walter Mitty’s imagination. The oldest of seven children in an immensely happy family which I thoroughly enjoyed, she influenced me enough to believe that the desire to attend college was realistically within my potential. She forced me to study, tutored me before exams, and helped me with term papers. She praised my accomplishments (even my acting!), encouraged me when I stumbled, and instilled in me the almost forgotten feeling of self respect. But more importantly, she convinced me that I really could succeed on my own

merits as she mothered me, established a sense of order, set strict guidelines for success and supervised the satisfactory completion of those priorities.

I was becoming somewhat depressed as many of my fellow seniors began receiving letters of acceptance to various colleges and universities across the county. A select number of honor students gained admission to Ivy League schools and a handful of athletes were bound for Clemson, Brigham Young, Maryland and Tennessee to name a few. No way could I live at home for four years while attending the nearby University of Maryland even though I passed the entrance exam. Yet, to go away to college required money – big money. I slowly began to realize that no sane recruiter would risk his career on an Ichabod Crane in an athletic supporter. I did, however, receive “nibbles” from a junior college in Florida and a military college in Pennsylvania but my share of the cost was prohibitive. I credit my basketball coach with providing my one outside chance which rested in the hands of a small school in Virginia – Bridgewater College. My coach had arranged an interview for myself and two teammates with the football coach from the small church-affiliated college (Church of the Brethren) located in the Shenandoah Valley. I had fallen in love with pictures of the school and its beautiful campus; however, the tuition fee was \$1,500.00 for the first year. Fifteen hundred dollars! The school also did not offer athletic scholarships, per se, but the recruiter mentioned the slight possibility of a “general scholarship” and supplemental aid via federally funded student loans. I mailed my letter of application in the spring and waited helplessly for a response.

While walking from the baseball field after one of our games, I was told that two men were waiting to see me in the coaches' office. I almost panicked and my first thought was that I was in trouble again! My heart was racing at an accelerated speed and I felt like a condemned prisoner on the way to the gallows. After timidly entering the room I was greeted by the football and basketball coaches from Bridgewater. The ensuing conversation lasted for about thirty minutes but I can now only recall answering one question:

Football Coach, "How much do you..."

"One hundred and sixty pounds!" I snapped.

The room was stifling hot and humid but I remained steadfast – still fully covered in catcher's gear of shin guards and chest protector in an attempt to camouflage my thin frame. The coaches had seen most of the game that day and it just so happened that I had banded out four doubles. (Maybe luck was on my side for a change.) They left without any indication as to their interest in me – only a promise that I would hear from them. All I could do was wait and hope.

Meanwhile, I summoned all of my courage and decided to approach Guy Stoneman again with my desire and growing need for a driver's license. (It had been about a year since my experience with the judge.) After rehearsing my speech for about a week I sat down with him at the dining room table one evening where I explained my remote chances of going away to college. I further explained that I would probably have to work at least two jobs in the summer and could make more money if I had the flexibility to drive. I had obtained an estimate of the additional cost to his automobile insurance premium and offered to pay the difference from my initial

earnings from summer employment. Besides, I felt that I had matured (eighteen) to a point where I understood the responsibility involved in driving and expressed sincere appreciation for the opportunity to discuss the situation with me. I concluded by asking for his help and advice.

A long pause prefaced his response and I may have just imagined the appearance of a slight sheepish grin on his face. Much to my surprise, he immediately consented and the very next day took leave from work in order to drive me to the insurance agent. He also seemed to be anxious to pay for my share of the cost and within three days I was the proud owner of my Maryland state learner's permit. It was not until many years later that I realized the depth of fatherly wisdom which Guy exercised in dealing not only with my personality but the dilemma involved with obtaining my driver's license. As a result, I have valued few material things more than my privilege to drive; however, one of my most treasured possessions has been the foundation for understanding and insight into that "hillbilly" which began to set in at that particular point in our lives. It was as though he instinctively knew that I would come to him when I had matured enough to accept him as an integral part of the family.

CHAPTER V

AFFLUENCE CAN BE INFLUENCING

Shortly before graduation I received my letter of acceptance from Bridgewater College and could scarcely believe that I was offered a scholarship for about half the cost of tuition for the first year. A scholarship! I did it! It was too good to be true. The thought of going away to college and participating in athletics was truly unbelievable – a miracle – the culmination of a dream. I even willingly accepted the idea of the church affiliated nonsense for what seemed to be the opportunity of a lifetime. But what about the balance of the tuition costs, books, clothes, etc.?

Empathizing with my predicament, a friend's father, Mr. Sam Imbriale, provided the break I needed by offering me a full time summer job in the processing lab of a company called RECORDAK Corporation (a subsidiary of the Eastman Kodak Company) where he was the Processing Manager. I eagerly accepted and worked as a microfilm machine operator for \$2.00 per hour. I worked Monday through Friday nights from 6:00 to 10:00 P.M. candling eggs at Dawnrose Farms and worked Saturdays and Sundays pumping gas at the Esso Station. I saved as much money as possible but as the date to report for football camp grew closer it was obvious that I would never come up with the difference. Therefore, I applied for a federally funded student loan by submitting erroneous data regarding Guy's financial status

and illegally forged his signature. (To this day I had never divulged to anyone my underhanded scheme.)

Jay and Linda drove me to football camp at Bridgewater in late summer and my insecurity in the strange surroundings intensified in that I had no knowledge as to the status of my loan application. It was not until two days before registration that I learned that the loan had been approved thereby assuring my ability to attend school at least for the coming year. After the scholarship, proceeds of the loan, and my savings paid for tuition and books, I was flat broke.

I quickly learned that football on the college level, no matter how small the school, was played with intensity by over-sized ghouls who take the game seriously. Over the course of the summer my physique had increased almost to a laughable state in that I grew even thinner and a little taller. I was soon assigned the handle of “Weed” by my teammates who jokingly argued over who would be lucky enough to be assigned to me for tackling drills. (I remember deliberately weighing in alone before and after practices so that I could falsely record inflated numbers on the weight charts.) I played quarterback on the freshman team, affectionately called the “Gang Busters,” and earned a spot on the varsity as a member of the specialty teams. Before the end of the season I joined the ranks of most football players with proverbial knee injuries when I suffered cartilage and ligament damage and was on crutches for weeks. I recovered enough to play basketball, making the traveling squad on the varsity, and played baseball in the spring. I was surprised to learn that I made the All Mason-Dixon Conference Baseball Team as a freshman.

During my first year I washed dishes in the dining hall and refereed intramural games in an effort to earn some spending money; however, most of the time I had absolutely no cash at all and my pride suffered countless blows as I passed up many visits to the campus canteen or to a pub when the teams traveled to away games. I remember many occasions when I found myself staring at fortunate fellow students who slowly drank a cold PEPSI-COLA or devoured a mouth watering cheeseburger and I was always first in line at the Treasurer's Office on pay day to collect the meager wages for my chores. I can never forget the wonderfully secure feeling of walking back across campus with a few dollars in my pocket. I usually hitch-hiked the 125 mile trip home for holidays and spring break where Mr. Gosman always allowed me to work at Dawnrose Farms until I made enough money for bus fare back to school. My resentment and bitterness over being poor and "underprivileged" grew even stronger as I developed a sense of values which centered around material wealth and genuine respect for financially successful people. While I know that there were many students at college who also experienced financial difficulties, I was amazed at the wealth of others. Many of my friends' parents provided them with personal checking accounts at the local bank. The boy next door in the dormitory had two drawers filled with sweaters and most of the guys had an ample supply of clothes which allowed them the luxury of sending out for their laundry. Upon completion of high school one of my best friends was given a Corvette and a gas station as a graduation gift! Like most everyone else I made a commitment to eventually make my niche in the respected hallowed halls of the American upper middle class society. My values cast in granite and my yearning for success firmly seated,

my inner competitiveness transgressed to a near delirious mental state of determination to conquer the American dream. I decided to major in Business Administration instead of physical education solely because of the infinite potential for monetary gain.

The following summer I duplicated the previous year's work schedule with the same employers. I also fraudulently received another federally funded student loan and was back in school in spite of increased tuition fees. My knee injury prevented me from continuing in football and I fell victim to the wise fool sophomore syndrome. I discovered that wine, women, and song offered considerably more gratification than any economics text book and my grades slipped to a point where I was dropped from the basketball squad. I continued to work part time at odd jobs which included collecting and distributing laundry for a local dry cleaners and barely managed to escape academic probation thereby surviving my second year which was even more financially difficult. In order to buy my books for the second semester I secured a promissory note from a local bank with the understanding that I would repay the money the following summer. The affluence to which I was exposed became increasingly important to me as most of my friends were driving their own cars – a luxury not available the previous year since freshmen were not allowed to have cars on campus. Therefore, my first priority the following summer after repaying the bank was to procure my own transportation. Guy seemed to understand my predicament and proudly recommended a friend who sold me his 1958 Ford for \$300.00. My previous '54 Chevy could never come close to the ultimate pedestal that I emotionally created for my first

“legitimate” automobile which was black with bright yellow sides and equipped with an “ooga” horn. What a car!

After settling my debts it became apparent that the possibility of returning to school in the fall would be even more difficult as tuition fees had risen for the third consecutive year. I again worked for Sam Imbriale at the processing lab and candled eggs Monday through Friday nights. However, instead of pumping gas on the weekends, I earned a higher wage driving “Charlie’s Rolling Supermarket” through the black ghettos of southeast Washington, D.C. Mr. Gosman had established a route for a converted mobile home filled with groceries to meander through the streets of an area with one of the highest crime rates in the country. The people came to know the sound of the familiar bell on the truck which pulled the trailer and I acted as cashier as they exited one of the side doors. I carried a pistol loaded with blank bullets for “protection” and employed the services of a bouncer by the name of “Jelly Roll” of whom I was scared to death. I picked him up on a corner in D.C. every Saturday and Sunday morning and paid him \$5.00 for the day’s work. He also had free access to all he could eat and drink. Jelly Roll, a quiet Sonny Liston look-alike, educated me in many of the harsh realities of human survival in sickening hard-core poverty and I felt strangely privileged to have experienced, while relatively young, opposite extremes of the social and economic spectrum in this country.

Because my debts from the previous year and expenses for the car received first priority, I borrowed even more money in order to return to school for my junior year. In the fall and winter I worked at a turkey

processing and packaging company from 6:00 to 10:00 P.M. Monday through Friday and played baseball in the spring. I was Co-Captain of the team and was elected President of the Varsity Club for the upcoming senior year which I came to realize was literally an impossible dream. My financial situation had deteriorated to a point where I sold my books half way through the spring semester in order to complete the year and the personal loans appeared to rival that of the national debt. I was at the end of the line.

Had it not been for my desire to rekindle the relationship with a cute young lady, I honestly doubt if I would have returned to school for my junior year. However, the previous spring I had met an intriguing gal who had captivated my curiosity and I was determined to see her again. Because the rules against drinking alcoholic beverages at school were stringent with severe punishment for offenders, a friend, John, and I were cautiously sneaking two giggling co-eds back to the dorm one evening after they had overindulged in a bit of the bubbly. We were confident that we had succeeded in our evil deed as we quietly tip-toed the swaying girls past the door of the dorm mother's apartment at precisely forty-five seconds before curfew. Suddenly a bolt of lightning camouflaged in the form of a brash female college student thundered into the foyer as she loudly proclaimed her victorious defeat of yet another curfew violation.

“Hey, shut up!,” I demanded.

“Don't tell me to shut up. I live here!,” was her disrespectful reply as she masculinely ascended the stairs at a rate of three steps per leap. Thus, the first romantic words were exchanged in a stormy relationship obviously made in Heaven!

A week or so later John and I, after purchasing two six-packs of beer, stopped by the girls' dorm to see if our two giggling friends cared to share in the spoils of our sinful relief from academic pressures. The obnoxious floozies had gone out for the evening but two hecklers, sitting in the parlor, jokingly chastised us for our intended mischief. One of them was a friend of John's and the other happened to be the indignant female who had earlier berated me for telling her to shut up. She was also the same freshman that I had occasionally noticed on campus and for whom I felt a strong attraction (as did most of the other guys). I was inwardly excited when Sue Park gave in to the coaxing of her friend and agreed to share a beer with us.

The ensuing conversation revealed that we had grown up less than fifteen miles from each other in the D.C. area and that we unknowingly shared a couple of mutual friends. In fact, she had dated one of my best friends from junior high school. I also found out that she was equally as "cool" as I had been in high school in that she was Captain of Cheerleaders and had been an accomplished ice skater among her many other activities. Later that spring she agreed to see me occasionally and I felt somewhat uneasy after I saw that, besides being pretty, she could punt a football as far as I could, hold me to a stalemate at arm wrestling, and could drink more beer than I. Furthermore, it bothered me that she neither outwardly expressed excessive interest in me nor acknowledged my "coolness." However, before summer recess we had developed a strong bond with each other in spite of the fact that each of us was almost engaged to another person – I to my high school sweetheart and Sue to a fellow named Joe. After the end of the school year, I

called her often and visited her at home a few times. Even though a violent argument separated us for the summer and mutual pride prevented further communication, I was determined to see her again in the fall.

Shortly after the beginning of my junior year I received a note with familiar hand writing. "Can I talk to you?" were the only words written on the paper and I almost exploded with anxious excitement. However, pride dictated that I restrain from calling Sue for a day or two. After all, I could not appear overly anxious. We met shortly thereafter and eventually became virtually inseparable. Although our relationship was a stormy one due to many arguments, we soon discovered that we were totally devoted to each other. Because I was perpetually without money and because she was from a relatively affluent family, Sue paid for almost all of our extracurricular activities as checks, varying in amounts from \$1.00 to \$7.00, were cashed with regularity. We talked for hours at a time and truly enjoyed the simple pleasures and secure feeling of just being together.

The longing to see my heart's desire led to near disaster one evening after curfew when I scaled the fire escape of her dormitory and shocked the hell out of Sue and six of her friends with an unexpected visit. The night watchman apparently had observed my illegal entrance, called the Dean of Students, and waited for my exit at the bottom of the fire escape. Since the doors to the dormitory were securely fastened for the night and a sure capture awaited my descent of the outside stairs, I climbed out of a second story window and, while clinging on to a chain of knotted sheets, rhythmically dropped (commando style) about every five feet while pushing off

the wall with my feet. Before reaching the ground, I accidentally rammed a foot through the window of the dorm mother's apartment on one of my return swings. The loud crash brought the watchman scurrying to the back of the dorm where I leaped the remaining distance of about ten feet and almost landed directly on top of the frightened old man. He could not regain his composure in time to apprehend me as I rolled down a hill, hustled across the athletic field, and disappeared into the night. I left the remains of a near delirious dorm mother and night watchman, and a dormitory whose appearance resembled that of a disorganized Chinese fire drill.

By spring Sue and I were desperately in love and decided to get married even though I never really proposed. One day I outlined a plan of action for our future and simply assumed its completion since we were both blind to any negative influences. Since it was obvious that I could not possibly return to college for my senior year, I planned to rent an apartment and convince Sam Imbriale to hire me permanently for work in the processing lab. Sue would attend a secretary's school in preparation for employment in the business world, we would be married the following spring, and I would complete requirements for my degree at night school somewhere in the D.C. area. The plan was flawless because recent surgery on my dilapidated knee protected me from being drafted for service in an unpopular war which was escalating in a place called Vietnam. The only potential barrier was Sue's parents.

In my entire life no obstacle loomed so insurmountable as asking Mr. and Mrs. Park for permission to marry their only daughter. I would rather have faced the abuse of two traffic judges or the

consequences of spitting at Granddaddy Hampton than to have confronted Sue's parents with my plan for our future. I was intimidated by their luxurious home and insecure in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Park. I had talked to Sue's mother once or twice before and even thought I was relatively unsure about her impression of me, felt that I stood a slight chance of gaining her approval. Mr. Park, on the other hand, was a different story. He was a strong, distinguished gentleman, balding with gray temples, and whose mere presence commanded immediate respect. He was the epitome of a man's man. A highly successful entrepreneur in the Washington area, his quietness and gruff mannerisms had startled me during a previous visit as he had only grumbled when I spoke to him. I pictured him as inspiration for the original troll who violently devoured unqualified suitors of his only daughter. Although I trembled at the thought of approaching both of them, Sue helped me to summon all of my courage and we drove home one Saturday on what seemed to be a personal Kamikaze mission.

Experiencing the sensation of overly active arm pits as we awkwardly sat in the den with Sue's parents, I filled in the unbelievably long silent pauses in the conversation by counting my heart throbs which I was convinced echoed around the room. Finally, after a reassuring nod from my partner, I stood up and turned down the sound on the television set half way through the Jackie Gleason Show and began stuttering even before I seated myself almost in Sue's lap. Her father continued to stare at the T.V. (Jackie Gleason was his favorite program!) as I stumbled through the prepared remarks concluding with my commitment to eventually complete requirements for my degree. When I finished speaking, the deafening

silence was broken when Mr. Park grumbled, “I never had to ask anybody when I got married.” Judging from Sue’s happy reaction I interpreted the puzzling statement to mean that parental consent had been granted and my whole body seemed to deflate in a sigh of relief.

We were formally engaged shortly thereafter when we reached mutual agreement on a suitable ring. I deposited \$10.00 on the jewel and signed an agreement to pay an additional \$10.00 per month for the next three years thereby initiating my plunge into the sea of high finance. The following summer Sam Imbriale was kind enough to again offer me a job paying \$80.00 per week in the microfilm processing lab of RECORDAK Corporation which had become a separate division of the Eastman Kodak Company. I stayed at home for a few weeks before moving into a roach-infested apartment building in Hyattsville, Maryland where my entire furniture ensemble consisted of an old army cot; however, before leaving, Guy and I had a near fist fight over my apparent negligence toward my mother who was in the hospital again.

Sue enrolled in a business school and we spent considerable amounts of time with her parents. Her mother included me for dinner almost every night and her father (“Bud”) and I rapidly became exceptionally close friends. He taught me how to fish, how to golf, consistently won money from me at the pool table, and included me on many fishing excursions on the Chesapeake Bay where he docked his power boat which was named the “Susan.” We shared many similar personality traits and were extremely comfortable with each other though neither of us talked much. A strange unity existed between us almost like that of my father in

years past and I came to appreciate the value of the many subtle lessons about life that he taught me. Unlike many people who talk a lot without saying anything, Bud was the type of person who always said something when he talked. As opposed to the “troll” image which I had erroneously pictured, he was a kind, unassuming, empathetic, and loving man of infinite depth and wisdom who possessed a robust sense of humor. He had a heart of gold and my love for the man was equaled only by my immense respect for him.

Like many young Americans of the liberal 1960's, Sue and I fell victim to our emotions and briefly experimented with pre-marital sex. We sincerely loved each other, were engaged to be married and, even though we knew our lack of discipline opposed the beliefs of others, did not suffer from overwhelming guilt. We did not purposely intend to hurt anyone, especially Sue's parents, and felt that the only justification for our action rested within ourselves. However, fate dealt a severe blow as our immature experimentation resulted in the worst conceivable predicament for an unmarried young couple – pregnancy. We suddenly found ourselves desperately alone in a world of hypocritical judges and felt that our life line to sanity had been severed. Our bitterness and resentment of other more flagrant violators of the sacred universal law yielded to genuine fear and sincere regret at the prospect of hurting others in an era which preceded a decade the popularization of the pro-abortionist movement. After mutually suffering through the initial period of extreme mental trauma, we confessed our shameful dilemma to Sue's parents whose reaction was somewhat tempered by our obvious emotional turmoil. Mrs. Park reacted more vehemently than Bud

who predictably withheld his emotions and withdrew within himself in an effort to suppress his painful disappointment in us. That experience boiled to a feverish pitch my commitment to prove to them – and everyone else – that I would be a success in life. I was determined to never, ever, knowingly disappoint anyone again. I became possessed with my ambition to prove to the world that I was not a loser! (Sue and I remain perpetually guilt ridden with the knowledge that our selfishness drove a stake into the hearts of the two people who suffered most from one of the greatest mistakes of our lives.)

A couple of weeks later, on September 9th, we drove to Frederick, Maryland where we were married by a Justice of the Peace. After “honey-mooning” in Gettysburg for the weekend, we stopped at the Park’s home on the way back to our nearby apartment. I will never forget Bud’s reaction when he greeted me with a warm handshake and almost tearfully expressed his sincerity in accepting me as his son-in-law. His action that evening served as tribute to the character of a man who was a giant in the eyes of those fortunate enough to have known him. Sue and I immediately announced our “secret” marriage to her older brother, George, and to my family by explaining that we had eloped on May 27th and her pregnancy prevented us from following through with our plans for a formal wedding ceremony the following spring. In spite of the obviously embarrassing and humiliating situation, we were enormously happy. Our weekend honeymoon was absolutely fantastic and we were in sheer ecstasy at the prospect of facing the world together. Besides, my life’s dream of establishing my own family of boys was realistically within reach.

I acquired a loan from a local bank (by illegally forging Guy's signature as co-signer) so that we could furnish our apartment and somehow managed to juggle the household budget on \$80.00 per week (\$65 net). Sue became an expert at providing balanced meals on our weekly grocery allowance of \$10.00 and we charged literally everything (including gasoline) at a nearby SEARS store. We were so happy in our relationship that, similar to my first five years in Galax, we did not care that we were poor. In early December we splurged on two T-bone steaks in anticipation of our New Year's Eve celebration and ceremoniously opened the freezer door every night for three straight weeks, stared anxiously at our prized possessions, and joked about our good fortune. We inevitably concluded our evenings by discussing future plans for our first born "son" who was due in the spring. Our nights out consisted primarily of visiting Linda and Jay who always had ample supplies of snacks, plenty of beer, and a million laughs. Gradually, however, the sobering realism of providing for three people and my personal standards of success began to surface in our incredibly happy and carefree environment. It was obvious that my salary and position would limit my American dream to a financial nightmare unless I rapidly changed career paths.

I placed my credentials in the labor market through an employment agency and immediately discovered the humble value of my high school "coolness" as I bounced from one interview to another. No one expressed a need for an ex-jock with no college degree except for finance companies with a demand for "self-starters" to serve as collection agents. Even though I felt that I had proven for twenty-one years that I was a self-starter, I somehow

could not picture myself assaulting little old ladies in an effort to extract delinquent interest payments. Out of frustration I approached the KODAK Sales Manager at the Washington office where the microfilm lab was located. Sporting a T-shirt and jeans and the firm belief that I did not have a snow ball's chance in hell, I almost accosted him as I "demanded" the opportunity to prove that I was equally as proficient as most of the arrogant snobs employed upstairs on "fraternity row." As much as I resented those peacocks who were born with silver spoons in their mouths, I respected the materialism which they flaunted. I was absolutely flabbergasted when the manager smiled and said that he would consider my request even though I was two semesters shy of a college education. Later I discovered that Sam Imbriale had urged the manager to consider me as a potential candidate for a sales position and personally vouched for my character.

If fate, chance, blind luck, or being in the right place at the right time influences success, then the criteria for all four were satisfied at that point in my life. I found out later that the Sales Manager, Mr. Bill Townsend, was not a college graduate himself and that someone had taken a chance on him earlier in his career. Apparently he was empathetic to my cause and perhaps reflected a part of himself in me. Ironically, a relatively unimportant sales territory in Virginia was to be available in the spring – the northern border of which included Bridgewater and a small town called Galax bordered to the south! Therefore, based on my background, it was concluded that since I was familiar with the geography and its people, I might possibly relate well to prospects in that area. Furthermore, the national economy at the time was

booming and the division's profits were soaring which provided a healthy environment for the multi-billion dollar company to take a chance on a skinny kid that stuttered. After another nerve racking interview with the Regional Manager and my first plane trip to the home office in Rochester, New York, I was officially offered a sales position with the Business Systems Markets Division of the Eastman Kodak Company. I could scarcely believe my luck. I had successfully pulled off the greatest con job since the Great Train Robbery!

The only problem with my good fortune was that I absolutely and positively detested the idea of selling. I cursed the personality traits of typical sales people and was haunted by the prospect of having to constantly talk to people in order to make a living. I also felt extremely inadequate and was convinced that I would eventually be fired. However, the salary and benefits were very attractive and I reasoned that I dare not reject an opportunity to adequately provide for my family. I decided to accept the job temporarily until I could finish night school and find a career that appealed to me. Therefore, I charged two suits at SEARS, left Sue (who was seven months pregnant) with her parents, and took off for a corporate sales training class in New York City which was to become my home for the next fifteen weeks.

CHAPTER VI

CEMETERY SALESMEN SHOULD BE BURIED

Because I honestly believed that my job as a sales representative for KODAK was only temporary and also because I was intimidated by the aggressive nature of the corporate executives, I offered little resistance to the pronunciation of my last name as (Reevis). I quickly became accustomed to the new name and also discovered that it was infinitely easier for people to accept and pronounce than (Revis). Besides, I could revert back to the original pronunciation when I left KODAK for a more suitable career. Eventually I selfishly developed the notion of starting a whole new family heritage with Sue and me as the top branch of our future family tree and we both gradually adopted the new name.

My initiation into the corporate world was a sobering experience for me as I discovered the harsh reality of my inability to converse on the same level as my peers – much less my superiors. My insecurity forced further withdrawal as I was constantly embarrassed at my lack of knowledge about fine wines, French restaurants, liqueurs, world politics, jazz, fashion, the stock market, etc. I was at a complete loss at cocktail parties and multiple eating utensils threw me for a loop. I was the proverbial black sheep again in a lily white herd of corporate beings who appeared as though they had been mass produced. It seemed difficult at times to distinguish one individual from another and it was almost impossible

for me to conform to standards about which I knew very little. I felt grossly inadequate and humiliated and took everything personally. The insecurity about my stuttering and lack of a college education did not help matters either. My resentful nature and bitterness increased in intensity as my inability to compete in the corporate arena surfaced. The influences in my background did not lend themselves to the use of symbolic persuasion or the ability to comprehend corporate politics which I hated. I developed a tremendous dislike for many of the arrogant, back-stabbing, ass-kissing, ladder-climbers with whom I was associated and often told them exactly what I thought of them. I absolutely detested my new environment and the idea of selling microfilm information storage and retrieval systems was a tremendous bore to me. I very much wanted to drop out of the sales training class; however, for the first time in my life, others were depending on me. I had to grow up in a hurry and realized that I could no longer simply walk away from a difficult situation. Furthermore, the burning desire to acquire material wealth as a symbol of American success was almost like a sixth sense that prevented me from quitting.

On the afternoon of March 29, during the ninth or tenth week of sales training, I was excused from class to receive an emergency telephone call. I recall Mrs. Park saying, "You had better come home right away. You're about to become a father!" I was stunned. My mind was numb as if in a vacuum and all I remember thinking was that the baby was not due for another few weeks. I returned to the class room, grabbed my coat, told the instructor that I would return in a day or two and ran out of the building in search of a cab. Forgetting about

checking out of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, I went directly to LaGuardia and took the shuttle flight to Washington where Bud met me at the airport. Very little conversation took place on the way to the hospital (Washington Sanitarium and Hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland) after I learned that the doctor had been unable to detect the baby's heartbeat earlier in the morning. Bud dropped me off in front of the building and I remember badly skinning my shins when I tripped while trying to fly up the stairs. Mrs. Park, Bud and I waited together for the anticipated blessed event and I recall trying to suppress my excitement over finally having a son of my own. My life's dream was on the verge of coming true but – just in case – I mentally rehearsed positive remarks in the event that we might (God forbid) have a daughter.

When an aid finally appeared from the delivery room at about 5:00 P.M., he informed me that a boy was born and that the doctors would talk to me shortly. A BOY! Could it be true!? My dream had actually become a reality. My son would have the best of everything – everything! When Sue was rolled from the recovery room we held each other for a long time as she quietly explained that the baby was being taken to Children's Hospital in Washington simply as a precautionary measure. He was premature and the nurse had mentioned something about a small hole in his stomach. In an instant Sue was taken to her room and a doctor was explaining to me that there were serious complications. The baby had a problem of ruptured Omphalocele – stomach not closed properly. Our son was being transported to Children's Hospital where he could receive specialized care. Bud immediately drove me to Children's and in the distance we could hear

the cry of the siren from the ambulance which carried my son.

While fighting the tears as I quickly signed reams of paper, I was directed to the operating preparation room where I was outfitted in a smock and surgical mask. A doctor explained the hospital's policy of thoroughly explaining to parents of their child's problems and all necessary corrective procedures. As we entered the room I saw my son from a distance for the first time as we slowly approached the incubator. A blanket covered his lower body and (selfishly, I guess) could scarcely believe his resemblance to me. Standing next to him, I was amazed to see a miniature mirror image of myself – identical hands, elbows, chest, head, face. To me, that fragile little boy (4 lbs., 6 ozs.) was like, well you know, Pete and Repeat.

After a moment's silence, the doctor removed the blanket from our son and never in my entire life had anything so revolting shocked me like the repulsive, sickening, nauseating sight to which I was exposed. The entire contents of my boy's intestinal tract rested on the table beside his tiny frame. A relatively large opening in his stomach revealed the inside of his body and an upper intestine served as the sole life line from his stomach to the balance of the intestines. I desperately searched my soul for any form of emotional release but nothing helped. I could only stare at my son as the doctor explained that they would attempt to insert the intestines into the body and close the opening to the stomach. Our boy's chances of survival were perhaps one in four at best; however, a highly regarded young surgeon, Dr. Judson Graves Randolph, had been summoned to perform the surgery and was on his way to the hospital.

Bud and I waited silently and later that night were joined by Jay and Sue's brother, George, whose father-in-law was Chief of Staff at Washington Sanitarium and Hospital. Dr. Irey was the physician who had initially explained our predicament and had aided our baby at the time of birth. Around midnight the silence was broken when Dr. Randolph announced that the delicate surgery had been completed and our son was resting in the intensive care unit. The doctor took me to our baby and, while in the midst of explaining how they had closed the stomach, pushed me aside, summoned the two nearby nurses and sounded an emergency. In a flash doctors appeared from everywhere and they were running the baby back into surgery. Apparently the tightly drawn stomach had prevented adequate respiration and he almost died right before your eyes. They operated a second time and a few hours later he was again resting in the intensive care unit. This time they had left the intestines outside of the body but enclosed in a "mesh" substance which would hopefully allow the organs to function while permitting proper breathing.

I stayed at the hospital the rest of the night and kept vigil over "Repeat" who stayed awake all the time. Dr. Randolph told me that the baby's first twelve hours on earth had obviously been quite violent and that his chances of surviving were not good. However, the weary surgeon said that he had never before seen a baby fight to survive like our son had done and he was amazed at the boy's will to live. Bud stopped by the hospital on his way to work at 6:00 A.M. the following morning and I left later in the day in order to visit Sue who was not yet aware of the severity of the baby's condition.

In direct contrast to that of Children's Hospital, the atmosphere of the maternity ward was typically joyous as new born babies were fondled and cuddled by proud parents and relatives. I entered Sue's semi-private room where her roommate mothered her first born. Even though Sue looked lost from being deprived of one of life's greatest gifts, her only concern was for our baby. After I stumbled through a brief explanation of our son's dilemma, our attempt to avoid conversation about the myriad of gifts from her shower, newly acquired baby furniture, baby book, and future plans was cumbersome. Both of us refused to cry for fear of upsetting each other and we made the final decision on our boy's name – David Michael Reavis. What a great name for the first grandson in both families!

I went to Sue's house where I called New York and explained that I would not return for a few days. A friend had collected my belongings and made hotel arrangements for my check-out. For the next two days and nights I spent most of the time with David and stopped by to see Sue at odd hours. The nurses graciously allowed me on the floor of the maternity ward at any time since they understood our situation and in the early morning hours I left Sue notes explaining the baby's progress from the previous evening. Sue kept some of the notes and began a mini diary of David's activities so that they could be posted in his baby book.

MARCH 30 – “GAINED COLOR AND SOME NORMALITY IN HEART AND BREATHING FUNCTION.”

MARCH 31 – “BREATHING AND HEART NORMAL. BEGAN SLEEPING. COLOR GOOD.”

(I was amazed that David did not sleep a wink until he was over two days old. He was a fighter!)

APRIL 1 – “SAW DAVID FOR FIRST TIME!”

(I checked Sue out of the hospital and we drove directly to Children’s Hospital. Earlier that morning I had asked the nurses, who by now were all emotionally attached to our little boy, to prepare David for his mother’s first visit. When Sue arrived the nurses had covered his stomach and much of the attached medical apparatus with a blanket which had a little blue ribbon taped on the top. Sue’s desire to touch her baby was painfully obvious but she never outwardly complained as she stared through the incubator/respirator at her son. I bought a pair of little blue boxing gloves which the nurses hung inside his life-sustaining container. To us, those gloves came to represent a symbol of David’s almost unbelievable determination to win his fight for life.)

APRIL 2 – “SAME”

(Sue and I visited him every day and often in the middle of the night as neither of us were able to sleep much.)

APRIL 3 – “THIRD OPERATION. PUT 1/3 OF INTESTINES BACK IN AND CLOSED UP 1/3 OF STOMACH. EVERYTHING NORMAL.”

(The doctors agreed on a gradual attempt to correct the abnormality and apparently were encouraged by the results of the first effort. I received a telegram from New York which read – “TED, WE HAVE YOU VERY MUCH IN MIND. HOPE THE SITUATION IMPROVES; ALL WE CAN DO IS PRAY AND WISH YOU WELL – THE TRAINEES.” Sue and I refrained from talking much about the gravity of the situation as

painful reminders abounded in every song, T.V. program, store window – everywhere. We received a congratulatory card from a friend who was not aware of David's condition. She wrote, "Couldn't find a baseball team card. What position will he play?"

APRIL 4 – "SAME. (TED BACK TO SCHOOL IN N.Y.)"

(Since David had come through his third operation and was relatively stable, I decided to return to training class. Sue and I could only exchange a long, understanding look as we parted in different directions. She continued to visit David every day and night and kept me posted as to his progress.)

APRIL 5 – "GAINED ½ OUNCE!"

APRIL 6 – "SAME"

APRIL 7 – "MOVED FROM INTENSIVE CARE TO PREMIE NURSERY!! WEIGHS 4 LBS. 6 ½ OZS. (TED HOME)

(I came home for the weekend after a miserable time away. None of my fellow trainees talked much about our situation at home and the atmosphere in class was subdued and solemn. I remember that Sue looked terrible as a result of lack of sleep and obviously a lot of tears. The Park's minister stopped by the hospital and left a note which read, "Welcome – David Michael Reavis! Everyone is pulling for you. Your Grandpa promised me a big cigar!" All hopes were raised when David was moved out of intensive care signifying the end of any immediate danger. Sue and I were convinced that we were to be parents after all. God – we were excited!)

APRIL 8 – "TALKED TO DR. RANDOLPH – VERY ENCOURAGED! INDEFINITE AS TO NEXT

OPERATION. BEGAN FEEDING WATER AND SUGAR THROUGH TUBE IN STOMACH. FIRST WET AND FIRST MESS!!

(Everyone was absolutely ecstatic about David's first messy diaper! David was definitely going to make it!)

APRIL 9 – “TAKEN OFF WATER. SECOND MESS! TED BACK TO N.Y.”

(I returned to training class but not before buying a big box of cigars. On Monday morning I announced in class that our son had pulled through and a tremendous roar erupted from the class accompanied by a standing ovation! We all lit up a big cigar and stunk up the whole building.)

APRIL 10 – “GAINED 3 OZS. – WEIGHS 4 LBS. 9 OZS. – BACK ON WATER”

APRIL 11 – “LOST 1 OZ. TALKED TO DR. RANDOLPH – NO DOUBT THAT DAVID WILL NOT MAKE IT ... A MATTER OF WEEKS!!!”

APRIL 12 – “ON WATER FOR THREE HOURS. THREW UP A LITTLE. OFF WATER. GAINED 1 OZ. (4LBS. 9 ½ OZS.) MESSED! TED ASSIGNED TO D.C. BRANCH.

(I received official word that my sales assignment would be in Virginia and we were to be transferred to Lynchburg.)

APRIL 13 – “TALKED WITH DR. TINNELL – VERY PLEASED WITH PROGRESS – STOMACH CAVITY ENLARGING – STARTED FEEDING THROUGH MOUTH! TOOK HIM OFF OXYGEN AND OUT OF INCUBATOR FOR FIRST TIME TO FEED (1 oz. every hour) WEIGHS 4LBS. 8 OZS.

MESSED DIAPER! EVERYTHING PASSING THROUGH!!! DOCTORS VERY PLEASED.

APRIL 14 – “GAINED 1 OZ. (4 LBS. 9 OZS.) PUT ON FORMULA! (SIMILAC). ALL SUGAR WATER STAYED DOWN. THREW UP FORMULA AT 8 P.M. – OFF FORMULA. (TED HOME)”

APRIL 15 – “PUT ON FORMULA – THREW UP AFTER FIRST FEEDING – TAKEN OFF AGAIN. BAG TAKEN OFF – ALL INTESTINES BACK INSIDE BUT SKIN NOT GROWN OVER. WEIGHS 4 LBS. 6 OZS. – OUT OF INCUBATOR AGAIN. TALKED TO DR. RANDOLPH – SAID POSSIBLY ONE MORE OPERATION, NO MORE, AND DAVID DOING VERY WELL!”

APRIL 16 – “WEIGHS 4 LBS. 8 OZS. PUT BACK ON SUGAR WATER FROM BOTTLE. (TED BACK TO N.Y.)”

APRIL 17 – “OFF I.V.!! SUGAR WATER FROM BOTTLE EVERY 2 HOURS (1 OZ) – WEIGHS 4 LBS. 7 OZS. – MEMBRANE GROWN OVER INCISION!!!”

APRIL 18 – “ON FORMULA (4 LBS. 6 OZS.) OFF FORMULA”

APRIL 19 – “4 LBS. 4 OZS. – ON I.V. AGAIN (THROUGH HEAD). FEEDING THROUGH BOTTLE (WATER). OFF I.V. (CRIED A LOT)”

APRIL 20 – “4 LBS. 6 OZS. GETTING 1 OZ. FORMULA EVERY TWO HOURS. GAVE DAVID ENEMA – SOME RESULTS.”

APRIL 21 – “OFF FEEDING (BOTTLE). BACK ON I.V. IN ARM. WEIGHS 4 LBS. 4 OZS. (AWAKE AND QUIET). SKIN GROWING OVER

STOMACH – DOCTORS VERY PLEASED ABOUT IT. BACK ON SUGAR WATER IN BOTTLE (P.M.)”

APRIL 22 – “STILL ON I.V. AND SUGAR WATER (1/2 OZ. EVERY HOUR). HAD ONE MESS DURING NIGHT. 4LBS. 6 OZS. STARTS ON FORMULA THIS AFTERNOON. OFF WATER – VERY SWOLLEN. TALKED WITH DR. RANDOLPH – POSSIBLY ANOTHER OPERATION TO OPEN INTESTINES – NOT HAVING PROPER ELIMINATION. SERIOUS OPERATION BUT THINKS DAVID CAN MAKE IT.”

Sue stopped recording the daily progress on April 23. I received a phone call in Rochester that day since we had moved to the home office from New York for our final two weeks of training class. David had suddenly contacted pneumonia and was in serious trouble. He was returned to the intensive care unit and this time his chances were extremely remote. I rushed to the airport in a state of panic and almost punched the United Airlines ticker agent who told me that the flight to Washington was booked solid. Fortunately the manager bumped another passenger off the flight in order to make room for me and, upon arriving at the D.C. airport, Sue and I went directly to the hospital where we stayed with David throughout the night. We remained at the hospital for most of the next day and into the night on April 25th. That evening while we stood quietly next to David, he almost died. We called one of the nearby nurses who threw open the top of the respirator and quickly revived him. That little guy was giving it everything he had.

Sue made one last notation in her mini diary:

APRIL 26 – “DAVID PASSED AWAY – 11:00 A.M.”

(When the telephone rang at the Park’s house, it seemed as though neither of us wanted to answer it. Finally, Sue’s mother said that someone from Children’s Hospital wanted to speak to either of us. Sue picked up the phone and Dr. Randolph said, “Mrs. Reavis... I’m sorry... your little one passed away this morning.”)

Later, we drove to the hospital and met with Dr. Randolph who comforted us by assuring that perhaps it was best for David’s sake. There was a chance that lack of oxygen caused by the pneumonia may have triggered brain damage. We found some solace also in the doctor’s sincere confidence that “even though we were unable to help your little one, we now have new information which may save other babies in the future.” He also indicated that David’s problem was not congenital and that we need not refrain from having more children.

I guess Sue and I have never really shared our emotional wounds and inner thoughts about David because it was obviously painful. It would have been easy to selfishly wallow in self-pity and punish each other with consideration of the fact that if only he had not contacted pneumonia... Sue had wanted desperately to hold her baby – just once – but never had the opportunity to even touch him as she could only express her love to him through a glass barrier. Her suffering and sorrow never really surfaced and she has yet to complain about her deprivation.

The magnitude of resentment, frustration and hostility toward life in general and the bitterness toward death which boiled inside of me further increased. My growing commitment to atheism solidified as I hardened

even more in an effort to protect myself from pressure inflicted by self-proclaimed Billy grahams of the world. Like Little Joe, David was dead and nothing could ever convince me that a merciful God in Heaven would ever allow a baby to suffer as did ours. Only ignorant, weak people who could not cope with the harsh realities of life turned to such fantasies as religion in order to help them avoid accepting proven scientific fact. While purchasing a cemetery lot my contempt almost erupted when Sue's father quickly refrained me from attacking a high-pressure salesman. The calling card of that haughty bastard was laced with the words "Number One Salesman – 1967!"

Since Sue and I both rejected the idea of a typical funeral ritual, the painful ordeal of making burial arrangements was eased somewhat by our desire to have only a brief service at the grave site. We insisted only that David's little blue boxing gloves be placed beside him in the casket. Those gloves symbolized a mountain of very special meaning to us and we were comforted by the knowledge that they would remain with our son forever.

The day after David's funeral Sue and I left for Lynchburg, Virginia where we planned to reconstruct our lives which had been shattered by tragedy. We stopped by the KODAK sales office in Washington and met with my boss before departing for the "Hill City" which represented the first giant step in our journey toward the American dream. Bill Townsend was not a typical manager in that he was a sincere, empathetic person who placed an individual's needs above corporate demands or his own personal career ambitions. Bill greatly influenced my life, perhaps more than any one individual, and I have always attempted to emulate him. He not only served as my manager, counselor, confidant and father figure for

eight years but also was my personal mentor. (Bill and Sue's father were the two people to whom I gave my word that I would complete my college education.)

Sue and I lived in a Holiday Inn motel in Lynchburg for about two months before our new apartment became available and most of our energy was exerted in trying to get pregnant. We desperately wanted a child (a boy) and in the summer actually celebrated a death – the rabbit died! We accepted the joyous news with obvious reservations and anxiety and never once openly discussed our inherent inner fears.

That same summer I satisfied the strong desire to visit my father whom I had seen only once or twice in the previous eight years. We stayed at Granny Reavis' house in Galax where Sue was exposed to the entire family for the first time. The agony of seeing my father's poor health was tempered somewhat by a pleasant visit as he took us to Little Joe's grave at the Reavis cemetery and on to Baywood where we paid our respects at the gravesites of Grandmama and Granddaddy Hampton. Daddy and I never did really communicate our true feelings to each other but the loving bond between us was as strong as ever. As we shook hands to leave, I left \$25.00 in his palm which, perhaps more than anything, symbolized our unique understanding of each other. I knew that pride prevented him from ever complaining of his misfortune and somehow sensed that he would accept it as a pure symbol of my sincere love and compassion for him. Our visit with each other seemed to temporarily heal the deep emotional wounds inflicted by our long separation from each other.

The following spring, on the morning of March 14, 1968, Sue and I made last minute preparations before she

was admitted to Virginia Baptist Hospital where the doctor was to induce labor. We barely spoke that morning as our anxiety had snowballed to a point where we almost feared the outcome. Later in the day, while still sedated, Sue accused the nurses of lying when they told her that she had given birth to a healthy boy. When the doctor announced to me, “Mr. Reavis, you have a seven pound boy and both the baby and mother are doing fine!,” I immediately demanded to see the baby. The doctor approved and, after verifying the good health of our son, I left the hospital in a daze. I drove home and called everyone. Only when I called Charles (who, after leaving the Air Force, had moved his family to Leesburg, Virginia from Texas) did the reality finally hit me. It dawned on me that I had not only left my coat and a lot of paperwork in the waiting room, but also had left the hospital without even seeing Sue! I left a note for our neighbors in the apartment and rushed back to the hospital where I began making plans for our boy’s future. There was no limit to my determination to provide the best of everything for my son.

The very day that Sue and Douglas Park Reavis came home from the hospital, I dragged my weary wife out to see a new home which I had investigated during her three day respite. Sue’s parents were visiting for a few days and we left Doug with Mrs. Park who was absolutely distraught with my audacity. I made a deal with the builder where I agreed to give him \$500.00 cash and signed an I.O.U. for an additional \$1,000.00 (\$30 per month) which represented the balance of the required down payment. Since I only had \$250.00, I borrowed the additional \$250 from Bud and repaid him three weeks later from my first bonus check. A local bank approved

the mortgage of \$16,000 and, at the age of twenty-two, I became a proud homeowner – the first major symbol of American success.

I took Doug with me wherever I went and we became the second generation of “Pete and Repeat.” He was everything that I had ever hoped for in a son and on occasion I wiped tears from my eyes as a result of sheer pleasure derived from almost disbelief at my good fortune. It was somewhat like the moments I would steal at the family reunion in an attempt to prolong the pleasure of reflecting on the happiness of the moment. However, the realization that our relationship would never end was almost too good to be true.

Shortly after moving into our new home I received a phone call from my aunt who said that my father was desperately ill. He agreed to enter a hospital only if I took him. The next day I drove to Galax and picked up my father, his two brothers and Granddaddy Reavis and headed for the Veterans Administration Hospital in Johnson City, Tennessee. My father’s health had degenerated in the last year to a point where he was barely coherent and it was painfully obvious that he was near death. I fought the tears as we left him alone at the hospital where he was to be treated for cirrhosis of the liver. A few weeks later my father died.

I guess that for once I was almost grateful for my inner bitterness toward life because the emotional scars had left enough tissue to prevent me from going absolutely insane. I was conditioned to a point where I could fend off life’s blows by withdrawing into a shell and simply not allowing deep feelings to surface. My father had never even seen my son, Charles’ daughter, never saw one of my baseball games, never shared in Charles’

accomplishments or Linda's achievements. Daddy was buried close to Little Joe in the Reavis cemetery in Galax and his death further rekindled my burning desire to not only protect my family from life's miseries but to also instill in them the true value of perpetuating family unity.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH AND TRAGEDY ARE RETARDED

Guy Dewey Stoneman was born on a farm in 1915 in a little place called Capp, Virginia (later changed to Woodlawn) which was located in the vicinity of Galax and Hillsville. The first born son to Roscoe and Lenny Edwards Stoneman, he dropped out of school after completing the sixth grade and went to work with his father in a saw mill while at the same time helping the family to run the farm. His first excursion away from home came at the age of sixteen when he traveled a distance of about thirty miles to Fries, Virginia where he worked in a cotton mill. He returned almost immediately to the farm and subsequently ventured a little further from home to seek his fortune in the town of Welch, West Virginia. Homesickness again forced him back to the farm after he earned just enough money to finance the return trip. He then traveled as far away as Wilmington, Delaware and worked with one of his second cousins on a dairy farm which was owned by the Vanderbilts. He eventually migrated back home and proceeded on to Greensboro, North Carolina where, among other jobs, he worked in a cotton mill on two separate occasions. Guy met his first wife in Greensboro and they married in 1937. He was drafted into the army at the outbreak of World War II and served for about a year before the death of his father forced him to leave the service so that he could run the farm for his family. (Shortly after his honorable

discharge, the unit with which he was to have served in Germany was virtually wiped out in battle.) He later moved his wife and son, Don, down the road to Hillsville where he opened a cafe and also began his career as a carpenter. A second son, Dean, was born while Guy was commuting to the D.C. area where he worked as a carpenter with my father and he eventually joined the General Services Administration of the federal government.

At the age of twenty-two I was astonished to discover how much Guy Stoneman had matured in the last four years! I had the opportunity to develop better insight into the character of the man after spending some time with him in Harrisonburg, Virginia where we all pitched in to help him build his hunting cabin. Contrary to my earlier impression of him, he was a deep thinker who made a lot of sense when he spoke. Although he was quiet and unassuming, he always said exactly what he thought and every one knew precisely where he stood. He was what some might consider to be old fashioned in his beliefs and he never wavered from the high standards which he set for himself. Even though deprived of extended formal education, he displayed a keen interest in history and was almost unbelievably perceptive. He was ultra clean in mind and body and meticulous in appearance. Extremely independent, strong willed and hard on the surface, Guy was very humble, empathetic, blessed with a heart of gold and was unselfish to a point where he always considered the feelings of others before his own. Although relatively small in stature at five feet, eight inches tall and 150 pounds, he was the hardest working and most energetic person imaginable. He was, by far, the most honest and trustworthy man that I have

ever known and he established instant credibility as one who could be trusted. He was the type of unique individual whom everyone admired, loved and respected. In time, I developed a deep feeling of admiration and compassion for him as I learned to truly appreciate the good that he had done for me and the entire family in spite of my immature and selfish behavior toward him.

In the fall of 1968 he taught me how to hunt and our relationship advanced to a point where we really enjoyed each other's company. Guy and I both possessed relatively introverted personalities and we shared a similar warped sense of humor as he would respond to my battery of abusive heckling with just a few simple words that would inevitably bring me to my knees. Next to playing the fiddle, he most enjoyed hunting and every autumn Charles and I would join Guy and his brother, Barney, at the cabin for our annual outing with Mother Nature. However, despite my fondness for Guy, we were always separated by an invisible barrier of resentment which I held toward my mother – a situation which caused him a great deal of mental anguish. Over the years he had treated my mother with unlimited kindness during her many illnesses and he loved her dearly. He considered Linda, Charles and me as his own kids and our children loved him as “Granddaddy.” He was deeply devoted to the well being of his own two sons and held sacred the values inherent in family unity. However, he bore the brunt of the depressing relationship between my mother and me and tried desperately to maintain relative continuity in our family.

Sue, Doug and I spent the Christmas of 1968 with the Park's and the festive occasion was tempered somewhat by our concern for Bud's poor health. He had

lost an enormous amount of weight and was being treated for sugar diabetes. When it was discovered that he was suffering from lung cancer we were again faced with the bitter reality of coping with the death of a loved one. It seemed to me as though tragedy appeared to always strike the wrong people. Why was it that truly good people are stricken when the criminal element of our society goes seemingly unscathed by life's blows? Life just seemed to be one endless road of misery with people apparently creating a facade for themselves in order to avoid facing the cruel facts.

Although Sue and I loved the serenity of living in Lynchburg, we were pleased with the prospects of moving back to Maryland where I was to assume a sales territory in downtown Washington, D.C. While in the area on business, I had the opportunity to visit Bud a few times and he appeared to accept his pending rendezvous with death bravely which was a tribute to the character of the man. Fortunately, perhaps, the cancer felled him quickly and his terrible ordeal was limited to a few short months. When he was finally taken to the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Washington, Sue and Doug flew to D.C. in an attempt to visit him one last time. I picked them up at the airport and, upon arriving at the hospital, learned that Bud had passed away while we were in transit. He died the day before Doug's first birthday – March 13, 1969. While the trauma of losing Bud rendered me disconsolate, I was shocked at Sue's attitude toward her father's death. She and Bud had shared an unparalleled emotional bond and his death represented a tremendous personal loss the depth of which only she could understand. Sue suffered deeply. However, she indicated a firm conviction that not only was her father

better off, but somehow felt that he was aware of everything that was happening. Although I did not voice my opinion at the time, I felt that she was falling victim to the ancient syndrome for weak people who needed a crutch in order to cope with life's realities. Subsequently, Sue always refrained from discussing such feelings with me because of my vehement objection to such utter nonsense.

A few weeks later we moved from Lynchburg to an apartment in Greenbelt, Maryland and in the summer purchased a house in Waldorf. In the fall sue suffered a miscarriage which was relatively uneventful as compared to some of our previous heartbreaking experiences. Although obviously disappointed, we were determined to have more children (boys!). We did not want Doug to be an only child and feared that a wide chronological gap between brothers and/or sisters was less than desirable. Therefore, we enthusiastically agreed to make every effort to get pregnant. A fantastic challenge!

After wallowing in a "temporary" sales job for almost two years, I decided to fulfill the commitment which I had made to Sue's father and Bill Townsend by completing requirements for my degree. I also felt that a full college education would enable me to break the despicable loop that I had created for myself in a career which I detested. In all honesty, selfish pride also dictated that I finish school partly because I felt a strong need to flaunt my accomplishments and material possessions. The frustrating passion to succeed still burned feverishly inside of me as did the haunting influence of "V.I.G." who instilled in me a compulsion to never willingly accept failure at anything. Therefore, the following summer I enrolled for two courses at Southeastern University in

D.C. and attended classes two nights a week. I resumed the same schedule in the fall and Sue allowed Doug to stay up on my school nights so that we could be together for at least a few minutes. Doug and I were virtually inseparable and seldom did a day or night pass without the two of us getting involved in something – even if it was just going for a walk or playing a game together.

In January, 1971, we were blessed with the birth of our second son – Christopher Harding Reavis – a beautiful baby. As with Doug, we were relieved to find that Chris was perfectly healthy not only because of our previous experience with David but also because Sue was ill throughout the entire pregnancy. Before discovering that she was pregnant, Sue had taken a considerable amount of aspirin (potential enemy of a fetus) in an attempt to relieve severe headaches. Finally, Chris arrived three and one-half weeks late and was born frank breech which resulted in an extremely difficult delivery. Apparently the doctor was unaware that the baby had not turned and he interpreted the position of Chris' bottom to be that of his head. After assurance of the baby's good health, we celebrated the arrival of a brother for Doug as well as the fulfillment of our desire to have boys.

I influenced the use of Harding as Chris' middle name – the same as that of my father. It is difficult to adequately explain that the name was not intended to simply perpetuate my father's memory. It was meant to symbolize my profound determination to extend to my sons such a sacred relationship as that which I had once shared with my own father. In retrospect, and perhaps somewhat hypocritically, while we used my father's middle name, we simultaneously changed the pronunciation of his last name. I also realized later that

Chris' middle name could have been interpreted as complete disregard for Guy's feelings for obvious reason; however, I have never felt a compulsion to justify it because the motivation was deeply sincere.

Because of our proven track record in fertility (three births and one miscarriage in five years), and because of Sue's difficult pregnancies, we came to the brilliant conclusion that some method of birth control might be in order – and fast! It was decided that a coil, which would hopefully prevent us from suddenly overpopulating the entire Waldorf area, would be put to the supreme test. But, low and behold, that cursed monthly female visitor betrayed us and we discovered that Sue was pregnant again – three months after Chris was born! We had clearly planned for Doug and Chris; however, this sudden shock had come in the night, so to speak. We could have served as inspiration for an entertaining comedy series were it not for the gravity of the situation. It was obvious that Sue was neither mentally nor physically prepared for another pregnancy and we seriously contemplated the possibility of an abortion. However, our conscience dictated that we accept our fate and, summoning all of her courage, Sue approached her destiny in the stirrups like a trooper. Meanwhile, she continued to change diapers and wait in doctors' offices while I kept working and attending nightly classes. The limited time that we had alone was marred by mutual exhaustion and our lines of communication were slowly being severed. I suppose, like many young couples, we were unable to recognize that we were gradually drifting apart.

Because Chris did not appear to focus his attention on any particular objects when he was about four months

old, we had his eyes examined by one of the area's most prominent optometrists who, ironically, was the physician who had performed eye surgery on Sue when she was about two years old. The doctor found nothing abnormal except to indicate that Chris' vision was equal to that of the rest of his "relatively slow development." Sue's instinctive inner fears relating to our son's delayed development were enhanced by Chris' apparent sporadic breathing tendencies. Sue had noticed that Chris appeared to occasionally stop breathing for intervals of up to ten or fifteen seconds whenever he drank from a bottle. At the age of five months, Chris' eyes still were not focusing, his reflexes were almost non-existent, and he had yet to roll over. A young pediatrician jolted Sue with the dreaded news that Chris was "abnormally slow" in that he was not even approaching the lower end of the spectrum of relative development. She initially rejected the doctor's indication that there was definite reason for concern for our baby and immediately called me at the office. My reaction was more violent as I unsuccessfully attempted to telephone the indignant young doctor in an attempt to challenge her audacity and archaic bed-side manner. How dare she indicate that our child was less than normal!

On August 1, when Chris was six and one-half months old and Sue was four months pregnant, the frightening reality of Chris' problem pierced the Sunday afternoon silence when Sue screamed for me to come to the living room. When I arrived, Chris was lying on the couch where his entire face was turning a deathly blue-gray color as his head and left side of his body jerked rhythmically. The sickening memory of the color of David's face the night he almost died flashed before me as

I gathered up Doug and ordered Sue to quickly get Chris to the car. Sheer fright eliminated all consideration for personal safety as we ran red lights and exceeded speeds of 80 miles per hour as we sped to Physicians Memorial Hospital in nearby LaPlata, Maryland. When we arrived at the Emergency Room, Chris appeared to be perfectly normal and the doctors found no evidence whatsoever of any problems. On our way home Chris' face again turned blue and his body began shaking violently. This time we duplicated our high speed pace but headed instead for Children's Hospital in Washington where a team of medical specialists tried feverishly to revive him. With a tentative diagnosis of probable spinal meningitis, he was admitted to the Communicative Disease ward of the hospital. My GOD! I feared that Chris' fate was to be the same as that of Little Joe's.

The next day Sue became ill with what appeared to be the flu as she suffered violent headaches and severe depression which led to an almost constant state of crying. Her bout with the illness increased in intensity to a point where she could not sleep and was losing control of her emotions. Over the next thirty-six to forty-eight hours we went to two doctors, the emergency room of a hospital, and a medical clinic in search of help. Like a nightmare, we tried in vain to secure medical treatment from professionals who tried to convince us that Sue was suffering from extreme emotional trauma instead of a physical illness. One doctor at the medical clinic referred us to a psychiatrist who questioned me concerning Sue's apparent alcohol problem and insisted that she be admitted for psychiatric observation! Because none of those self-serving saints of science would listen to our plea for realistic help and because Sue's doctor was "not

available” that week, we called Dr. Irey at home late in the evening. We knew Dr. Irey personally and had tremendous respect for his professional ability. I explained our desperate predicament and conviction that Sue needed medical treatment in lieu of psychological help and he insisted that she be taken immediately to the Washington Sanitarium and Hospital. The results of a spinal tap revealed that Sue was suffering from viral meningitis and she finally received credible treatment over the next five days. However, we learned that six of the nine drugs which she had been given during our initial search for help were potentially harmful to the fetus which she was carrying. More importantly, our concern again for the health of our expectant baby was overshadowed by Chris’ dilemma.

Besides spending a few hours at work each day, going to classes at night and seeking help for Sue, I spent the balance of the week with Chris. Sue’s mom relieved some of the pressure by staying with Doug but after about ten days I felt like an emotional yo-yo. Our infinite confidence in Children’s Hospital as a result of our earlier experience with David could not prevent horrible memories as the doctors attempted to regulate Chris’ convulsions. The word “seizure” was a bit mysterious, frightening, and almost vulgar to us; however, we learned its meaning all too well as we were told that our son’s problem stemmed not from spinal meningitis but from an apparent disorder in the area of the brain. Over the next four to six months Chris was treated as an out-patient by the neurological specialists at Childrens in an effort to not only control his seizures but to also diagnose the exact cause. Chris was subjected to every conceivable test known to science. The tedious process of determining

appropriate amounts and proper types of medication for the regulation of seizure activity was apparently relatively subjective and, as a result, Chris was readmitted to the hospital on many occasions. In a near panic state, we constantly scrambled to hospitals on the spur of the moment and at all hours (usually at night). In the beginning we always attempted to drive the forty-five minute trip to Childrens Hospital as we broke every traffic violation imaginable. Lights flashing, horn blowing and traveling at excessive speeds, we encountered officers of the law on only a few occasions – even when we attempted to attract one. On one occasion we were momentarily relieved when a D.C. policeman caught us running red lights on Pennsylvania Avenue; however, we sped away from him when he refused to escort us. In the early morning hours we were once intercepted by a police road block. After verifying the severity of our predicament they summoned an ambulance and insisted that we use the services of such an emergency vehicle in the future. Taking their advice, I once drove Chris to a nearby fire department and quickly explained that he had to be taken to Childrens Hospital. When I arrived at the facility I was told that because the volunteers feared that our son was near death, he was delivered instead to a closer hospital located at Andrews Air Force Base. When I arrived at the Emergency Room at Andrews I was told that, after a brief examination, Chris had been sent to Childrens where specialized care was available. We refrained from future use of emergency services after that harrowing experience and also because we could not waste valuable minutes waiting for the vehicle to arrive at our home. Extended seizures posed potential threats of brain damage. On still another occasion two indignant policemen actually tried to detain us on the roadside even

after I hurriedly explained our problem. When they only offered a sarcastic rebuttal to my reasoning, we sped away at a break-neck speed after I questioned their motherhood. Surprisingly, they did not pursue us.

Over a period of time Sue and I became relatively proficient at dealing with Chris' seizures and eventually began taking him to the nearest emergency room where valium, injected directly into a vein in the forehead, represented the only cure which alleviated the disorder. We occasionally encountered a few medical experts who disregarded our recommendations for proper treatment and verbal wrestling matches inevitably ensued. On one occasion an indignant nurse had adamantly insisted that treatment was unnecessary and that no possibility existed of potential brain damage. After reasoning with the lady for over half an hour, we finally gathered up Chris from the treatment room and headed for Childrens Hospital. On still another occasion, after a young physician indicated that he had never heard of a drug called valium, we headed for Childrens again!

After about four months of extensive tests, the diagnosis of Chris' problem revealed that the right front lobe of his brain had not developed properly and, in fact, was missing. The initial prognosis was somewhat unclear but the word "atrophy" was used in describing a conceivable alternative in our son's future development. Sue researched the exact definition of the word and its meaning echoed as solemnly as the pronouncement of death penalty to a condemned prisoner. The first definition revealed "decrease in size or wasting away of a body part or tissue; also: a wasting away or progressive decline: degeneration." It was impossible to adequately explain our emotions at the time but we both firmly

rejected the possibility of perhaps the worst conceivable fate for a family – a mentally retarded child. After all, the prognosis was an educated guess and atrophy was only considered as a possibility.

In the midst of our conflict with Chris' problems, in December of 1971, Guy suffered a heart attack which apparently damaged the external walls of the heart and was severe enough to hospitalize him for almost three weeks. The extent to which Guy considered the feelings of others was epitomized at the doctor's office where, after having been driven there by my mother, he insisted that he not be examined before the other people who had been waiting patiently to see the doctor. Fortunately, my mother intercepted the physician who immediately ordered an ambulance to transfer him to Washington Sanitarium and Hospital. Guy's flirtation with death solemnly exposed, perhaps for the first time, the fact that he represented the glue that held our family together. It seemed to me as though most people inevitably avoid expressing true feelings of affection to a loved one until tragedy rudely reminds us that it is too late. I never had the satisfaction of openly expressing love to my father, Granddaddy and Grandmamma Hampton, Sue's dad or Granddaddy Reavis who had died the previous spring. Yet, in spite of my guilt feelings, I was incapable of telling Guy how much I appreciated the good that he had done for all of us and our hectic schedule prevented us from often visiting him at the hospital. Fortunately, he survived.

On January 7, 1972, Sue gave birth to Michael Sinclair Reavis. Again we were obviously relieved at the baby's apparent good health because of Sue's bout with viral meningitis, the six potentially harmful drugs, and our concern that Chris' problem might be congenital. The

joyous news was secondary to the results of meeting which I had with the neurological specialists regarding Chris' prognosis the day Mike was born. Our worst fears were realized as the doctors tactfully informed me that Chris had already reached the peak of his mental and physical capabilities and that his existing state of development would never improve. I accepted the doctors' sobering analysis without any reaction whatsoever and took a long walk before calling Bill Townsend at work. He represented the one person who could almost always manage to restore a sense of equilibrium in my life and I had infinite confidence in his wisdom. I drove to the office and talked with Bill for quite awhile not only about Chris' situation but about life in general and, as usual, was comforted by his empathy and concern. I shared the doctors' consensus of opinion with Sue the day that we brought Mike home from the hospital and that same night we had to transport Chris back to Childrens because of continued seizure activity. Shortly thereafter, we were hammered with the profound depth of Chris' problem when one of the neurological specialists proclaimed, "This child is as far along as he will ever be and, for the sake of the family, he should be institutionalized immediately."

Pondering the death of a loved one does not compare to the frightening uncertainty, loneliness, and insecurity of discovering a world which is relatively blind to the needs of the mentally retarded. It is extremely difficult to explain how parents of a retarded child are psychologically affected. Both Sue and I retreated into shells and our avenues of escape differed immensely. Sue firmly rejected even remote consideration of institutionalizing our son and showered Chris with

enormous love and attention. Her relentless determination to obtain help for Chris, resulted in a torrid search of seemingly endless organizations, all of which seemed prominent in diagnosis but simultaneously incapable of offering recommendations for treatment. Sue was convinced that Chris was not beyond help and over the next six months her convictions were seemingly justified as Chris began to roll over, sit up, pull himself around furniture – all the things which the experts said were impossible. She drove Chris to an Easter Seal Center once a week where he received physical therapy, enrolled him in nearby Spring Dell Center where he received daily care and eventually made long term arrangements for him to visit the highly regarded John F. Kennedy Institute in Baltimore.

Although I loved Chris, my attitude toward him developed into one of mere tolerance, self-pity, and a greater concern for relative normality in the lives of Doug and Mike. When dominant personality traits of impatience, jealousy, intolerance, bitterness and insecurity were coupled with overwhelming pride, even more resentment surfaced toward prejudicial referrals to my son as “one of them” and I experienced a severe guilt complex for feeling a twinge of embarrassment and humiliation over my son’s condition. Flaunting material possessions and wealth in search of approval and recognition became even more important to me as I purchased a new car, sported a Fifth Avenue wardrobe with Pierre Cardin accessories, and installed a forty-three foot swimming pool in the back yard. I admit that I subjected myself to a vasectomy and took Sue along on an occasional business trip in an effort to relieve some of the pressures on her; however, my career suddenly surfaced as

one of the top priorities in my life. I accelerated my efforts to complete degree requirements and attended classes five nights a week and on Saturdays from 9:00 to 12:00 noon. In the process I developed ulcers which enhanced my irritability in dealing with people at work, school, Chris' needs and those of the family. My impatience and frustrations were regularly vented on Sue and I simply had no time to be a loving father to Mike. Doug had been positively influenced at an early age by our love and patience and was easily managed; however, Mike turned into a hell raiser as he returned ten-fold the negative influence to which he was subjected. His first action as an infant was to urinate in his mother's face and he continued to establish the fact that he meant to express himself, however mischievously, as an individual come hell or high water!

In spite of developing into an ogre, I always retained my insatiable desire to instill in my kids, nieces and nephews the values of strong family unity. I wanted our home to be the focal point for family gatherings and the swimming pool represented a means by which we could share what I felt was the single most important thing in life – family. I selfishly wanted to set an example of American success that the kids might choose to emulate and, before Charles moved to Chicago and Linda to Dayton, our three families gathered at our home quite often. My mother and Guy joined us at times; however, those occasions were somewhat strained because of the resentment which I still held for my mother.

On February 2, 1972, Guy suffered a second cardiac arrest. This time, the attack was massive and he actually died at the hospital before the doctors applied four electric shock treatments of 400 volts each – all to no

avail. While his body rejected oxygen and all vital organs ceased to function, his heart continued to fibrillate which prompted his physician to order one last electric shock. The voltage apparently was so severe that both arms and legs flew violently into the air and, miraculously, Guy displayed signs of life. He had been dead for seven minutes! In spite of regaining life, which in the words of the doctor “defied known medical logic,” the entire family was summoned as Guy was not expected to live beyond a few hours. He not only survived longer than expected, but relentlessly fought to regain strength to a point where he returned home in less than a month! Eight weeks later he resumed working at his supervisory job on a limited basis of four hours per day and six weeks later, on June 17, he was felled by still another heart attack – the third in seven months. Again, somehow he survived; however, he finally retired from his job at General Services Administration. Guy’s confrontations with death typified his entire life as dogged determination led to emergence as an honorable winner against extreme odds. He had completed correspondence courses in an effort to improve his educational credentials, advanced at G.S.A. to Assistant Foreman at the White House and, more importantly, displayed personal integrity the likes of which most people can only dream. Never boasting, he often joked about filling his commitment of someday making it to the White House. Finally, he humbly thanked God for allowing him to overcome one of the worst killers known to man.

That same summer Sue and I welcomed the long awaited news that Chris had been accepted for diagnostic testing by the Kennedy Institute in Baltimore. Sue’s determined pursuit to find help for Chris was on the verge

of returning dividends in the form of aid from perhaps the most renowned organization of its kind in the world. We were ecstatic over the prospects of our son becoming a “Kennedy Child.” Staying in an apartment at the Institute for two nights, we spent three exhausting days talking to a seemingly endless number of specialists who also conducted extensive tests on our boy. Chris remained at the Institute for two weeks where he received intensive therapy and we could scarcely believe that he began walking while pushing a cart, standing (with the aid of a table), and feeding morsels of food to himself – remarkable achievements! Meanwhile Sue’s Uncle Richie constructed a “standing table” and “walking cart” prescribed for use in Chris’ recommended schedule of activities at home. We brought Chris home the first weekend and I rushed him back to Baltimore due to a horrible seizure caused by an overdose of Dilantin which kept him bed-ridden for the next three days. When a young doctor openly admitted “I made a mistake,” I thanked him for his honesty and my enormous respect for the people at Kennedy and their tremendous achievements in the field of mental retardation increased even more.

Confident that there was hope for our son after all, Sue and I anxiously anticipated our final meeting at Kennedy where it was revealed that, as we had expected, the diagnosis of Chris’ problem coincided with earlier professional opinions. However, the ringing prognosis sounded a deafening blow as we were told that Chris, at the chronological age of sixteen, would probably reach the peak of mental development which, if extensive therapy were pursued, might be equivalent to that of a thirty-six

month old child – at best. A progressive decline might then be anticipated.

Atrophy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMERICAN DREAM CAN BE A NIGHTMARE

Three years of night school had created a ritual of late night meals for Sue and me and one evening in the spring of 1973 I accused her of attempted homicide as I almost choked on an egg salad sandwich in which she had concealed a small gift. Immersed in the typical late night offering to which we had become accustomed rested a Southeastern University class ring the back of which was inscribed “All our love – Doug, Chris, & Mike.” The method of presentation could not have been more appropriate and we soon celebrated one of the proudest moments of our lives at graduation exercises. Sue presented me with a watch with the inscription “We finally made it! Congratulations! My love, Sue.” The words prompted sentimental reflection of the unselfish sacrifices on the part of our three boys and Sue’s dedication and encouragement which allowed me the opportunity to fulfill a dream. During the ceremonies the graduates’ spouses were asked to stand in recognition of their support and the emotion packed moment prompted a long ovation from a tearful throng of people. My mother and Guy, Sue’s grandmother, two of our close friends, and Charles and Viv shared our moment of glory, capped by my brother’s surprise gift of flying Linda in from Dayton, as we all drank champagne and danced at a nightclub in D.C. until the wee hours of the morning.

Like a red badge of courage, a college degree erased some of the insecurity that I had experienced in dealing with my peers as I came to realize that my sales performance of exceeding assigned quotas five out of the six previous years equaled that of the most successful marketing people in the company. While Bill Townsend graciously allowed me to skip late meetings and coordinated many required business trips with my personal schedule, I felt that my track record had been compiled while at an obvious disadvantage due to the combination of domestic problems and night school. The idea of escaping from the hated sales job had become unrealistic in view of accumulated financial obligations and I realized that I was too deeply entrenched in my career to suddenly change professions at the age of twenty-eight. Besides, I had tasted morsels of gratifying recognition and other rewards which accompany our society's standards for success and had slowly developed an insatiable appetite for them. The importance of my job became paramount as I enjoyed a particularly rewarding sales year in 1973 and finished in the top five percent of the national sales force in 1974. Among other lavish forms of compensation came a week's trip to the Caribbean for Sue and me. During the year I attended an elite training class comprised of successful sales people who were groomed for prestigious specialty assignments such as "Information Technologists" and I developed a knack for "bobbing and weaving" at cocktail parties while rubbing elbows with all of the right people. I had stepped onto the first rung of the ladder of success, liked what I saw, and made everyone aware of my pending splash-down in the hallowed halls of the upper middle class. The dominant concern in my life was "what would people think?." Ahhh, the taste of success!

The gap which had gradually separated Sue and me continued to widen to a point where, except for the kids, we shared little in common and had difficulty relating to each other. She had been marooned from the outside world by pregnancies, kids, the house, and the responsibility of caring for a mentally retarded child while I had the opportunity to expand my horizons in a business world with the Wall Street Journal as my Bible. As a result, we communicated less about individual interests that were equally boring to each of us. Sue expressed a keen interest in such idiotic topics as life after life, the increasingly popular concept of reincarnation, and the true meaning of fulfillment in life. I vehemently refused to even consider discussing such crap and insisted that she seek interests of value. To me, it was absolutely inexcusable for people to fail to recognize that such nonsense served as a crutch for losers – those who fell back on the supernatural because of their own inability to succeed. Further, I could never understand why there were so many narrow minded people – and particularly my own wife – who were totally blind to what was really important in life.

One rewarding avenue of escape from my frustrations was involvement with Doug and all the kids in the neighborhood. An evening or weekend seldom passed without supervising a kick ball game, baseball, football or taking an active roll in a game of Cowboys and Indians or Hide and Seek. I loved kids and often expressed regret at not following through with my desire to teach and coach; however, I partially satisfied the need by volunteering to manage a minor league team in the local Little League. I attended try-outs, rated all the kids according to ability, and had a manager from an opposing

team make my selections because I was in Rochester the week of the draft. I returned to discover that my team had been stock-piled with fourteen of the original “Bad News Bears” and our first six games were so lopsided that they were halted because of darkness. The average margin of defeat was about twenty-eight runs... for three innings! Much of my “coaching” was spent trying to stop the outfielders from picking dandelions during the games or praying that none of my infielders be killed. One of the highlights of the season occurred when one of my particularly uncoordinated kids accidentally hit a pitch for the first time in his life and forgot that he was supposed to run to first base! Somehow, he ended up safely on the bag and most of the parents were fighting tears as they gave him a standing ovation. The team was so bad that most of the other managers refused to even play us in a practice game; however, we improved to a point where we actually won a game and celebrated at the PIZZA HUT (cost me \$50.00!). During the course of the season I discovered that most of the horrifying rumors about Little League were really true as that disguise for adult ego mania turned many of our model citizens into animals on the playing field. Parental abuse of children was even more repulsive to me in light of Chris’ problems and earlier experiences with our first baby as many parents brutally and selfishly took advantage of the kids in an attempt to preserve the adults’ immature pride. As a result of my rebellion against the establishment of truth, justice, apple pie, motherhood, and Little League, I have since carried the scarlet letter of having been kicked out of that sacred organization. The story can be best summarized by my letter-to-the-editor which was published in the local newspaper:

Little League Manager Says Players Mistreated

Dear Sir:

I would like to share my experience as a rookie manager of a minor league team in the Waldorf Little League. I will preface my comments with the fact that I have no children in Little League yet. I offered my services because of my love of baseball, competition and an insatiable dedication to kids. However, in no way do I wish to portray myself as the perfect example of responsible adult leadership. For recently I finally found myself in a shouting contest with an umpire in front of many kids and parents. Therein lies partial motivation for the first letter to the editor of my life.

My experience with Little League began at the winter meetings where I observed as some managers argued the procedures for protesting games, fines for profanity by coaches, player draft procedures, and hiding players from major league coaches by encouraging players to do poorly at tryouts. There were a myriad of rules discussed regarding countering degenerate policies of

some coaches. And, oh yes, even an occasional comment about kids.

The player draft (with which I vehemently disagree) is an exercise in adult ego mania with little consideration given to the kids. It seemed unfortunate at the time in that by chance my draft number was 12 out of 12 teams. Since each team takes five players on the first round (after the major league drafts), it appeared that any chance of “success” was doomed. In terms of winning games we have had little luck. Our record is presently 1 win and 11 losses. However, I would not trade one kid on my team for the best player in the league because every one of my kids is a winner. Fortunately, I have also been blessed with outstanding parents who understand the purpose of Little League and that the teams which win the most games are not necessarily winners, and vice versa. At any rate, the idea of picking all potential players’ names at random for equitable teams and then readjusting for transportation problems, etc., was ridiculed.

I have seen coaches protest games, unmercifully criticize kids for physical mistakes, and literally lie and cheat for that almighty WIN. I have seen coaches as well as a few parents participate in violent arguments and yell obscenities at umpires and opposing players and spectators. I have been ridiculed by other coaches for not letting my pitchers pitch more than the

allotted innings per week and personally insulted by some coaches over my losing record. I have seen kids literally crying on the field due to pressure from coaches. I have seen batters hit by pitches thrown from a kid who had tears in his eyes. All of these things are in quest of that almighty WIN.

One of the rules of baseball is that if a batter is hit by a pitch he does not automatically get to advance to first base unless he makes a concerted effort to get out of the way of the pitch. One of my smallest nine-year-old boys was hit hard on the shoulder by a pitch thrown by an opposing pitcher who threw extremely fast. This being his first year of baseball and being still somewhat uncoordinated and frightened, the boy honestly did all he could in the split second to get out of the way. The umpire ruled that he did not, and made him continue to hit. The boy was literally trembling from fright. So I, in an effort to protect the kids, found myself arguing for the first and last time with an umpire. Not for the sake of advancing to first base and not for the possible almighty WIN, but for the sole purpose of protecting kids from possible injury.

When the matter was discussed at a coaches meeting, it was said that a boy like that shouldn't be playing. But where are "boys like that" to learn? I was condemned for not teaching my players how to avoid

being hit. A rule allowing an automatic advancement to first base by a hit batsman was not approved because it would open the door for degenerate coaches who would actually encourage kids to get hit by pitches! Unbelievable! One coach summed it up by saying, "My job is to WIN, no matter what it costs." So in arguing with the umpire, I was in effect arguing the principle involved and not questioning the rules of baseball. I was taking out my season-long frustrations on an umpire who does his best to follow the rules as they presently exist.

Finally, I am not in the embarrassing position of possibly being barred from Little League or being fined by the league. The reason is that I allowed a boy who was one year over age and a house guest of one of my players to illegally play in one of our games, which was the evening of the last day of school. The game would have been forfeited anyway, because I only had eight players. Five kids had left on vacation and one had a doctor's appointment. I realized before the game how technically wrong it was, I realized it was cheating and doing exactly what I have detested in this letter. I realized that if another, younger player was hurt, it was my responsibility. I realized the proper procedure was to explain to the opposing coach the situation and proceed to play a practice game. I considered the feelings of the players on the other team

which is in first place and unaccustomed to losing. I realized I was subjecting myself to harsh criticism from other coaches and parents when our actions were explained. I also expressed the fact that I would probably be disciplined by the league and understood the consequences. I fully realized that technically I was wrong, wrong, wrong - but I did it anyway. And I would like to add that I would again, given the exact set of circumstances, because the motivating factor was not the almighty WIN.

I gave in to the mischievous and childish coaxing of the parents and kids and my own long forgotten feeling of a desire for mischief on the last day of school. The look on the kids' faces (and parent's) was worth every bit of hardship I and my family have suffered since.

We lost the game, and I was the one who sheepishly confessed to the opposing coach after the game. At any rate, my kids played one of the most exciting, inspired and fun-filled games of the season. The disappointments of still another loss and further criticism from their peers was non-existent. They seemed to realize that for once our team was doing something wrong, for a change under the supervision of consenting parents enjoying pure and simple mischief. The parents, my coach and I were even concerned at one point that we might actually win! During the game one opposing

coach left the field in a huff over the possibility of losing to our team. One coach was so upset with his son that he literally kicked forced him to leave the field. The manager of the team said later he fully endorsed that type of behavior.

What is it in Little League that at times brings out the violent and animalistic characteristics of our society? Why is a win or loss by 9 to 12 year olds a boost or a detriment to adult egos? Is it that some coaches try to pressure the kids into being something that perhaps the adults were not or cannot be?

The bitter and painful irony is that my future in Little League is now being “judged” by some of the “win-at-all-costs” coaches who could never understand the motivation of FUN versus WIN. I agree, however, that I must face the consequences for the kids’ sake. It must be shown that when rules are broken, punishment results. On the other hand, how do I explain to the kids that if I had acted all season like some of the previously mentioned coaches I would not be under indirect and personal criticism at all?

The purpose of this letter is not to criticize Waldorf Little League, because the majority of individuals are outstanding, responsible people devoting long hours in an attempt to make Little League a service to youth instead

of to adults. They are striving to help kids become good and decent citizens. I hope that sharing my experiences helps to motivate those parents and others who are concerned to volunteer their ideas and opinions in an effort to help.

Ted Reavis,
Waldorf

P.S. June 8, 1975

I was just informed that I have been voted out of Little League.

The Sports Editor of the paper picked up on the story in his column the following week:

Southern Maryland Sports

By Garry Smits

I think it was about time that someone, and that someone was Ted Reavis, had the guts to take a stand and point out the abuse and exploitation of kids in the little league. For his statements, Reavis has been barred from the Waldorf Little League with little chance of

returning, but they can't bar the truth which has come out.

It has been thought all along by many people that some Little League coaches and parents have abused the children with verbal onslaughts and even occasional physical abuse, and changed what was intended to be a kid's activity, in reality to adults using the kids as pawns in their own childish actions. Reavis detailed incidents of coaches kicking players who strike out, parents abusive to umpires, and coaches who will stop at nothing to get what Mr. Reavis calls, "the almighty win."

Some of the things that are alleged are pretty shocking. The thought of a grown man kicking a child because he struck out makes me wonder about the mental state of such a man. The draft that the league employs is ridiculous, shuttling kids around as if they were just so much property. The kids are under so much pressure from their coaches and parents that it makes me wonder whether they actually want to play ball, or are the parents and coaches forcing them into it because they have not grown up yet. Mr. Reavis was quick to point out that these offenders are in the minority, but there are still people doing these things where there should not be any.

But being a reporter, I knew that I had to get the other side of the story. I called Don Jamison, the president of the Waldorf Little

League, and asked him for his reaction to Mr. Reavis' charges. He went the "no comment" route and hung up on me before I could ask anything more. So much for getting the other side of the story. It's clear to me that the truth hurts for Waldorf Little League Heirarchy.

My fondest memories as a child are the spring and summer days when my friends and I would get together in an empty lot of field somewhere and choose up sides for a game of baseball. We'd use rocks for bases and as far as equipment goes, sometimes we had to use old rubber balls to play with. But we had a hell of a time. We'd play all day, end with scores of 56-45, and we did what the Little League does. We played baseball, but without all the pressures of trying to win at all costs.

I have a word of advice for parents and coaches in the Little League who use kids for their own personal glory. In the words of satirist Alan king, "You wanna do your kids a favor? Let them stay home and you play the games."

Almost every parent of the kids on our team as well as many others attended a Little League meeting to protest my ouster. The melodrama continues:

Little League Dispute Boils

Editor's Note: The following account, written by Sports Editor Garry Smits, presents one version of an emotional issue and is not necessarily a complete report. Attempts by the sports editor to secure comment from those on the other side of the issue - the little league official - were unsuccessful.

The controversy in the Waldorf Little League that began with minor league coach Ted Reavis' letter to the editor of The Citizen News heated to a boil Thursday at a meeting at Thomas Stone High School. There, a number of parents showed up demanding to know why Reavis had been ousted as a coach, according to Reavis, and the affair eventually erupted into a shouting match between parents in support of Reavis and the Board of Directors of the League.

In his letter, which appeared in the June 12 edition of The Citizen News, Reavis cited cases of coaches abusing the players, using verbal and sometimes physical abuse, and putting winning above all else in the games. The letter was damaging in that it revealed the number of coaches who misuse the boys

on their teams just to achieve what Reavis called “the almighty win.”

Reavis was voted out of the league for next year, because he used an ineligible player in one of his games. Although he did not offer any excuses for the rule violation, he did say that he would have had to forfeit the game anyway because if the ineligible player hadn't played, they wouldn't have had enough players to field a team. Reavis admitted that the vote for his ouster came before the letter appeared, but he did say, that “the letter wrote made my chances nil of returning next year.”

“If I had swallowed my pride,” continued Reavis, “and asked them to let me back, they probably would have, but now with that letter, there's no way I can get back in next year.” He did say that he had a slim chance to return if a planned parent's petition to return him had any effect on the Board of Directors. “They feel the punishment exceeds the crime,” said Reavis.

Don Jamison, the president of the Board of Directors was reached for comment Sunday and said, “officially, the Board of Directors has no comment on the matter one way or another. We have our own thoughts, but we will make no rebuttal.” Jamison refused to say anything further.

Reavis reacted to the statement by Jamison by saying, “That's the attitude they have

taken. They feel too much is being made about the problem.” No other members of the leadership of the Waldorf Little League could be reached for comment.

At the meeting, the parents were upset that Reavis had been dismissed, according to Reavis, and wanted to know specifically why he had been removed. Several said that they were satisfied with the job that Reavis and his assistant had been doing. The meeting turned into a shouting match between several parents and the board, which felt that Reavis was “nit picking.” Reavis said that some remarks got “pretty personal.” He also said that the Board did nothing on the matter.

Reavis, in a phone interview Sunday evening, offered further views on the little league. He was quick to praise most of the officials, coaches and parents. “Most of the coaches in the majors and majority in the minors are good. The Board of Directors, and there are 11 of them, honestly try to put out a good effort, and they are really in it for the kids.” He also said that the majority of the parents were “super.”

He did, however, charge further misconduct by a few coaches and parents, though he was quick to point out again that they were in the minority.

“Out of the 12 minor league coaches, about five should calm down a little bit, to say the

least,” Reavis said. “Minor league is the lowest form of organized baseball there is, but they treat every game like the World Series. No one feels worse than a kid when he makes a mistake, and he doesn’t need anyone screaming at him when he does. By the same token, Little League shouldn’t be like a day camp. They should be taught discipline and baseball.” Going on to the parents, Reavis claimed that the problem was the parent’s abuse of the umpires. “They get on the umpires a lot and as a result, the kids start on the umps. It’s a minority of the parents that do this, but when you have 600 parents, even a minority is a large number.”

Reavis said that many parents are angry when they hear that their children have been mistreated either physically or verbally by coaches. “I’ve had some tell me that if their kids don’t play for different teams next year, they won’t play at all.”

After the letter appeared in The Citizen News, Reavis said that he got a number of phone calls from parents and coaches. “Those supporting me ran about 4 to 1,” Reavis said. “and of the parents who called, 100 percent were for me. I got one or two calls from coaches, who knew who they were from the incidents outlined in the letter, who told me off, and some of the calls weren’t very nice. They felt that I had been mistaken. I even had a couple of coaches’

wives call me in support. Most of the coaches who called took no stand.”

Although Reavis said no specific action had been taken at the meeting, several rule changes have been or will be made as result of his letter. One is that if a pitcher hits three batters in a game, he is out, and another is that a player can't play for two coaches two years running. That, according to Reavis, is to downplay the draft. Every year, the coaches evaluate the prospective tryouts and hold a draft of the new hopefuls. It was one of the things Reavis spoke out against.

So, although it appears that Reavis will not return next year, his protests may have sparked some rule changes and some awakening to the problems in little league. Reavis said in a statement about Little League in general, “Overall it's good for the kids if it is put in the proper perspective.”

Many people in the local Little League never spoke to me again and I returned their hate by refusing to acknowledge their presence as human beings. Besides, the freedom from demanding extracurricular activities allowed me to address all energies toward my career. The Business Systems Markets Division sales force, the only group of marketing people in the Eastman Kodak Company to sell directly to end users as opposed to dealer organizations, had advanced over the years to a point

where it had become known as the “class organization” in its field. Although we were respected by business and industry for our professional and ethical approach to marketing, I jealously took exception to more awesome marketing reputations of other equally prominent international corporations and, in December of 1974, was given the opportunity to compete in the “big leagues” of the business world. Hundreds of millions of dollars in research invested by KODAK over many years had finally yielded a technologically superior high speed copier-duplicator and our company planned to introduce the product in a marketplace dominated by such giants as Xerox and IBM. I was selected to serve in the initial cadre of twenty-four field sales people charged with the responsibility of launching a project which had the potential of becoming one of the most formidable marketing achievements of the twentieth century. For about five months, three of us worked behind locked doors in our sales office in Washington, D.C. – one of eight major cities in which the project was to be introduced. Because of the priority of the program, the Caribbean trip that I had won as a result of my sales record in ’74 was postponed and Sue and I were instead treated to a week in Bermuda in the spring of ’75 as retribution.

I became obsessed with the job as my hours at the office increased and our success in D.C. was so phenomenal that we placed more machines in 1975 than almost all of the other sales offices combined. A second wave of equally impressive products were introduced in early ’76 and we completed the year as the number one marketing center ahead of a long list of cities which had been opened over the previous eighteen months. In the

process the sales force had increased to hundreds of people nationally as our sudden success drove us at a feverish pitch. Recognizing that a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity existed for me to finally achieve something meaningful out of life and leave a personal mark in the history of American industry, I became like a man desperately possessed. Personal success and the accompanying recognition only whetted my appetite for me as I began staying out later at night, drinking more, and cursing the days which offered too few hours for my hectic schedule. I was winning tremendous sales over the most experienced representatives that Xerox and IBM could throw at me and I wallowed in the glory of it all. Like Sherman's march through Georgia, I left a torrid path and when the dust settled at the conclusion of the 1976 sales year, I had become the number one Sales Representative in the company by personally accounting for over ten percent of all machine placements nationwide! Our product line became the "standard of the industry" as many publications heralded our feat as "one of the most impressive entries into any marketplace" that they had ever seen. I had reached the top of Macho Mountain and had become the company's brightest rising star with unlimited heights of potential levels of advancement.

One result of the sudden climb to fame was that my needs at home were no longer satisfied by a wife who coexisted at converse wavelengths and our decaying relationship led to occasional arguments which increased over the years. Sue adamantly resisted change, balked at mingling with aspiring corporate wives, shuttered at the mere thought of entertaining in our home, and became what I considered to be a detriment to my career. I

resented the fact that she had become almost incapable of expressing adequate love and affection toward me and felt that she always disappointed me at the most critical times in my life. I made it clear that I would never forget nor forgive and we eventually found it difficult to even relate to each other or share meaningful conversations without bitter disputes. Frustrations erupted over our inability to communicate and Chris' increasing demands for constant care served as a perpetual depressant. Serving as chairman of various fundraising activities and eventually on the Board of Directors at Chris' school helped me to rationalize the guilt complex about my lack of keen interest in him; however, Sue was strapped with the burden twenty-four hours a day in addition to serving the needs of Doug and Mike. While I was establishing myself in the annals of industrialized nations, she had exhausted every conceivable avenue of help for Chris – except one.

A book entitled Brain Child, the true story about a mentally retarded young girl and her parents' extensive search for help, motivated Sue to research all available information on the theories of treatment for handicapped persons by what was known as the Doman-Delacato Method. The father of a brain injured child authored a book called Todd which further explained the impressive results that his son had achieved after years of applying the unconventional methods recommended by the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential located in Philadelphia. Although initially opposed to the idea of applying Chris for placement on the one-year waiting list, I finally agree – mainly in an effort to appease Sue. I was too much a realist to seriously expect miraculous results for Chris but how could I deny Sue one last-ditch attempt to acquire help for our boy? Chris was

accepted and his scheduled visit to Philadelphia in the summer of '76 was suddenly postponed when, on Mother's Day, he broke his left leg. Awakening early one morning to screams from his room, we arrived to find him hanging upside down from the railing around his crib. The entire weight of his body was suspended only by his leg which caused the thigh bone (femur) to shatter. He was in traction for five weeks and was confined for another two months to a cast which covered him from arm pits to toe on the left leg and to the knee of his right leg.

Ironically, our visit to Philadelphia was rescheduled for five days in September which also happened to be the most critical period of time for my project at work; however, much to my chagrin, it was too late to renig on my commitment to Sue. We spent an entire week at the Institutes where Chris underwent extensive diagnostic testing while Sue and I were schooled to treat our child in methods which theoretically programmed unused cells in the brain to assume the activities of cells which were missing. A rigorous schedule at home was to be strictly enforced from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. In order to be effective the program required a total commitment and absolute adherence seven days a week by the entire family as well as a host of others. Organizing the program took almost three weeks as Sue called everyone we knew personally and many whom we knew only indirectly in an effort to recruit volunteers to help "pattern" Chris. Sue's Uncle Richie again constructed a myriad of equipment, her two aunts came in twice weekly to help with the household chores, and forty volunteers per week paraded in on a pre-arranged schedule as Sue began working constantly with Chris for nine hours per day with only a

thirty minute break for lunch. The patterning sessions lasted for five minutes each as three people synchronized the movement of Chris' legs, arms and head in an effort to simulate normal patterns of movement which were skipped in his early stages of development. Some nights, we made Doug assume one of the positions necessary in patterning and his eight year old arms would ache from the strain as we doggedly insisted that he not stop until the session was complete. I initially participated in the 8:00 P.M. sessions and half-heartedly relieved Sue on some weekends but my nightly time of arrival at home gradually became later and later and my selfish attempts to avoid relieving Sue on Saturdays and Sundays became more of a hindrance to her which further fueled the flames of growing resentment between us. Sue's belief in the program and endless determination drove her relentlessly nine hours per day, seven days per week, from the end of September through the beginning of January (including Thanksgiving and Christmas) until she was physically and mentally exhausted. She finally gave up – not as a result of accepting defeat or doubt as to the validity of the program – but solely for the sake of the family and preserving whatever was left of our marriage. Shortly after Chris' sixth birthday, all of Sue's hopes and dreams for our son ended the day that she placed him back on the Spring Dell School Bus. While her horrifying emotional ordeal may have appeared to end, it signaled the beginning of mental anguish the depths of which only she could ever understand. Furthermore, the cursed word "atrophy" could have been used in defining what my selfishness had done to our relationship.

That same January, in 1977, I was promoted to the prestigious assignment of coordinating our marketing

activities nationally to the federal government and in the spring Sue and I, along with a select few sales people and their spouses, accompanied members of top management and their wives on a Caribbean cruise in celebration of our success the preceding year. The gap which separated Sue and me overshadowed our luxurious visits to all of the glamour ports as we tolerated each other's company but rarely discussed anything meaningful. That summer the pinnacle of my career was achieved when I was offered the job as Copy Products Sales Manager in Philadelphia. My efforts had paid off! The job represented an almost unprecedented leap over many rungs of the corporate ladder as I enthusiastically accepted and became, what I am sure, was the youngest sales manager in the illustrious history of the Eastman Kodak Company. I had achieved success and recognition beyond my wildest dreams and was on the verge of landing in the midst of Upper Middle Class America – an envious pedestal sought by most of the entire world! Sue's attitude regarding the move was more refrained as she reluctantly considered leaving friends, Chris' school and the only home that Doug and Mike had ever known – not to mention our increasingly bitter relationship which offered an insecure future.

I sold the kids on the excitement of discovering a new environment and convinced Sue that the change would be good for both of us. Perhaps the move represented our one chance of reconciliation and am sure that her primary motivation for acceptance was the possibility of salvaging our marriage. We both openly considered the prospects of my moving to Philadelphia alone but neither of us really wanted to separate. Therefore, we all moved to a little township located in the

rolling hills of northeast Pennsylvania – an extremely affluent area with one of the highest standards of living in the entire country. We bought a luxurious, custom built, two-story colonial house situated on an acre of land in the midst of a few larger homes owned by people with impressive credentials from a variety of respected professions. The picturesque surroundings with completely shaded country roads, peace and tranquility provided a statuesque setting for suburban living at its best. Our house offered a two-car garage which was connected by a huge family room and, of course, the interior was replete with Vermont slate in the foyer, elegant pewter chandelier, plush color coordinated carpeting, many square yards of Solarian tile in the kitchen and special-order light fixtures. At the age of thirty-two, I had fulfilled my commitment to give my sons the best of everything including friends with ambitious goals for success, a home of which they could be proud, a solid educational foundation and all the material possessions that I never had. I wanted them to be proud of their successful father who established for them a lifestyle that assured their own future success. Ahhh, the American Dream!

Sue loved the area and was satisfied with Chris' new school; however, unlike our old neighborhood, there were only a few children for Doug and Mike to play with. Both of our boys were desperately homesick. In Waldorf they had an unlimited number of playmates and activities but most of the kids in their new world were older, rebellious and spoiled rotten. The majority of the “well bred” offspring used foul-language, shared in the use of drugs the instant they stepped from the school bus and congregated in the streets while their parents either

worked or enjoyed leisure time at the nearby country clubs. My business trips increased to as many as four nights a week since I was responsible for opening sales offices in downtown Philadelphia, Wilmington, Del., Allentown, Pa., Cherry Hill, N.J., and Harrisburg while almost all of my time at home was dedicated to wading through reams of paperwork. I seldom made myself available to the kids and many weekends actually let them occupy themselves at the office while I worked! Instead of an improved relationship between Sue and me, the increased friction had made everyone's life so depressing that by Christmas I had almost convinced Sue that our marriage should end. Finally, late one evening when Doug's crying woke me and he tearfully confided, "Dad, my life's like a nightmare," I made a decision to insist that Sue take the kids back to Maryland. Our boys' lives were filled with misery and it was inexcusable that they should suffer as a result of their parents' inability to communicate. I reasoned that they would be better off by receiving love from separated parents instead of the wrath of impatient frustrations from a plastic family.

Sue and I still felt love for each other in spite of our differences but years of resentment and mutual inabilities to express emotion bred further contempt. It was as though we could neither live with each other nor live apart. Sue's attempts to enlighten me as to potential hazards of blind ambition were taken personally and I reasoned that someday the boys would surely understand. She made sincere attempts at keeping us together but my selfish rejections repeatedly resulted in emotional torture. We agreed to sell the house and for Sue and the kids to move back to the old neighborhood in Waldorf. The kids were elated as I explained that I would be with them on

weekends. Initially, my absence would not be sorely missed because they rarely saw me during the week anyway. Sue purchased a little three-bedroom house around the corner from our old home and on March 30, 1978, approximately fifteen excited kids warmly welcomed Doug and Mike back home.

The cruelty in my treatment of Sue during our eight months in Pennsylvania can be detected in the following excerpts from a notebook in which she recorded many of her inner-most thoughts. She found solace in writing as a means of relieving frustrations and has graciously allowed me to share some of her personal feelings. Until recently, I was totally unaware of the notebook which helped her to maintain relative sanity during an extremely difficult situation and also did not realize until later the profound wisdom in much of her philosophy.

Jan. 3, 1978 – “Three days into the new year and each one has been worse than the previous. I thought I had myself together and then for some God-awful reason I tortured myself again with another ‘last attempt’ at holding us together. Why do I keep doing this to myself?”

Jan. 8, 1978 – “I’ve done it again after promising us both that I wouldn’t. Another gut plea for a chance or a hope of beginning together again. I’m driving him further away each time I do this and I know it... He will never be as deeply loved by any one else – but that doesn’t matter because even a surface love that’s made known is better than the deepest love that is kept suppressed. God, I want so badly to be a part of this new life and job of his

and I want to go up with him. I know he wants this climb now and I want it with him. I know I could be an asset to him wherever he goes. Why didn't I force my feelings on him – regardless of his rejections? I know he needed that – it's in his nature... I am now finding solace in devising ways to commit suicide... But just to show how bad off I am – get this – the thing that stops me is the very thing that is supposed to be the reason for it in the first place. To hurt or punish someone – right? Oh no, not me. You see I know for a fact that Ted would not be punished or hurt by that. He would be angry – that's it. He'd be totally angry and would absolutely detest the thought of me for taking the 'ultimate cop-out' ... To think that we have gone through eleven years together with more crises than most couples face in a lifetime – and now we don't even speak or touch or even look at each other ... I've never been a devout believer but somehow have always had an underlying faith and a relatively optimistic view about everything. But now it seems I've been slowly taught otherwise and those things which were such a part of my being have been destroyed. I am such an uncomplicated person who has been living a hellaciously complicated life with an even more complex person..."

Jan. 10, 1978 – “A try at analyzing this situation and so much that led to it – maybe it helps – maybe it doesn't. It surely won't change anything. Ted has always expected so very much of people – perfection you might call it – but his version of perfection. The flaw in this and one I could never overcome was that he never left room for human nature and human weakness, especially in me. Maybe because I was his wife and I above all should have lived up to those standards – maybe this is why he has had less patience with me than with anyone else he

encounters. With his people at work he has been kind, helpful, and above all, patient. He wanted them to think the world of him and he gave his all to achieve that – and they do. For some reason he could persevere with these people and I can guarantee he always will and his impressive character will always stay intact with them. Why didn't he extend this patient, tolerant character he has with others to me? He tried, as we both know, to make me communicate with him. What I don't think he will ever see is the way he approached this with me. He would never conceive of how very brutal his attempts were – how mentally and emotionally battering they were. Rather than a true sense of wanting to communicate and develop a closeness between us, he was actually (and not realizing it himself I don't think) very attacking and accusing with me which is what drove me to further retreat into myself. Can anyone respond in a loving way to someone who demands love and attention and then invariably rejects it? The ironic damn thing is that one kind sentence from him would have given him exactly what he wanted. We all need to be reminded from time to time, no matter who we are or what our situation is, that we are being overcome by daily routine and must be jolted from the mechanics of it to our true meaning in life – our love for one another. But this must be done in a gentle, loving way and any other way defeats the purpose – which it did.

Jan. 13, 1978 – “... Knowing Ted's character and how difficult it would be for him to ever put this behind him... I think I finally, finally, know that even with another chance, we would never make it. And I also realize that I am almost completely resolved to leaving

and beginning a new life for myself ... Today will be the day the decision is made – ironically, on Friday the 13th.”

Jan. 16, 1978 – “I don’t have to know where I’m going – at least I know I’m on my way! ... It’s truly amazing how fast a person can grow up – form mature, realistic attitudes and acquire a sense of realism and insight... from now on I’m going to be me and will be accountable to me – and me alone ... The boys and I are leaving as soon as the house in Maryland is ready.”

Jan. 24, 1978 – “The dreams are coming back. They’re nearly shattering my perception and ability to handle this God-awful situation. They won’t get me, though, because I’ve become too detached from all emotion and feeling about anything. They are bad – they make me revert back to thinking of things that I have, out of desperation and months of grueling anguish, blocked from my mind ... He would know all too well what these dreams can do to shatter a person – he had them quite often for many years ... I suppose the dreams come out with the ‘institution of divorce’ – one of the lesser of the side effects ... I could almost hate – I hope it doesn’t come to that because it will surely ruin me.”

Jan. 29, 1978 – “... God, if you’re up there, I sure hope the reward is coming up somewhere – or why, in Your name, would we put here in the first place?! My truest and deepest belief is that of absolute love and happiness – and they’re so shattered that it’s hard, no, to believe in anything. The only thing I can count on and believe in now is myself. I sure don’t feel as though that’s much to go on – but I do know that that’s the only thing anyone has and everything else will fall into place ...”

Feb. 5, 1978 – “ ... my love surpasses all pent up anger, resentment, and frustration that I’ve had and will

have over the years – and, with his acceptance of me, I could rid myself of those destructive feelings. But because those feelings are so strong in him – stronger even than his love (I think), that they are going to destroy him and me – us as a couple. It boils down to we can't live with each other and we can't live without each other. Why can't he allow himself, and me, to be human – to feel natural feelings but to know that these feelings have a proper perspective and that he has always let the destructive one take precedence over the fulfilling ones.”

Feb. 6, 1978 – “... He seems to think I'll never let him forget it if we split – it's him and his conscience that won't let him forget.”

Feb. 7, 1978 – “... There is no turning back now. It's over and done and as they say when someone dies (or in this case – something), there's nothing left but the clean-up expenses ... love can not overcome all obstacles! I sure had to learn that the hard way, didn't I?”

Feb. 8, 1978 – “... this is the day of finality. I truly and very deeply love Ted. If there was any possible way that he could overcome his resentments, frustrations and angers over all my human failings ... but this love that he professes is not strong enough to overcome these feelings – that's the crux of it. If he could only forgive and forget and get on with the really important things in life. Maybe one day he'll see it – I can always hope ... as far as the kids are concerned – I think this is the absolute worst thing that could happen to them – long term. Short term it will probably work out all right but no kid who loves a parent that he has to live without will ever grow up without some kind of long term negative effect. Still – after all of this – I am a true believer in the family institution and that a child has a 99% better chance at a good normal life in

such a family unit. I could say, look at Ted – a prime example of past family problems but a successful adult businessman. He’s done terrific things considering his background – but his background will always rule his life because his background is what made him impossibly complex and hung-up almost to a paranoid point. I don’t think he knows how he can never truly be happy until he somehow rids himself of those masocistic hang-ups. God, I wish I could help him to realize it.”

Feb. 11, 1978 – “... This may well turn out to be another false hope, but I feel, almost compulsively, that he will one day realize what all he’s giving up and that it does mean a lot more to him than his impossible search for total happiness ... He’ll one day see that it’s much more himself than me who has made him unhappy. When he’s free of his self-inflicted miseries and uncertainties...”

Feb. 14, 1978 – “... but he doesn’t have what it takes to be (in my eyes) a really good man. That is, enough security in himself and the knowledge of the true meaning in life to truly incorporate himself into a relationship. He relates to people on his level, but not with people on their level – and that’s what it’s all about.”

Feb. 19, 1978 – “He asked me my gut feeling about this whole thing and I tried to tell him that I feel as though he’s making a mistake by trying to find that bit of something missing in his life and, in the meantime, throwing everything else away that means so much to him. What I truly believe is that the drastic change in me and my entire attitude toward him and our relationship, we could eventually have something fantastic – even better than it was at its best. But – he’s not ready for that – and I’m not quite either. I think this separation will do

a great deal to bring us closer together on a much different level than ever before... in time, I honestly think we may one day be together again.”

March 2, 1978 – “... I can hardly stand to be around Ted anymore mainly because I can hardly respect him anymore and – well, I guess because I just plain don’t like him much.”

March 5, 1978 – “... I’ll miss this house and everything in it that I chose. I could love it so much if I was able to finish it – I love it now – I’ll always feel that much of me – my dreams and hopes – will be left in this house in little Buckingham, Pa.”

March 6, 1978 – “I feel a need to say something – I want to write, but don’t know exactly what it is I want to say... Maybe, with some help, one day I’ll be able to write what just can’t come out now.”

March 13, 1978 – “There is the slightest twinges of something really important happening inside of me. Since this all began, it seems I’ve been reacting through sheer emotion and conditioning. As dramatic as it may sound, something is happening in the very depths of my being and is trying very hard to surface. I can’t begin to explain it, but it has something to do with a concept much larger than this entire situation which, until now, was all I could relate to. There is the virgin feeling in me that I truly have a faith – and it is partially a concept of self in relation to everything else. No matter how close to someone a person is, the time will ultimately come when they realize that they are truly alone in this world and that only they have control over their lives on this earth. When they realize this and begin to live their lives accordingly, then, if they truly accept this concept, they will make it in this world. I can’t explain this the way I feel it yet – maybe

one day it will all surface – I hope so because it’s good, and comfortable, and right. Could this be the approach to the threshold of self-reliance and self security?”

March 20, 1978 – “Something really good has happened – I think it’s an extension of that concept that has been surfacing – it’s come a long way and I’m feeling very comfortable with it. As far as the bitterness and resentment – (I think that’s cyclical) - ... it isn’t a large part of my character ... I’m happy about that ... it makes me feel good about myself ... The difference will be (and is already) a self-comfort and, perhaps, even a serenity.”

April 1, 1978 – “It’s been quite awhile since I’ve felt the need to write – and the time is here again. I’ve made the move, am in Maryland, and trying to get settled. Ted’s been thinking about giving up KODAK for a sports shop (which he’d absolutely love to do) but, as he says, is now stuck with KODAK for the rest of his life...”

While awaiting an acceptable offer on our home, I lived alone in the empty house in Pennsylvania and visited the kids in Maryland every weekend while continuing to pursue my almighty career. The hurt in having to leave the kids every Sunday night combined with my time alone gradually forced me to consider how much I really loved Sue in spite of my resentment toward her. Although I failed to understand her attempted explanation of inner peace, I constantly contemplated her new conviction that fulfillment in life stems from the knowledge of one’s self and that happiness can only come from within. I came to realize that I had lost perspective of almost everything that was really important to me and that I had set my

family adrift in order to seek satisfaction for my own self-serving, inflated ego. Doug was about the same age as I had been when I was separated from my dad, Chris' needs were far more important than my selfish demands, Mike needed a loving father and Sue and I did, in fact, love each other. Like serving at Chris' school instead of accepting him as a son, I tried to rationalize my guilt by sending a monthly check to the family. However, contempt for Sue, my inability to forget and forgive, and selfish pride still prevented me from facing up to my mistakes. Our situation was better explained by further excerpts from Sue's notebook:

April 5, 1978 – “I think I have finally learned to stop praying for what I want and to ask just for guidance for Ted and for me. Whether together or not, whatever it is will be what's best for both of us.”

April 8, 1978 – “Ted came Saturday (his first weekend visit) and left Sunday afternoon. It was very strange – as though he was visiting in a place he didn't belong. He seemed so uncomfortable... He asked for a blanket and slept on the couch...”

April 16, 1978 – “Another Sunday night and Ted has come and gone. This weekend was much better than last, maybe because we had a talk (phone) on Wednesday ... I don't know if it was easier because he's happier apart or because he wants us to be together.”

April 23, 1978 – “It's Sunday night again. Each weekend seems to get a little better ... We played tennis Sunday – just the two of us. It was really fun and we actually laughed together.’

May 3, 1978 – “... am not able to believe this relationship won’t eventually work out. It’s pretty much summed up in this:

If you love somebody

Let them go

If they come back

They’re yours

If they don’t

They never were.”

May 14, 1978 – “Ted came on Wednesday and spent five days with us. He’s been sick and decided to take off a few days and come down here. It was unbelievably unpressured for me – and I hope for him.”

Like the day that Sue placed Chris back on the Spring Dell School Bus, I gave up many of my own hopes and dreams for the sake of the family when I resigned from KODAK in June. Sue accepted my return home even though I was incapable of adequately explaining my changing priorities in life and we never really discussed our many differences. I spent the next five weeks with Sue and the kids as we rediscovered the simple pleasures derived from sharing as a family. I even bought myself an old motorcycle and carried Mike along with me as we trailed behind Doug on his YAMAHA dirt bike. The temporary retreat from reality, however, did not erase my concern for providing for the family as well as the kids’ future needs – especially those of Chris. The uncertainties involved in opening a small sports store and my lack of credentials in any other profession dictated that I return

to a career in marketing. I accepted an attractive offer to work as a Sales Manager for a corporation in the D.C. area and resigned after exactly four days on the job when I rebelled against the familiar pitfalls inherent in corporate management – excessive time away from the family. I vowed to never again compromise my family's happiness for any job even if it meant providing the kids with fewer material possessions. We had learned the hard way that there were more important things in life.

Realizing that I was doomed to a career in sales as the only realistic means of maintaining our minimum standard of living, I attempted to return to the one company which offered the most security for my family's future. Swallowing all pride for the first time in my life, I flew to KODAK headquarters in Rochester where I met with the National Sales manager and requested to be rehired as a Sales Representative in the Washington-Baltimore area. Blind luck, similar to my initial employment twelve years earlier, was with me again as I sensed that the aging executive perhaps reflected a part of himself in me. As one of his last official acts before retirement, he granted my precedent-setting reinstatement with no interruption in my benefits or tenure. Therefore, with a refreshing new set of priorities, I was given the rare opportunity to retrace my steps.

It was extremely difficult to return as a fallen star to a business environment which I had once dominated in terms of success. I quietly accepted my position at the bottom of the totem pole and faced a daily gauntlet of humiliating situations which taxed my tolerance level for humbleness. I survived the initial humiliation by maintaining a low profile and disciplining myself to accept things as they were; however, I was less patient in dealing

with silent frustrations at home as Sue and I fumbled many attempts at bridging our communications gap. Like an incompetent actor portraying someone completely opposite to his own personality, I was going through the motions but obviously giving a poor performance. It was as though a time bomb was ticking away inside of me and nothing could be done to prevent its explosion. On August 18, 1978, exactly seven days before the event that drastically changed our lives, Sue made one final entry in her notebook:

August 18, 1978 – “Well, it’s been three months since I’ve felt a need to write. So much has happened since last time. Ted came back to live with us – he quit KODAK and I guess decided the family was more important than the job. Even after all we’ve been through, things haven’t changed much between us. He’s trying awfully hard to swallow his pride with me and especially with KODAK because he went back with them as a sales rep. All the right things seem to have been done and all the proper words have been spoken, but somehow there’s still that lack of peace in Ted. I think the humiliation of it all is quickly proving more than he can take – he says it’s right and he says he’s happy with all his decisions but his actions say his mind is in a real turmoil. It will only be a matter of time before it all erupts again and I’m convinced we’ll eventually split for good. At least next time I’ll get through it okay.

I think it would take a devastating tragedy or a true miracle to ever make him see what it’s all about – but even then, I have my doubts.”

CHAPTER IX

WHY ME LORD?

Following Guy's retirement in 1972 from the federal government, he and my mother resided near the Chesapeake Bay in the summer months and in Florida in the winter. We continued to enjoy our annual hunting excursions and he helped me to build an addition onto my house before establishing permanent residence in Harrisonburg, Virginia in 1975. The following year he pursued his favorite pastime of playing the fiddle by joining a Country and Western band called "Bonnie Lou and the Skyliners." That year not only marked the events which led to my emergence as a "hero" in the business world and our ordeal with Chris' program at home, but also ushered in the somber news that Guy was suffering from cancer. A small lump appeared on his right shoulder and exploratory surgery on May sixth confirmed sarcoma – a rare form of the disease found primarily in muscles and lymph glands of youths. A relatively new medicine from Italy represented one outside chance of beating the dreaded killer in its early stage; however, the National Institute of Health rejected Guy for treatment because of his history of heart trouble. Apparently while the medication represented potential arrest of that particular type of cancer, it also posed as a threat to a weak heart. Therefore, in the summer Guy was subjected to a series of thirty-six cobalt treatments at the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville and in January of 1977,

he underwent more drastic treatment in the form of chemotherapy as the growth on the front of his shoulder continued to increase in size. All the while, Guy continued to play the fiddle in the band which pursued a vigorous schedule of appearances at barn dances and other events in the Shenandoah Valley.

“Not on your life!”, was Guy’s reply to the physician who recommended amputation of the entire right arm and shoulder in the spring.

After further prompting and reasoning from the doctor, Guy solemnly replied, “I’ll have to think about that for a long time.”

A few weeks later when it was discovered that the malignancy had spread in the form of a small spot on one of his lungs, Guy clearly explained his position by declaring to the doctor, “I’ll play the fiddle as long as I can possibly do it and I’m gonna’ take my arm with me when I go!”

With that, he promptly visited the local funeral home as a “future customer” and made arrangements with the astounded proprietor. He then proceeded to hire a drummer boy to accompany him in recording a tape of his favorite fiddle tunes for the family.

In September of 1977, Guy accidentally tripped and fell on his right hand causing profuse bleeding from one of the major veins in his right arm and the doctors subsequently initiated a series of extremely painful procedures aimed at shutting off the three major veins which fed the rapidly growing tumor. The first two attempts were successful but Guy refused the third tortuous treatment. Shortly thereafter, the sickening malignancy rendered him so weak that it forced him to

give up playing the fiddle. My mother nursed Guy continually and while she was changing bandages on the enormous tumor in November, his shoulder actually divided when he moved his arm. He finally agreed to seriously consider amputation.

Our move to Pennsylvania, marital problems, and my self-serving career kept me from confronting my guilt about not expressing outward emotion for Guy or concern for his predicament. I did, however, drive to Harrisonburg to discuss with his doctors the decision regarding amputation. The physician confirmed that Guy was obviously going to die from cancer and that the shoulder had to be removed immediately in order to afford at least some degree of relief from his suffering. He also expressed amazement at Guy's positive attitude at such late stages of his illness and the patient's continued determination to beat the disease that plagued him. I think my closest moment with my step-father occurred when we reviewed our thoughts concerning the doctor's recommendations. Sitting in the living room with him and my mother, I almost apologetically indicated that, after having talked to the doctor at great length, I felt that having the shoulder removed was the best thing to do. Only silence followed as we maintained eye contact for a long time before all three of us awkwardly attempted to conceal our tears. It was as though at that moment Guy realistically came to grips with his destiny; however, in the months that followed he never once sought self pity and even went to great lengths to comfort others who grieved over his suffering.

Although my sacred business schedule in Pennsylvania prevented me from joining members of the family and friends at the hospital the day of Guy's surgery

in November, I was told that before entering the operating room he made an ugly face and sarcastically declared, “Y’all hand around – I’ll be right back!”

Guy recovered enough from the amputation of his right arm and shoulder to buy an electric bass guitar and amplifier less than ninety days after the operation and in a very short period of time taught himself how to play it – left handed! Even after I assigned him the handle of “Lefty,” he maintained his contagious sense of humor and remarkably adjusted to his misfortune. He refused to outwardly consider himself handicapped as he constantly invented new techniques for self reliance; however, by mid summer of 1978, in spite of his inner strength, the cursed disease had mercilessly delivered Guy to death’s door.

By then, I had returned to my family in Maryland and we all visited Guy and my mother one weekend in July. I found out later that while Doug, Mike and I were riding our motorcycles in the mountains, Sue had openly discussed with Guy and my mother the book Life After Life and my wife’s conviction that a person’s spirit continued to live on after the bodily death. Apparently the opportunity to discuss “the happy hunting ground” was a relief to him as he explained his “death” experience during his second heart attack. He had never before divulged to anyone that when he “died” for seven minutes in the emergency room he had seen and talked with his cousin, Gernie, who had been dead for forty years. He said that they had been very close friends and Guy apparently was comforted by their reunion. Beside his bed he also saw a large shadow of a hand reaching out, palm upward, as though it were going to lead him somewhere and he added that it was a calming, peaceful,

reassuring gesture which he did not question. The conversation about death between Sue, my mother, and Guy ended abruptly when I returned with the kids as Sue explained that I would vehemently object to such nonsense and, under the circumstances, would probably be upset by her audacity. Half jokingly, she concluded by insisting that he somehow let her know if her beliefs were really true and he replied with a grin and a promise that he would try. That was the last time that Sue saw Guy.

In August, he re-entered the hospital for the last time as his condition had deteriorated to a helpless state. I drove to Harrisonburg on the twelfth and, recognizing the severity of the situation, immediately began to make necessary arrangements in anticipation of his death. Helplessly watching Guy's excruciating demise demanded personal soul searching and I became obsessed with helping the entire family and doing precisely what I felt he and my mother wanted. Perhaps such action served to rationalize my own guilt about never having expressed true feelings to him, but my every thought was prompted by profound love for the man and a sincere concern for others – a first in my life. I made every attempt to comfort my mother (also a first for me), mechanically notified many family and friends, hired a person to sit with Guy at night, and made all necessary arrangements with the funeral home proprietor who remembered Guy from his shocking visit the previous year. After a couple of days I returned home, bought the prescribed clothes in which Guy had requested to be buried and drove back to Harrisonburg where I stayed until late Sunday night, the twentieth.

I arrived home around 2:00 A.M. and my mother called the following afternoon with the sad news that Guy

had passed away at noon. I raced back to Harrisonburg after making arrangements for Sue to pick up Charles and Viv who, after having just returned to Chicago from visiting Guy over the weekend, were catching the next available flight to D.C. That night, my mother and I drove to the funeral home where we made last minute arrangements for chapel services to be held in Harrisonburg on Tuesday evening and funeral services which were scheduled for Guy's hometown of Hillsville on Thursday. As I sat reverently in the back of the chapel of the funeral home while my mother shared time alone with her departed husband, I rediscovered a twinge of respect and love for the woman whom I had shunned ever since my childhood and even sensed a trace of admiration in consideration of her devoted care to Guy throughout his illness. However, those long forgotten feelings were in no way to be confused with my hard core commitment to never – ever – forget or forgive.

On Tuesday evening while Charles and I accompanied my mother, other family members and many friends in memorial services for Guy, Sue and Viv drove to Dulles Airport to pick up Linda who had flown in from Denver. After having visited Guy two weeks earlier, she had joined her family on vacation and telephoned every twenty-four to forty-eight hours to check on Guy's condition before arriving in Harrisonburg around midnight. The memorial service which deeply touched the hearts of everyone was concluded by the playing of three of Guy's favorite hymns which had been recorded specifically for the service by the band in which he had been a member. In light of Guy's prolonged suffering, the degree of his inner faith, consideration of others, and, above all, his humility was perhaps best personified by the

words of one of those hymns, the last verse of which almost prophesized events which occurred over the next three days:

Why me Lord, what have I ever done
That was worth even one
Of the pleasures I've known.
Tell me Lord, what did I ever do
That was worth loving You
For the kindness You've shown.

Lord help me Jesus, I've wasted it so
Help me Jesus, I know what I am.
Now that I know that
I've needed You so
Help me Jesus, my soul's in Your hands.

Try me Lord, if You think there's a way
I could ever repay
All I've taken from You.
Oh, Lord, I could show someone else
What I've been through myself
On my way back to you.

Sue and I drove Linda to the funeral home about 2:30 A.M. in order that she might be alone with Guy for a short while and the three of us continued to drive around the countryside until about 5:00 A.M. Even though Linda was distraught over Guy's death, obviously exhausted from her trip and the emotional stress of helping her family to enjoy its vacation in spite of her sorrow, we continued to talk throughout the night and watched the sunrise on Wednesday morning. Sue had gone to bed around 6:00 A.M. but not before (I found out later) having a "talk" with Guy. Her account of the one-way conversation:

"Guy, if you're there – remember your promise. I really want to know if you're living on. I have the feeling that you're watching all of this and are aware of everything. I would like to know I'm right and that you're O.K. If it is so, then please give me a sign of some kind – one that is real – one that I will know or recognize. Drop a shoe on my head! Good luck and I hope to hear from you soon."

(Later in the week when someone confronted Sue regarding her obvious lack of emotion or sorrow, she did not attempt to justify her feelings because she honestly feared that people would think she was crazy. She later explained that her inner most feelings were that Guy was much better off than all of us and she genuinely felt good that he had left this life and gone on to a better one. She also later explained that she feared she would be happy rather than sad when I received the phone call announcing Guy's death. When I answered the call she went into the adjoining room, smiled, looked up, and nodded confirmation that he was all right. She also added

later that she especially concealed her feelings from me out of fear of my predictable reaction).

We all drove to Hillsville Wednesday morning and made last minute preparations for burial services before Charles and I checked in at a motel on Main Street in Galax. My mother and Linda made arrangements to stay with our Uncle Sam and Aunt Thelma who also lived on Main Street and we greeted literally hundreds of people at memorial services in Hillsville that evening. Afterward, Sue and I welcomed our first good night's rest in three days and the following morning – Thursday, August 24 – joined our loved ones in paying last respects to the number one member of our family. The religious services and stirring eulogies were given by two of Guy's cousins, the Reverends Barnard Edwards and Carney Burcham, both of whom were also boyhood friends of his. Reverend Edwards, recalling their childhood days together, expressed sincere regret at not having had more time with Guy ... “to just fiddle around.” He further expressed his profound conviction that “surely, there was a place in Heaven for a happy fiddler.”

Sue and I were unaware that the minister's appropriate referral to Guy actually helped to trigger the experience that was to drastically change our lives. I will make not attempt at this time to explain how or why things happened as they did. The following account is simply a description of the sequence of events which occurred over the next few days.

After the comment about the “happy fiddler,” I tried to refrain from crying by focusing my undivided attention on a yellow flower which rested about ten feet in front of me. I concentrated so hard on its center that I actually freed my mind of all influences around me. Sue

reassuringly placed her left hand on my right leg and I responded by picking it up and gently placing it back on her lap. I consciously moved my left leg to be sure that it was not touching Viv who was seated next to me and repeated the same movement with my right leg so that it was not touching Sue. Then, with both of my hands between my things, I ever so slowly, and uncontrollably, began curling into a near fetal position while continually staring at the yellow flower. I remained in that position for what seemed like an eternity but for what Sue estimated to be about two minutes. I then gradually resumed my normal sitting position, relaxed, took Sue's hand and placed it back on my right leg. At that point I was emotionless in that I felt no compulsion whatsoever to cry and was virtually oblivious to my surroundings. It was almost as if I existed in a different world where everything seemed to be perfectly all right in spite of the enormous sorrow in the chapel.

Ironically, while I was focusing my attention on the yellow flower, Sue was staring at a lily located directly in front of her; however, her reasons for looking straight ahead were entirely different from mine. In order to prevent further comments about her questionable attitude, she did not want anyone to see her face which she felt revealed an obvious lack of sympathy for the entire situation. While she concentrated on the white flower she kept "talking" to Guy. Her one-way conversation:

"It's really a shame that all these people are so sad because you and I know that you're O.K. I wish they did. Then, they wouldn't be so sad. Something very strange is happening to Ted. I don't know what it is but it really doesn't matter because I know that you're all right and

whatever is wrong with him will be O.K. as soon as this is all over.”

As Guy’s younger son, Dean, and his Fiancée, Jan, rode with Sue and me to the cemetery, we were touched by the reverent attitude of the local citizenry toward the funeral procession. A policeman, directing traffic at the only intersection in town, removed his hat and held it over his heart until the entire entourage had passed. Along the way, a highway construction crew, standing almost at attention, removed their hard hats and stood respectfully as the hearse drove by. After a brief religious service at the gravesite, the Masons conducted their honored ritual, an American flag in recognition of a deceased veteran was presented to my mother, and taps were played. Throughout the deeply stirring ceremony, neither Sue nor I expressed any emotion at all. After driving Dean and Jan back to the funeral home where their car was parked, Sue and I headed for Guy’s sister’s house where lunch was provided for the entire Stoneman family. After glancing at a music store in Hillsville, I remarked to Sue that I felt a strange compulsion to play the fiddle and we both joked about the prospect.

I followed up the amusing thought by saying seriously, “You’ll never believe this – but – I feel like I just have to learn how to play the fiddle!”

As most of the younger couples were eating lunch in the back yard of Ruth’s house, one of Guy’s nieces from Georgia was summoned to receive a phone call. She was seated in front of me and when she stood up, I stopped eating. I stared at her as she hustled across the yard and into the back of the house and I continued to stare at the door until, in what seemed like a split second, she reappeared and announced, “It’s a boy!”

Apparently one of her friends had called with the news of a birth in the family. At that exact moment, I slowly put my plate on the ground, stood up, and, as if in a daze, started going from person to person in Guy's family (some of whom I barely knew) thanking each for various acts of kindness which they had expressed toward Guy during his long illness. I remember even thanking "V.J.," the husband of one of Guy's nieces, for cleaning out the chimney during one of his visits to Harrisonburg. My sudden outpouring of warmth and gratitude to people was directly opposed to my introverted personality and even though there were those whom I did not thank for specifics, I made it a point to talk to every member of Guy's family. Sue, watching in amazement at my actions, was dumbfounded when I stopped the car when we were leaving because I had left out one family member. "I didn't talk to Ann – I have to talk to her before I leave!", I blurted before returning to the house where I finally found Guy's niece and thanked her for her love and kindness toward him.

We returned to Uncle Sam's house in Galax and visited with members of my mother's family before we drove to Granny Reavis' home where we renewed old acquaintances with many of my father's family. I remember that as I talked with my cousin, Bobby, and his wife, I felt a genuine desire – for the first time in my life – to not only listen compassionately but to also search for more information about them and their lives. At the risk of sounding somewhat melodramatic, it was as though I had suddenly discovered the infinite riches that can be derived from empathy and concern for others. A little while later, Sue even expressed further disbelief at my sudden change of character when she jokingly

commented that I was “almost digging information out of people.”

We drove my mother and Linda back to Uncle Sam’s before Charles, Viv, Sue and I returned to the motel where we each shared a beer together in our room. Charles and Viv returned to their room and, I suppose as is normal under the circumstances, Sue and I began reviewing not only the week’s activities but also some of the individual personalities that we had encountered. We talked for about two hours – until midnight – as we both were relatively upset at the attitude of one particular individual and I concluded with, “I hate to say this, but I could find it very easy to literally hate that person.”

I turned off the bedside lamp and shortly after we had both comfortably positioned ourselves back to back, I half rolled over, slapped Sue on the rump and exclaimed, “He can’t help the way he is – IT’S ALL THE INFLUENCES! It’s not his fault! And the same thing with my mother – she couldn’t help the way she was when I was a kid – it’s all the influences! That’s what’s the matter with everybody! That’s what makes people the way they are – all the influences from when they’re first born. They can’t help it. You can’t change people and you have to accept them because they’ve all been through different influences in their lives to make them what they are. YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT PEOPLE FOR WHAT THEY ARE AND YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT YOURSELF FOR WHAT YOU ARE! Once you accept yourself for what you are and accept others for what they are – that’s the beginning of inner peace!”

Oddly enough, instead of pursuing my strange proclamation, we both quietly rolled over and tried to go to sleep. I then rolled over again and slowly said, “You

know what the secret to life is? THE SECRET OF LIFE IS THAT THERE IS NO SECRET... BUT! ... THE TRUE SECRET IS TO KNOW THAT! And it is no more than doing unto others and being kind and loving and accepting people for what they are and accepting yourself for what you are. Accepting others allows you to love people, be good and kind, give of yourself to others... that's what the secret of life is all about!"

Again, neither of us followed up on the thoughts and we remained quiet for awhile. Then I continued, "PART OF THE SECRET IS THAT IT IS SO SIMPLE THAT WE MAKE IT COMPLICATED! The influences keep us from it. THOSE WHO HAVE 'IT', CAN'T EXPLAIN IT AND THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE IT, CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT! The people who have it understand it, but can't really explain it anyway – even to others who also have it. EVERYBODY HAS TO FIND IT FOR THEMSELVES! And even if they don't find it, it's O.K. because they are all going to find it for themselves eventually anyway – everybody! YOU KEEP GOING AROUND UNTIL YOU GET IT RIGHT!"

Sue, "Reincarnation?!"

"Yes! It all fits!"

Somehow, I then viewed from afar a miniature globe on top of which rested a Ferris wheel that offered twelve seats. The circular motion continued to cycle lives on earth.

I reiterated, "Reincarnation!"

Even though I was totally aware of my senses, it was as though my mind was in a different dimension. I even jokingly said, "Can you believe this is me saying this crap? These aren't my thoughts – these aren't my feelings

– you know me better than that!” Yet, I did not question where all the thoughts were coming from.

Again, Sue and I strangely remained quiet for awhile and I said, “Hey – you’re not going to believe this – you know what? I’m God.”

She laughed out loud at the comment from one of the world’s most devout atheists.

“No, no! I mean it!”

“O.K.!” she replied sarcastically.

Then I joined in the humor, “Are you believing this crap?” I kept fighting the situation by refusing to accept any of the nonsense because of my realistic, scientific philosophy and we again settled down in bed.

Suddenly, I raised up and, pointing upward with my right hand, described to Sue the inside of a large, dark “cone” into which I had somehow inserted my head and was looking around! I experienced an almost unbelievable compulsion to tell the absolute truth about what I was seeing – in exact detail. It was literally impossible for me to lie, exaggerate, hold back, or maintain control over any of the thoughts which were pouring out of me. Again as if in another dimension, the cone looked to be wider at the middle than at both ends which appeared as small openings. I perceived its size to be perhaps from floor to ceiling – but yet endless! I also perceived that the circular opening into which I inserted my head was only wide enough to accept the mind which prevented one’s physical body from entering. I further sensed that everyone had acquired whatever was necessary from the lower end of the cone in our upward journey which prompted my disinterest in looking downward. With my head penetrating the middle of the cone, and not caring to

look downward although I somehow knew that its depths continued for infinity, I was compelled to look upward. I saw six rings above me on the inside of the cone and a very small yet brilliant, calming, peaceful, friendly light and I did not possess the vocabulary to describe the magnitude of happiness and joy which radiated from its glow. Suffice it to say that it was absolute ecstasy! I explained to Sue my feeling that everybody – everybody – would be all right because eventually we all would some day make it out of the cone and into that beautiful light which is everyone’s ultimate goal.

I described the middle of the cone as the existing state of human life on earth. The only way to break the cycle and progress to the next level of life was by not only discovering the secret of life here, but also actually living it. “We keep going around (reincarnation) until we acquire “IT” at each level and ultimately climb out at the top of the cone. That includes every single soul! If people don’t make it – it’s all right because they will make it eventually.”

Like a quagmire, all the influences (greed, selfishness, impatience, power, jealousy, temper, prestige, self pity, money, pride, vanity, peer pressure, all the psychological needs, etc., etc., etc.) hinder our search for the real truth and continually interfere – even after it is achieved. The influences serve as a constant deterrent to focusing on the truth. Once that truth is found, the result is an almost serene state of selflessness and genuine concern for others. “The quickest way to break the cycle is to give of yourself and simply be a good person – love, doing for others, unselfish – the Golden Rule.”

“Death is not the end of life. It’s a wonderful experience!”

Sue, “What about babies – David, Little Joe?”

“It’s O.K. – because babies are good people with no knowledge of bad influences. If you don’t respond negatively to the bad influences, then you’re a good person. They may have to go around again – but it’s O.K. – because everybody is going to make it!”

“What about Chris?”

“Chris is O.K. too – he has never done anything wrong to anybody and all he knows is love. He may have to go around again – but it’s all right. He is similar to a truly good person who has acquired the knowledge!”

Like the difficulty I had in explaining the wonderful feelings about the light at the end of the cone, I experienced a similar perception about death – and especially of children. There are literally no words to describe the absolute security in knowing that everyone who dies is perfectly all right and, in fact, infinitely better off than we who are left behind. I uttered one key sentence which vividly summarized the true meaning of life and immediately neither of us could repeat it. It was as if it strangely went out of “focus” and was not meant to be recalled.

Our conversations, interludes between each, and my descriptions of reincarnation, the cone, etc., lasted until about five o’clock in the morning. Between each “session” I kept insisting to Sue that I still did not believe any of the strange information which was spewing out of me. I fought it tooth and nail even though I felt good about the prospects of our newly discovered knowledge – if it were true. It was as if I was rhythmically hammered with an onslaught of new information after jokingly denouncing each session by remaining firm in my

conviction that it was all “a bunch of crap.” We finally relaxed and settled in bed in an attempt to get at least a few hours sleep before driving back to Harrisonburg the next day.

After a short while we both commented about how cold the room had become and we snuggled closely under the covers. Suddenly, I whispered to Sue that someone else was in the room – over by the door. The terrible fear that we were not alone became so strong in me that I slowly pulled myself up as quietly as possible and quickly turned on the bedside lamp. Sue gave one glance at me and said that she had never seen such a frightened, almost panic, look on anyone’s face. “You look absolutely scared to death! I’ve never seen you look like that – you’re scaring me!”, she blurted.

I slowly got up, looked under the bed and searched the bathroom – to no avail – before checking to see if the air conditioner had been set wrong. The room had become frigid! “Damn it – that’s enough!”, I exclaimed. “We’re getting out of this goddamn room. I’ve had it with all this shit! Get dressed – let’s go get coffee and see if we can find a place to get breakfast. We’re not gonna’ get any sleep anyway.”

We walked across the room to where our clothes were hanging and I started vigorously shaking both hands in an attempt to get rid of a strange tingling sensation in my fingers. By now the room felt like an ice chest which even irritated me more. “Damn it! It’s so cold my goddamn fingers are freezing!” I then looked in the mirror over the sink and made some vulgar comment about the size of the “goose pimples” on my body. Then for some reason I walked back and sat on the edge of one of the beds.

At that point my fear had still not dissipated and as I slowly looked to my right at the narrow mirror on the wall, the image of my face smiled back at me!

“Oh, shit! You’ll never believe this – but – I just saw my face in the mirror – it was MY face – but its sarcastic expression seemed to say ‘Do you have it?’”

Sue slowly walked over and sat down, facing me, on the edge of the other bed. We both hesitated and simultaneously turned to look at the mirror. Nothing. We turned back and faced each other and I took one more look around. Then, to the right of the mirror, between the dresser and the door, and about four feet off the floor – I SAW GUY STOMEMAN! Call it his ghost, spirit, soul, or whatever – I saw Guy Stoneman! The image was bell-shaped, white, crystalline, sparkling, almost transparent, seemingly floating yet stationary. I quickly jerked around to tell Sue but the instant I looked at her I was almost blinded by her eyes which projected brilliant rays of light – similar to the results of shining sunlight directly through a diamond prism. The light appeared to ignite blinding beams in all directions. I immediately dropped my head and shielded my eyes with both hands.

“Ted, what’s wrong? ... tell me ... what is wrong?!”

After a moment I calmly replied, “I can’t look at your eyes – I’m afraid they’ll blind me. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to look at you again!”

Sue jumped up and ran to the mirror. “I’m looking in the mirror and there’s nothing wrong with my eyes!”

After a long pause I slowly began raising my head and gradually exposed my eyes to areas around Sue before finally realizing that it was safe to look at her again.

“What happened?”, she asked.

Very calmly, “I just saw Guy. He was right over there.” I pointed toward the door but dared not look again.

“You’re kidding! Then what?!”

“I looked at your eyes and they blinded me – I thought maybe permanently.”

“Where was he? What did he look like? Was it really him?!”

I gathered the courage to slowly glance back to my right where I had seen his image. Nothing. “Yes – that son-of-a-bitch!” I joked. The tension broke.

I slowly stood up, walked over to the exact spot where he had been, held out both hands and, looking back at Sue, simulated tracing the outline of his image. “He was right here and he looked just like this.” With both hands held together, palms down, I started at the top and worked down opposite sides as if drawing an imaginary bell. I then turned and faced Sue.

As I turned around, the strange tingling sensation in my fingers returned. I again vigorously shook both hands and said, “There’s definitely something wrong with my fingers!”

I suddenly stopped shaking my hands and slowly raised them, palms upward, close to my face. The tingling feeling departed from my left hand but the sensation in my right fingers intensified to a point where they actually felt numb as if the joints had not been moved for a long time. I tried to eliminate the numbness by rubbing the fingers with my left hand and index finger but it did not seem to help. Then dropping my left hand, I slowly looked at Sue and the frightened expression on my face startled her. “Ted, what’s wrong?!”

“Look at my right hand! It feels like it is turning to stone!” I had no control over the hand as it slowly turned over, palm down, and the wrist slowly turned the hand to the right.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m not doing it! It’s going by itself! I have no control over it! I can’t move my fingers!” The joints of my fingers felt as if they were “rusty” from lack of movement and they remained in that fixed position, slightly bent, as my little finger began to slowly move to the right.

“My whole right arm feels funny ...” I paused and quickly glanced at Sue.

“Guy’s arm!...” She stopped, realizing that we both had the same thought! “Ted, look at your little finger!”

The finger continued moving so far outward that it almost reached a ninety degree angle from my hand!

“My God, Ted, it’s going to break! Doesn’t it hurt?!”

“It feels like it should hurt ... or would ... or did ... but it doesn’t!”

I slowly walked back to the bed and sat down facing Sue as the right arm remained in its fixed position – bent at the elbow, hand outstretched, palm down, wrist cocked to the right. We both continued to stare at the little finger as it gradually returned to its normal position. The gap which separated it from the other fingers remained wider than the other three and it stayed in a relatively awkward position – as seemingly detached from the others. I tried to move my right elbow but could not.

“I want to move my fingers but I can’t!” I slowly forced the joints to bend ever so slightly and it felt so good that I cupped my left hand over the fingers and moved them so that they were all slightly bent. The resultant position of the hand and fingers was perfect for “clawing” or scraping all the fingers on a blackboard.

“God, that feels good!” The movement of the joints felt so good, in fact, that I again cupped the fingers with my left hand and pushed them closer to the palm of my hand and eventually forced the fingers to make a fist. As we continued to stare at the hand, the fingers slowly opened and returned to an outstretched position and the joints remained stiff.

“What the hell is going on? Look at my knuckle!” The knuckle of my middle finger slowly swelled to perhaps three or four times its normal size! After it slowly subsided, two small spots about the size of pencil points appeared on top of my hand. Sue and I watched as those spots actually turned bright red!

“Ted, are you afraid?”

“I was ... but I’m not now. I’m afraid I might lose the use of my right arm – but – I really don’t care. If it helps him – I honestly don’t care.”

My fear of the entire situation had slowly dissipated as I realized it was Guy who was somehow doing these things to my hand. I also felt that I may have been able to actually break the spell at that time by forcing my fingers to move and dropping my arm – but for some reason did not. I had no idea of how or why Guy was doing this to me but I genuinely believed that I might be helping him in some way. I was completely aware of all my senses and Sue and I talked throughout the experience as we both

watched the unbelievable changes in my hand. Besides, I strangely felt no pain and, after the initial fear and concern that I might lose use of the arm, realized that I was in no danger at all. I simply gave in to the experience.

Meanwhile, Sue was not the least bit afraid – skeptical, maybe – and was taking it all in like a kid’s first visit to the circus!

The arm remained extended in front of me, the hand palm down, and the right elbow immovable in its bent position. When I tried to move my arm but could not, I then placed my left hand on top of my right hand and wrist (four fingers on top and thumb on the bottom of my wrists) and moved my arm so that it rested on my right leg. My right shoulder was somewhat stooped.

“Look at my muscle!” At that point my right bicep began turning a bluish gray color and all the skin in that area actually wrinkled up right before our eyes!

“Can you see anything on my shoulder?”

Sue leaned over and closely inspected my shoulder. “No – nothing. Why? What’s wrong now?”

“It feels like a pin or something is pricking me – it doesn’t hurt or anything – but – it’s sticking me right here.” With the index finger of my left hand, I pointed to the joint where my right arm meets the shoulder.

“Are you sure?”, I insisted.

“No, I don’t see a thing. What are you doing now?!”

“Damned if I know!” My right arm raised slightly off my leg and my wrist slowly turned over so that my right thumb was facing up. My index finger, middle finger and ring finger were barely touching each other at the tips

and my little finger remained in its slightly awkward position – somewhat the way a prissy lady would point her little finger when she drank from a glass. The tips of the thumb and index finger were separated by perhaps half an inch. My right elbow remained in its bent position but out a little from my body which forced my right hand closer to my stomach.

“Now what?!”

“I don’t know, but I’m gonna’ let him do whatever he wants to.” Suddenly, my arm – remaining in the same fixed position – began slowly moving forward and backward!

“Why are you doing that?”

“How the hell should I know? This is really weird!” The movement continued for quite some time. When it stopped, I placed my left hand on my wrist (the same way I had done previously when I gently placed the arm on my leg) and again rested my arm on my leg. After a short while the arm raised and continued its swinging forward and backward. Again, I rested it.

Sue, “Is it over?”

“I don’t know.” Again the arm raised and repeated swinging slowly to and fro. “Oooh, that feels good. That feels sooo good!” Half closing my eyes as I felt the inside of my bicep rubbing my ribs, it felt like blisters rubbing each other and the result was an extremely soothing sensation – like satisfying rubbing the blisters caused by a sever case of poison ivy.

“What feels good?”

“Where the inside of my arm is touching my side.”

“Ted, your arm isn’t touching your side.”

“It is too. It feels great!”

“Where?”

“Right here ... oh my God!” Moving my left hand across my stomach to where the blisters were, I also dropped my head to look at the precise area where the itching was being satisfied. Instead of touching my arm, my ribs, or any blisters, my left hand was suspended between my side and my arm as the rhythmic swaying continued. The right arm was not even touching my ribs at all!

After a short while I again rested my arm on my leg and it remained there.

“Is it over?”, Sue asked.

“I don’t know – I hope not.”

It was then about 8:00 in the morning and even though I had initially been scared half out of my wits, neither of us wanted the night to end. Like the indescribable light at the end of the cone, we could scarcely describe the beauty of our experience – and who could we tell?! The joints in my arm and fingers relaxed somewhat and I began to slowly exercise them. It was over – almost.

I glanced over at the mirror and saw MY face – but with Guy’s well known sarcastic grin. He nodded as if to say – “Now do you have it dummy?”

I nodded back and smiled confirmation as if so say – “Yeah, I finally got it.”

I explained my gesture to Sue and very humbly said, “I believe – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that there is a God, there is definitely life after death, and that reincarnation is real. If I never believe in anything else as

long as I live, I will believe in those three things. And there is nothing that could ever change my mind.”

CHAPTER X

LET'S HAVE ANOTHER GO AROUND!

We walked into Uncle Sam's house and were greeted by Aunt Thelma, my mother, Linda, Charles and Viv – all of whom were seated in the living room.

My mother, "What have you all been up to? You both look like you're glowing!"

Sue, "We've been up all night. We shouldn't be glowing. We should look tired."

My mother, "I know. Viv told us that you stayed up all night."

Sue, "Well, we just started talking and ..."

I interrupted and jokingly blurted, "You're not going to believe this, but we found the secret of life! We solved all the world's problems!" Even though we all laughed, everyone in the room looked at us as if we were crazy.

"We found it – we've got it!", I added.

My mother looked at us and smiled a very strange, knowing smile. I stared at her in amazement, smiled back, and slowly asked, "You've got it too, don't you?"

She grinned and said softly, "Yes, I've got it."

Sue and I quickly looked at each other. I thought to myself, "My God! The one person in the whole world whom I have most abused! Oh, my God! All these

years!” At that instant it hit me that my primary goal in life – above all others – was to take care of my mother.

Charles and Viv drove my other car while my mother and Linda rode with Sue and me to Hillsville where we were to pay one last visit at Guy’s grave before leaving for Harrisonburg. Because of our excitement over the experience, Sue and I tried to convince my mother and Linda that there was a reason for everything and that everyone would eventually be happy in spite of the existing circumstances. For a while, at least, they seemed to be positively influenced by our attitude. I even told my mother that I loved her at which point both she and Linda broke down and cried.

Linda said, “Ted, you have no idea how long we’ve hoped and prayed that someday you could say that! I can’t believe this – it’s like a miracle!”

I think we made them so happy that they momentarily almost forgot that we were in the midst of post-funeral mourning.

Standing by the grave, I kept grinning at my mother and she continued to smile back. Sue and I found it difficult to contain our excitement and we slowly walked away to prevent any misconceptions about our knowledge that while Guy’s body was buried underground, he surely was not! I even cracked a sarcastic joke and, referring to me, my mother commented, “If that’s not Guy Stoneman!”

I leaned over and whispered to Sue, “If she only knew!” We both laughed out loud. In fact, we laughed and giggled all the way back to Harrisonburg. I had Sue in stitches as I pretended to flop my right arm around the car seat like a fish out of water.

We all spent the night in Harrisonburg and Sue left early Saturday morning in order to drive Charles and Viv to the airport in D.C. on her way home. I stayed with my mother and Linda and spent the entire day prodding my mother for information. I wanted to know everything – more about Guy, my father, relatives, family history, her own life – everything!

That night as the three of us sat on the porch, I chanced telling my mother and Linda about the experience with Guy in hopes that some of their grief might be lessened – if they believed me. I explained what we had been told about the true meaning of life and my new conviction that there was definitely life after death. When I told them that I had actually seen Guy the night that his body was buried, my mother broke down and cried. Fearing that more harm than good might be done by the conversation, I said no more.

My mother broke the silence by asking, “Ted, are you telling us that you really saw him?”

“Yes, I did. And it’s important to me that you both believe me because you’re the only two people in the world that Sue and I can tell. Everybody else would think we were nuts.”

My mother, “Did Sue see him too?”

“No, but she experienced everything else with me. There’s not a doubt in her mind about what happened.”

My mother, “How do you know it was really him?”

“It had to be him because of the weird things that happened to my right arm after I touched the area where I had seen him. When I turned around, both my hands felt numb – like they were turning to stone.” I held both hands up in front of me exactly as it had happened.

I continued, “When the numbness, or whatever it was, went away from my left hand, I started rubbing my fingers like this.” I rubbed the fingers of my right hand in the same manner as I had done two nights ago.

My mother stared at me as I spoke and her blank expression puzzled me. I added, “I had been shaking my hands earlier – trying to get rid of a strange tingling sensation in my fingers ...” I simulated how I vigorously shook my hands that night. “...and I didn’t think much about it until my right wrist kind of cocked to the right – like this ... Mama, what’s wrong?!”

Tears again welled up in her eyes as she exclaimed, “Ted, that’s exactly what happened to Guy before his heart attacks...”

“What did?”

“Before his heart attacks – especially the first one – he kept trying to shake a funny tingling sensation out of his fingers and he used to try to rub the numbness out of his fingers just like that ... and his wrist looked exactly like that!”

“You’re kidding! His wrist? Why?”

“We thought he must have sprained it at the same time he broke his finger when ...”

“What finger?”

“His little one, when ...”

“This one?!”

“Yes, why?”

“When did he ever break that finger?!”

“When they gave him that last shock treatment during his second heart attack, his arms and legs flew up

in the air and they believe that that's when he sprained his wrist and broke his finger. Also, both of his hands swelled because of the shock treatments but his right hand bothered him more than the left."

"He didn't have a cast on it or anything did he? I don't remember ever seeing a cast or anything on his hand."

"Well, they didn't even know it until days later when he got strength enough to talk. He told somebody about it and they put an ace bandage on his wrist and put his finger in a splint."

"I never saw it!"

"Well, you know him. He didn't keep it on very long."

"Mama, you've got to believe me. After my wrist cocked to the right, my little finger went out at almost a ninety degree angle from my hand and after it returned, it stayed like this." I showed her the position in which the finger remained.

"That's exactly like his!"

Pointing to my middle knuckle, I asked, "Mama, did he ever have anything wrong with his middle knuckle? Wait a minute! Let me tell you first what happened to my hand – then tell me if I'm right – and why. O.K.?"

"Well, O.K."

"My middle knuckle swelled to about three or four times its normal size – about this high."

My mother could scarcely believe what she was hearing and Linda was caught up in the rapid-fire conversation as if seated center court at Wimbledon. My mother anxiously continued, "That knuckle of his swelled

up ‘like a little ball’ from all the blood tests, I think. We weren’t sure why ... maybe it was from the shock treatments ... Anyway, he wouldn’t let them take blood from his left middle finger.”

“Why not?”

“Because, that’s the hand that notes the fiddle. They wanted to start drawing blood from that one because his right one got so sore and swelled so bad. But, you know him – he got his way. In fact, he used to like for me to help him bend his fingers on the right hand ...”

“Stop! Don’t say any more!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Don’t say another word until I get back!” I ran inside and got a piece of paper and a pen. I ran back out on the porch, sat down, and motioned for Linda and my mother not to speak until I jotted down the highlights of the conversation thus far. “O.K. All set.”

Well, he couldn’t very well bend the fingers on his right ...”

“Stop! My fingers couldn’t bend much by themselves so I cupped my left hand over them and forced them to bend – but only this far.” I again simulated the movement with my hands and continued, “I could tell that it must have felt great and then I forced them to move further – like this.”

My mother started crying again. After a pause, she commented on my gesture. “Ted, after his second heart attack I bought two different sized rubber balls. I started with the larger one and put it in his palm and bent his fingers over the ball. His fingers went only as far as yours did. Then we eventually got to a point where we used the

smaller one and bent his fingers just as far as you did the second time – the same distinct position! When I moved his fingers he used to say, ‘Ooh, that feels good.’”

“Holy cow! Wait till I get this down. Now, do you remember him ever having anything like a couple of red dots, or spots, on top of his right hand – maybe about the size of pencil points – here – and about this far apart?”

“Yes! When the ace bandage was removed from his wrist, two of the points on one of those little metal clamps had dug tiny holes in the skin – and they were bright red. I remember him complaining about it!”

“Did anyone else know about that?”

“Not that I know of. The nurses maybe – but no one else – except me!”

By now my mother was reeling from my knowledge of many things which only she and Guy had shared. I began to appreciate more about what Guy had done and recognized the opportunity to prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the validity of our experience – at least to my mother. In addition, Linda, who was caught up in the momentum of the conversation, served as our “witness.”

I continued by asking, “Did Guy have any specific problem with his right elbow? The reason I’m asking is that I couldn’t bend my elbow.”

“Ted, Guy couldn’t bend either of his elbows after those shock treatments and later, after the tumor got so big that it almost burst, he couldn’t bend his right elbow at all.”

“The only way I could move my arm was like this.” I moved the arm with the aid of my left hand and for an

instant my mother looked like she had seen a ghost. She burst into tears.

After a moment she replied, “Ted, that’s exactly the way Guy moved his arm! That’s the only way he could move it after the tumor got so big and when he played the fiddle he would let his arm down with his left hand. Sometimes he rested it in his pocket after moving it that way.”

I relentlessly pursued the chain of events that occurred in my arm. “This may really sound weird, but did he have a problem with his right bicep actually turning bluish-gray and even wrinkling up?”

My mother, seeming to finally accept the fact that our experience was real, sat back in her chair and calmly replied, “The cobalt treatments caused the skin there to turn blue and it wrinkled up like the skin was a hundred years old.”

That did it. I looked at Linda and jokingly asked, “Do you believe this?”

She replied, “Are you kidding? I’ve had to go to the bathroom for fifteen minutes but I’m afraid to move!”

I continued, “Mama, I don’t know if this means anything or not, but did Guy ever mention anything about something pricking his shoulder right here?” I pointed with the index finger of my left hand to the exact spot on the outside of the shoulder where it joins the arm.

“That’s where his third heart attack started.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, we were driving to the Ranch Club when he complained that the starch in his shirt, or something, was sticking him in the joint of his right shoulder – exactly

where you pointed. I felt the shirt but there wasn't anything there. Then, after a few minutes, he grabbed the shoulder with his left hand and pulled the car over to the side of the road. He asked me to check again inside his shirt. His exact words were, "There's a pin sticking me." That night he had his third heart attack."

"O.K., one more thing. Did he ever have blisters or a lot of itching between his arm and ribs?" I moved my arm, elbow, and hand to the exact position where it had swayed back and forth. "As I went through this motion, I ... Mama, what's wrong?!"

My mother looked almost frightened. "Ted... YOU'RE PLAYING THE FIDDLE!"

My mother's comment even startled me. "Oh, my God!" I looked down at my arm as I slowly swayed it rhythmically. "Of course! That's it!" How could Sue and I have possibly missed the interpretation of that movement?!

After the three of us took turns in staring in amazement at each other as we pondered the significance of that movement, I asked my mother, "What about the blisters?"

"The cobalt treatments caused a lot of blisters on his skin and he often told me that it felt the most soothing when he played the fiddle."

After a long pause, I asked, "Mama, do you now believe that our experience was real?"

She answered, "How could I ever doubt it?"

Before going to bed, I called Sue with the details of the remarkable conversation that I had with my mother on the porch. Over the phone I insisted that Sue position

her arm exactly as she had seen mine that night in Galax and to simulate the swaying motion. I asked, “Are you doing it?”

“Yeah – but why?”

“Now, look at the motion. Are you looking?”

“Yeah.”

“Keep looking at the motion while I ask you a question. What was the one thing that Guy loved most – above all others?”

Sue, “... the fiddle ... the FIDDLE!...Why didn’t we think of that?!”

The next day I drove Linda to the airport in D.C. before returning home with what I considered to be the most precious material gift of my life – Guy’s fiddle. Before leaving Harrisonburg, my mother had been kind enough to allow me to have the fiddle, at least temporarily, for safe keeping.

When I arrived home I almost immediately sought out to satisfy my insatiable thirst for knowledge. I planned to first write of our experience before reading any books so that nothing would influence our account of that night in Galax; however, the burning desire to read was too great. Therefore, Sue and I taped our description of the incredible after-death experience and we filed it away. I stayed up until the wee hours of the night reading the book Life After Life by Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D. and was astounded by the striking similarities between individual accounts of “death” experiences to our own encounter. Dr. Moody pointed out that such things as a “dark tunnel,” a “being of light,” “intense feeling of joy, love and peace,” and “no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes” represented not just

one person's account of a death experience but "a composite of the common elements found in very many stories."

Not only was I amazed at the startling similarities to our experience, but attitude changes of most of the individuals remarkably coincided with the after effects which have altered my life. Many people indicated to Dr. Moody that their lives were "broadened and deepened by their experience, that because of it they became more reflective and more concerned with ultimate philosophical issues." He explained that many people "have emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge" and one person added, "No matter how old you are, don't stop learning. For this is a process, I gather, that goes on for eternity." Dr. Moody further offered that "almost everyone has stressed the importance in this life of trying to cultivate love for others, a love of a unique and profound kind." It was also reported that many of the people interviewed experienced a reverse philosophy in that suddenly the mind was more important than the body – "But after this happened,... - it (the body) was only something to encase the mind."

Some of the comments which immediately grabbed my attention were, "I wanted to know more," "I didn't think there was a person who would know anything about this," "There's so much that I've got to find out," and "there's more to life..." Among other things, one person said, "I try to do things that have more meaning, and that makes my mind and soul feel better. And I try not to be biased, and not to judge people. I want to do things because they are good, not because they are good to me." Conversely, I was delighted to read that no one interviewed came out of their experience feeling morally

“purified,” “perfected,” or “holier-than-thou,” and with no feelings whatsoever of “instantaneous salvation or of moral infallibility.” Dr. Moody’s book only whetted my appetite for more.

The next day, Monday, I checked in at the office and then went directly to a library where I read not only for the rest of the day, but every day for the rest of the week. In the months that followed, my schedule included a minimum of sales calls and four to six hours per day at the library as I performed only enough duties at work to barely maintain my job. Sue and I either purchased or borrowed untold numbers of books and I read everything I could get my hands on – philosophers, religions of the world, the occult, some classics. The indescribable clock inside of me was ticking away precious time and my sense of urgency to learn drove me relentlessly night and day as I consumed books of all kinds at an unprecedented rate for me – especially in light of my slow reading ability.

During the year following our experience, I sought out many people of various religious beliefs and discussed at length their individual philosophies. I regularly attended a Protestant church for a few months and experimented with a number of others in an attempt to find a suitable place of worship for me; however, none applied to my new beliefs. I called my mother about every other day for the first few months or so after the funeral and visited her about every other week.

Throughout the year I administered her financial affairs and regularly checked to be sure that she was relatively well cared for. I not only came to accept Chris and love him as my son, but also learned to appreciate his roll in our family. I even changed messy diapers on occasion! I shared as much time as possible with Doug and Mike and

expressed genuine interest in their activities. I actually involved myself with Little League as an assistant coach and survived the entire season by sincerely trying to accept people for what they are. The most rewarding aspect of the first year following our experience was that Sue and I rediscovered each other. Suffice it to say that it took thirteen years for us to finally realize the infinite potential of our love and that we happily look forward to sharing this lifetime – and hopefully others – together.

When I was reassigned to the federal government marketing team in January, I made amends with every individual in the company whom I may have offended in my original climb up the corporate ladder. I also tried very hard not to make any new enemies. Even though bored silly in my job, I accepted my old position as simply a means to an end and merely tolerated the materialistic corporate world which suddenly opposed my new sense of values. My attitude towards money changed drastically as I fully realized that happiness comes not from the accumulation of wealth and material possessions. They could never fit into the cone!

My thirst for knowledge, especially in the field of parapsychology, has continued to drive me relentlessly even though I have attempted to maintain a relatively even balance between family, work, religion, and recreation. I began writing these memoirs four months after our experience and perhaps only twice has more than a week elapsed between writing sessions. My first major stumbling block (besides the fact that I never claimed to be an author!) was the concept of reincarnation. I suppose like most other people, even though I knew almost nothing about the mysterious philosophy, I had always considered it to be weird, eerie,

supernatural, witchcraft, work for the devil, superstitious bunk for ignorant people. I mean, people were burned at the stake in Salem, Massachusetts for professing such blasphemy – in the name of God, of course. However, everything else that Sue and I were told that night in Galax made good sense and I proved, at least to my mother and sister, that it really was Guy Stoneman who revealed the information to us. Perhaps even more remarkable was the possibility that the concept of reincarnation was somehow communicated between Guy and me – two people who would ordinarily never have accepted such a philosophy.

Much to our surprise, Sue and I were comforted in finding that we were not alone in our beliefs and that there were untold numbers of people who have had similar experiences. We also found many books documenting case after case of incidences which suggest that reincarnation might – at the very least – be considered a possibility. Its doctrine was accepted by many of the greatest philosophers the world has ever known – including Plato and Pythagoras – and by such relatively modern Western figures as Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, George Patton, Henry Ford, Louisa May Alcott, and Ralph Waldo Emerson to name just a few. The list is almost endless. More recently, many leading colleges and universities have established schools of parapsychology and Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia, after studying over six hundred cases of what appeared to be conscious memory of previous lives, wrote a most fascinating book on the subject, Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation. My purpose is not to attempt to prove that reincarnation is real, but to point out that its concept, as was explained to us through my

step-father, is a far cry from witchcraft. The belief is older than recorded history, accepted by about two-thirds of the world's population, and is rapidly increasing in acceptance in the Western Hemisphere.

I suppose like many others, I confused reincarnation with the concept of a caste system or the repulsive belief that humans return to earth in animal form and that cows or beetles – or any living human entity – could be one of our ancestors! Much to my relief, I discovered that the philosophy does not profess such nonsense at all. There may be those who profess such a belief, but even in Christianity there are also some distorted misrepresentations of its true meaning. The philosophy of reincarnation is a beautiful, loving, God oriented, thoroughly respectable doctrine that suggests a logical organization to our universe. Briefly stated, reincarnation is the belief that each soul returns again to physical body in order to develop and learn in preparation for ultimate reunion with God. Before an individual soul can complete the cycle of rebirths and step off the “Ferris wheel” of karma, he or she must experience lives in various nationalities, races, and religions – as both male and female. There is a universal law called cause and effect or, for every action there is a reaction. That law applies to everything in the universe, including the soul, and we create our own destiny in our everyday lives. Souls can choose situations and circumstances under which they return to earth – and with whom. It is comforting to know that we probably have been around before, and probably will again and again, with those we dearly love; however, we might also continue to recycle with people with whom we have differences unless we learn to settle them in this lifetime.

Consider the possibilities! If you hate – you will be hated, if you condemn – you will be condemned, if you love – you will be loved, and so on. A person who is a racial, ethnic, or religious bigot might return to experience exactly what he or she professes. A man who considers himself superior to a woman – or vice versa – might shutter to think he (or she) will return (or may have already) to the opposite role. Brave souls choose more difficult situations in which to incarnate in order to work out previous karmic debts or in order to advance themselves, and accept others. One would be quick to forget and forgive, and refrain from blaming someone else if he or she fully realized the sobering fact that each individual is solely responsible for his or her own destiny – and nothing can ever change that. A universal belief in reincarnation could result in the replacement of selfishness and greed by such non-materialistic values as giving and going for others. There would be no wars, no crime, no hatred, and limited suffering. A more rapid reunion with God would result for all of us and love and happiness would dominate our lives.

Reincarnation is a belief in God, love, and free will. It is not a holier-than-thou faith based on the fear of God and condemnation of the majority of people to burn in fire forever after being judged by another party. We can't escape that easily. We judge ourselves at the time of each death rather than all souls being raised at some point in the future. It is not a religion primarily dominated by white males but rather a belief that we are truly equal. Neither is it a religion where one central earthly figure can direct us to salvation while we simultaneously argue over such irrelevant subjects as what church leaders should wear or who is allowed to preach. Everybody has to find

it for themselves. I believe that all religions are basically right if they worship God, if they offer help to people, and if they, in fact, practice what they preach. I also think that a belief in reincarnation is not absolutely necessary in order for people to acquire the “knowledge”; however, it logically establishes order in the universe, explains life’s inequities, and certainly enhances one’s search.

I am certainly not capable of explaining all facets of the philosophy of reincarnation and will make no attempt to satisfy all doubts or answer all questions about its doctrine. I can honestly say, however, that my personal reservations have been satisfied beyond a shadow of a doubt. Even limited investigation of the fascinating subject would assuredly lead one, as it did Sue and me, to the rewarding books written by Ruth Montgomery who, after spending twenty-five years as a featured syndicated columnist on political affairs, has become one of the country’s most widely read authors dealing with psychic phenomena. Some of her works include A Search for the Truth, Here and Hereafter, A World Beyond, Companions Along the Way, The world Before, and most recently, Strangers Among Us. Also, a mere glance at the field of parapsychology would surely focus one’s attention on the works of Edgar Cayce who had to be the most gifted psychic of our time and certainly one of the most documented. Mr. Cayce, a relatively uneducated man of Christian faith, possessed the ability to enter into an altered state of awareness and give discourses on a myriad of subjects including religion, philosophy, psychology, parapsychology and prophesy of world events. When he died in 1945 in Virginia Beach, Virginia, he left 14, 256 discourses (“readings”) which have stood the test of time as well as science. The Association for Research and

Enlightenment, Inc. was created in 1932 in Virginia Beach to preserve these readings. Presently under the directorship of his son, Hugh Lynn Cayce, the foundation known as the A.R.E. is an open-membership research society which continues to index and catalogue the information, initiate investigation and experiments, and promote conferences, seminars and lectures. I mention Ruth Montgomery and Edgar Cayce because their work not only encompasses many aspects of life after death, but also because the information which was given to us by Guy precisely coincides with much of their writings.

With the intent of subjecting Sue and myself to hypnosis in an effort to recreate our experience in exact detail, I contacted a number of well know leaders in the field of parapsychology. I was delighted (and also somewhat tongue tied!) to speak briefly on the telephone with Ruth Montgomery who kindly recommended that I contact Hugh Lynn Cayce personally. Two weeks later Sue and I chatted for an hour with Mr. Cayce at A.R.E. in Virginia Beach where we explained our experience and sincere desire to locate a prominent hypnotist who might help us to share with others every detail of Guy's after-death visit. Mr. Cayce's recommendation was, instead, that we write of the experience in our own words and in the same manner as we had spoken to him.

CHAPTER XI

JESUS DID THAT?

In writing of typical American influences which gradually nudged me further away from the real meaning of life, I struggled with many sacred religious and social beliefs. No barrier, however, seemed so insurmountable as the Bible. I mean, how could I say I believe in God, in Jesus, and in reincarnation? Talk about treading on thin ice! Most everyone of Christian faith knows that such a statement is utterly absurd. We have been taught that man has a soul, the soul is immortal, and Heaven or Hell is God's reward or punishment for the way we responded to life's tests. We are encouraged from childhood to question everything that we do not understand – "Don't accept everything you're told!" Everything, that is, EXCEPT religion. "That's not for us to know!" "You have to accept it on faith!" "Don't question God's ways!" We are to believe it because we are taught by our parents and prelates who were taught by their parents and prelates, and so on, until we come to the Bible and a fellow by the name of Jesus. But the information we were given that night in Galax – especially the concept of reincarnation – is not in the Bible!

Or is it?

During the year following our experience, I read the bible from cover to cover, which certainly does not qualify me as a Biblical scholar by any stretch of the

imagination. In fact, I did not even understand some portions of it. Although aided by more readable versions such as The Living Bible, New English Bible, Modern Language, and Revised Standard, I was still somewhat apprehensive about accepting, without question, someone else's interpretations of words which were spoken or written thousands of years ago in a different language. It was enlightening to discover not only that some perplexing statements in the Bible were interpreted differently by each of the various modern translations, but that some things were actually omitted! Much has been written about the inadequacies of translation from one language to another and interpretations over the centuries of what Jesus actually said. Add the fact that in some of his teachings he used parables and symbolism which created even more obstacles. It is generally agreed that to translate one language to another, word for word, would result in little, if any meaning unless changed somewhat in order to apply to the new language. I mean, words can be translated, but ideas must first be interpreted and then explained in new context in order to bring out the true meaning.

Well then, how did the Bible come to be? Biblical scholars agree that the early assemblers of the "world's best seller" had many original letters, essays, stories, poetry, laws, and texts from which to choose in creating the Bible and that a great many were rejected. It is also agreed that additions and deletions were made in the material eventually selected. The Bible is not something that was simply created in one day in Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic and then handed to someone to translate into Latin and, in turn, to the other major languages over the centuries. The text of the bible slowly evolved over

literally hundreds of years by religious leaders who jointly decided its content by either accepting or rejecting enormous amounts of information. Although obviously difficult, the translations of the Old Testament with its sacred readings of the Jews, record of their history, and code of laws by which they were governed did not offer such an imposing and controversial task as did the New Testament.

So far, my generalizations about the evolution of the Bible are almost universally accepted and agree upon. However, the controversy begins immediately when the subject of interpretation of its content is discussed. Witness the large number of faiths which profess drastic differences in interpretation of the exact same book. Add to the controversy many of the more recently published theories which propose that a philosophy called reincarnation was not only supported by the earliest Christian Father but, in fact, served as the very foundation of Christianity! It is further proposed that many of the writings of some of the first great Biblical scholars, such as Origen (A.D. 185 – 254) and St. Augustine (A.D. 354 – 430), were purged over the years and that many powerful emperors, such as Justinian (A.D. 483 – 565) and his ruthless Empress, Theodora (A.D. 508 – 547), may have influenced interpretations which might have conflicted with their own self-professed deification – as obviously reincarnation’s law of cause and effect would. After all, a king or emperor might look rather silly if his subjects believed that he might reincarnate as a pauper! And would it not be easier for the clergy to maintain control over their flocks if their parishioners believed that they had only once chance at achieving salvation and that it would be blasphemy to ever question it. At least one

thing is for sure. For nearly 2,000 years the battle has raged between scholars over seemingly unanswerable questions which will probably remain open to speculation and academic debate for some time to come.

I regard the Bible's intent with reverence, as most certainly did Edgar Cayce who read it once for every year of his life. Mr. Cayce once said, "I can read reincarnation into the Bible – and you can read it right out again!" Truer words were never spoken. But how is that possible? Is it not reasonable to consider the logic that if some symbolic language was used in the original verbal teachings, then some symbolism might also appear in the writings? Symbolism in the Bible – another fact almost universally accepted – leads one right back to interpretation and Mr. Cayce's statement. On the surface it would appear that terms like "last judgment day," "resurrection of the dead," and "hell fire" certainly contradict reincarnation. However, could it be that these concepts are meant to be understood symbolically? Billy Graham, on national television in October of 1979, explained his firm conviction that the use of the word "fire" in the Bible is certainly symbolic.

Let us examine the simplest, shortest verse in the Bible (a verse that was my favorite in Sunday School, because I had no trouble memorizing it!) – "Jesus wept." (John 11:35). Perhaps I was taught, or maybe I just innocently assumed, that he cried because his good friend, Lazarus, was dead and he was expressing his grief, along with Martha, Mary, and many other Jews, over losing a friend. I mean, that is why people cry at most funerals. On the other hand, did he cry because it was painfully obvious that his teachings of life after death were either misunderstood or not believed at all? Or, albeit unlikely,

did he cry because he knew his good friend would burn in fire for eternity? Why did he cry? And why did he then proceed to raise Lazarus from the grave? Was it only to prove to the Jews that he was truly the Son of God or was it to show that there was, in fact, life after death? Or was he going even one step further to show not only that there was life after death, but that people can be “born again” in human form? It would be absurd to propose that the Bible professes reincarnation based on the fact that Jesus cried or that he resurrected Lazarus from the grave. My only point is that the simplest verse in the Bible is subject to almost endless debate because of interpretation.

I was delighted to find that the Bible most certainly coincides with reincarnation’s philosophy and universal law of cause and effect. To name just a few: judge not lest ye be judged: do unto others as ye would have them do unto you; Revelation 13:10 – “He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” The law was simply and clearly explained by Jesus when he said, “As ye sow, so shall ye reap.” And in Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus’ reply regarding the greatest commandment in the law – “Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” How does that differ from cause and effect, loving God, and accepting others for what they are?

I also discovered a passage in the Bible which perhaps supports our explanation of part of the secret of

life – “those who have it can’t explain it, and those who don’t have it can’t understand it.” In Luke 8:10 Jesus said to his disciples, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables that seeing they may not see, and hearing they might not understand.” Could it be that Jesus revealed the secret of life to his disciples and, knowing that “those who don’t have it can’t understand it,” chose parables as the most effective means of helping people to lead themselves to it?

But what about actual references to reincarnation in the Bible? There are quite a number of statements which indicate its philosophy such as Jesus’ description of God’s throne in Revelation 3:12 – “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.” Could it be possible that Jesus was referring to the reward for those who “keep going around until they get it right?” In Chapter 8 of the book of John, the orthodox Jews, in a heated debate with Jesus, were so upset with him that they threatened to stone him. When he finally said, in verse 58, “Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am,” they picked up rocks to kill him! Certainly an obvious reference to reincarnation would have triggered such a violent reaction.

Consider a question based clearly on karmic debt which was asked by his disciples as they passed a man who had been born blind. John 9:3 “... Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” Could the disciples possibly have asked such a question had they not been taught the philosophy of reincarnation and karma? And would not Jesus’ ambiguous answer differed had he considered the question idiotic? He answered, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents:

but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

Can a crystal clear implication of reincarnation be avoided by the following example from Matthew 16:13-14? “When Jesus came into the coasts of Ceasarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” And they said, ‘Some say thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jerimiah, or one of the prophets.’” The discussion continues in Chapter 17:10-13. “And his disciples asked him, saying ‘Why then say the scribes that Elias must come first?’ And Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things, But I say unto you That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.’ Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist.” Elias had been dead for five hundred years and John the Baptist had only recently been beheaded by Herod. Yet, the disciples immediately concluded that Elias had reincarnated as John the Baptist! The only logical conclusion is that Jesus had to have taught them the philosophy. The Living bible even states it more clearly: “... And, in fact, he has already come, but he wasn’t recognized, and was badly mistreated by many. And I, the Messiah, shall also suffer at their hands. Then the disciples realized that he was speaking of John the Baptist.”

The interpretation of “born again” over the centuries has come to mean that a spiritual rebirth is necessary in order to achieve salvation. That interpretation serves as the very basis for the religious philosophy that I was taught as a child. I mean, unless

one confesses Jesus Christ as his savior, and is baptized, then he will burn in fire forever. The Bible says so, doesn't it? Jesus refrains from the use of parables as he discusses the subject with an educated ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus, (John 3:1-13) and gets right to the heart of the matter. However Nicodemus seems shocked at the Son of God's repetition in making his point. Jesus said, "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, obviously confused, asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus responded, "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

I was just as confused with the answer to Nicodemus' question as the old boy himself was. I read the question and answer over and over and over. As preposterous as it may sound, the more I repeated the question and answer, the clearer the possibility became that here was Jesus Christ actually saying that reincarnation is necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God! Nonsense! No way! This passage has been scrutinized for 2,000 years by the world's greatest Biblical scholars. I mean, it appears that Jesus is actually chiding Nicodemus who should know better than to give his symbolic words a purely literal interpretation. Ridiculous! Everyone knows that he is using "water" to symbolize baptism. I consulted The Living Bible for clarification of "Except a man be born of water," and it was footnoted. The footnote read "Physical birth is not enough. You must also be born spiritually." But wait a minute – there was more. "This alternate paraphrase interprets 'born of water' as meaning the normal process observed during

every human birth. Some think this means water baptism.” Now I was thoroughly confused. Are they saying it can mean both?

I went back to Jesus’ answer and inserted “human birth” and it read, “Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, unless a man is born of human birth and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” It made little, if any, difference except to rule out baptism. I explained my confusion to Sue who has a habit of asking frustrating questions.

“What does ‘verily’ mean?”, she asked.

“What difference does that make? That’s just a saying that’s always used in the Bible – just a formality. It has nothing to do with anything.”

“Let’s look it up.”

“That’s crazy!”

She looked it up anyway and read aloud, “In truth: certainly – or truly, confidently.” She added, “And the passage doesn’t mean as much unless you read both the question and the answer together. The QUESTION is the key! Now, read them both and insert ‘certainly’ for ‘verily.’”

“Can he enter the SECOND TIME into his mother’s womb, and be born? Certainly, Certainly, I say unto thee, Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Sprit!”

“Ted! Jesus Christ is answering YES to the question which asks if a person can be born physically again from his mother’s womb. Each birth is obviously to

his mother – but – it doesn't necessarily have to be the same mother every time according to reincarnation! He is saying YES to rebirth physically AS WELL AS spiritually!"

Impossible. I went back to The Living Bible and was absolutely flabbergasted when I found TWELVE subtle variations of the interpretation of "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee" – just in the Book of John! And in some cases it was not important enough to even be included in the translation at all. And the interpretation of, or omission of, "just a saying that's always used in the Bible" can be used to change the entire meaning of a verse, an idea, or an entire Chapter! For example, in answer to Nicodemus' question, The Living Bible uses "WHAT I AM TELLING YOU SO EARNESTLY IS THIS:." Consider, if you will, the interpretation of that statement and the insertion of the colon. Now, insert into its place another interpretation from The Living Bible of the exact same words – "YES IT IS TRUE." Compare the difference in interpretation! Or how about "THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS" – again, consider the different meaning. Or how about "IN ABSOLUTE TRUTH," or "TRULY," or "HOW TRUE IT IS," or "I SAY EMPHATICALLY THAT," and so on.

Now, let us read again the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus and use a different interpretation (all from The Living Bible) of only the exact same words for each of the three times when Jesus said, "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee:"

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Jesus answered and said unto him, "THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus saith unto him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

Jesus answered, "YES, IT IS TRUE! Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? WHAT I AM TELLING YOU SO EARNESTLY IS THIS: We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye received not our witness. If I tell you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man ascended up to heaven, but he that

came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

As unbelievable as it might first appear, Jesus actually told Nicodemus that he must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God! Nicodemus understandably balked at the statement. Jesus repeated himself and again told him that he must be born again – of the flesh AND the spirit. Then he emphatically stated, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” He even went so far as to compare the phenomena with “the wind” which is here for awhile and goes away; however, everyone knows that it will return even though we are incapable of seeing it! Jesus then reasoned that if Nicodemus could not accept other earthly facts, then why should he be expected to believe heavenly things even though they also are real.

Are we not like Nicodemus in that we accept only that which has been scientifically proven and reject almost everything else? Like Jesus’ example of the wind, we accept such unseen things as sound waves, radar, or atomic energy whereas we rejected them not so long ago. New information is being discovered today that was scientifically rejected yesterday; yet, we are amazed when it is explained to us in simple terms which we can understand! We readily accept such universal, cyclical phenomena as leaves and grassy dying – only to live again without ever losing its identity. We know that even history repeats itself. Yet, being comprised of the very elements of the universe, we somehow persist in exempting ourselves from universal laws! Jesus posed

basically the same logical reasoning to Nicodemus – if you accept this portion, then why not the other?

Are we in the Western World perhaps victims of collective unconsciousness in that we continually create facades for ourselves in order to avoid facing life? Woody Allen’s movie, “Manhattan,” although a hilarious comedy, posed basically the same profound question. Or are we so selfishly immersed in the American Dream that it prevents us from facing the truth about ourselves? And no matter to what extent we seek happiness or desperately try to avoid facing the misery around us, we all have one basic fear in common – death. Although the philosophy of “you only go around once” may frighten some of us into believing in God, does that very doctrine itself breed even more selfishness in our lives? Do we cry at funerals because of that same selfishness as well as twinges of guilt? And, very honestly, do we also cry because we seriously doubt some of the religious doctrines that we are taught? And because we are programmed not to question “God’s ways,” is the result – like so many other things we fail to understand – that we disbelieve it, fear it, or deep down inside actually reject it? Is that not a psychological crime against all of us when it contradicts one of the primary reasons for our being here – to learn?

Do we inwardly reject many of our Western religions because they often defy logic and accepted universal laws? Does it seem rational that a loving God would go to the trouble to create us, drop us in a quagmire of extremely difficult situations, and then condemn the overwhelming majority of us to burn forever when we fail? Is that a righteous God or a masochistic one? Does it seem fair that a loving God would create some of us blind, crippled, retarded or poor

while others are created healthy, beautiful, rich and powerful? And is there the identical happy ending in “Heaven” for all – with no compensatory rewards for varying degrees of suffering here on earth? Are we really expected to believe that some people must “pay for the original sins of Adam” while others go through life unscathed? Are we still expected to accept “that’s God’s way” as a reasonable answer? Are we to think that an outward confession of Jesus as our savior automatically purifies us and guarantees instant salvation while we condemn every other human being to hell forever should they dare to disagree? And what happiness would there be for us in “Heaven” if we saw that some of our loved ones were burning in fire? Is that not a selfish philosophy in itself? Does that not sound like a philosophy from the 17th or 18th centuries when we were burning people alive and threatening similar fire as cruel scare tactics for adults while we were frightening our children with the “Boogey Man?” Or do we go further back in history by dressing up our religion with snobbish and immaculate pomp and circumstance fit for a king – or an emperor? Are not many characteristics of our religious philosophies representative of their era of origin?

Would it be illogical to consider that a righteous God might raise us as we would raise our own children – realizing that mistakes and experience are the best teachers? Do we know many people who are so self-righteous that they could possibly go through life’s tests once and achieve perfection? And if our own children failed to meet our expectations, could we possibly condemn them to burn in fire? Would it not make sense that a loving God might give us another chance to correct our errors – as we do with our own children? And that a

God of infinite love and wisdom might let us keep trying until we get it right?

Is it too unreasonable to assume that many of us would really like to believe in God but perhaps honestly feel that the Bible has been changed or misinterpreted to such a degree that we do not know what – or whom – to believe? And, at times, do some of us find it difficult to accept because logic and common sense tell us to reject it? Has history not taught us that it is a dangerous assumption to simply accept on blind faith whatever we are told? If man is less than perfect and subject to all the influences, and if man interpreted and created the evolution of the Bible, then is it not also feasible to consider that the Bible might also be subject to the same influences?

Would many of us not also like to believe that we are actually a part of God? Is it absurd to consider that the simple secrets we were given that night in Galax were not “transmitted” by Guy, but that he somehow used our combined energies to bring us to oneness with ourselves? And the resultant flow of information poured out automatically without us even realizing it? The comment of “I’m God” was definitely not a self-deifying, self-righteous, holier-than-thou statement. Embarrassingly enough, quite the opposite was true. In fact, I not only rejected it at the time but that comment contradicted absolutely everything that I had ever believed! I had turned away from religion because I rejected the hypocritical interpretation of Jesus’ teachings. When I was told the secret of life, it had nothing to do with what I had been taught; yet, it was the essence of what Jesus actually said.

Could it be that the same information lies within the souls of each one of us and is just waiting to be discovered? And is it “all the influences” which prevent us from coming to oneness with ourselves? Perhaps God did, in fact, create us in his own image – the soul and not the body – and within every soul lies the true meaning of life. Could it be that we need look no further than within ourselves for all the answers? As some religions ridicule those who meditate while preaching the power of prayer as the only means of communicating with God, others strongly profess meditation. Is it not possible that both are helpful in that prayer represents a means for talking to God, and meditating is a way of listening to the God which is in all of us? Even in the most conservative Protestant religions, the church service bulletins still list “prayer and meditation.”

Is it remotely conceivable to believe that we can, in fact, achieve salvation through Jesus Christ – not in the dogmatic sense of outward displays of the degree of faith in his existence – but in applying his teachings of cause and effect in our everyday lives? And in doing so, we can exercise our free will in coping with all the influences by listening for guidance and sincerely asking for forgiveness when we falter. Jesus tried to tell us not to worship him, but to worship what he was saying – and in doing so, we can get there too! He told us over and over that he was not special – only representative of each of us and that we all have basically the same capabilities as he had. He told us to honor God and that part of God which rests in all of us. He tried to tell us that, like so many other things, we are too close to focus on it because it is right inside of us. All we have to do is look within ourselves – Seek and Ye shall find!

He kept trying to tell us that the SECRET OF LIFE IS THAT THER IS NO SECRET. But the TRUE SECRET is to KNOW THAT. And the only way to find it is to be selfless and do unto others – “... all the law and the prophets.” Only when we do that, do we realize that that is the secret! But we can never find it until we ACCEPT OTHERS FOR WHAT THEY ARE – regardless of what they are – and ACCEPT OURSELVES FOR WHAT WE ARE. We are all in the same boat regardless of race, religion, or sex because IT’S ALL THE INFLUENCES that make us the way we are. It is equally difficult to find it if we are blind, crippled, or poor as it is if we are healthy, rich or powerful. We all have the same potential goodness within us – we are all truly equal.

Jesus said that very few people will get there – it’s a narrow road. But those of us who fail to make it are not condemned to burn! Because God is such a loving force, WE KEEP GOING AROUND UNTIL WE GET IT RIGHT. So very few people make it each time, that it might take an eternity for all of us to get there. Jesus said, in Matthew 19:30, “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” It matters not who gets there first because EVERYBODY’S GOING TO MAKE IT EVENTUALLY, ANYWAY. Everybody is going to be all right! As with everything else in our world, it takes some of us longer than others. Jesus told Nicodemus that no one will make it back to the kingdom of God without having been there – in answer to his question of being born more than once.

Jesus told his disciples that the secret of life could not simply be explained to us. THOSE WHO HAVE IT CAN’T EXPLAIN IT AND THOSE WHO DON’T

HAVE IT CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. EVERYBODY HAS TO FIND IT FOR THEMSELVES. Therefore, he not only preached reincarnation's philosophy of cause and effect, but he also showed us by example – in his own body. When he said that he was here before Abraham and that he had come back to tell us of the secret of life, we threatened to stone him. After we finally rejected everything he said, we killed him. However, before he was crucified, he said that he WILL COME AGAIN. He showed us the greatest example the world has ever seen – or will ever see again – of REINCARNATION. He was here before, he was here then, and he will return. JESUS CHRIST IS REINCARNATION! He died for us – he really did. But the reason he allowed himself to be killed was to prove to us that what he was saying was true!

Can the beautiful irony of it all be that Jesus' explanation of the secret of life was so simple that it has been misinterpreted for centuries because we have reasoned with it, added to it, deleted from it, rejected it, or changed it to serve our needs – however virtuous or devious the intent; but, we have never accepted what it really says? No matter how hard man tries, he has difficulty in understanding that he can never alter God's universal laws. The secret itself was all that was needed to carry the message through time.

Consider the final bit of information we were given in Galax by a man who had been physically dead for three days – “PART OF THE SECRET IS THAT IT IS SO SIMPLE – WE MAKE IT COMPLICATED!”

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.”