

The

Man

Within

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FORWARD

Where do I begin??

I was born October 12, 1949 at 1153 Balkin Street, Houston, Texas in Harris County- phone # Olive 44134. Of my parents Walter Doyle Shultz, and Geraldine (Jeri) Reeder Shultz, born 1930 and died right before Christmas 1985. She was 56 and way too young to die. My mom's dad was Virgle Reeder, who died about 1981, and her mother died when my mom was 11 years old. Her step mom (Hattie Reeder) raised her. Her brothers were Herbert, Pete and Otis, her sisters were, Navolene & Ruby. My dad was born Feb. 15 1924 and died April 2010. His dad was Cary D. Shultz (1874-1958). My dad's mom Margaret died in 1952. He was 1 of 12 children (6 girls & 6 boys). C.D. Shultz fought in the Spanish-American war, and His Dad (my great grandfather) fought in the Civil War. My Dad's brothers were George, Bill, Cary Jr., John, & Robert, his sisters were May, Kate Lillian, Sara, Becky, and Betty.

Heinrich Christoff Schultz born in Germany in 1680, died 1734, begat; Johan Valentin Schultz born in Cosby Tn. 1715-1787 begat; Johan Martin Schultz, begat; George Shultz, born 1798, wife Mary begat; Martin V. Shultz, born

1822 begat; Carey D. Shultz, born 1874-1858 & wife Margaret Smeltzer. He had a wife before Margaret, Begat; Walter Doyle Shultz, Feb. 15 1924-April 2010, and wife (my Mom) Geraldine (Jeri) begat;

Ross Wayne Shultz Oct. 12 1949- , wife Nancy Sue begat; Andrea Leigh, Susan Lee, and Matthew Wayne.

On my Mothers' side was Martin Reeder, Born July 1855 and great grandma Vine, from Pickett Co. begat; Grandpa Virgle Reeder, born 1899, from Pickett Co and his wife, my grandma Elizia; Begat Geraldine (Jeri) Reeder, my Mom. Born June 12th 1929, in Pickett Co..

My brothers; Doyle, Scott, and Todd, and my sister Karen

1. IN THE BEGINNING.....

I guess I'll start my story in and around the 1950's. The country was getting ravaged by the Polio epidemic, and it had everyone scared to death. At 18 months old I was struck with a bout of polio. Now, when I say a bout, I don't mean a mild case like some of the kids who just ended up a little sick and in a wheelchair for a couple of weeks; I caught a full blown, knockin' on deaths door, plan the funeral, *real* bad case. After a long stay in the hospital, (seems in my memory that I was there for about 17 years give or take, but then again I was only 18 months old, (so don't hold me to

that), the prognosis was *not* good. In fact, that no-nonsense, black and white, book-smart doctor told my mom, “Not only will he not ever walk; he will not even be able to wiggle his toes.” He tried his very hardest to convince her to just give up.

Did I mention I was living in an iron lung at this time? An iron lung is a contraption about the size of a giant Zeplin and resembles a monster, but was more like a rounded jail cell and definitely not the place that this two year old wanted to be. But, since I couldn’t breathe on my own, unfortunately it was a necessity. Along with all the spinal taps, shots and that iron lung, it sure wasn’t much of a life for a little kid.

My Mom wouldn’t listen to those doctors, or anyone for that matter, when it came to trying to get her to give up on me; no not one bit. She knew from deep inside herself, in that place where moms just know, that I would walk again and more, that I would be ok. Mom was the only one though that believed that, my Dad, had been convinced by those same experts and he tried and tried, even enlisting several other doctors’ help, to convince her to come out of this “denial”.

You see, he’d heard the stories and listened to the doctors and he was convinced the best thing to do, was for

everyone to just make up their mind that I was going to die, or at least be an invalid for the rest of my life, and just move on. But not my mom, she wasn't buying that thinking; she wouldn't give up, despite the doctors, the other experts, and even my dad, for her vision was to see me well.

She'd, almost constantly, rub my feet and legs; I guess to get the blood flow going. Well, after several months I begin to wiggle my toes and fingers, which brought jubilant expressions of joy. My mom, my constant companion and advocate was the only one who saw this 'miracle' as a sign of hope. The doctor's kept saying "that's all he'll ever do and don't get your hopes up" because that's as far as it will go." The doctors kept trying to treat my Mom as if she were still in denial. They tried saying that's probably all he'll ever do, and a lot more of those things that doctors say, but none of it worked on convincing her that the outcome didn't come from the means.

Mom and Dad came very close to a divorce over this, but she held her ground, they did not divorce and I kept improving until I finally was able to come home from the hospital. The truth is..... well..... God had a whole different plan.

After being delivered from polio, I had to learn to walk all over again, which isn't a huge big deal I guess since I had only started walking the first time a few months before getting sick anyway. The worst part was after I was 'better'.

Now, I know that sounds strange but, the parents of the kids on our block wouldn't let their children play with me; they thought that I was dirty or contaminated, or worse. I guess it's no different than now when people get sick with a contagious disease, but to a small child, it sure was a scary and lonely experience. I guess, well... I know, it was scary for them too, but I sure didn't get that at the time. People back then didn't understand polio. I guess most still don't.

A. **SKIPPY**

But....I had this mutt of a dog named Skippy, and he played with me.

He didn't care one bit that I had polio. That dog of mine, by the way, was HUGE. Skippy was so big that he was only a little bit shorter than me, and I think around, oh....

200 pounds and a vicious guard dog. But, that scraggly, long haired, ferocious giant was my friend, (my only friend for a while). I guess I should probably admit that Skippy only weighed fifteen pounds, if that, and was scared of just about everything but me. But to little kid, he sure was big and brave.

Well anyway, we had this gigantic, vast fenced-in back yard with a swing set, and a sand box where me and Skippy, the giant mutt dog, played together almost every day. That backyard was like the Tundra, or maybe the Great Plains (in reality it was a 40'x50' backyard), but for me, it was my domain, and I knew every crack and crevice of every corner of it. I couldn't even begin to tell you all the adventures we had, trekking across that enormous yard, scaling mountains, fighting Indians, shooting bad guys, saving the world, and discovering new lands like Lewis and Clark.

That was us, Ross and Skippy, we were a team, we were partners, and more important we were best friends.

After a couple of years of just me and Skippy playing alone in the Tundra things finally started getting' better and I got to start playing with the kids in the neighborhood (at least the ones who could brave the distance and elements just to get into my backyard). And, I had trained Skippy to be

just slightly less dangerous, I guess all those adventures had taken their toll on that poor ole' dog.

A bunch of us kids started a club called THE BROKEN ARROW; of course we let Skippy join too.

We sure were young at age 6.

B. MORE NEEDLES

There are a lot of things over the next couple of years that stick out. Like for instance the time, several years later, that I was riding in my Dads 1950 Plymouth, and our family was up-town with a car like that.

That day, I don't remember the weather but I do remember that he suddenly slammed on the brakes. I don't recall what happened, maybe a dog ran out in the road, maybe another car slammed on their breaks, and maybe, just maybe he simply wasn't paying attention, but anyway, when he slammed on those brakes I went flying, turning loop-d-loops, across the back seat like a carnival acrobat that had been shot out of a canon. You see, I was standing in the back seat, we didn't have no seatbelt, and wouldn't have wore 'em anyway.

Well, I flew so hard that I went over the front seat and hit my head on the dash board. I don't remember a whole lot of details but that there was a lot of blood, and me getting 7 stitches right on my forehead. Kids can invent a lot of ways to have fun, but, that day wasn't counted among them.

Now that was not a pleasant experience. After all them years of doctors, and that iron lung and stuff, my idea of doctors was just the guys in the white jackets that poked stuff in ya with giant swords they like to call needles, and squirt stuff in ya that they promise will make it hurt less, (never will understand how the stuff that is supposed to numb ya hurts worse than that cut did).

You know I remember a lot about my early years, but, I don't remember being born. But I do remember the first time I had to have my diaper changed, and my first tooth.

I honestly can still see my first day of school, way back in kindergarten. I remember I got mad, really mad, not just a little upset, but I'm talking temper-tantrum, can't believe my momma didn't whoop my behind for acting like a fool, mad. And all because I couldn't take my lunch to school like my big brother, Doyle did. I guess, it was because I only got to go for a half day. But I sure did wanna take me a packed lunch.

Man, I still hate that.

C. THE FLOOD

A few years later, it had been raining for a couple of days, raining might not be the best description of it, it poured buckets, night and day like maybe we should be buildin' n Ark kinda rain. The kinda rain like only Texas can have, I guess cause there is nowhere for it to go, and it just kept coming until all you could see was something that resembled the Great lakes, and I was at school.

They wouldn't let us go home from school cause the streets were flooded real bad, and it had already risen over the tops of the cars. And nobody thought that rain would carry on that way, but they were wrong, one of them five hundred year floods.

Was I ever scared! The thought of staying away from my Mom, my security blanket, my constant, for another night; no way that was going to happen; so I started to panic. Everything started closing in on me, and my mind started racing like a kid caught stealing candy from the penny candy store around the corner. I mean with all the memories I still had from having polio, and all those nights I spent in at the hospital when Mom had to go home and take care of her family (my Dad & Dolye). I did not, and I mean I REALLY DID NOT want to stay another night away from her. I COULDN'T do it. To heck with my dad and brother, I wanted her with me, so my inventive mind began working.

So while the other kids thought about the fun they'd have being stuck at that school, and they started getting all rowdy and stuff, well..... I waited. And waited, and waited. I waited with my nose pressed against the glass in my class room, anxious, scared, nervous, and panicking as I watched every drop that fell. I don't know, maybe in hopes the rain would quit, so I could make my dash down those four city blocks to where I belonged. I thought for a minute that I could make a raft like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, or swim like I was being chased by an alligator, I think just about every thought, at one time or the other, entered that scared little brain of mine. Maybe the teacher wouldn't notice that I snuck out and I'd be home before anybody realized I was even gone. That's it, I could make it, I 'm sure

of it. This and many other well-calculated considerations were reflected on.

'Bout the time I had made up my mind that I was gonna make a run for it, I heard the most amazing sound, and for a minute I thought I was seein' a mirage; for could it be that relief on its way? My eyes must be playing tricks on me, cause there came my Dad, The Hero, (a super hero without the cape--but he didn't need one that day). He came right up the middle of the street in his boat, motor running wide open and everything. I told ya it was raining hard, but nothing was going to stop that determined man from getting his sons, what a beautiful sight.

My dad pulled that boat right up to the front of the school house and picked Doyle and me up, and with that outboard motor running wide open, he took towards home. We rode right up the middle of the street, and we weren't even stopping at the red lights. What a relief. I was home, safe, soaking wet, and still with all my insecurities in tack; but we were home. Safe and settled in, I was where I belonged.

Don't remember if I ever told my dad he was my hero, or if even my mom ever understood how bad I NEEDED to be home, but I sure was glad to be there. She knew my personality, and maybe I could be honest, and say,

my insecurities, much more than my dad, and it was probably her prompting him that made him a hero; but fact was, he was my hero.

By the way, I went to Hartsfield Elementary school, you know, even back then we had to have a driver's license, issued by the city of Houston, to ride our bikes. Boy, that's a lot to put on a little kid. Guess they thought there were enough maniacs on the road already, and at least were trying to help keep us safe.

We lived in a neighborhood that was made up, almost, entirely of young families; seems like family had children around my age. When I was 8 there was a girl who lived next door, and she was pretty, I mean real pretty, this girl could make you fall off yer roller skates, or break your neck twisting around to get another look, pretty. I'm talking can't concentrate on my chores but I didn't care pretty. She was the first person, really the first girl outside our family that I ever kissed. You know, I can't really swear I kissed her, but thinking back, I sure did want to, well maybe, I had imagined it so many times that it just felt real, but I think I did.

Eight years old is kinda young, but she sure was pretty and maybe it's just fun believing that's the way it happened.

You know, living in a sub-division during the 50's, in Houston, wasn't a bad place at all to be. We had a lot of fun. We'd go snake hunting, 'cause back then Houston wasn't so grown up with buildings, and strip malls, and such. There were plenty of places we could walk to, we'd turn over rocks and old logs, and catch all kinds of snakes, or lizards, and such. Boy did they come in all different colors, some looking good-enough to eat. We didn't know what brand they were, but heck, we were only 8 years old. Who cares! We were having fun and nobody died, so I guess it was ok. We sure got good at catching them slippery suckers too, like regular African explorers, we had no fear.

Later that summer I'd got me some roller skates. You know the kind with steel wheels that screwed onto your converse tennis shoes? Anyway, after getting tired of going up and down the streets, we thought we'd disassemble them skates and make ourselves a go-cart. We searched around and after finding some scrap lumber and a few nails, we commenced to building a go-cart, or maybe it was a race car; either way, it was gonna be FAST! Once we got that thing put together though, we knew it was fast, so we also figured why not make some money from it too, I mean heck, wasn't that what we all wanted to do?

So we kids figured we'd call it a taxi, and went to sell people rides, taking them one place to another. We made fourteen cents on the first day. Hey, may not sound like a lot now, but that was enough money to buy two Baby Ruth candy bars and a whole pocket full of bubblegum & some Kitts candy.

Stealin' bananas from the neighbor's tree, puttin' on a circus', playing in the drainage ditches, and all kinds of other good stuff; that was what our typical days were like in the jungles of Houston.

Doyle and I even got to go on the 'Howdy Doody Show', you know, the one with 'Clarabell the clown'. Now that was a neat thing. We got to play games, watch the acts being performed live, and all kinds of entertaining attractions were going on all over the place. And the best part, it was all on live television. Man, we were lucky. Those single digit years were filled with almost anything the imagination could think of, some real, some not so real, but every day was a new adventure.

2. TENNESSEE

In 1958 my Dad got laid-off from the Hughes Tool Co. (he had worked for Howard Hughes), and at about the same time, his Dad, my grandpa, died. My dad had to go to Tennessee for the funeral, it sure was a long way from Houston. While in Tennessee, he asked for a job at Y-12 in Oak Ridge, and low and behold he got it. Don't exactly know what led my dad to want to stay there, or apply for a job, but heck, it happened before we knew it.

Dad worked as a machinist and made about \$4 an hour which was good money.

We were struggling back then more than a little, and I remember we almost lost our 1957, 9-seater, Ford station wagon. Somehow we had managed to hang on to it, mostly cause my dad told our mom to hide it in the garage and keep the doors closed and locked, so the reposesser's couldn't find it-- but it worked though. But now it was just my Mom who was taking care of us four kids (Doyle, Me, and by now I had a sister Karen, and another brother Scott). My dad was working in Tennessee and sending his money home to my mom, to take care of us.

Guess I should tell ya that my sister Karen was born and because she was a girl, I didn't much play with her, and well Scott was six years younger and he wasn't any fun yet. We all loved each other, and about the only time it was expressed, was during meals, or at least, that's when we shared our days activities with each other.

Ok, well, I'd been mowing yards in the neighborhood and had saved up a whole \$21.00 that summer. One night my dad called up and he asked me to let him borrow the \$21.00. Now, I don't know if he knew that's exactly how much I had saved, or if it was a coincidence, but either way I didn't care, probably didn't even occur to me to ask anyway, but being the hero that I was (or at least wanted to be), I said sure! It felt good, like I was a man,

helping out my family, and to me it was an honor, and a privilege.

You know twenty one dollars sure was a lot of money back then. My Mom could buy that whole station wagon full of groceries; clean up through the front seat with that much money. The same twenty-one dollars could buy so much that us kids couldn't go with her, and as big as that station wagon was, it wasn't big-enough for any of us, and the groceries; it was filled from bow to stern.

A few months later, my dad finally moved all of us to Tennessee, the trip was long, we were tired, but, us kids, were excited to be in this new frontier. We settled into a little community called Little Emory, right between Oliver Springs and Harriman, completely different than the noise and speed of Houston, but seemed to have potential for any would-be explorer.

WOW! This was a *rough* place, and I don't mean crime and stuff, I mean we didn't even have running water, or any inside plumping (what a huge change from the house in the suburbs with the Tundra in our backyard). Worst part to get used to was when we had to go to the bathroom, we had to go in an out-house, which happened to be four & a half miles up a steep 45 degree hill (that's how I remember

it anyway). Every time it seemed I had to go, it was either snowing, raining, or so dark you couldn't see the stars. Guess what, most of the time I'd just go in the corner of the bedroom (I was just 9 years old), smart enough to know better, but lazy enough not to care. Anyway, after getting caught one too many times by my mom, who didn't have any sympathy for that hike to get to the outhouse or the elements we had to endure like blizzards and blackouts, well, I figured it hurt a lot less to take that 12 hour journey to that little house way up at the top of Mt. Everest, than to succumb to the her wrath.

A. BACKWOODS

Living at Little Emory, wasn't all bad, we had acres and acres of woods and fields, that was something Doyle and I didn't have in Texas. I mean, we did have a big yard

but now looking at this, it was tiny compared to the wilderness here. AND, we had squirrels, rabbits, and the occasional mountain lion, wilda-beast, a few bears, some rabid wolves, a stray hyena or two, and on the rare occasion I think I caught sight of a rhino trying to sneak a swim in the creek, and I don't wanna brag but I did try and try to lasso a buffalo, but he was faster than that rascally varmint looked.

We had one tame animal that hung around, not something exciting like a zebra or a chimpanzee, but we did have something that resembled a dog. At least he looked like one if ya held your head at the right angle and squinted just so. He was a miniature wiener-dog that we named Wee-Low. Don't know what ever happened to Skippy, maybe he just liked Texas better, don't blame him, besides having the great wilderness to explore, I didn't much think highly of TN either at the time.

This dad-burn dog must have liked fishing or something though, cause one day when we got off the school bus, that runt of a dog had a bass plug stuck in his mouth. OUCH! My Dad, being the hero he was, took that short legged thing out to the car, rolled up the windows (so we wouldn't hear) and performed surgery on that dog. The next day Wee-Low and I were still friends, never did really warm back up to my dad though, and funny thing is, he never did wanna go fishing again.

The school we went to was Little Emory. It was a two room school house. The first through eighth grade were in one room, with one teacher and eighteen of us kids in that room. The other teacher had the other twelve students from ninth thru twelfth grade in the other half of the building.

Anyway, after about 3 weeks of going there, me and two other fellers thought we'd go to the country store and spend our two or three cents on penny candy. That county store was almost on school property and we'd go during our 'rithmetic class. We figured we would tell our teacher we needed to go to the bathroom, sneak to the store, eat that candy and then be back in our seats before anybody figured it out. Who ever said that nine year-olds were good at figuring?

I don't think, lookin' back, that that it was a very good idea, but at the time, and seeings how all we were thinking about was the candy, mmmmmmmmm, maybe we should have done a little less figuring outside the class room, and a little more with learning fractions. Yes, you guessed it, we got caught! We were sent straight to the Principal's office, didn't even get to pass Go, didn't collect no money, and didn't even get to eat any candy, but a new-found wisdom was on its way.

And I told you that this was a pretty poor town, and most of the people there were worse off than us, if you can imagine life being worse than no plumbing, no electricity and such, but, al-in-all, these were wholesome folks that knew about life.

Well, since my Dad worked at Y-12 making the big bucks, (most of the people in town probably made about \$40 bucks a week), and we lived out in the middle of nowhere, they thought my family must be rich or something. I guess after all, if we could move all the way from Texas, and we drove a big ole, almost brand new, nine-seater station wagon, we must be rich, Right?

Them other two guys got the wupping of their lives that day, but not me, seeings how I'd come from good stock, and should have been living in one of those big mansions with those big column's on all four sides of the house-- well it was obvious to that principal, that I was influenced by them boys, and maybe a stern talkin'-to was sufficient, and I agreed with him.

God was good to me, even back then. We were so poor we couldn't even pay attention, but not to them, to them we were rich. I have a hard time, even now, imagining how poor some of them kids must have been, but these

folks knew how to get-along, and many-a-thing was learned from them.

B. **BIG SNOW**

Later in the same year, but now in the 5th grade, we'd moved to Oak Ridge in one of those apartments the government built for the Manhattan Project. It was nice, the roof didn't leak, and you couldn't see the dog playing in the yard by looking through the cracks in the walls, we began settling in. There were lots of kids to play with, seeing how there must have been about a million and one apartments within two blocks of us; a sea of kids, and a bunch of watchful parents keeping an eye out.

Well, one day in 1959, it started snowing. I mean it really, really snowed. We had 18 inches of the white fluffy stuff. I didn't know what that stuff was 'til my parents told me. Being a Texacan, we didn't have any of that stuff in Houston.

It was beautiful, and it was cold, and it was calling my name; I wanted to go play in it, and build a fort, and throw it at Doyle and... man, it was great till my mom said we still had to go to school anyway???? Did I mention it was 18 inches deep?

Heck, we'd done pretty good just getting the front door opened. We didn't have any boots, didn't even know what they were, so my Mom wrapped plastic bags around our feet, and off we went. It must have been 10, maybe 12 miles to that school, and probably took about an hour or more to get there, but we made it. Our feet were soaking wet and frozen, and couldn't talk 'cause our mouth was froze, and we had on so many layers that we couldn't put our hands down to our sides, but we made it. Did I mention we made it the whole 15 miles or was it only 12 without a single fatality.

I didn't even know what cold was 'til that day. Best I can remember, my toes turned black, and I'd have sworn when I finally got my shoes off that one or two of them toes

woulda broke off and would be still stuck in the bottom of my shoe.

But, despite the cold, I've liked snow ever since, love it actually, at 60 years, I still get a little bit excited when the ground gets covered in that purty white stuff. Till this day, I still can't figure out why my feet is always cold, even in the summer time, but times were looking up, I had a completely different band of friends, and the distinct seasons made for different challenges.

3. SEWER GATORS

There's a secret that I've kept for all these years, and now that my dear mom is departed, I can reveal. Between each long row of apartments, down in the valley of a big ole' field, was a sewer pipe. Buried about 8 feet down and running in a thousand different directions for probably more than a thousand miles, and at least 3 or 4 feet around in diameter. It was runnin' under the city of Oak Ridge, and exposed itself at a creek that was about 100 yards from our backdoor.

Now, Doyle and I had a code that said "Nothing was off limits that was unknown or had a flavor of fun". So... off we went.

Down through the hole, a kid couldn't really stand up, but we almost could. Did you know some of those culverts can go for miles, and miles and miles, and I think we could go anywhere in Oak Ridge we wanted to go, and all underground.

One time we went from Prairie Lane, where we lived, all the way to that monstrous, giant swimming pool in the middle of town. Hey, that thing had to be at least 2 or 3 miles away. Anyway, that was fun, or at least we thought it was 50 years ago.

No one had to tell us how to have fun; we might have even invented it during the early 1960's. The reason I kept this a secret is because my Mom would have hurt me bad and my Dad, well I have no doubt he would have killed us, so, as mentioned before, I could now tell this story and still be safe.

Looking back, this was no causal thing. There was probably a dozen different ways we could have died; disease, bacteria, floods, rats, alligators, fumes, methane gas, or who knows what could have swam up from the Gulf of Mexico- I'm talking electric eels or the dreaded great

white shark. It didn't take us long to figure out we'd best keep this to ourselves. Did I ever mention that, (and I know for a fact), God takes care of us, especially kids that's got about as much sense as a pile of rocks. In our early years, we were idiots, but ain't that what our youth is made for; the mind seemed to be on one planet, while we goofed around on this one.

4. THE SPELL

It was about this time in my life that I would frequently have this recurring dream. I would dream that someone placed me in this padded room all by myself, and was told that I had to stay in there until I could crawl, (in the dream I wasn't old enough to walk yet), up the wall, across the ceiling, down the opposite wall and back to my starting point.

I'd try and try and try to get this accomplished, and many times I'd almost make it; but I never did. I'd get up the first wall, half way across the ceiling, crawling upside down and almost make it to the other wall and then I'd lose

my grip and just fall. And every time I fell, I would have to start all over again. This was a never-ending process in my dreams, and would occur several nights a week, and would not be understood until many years had passed.

On an ever more stranger note; I remember a very abnormal thing that use to happen to me. I'd have, from time to time, this thing that would come over me, that I would call "A Spell". Let me try to explain if I can. Sounds were very exaggerated; loud, and scary, and much more than this insecure little kid could handle, and I swear I could hear a clock ticking in the house, while I was still outside. My fingers appeared to be as round as a silver dollar, (not really swelled up, just big), and a feeling of being chilled would rush thru me.

This occurred about half a dozen times over the years. Anyway, thought I might mention this now, 'cause this is when it first happened to me, and I will discuss this in detail later in this book.

Also: A short mention, I don't know if I was having a dream, a vision or just something that stayed in my head.

I'd have a lot of thoughts about John the Baptist. I guess, maybe, I just did a lot of thinking about him, and who he was, what he did, and what he stood for- this would occupy my mind often. I even thought of myself as maybe a part of him. I know this was strange, but thought that maybe I should make a comment about it at this point, and hopefully, put it all together in a later chapter.

A. VACATION TIME

The summer before the 5th grade, my Uncle Herbert and Aunt Betty asked if I like to stay with them during for the summer, but mom didn't think it was a good idea, because of the stress that I was still going through from being in the hospital for so long, not that many years ago. I guess I never considered how hard it was on her, with me

being in the hospital with polio, and I'm sure, as I look back, that what she went through must have been more than tumultuous. Any, getting back to the story, it wasn't like going around the corner, cause my aunt and uncle lived all the way in South Carolina, which is a good long ways, especially to a knuckle-head that had very understanding of distance and time.

But I begged and I begged, and maybe even shed a stray tear or two until my mom finally caved in. So the next day they loaded me up and off we went. Their two boys Eddie and Danny were both close to my age and we had a ball.

We got into everything you could think of, and when three heads are put together, and none of us were known for our intelligence, the imagination doesn't have to go far before one could see that every notion had to be explored. Picking blackberries, playing on the railroad tracks, sneaking off at night and going to town, and listening to my uncle Billy (he was a policeman), and he would tell us all kinds of wild stories. A couple of nights he'd even load us up in the police cruiser and take us down to lover's lane, for a peak at the real life, meaning, that we'd watch cars, comin' and goin', and the silly antics of what went on inside of each them; we were just kids, what would we know about stuff like that.

Lover's lane was a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. We would drive up with no lights turned on, and coast in real slow. We'd sneak up on these parked cars, getting right behind them, and we'd turn on the lights and watch 'em scramble. Those people would then either take off running or hit the gas pedal. Now that was fun!

What we did mostly was, we would collect baseball cards.

The only reason we would even work was to buy more baseball cards. I must have had 35 or 40 Rodger Maris cards, not even counting all the Sandy Koufax, Yogi Berra, and all those great players back then. Eventually though, we use them all on the spokes of our bikes to make it sound like a motorcycle. Imagine how rich we'd all be today if we had actually "collected" and saved all that stuff way back then.....

Even though we had a ball-of fun; well, I started getting home sick. It began fairly mild, but didn't take but a few days to escalate to a full blown home sickness, and I'm talking about crying, and not being able to sleep 'cause I sure missed my mom, crying. I must have made my aunt and uncle miserable, but they never said anything, but I'm sure it wore thin on them too.

It took 'em about another two weeks, and then I think they must have called my parents. Probably must have pleaded and begged them to come and get me, for it only took my Dad another week, but they finally came up to South Carolina to get me. I'd missed 'em, and I'd missed 'em bad. But I was heading home, back where I belonged, back to Oak Ridge, to my own Tundra, but close to the securities of my designed life.

After barely starting the 5th grade, my parents bought a house in a small community, not far away, called Claxton. We moved into a three bedroom house on Oak Drive, and it was smack-dab in the middle of a sub-division, again populated with families that had kids who were all about our age. Wow, how much gooder can it get?

First business we had to take care of was, gettin' me started in the 5th grade, (a month late), and though I didn't like getting very far from our house, I liked school.

Mrs. Stevens was my new teacher, she was kinda the best friend to my Aunt Becky, who taught the 3rd grade in the same school. Oh no, not a built in tattle-tale. Great! Now I was gonna have to cover my mouth when I sneezed or coughed, and couldn't pick my nose in class, so this didn't seem like it was going to be whole lot of fun, starting this new adventure, and besides that, Aunt Becky lived just on

the other side of the hill from us. I liked school, and that was a fact, but to have to stand up straight, keep my shirt-tail tucked in, and speak proper, was probably more than this boy was willing to negotiate; but what could I do?

After a couple hours on the first day of class, we marched in single file to the lunch room. There must have been 4 or 5 little, short, fat ladies behind a food counter, which was filed with food that looked like it came from my Mom's kitchen. *Hey, this might be a pretty good ride, I thought, and when I took those first few bites, I was hooked!* Boy-o-boy this is good stuff; homemade, stick to your ribs, finger-licking good, good stuff. I made such a big deal about it to those ladies that they asked me if I wanted seconds. Heck yeah!, umm, and could I have a little extra piece of that apple cobbler please? This is going to be a pretty good deal. I'm thinking I'm going to like this new place called Claxton.

One of the things that was so much different about this school though, and that was the way they settled their problems.

They had what you call a chain of command, a pecking order, and I was way down the food chain. I'm talking fights; you know, the kind that you get hit in the head, kinda fights.

I might not have been that good to look upon, but I was partial to my face. Well, it looked like I was going to have to reach way down inside, to those internal reserves, and figure out a way around this one. I had to find a way to avoid having my face bashed in. I know! “I’D RUN!!!” Well it wasn’t the most honorable thing to do, but until I could position myself farther up the ladder from the omega, and closer to the alpha, I had to do something to preserve my beauty. For some strange reason, it sure seemed like, there for a while, I was doing a lot of running.

This whole situation wasn’t what I was used to, cause, I’d never been in a fight, and really hadn’t ever seen that many, but I was experienced enough to know they were to be avoided at all cost, if possible. I had to figure out how to keep my honor in tack, and save my pretty face at the same time. I guess it was around this time in my life that I learned how to talk myself into, or out of, a lot of situations. That would last for many years.

Speaking of fighting, did you ever play a game of organized baseball, and not have an impartial umpire? Well that’s the way we played. Each team used their own hind catcher as the ump. *Imagine a sorta close play at first base or even worst, home plate, and unless the runner was safe by 10 feet, there was always an argument.* Remember how these guys solved their problems? Yep, that’s right, we went

to fighting. Sometimes just 2 of us, sometimes all of us, and if the biggest guy wanted him out, guess what, he was out, at least if it was up to me.

Well, look at it from my point of view. He was either out or I was running toward the woods. That fighting stuff was for country boys, but I was from Houston, we did things different there. Back in Texas, we were more civilized, and who cares, we didn't know how to play the game anyway.

Remember when the catcher, (then called the hind catcher), caught a foul tip on the third strike, the batter got another swing. I guess back then we just made up the rules as we went. So playing baseball, back then, was just another day at the battle field, I mean school.

5. CHECK YES OR NO

Starting the 6th grade, I decided I was going to play marbles. Seemed to be a lot safer, and I was pretty good at it. Anyway, when one the bigger boys played, I'd just lose no more than a few marbles, instead of my scalp.

And more important, this was the year I met Silvia.

Remember those little pieces of paper that said "I like you. Do you like me?" Please check the box ---yes or no. So we, myself and Silvia, wrote notes to each other when the teacher wasn't looking, and that settled that, we were girlfriend and boyfriend. Well that meant I had to do the manly thing and steal one of my Moms' older rings, so I could make it official. This Was Not A Good Idea, for moms

had eyes in the back of their head, so why did I think that I was going to get away with this antic, but I still lied about it. And I got caught. Yeah right, what a brilliant idea that was, lying to the woman that knew every nook and cranny of my body, much less my life.

Like I said, this was Not a good idea!

The 6th grade is the year, in a young boys' life, that a lot of changes start taking place. You know, on the inside? The year, that no matter how many baths you took, you still stunk. And things were happening that we didn't know was supposed to happen. That was the year that I thought I'd better go ahead and make my mark, write my name in the sand, so to speak, and begin my legacy.

Us Texacans weren't no back-woods boys, so I made my mark by throwing pennies in the field. How cool is that? We got money, wasn't no hick in me. Well it did cut

down drastically on Silvia's' Christmas presents, but it did make a good impression on the other guys.

I must've been a man now. A 12 year old man, with the know-how of a, of a, of a, (might as well go ahead and admit it) a twelve year old. How was I to know? I had man things going on in me. Had that "stinking thing" going on, peach fuzz growing on my chest, and don't forget about that arm-pit thing, a man in every way, but I still couldn't remember if I'd ever had my first kiss. Come heck or high water, though I was going to prove that I had it in me, but fear must have bested me, for I don't think I ever kissed Silvia, don't even remember what happened to her- well actually I recall some sorta fight, and I came out on the losing end of. Ok, ok I got beat up by a girl- there I said it.

Well, let me tell you about 7th grade. That was the year we got to change classes, instead of just having one teacher, we had four. This was pretty neat. This meant we were just about growed up. We didn't have to stay in any one place for more than an hour or so at a time. When you've spent your whole school life with only six teachers for that entire career, this was a pretty big thing.

I started growing up, and I don't mean maturity, I mean height. I must have grewed a foot or more taller that year. In fact, I was in the 7th grade, but was taller than all the 8th graders, which meant I didn't have to be picked on any longer? Which kinda was like being "King Of The Mountain". Hey, I'm liking this. But, it also meant that I was sorta forced to play basketball, which I was absolutely, beyond any shadow of a doubt, not comparable to any, the worst that ever played the game. But this meant that I was finally on the top of the food chain,

Now, my family was a lot of things, probably most of them good, but athletes we were not, and if anyone thought there might be a surprise hidden in the bunch, I proved 'em wrong.

In fact, most of the time, if I had to do any running, my ankles was black and blue. My line of expertise was in the thinking arena, that I was good at, but athletics, not so much. Not really saying I was a scholar, I just directed my energy to figuring things out. Anyway, when it comes to sports, I'd try, but truth is; I'd be doing a good job to stay on my feet just trying to walk, and let's just say, my dunking abilities never developed. But I did play basketball, might've even made 6 or 8 points, even in a couple of the games, but no all-star athlete, that's for sure.

6. FOUR SQUIRRELS AND A WATERMELON

The 7th grade meant I was a man now, and I got to get me a gun. Now I don't mean a Red Rider BB Gun, or a toy, but you know the kind that shoots bullets, the real kind of bullets, and I loved it! I hunted almost every day, I even hunted before the school bus ran in the morning, and I certainly went hunting every day after school. Well, almost every day anyway, and I was good at it.

So let me tell you this true story. I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and anything but the truth. Folks, all kiddin' aside, this REALLY did happen.

Since I hunted all the time, I figured I'd take a yard rake and rake me a path through the woods. Hey, I must have raked 2 or 3 miles of path through the woods. This was

so's I'd have a quiet place to walk while's I was hunting squirrels, and I could sneak up on them better than a hawk could. The work doing this was hard, but the potentials, at least in my head, were out of this world.

But, on this day I only had only 3 shot gun shells with me, but who cares, I was still going to kill food for supper. We didn't eat dinner, we ate supper. Well anyway, I shot me 3 squirrels right off the bat. Heck, I'd just got started, but might as well head home since I was outta ammo anyway. Well I was headin' home, and low and behold, I saw me a squirrel up in a tree, maybe 30 feet off the ground. I thought to myself, if I'd scream right before this varmint jumps to the next tree, I'd scare the pee-pee out of him, and he'd fall. Then, if I had my act together, and moved fast enough, I'd hit him with the butt of my gun on the way down.

Well my Mom taught me not to lie, and of course I always did what she said to do, so this is the honest to God truth.

Well, right before this critter jumped, he squatted on his haunches, and I yelled. I'm telling you I screamed so loud it echoed for what seemed like about 5 minutes. Sure enough that squirrel flinched, jumped and missed his branch, but, I was ready for him. I took the butt end of my

gun and swung as hard as I could as he was falling towards me and ground, and by-cracky, I hit him. I'd hit that gray creature so hard that it took ten minutes for the fur to settle, and then it looked as if it snowed gray flakes.

I think I stood there soaking in the shock and wonder of what had happened, and began recounting the story, so's I could get it just right when I retold it. That was the day I killed 4 squirrels with 3 shells- Scouts honor.

To this day I think its ought to be in a world record book or something, and man, what I woulda' given to have me a witness there that day.

Most of the time there were 3 or 4 of us kids (I mean men), that would go hunting together. We'd go across Clinton Highway to an old dirt road that was called Dynamite road.

It was a long road, maybe three or four miles long, and just a little more than a path, but an older model car could drive on it, I certainly proved that, later on in my teen years. But, two cars could have no way, passed each other, that's for sure.

We could all spread out, in what we'd called hunting together. It sure was fun, not one of us really knew what we were doing, with maybe the exception of me, but we sure thought we did, weren't no little boys here, after all, we were "men", right?

We probably spent most of our week-ends trompin' together in these woods, shooting squirrels, rabbits, birds; hey, whatever we could find. We would start out at one end of Dynamite Road, and hunt until it came out again on the highway, down next to the Hitchen Post. At night that road was used as a lover's lane (we knew this was true, because of all the "evidence" left lying around on the ground). Anyway, this was a fun place for a feller to spend his teenage years, either hunting, or making out, it was fun.

Living in Claxton, our house was right off Clinton highway, and about a mile from a country store called Conner's market. At least five times a week or so, our Mom would send one of us kids to that store to buy milk, bread or whatever, and on every trip to the store, as I walked down that busy highway, I'd look for soda bottles, we'd call them coke bottles, or dope bottles, so's I could cash 'em in. I always did find at least three or four, and this would keep me in spending cash to buy my favorite drink or a couple more of those Baby Ruth candy bars. *I don't ever remember not having at least some cash jingling in my pocket. Back*

then three cents wasn't bad, but if one had fifteen cents in his pocket, he was rich.

In the summers of the early to mid-60's, we'd go across the highway to this cow pasture that was all grown up with who knows what kind of weeds. But in the mist of that conglomeration of weeds grew thorny blackberry bushes. Us kids, my best goodest friends, Steve and Jimmy, would pick them blackberries to sell for a dollar a gallon, and it was not hard to find some old lady to buy them from us, so hey, why not, right? Back then there were more ways to get rich than you could shake the proverbial stick at.

One day, after pickin' those hand staining berries all day, we run across this watermelon patch, right in the middle of that field, with a fence around it.

Scoping it out, we sat under a shade tree to make a plan on how we were going to raid it the next coming night. In the summer time, it didn't get dark 'til about 9:30, so we had to come up with a plan that would work for all three of us.

I was going to spend the night with Steve, while Steve was spending the night with Jimmy and Jimmy was spending the night at my house. Our planning was working out, and all things were arranged. That next night we stumbled through those woods and thorns, crawled on our

bellies and swiped all the water melons those little teenage arms could carry.

Did this about three times a week until one day in the bright sun light, while picking blackberries, we looked over towards our favorite melon patch and saw a sign on a post that read:

**“One of these watermelons has been
poisoned”.**

This threw us for a loop. What were we going to do? Our entertainment was coming to an end, all because some grumpy old man wanted to keep that acre of melons to himself.

Folks, this wasn't good for us men, you know we were teenager, and certainly believed we were men, but not to be skunked by the selfishness of a greedy old man that wanted to keep his own watermelons to himself.

We had to come up with a plan, and a plan we did make. We were to meet again that night, to make one more raid on that patch before our new found 'sand box' was taken away from us.

So that night, just after dark we met, and took off on that long tract across the highway, and through the woods,

trying to dodge the blackberry thorns, thistles, cow patties, and whatever else grew in a half trodden cow pasture. It wasn't easy, because the moon wasn't out that night as it had been previously. After crawling some quarter of a mile on our bellies, we were right to the edge of the fence that had recently become our favorite after dark entertainment.

But this time, we made, and took, our own little sign. Steve drug it the whole way. He'd use it to ward off the thorns, so he had it a little easier than Jimmy and myself had it, but we persevered.

Anyway, I took that sign on a stick and crawled to the middle of that melon patch, where I stuck it in the ground for all to see that came within a half mile of that delicious watermelon patch.

I can't even imagine, or maybe we could, what that old man thought when he woke up in the morning to see another sign in the middle of his beautiful green, mouthwatering melon patch. I could just see the look on his face when he read,

“Two watermelons have been Poisoned”

7. MAKING MY MARK

Now, when I was in the 8th grade, with all them hormones flowing and stuff, I met this girl in my class, named Patsy.

She sure was a pretty girl. And Patsy, she had horses, well, to be honest they were her grandparents, but as far as we thought, they were ours, I mean hers. We'd go riding until it was time to go home, and the next day- we'd go riding again, and we did this for several weeks. We just rode those horses all day long, till one day we decided to check out the barn, and that barn was full of hay, so might as well check it out. Right? Right.

Me and Patsy went to check that hay barn out, “wink”, and just about got caught by her Uncle doing it. We knew that barns were made for horses, cattle, and such, so why not reinvent its use for other purposes? We didn’t do anything, but we thought we did. Truth is: we kissed a little. OK, we kissed a lot.....and made it out of the barn just in time, and without getting caught.

Bet my heart was racing faster than those horses coulda ran, partly from the excitement of making out, and partly from the fear of getting my hide tore plum off, by her uncle if he’d showed up only a few seconds earlier.

Those were the days that a kid did a lot of high energy playing. We pitched horse shoes, and I was pretty good at badminton too, and, in fact, don’t know that there was anybody better at the time in either one of them two sports.

So about every morning and then again every evening, we were playing badminton tournaments and horse shoe matches, and when we’d done this for so long, there were more than a few that got good at it. All the kids in the neighborhood were there in my back yard playing, for it was the central meeting spot. Guess I was a pretty lucky kid, big ole back yard, fishing, camping out, horseback riding, barns to explore----- life was good!

Right next to our house was a vacant lot, the owners used to use it as a cow pasture, but now our neighborhood was becoming a fair size sub-division, and somebody was beginning to build a house on that empty lot. Good! Another place to hang out. This could be the diversion we were waiting for, for in the 8th grade, one couldn't have too many planned diversions.

When the workers went home in the evening, we'd go to work. Maybe I should say play, for one night we opened every single can of paint in that place, and then pee'd in em'. That way when them workers painted the walls, that house would have our mark on every single room, and we thought it would be pretty darn funny for the whole house to smell like pee too. Guess we were marking our territory. We laughed about that for years., but lookin' back, maybe it's not so funny.

Anyway, after they had finally finished, and completely built, when all the clean-up was done, they put a price tag on it- \$16,000! I couldn't believe there was that much money in the whole world. There was a bunch of us guys making bets. Nobody in their right mind would pay that much money, some of us even thought that there wasn't that much money in the whole state of Tennessee. It's funny, but I can't remember who won that bet, but in fact, it did sell.

It was a nice house though, and a brand spankin' new split level, and low and behold, two months later it was sold, and family buying it must have been rich. At least that's what we thought. We were fixin' to rub elbows with rich folks.

Well, it turns out that a guy named Ronnie moved in, he was my age, and in the same grade. It must have been divine intervention. Me and Ronnie became the bestest, goodest, and tightest friends in the world. We spent many of our days together, either playing monopoly, cards, reading *Mad Magazine*, or riding bikes and skate boards, for most every day was filled with some kind of entertainment.

Ronnie and I did everything together, it seemed like, and eventually, he married my other neighbor Becky several years later. It's funny how things just work out that way. But one thing for sure, well maybe not so sure, I wonder what his mom would done if she knew what we did to that paint? And more than a few times I wondered if she was on her hands and knees scrubbing the bathrooms and bedroom floors wondering where that urine smell was coming from, and why she couldn't get rid of it.

Now, let me tell you about the time one of my other buddy Eddie, and him and I would be out riding his

motorcycle. It was a Honda 90. That Honda was a neat bike, but it fell into the forbidden zone, as far as my Mom was concerned, and was strictly outlawed by her, and with dire and devastating circumstances, if that law was broken

I suppose that there weren't many things she put her foot down about, since I did spend most of my days from before sun-up, and clean up to supper, and beyond, hanging with the fella's, but this motorcycles was another story all together with her. So mostly, we'd ride around over at Eddie's house, or at least when my mom wasn't around.

One day, about dark, while my parents went grocery shopping, we thought we'd go to Oak Ridge. Now it was about 10 or 15 miles away, and we were going to ride that Honda. We had to be real sneaky, but we had a plan, and here we go. Being it was a Honda 90, and looking back at that itchy-bitsy bike, it hard to imagine how we were to pull it off, and it took us about 45 minutes, with both of our hinded-ends trying to hang on, on that little piece of a bike, but there was fun at every curve.

So, after such a long trek, we were hungry, the obvious choice was to head straight to Walgreen's. Back then there was no such of a thing called a Mall to hang-out at, but there was a giant stretch of stores that made a big L shape, what you'd call a strip-mall, and Walgreen's was right

smack-dab in the middle of the big right-angle curve. The Five and Dime on one side, and McCroy's on the other. Did I mention we didn't have a nickel between us?

Well, our hunger was powerful, so our plan was to steal us a candy bar- Each. So Eddie went one way and I went the other. I had one of these jackets on that was called a parka. Since it had elastic around the sleeve, I figured I could take an Almond Joy in my hand, and with my little finger could stretch the elastic out, and with one motion slide that candy bar up my sleeve. Don't really know how Eddie did it.

So, with the mission accomplished, we met out front, next to the motorcycle, the same place that a bike rack had been placed. Well....The darn Honda wouldn't start. In about 3 or 4 minutes the Pharmacist came out and asked us if we were having any problems. Of course we said no, and then..... And then he asked me if I'd had anything to eat. I said no but....., he then asked what that bump was in the sleeve of my jacket. "Nothing" I said. But he asked me to take a look anyway.

Well, now I already knew what it was, and my mind was blank from fear. I was busted, caught, slammed, and THAT was to put it mildly, I was in trouble- real trouble. We went back into the store, and I went to crying. Crying is an

insufficient way to explain what was happening. I was not only sobbing, but I was shaking, convulsing, and maybe even screaming, and definitely carrying on like some kind of deranged trapped animal, but anyway there was some wailing and gnashing of teeth. And that was just me; I can't even tell ya what was going on with Eddie, for the old saying about being scared blind, well I guess I proved it.

Looking back, the pharmacist was probably a pretty good guy, not saying that anything we did was ok, but he knew things that us kids hadn't thought of yet, and said that he was going to call the Police. ***You going to do what?***

Wailing and gnashing of teeth is now a mild way to put what took place here. It must have been embarrassing to anyone within a block of that store. I'd even bet that our neighbors back in Claxton could hear us carrying on all the way from Oak Ridge at that Walgreen's store.

There were a lot of different sounds coming from that little fourteen year old mouth of mine. But, even though I didn't have any plans, nor the sense enough to try and use tears to get out of anything, it worked, for there were enough water coming from my eyes to float a battle ship. That pharmacist broke down, and he let us go. He did, however, give us some conditions, and that was to "Go home!", he said, "And, you gotta tell your parents what you

did, and I'll call them tomorrow, and talk to them about what went on".

We left. Wasn't no grass growing under our feet, but just about the time the motor cycle started, he came out again, and told me ,that if I'd not told my parents, he was going to, then, he was to call the Police, and I was going to jail. GOING TO JAIL? Oh no! This can't be happening! This stupid kid hadn't, as so much, as even got caught stealing cookies from the cookie jar, much less having to go to jail for this monstrous act of doing something as bad as this.

It wasn't a very pleasant trip home, I tell ya, and with knees wobbling, my head throbbin', I finally made it in the house, and all before my parents had gotten back from shopping. It wasn't even 8:30 yet, but I went to bed anyway. I was exhausted. Man, I had done so much crying and carrying on, and then shook the whole way back home, I was plum tuckered out, and I had a lot of thinking to do, but I couldn't think.

I didn't know what my Mom would say, or worse, what she would do to me. Mostly cause all I was considering, was that my Dad was going to kill his second son. I don't mean hurt me real bad, I mean he was going to KILL me. Mom probably couldn't even stop him either, she might even help him.

Needless to say I didn't sleep that night, nope, not a wink. I tossed and turned all night, wet the sheets with sweat, and most of the feathers came out of the pillow, but, I came up with a plan, and it went like this: I was going to glue myself to the phone, I'd answer it before my mom, or anybody else could, and I figured that it just might work. That darn thing must have rung 8 or 10 times the next day. I was there to answer every one of them. "I'm sorry, you have the wrong number." It didn't matter if it was the neighbor calling to borrow a cup of sugar, or my grand-pa checking in, each time the phone rang, the answer was the same; "I'm sorry; you must have the wrong number". I've never fretted so much in all my life, No, not even 'til this day. Don't even remember how long this must have gone on, days, weeks even, and I can't even ever remember going back to that Walgreen's for many, many years to come, and Mom and Dad never did find out what happened on that day. Just me writing this down proves that. 'Cause like I said, if they had known, well I would be dead. Not hurt, not injured, not even maimed, I would be dead. I really was-one scared little puppy in those weeks of turmoil.

This is a good time tell you a very short story that was taking place with me at the ripe ole age of 14.

The preacher from the church house right down the road, lived almost straight across the street from us, and

since I was 14, he figured I was a man now, and that it was time to give my dedication and life to Jesus.

Approaching me he asked if I was ready to give my life to Christ. I responded “Yep, I reckon”. His response was “This Sunday morning I’ll tell the congregation that you gave your life to Christ and we’ll baptize you in the evening services”. “OK’ was my second response.

Since this was happening on Thursday, by the time Sunday rolled around, I’d forgot. He came to the house on Monday and asked me what happened, and after making up something, I assured him I’d be there on Sunday, and that I wouldn’t forget.

So Sunday morning I was there with all the bells and whistles on, and it was announced to the congregations, and here they came. There was a string of people that looked like it was a mile long, every one of them coming to shake my hand and welcome me.

I did more shaking and howdy-ing than a feller ought to in a life time, but I did get baptized that night, or maybe I ought to say, I at least got wet that night.

A. FELL AND FAILED

After buying my restroom pass on the first day of High School, my eyes were opened to an entirely different situation than this young, naïve, dumb as a coal bucket, feller had ever experienced. Most of us freshman, especially those from Claxton, had no more sense than a bull frog on a sand dune, and there's no tellin' how many jokes were tried, at our expense, but it never kept them from trying.

On Friday, of the first week of school, Clinton High School Dragons had their first football game of the 1963 season. Being an away game, the school provided a ride to the game for only 50 cents a person, so I went to that game. Didn't know anything about anything, about football, and this was a whole new world to me, but I went anyway.

And, on the bus, I met this girl named Carol. Well, I admit, that that was the day that I fell in love, head over hills, the silly kind of love that makes you feel good and bad, and at the same time, kind of love.

Carol and I went together for almost 3 years, and one day, in my junior year, (She was a senior), Carol said, out of the blue clear sky, that maybe we should break-up.

Let me stop, for a minute here and explain: Back then I might have been a pretty cool guy, but I didn't feel my feelings very well. After being in the hospital for so long, I'd just shut down my feelings. What I did was; intellectualize everything. I guess what I mean is: I put a wall up, to protect my precious man-hood, for I'd been disappointed and abandoned too much in the hospital, to allow myself to be hurt even one more time.

Remember, my Mom had to go home each night to take care of my Dad and brother, which meant, that I had to sleep there in that cold, sterile, echoing, scary hospital bed, all by myself, each and every night, for a long, long time. She'd done nothing wrong, but to a two year old, it was abandonment. I couldn't make sense of her duties and obligations, I just knew my mom left me every night. You know, thinking back I might have been pretty selfish when I was a tiny boy, but to carry it this long, might have been too much.

Anyway, I told Carol "OK" and that was that. You know, we didn't speak in our school days again.

But I did see her again, and that's another story for another day.

8. GOD TAKES CARE OF IDIOTS

In the summers of the mid-60's, a bunch of us teenagers would get together, on just about any given day, and do something, even if it was dumb, foolish or just plain ignorant. With each different group of kids, seems, I was always one of the bunch. But on this particular day Pete and I had decided to make us a gun, I'm not talking about any ordinary gun, but a big gun, like an eight gauge shot gun, there was no need in making a toy, we both wanted the real thing.

Now Pete lived across a couple of hills from me, and his dad reloaded shotgun shells for his own personal use,

and maybe sell a few on the side. And beings it was close to the 4th of July, we had access to all kinds of powder that we could blow things up with, seeing how firecrackers were in east access, and in this case, make a muzzle-loading gun out of a one inch piece of pipe. About three foot down this pipe we'd put this ninety degree elbow to make something like a pistol grip, with another four inch piece to hold on to. In the middle of the elbow we'd drilled a hole just big enough to thread the fuse of a firecracker thru, and by using a piece of thin wire threaded down the barrel, we did just that, with the remainder of the firecracker staying inside of the barrel. This was going to be our igniter.

We always did something during these muggy summer days, and this was not to be any exception. So with what seems like hours of engineering, we come up with this plan for the shotgun. We called a couple of the other guys, but just couldn't get anyone else involved in our new project. Wendell, who just lived down the street, had to do errands for his parents, or he'd been there with us.

Rummaging through a scrap pile, we found the pipe that we needed, and run down to the hardware store and bought the elbow. We were ready... Had to saw the pipe twice for the two sections, and did it in a way that both had a threaded end that we could screw onto both sides of the elbow, making the handle.

Must have broken three of Pete's dad's drill bits trying to drill that little bitty hole in the middle of the elbow, so I had to run home to secure what my dad had in stock. But it all worked, we got it done and hid all our broken evidence.

We had a time trying to figure out how to stop-up the pistol grip end so when it was shot, it wouldn't blow out both ends. Decided we stuff some cork up the short end, somewhere close to the bend, and then pour concrete down what was left to make a solid stopper. We soldered some sights across the top of the barrel, and now we had us a gun made that was equal to anything Smith & Wesson could come up with, and maybe better.

Moving on down our assembly-line, we now had to produce the powder to set the soon-to-be famous gun off with. Like I said, it was early July, and we had stacks and stacks of firecrackers, and commenced to unraveling at least fifteen of those nickel packs, and making a pile of that silver powder that would come close to filling up a coffee cup.

Not really sure if that was enough, we then took about half of cup of black reloading powder from Pete's dad's machine that he used to make the shells, and we were ready.

Taking a three foot piece of thin wire, we threaded it down the barrel and out the tiny hole. Tied the firecracker

on the wire and pulled it through. Started pouring in all that mixed up powder, and cramming down the barrel a wad of tissue paper, we now had to load the buck-shot in. Well ... We did pour in about two handfuls of buck shot, but thought that might not be enough, so finding some bolts and screws, we thru them in too.

Now ready, Pete and I had to figure how we were going to pull this fiasco off, and which one of us had the lucky position to do it. We drew straws, and I don't know if Pete won or lost, but it was up to him to shoot this monstrously of a gun, or may be that I should call it a cannon.

The one thing we both figured out was that no one could hold it in their hands. That gun must of weighed ten or fifteen pounds and was way too heavy. So, propping it up in the fork of a tree we lite it and took off for cover.

You know, with such of a short fuse, wasn't much time for that, but we run as fast as those teenage legs could carry us.

Hey...When that thing went off, or maybe I better say exploded, we were no more than thirty feet away, and felt, and sounded as if it was directly under us. I've never heard such a sound as that in my entire life. No, not even until this day, and I was in the military!

After picking ourselves up off the ground, looking back, the tree was mostly gone and a small crater in the ground. What have we done? Wasn't long before the neighbors starting calling and we were busted, but still alive (couldn't hear anything for at least week).

Don't know how we made it out alive, but I think we both learned something that day that will never be forgotten.

God takes care of IDIOTS.

Don't want to start bragging here, but I do believe that Pete and I invented the 'pipe bomb' that year.

Now, since I got a little ahead of myself, I'll go back to my freshman year.

Back in these days, it seems like we always had stuff to do. Whether it was lying under the apple trees and seeing all the pictures in the clouds, or riding our skate boards, which was a new thing in the mid-60's, we always

had something we were doing. When it snowed, which it did often back then, we'd ride our sleds, there just wasn't a day that went by that at least one in our group would come up with some kinda' fiasco, fun was easily had.

In our community there were two pretty good size hills. All of us kids, and there was a bunch of us, would get together and go up and down them hills all day long. I mean, we'd ride those sleds until our feet were starting to turn black, and we couldn't pronounce our words any more 'cause we were frozen from the inside out- or maybe the outside in, it was hard to tell, but more than a few of our body parts would quit working.

But we had fun, and there must have been about 25 of us kids. One of the hills, that we liked to sled, on was on Foust Carney Road. Now Foust Carney Road was steep, and it had a long straight run on it where a person could really pick up some speed, so's we got the brilliant idea to get together and build us a sled jump near the bottom of that hill. Since, we couldn't build it in the road; we had the bright idea that we would put it on top of this really deep drainage ditch, just off to the side of the road, but handy for both sleds, and car traffic. You know, if you put 2 or 3 kids on the same sled, that thing could really fly far coming off that ramp. Of course, there were kids flying off in every direction, and being over the ditch, just gave it an extra

mystique about what could happen, and anything that could happen, happened at least once.

It's a wonder any of us made it through the mid-60's. Ain't God good?! Especially to dumb teenagers. Anyway, on a night before a school day, when it was below freezing, we'd take garbage cans full of water, and pour them out down that hill. That was so the school bus couldn't make it up that road to pick us kids up. You know, I think we got out of a couple of extra days of school, due to that genius plan.

A. FISHIN AND CAMPIN

Now there were a bunch of times that me, and a group of us guys, would go fishing. Now when I say we, I mean mostly Fuzz and Jimmy and me, but, we always seemed to have one or two other fellers with us too. Anyway, a group of us would go fishing, and sometimes hunting down at the river next to Bull Run Steam Plant, on Melton Hill Lake. It was a long haul down there, must have been about four or five miles, and It sure does seem, looking back, that everything we did as kids was about three or maybe five miles away from home.

So we'd have to get up 'bout 4 o'clock in the morning, tiptoe around real quiet like, so mom didn't get up, and then, I'd sneak out the door. It would take us three hours to get there, hunt or fish all day, and then have to walk all the way back home in time for supper. You ever noticed how much farther it was coming home, than it was going when you started out? You know, I think it's still that way.

Sometimes we'd camp out, you know, since we were all men now. The good part about camping out was somebody would always bring beer. Maybe even a half bottle of some kind of whiskey or whatever we could sneak out. We sure did always manage to have some kind of fun,

or at least looking back at it..... yea, we DID have fun. Wow! I still remember all those sun-burns we got too, staying out there by the water all day long, ever day drinking beer, when we had it, and horsing around. And man, on them days that we camped out there, when we did, what I'll call "sleeping", which was more like, we'd fall asleep around 5am and wake up when the sun was beating down on us so that our skin would start sizzling (that's how we got them bad sunburns actually). Well, I tell ya one thing, it wasn't any fun getting up the next morning, especially havin' to walk all the way home feeling like we'd been run over by a train and dragged all the way back by our shoelaces. We didn't know which way was up. Seeing how, back then, the code was, we all had to be up by the crack-of-noon.

No wonder it was always farther going home. But this was what we called fun, and we were good at

B. SNOWMAN

In 1966 or maybe it was 1967, on New Year's Eve, it started snowing. It snowed all day and was still coming down hard as it turned dark. You know how kids are about the white stuff. We loved it, especially me I think.

Somehow we all had this sense about the times we were to meet together. It was usually in my backyard, and that night, just after dark, about 15 of us were standing around talking and kicking snow, when we had the idea to build a snow man. The snow was already about 8 inches deep, and still comin' down.

It took about 3 minutes to roll the bottom ball to 4 feet around, but it started getting pretty heavy at this point, so a couple more pitched in, and it was soon 5 or 6 feet around. Hey, that's no small snow ball. Three or four more kids jumped in, and at this point, we had to get our reserve stock, which meant the girls, and continued pushing that sphere of snow up and down the yard, and it was no easy task. It had to weigh more than a ton at this point. But we didn't stop, the rest of the group came to our rescue, and we would push and shove, but determined, we kept going. At eight, or nine feet there was no more making that thing move. We had to stop whether we wanted to or not.

Now we had the task of rolling out the middle ball, and then the head, or the third ball which went on top. The next snow ball was about six feet around, but it was way too big to pick up, even with all the kids standing by. We were whopped, but determined. All fifteen of us kids got in there and couldn't picked that bugger up. So, out of necessity, we had to cut it back to about four and a half feet. We got it!

And after it was sitting on top of the bottom ball, we began to pack snow around it, until it was, again, some six feet around.

The next ball was only about four feet, and with six of us boys, and the help of a few girls, we got it up there. Now came the time to dress him up. We took buckets of snow, and formed an arm on each side of him. The arms were probably eighteen inches in diameter, but we packed them in tight, put the trimmings on, and mission accomplished.

I know all these figures add up to eighteen feet, but it was so heavy that it squashed down to Thirteen feet tall. Let me tell ya, it was a big snow man, and I mean big. Huge was probably a better word, and it was impressive for sure.

That snow-man, or I might just say snow mountain, stayed next to our house until school was out.

We'd played in that snow, day in, and day out, after getting tired of the man look, the carrots, coal, and so forth, we knocked the top off, and hollowed the bottom ball to make an igloo out of it, so we ended up playing in that pile of snow for months,

It was fun.

There's not much I can brag about in my teenage years, and I don't know if I couldn't do anything right or I just didn't care if I did, but I did make really good grades in High School.

When I turned 16, my Dad told me: "if you want to get your driver license, you'll have to make the Honor Roll, or you'll wait 'till your 18".

I sure wasn't going to wait until I was 18, and since I was good at figuring things out, I made a plan. I'll cheat in school. So the ideal was to make a cheat sheet, hide it in the inside of my London Fogg jacket, and during a test, I would conveniently have, close at hand, all the answers, and ace the thing.

That's exactly what I did. I'd take a lot of notes during class, "cause every teacher will tell you what's going to be on the test. She'd say something like; "this is something that you'll want to remember", or "pay attention to this", for every teacher will put emphasis on the subject she's talking about if it's going to be on a test.

That was when I learned, that when I write things down, and speak 'em out loud, I wouldn't forget them. I never did use a cheat sheet, but I sure did make a bunch of

them. I'd just make 'em and throw them away; I guess it was the act, and energy, that I put into it, but it worked.

I did get my license at 16, my sophomore year.

One more thing I did, and that was, I poled vaulted on the track team of Clinton High School. I held the school record for many years, maybe still do.

But I might as well not get too excited, cause the truth is, my friend Jimmy and I practiced together in a pit we built in my backyard. Jimmy was a whole lot better than I was, but I couldn't get him to go out for track. I always knew, in the back of my mind, that if Jimmy was on the team, I wouldn't have even had a shot, and at least, wouldn't have held the record-that's for sure.

OH WELL, since he didn't, at least to all the kids who didn't know how I got so good at it, I was the best in our school. Well, best on the track team anyway, for nobody else even attempted it.

In my junior year of high school.... I met this really pretty girl, she was a sophomore, and the prettiest thing I'd ever seen.

Her name was Jonnie, and her I went together for two or three years, but her parents didn't think I was the best choice for their daughter, don't exactly know why, but I reckon most dads don't think anyone is good enough.

We had lots of fun together, and let me tell you, we were dancing fools. Our school had two dances a week, and we went to every one of them. Dancing was dancing back then. Remember the Hully-Gully, The Twist, The Locomotion, The Jerk, and the Alligator? We knew 'em, and we were good at all of them. Boy-o-boy, those days were fun.

Hey! This was happening year 'round, even in the summer, even when there wasn't any ball games, as well as all winter, during ball season, and all of it happening with a live band.

C. DYNAMITE

Well, it was about this time, after graduating, and Jonnie was now a senior, that us boys got together, and did a really stupid thing. Remember Dynamite Road? I'll tell ya a story about it.

There was a shack about half way down it, that rumor was; had dynamite in it, and we'd heard this story since we were little kids. So, since we were men now, and been driving for a few years, we decided we'd cut the chimney off of it, and just see what was down that hole. One night about mid-night, with our saw in hand, we snuck up that road, turning off the lights in my 1948 Ford. Creeping about 10 miles an hour, having to stop every few minutes, to turn the lights back on, to see if we were still in the road, so it took a while to get there, but we made it. Standing on the roof of my car, I could crawl on top of that block building, and I sawed the metal rain guard off the chimney, and looking down, I couldn't see a thing. Nobody brought a flash light. (Yeah, they had already invented them, even in those days). So, we went and gathered a hand full of brush, so's we could make us a torch. I'm writing this, so I guess you figured it out. WOW! There was dynamite in

there, in fact, it was filled to the top. I'm talkin' box after box. WOW!

We were out just to have something to do, and we certainly didn't expect this; for in truth, we thought all the stories to be anything but true. We hit a gold mine. But, I thought I might as well get down from the top of that building, seeing how I still had the torch in my hand. See, I told you we weren't little kids any more, and what a man will do, to prove his man-hood.

There were five of us, Wendell, Pete, Jimmy, and I can't remember if it was Ronnie or Fuzz. But anyway, we got back into that old jalopy of mine and heading back down the road, with lights on, and making plans. We had to decide what we were going to do with all of that, high powered, well deserved, explosives.

The next morning, most of us got together to figure out what we're going to do with all that destructive power. Finally after a couple of hours of debating, we come to a census. All of us would go to Point 19 (that was a fishing spot on Norris Lake), and blow us up two or three thousand pounds of mouthwatering fish. You see, the water was over forty feet deep there, and all this could happen without making a sound, seeing how dynamite, when set-off underwater, didn't make a sound, only bubbles. We had

sugar plums and candy cane dancing through our heads; and for sure, this plan was going to be carried out.

The next night, we all met at the Old Hickory store and restaurant. This was where Foust Carney came out on Clinton Hwy, not but a few hundred yards from Dynamite Rd. Excited, and getting close to midnight, we drove up there with lights out, and ready to make our mark on the fishing industry.

BUT, When we got there, crow bar in hand, we found that someone (the owner I'm sure), had taken that gigantic lock off, and the building was completely empty.

How could this happen? All our dreams were blown up. No fish to sell, no fame to be had, and we had certainly lost all our bragging rights.

Ain't God good?

Heaven was the only One that knew what was about to happen to us. I am certain that God saved five young kids, I mean men, that night, from being blown into pieces too small to be found, and not to mention, whoever else we might have taken with us. And thinking back, what we saw in that cinder-block building, peering down that cut off chimney, was boxes, and boxes of broken down cardboard, and all of them sweaty with some kind of jelly.

If God hadn't of been there with us kids, none of us would be here today.

Ooooo- Weeeee

9. PROM

I got my first public job while in my junior year, and I worked at the I.G.A., a grocery store in South Clinton with Gary, a really good friend of mine.

Gary had a 48 Ford like mine, but his was a whole lot nicer, for Gary's was a coupe. We made a dollar an hour, and that was enough money to keep the old Fords running, and seems like, there was always plenty of cash for our dating life, as well as enough to keep them clunkers going.

Pete, Wendell, and I on Friday nights, would go to Oak Ridge, and circle Shoney's, then back to the South Pole, which was a drive-in restaurant in South Clinton, and most of the time, Gary was right there with us, but in his own car.

Then we'd go back to Shoney's again to complete the circle. This would go on and on 'til we got too sleepy to do it anymore.

Remembering back: *We could buy a large order of onion rings for 65 cents. Boy-o boy, there was no way even a hungry kid could eat that much, or we could go to the Krystal's in Clinton, and buy twelve of those little hamburgers for a dollar, or ten cents apiece, if one only wanted a few. Back then gas was selling for nineteen cent a gallon, but every once in a while someone would have a gas war, and gas could be bought for fourteen cent a gallon; so buying gas, was not one of our problems.*

Said all that to say this; having a car, even if it was a 48 Ford, the 60's was a neat place to be, dating, or trying to pick up a date, was what us boys did, at least when we were between girl-friends. For \$2.00, a person could have a good date. Maybe head to the drive-in or go to McDonalds and we'd have a good time. For \$3.00, who knows what would happen?

Growing up back then was a wonderful life, and we were innocent, and some would call ignorant, or at least, we were innocent compared to what we know now. All of us, except me, talked, or should I say *lied* about our dates and what we did on 'em. Funny though, cause most all of us

were still virgins at graduation. You know how boys, I mean men, are, we'd talk about stuff as if we knew what we were talking about, but this was the time of life that you'd see if one had enough feathers on their wings to fly, and whether we had enough feathers or not; it wouldn't stop us from trying.

Trying to make good decisions was just about impossible, and I reckon it was in that respect, it really was hard growing up. Always thinking we were men, I guess because of peer pressure, but not having a clue as to what we were to be, or caring for that matter, or what was expected of us. Back then we didn't listen to our parents, only the pretense of it.

We worked our problems out amongst ourselves. At least we thought we were, but nothing, I mean very little, ever worked out. Oh well.....we were kids.

Having fun, or at least occupying our time, was what we were good at. We always had something in the works, and whether it was building a hut out in the woods, riding our skate boards, chasing girls, playing horse shoes, or just hanging out around the apple trees, we all had fun, and most always got along with each other well.

And, I have to admit that I had very few responsibilities, except every once in a while, my dad would

ask me to help out around the house, or in the garden, and since I wasn't asked to do much, well, when he asked (or told me is a better way of puttin' it), well you did what he said. At least if ya knew what was good for ya.

One night my Dad came in my room and asked me to rotor-tiller the garden the next morning. "OK", but somehow through the course of the night, I forgot. Now partly I forgot that he asked me, and partly I forgot that the next day was our school Prom, but either way, man was I in trouble.

So the next day being the Prom, that meant it was preparation day, for I had to get the corsage, tux, shine the ole shoes, take a bath, get the car clean, and buy the beer. Yes, I drank beer, didn't really like it, but felt like I had to do it.

After a full day of preparations, and remembering to do everything that had to be done, the prom was starting at 7:00, it was now 5:00, and I was clean, shiny, and had my tux on. I was ready and looking sharp, if I do say so myself.

Dad came in and asks how it went in the garden. "In the garden?" I said, "O yeah, I'll get that the first thing in the

morning”. Did he not notice my tux? Could he not see how important this night was gonna be? This ‘garden thing’ was the only element that I seemed to have forgotten.

Let’s just say that it was a sad sight, and Dad wasn’t going to fall for sad sights. I begged, pleaded, and even mustarded up more than a few tears, but it wasn’t working. “Dad! This is prom night, and you’re supposed to love me!” Nothing worked.

So, what else could I do but take off the tux, and head out towards the garden, roto-tiller in hand, I went to digging long rows of weed free vegetables.

It was a sight; I’m sure, watching me dodging every clump of dirt, to make sure that not one blemish was on me. Then....., I started sweating. In a few more minutes I was soaking wet. Forty five minutes later, face muddy, and barely standing up, I was finally finished.

Oh, NO! It was almost 6:00, but I still have time. I’ve got say, I don’t know how, or don’t know what I did to pull it off, but I did.

Oktook out of there in high gear, just in case Dad figured that I had given the abbreviated version of running a tiller. I was not taking any chances at this point, for I was out of there in a blur.

I went to pick up my date, who happened to be wearing a very pretty creamy white formal dress, and she sure did look good in it. She was none the wiser that I had been rotor-tillering only minutes before. I got her into my old Ford and we headed off to the prom, only a few minutes late. There was a live band playing and we danced, acted a fool, showed off when we could, and danced some more, but had a good time.

Now it was almost 11:00, and we were out of there. I took her, and we headed towards Shoney's, ate our French fries, wasn't going to chance the onion rings, and met up with some of our friends, done some more fooling around, and we all had a good time, but I had other things on my mind, so we were headed toward this dirt, back road that I knew about.

My 48 Ford was a 4 door, and it had those suicide back doors that opened backwards, and you'd know that, when I parked on that dirt road, cause I had the front end pointed slightly downhill. The Back door wouldn't stay open and we were working up some steam. So, looking around for something to prop it open, I found a spray can of the touch up paint. The paint was dark blue, same color as my car,

and I used it to cover any scratch that occasionally show up on my prized car.

The rest of this story breaks my heart to confess, much less write it down. I'm sure you can already imagine how it's going to go.....

With the can holding the door open, and a breeze blowing through, we were ready for some heavy necking. Probably even smoking a cigarette or two, but definitely having a good time.

Enjoying the night and my girl, the car shook, and we heard this hissing' sound. As we looked over, we saw the paint can had ruptured and paint was going everywhere. Well, since I was a quick thinker, I thought it was an easy fix, so I grabbed that can, and getting my back motion going; I slung the culprit as far I as my mighty strength could sling it. Problem solved.

But...When I turned around, my date was covered in blue paint from her hair to her shoes. Hey, I'm tellin' you there was very little of her beige dress still showing. In addition to the sad condition that my date was in, you couldn't see out the windows. All we had was blue, lots and lots of blue, the whole inside of that ole Ford was blue from the headliner to the floor boards.

Being the man and hero that I thought myself to be, I took my shirt off and started wiping everything, including my date. THAT WAS A MISTAKE!

I believe there was enough blue paint in that car that one could have painted a barn. The more I wiped, the more it smeared, it's hard to explain just how much paint there was. I managed to even paint the few remaining beige spots she still had left on her dress. I'm telling you, it was a sight. I did get the windows clean though....., well sorta'.

That wasn't even the worst part; I still had to take her home to her Mom, who I was sure was waiting on her.

Not A Pretty Sight. Folks it was bad. It was real bad. So we went to the Amoco service station in South Clinton, and took some of that Go-Jo, which would clean anything, to try to get the rest off. Not a Good Idea. I managed to smear the already dried paint, and brought it to life again. We did manage to take that dark blue to a pretty medium bluish color, but it was not looking good for me at this point, and I'm ashamed to say, I don't even know what my date was saying or thinking, most of my thoughts were on my own hinded-end, and how I could keep it after her mom saw us.

I'm not going to tell you what her Mom said and did. Nobody needs to hear such things. I can tell you that I made it through it. What's ironic, is that Prom was titled "A Night To Remember". It sure was.

10. THE BOMB CATCHER

After graduation, I tried going to U.T. but that didn't work out so well, so, my uncle Bob got me a job at Burlington Mills, in Burlington, N.C. I was to be a sample inspector, but didn't work there very long, for back in those days I didn't know what I wanted, except I knew I wanted to have fun, but I worked there long enough to buy a Bridgestone 90 motorcycle.

That sad little thing wouldn't go over 55 miles an hour, but I drove it all the way back home to Tennessee. If

I'd get behind a tractor trailer truck doing 60 or 65 M.P.H., and get right on his tail gate, and I mean right on his tail, the vacuum from the truck would pull me and that bike would scream.

In 1969, my buddy Fuzz, that had worked for the F.B.I., walked me, one day, through all the procedures of getting hired, and helped get me a job right there at the J Edgar Hoover Building, working for the F.B.I. After getting my secret clearance I moved up north, and began to work in Washington D.C., the city of Yankees.

We got an apartment outside the Beltway in Silver Springs MD. This was in 1969, and four other co-workers and I got to share this apartment, which cost \$495.00 a month total, but we all made entry level money at \$4200.00 a year; and that's only \$350 dollars a month, before they take taxes, and all that other stuff out of our paycheck, hey, we couldn't even afford to pay attention much less pay the rent and still have money to eat on. A whole lot of the times we lived on nothing but noodles and Kool-Aid, and food like that wouldn't keep a bird alive, much less a growing teenager.

We lived in the Eldorado Apts., which was a complex of three, twenty story buildings, on a two acre lot, and every one of those buildings had sixteen apartments on each floor.

You know, the youngest person that lived in that building was 18, and the oldest was maybe only about 28. That made for a lot of parties; I'm talking a lot of PARTIES. When we weren't at work we were having fun. Even on work nights, I mean seven nights a week someone was throwing a party. Those were the years that I didn't get much sleep.

The company that owned our buildings also owned the Ballantine Brewery. And, consequently we had lots of beer. I'm talking every bath-tub filled to the top with cans of the sudsy stuff. Can after can, and what we couldn't get in the tub, we'd stack in the closet. Anyway, we drank a lot, and when not at work, acted just as we were, stupid kids.

Right down the road was Georgetown University. The hippie-hang of the East. Black lights, posters, long hair, Jimmy Hendrix groupies and wanna-be's, the whole nine yards. We didn't have any idea how to act, so we faked it. We acted as if we were in the groove, for we didn't walk down the stairs, we strutted and swaggered with style. Since the F.B.I. had a strict dress code, I'm sure we stood out with our short hair, and our sideburns clipped off at the top of our ears, but at that time we didn't have enough sense to know it, but man were we having fun. Back then, Be-Bops shoes were in style, and all of us wore our black & whites everywhere we went.

Was we cool or what!?

Back on Pennsylvania Avenue, in the F.B.I. building, we were all business. I started in the mail routing room, but soon I got moved to the receiving room.

My job was to receive the mail coming into the bureau. This was an OK job. They'd put me in this concrete block room and left me alone while I opened packages to find out where they belonged, and then expedite them there with speed.

All kinds of stuff would come through there. I'd seen piles of money, mostly stolen or counterfeited, some of it was even blood stained, and once in a while I'd open a box and that would contain a head or a hand, or maybe just a finger. It sure was always interesting seeing all the neat stuff that was sent to them from all around the world, and besides that, nobody ever bothered me; I was alone, and I liked being alone after the nights we had, for it was just me and those four wall, and with no distractions.

They made me sign a form that said I could sign J. Edgar Hoovers' name to anything that was to come into our building. I was the man, a big man, for in my estimation, how many others, through-out this world, could say that they could legally sign Mr. Hoovers name? How many

people could say they had the same right to sign that name as J. Edgar himself had; and not go to jail?

You know, years later, I looked back to that job, and would reminisce about those days, and all the fun I had opening those pieces of mail, and the many boxes, with the diverse contents, and as the years wore on, I think I finally figured it out; I WAS A BOMB CATCHER!

After a while they moved me to document restoration, and then to the finger print department.

It was a good job and I enjoyed working there. The best part though, was having that F.B.I. badge. I could cash a check anywhere in the world. I guess they'd thought that I was special, and it was fun showing people my badge.

Those were some special days, and when a young person wants to learn, he's like a sponge, soaking in everything, and when one can have an experience like this, no day was ever dull. And if we gave blood, we got off half a day on a Friday, and believe me, I gave blood every Friday; it might have taken a few days of wobbly legs, before I would recover, but it was all worth it for the extra party-time.

A USMC

One day a buddy of mine, and myself, thought we'd do the manly thing and join the Army. So at lunchtime we went to the recruiter, but he was out to lunch, and so, being that we meant business, we went next door to the Marine recruiter instead.

A few weeks later, after our physicals, we were standing on the parade deck of Parris Island, we were full-fledged Marines; funny though, they just called us maggots. (Really, they called us a lot worse than that. Hey! I heard cuss words that I didn't know even existed), but, sure enough, we became one of our nation's Marines.

We were taught to salute an officer, and hold that salute until he saluted back or passed us by. Makes sense to me, I thought.

Well, one day after our daily eight mile run, and our 200 push-ups, and our 200 bends-&-thrusters, and our 300 set-ups, and our 300 toe touches, and holding our 76 pound gun (I mean weapon) over our head for 2 hours, a dog came up to where we were. He had one of these dog shirts on, but this dog had a patch that indicated he was a colonel. A

Colonel! This could not be happening to me, for with our vast training, and the information gathered, we knew what we had to do.

And there was nothing left to do, but, well we saluted. You know that dog didn't salute back and he didn't leave. We stood there for 4 hours, I mean right through chow break, and that S.O.B. never did do his military duty. And as the hours went by, we were too tired to even know how we even got out of it.

I received my honorable discharge on Christmas Eve, and after some hours of travel, somehow managed to step off the Greyhound bus, on the highway where our subdivision intersected it, just as the day was breaking.

It was snowing. Hey! This is nice, and I liked snow. Anyway, I got home just in time to spend the morning with my family, which I missed very much, and it was probably more pleasant for me, being home, than it was for them having me there, but we all had a good time.

It had snowed about six or eight inches, so us kids, (I mean neighborhood men), got together to go sledding, which was our usual winter past-time.

I must have been a pretty good boy that year, because I was going down this real steep hill setting on top

of the trusty sled and hit a bump. After wiping all the snow from my face, I saw something black sticking up out of the snow, pushing the snow away, saw that it was a motor cycle; a black and silver Honda 450. It was a nice Christmas in so many ways, but finding this was the icing on the cake.

Now since I was a man, a man of morals, and had served my country, I did the right thing and turned the new bike into the Police Department. Well, you know what? Ninety days later, they had given it back to me 'cause no one came and claimed it. The Honda was mine.

I went back to work for the F.B.I., but didn't work there for very long after that. I had to have my thyroid removed. I only weighed 130 pounds, and I was eating six or seven times a day trying to maintain that weight, so the Doctor figured out it was an over active thyroid. You know, I almost died during the operation, and the Doctor said that I had lost my will to live while under the anesthesia. If times were bad, I really didn't know it, each day was treated as a new adventure.

B. SWANK

About this time in our lives, us kids would get together and play music. We would play our different instruments in different peoples' basements, but could only play two or three times before, who ever lived there, would run us off.

After weeks of just a couple of us getting together, more and more talent would meet until we had a pretty good sized, and, sounding band; we called ourselves 'The Swank'.

I didn't play anything; I just put it together and organized everyone. I also worked at getting the band places to play, so I reckon' I was the manager.

We got pretty good at it too. There were seven or eight of us, and as time went on, we had gotten better and better. Joe the lead vocalist, Ronnie the bass guitar player, J.T. the man on the Hammond organ, Ricky on the drums, Steve played a horn, I can't remember who played the lead guitar, or the rhythm guitar, and some of the time Oko, that was his name, sang with us. Hey, I'm no pro, but we really did have a good sound, and Joe sure could sing. Boy-o-boy could he sing.

We played most every week in the Rec. Hall to a crowd that really liked us. Maybe we weren't the best band, (that honor belonged to the Embers, Joes' brother Jack sang in that band). We were definitely a close 2nd, not just in my opinion but many others thought so too.

We did get an offer to play in Louisiana, and also in the pan handle of Florida, but couldn't go because some of the boys' parents wouldn't let them. We did though, go to Ashville N.C., and played at the Highlander lounge.

Ronnie's' mom gave us use of a van, She owned a car dealership, and we painted it up with our name and a few musical notes, and it looked good. We all thought it looked really, really good, but since we used water based paint, we could rub it all off when we got back.

PLEASE Don't let it rain.

The band lasted for a couple of years, and we all enjoyed these days in our lives.

11. HEY KID, WANT ME TO GUESS YOUR NAME?

In 1970 I went to work at Kramer's' Shoes, in the down town shopping center in Oak Ridge. I worked for Homer for several years. I lived, not far from the shopping center, in one of those apartments built for the Manhattan Project, not but a few blocks from where we lived ten years earlier. I lived there with my good buddy Steve and another buddy of ours, John.

I sold a mountain of shoes and mingled with a lot of different people. I had a knack at this shoe selling, but most importantly I started learning a great deal about myself.

Lots of little kids would come in there with their parents, and I'd try to guess their names, just to try to break the ice, and make them a little more comfortable. Just playing around, I'd say how's little George doing today, and he'd reply, "How'd you know my name?" Done this six or eight times, and for some strange reason I would get them all right. I didn't have a clue how I had guessed their names, but I really did get all of them correctly.

I thought it was just lucky guesses, but started entertaining the thought that something was wrong, or at least just a little strange in me, so thinking about it all night, I was determined to go to work the next day and purposely run a test on myself, to see exactly what was going on. So from then on I'd ask the child if I could guess their name. The condition was; that I would get three tries. Many would say that I could never guess theirs, and some would say that even their friends didn't even know their real name. Anyway, the whole time I worked there, which was more than three years, I never missed guessing one of their names.

I studied on this for several years and determined that what I was doing was reading body language. As predicted, the first guess was almost always wrong, but the way they would express themselves, would somehow give me a clue. They'd say something like, I was a long ways off,

or maybe I was close or a little close. Anyway there was something I was picking up on.

A half a dozen times, over the next ten years, I told this story to people that wouldn't believe it. So as a test they would ask me what their real name was, and one guy said, nobody but his wife knew what his middle name was.

It didn't matter to me if they wanted me to guess their first name or their middle name, and lo and behold, I never did miss. The feller that said nobody but his wife knew, accused me of asking his wife. His name was Rueben.

I told this short story to say something later on in this book. So I'll explain more in my later years.

A. WOODSTOCK

Let me tell you about the time Steve and I were bored, and spent the day trying to figure out what we were going to do over the week-end.

Now in 1970 or 71, somebody was putting together a shin-dig, or that's what we called them back then, but the promoters called it the Woodstock Festival. Now the real

one had already taken place and this was the sorta follow-up festival, much bigger, and it was in Atlanta, GA.

“Let’s go!” It didn’t take a lot to talk, to talk each other into doing something, anything, and this sounded as good as any. Off we went in Steve’s’ 1963 Chevy, proud of our decision, and singing all the way. The closer we got, the thicker the traffic got, and those last ten miles probably took us three hours. People in their cars, on bikes, on motorcycles, walking, and many were hitching a ride on the trunk, or hood, on most any of the cars passing their way. The traffic was so slow, and most didn’t care that few extras were attached as hood ornaments, anyway, we got there. Parked the Chevy in a cow pasture, probably over five miles from the main events, and started walking toward the music, for we could hear in the distance.

After walking, looking at our feet, because it was easy to trip or step on someone, for about another two hours, and we might have covered half the distance, for a feller had to watch the ground, if not we would probably be laying on it instead of walking on it. So after about two hours, I looked up, this was the first time that I had looked at anything but the ground. WOW! all I could see was people; and I’m talking **a lot** of people. All the eye could see was faces, signs, more faces, and lots of smoke filled air. As far as the eye could see was people, and we could see for

over a mile. Just people. (They claimed there was over five hundred thousand.) Did I mention, there were a lot of people? Anyway, there was this ambulance going by, siren going and movin' real slow, but movin'. We both, Steve and myself, jumped on the back bumper and hitched a ride all the way to the band stand. The crowd was so thick; I doubt the driver even knew we were on it, and to speed things up, the Hells' Angels were walking in front of the ambulance to clear a path from the crowd, so the emergency vehicle could get there. It still took us another forty-five minutes to make it to within 200 feet of the stage. Some girl had over-dosed. There was a lot of that going on over the next few days.

Jimi Hendrix, the Chamberlain Brothers, Joan Bias, Janis Joplin, Richey Haven, Country Joe and the Fish, just to name a few were on the stage, and in fact, just about everybody, but Elvis and The Beatles were there.

Sometime after 3:00 in the morning, Steve and I thought we'd best make our way back to the car for a little shut eye. Two hours later we finally made it, and exhausted, we were down for a short nights' sleep. Those big cars, back then, had real seats in them. Steve took the front, and I took back, and it didn't take us long to be in that dream world, for the day had taken its wear on us.

Slept good in the time we had, but a shaking, and a noise, woke us up a couple of hours later, right after day light. It was those dad-burn Hells' Angles. Two were asleep on the hood, two on the roof and two on the trunk, and the big guys on the roof had their feet hanging off the top, and from their knees down, had all the doors blocked. We couldn't get out, and we sure as heck didn't want to stay in. You know the two of us set in that car, very quietly, and without moving even a muscle, for about 4 or 5 hours. Hey, those fellers needed their rest too, and we sure didn't want to deprive them of it. I'd like to say I wasn't scared, but that would just be the half of it; I couldn't eat, couldn't pee, couldn't do nothin' until they said we could; we were stuck. But at the crack of noon when they got up and left, we still had our faces, and all our limbs were still attached, so it made for a pretty-good night, after all.

B. OOPS

Ok; I'm reluctant to tell this story, I'm not at all proud of myself for what happened, or how it happened, but, for better or for worst, here it goes:

Remember my first high school girl friend Carol? One afternoon I'd gotten a phone call that was from Carol, and she called to ask if I would meet her, because she had something to talk with me about.

Knowing no more than the short call revealed, we met and enjoyed seeing each other again. We talked for several hours, and then she told me that her flame for me had never gone out. Hey. I was a little astonished, but not about to say no to a pretty girl like her, so my answer; "OK, sound's great to me".

As it went, Carol was married and had a two year old son. I was either twenty, or twenty-one at the time, and definitely too stupid at this point in my life to do the right thing. So we had an affair.

About three months later, Carol said she was pregnant, and I was the dad. Now she was still living with her husband, and said that she'd already told her husband (Johnny) about the coming baby and that I was the father. I

didn't know what to think, so I just sat there with this stupid look on my face.

We talked, and then talked some more, for this was more than this stupid, and immature kid, could squash up in that little pea-brain of mine, and then she said that she wanted to leave him, and come to live with me. So, after talking more, we started making plans in that direction.

Wanting to get this story over with, I'm going to give the abbreviated version.

She said to me, one day, that her husband was willing to forgive her, and that they would raise the child as theirs, and put the relationship back together. That's a pretty big man.

At the time I was still in the band, The Swank, and one night while playing at a dance, Johnny, her husband, came up to me and asked to talk. We went outside, and I was more than a little scared, for this guy was older than me, and about six inches taller. Yeah, I was scared.

His first words were: Ross, "I know about you and my wife, and I know about the baby". Saying I was frightened wasn't even close to what was going on inside of me, for my knees were shakin', my speech was slurred, my

hands were sweating, and I wanted to run, I wanted to run so bad that I even had a taste in my mouth.

Then he went on to say; “I want you to back away, and let Carol and I raise this child as our own”. What was I to say? I don’t know if I wanted to be cool, or just a stupid kid, I mean man. So I looked up to his face, and said no, and then spit on him. Nobody reading this, needs to explain how stupid that was, for I have always known, except for that day, that’s there’s not much worst that a guy can do, that to do what I did.

Thinking that I was fixin’ to be jumped on like a duck on a June-bug, I braced myself.

He wiped the spit off his face, hung his head down low, and said “I’m sorry you feel that way” and just turned around, and then walked away.

Well, as it turned out, Carol had a miscarriage and was in the hospital, when she called me to come and see her, but I never did. That made her mad, and it’s quite evident why; and we never did see, or talk to each other again.

Over the years I would think about this situation on a weekly basis if not, almost daily. I rehashed it a thousands of times over, and over the decades, I have looked at this from every angle I could approach, and still can't believe that, even at that age, I was that ignorant. This definitely was a major part in my life changing, in the years to come.

I will certainly explain more about this later.

12. WEDDING BELLS AND STATIONWAGONS

One afternoon in June of 1971, while still living in Oak Ridge, with Steve and John, I met this real nice girl, (maybe I should say lady), named Nancy. It was a causal meeting, she was with her friend that happened to be Steve' girlfriend. It was two months later before I got up enough courage to ask her out on a date, but she sure had made a good first impression on me, for my thoughts were consistently going back to the day we met.

Nancy either had just broken up with her boyfriend, or maybe they were still seeing each other, but It didn't matter to me, I was determined. I had my sights set on her,

and come heck or high water, I was going after what I wanted.

Well, in October, of this same year we were married. Just barely got married, 'cause she didn't show up at the church until 8:00, the ceremony was supposed to start at 6:30, and I don't know if you can imagine, but that was a long, long hour and a half. Just walking around wringing my hands, and trying to keep the people from leaving, but, success was finally had, even if it was the middle of the night. Her Dad (Bill) made up this 'cock and bull' story about the traffic, but it was the Clinton-Oak Ridge football game that night, and that was a pretty big thing. Oh well, who cares at this point.

Our plans were to go to Myrtle Beach, so we took off. That sure was a long drive for a feller who just got married, and not to mention how late it was when we finally stopped for the night. I was so tired and stressed that when I carried her across the threshold, I was whupped, I'm talkin' so tired that I didn't know which way was up tired, except that I had a baseball cap on as an indication of which way the sky was.

This is not an easy thing to talk about; but I remember walking in the room and saying "WE DID WHAT?" Hey! I was scared, I mean so dog faced scared, I didn't know

whether to go to sleep, go eat, or go back home by myself. You know, even threw all my dysfunctional antics, she really came through for me that night. We talked and talked most of that night, and I finally calmed down.

After coming back home to our little apartment, we began to make all these grown up decisions: Planning our future, how to save money, what we were going to do with it when we did, what we liked to eat and how to cook it. You know all those things that adults do. I was twenty-two, and Nancy was nineteen, but we were grown-ups. Yeah Right, we were anything but grown-ups.

The end of November we found out Nancy was pregnant. Glad, scared, worried, glad, and scared some more, but we were noble about it and acted like we were thrilled. Really, to tell the truth, we were thrilled, but with any new experience, major adjustments had to be made, and neither had a clue as to what we were doing.

At this point we moved to Kingston. It was actually right outside of Kingston, Greasy Run Road, on a little farm that my brother Doyle had bought. We lived in the garage that was detached from the house, and was converted to a nice little one bedroom apartment.

Nancy quit her job at Miller's department store, and I was still working at Kramer's. We had it pretty good. I'd go

to work in Oak Ridge in the morning, and work in the garden, or tend to the cow in the evening. A simple life, but not bad at all, especially for two simple people trying to figure out their way through life.

So, thinking one day about a child coming, I had this brain storm of an idea; and since I was all grown up, and going to be a Daddy, I better start looking, I mean acting, like an adult. You know what I'm talking about; faking it. The things that a child, stuffed in a man's body, will do, still amazes me, even until this day.

So I bought a station wagon, and I also bought a crib, cut my hair shorter, kept my shirt tails tucked in, quit saying 'groovy', listened to classical music, all the stuff the grown-ups do. I think I put the crib in the back of the small station wagon in December, when our baby wasn't due 'till July; but I guess all this made me feel like an adult, when I was anything, but one.

I made \$1.75 per hour selling shoes, and we grew our own vegetables, butchered our own pork and beef, so we sorta done pretty well. We did good together, for the most part, but we did have a few challenging moments, along our way. But...., we had fun that winter, and we were so excited.

Come July our first child was born, Andrea. WOW! Is this neat or what? I don't think either one of us had a clue as what to do, but we knew how to love her. Love her we did, but the rest we had to learn.

Always wanted a girl, figuring I could snuggle with and kiss on her a lot more than a boy, so I was happy and scared, but happy.

We stayed on that little farm for a couple of more years.

Like I was sayin', we were living next door, (about twenty five feet away), to my older, wiser brother Doyle, and his wife Rudy, and their small family.

In our spare time, me and Doyle would go to this auction in Midtown about seven miles away. It was fun, and after several months, we both decided to try selling our junk there, and see if we too could make a little money. This auction we were going to sell stuff at, was not known to have high class junk, just the low class variety, but perfectly fit for our needs.

Our first attempt was a success, probably made \$40.00 or \$50.00 just selling stuff we had and didn't need. We sold a pile of things that was left on that little farm

before Doyle bought it, and moved in. But in a couple of weeks we didn't have anything left to take, so we started scrounging around back of store dumpsters, and looking for useable junk that had been left on the side of the road.

One day, we had this brain storm, or maybe it was a brain fart. We thought we'd go to Oak Ridge city landfill and see what could be picked up from other people throw-aways. Our little brother Scott was there on a visit so we took him with us.

At the same time, we were clearing trees and brush off the hill side, behind the house, and needed old car tires to help start a fire, and placing the tires under the brush, and burning them in several places, we would evidentially clear the over-growth.

Good idea, we both thought. So heading out, and getting to the dump about 10:30 Saturday morning, we dove in, up to our elbows, first looking for the old car tires, for our priorities were right in getting the necessities first, and then started in on the sellable junk.

Looking around, there must have been 125 other people there doing the same thing. But after picking up about a half dozen tires, we both looked up, and just about everyone had left, and we had the whole forty acres of

landfill to ourselves. Good deal, we thought, after having spotting more than a few items of high class junk.

I don't think we were on our toes that day, because within two minutes a police officer had showed up. Came straight up to us, and I mean made a bee-line to us. That officer asked what we were doing, "Sir, we're burning brush, and needed something to help start the fire." I don't know if it was because we had already gotten dirty, or maybe just ugly, or maybe he was trying to make a name for himself, but he arrested us, all three of us, right there on the spot.

Folks, I'm tellin' ya, he took us to jail. To jail, at this age, we didn't even know what a speeding ticket was, much less jail and Scott wasn't even old enough to drive. Just talking to an officer wouldn't come easy, but having to spend time in jail, was horrible.

Here we are sitting in the tank of Oak Ridge city jail, on the charge of scavenging. Hey, we were doing the city a favor, getting' rid of a little trash, and helping to keep the dump from filling up so fast. But, there we were, arrested as scavenger, and put on the group W bench with the mother rapers and father stabbers, taking 8X10 glossy black and white pictures, of us three hardened criminals. This was not a fun experience for any of us. We had to sit in the same cell as the hardened criminals did, and dodge their taunts.

So three and a half months later we got out, not really..., another officer let Scott and I go, Doyle had to stay, and later that afternoon we'd posted bond of \$75.00, and they let Doyle out.

What a stupid law. Maybe back then there just wasn't enough laws broken, 'cause the city law of Oak Ridge, and those that made 'em, must have had a lot of time on their hands.

A year or two later I took a job at Rutherford's car dealership, but didn't too well with that one. I was struggling to figure out how to lie just right. A few short months were all I could last.

13. SAVE THOSE NAILS

My uncle Cary was living in Virginia, and said that if I'd move up there he'd help me get a job at New Port News Shipyard. Nancy and I talked it over, and took us a couple of days to get things packed up. We didn't have much, but we were proud of what was ours, and the preparations began.

Andrea, our daughter was about two at this time, so off we went. VW station wagon loaded to the hilt, and a small rental truck, we took off towards Virginia. Well, it wasn't long before we were at Uncle Cary's home, ready to go to work, and it didn't take but a few days before I went to work at that shipyard.

I went into the apprenticeship program as a machinist, and they put me in the nuclear section, working on sub-marines. This was a good job, and I made over twice the money I was making before.

I stayed there for a couple of years, and learned a lot, and worked even more. I got to help build the Nimitz, and the Kennedy aircraft carriers, and two of the nuclear submarines. My mentor taught me the tricks of the trade, and we worked very well together. Our job was to help install the nuclear reactors, building them with one piece of stainless steel at a time.

While still living in Hampton Va., lying on the couch reading a book by Hal Lindsey, I made a commitment to God as I understood Him at the time. It was no small deal, for something real and big was happening inside of me, and what was happening, I couldn't explain if I wanted to, but it was real, and very serene, the transformation that was taking place inside of me. The next few days proved, through temptations, that what I'd received was real, this was a very new experience for me.

My first prayer was: Lord, "I'm coming to you, and I'll give you my all. But the one thing I don't want; is to be an average Christian". I really didn't know what I was asking

for, but the words came from a place deep inside of me, and, although I didn't understand then, years later they began to make more sense.

A few years later we moved back to Tennessee, only to move back to Hampton VA, again. This time I was working in the machine shop. This is where we'd build machine parts that were to go on the two aircraft carriers and other ships being built.

A year or so later I was called by Union Carbide (K25) plant to go to work in October of 1975. This is getting better all the time. Didn't make any more money, but I sure was closer to home. (I seemed to have a problem with being homesick).

This was a great opportunity, and I had wanted 'this' job for several years, sure did take them a long time to call me back after applying for it some years earlier.

I moved my family, all three of us, to the town of Karns for the winter, and then we moved again to Oliver Springs in the early spring. We moved into the same home my Grandpa came to when my dad was a small child, and the same place our family would visit on the week-ends as we got older. Now my aunt Kate, grandpas' daughter, owned it.

When our new family was moving in, my aunt Kate was moving out. She showed me a giant pile of used lumber in the back yard next to the garbage pit. She said “Ross, you see this lumber, what I want you to do is” (at this point I was bracing myself for what she was going to say. I knew aunt Kate was going to say that she wanted me to stack that four hundred tons of lumber for some future use, so, at this point, I thought, this ain’t happening.

Continuing, she said “as part of the deal for living here, I want you to pull all the nails out of each board”. At this point my back was stiff, and my mind was running wild with the thought of spending months and months of the labor it would take to stack all that wood, not counting all the bruises I’d have pulling ten million nails out of some useless boards.

As she continued, and finished by saying; “stack all the lumber in the shed in a neat pile,” Oh no! The shed was a good 100 feet away, and this could take years, and all this for a bunch of boards that come off a hundred year old barn. And she finished it off with “and save the nails”. And save the nails!? This lady was a hundred years old herself. What was she thinking; Save the nails?

But I promised her that I would do just that. The next day my aunt took off to Florida, so I burnt the pile of

wood and who knows what happened to the nails, and who cares?

This house was built in 1864, and it was a big house. It had probably been built right those hundred and ten years ago, but wasn't in the greatest shape now. A feller could see who was coming up the driveway without looking out the windows. All you had to do was move your head up and down real slow, and you could see who it was by looking through the cracks between the boards on the side of the walls. It did have a newly installed bathroom, and running water in the kitchen sink though, so we were in business.

This was the house that my second child, Susie, was born in. What a thrill it was to have another girl to snuggle and play with, a true blessing, but not the greatest of houses for a baby to live in, but we did survive. It really was a pleasure to have Susie in our lives. Two girls, man I sure did want a boy to carry on my name, but you can't get much gooder than two girls to snuggle with; a lot of work, but the thrill of my family was joyful.

One winter night we all climbed in the same bed just to stay warm, cause that wind and cold was whippin' around outside something fierce that night, and the house wasn't built for weather like this.

I set a glass of Kool-Aid on the table next to us, and went to sleep. The next morning, I sat up and saw that the liquid had frozen, and the glass had shattered. Now that's cold.

What heat we did have come from a pot-bellied coal stove, if you could call it heating. If the wind blew, it would almost blow the curtains off the rods, and the window panes shook so hard, it sounded as if they would break.

It was bitterly cold in the winter, and equally as hot in the summer, but we loved it. The girls had a big yard to play in, and we learned a lot about each other.

There were lots of memories here in this ill insulated house, and I guess that's what kept us from freezin' to death.

Years later my Aunt Kate died in Florida, never returning to Tennessee, a good thing I guess, cause who knows what she would have done if she found I didn't listen to her one bit about removing and saving those nails.

I had a good job working at K-25, but we were poor, I mean we didn't have any money. I had to keep my C.B. radio base station up to date, and there was that thing about keeping me in fishing supplies, and retaining my

priorities where they ought to be, we were still poor besides.

But I learned something during this time that I still carry with me to this day.

Months earlier, I bought a trailer load of fishing gear, including a boat motor, and all the camping stuff a feller would ever need. I bought it on credit at Sears, and had fallen behind on the payments. So every Friday a young man, from Sears, would come out to get my payment, because Sears wasn't going to let it get any more delinquent. He seemed like a very nice person, and some of the Fridays we'd just sit on the big front porch and talk about this and that. I kinda of liked him, but one day I got in me that I wasn't going to make any more payments. So, the very next Friday he drove up and said "Good morning Mr. Shultz". At this point I knew I wasn't a Mr. and as he got out of the car I spoke back to him; "I'm doing great, and if you step on my porch, I'm going to knock you off of it". He didn't say a word, just got back in his car and left.

That night I couldn't sleep. I got to thinking, and figured out that the man in this situation that was wrong, was me. This person, a really nice guy, was only doing his job, and I certainly wasn't doing mine. The whole deal made

me ashamed of myself, so I made a commitment, to myself and to Nancy, that there was no more buying anything on time. One of my comments was; “if the washing machine breaks down, you’ll have to wash in the sink until we can pay cash for a new one”. Low-and-behold, the next day it broke.

God had a hidden favor in this. I virtually, never did borrow money or owe for anything again.

One day, after coming home from work, Nancy showed me an ad in the paper about this little house for sale in South Clinton. Selling for \$8500.00, it couldn’t be much, but after four or five days of nagging me, I finally agreed, and we’d go look at it.

I didn’t expect much; in fact, I pretty much expected to find a dump. But after looking at it and the acre of land it sat on, the house seemed like a pretty good deal, so we tried to buy it on the spot. It turned out to be a little harder than that, but we did end up buying it. Had to offer more than what the seller was asking for it, but we got it.

This is now 1978, and after a snowy winter, our son Matthew was born. This was not an easy birth, and Nancy lost a lot of blood, Andrea and Susie were home at the time that Nancy went into labor, and when I say there was a lot of blood I don't mean just a little. For my wife had a crisis, and started hemorrhaging, and Andrea had to run get the neighbor. I can't imagine how she felt seeing all that blood and her mom almost dying in front of her. But God being with us, Matthew was born, but he did have to stay in the hospital quite a while. This is my first son, my namesake, I already had two girls to snuggle with and found out, low and behold, I could snuggle up with my son too. After that scare, it was still a very nice spring. And, I had my son.

As I grew in my walk with Christ, spending as much time in church as I could, I heard God's voice calling me to what I thought, in my heart, was to preach.

After telling preacher Glenn what I was hearing, and what was going on inside of me. He began to tutor, and I rapidly grew in my new walk. He set up a time, that in a couple weeks I was to be ordained as a minister.

I studied, and I grew, and these were wonderful days. Reading scriptures six to ten hours a day, I probably learned more in that month than I'd learned all the rest of my twenty nine years. This was a very special time in my life, learning my Daddies voice, and enjoying my times of talking with Him, for each day was a new adventure, while walking with my Father.

Then came that day I had so very much looked forward to, sat in the chair at the church house, deacons all around me, it was now time to be ordained. To be a Baptist preacher had a good ring to it, and just as the ceremony was starting, I heard God speak in a clear fluent voice:

“Ross, if you go through this, it will open every Baptist church door in the world. But, it will also close all the others”.

That's all I heard, then there was just silence; a peaceful silence.

So just as the ceremony was beginning, I stood up and told preacher Glenn that I wasn't going to go through with it. So we all went home, and that night he came to the house. “Ross, many people get cold feet, so we'll just set the ceremony up for next week-end”, he said. Responding back, I told him: “This is not cold feet, and personally I wanted this more than anything, but I heard God speak to me very

clearly, and this is not the route that he wants me to go". Several weeks later he asked again, but I heard what I heard.

Late that same summer, we put our house up for sell. It sold for \$18,000, in a few weeks. Hey! This was alright, paid \$8500, did about fifty dollars' worth of painting, and replaced a couple of screens in the window, and closed in the back porch, and made a \$10,000 profit.

Not a bad deal!

14. GROWING AND GAINING

My parents still lived in Claxton, not far from where we were now living in South Clinton, and it was just over the hill, and at about this time, my Dad decided he was going to move.

You see my youngest brother Todd who was sixteen years younger than me, had a lot of allergies. Bull Run steam plant wasn't but four miles down the road, and it produced tons of ash. The ash fell everywhere, and on everything, and Todd was highly allergic. So Dad found this farm for sell in a tiny community 40 miles south, called Paintrock, and made the decision to buy it.

There were eighty-three acres of rolling, wooded land, with maybe seven or eight acres cleared for planting, or running livestock on. He'd offered us an acre patch if we wanted to build a house. I had close to \$11,000 of profit from selling the house in South Clinton, so I took him up on it.

At this point in my life, I'd, virtually, never held a hammer in my hand; except for the taxi we built twenty something years earlier, out of them roller skates. Being the person that I was, and not afraid to fail, I took to the task of starting to build a new home for my family.

When I say I knew nothing about hammers, nails and boards, I mean I didn't know a level from a square. But a feller working with me at K-25 did. So every day at work I'd ask him to tell me what to do.

Didn't know I had to start with a hole in the ground to put a basement in, but O.C. nurtured my daily projects one or two days at a time. As time went on, the house was starting to take shape, and looking pretty good. The joke at work was; that if I'd flush the toilet and the lights would come on. But with all the advice I was getting, it was a sturdy, nice looking house. After all, I was spending eight hours a day working on it, and didn't sleep a lot those days, but sure got tons of nails drove in as the house went up.

I was resting in my walk with the Lord in those days, for nothing was happening in my life that anyone one would sit up and take notice about. So, one night, as I was talking to my heavenly Daddy, and in a matter-of-fact way, His presence came over me. My prayer was; "God.....If this is all there is in my walk with you, I think I'll go back into the world". But, instead of being slapped on the side of the head, or just taken out of this world, He spoke back to me in a very soft voice. *"Ross, it's not, just sit back and watch what's fixing to happen"*.

Well I had a neighbor, Ed, that would lend a hand once in a while, and one evening said he had to leave to go to this meeting called Full Gospel. I think I kinda hornswoggled him into not going to that meeting and helping me instead, so we kept on working, but a few hours later my buddy Darrell called and asked me to go to the same meeting. Thinking that maybe there's something to this get-together, I went with Darrell. It wasn't a very nice thing to do to Ed, but back then I really wasn't in touch with my feelings, just sort of flew by the seat of my pants; or so I thought.

The meeting was very different from anything that I'd been used too, but still enjoyable just the same. On the way home Darrell asked what I thought of it, and my answer was; "I liked it, all of it but that speaking in tongues stuff".

Now Darrell liked to argue, and I did too, and it sure wasn't like him to let this go, but God had closed his mouth that night, and it kinda made me aggravated. You see, if he'd argue with me, I'd win the argument, or at least that what was in my head, but it wasn't to be so that night, so I went home frustrated. I went to bed that night, still aggravated, but thoughtful of the nights' situation.

"God, I don't know what this baptism of the Spirit is, but if it is of you, then I want it". Don't exactly know what had happened, or how it happened, but something sure did. My life, in an instant, was changed, I mean completely rearranged. My eyes were opening to the deep things that I'd never realized existed. Folks, this was a very pleasant experience. It was like I'd had a pair of welder's goggles on, and they'd been there all my life, and someone reached up and flipped them off my head. I could see things that imagination couldn't dream of, my life began to be transformed by means that I could explain, and into a creature that I'd never been.

I finished building my house that spring and we moved in. Our beautiful little family was snug in our new home, and it was paid for, and the best part was, I built it all by myself.

For the next three or four years I was probably hard to be around especially to the people I worked with, and I'm not sure my feet ever touched the ground, and I was learning things from God on a daily basis. I'm talking insights from God, and they were coming at me in rapid succession. I saw and heard the amazements of God, that my mind, brain, ears, eyes and heart sure weren't smart enough to invent or imagine. My walk with the Lord was wonderful, but my walk with people, not so much.

One day at work a supervisor asked me what God was doing in my life, so I began with that morning, and expressing what He was doing. Four hours later, as I was going backward in my testimony, I was all the way back to yesterday, for much was happening in my life, and sharing the joy with this man was a privilege; this was a fun and enlightening time in my walk.

15. TWENTY NINE AND STUBBORN AS EVER

Let me stop and briefly summarize what has taken place in these first twenty-nine years of my life, and how each event was adding up, in a pattern, to shape my future.

Life started off wonderful, with two loving parents and an older brother. This was short lived by a major bout with polio, and the worries that came with it. After a struggling recovery, I began living what I thought was a normal life, at least from my prospective.

I think there was always an unction in me, a desire, an urging for me to hurry up and grow up. To a little kid, 12 was the number, to a 12 year old it was 16, then 18, then 21, and the insurance companies said it was 25, before anyone matured, and since we couldn't trust anyone over 30, maybe that was the magical number. Then it shifted to; you can't trust someone over 40, which meant, to an adult child, that we still hadn't grown up. Fact is; even at age 40, I still didn't make it to manhood.

Through all these years, manhood was either what I was striving for, or something I knew was an important part of life, and not knowing the latter, I continued searching for the enchanted year that I would be a man.

Though these twenty-nine years were fun, exciting, and adventurous, they were also sad, scary, and at times very lonely. Having such a devastating disease played a major roll in most all of my decisions, but it also helped, in my personality, to nudge me into independence. Having overcome many obstacles and surviving several personal problems, I developed an attitude that failure was not the worst thing a body would fear. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I had no fear of failure, so I'd try things, build things, dig into stuff, turn over rocks, (so to speak), and set my goals just a little higher, than I was comfortable at; always looking deeper into what was behind the hidden door.

But, when it came to relationships, I was afraid of rejection, for my dysfunctions were many, but my training was little.

My parents raised us to be clean, proper, and with manners, but they didn't have that loving, cuddling, or closeness to us, or outwardly to each other. Don't think I can remember my Dad ever showing affection, to us, or even for that matter, my Mom. We were loved, but really never learned how to show it. We felt loved, but were never told.

So, having a beautiful family of my own, I wanted to give to my children what wasn't given to me. I sure was proud of Andrea, Susan, and Matthew and I gave to them all the love that I had, which was a lot, and I did it the best I could, but my well wasn't very deep, and I didn't have an abundance to draw from. In other words, I too didn't know how to share the love I had for my family. But I told them.

Also I pushed the kids and Nancy a little too hard in wanting them to be the best they could be, I pushed 'em to go a little farther, get a little higher and do a little better, which is not so bad if done right, but of course, I also carried it too far. If the kids came home from school with A's and B's, I'd fuss at them for not having all A's. I know now that this wasn't right, but back then I figured I was doing the

right thing, or the best thing, in the best way, for again, my well could not yield what it didn't have.

I really, really wanted to be a man, but I was not. It was inside of me, but I knew, I was still just a boy, trying to function in a man's body.

I went to work at Union Carbide owing everybody something, and having nothing. But, this was a good job, and very good for me.

I worked in the centrifuge program separating the isotope 238, and building the very large machines that did it. All the people that worked there, for the most part, were neat to be around. I had a satisfying job, and enjoyed going to work every day.

This was not a demanding job, and for the most part, I worked in the computer room. And having this job, we had plenty of time on our hands, with very few demands, so most of us played checkers, or Rook every day.

Mostly though, I read, sometimes for five or six hours of a shift. I would read the scriptures. Not that I was doing wrong, the boss' let us, since we had alarms that

would go off if anything was to go bad; and with this extra curricula, that I had the privilege to do for about seven years, I guess one could call this a pretty good job.

A few years earlier, I was attempting to move to the Y-12 plant. My uncle Roy was the plant manager, and after talking with me, said he'd help me get whatever job that I decided to go into; and having this clout, and the seemingly power that went with it, was starting to get into my head, and I began to brag about Y-12, and my uncle. The word of the transfer got back to the head office, and someone (a supervisor that I didn't see eye to eye with), secretly wrote a letter to employment about my work habits.

Trying to explain this letter, or the reason for it, is going to be a little difficult. But Uncle Roy told me he couldn't hire his mother with a letter like this.

I know, you want to know what the letter was all about. So here we go: We worked in research and development, and had groups of important people that would tour the building, and our jobs. Back then I had a full beard, as many people did, but it wasn't very well accepted. Seeing how we entertained senators, and congressmen, and all sorts of important individuals; management did not want to be embarrassed over some hippie-looking employees.

They come up with this plan to call beards a safety issue, and told us we had a week to shave them off.

I wasn't really a rebel, or maybe I was, but I knew what was right, and what truth was. The facial hair was not a safety factor, nor did it interfere with our job.

So, being a man of principles, I called a meeting with the big-wigs, by going through the union.

"Sir's," I said, "Safety is the responsibility of every employee, and no one has any more power than any other; Right?" Their response was; "Right." "If anyone, no matter how far down the ladder he is, even on the bottom rung, sees a problem, it is his requirement to fix that safety issue the best way possible. Right?" Their answer was "Right." "Then the next time I see a senator or congressman, or even the governor himself that is wearing a beard, I will personally grab him by the collar and immediately escort him out of the building."

I wasn't stupid, I realized that I was pushing this issue pretty far, but they didn't have a leg to stand on.

So to retaliate against me, they came up with this idea to make us computer room guys; not put their feet on the desk, because it was a safety issue.

So, here we go again. “Sirs, safety is the responsibility of every employee, and no one has any more power than any other; Right?” Their response was; “Right?” I continued, “If anyone, no matter how low down the ladder he is, sees a problem, it is his requirement to fix that safety issue the best way possible; Right?” “Then the next time I see any employee, whether the department manager or any supervisor under him, that has their feet on a desk, I will personally knock their feet off the desk.”

To say the least, I made it hard on myself. But, this was the reason they wrote that letter to the Y-12 plant.

In their eyes, Ross wasn't a very good employee, but I managed to stay there at K-25 for several more years. One time they gave me a reprimand for backing into a legal parking space, and said that if I did it again, they'd send me home for three days. Imagine that: Send me home, for a parking ticket. A \$300.00 fine for a parking ticket! I don't think so.

Well anyway, three years later the whole department was shutting down. Everyone had to look where he could to get a job to stay in the plant, or move to one of the other company plants. Everyone, including the department heads, for our whole building was being vacated.

For some strange reason management said that I'd become a model employee. Imagine that, Ross, a wonderful person, hardworking, very nice, friendly and easy to get along with, and still had an uncle overseeing the only place any of us could go to; Y-12.

You'd never guess what happened. Yelp, I wrote a letter to Uncle Roy.

I never could figure out how some of them guys never did get a transfer to Uncle Roy's plant.

A. BUZZARDS

Sometime in 1984, we had an incident that came along that would help strengthen us for many, many, years to come.

We were all attending the country church right down the road, and I had been teaching a Sunday school class of adults, and occasionally preached from the pulpit. When one of our lessons was on 'unknown tongues', and I admitted that I had been speaking, or maybe, should say praying, in a prayer language, which many refer to as 'speaking in tongues'.

When word got around, some would say that this phenomena was of the devil, many others just thought I was nuts. Anyway, it didn't sit very well in a Baptist setting, (you know, one of them religious things), so there was a little mocking, and a little ridiculing going around. This didn't bother me because I knew what I knew, and it was a major part of my growth that I had received six years earlier.

One day, while mowing the front yard with a push mower, four cars pulled into the driveway. It was the preacher and seven deacons, so I stopped, welcomed them to my home, and one of the deacons asked if they could speak with me.

All nine of us stood in the driveway, and one right after the other, were asking me questions, one question and then another. Hey, these questions were coming so fast, there was no way to answer one before I was slapped with another one.

Do you believe this, and do you believe that, do you take the Bible literally, just what do you believe? WOW! Holding my hand up, I said I'd be glad to answer any and all questions, just give them to me one at a time.

This wasn't going to happen. Finally, I squatted on the ground, and it was like buzzards on a carcass, they swarmed around me. It felt like a trial with the Sanhedrin wanting to take me to the "place of the skull".

Nothing was getting accomplished at this point, so I asked if they'd pray with me in asking God's guidance in this matter. Six or seven turned their backs, and even the preacher walked away. It was a short prayer, and yes, a couple of them did pray with me. Then we got down to the nitty-gritty.

The head beagle (maybe I shouldn't make fun) spoke up and said; "We, not only want you to quit going to OUR church, we want you to sell your house and move away."

I did neither, I continued as always, and was told that I could no longer teach the class, but that I could be a substitute teacher. A year or so later they took that from me.

You know, maybe I shouldn't say they took it away from me, I'm thinking God did, and I'll explain this a little later in the book.

My daughter Andrea was baptized by a minister friend, about two years earlier, and she still wanted to join this assembly, which had the vendetta against me, and her joining was just fine with me. So she did, she stood up there with her profession of faith, and then afterwards, when all the little ceremony was done, she did a lot of shaking hands and howdying. She was twelve at the time, but smarter than her age. I was glad for her. Voted in, and on the roll, she was now an official member.

The next Wednesday was 'business meeting night', but we never went to the silliness of what went on in a business meeting. The next day though, we found out that the meeting was about Andrea, and one woman made a motion to ex-communicate her, and got a second to the

motion by another woman in the church. The vote was taken, and Andrea was out.

A twelve year old, was kicked to the curb, because her dad sought God at every level. Their reason was that their preacher didn't baptize her.

You know, this was not a bad time for us, we all knew what was going on, and continued to grow and rejoice in the Lord.

The next Sunday our daughter went back up in front of the assembly, and at the end of service, announced that she would get baptized by their preacher. I sure was proud of her and still am. It's a sad thought that a twelve year old had to get baptized twice, just to join a church, and all because of some religious technicality.

16. LESSONS LEARNED

It was about this time that I starting selling used pick-up trucks. The trucks I'm talking about are the \$200.00 to \$900.00 variety, and that was cheap, even for back then. Most people wouldn't want this type of vehicle, but there were a group, that like me, needed a truck, but didn't have a lot of money. Anyway, I'd buy these pick-ups, do a little work on them, shine 'em up, maybe touch up the paint, and resale them for about \$100.00 profit. Wasn't going to get rich, but it gave me a project to keep busy, and the extra money was needed in this time of our lives.

I had three or four older model trucks setting in the front yard, and a feller came by to look at them. He was a friendly sorta of guy, and we talked about this and that, then

he asked the prices of each one. Settling in on two of the vehicles, he kept going back and forth, checking out one, and then the other, as he contemplated. The dark blue one, I priced at \$200.00, and the light blue one at \$800.00. After about half hour I realized that I'd paid \$700.00 for the dark blue truck, and \$125.00 for the lighter colored one. Anyway, I'd gotten them turned around backwards, and accidentally reversed the prices.

Standing their watching this man go back and forth, I was thinking about whether I should tell him of my mistake, or just let it go. If he's not told, and picks the darker colored one, which I paid \$700.00 for, then I'll lose \$500.00, and that was more than a lot of money, at least to me. But, wouldn't that make me a liar? Now, my mind is going in all different directions, and at a speed that was uncomfortable as I watched him sort through the two trucks.

If he picks the \$200.00 truck that I miss-priced at \$800.00, I'd just tell him I made a mistake, and would sell it for the \$200.00, the right price. So that wasn't going to be a problem, and, he was showing a great deal of interest in it.

Walking back to the lighter colored one, with a look as if that was his choice, I started to feel a little relief. But, as there was a pause while looking under the hood, I began

to think again of what was done, and the consequence of making this mistake. It came to me. A voice rang in my head softly, but very clear. “Ross, you say what you mean, and you mean what you say”. No, I didn’t ever really give my ‘words’ that much importance, at least at this point of my life, but growing to manhood was something I sought for. The gentle voice wasn’t saying that I did mean what I said, but that I should mean it, and wallowing this voice around, as it echoed in that noggin’ of mine, was making me dizzy.

My decision was made. Either way he went with this deal, was going to be good for him. After a moment’s pause, and good for the good of me, he bought that darker truck, and at the time of closing the deal, I was both sad that I lost \$500.00 on this, and glad, peaceful, and very satisfied that it went the way it did.

He got a pretty nice set of wheels, and I got a million dollar lesson, that only cost a few bucks.

I never did tell this man what really happened. So all went well, for both of us, and I’ll carry this with me for the rest of my life. Every once in a while, life affords us great leaps, at only a small price, and this was one of them.

17. DAVID AND THE LITTLE GIANT

In 1984 I did get that transfer to Y-12, another plant, but with the same company, and what a blessing that was. I was transferred to a division that enriched uranium, and worked for a man named David. This man was very instrumental in my plight to becoming a man, and I'm convinced, that man didn't place me there, but it was by the hand of God.

David taught me many things. One of those was the day, about two weeks before Christmas, and I'd asked him for the week of the holidays to be off, for the remainder of my vacation that I was keeping back. His answer was; "Sure". So going back upstairs to our crew, I got to bragging

about being off Christmas week. The feller that had the most seniority told me that David couldn't do that. "We had eleven people on our crew and six was already off", he said, "and David had to keep a skeleton crew of five to keep the machines running, and he'd probably get into trouble".

Thinking about this for a few minutes, I headed downstairs to talk with the boss. "David, I sure don't want to get the big boss' onto you, and didn't realize you already had so many off". David turned to me and asked: "You're a man aren't ya?" Answering, I said "yes". He spoke again and told me to let him worry about that, if a boy wants off, that's one thing, but his group was all men. "Take the week off and enjoy it".

That was the day that my work ethics took a turn for the better. Any person that would stick his neck out for me was worth doing a good job for, and then a little bit more.

I made some great relationship during my stint with Y-12, and will always cherish them. From the stubborn foolishness of a boy, to the downright stupid man; way too many stories to tell, but each and every one of them, has a meaning to me.

In the mid-80's, I began farming in a bigger, and much more serious way than I'd been doing for the past five or six years.

For several years I'd graze three or four head of cattle, and would mow and rake hay with horse drawn equipment. Then stack it around a pole, twenty feet high, and stomped down tight, for the winter feed, I was working with what I had. Back then I would even mow the sides of the roads, or anybody's patch of ground that they weren't using or mowing.

There were several lean years here that were a remarkable learning experience for me, with lots of work, buckets of sweat, many mistakes, but I learned, in the old fashion way, what small time farming was all about.

And once again, I was working for David, and another co-worker Jimmy. Both, who had farms and knew what they were doing, unlike myself. So in all our spare time on the job, we'd talk about cattle, planting, mowing, harvesting, sowing, and just about everything that had to do with a farm.

These guys had the money to do what was needed done, and I was about as smart as coal bucket, and as sharp

as a bowling ball. I really didn't know anything about this venture, and had almost no money to do it. But I had a good job, the will, and a desire to learn, and make it work.

So to keep up with my co-workers, I succumb to the peer pressure and bought a passel of cattle, some new equipment, and even built more and bigger barns, and got me a new tractor, mower, rake, and baler; I was ready

But despite my appearance of being a first class farmer, I never did build strong or sound fences, and as long as the wind kept blowing from the south, I was ok, but when it would change directions, I was in trouble. Folks, my fencing skills, or knowledge of farming, weren't much, and the three strands of the best barbed wire money could buy, and put up like a knot-head that had been raised in the city, was much either. But I was having fun, talking the talk at work, and talking to cattle at home, and except for the many times that the cattle had to be chased back into the fences, I was content.

By 1988, I was running thirty-five head of cattle on twenty acres of cleared land, and I still was hoping the wind wouldn't change direction. To be honest, this couldn't be done by anybody, not enough land, not enough me and not enough money to do it right, and that was when south wind was blowing. So I sold out. What a relief this was.

Now I had a little money and a whole lot less worries, and could make more money selling hay than I'd ever come close to in the cattle business. And I never saw a bale of hay break through those leaning fences to run down the road.

Before I forget, and this being a few years later, I'll tell you the story about losing a whole litter of pigs: You see, as I was sitting on the front porch, reared back in the swing, that hung from the rafters, and my feet propped up on the railing, and this feller came by and had a boar hog for sell, that he said was ready for breeding.

The reason he stopped is 'cause I was finishing off shoats (a bigger pig but not yet a hog), that I sell in the Fall, so the neighbors could put a slap of bacon, and a couple of hams in the smoke house. It was a rare day that I wasn't working somewhere on the farm, seeing how the south wind was still keeping the fences upright, but his timing was just right, and he caught me being lazy.

As he walked toward me hollering out: "Afternoon, didn't think I'd catch you at home". Responding back, I said: "How ya doing Jack, just being lazy on this warm spring day.

Thought I'd set here a while and watch the traffic go by, while I rest a bit".

"See that big boar in the back of the truck?" Said Jack as he lit a cigarette and still walking towards me.

I snapped back. "Yeah, I see that, what you going to do with him?"

Jack said that he was going to sell him, if he could find someone that would have a use for a very big, but ugly hog.

Thinking about the dilemma, I couldn't come up with a solution. "Don't know what you oughta' do Jack, but sure hope it works out for ya." I said as he was turning to leave, head hung a little lower.

After he left, I got to thinking. Shoot, I wish that I had a sow to breed that boar too. Darn-it, guess that means that I lost a whole litter of pigs.

After that day I began to take my pig farming stewardship to another level, and did this part of my farming career for about three years. We ate good, but never did recover over that day with Jack, but I chased a bunch of pigs though, and not one of them were from his boar.

I'm not sure what was happening to me in these early, to mid- 1980 years. I've taken an honest look at myself hundreds, and hundreds of times, but all that I could come up with, is that the fear that I'd felt as a quadriplegic some thirty years earlier, were somehow creeping back up on me.

At work we were required to work three rotating shifts, every seven days. We'd rotate from days to midnights and then to evenings. The midnight shift was more than my feeble body, or should I say mind, could handle, and was becoming more and more irritable, for I was having a difficult time putting together how I was feeling, and what in the heck was going on, on the inside.

I was scared, and the fear led to thinking too much, which led to worrying about my health, which led to more fear, which led to working too much. Guess I was trying to run away, probably run away from myself. The polio, and all the doctors, and the way us victims were treated by the public, was more than this thirty-something year old man, I mean kid, could take, for it was now catching up with me.

I began to have panic attacks, but at the time didn't have any idea what they were, and what I was feeling was somewhat familiar to that stuff that I called spells back in

the 5th grade, when everything was exaggerated. Remember when I was telling about my fingers, and sounds that were big and loud, this was very familiar to that; At times, I didn't know if I was coming from somewhere, or going.

I went to the doctor often, sometimes twice a week, and once I went twice in the same day. For several months, the doc and I, both thought it was blood sugar. Then I would go a few months thinking it might be a brain tumor, or "maybe it's something wrong with your heart, since you're having palpitations", he said. This in its self was enough to drive a feller crazy, and I seemed to be in fast-forward.

Anyway, I went through a gamut of infirmities, diseases, and conditions, but nothing was bringing any relief to this knot-head of a guy, that just wanted some peace in his life. Not to mention what Nancy was going thru, and what she must have been was thinking. I'm sure this was a very difficult time for her too.

One day was extremely hard, and painful, and I was so scared that I just lay in the floor and rock back and forth. Folks, I was in the fetal position, just laying there moaning and rocking back and forth for hours. So I called up the doctor and told him; "I was scared". "What do you mean

scared, are you saying that you think someone is chasing you?" The doc asked, trying to pin it down. Not really listening to him, I said "I guess so". So he called in a prescription for me. It was Xanax.

I didn't know what the stuff was, but when I'd taken one, within forty-five minutes, I was well. I wasn't really well, but all the symptoms were gone. Now, we had a handle on this thing, that I called "a spell", that was haunting me all these years.

The dose doc gave me was .250, and I was taking one of these broken in half, .125, and doing it at least twice a day. Looking at that tiny pill, I realized that I was only a half of a tiny pill way from getting well, or at least better, and this thought was a positive influence in my mind; relief was on its way. So, me not really listen to the doctor on the phone, was what started me on the recovery that I sorely needed.

These four or five years were hard on my young family, because I was still having upwards of half-a-dozen panic attacks a day, but they were coming under control.

I think the fear inside, was being projected to other areas of my life, instead of a disease, which really should be called a dis-ease, I began to work more.



A PENNY FARMER

Wanting to get off midnight shift, I got to thinking about starting a business, a business that I could make enough to quit that hoot-owl work.

One night, as I was reading a coin magazine, I saw an ad selling bags of five thousand unsearched wheat pennies, for \$99.00. Ten days after ordering them I received my forty pound bag of so-called unsearched wheat cents, I was thrilled.

I spent hours going through each and every coin in that bag, searching for that special penny that would be worth hundreds of dollars. I will admit that I was disappointed when I didn't find anything of real value, but still, the time spent searching, helped relax me.

As a second thought, I put sixty or seventy Dixie cups on the table, each one with a different date and mint mark, for the coins on each cup. Then meticulously going through each coin, I placed it in the correct cup. When, after many days, I'd completely gone through the entire bag, all the cups had coins in them. The least amount in any one cup was nine pennies. Wow, this meant that I had nine complete sets of pennies of a certain series.

Being a little excited about this new found hobby, I decided to order another bag. Thoroughly going through each coin again, with my paper cups on the table, I found that the least cup had twelve coins in it. This meant that I now owned twenty-one complete sets of Lincoln cents from 1939 to 1958, all fifty-seven coins.

The same magazine had ads selling a lesser set for \$12.00, so I thought I'd run an ad to sell my better set in the same magazine for \$12.00. It worked! I sold every set, and had a grand total of \$252.00, and still had about eighty-five pounds of my original purchase. Right off the bat, I'm showing a fifty something dollar profit, from my almost \$200.00 deal.

I did this several more times, until I found this company that sold me a roll of fifty, of each coin in the set, for a price of \$240.00, which now meant I didn't have to go

through all that work, and my profit margin had just shot up exponentially. I sold these for \$600.00.

I continued buying more and more sets, and even added a second set from 1959 to date. As my business grew, I gave myself a name: “The Penny Farmer”.

For the next eight years, I continued to get bigger with a wider variety of coins, putting every dollar back into the business. I was advertising in five magazines that were distributed nationwide, and ended up becoming the biggest one cent dealer in America. This is not to say the biggest coin dealer, just the biggest that dealt with pennies, ranging from 1787 to today’s’ date.

Once in a while the magazines would even write an article about me, with an interview. This was free advertisement, and helped a lot.

As the coin business grew, once in a while, we’d all jump in the car and head toward Florida for a week or so of vacation. For relaxation, I’d run one of these metal detectors, and try to find mostly coins. Got pretty good at it, but never did find that ‘mother lode, but I sure did have a good time doing trying, and while the kids and their mom

played on the beach, and did their thing, I was combing, with the detector, up and down, doing mine

One day, still in Florida, we got a phone call at Nancy's parent's house that my Mom had had a heart attack, and had died. I didn't even know she was feeling bad, much less dying. She was my security blanket, and it WAS a sad day, and a very sad time in my life.

What's so strange about this, was that for several years, while still having panic attacks, and an occasional major attack, I often had a feeling of someone in my family dying. Fear would overcome me, to the point that I felt paralyzed. But I got through this hump in the road, and actually in my thoughts and dreams, about this death that was coming, it was much worse in my imagination than it was in real life.

I hope that makes sense, but in my mind, I first thought it was one of my children, and I'd always have an uncontrolled feeling of a much, much worst scenario. These were just feelings and imaginations that came over me, not a physical thing, just an overwhelming feeling of being out of control. It was simply a coincidence that the death happened.

Anyway, after all that confusion, this was another scary time in my thirty-six year old life.

So, with the success of this coin business, I could now start thinking about getting off those dreaded mid-nights. In 1988, I did.

Working three jobs; Y-12, farming, and now the coin business, and still having an occasional panic attack, was way harder on me than it was before, but began to slowly heal in my bout with anxiety, for each day I'd learn a little more about myself, and ever so slowly, began healing.

You see, as I mentioned before, I still didn't do very well in feeling my feelings. I sure hope that makes sense. At this time in my life, I had a wall built up, that I thought was protecting me from the pains and fears of life, so I couldn't get hurt, or at least not feel the pain, or have to face the fear. I was rude, impolite, stand-offish, abrasive, unthoughtful, inconsiderate, and a whole lot more of those dirty words.

I retired that year from Y12 at the age of 39, but still worked two jobs; the coin business and farming.

But I was a hard worker, for whatever that's good for. I'd make a living for my family, but was not the family man that I was supposed to be, I was still just a BOY.

Imagine that, a 39 year old boy. I was being responsible, and successful in just about everything, except

in the things that mattered, and they really did matter, MY FAMILY that is.

God had blessed me with three beautiful, intelligent, and wonderful children, whom I love from a deepness, way down inside of me, but still had not, as yet, learned to express it very well.

Our children were growing, doing well in school, very well rounded, and I was extremely proud of them. Andreas' job was to take care of the chickens, Susie's was to keep an eye on the pigs, and Matts' was helping me with the cattle, we all did the garden, especially Nancy. Their grades were great, and the teachers' all had something very complimentary to say about each one. As for me, life was not so great. It was like my feelings, or inner thoughts, were shut down. I could walk by people visiting in my house, that I'd known for years and not even speak.

At this time, and for several years prior to this, I was saying things to my wife that a person shouldn't even say to a dog. Unabbreviated ugliness was mostly what Nancy had to hear, and it was all coming from me. You know, this doesn't even make sense, since I WAS proud of her, and I was still walking my walk with the Lord, but still being a child, in a man's body, was proving its self-unhealthy for all.

I know that sounds strange, or maybe funny, I mean funny in a not so good way. I was shut down inside so much that I didn't realize how much hurt and pain I was giving them, because of the walls that I'd built, to protect myself, so I couldn't get hurt, was bringing so much pain, that I was destroying others, and myself. In other words; if I didn't feel the pain and criticism from others, then it couldn't hurt me. If words did no damage to me, because of the barriers I put up, then surely it wouldn't hurt someone else if I said it to them. I was wrong, but still it took a couple of years for me to see that for myself.

It was my mouth that was getting me into so much trouble, yes with my family, but mostly in my walk with Christ. So pondering on this mouth thing, and a revelation from God, (*James III, The mouth is a deadly poison*). I shut my lips to the ugliness in 1986.

No more name calling.

This, my friend, was a major break-through for me, I would say for Nancy too, but the pain I caused in her, echoed in her mind for many years. This was in 1986, and neither a name nor a slur came from me, but six years later, the hurt was so deep in her, that one day I asked; "When was the last time I said those filthy things to you?" Her response was; I think it was last week". When in-fact it was

six years ago. That folks, was a job of torment that I'd inflicted on her that I can't even begin to try and rationalize or explain. I had hurt her emotionally and hurt her BAD.

I told this story, to remind myself and you, that this was the beginning of a long, long process of healing that would still take many years of hard work, and mountains of apologizing, and ridicule from my peers, before I was even slightly accepted as a changed person, on my way to being dis-ease free.

But the change was on its' way, and there was no stopping me once I saw a difference that was beginning to take place in the inner man of my life. Not to mention that I was sleeping much better than I had in years. It might have gotten better for the next years, but our relationship never really got to that place you'd call 'good'.

I was one of these guys that thought psychology was one of those ideas that was full of crap, and only a nut would go to a shrink. (Did I just say something pertinent about me being a nut?) But, right before our split-up, Nancy saw things differently, and checked into a hospital to get some help. About three or four weeks later the councilor asks me to go to the 'family week-end get-together' at the hospital with her. Reluctantly, I accepted, and this too

created an enormous amount of anxiety that consumed me from my hair to the soles of my feet. Folks, I was scared, wringing my hands scared, and besides that, I was going to get “found out”.

Come the next Friday, I took out towards Chattanooga, where she was getting help, to find this mob of family members that were to meet with their spouses. I thought this was strange because almost all the guests were men, or should I say boys just like me, and about my age.

You know this was not so bad, I began to see things about people in general, patterns and such that I never realized was the paths so many people had taken, so I sat up and took notice as the many folks told their stories.

On Sunday afternoon, we were doing some of these psychological exercises, when it became my turn to participate in these activities. The counselor asked me to tell Nancy what I'd been wanting to say for these past years. Turning around to face her, I began to speak, but just as I did, Linda (the councilor) told me to turn back around and listen.

This frustrated me, but I did as I was told, after all I was here as a student, and at this point wanted to learn. I thought Linda was attacking me, or at least she did get me all riled up. She spoke about how I was taking a pacifist, and

at the same time aggressive, attitude in my marriage, and should stand up and be a man about this opportunity and tell her what I really thought.

Once more as I turned about to face Nancy, and began to pretend like I was a man, for this, again, was the opportunity to let out what I really thought. Squinting my eyes, pointing my face directly towards her, bent over with one shoulder directed towards her, I again began to speak. Linda, repeating the same thing, asked or told me to turn around, sit and shut up.

At this point I was more than disturbed about what was taking place, but I did what I was told. This same routine happened once more, and as I was sitting back in my chair for the third time, Linda walked over to Nancy, and in a calm, but firm voice, commenced to telling her, on my behalf, everything that I was going to say, and I mean Linda said verbatim everything, right down to the letter of what was to come from MY mouth. But she did it in an assertive voice that had a demeanor to it that I wouldn't have had.

WOW! This really did happen, I was thinking, she had every jot and tittle of what was going on in that noggin of mine, and said it in a way, that at least to me, let Nancy have it. Immediately, I felt some satisfaction, and relief, and peace come over me. "I was understood". Maybe for first

time in my life I said something, and was understood to the tee. It wasn't me that said it, but it felt like it was. This showed me that psychology worked and I wanted to pursue it further.

By the way, the meaning of psychology, is the inner workings of man; spiritual. For the psychological part of man is his spirituality.

The next several months after Nancy came back home, it got better between us, but I think I was on edge, just waiting for the next fight or episode to happen again, so I never did relaxed. Three months later we divorced.

Andrea was in college, and on her on, Susie went with her mom, and Matthew stayed with me, but the split-up was final. Nancy moved to the next town over and I bought her share of the house, and stayed where I was.

I think I was still having so many issues about my self, and was way to busy looking at hers to realize my own.

As I said, Matt stayed with me and we really did have a good time together. He played baseball and I coached a little, we both were learning.

I learned to cook and had fun in doing it because Matt liked my cooking, and that encouraged me to learn to do it better. If the meals that were cooked weren't all that good, I didn't know; because Matt would compliment each of them.

Earlier in Matt's life, whether working on the farm or anything else for that matter, seems that I would spend way too much time trying to make Matt, or the girls too, live this perfect life; so I did a lot of correcting, which is a polite way of saying griping. And it did put them on edge.

Just as my life was making a change for the better, Matt, while getting a gallon of milk out of the refrigerator and after pouring a glass, dropped the carton and it exploded. Hey! Milk went everywhere, the floor, the walls, and even some on the ceiling. Matt looked up expecting the same belly-aching crap that usually flowed from my hardened heart and mouth, but this time I kept my mouth shut and didn't say a word to him, and this wasn't anything like my 'normal' self.

Anybody can make mistakes, the milk didn't matter, but Matt did, so I kept my trap shut. As he was backing up

while wiping up the mess, the glass he'd poured was still on the counter and his hind-end was heading straight towards it. Thinking to myself, if this is a way to show my son that I loved him, in spite of the mess, what a wonderful opportunity if he were to knock the glass over and spill it too.

Probably sounds like a silly story, but this was the beginning of the realization of the imperfection, and selfishness that had been embedded in my life, and were now showing their fuzzy face as dysfunctions. I think this incident helped me to see how wonderful of a son I had; for at the same speed I could see my defects, I could also see the qualities of others.

On his fourteenth birthday, I gave Matt his freedom to choose and make his own decisions, and for the rest of his life. I let him decide his curfew and his rules, and live with the consequences. Now I didn't ignore him, I just did what you would call reality teaching, but I was always there just in case he needed me. He was a good kid and I appreciated him very much, even learned several good things from that son of mine. He made good choices, I am a very fortunate man. Matt and I built a good relationship living those years together, and will always cherish that time we spent together.

18. THE POWER OF LIFE

It was the last quarter of 1992, when we were told by my youngest daughter Susie, that she was pregnant.

Barely sixteen, it seemed she really wasn't old enough to wear make-up, much less be having a baby. It took a while for this to sink in, and just slightly getting a handle on the situation, when she told me it was from a black man.

I don't know whether I peed in my pant, or just threw an old fashion temper-tantrum, but this was not a pleasant experience for her mom and especially not for me. Seeing how, again I was proven to be a failure as a parent, at

least in my mind, the stress of this situation forced me to me limits.

As time went on, and it always does, I began to accept the way things were, and not necessarily the way I wanted them to be.

Yes, I was still a control freak, all people that have panic attacks are, but I did realize that I couldn't change this situation. So, as it got closer to her due time, I pretty much kept my mouth shut, except for the occasional lecture that Susie had to listen to, more times than was comfortable for her to hear.

I had never considered myself to be prejudice, but looking back at this trying time, I was. Not enough so that my children knew it, but it was hid away somewhere in that pee-brain of mine. The N-word was used more than I care to admit, and I'm not sure that any of my family ever heard me use it, but it was used.

On Susie's due day, while she was in her room at the hospital, I was sitting out in the hall praying about this dilemma. I don't know how to explain what happened, but I'll give it a try: As I was praying, talking to God, I heard His voice as clear as could be. His distinct, but subtle voice was speaking to me saying; "Ross, for one time, I'm going to give you the power of life." My response was: "What do you

mean by this Lord.” “If you want this baby to live or die, then you have the power to see it through”, He said as I was carefully listening. At that point I began to talk out loud. “If I have the power to give this life or to take it away, then I want it taken away.” For my mind was then focused on me.

As I walked back into Susie’s room, her son Tevin, my first grandson, was being born. This was not a pleasant sight, not only did Susie have some difficulty, but when the little boy came out, he was pink, but not breathing. The nurses broke his arm in the process. Here the little baby was, not breathing, and now turning blue. After laying him on a table, several people gathered around him with paddles, suction bottles, and all kinds of things to bring life into this child for the first time, but they were unsuccessful. Tevin had turned this putrid color of gray. They all walked away after covering his little body completely with a blanket.

So, I walked back out to the hallway with success on my mind. Got rid of that n---r, and could now save face at the same time. Sitting down on a bench, I began to go over what had just happened, and it dawned on me that the only person that I was thinking about was me. Never gave a thought about what Susie would think, and the pain that she’d feel when she realized what happened to her son.

I put my head between my legs and began to pray, or I should say plainly talk to God. “Lord, I’m not sure I made the right decision.”

He spoke back to me and said, “It’s your decision to make, right now you have the power to give life or take it away.”

Thinking for just a few moments, I spoke in a loud voice; “I want Tevin to live, YES!!!! I want him to live!”

Running back into the room where all this was taking place, I looked over to the blanket that the nurses had placed over the little body, and heard a small, but distinct, grunting sound, or maybe it was more like a squeaking sound. But none the less, a sound, and immediately every health care worker in the room ran to the small tray he was laying in, and one of them slapped him on the hind-end, and Tevin began to cry. It had been a full eleven minutes that all this had taken place. So brain damage was now our main issue, and his shoulder was torn loose. In reality, it is impossible for a child to not suffer brain damage in just a few minutes, but this was more than just a few minutes.

That day my life changed, but it would still take a while to process all that took place. Tevin was a beautiful, healthy little boy, and God had His hand on him, and on me

too, and this marked the day of my new found growth; but only the beginning of it.

Three months after my middle child gave birth, I'd met this girl, I mean woman named Pam, and we'd been talking on the phone for weeks before we actually met. On the evening that we did meet was a wonderful experience for me. Still scared and a little gun shy, I was trying to move in the relationship with her very slowly, But that wasn't happening, I was falling fast for this lady. After all it had been over a year since my divorce, and the past year was just Matt and I, and maybe I was getting a little lonely.

On our first date, it was now June, we went on a river boat ride, (you know, one of them paddle boats), and really had a good, enjoyable, and exciting night.

Several weeks later after going out and doing things together, it was very late one night when I took her home. (This story is not meant to kiss and tell, but I have to tell this part to say what was to happen to me.) So one night we spent the night together, and on the next morning, while driving home, I began to reflect on all that was happening. This was the first time that I'd been with anyone other than

my ex-wife since I was married twenty-two years ago, and many thoughts were weighing heavy on my heart.

After making it home, I sat in my chair, and still reflecting, I had a little talk with my Lord. “Lord, you know what happened last night don’t you?” His answer was; “yes I do.” So I continued; “Does this make a difference in the relationship between me and you?” His response was completely different than I’d expected.

He said; “Ross, I love you”. “But Lord,” I snapped back rather quickly, “maybe you don’t understand what I am saying, (That was really a silly thing to say to God, of course He knew what I was saying,) If given the chance, I’d do it again, will that make a difference.”

After a short silence, I heard His voice once more. “Yes, Ross, that will make a difference.” “What will it change Lord?” I asked again. Again He spoke; “It will make a difference, and nothing will change, I loved you before, and I will love you again. Nothing can separate you from my love, I will always love you, and always have.”

Wow! This short conversation made the biggest impact in my life, and set me free to see things, many things,

and open up a realm in my life that would open doors so I could be completely healed and delivered from all the darkness that had followed me from my youth up.

Even though my parents and others loved me, this was the first time that I felt and received love, real love. I no longer had to run away in fear of rejection, or be afraid of betrayal. So I shouted to the Lord in the quietness of my home: "Lord, I believe you, and I make a commitment to you that I will never run again." His soft voice spoke again, while I was expecting no response, "Ross, I want you to run". I spoke back; "WHAT! Running away is what is killing me. Why would you want me to keep running?"

After another short silence, and with a voice that cut deep into the heart, but was very pleasant, I heard: "Ross, Not only are you to keep running, my call on your life is to run. All that has to happen, is for you to turn around, and run to me." It was easy that day to fall-in-love, and I did, with my Lord and my God. All because I had done something that I was taught, all my life, that it was wrong. I'm not saying it was right, what happened, but God took a simple, silly, fleshly thing in my life and made it work together for good. Because, He Loved me, and I could then love Him.

It was, as I was sitting at home that beautiful late spring day, that the phone rang, and it was Michelle, my brother Todd's wife. Answering, Michelle told me that Todd was dead; he'd gotten killed on an aircraft carrier while serving in the Navy.

This was not news that I wanted to hear, but was slightly more prepared for it, at least maturity wise, than I was when Mom died, but devastating none-the-less.

After telling my Dad and my brothers, Doyle and Scott, and my sister Karen, it was a heart wrenching day to have to go through. Having Pam for support was a help, but not a cure.

A few days later Pam and I went to the top of the Smoky Mts., to this place called 'Top of the World', on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at night, and just laid there on our backs silently, just looking at the many stars that one could see on a moonless night. Neither one of us spoke a word, we just laid there looking up, and again, I began to ponder the last week and all that had taken place in me, and to me.

I began to cry, it was a deep, deep cry from within. There were no sounds in my crying, just a penetrated reflex coming from my diaphragm, my body would quiver and spasm of each reflex from within, and lots and lots of tears. (You know, the kind that feels wonderful).

As I laid there in amazement, I opened my mouth and for the next two or three minutes, there were these sparkly little flecks coming out of my mouth like little butterflies. Not understanding this, not even slightly. We laid there for about an hour, and then we got up to go home, without either of us really speaking.

The next morning, right after getting up, Matt was already gone to school; I noticed that I had lost some weight, lots of weight. I'm talking close to thirty-five pounds. Then again God spoke to me: "Ross, That was forty-three years of demons that came out of you on that mountain." That was all that was said, but it was enough, for I had felt more relief, and more peace that day, than any time of my forty-something years of living.

This was the day that I'd grown from childhood to adulthood. Yes I did become a man that day, maybe it's safer to say that week, but the change had taken place. Looking back at this situation, some eighteen years ago, I became a man during this trial, about as immature a man as a person can be, but never-the-less, a man; I can now say that I was an adult.

Just because I stepped over the threshold to adulthood doesn't necessarily mean that a fellow has to be a full fledge, all grown up, do everything right, thinking

straight, and most responsible person that had ever lived, but I WAS a man.

Don't get me wrong here, I had lots of growing up to do, but now I had the tools to do it with. It's kind of like making the varsity team, and thinking of yourself as the best there is in your sport, that you can ever be. Not so, this was just the beginning of a much more mature walk, and a completely different faze of my life.

A new, an excitingly new change that can take me places I've never been. Only at this time would I allow someone to call me mister, and that was still uncomfortable, but I could see myself as something other than a child.

Anyway, getting back to my relationship with Pam, it lasted, on and off for the next seven years. After one of our many, what I would call mini break-ups, I was tore all to pieces, and needed some help. Thinking about the lady that had so much influence on me, a year or so earlier, I gave her a call and made an appointment.

Tuesday, I took off to Chattanooga for my first session, and was a little scared, but at the same time excited, because I realized I still needed help, and I thought

she could give it. Didn't know, at the time, just how much help I really needed.

I'm still a little skeptical about counseling, but understand, again at this point, that I do need help. This lady, Linda, was the kind of therapist that would get in your face, and tell it to you straight. We met every Tuesday evening for group sessions, and there were about twelve to eighteen of us that would meet for about two hours.

I'm thinking, yes, all of us needed help, maybe even call us crazy, but the one thing we all had in common was; we all had a goal to get well. That's not a bad place to be, we all volunteered to meet in a group, and all admitted to having some type of a problem or dysfunction. Where else can a fellow be, where all that's there had similar directions for their lives. Admitting one has a problem is half the cure, so in that sense we were the healthiest people, most don't have enough concern, or love, for themselves to be there.

Many had problems that you could put a tag on, some had major problems, and some of us couldn't be labeled, and went to therapy only to better ourselves. But all in all it was a good group, and every night I'd come home understanding a little more about myself, and many nights the drive home was tearful. Mostly, we'd see and relate to defects in others, as they expressed them, that were similar

to our own, and how they dealt with them, or lack of dealing with them, and how it was affecting their lives.

My problems were; I really didn't know who I was, didn't know how to feel, or what I was feeling, nor did I know how to communicate. Somehow, through the 'protect yourself mode', I would shut down, and not receive the stabs, or slanders, or any hurtful remarks, and doing this by turning off my inner feelings. Therefore I was protecting me, by not feeling them, or so I thought.

It didn't take long to realize this was an unhealthy approach, and was one major problem I had. I learned early in the process of healing, even if it hurts, even hurts down deep, it's still better to recognize the hurt and allow it into your being, than to shut it off by pretending it's not there. No pain, no gain. I was there to gain, not to mention to get my money's worth, so I went home many, many nights with my face wet from tears.

I made a good student, no one was making me be there, just wanted to grow, and learn who this person inside of me was, and to find that road that was made for me.

Remember the short story, a little earlier, that I spoke about running? All my life, I was a runner, I'd run

from everything, everyplace, every person, heck, I spent my life running from myself. That was the time God spoke to me, and ask me to keep running, but to turn around and run to Him. Didn't know how, but I was going to learn.

Guess I better not bore you by going on and on about my six or seven years that I spent, but rather enjoyed, in counseling, but this was a very important part of my early growing-up, manhood years. Learned much about myself, and the problems many others were having. I'd like to share a few of the patterns that so many, even those who are skimping by, in individuals, and families, and can occur without them even knowing what they are up against. The things that were imbedded in them/us from childhood.

19. CODEPENDANCY

1a What is a co-dependent, or co-dependency? A co-dependent has developed patterns in their lives, probably from living in a dysfunctional household while growing up. They have problems with coping skills, and have had difficulty creating and maintaining relationships by using a set of dysfunctional rules that were given, or taught to them by the family system that they grew up with.

A couple of the symptoms are:

1. They have difficulty in identifying their feelings accurately; Am I hurt, or sad, or angry, or something.

2. Stubborn in their attitudes, and don't see a need to change, ridged behaviors; I've been doing this too long for change.
3. Problems expressing feelings; I wonder if it's safe to tell him how angry I am?
4. I have to do everything right, perfectionism; simply demanding too much of yourself and others, and unable to accept mistakes.
5. Can't, or have a hard time making decisions; I don't know, or I might screw it up, or, what do you want?
6. Codependents either hate or love conflict, I'll just keep things as they are; I agree when I don't agree because of the consequences, or, any attention is better than none.
7. A feeling of shame, guilt and/or embarrassed, and I don't think I'm that important; what I think is unimportant, and useless, and everyone seems to be against me.
8. A feeling of responsibility for other people, and wanting to fix their problems, it's my fault; I hope they don't do that or I'll apologize to them.

If two or more of the above rules apply to you then you have probably worked hard to become a co-dependent.

Because minor children cannot be co-dependents, for they have no choice of who their family is, and if trapped in a troubled environment, they begin to navigate the best they can. When one leaves home, he then chooses to become a co-dependent, or chooses to walk away from that lifestyle, either way he then becomes a volunteer. Folks, we are not victims as adults, unless a knife or gun or some real threat is there, we all have the ability to solve the problem, or simply just walk away. Therefore co-dependency is a chosen lifestyle, and hence causes problems because of our skills, or lack of them, and in most cases no one is to blame.

Certain avenues have to be taken in order to become acute at being a co-dependent. A few of which I will briefly mention:

- a. I'm OK and you're not OK
- b. You're OK and I'm not OK
- c. It's not okay to talk about our problems
- d. It's not okay to express my feelings in regards to not being understood and of retaliation

- e. Having expectations of others and/or yourself that are unreasonable
- f. And by no means 'rock the boat'

If in our rearing up years, certain subjects were not to be talked about, such as sex, or any other sticky subject, then we were stifled and come to believe that it was dirty, thus not understood.

If there were times that our moms and dads would fight or argue, we might hide, go to bed, or build a mechanism to turn off the volume. The next morning one might get up and the fight was over, and we never know how it got resolved, then one might grow up thinking that problems would go away on their own.

Many families, especially the parents of the trouble years, such as the depression, did not tell their children that they loved them, only that "you know I do". We might have grown up thinking that our parents loved us, but was still many times, deprived of hearing it. In my case, my Mom and Dad grew up in the hard times of the depression, when their parents were more worried about feeding their family, and less on the intimate contact a child so sorely needs. Many grew up with parents that were so involved in seeking a living that they showed little concern about the other necessities of life; many did not tell, nor show their children

their affection. Therefore they passed on to us what their parents gave to them. Actually, I was forty-five before my Dad told me that he loved me, and that was after my brother, his son, was killed in the military.

Remember, all things work together for good to them that love the Lord..., and this was one of those things. It was sad, the time my brother died, for all of us, but we did have the wonderful opportunity to hear our Dad tell us that he loved us. From then on, every time we saw each other, he would always say it. This was more than good for me, it was the right medicine at this time in my life, I was so thankful just to get to hear him say those precious words; "Ross, I LOVE YOU." Pure music to these ears, at a time that I was still having panic attacks.

Lesson learned; My children got to hear those words often, and it was my privilege to tell them.

Understanding this set of rules that one has to follow in order to become dysfunctional, and I say this with tongue-in-cheek, we can see that only adults, or I might say adult children, can truly become co-dependent, therefore dysfunctional by choice. Adults can, and do make a choice, children cannot, they truly are victims, or at least they don't have a true say-so, adults are volunteers.

Everywhere a semi-trained eye looks, one can see, in any varying degrees, that in these days and times, that co-dependency, and dysfunctional lifestyles, are an epidemic.

Relationships worldwide are strained under the set of dysfunctional rules that teach by example, or directly taught to us in our earlier years that we don't know any better than to follow. Such as;

- a. 'Don't rock the boat'
- b. 'What's done in this family, stays in this family'
- c. 'Don't talk about your problems, be strong'
- d. 'Don't just do the best you can, be perfect'.

Therefore many have lost who they are, and their maturity and identity development have been put on hold. Truly, many adult children in their thirties, forties, and even pass their fifties, are still trying, seeking the trueness of their inner identity, but have not found it because they are still working through the same dysfunctional system. No wonder so many today suffer from free floating anxiety.

If one doesn't know who he is or how he fits in, or is having a crisis to know what his purpose is, or just can't figure out why he does and says things that are not accepted, shows prejudice, tries to control people and

situations not under his control, feels like they don't measure-up, are the ones that see fault in others; are also procreating these same rules to others.

Mostly blaming anything or anyone for the faults and defects in their own lives; you made me do it, it's all because of you, you hurt my feelings so I lashed out, if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have said it, I know what you're thinking even if you didn't say it, and many more of the blame games that one can play, shows a low self-esteem, and a disrespect toward themselves. If we do not respect our self it is impossible to respect others.

Have you ever noticed that feelings and reality are two separate things? Our feelings don't often tell the truth, it just feels like the truth; "I have this sense, or feeling that says something is wrong, when in fact, it is not going wrong. Or he might be up to something, when in fact, he is not. Many people, after being shown evidence that their feelings were wrong, still choose to believe that something was wrong, but just can't prove it. Our thoughts and feelings sometimes are believed as being more real than the things that are truly real. Therefore we develop trust issues, all because of a thought, or a pass performance, or just a suspicion, and end up miserable over something that in truth is not there.

Our feelings are wonderful, and life would be hard and hum-drum if we didn't have them. But our feelings are just what they are, feelings; good or bad, they are feelings. They are not a god, and are not there to control our lives, they are there, maybe to put up a signal, maybe even to be listened to, but not necessarily there to make our choices for us, or necessarily there to be taken as reality.

Dysfunctional people, and many of us at one time or the other are, trying to live our lives the best we know how, but are doing it under a learned process handed down from a set of rules that don't work..... I'm thinking it's time for a change.

As for me, especially in the mid-nineties, I was living under that set of rules, and they were driving me crazy. So, I sought help, all the help I could get. I read every book, many of them were hog-wash, took every course I could find, took classes, went to therapy, took internet classes, set under the feet of several people in-the-know, meditated for weeks and years, but mostly prayed, and I prayed often, to be delivered from this demon I called a dysfunctional co-dependent way of life. Even though I was healing, I still worked at it every day of my life. I still watch the games people play on themselves and others, and each time I see them, I'm reminded and encourage, to inventory the inside of me, to see if there are any remnants left.

I stayed in therapy until 1999, and ended up getting a psychology education, and learned stuff about myself that I will carry with me for the rest of my earth years. There were things down there, inside of me, that wasn't recognized and I didn't know existed, until I realized that there were some parts of me that needed to be woke up.

So now my life is an open book, literally, I hold nothing back, my past is my school-master, and I will always tell on myself at any opportunity as it affords itself. Shout it from the roof top. If I tell about the junk, silliness, foolishness and the wrongs in my life, they can never be thrown back at me with regret. I've done just about everything wrong at one time or the other in my life, and maybe not proud of all of them, but each has been beneficial in my emancipation.

Every person is made up of; a parent, a teacher, and a child. The three are inside of each and every one of us. This is a good thing, and essential to have for a balanced life.

The parent is the person that tries to do what is right, lays out the ground work and makes the rules.

The teacher is the person inside of us that teaches how we should do it, and the way to get it done.

The child inside of us is the person that needs to learn, wants to play, whines, cries, laughs, gets hurts, or any spectrum of feelings we have in our being.

These three make up who we are, and can sometimes get out of whack. We could look at this as a trinity in each individual; a father, a spirit and a son.

A few of the dysfunctional ways these three can, and are used, are as follows:

Our dysfunctional parent inside may say; “get this or that done, if you don’t quit crying I’ll give you something to cry about, You do what I say and not as I do, If you don’t mind me you’ll regret it, if I’ve told you once, I told you a thousand times, and so on and so on.

The dysfunctional teacher inside of us might say; I don’t care how you get it done just do it, you better listen to me or I’ll set your hind-end on fire, I’ve shown you once, do I have to show you again? you better..., you ought..., you have to..., and so forth. The dysfunctional teacher barks out orders, and demands, without seeing or understanding the consequences as an end result.

The dysfunctional child in us might feel unloved, when in fact he is loved, may feel unimportant, feels as if he is in every ones way, too much is expected from him, and so

on. All children, healthy or not; whines, cries, is selfish, wants attention, blames, calls others names; in other words, does our feeling for us. But after entering adulthood, leaves these behaviors in their childhood, and does not bring them to their adult years. A healthy adult can feel pain, or even the urge to retaliate, we can cry, moan, and be upset, but not to the point that the inner child is ruling our lives, but the inner adult is appropriately in charge.

As opposed to the true parent, teacher, child, (God, Spirit, Son) the parent speaks with gentleness, peaceably, always encouraging, with a tone in his voice that is soft, joyful, well mannered, and all the traits our heavenly Father has. This true teacher, teaches with their arm around us, instructing in an encouraging way, that helps us to have an importance, and allows us to want to learn with enthusiasm. Unfortunately we weren't all brought up that way.

The child feels loved, develops in their play, and with playing with others are settled and can learn behavior at an appropriate rate.

Many people (adults), don't understand that this is going on inside of each of us, therefore inadvertently stifling the inner child. In my case, after realizing that I even had an inner child, come to see him as a brat, really a super brat. He would act up, or maybe I should say act out, at any given

time, with or without my permission. My inner child was not necessarily mean or bratty, but just mischievous, somewhat inappropriate, and would feel and say things that were not right for the situation. But after understanding that he was a part of me, an important part of me, and that I, that is to say my inner parent, held him back, so to speak, by keeping him in his bedroom and out of sight, not letting him out to play, I, speaking about the inner child, suppressed him by ignoring him.

Any child, whether a young person or the inner child of an adult, has the right, and necessity to play. Mine was stifled, and I figured he was a nuisance; therefore I kept him locked up. This only made matters worse, and that's how I came to view him as a super brat. When in fact my emotional inner child was a pretty good person, he just needed an appropriate time to play.

So as I continued to learn about the psychological workings that were going on, and began to see more of the truth about the inner parent, and teacher that was working inside of me, inside of all of us, I slowly realized that the whole ball of wax was out of kilter. My mind began to change to the fact that all my development was learned, given and taught through my family and circumstances, at least the way I viewed them, and each could be revamped, and since I am a volunteer, I owned them.

As we allow, or even enjoy, our inner child to come out and play, with the supervising inner parent and teacher, we will find that he will have enough activities to keep him satisfied, at the appropriate times, and that he will not act out on his own. Therefore, it is very important that we all have a well-rounded life, filled with the things that we enjoy, and just have some plain fun, all done in an appropriate atmosphere. This will bring about a positive change; and anxiety, and uncontrolled emotions will begin to fall in place, and will be settling in each of us in a way that will be noticeable.

Anyone that has uncontrolled emotions; are quick to blame, easily can call another a name, feels sad or left out in a crowd of friends, thinks of themselves as better than others, or just throws an old fashion temper-tantrum. They probably have an inner child that has not been emancipated. That is; has pushed their inner child back, and he, has become like an anchor, and is holding our emotional development back. All is going to be held at a standstill, and our emotions will continually be out of control until we come to terms with the real problems that lie within; and again, own them as who we are.

We all have to learn to play, have humor and enjoy things in life to be emotionally sound, whether we are grown or still growing. Our child within is a very important

appendage of our being and has to have fun in life, or we, because of the inner child's lack of skills, will be held back, therefore not truly functional in our lives.

God created all of us in his similitude, and in his image, therefore He has made a way to overcome, or means of escape.

Anyway, maybe I've said enough, and surely don't want to get you bored, because I could go on and on and on. I love this topic of why and how we work, all on a scale that is sub-conscience, working behind the scenes in each and every one of us. To know that we, as adults, can own our own vices and hang-ups, and then be responsible for them, is the emancipation that many hope for, but don't understand how to receive them, and when they come, can be set free.

20. GUILTY OF WANTING A FRIEND

The late 90's and early 00's was a funny, or maybe should say strange, time in my life, but very interesting. I got married twice, one lasted twenty or so minutes and the other, maybe a half hour. I'd made it to the point that I fairly well understood relationships, but just didn't have the knack at finding a compatible girl. Remember; I'm still growing at this point in my life, I've learned much, but still have much to learn.

Around this time I'd sold my house, and was taking my time to see what was really meant for me. Off and on I continued to struggle, was still learning on a daily basis, but this became the time to do nothing or maybe just very little. When I say nothing, I mean that it was a time to let my mind

rest by being still, and persist in the inventory of my secrets thoughts.

I had built a six-plex apartment building a few year earlier, and I was a little handier with a hammer and saw in my hands, so I began to build a house, no it was a home, up the hill from the one I'd sold. This was a pleasure for me as I was in 'stand-by mode', waiting on the Lord to move me.

I still had my coin business, and was doing only very little farming. So I took the time to put together this house that I had planned in my brain for several years.

A year and a half after finally finishing it the way I wanted, it burnt down. This was only a year or so after my second divorce, and I sure wasn't ready for this to happen. So now I was homeless. I knew then that 'all things work together for those that love the Lord', and not knowing all the particulars of why this happened, I knew to wait and see what was stored for me.

Well, I began to build back the very same week. In fact, the building permit was good for two years, from the last house, so I didn't even have to get one of those. Folks, this was not a pleasant period of my life, as far as the outside world. I most certainly felt like it was crumpling in, but still had the belief that this was for a purpose.

I had a booth at a coin show that I occasionally went and manned on the week-ends, and this is where I was when I'd gotten a phone message that my house had burnt down. I remembered this because, at the time, I was told by my daughter Susie to come home to see what had happened. For the life of me I could not figure out why I should go on home. There was nothing I could do about it, and the house was still going to be burnt down in a few days when I did make it back. There was nothing left; my home had been completely consumed, and now all I owned was about three inches of soft ash, where the house used to be.

It was at this time, during the coin show, that a man began to tell me about a vision that he had from God, and after listening to it, was not only convinced that it was from God, but it was my vision. What I mean by that is; I could see every detail that was being explained to me. I mean every nook and cranny, in living color, I could see the surroundings, smell the smells, and hear the sounds and feel the presence of the Lord. This was my vision, certainly it was meant for me.

Very shortly I will explain in more detail about this vision that would forever change my life. Now, back to the story.....

Normally I enjoyed carpentry work, but this time it was kind of a push on me, as I am a planner and did very little from spontaneity, and wasn't mentally ready to do all the work that had to take place to build the house back.

I was struggling to find the energy to get up in the morning, much less put in a full day's work with building and still run my coin business. The business was going strong however, but, I was living out of a motel room, that wasn't much bigger than a bath room.

With no other explanation, except that God's grace and Him bestowing me His energy, that I carried on, for the walls of that motel room were closing in on me.

Several months into working on the house, the outside was completed and I had a good start on the interior. I thought I'd hire someone to help me. Sounded like a good idea, but again chose the wrong person to help with the finishing.

I hired this company, or maybe should say man and his family, to help me complete what I thought were about a month's work. It started off great, and even thought this man would end up being my best friend. This was not going to be the case.

Right before we were finishing, I had to order my kitchen cabinets, get the dry wall hung and finished, and then painted. There were a few more odds and ends, including the heat pump and whatever, that remained on the work list. It was not what you call putting the final touches on, but could now see the light of this project being completed.

At the same time this contractor, named Mike, became like a friend to me, and got himself into a bind, and asked me for some help, financially. For a friend, sure I'd help him. It was a perfect opportunity to help a fellow man, believing this was one of the purposes that we were put on this earth for. It was a pleasure for me from the inside, and besides, I had the insurance money from the house, that was not needed in the near future. So between loaning him more than a little bit of money, and paying in advance for the materials needed to almost finish the house, I wrote him a check for \$54,000.00. Not a small amount of money, but at this time, because of the insurance, I had it, and it was my pleasure to help.

So a few days later Mike rented a truck to drive to Kentucky to buy the kitchen cabinets, the bath room vanities, and most of the fixtures for me. He would be back a day or so later, and with the crew he had working, it would only take a short time to finish and get me moved in.

Dumb me, It took about three or four days before I began to think something might be wrong. I was still trusting this guy, and told the workers he'd left behind, (they didn't belong to the company, just worked for him), that he was probably just taking a mini vacation since the whole family had gone with him in the rental truck that was rented earlier in the week. Time was passing slowly at this point, and the more we thought about it, the more concerned we became. So his crew and myself, got into our vehicles to go to the place where he lived only to find out that he had moved. Long-gone, could be in Mexico by now, or any other place, that four days of travel could take them.

After filing a police report, and placing a warrant against him, and then waiting a week or so, I finally figured out that the man, and my money were gone. Several weeks later, the rental truck was found in Texas, but all the rest, the man and the money, had vanished.

You know... If this had happened a few years earlier, it might have torn me up, but at this place in my life, it did not. I said to myself; "It's only money, hundreds, if not thousands of things could be a lot worse than this." I still had a peace, for God was doing a wonderful work inside of me on a daily basis. I never did lose a minutes sleep, or want to take revenge on him, or take it out on anyone else. Earlier, when God had asked me to be still in my mind, it

was now paying off. A stress test in a magazine article, that I read and took the test, said that my stress level was over a hundred points higher than severe, but at this place in my life, I didn't feel it.

Divorced, sold my home, moved, built another house and then it burned, and Mike stealing the money, was not enough to tear down what God was putting together. Remember, as I quoted several times before, that; "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord, and called according to His purpose." I wasn't mad, or even aggravated at myself for even doing such a foolish thing. It was a learning experience for me and a proving ground. My life WAS changing, and I was enjoying every minute of it.

The other guys working for Mike were hurt, maybe a lot more than me. They were just guys trying to scratch out a living, working pay check to pay check, probably just getting by, and had to deal with at least a whole weeks pay that was lost, or I should say stolen.

Come to find out several weeks later that the contractor had scammed a half of dozen others with as much, if not more than he had me. His final take on this scam was well over a hundred thousand dollars.

Stupid people are just stupid, but I was guilty of ignorance and wanting a friend. A friend is that special

person that comes along once in a life time. Mark Twain once wrote, and I'll paraphrase; "A friend is the greatest asset a person can ever have, but only a fool tries to have two of them."

Through all the years in counseling, and the time spent learning what a friend was, and how to be one, I was not totally deprived of the definition of friendship. At this point, I would have made a good one.

I didn't beat myself up too badly for still trusting in mankind, helping my fellow man, or just plain and simply wanting the closeness that one can expect from a real friendship. Maybe got a little too anxious and jumped the gun on this one, but was not too hard on myself for being considerate, and would look a little deeper next time into what I was doing, and the consequences of doing it. I hadn't had a very good track record in the last six or eight years in the department of relationships.

I still had to finish the house I was building, and now I didn't have any help. I was back to working by myself. It took several more months, but in July I had it all done. I had moved in and was snuggled and comfortable in my own bed again. A little smarter, and a little wiser than before, and also learned a few more things about me that I didn't know before.

I learned to prioritize my life, in the fact that some things just aren't that important, namely money, and just about anything else the outer eye can see. I also began to develop some skills in the area of patience, but was not quite there yet, as I still had much more to learn through tribulations that were yet to come.

21. THE VISION

2a As I mentioned earlier the vision that I was told, was now mine. It's a little difficult to explain how it became my vision, but I could, and still can see every small detail in clear and vivid color, could taste the smells, and could hear the voices as if they were speaking right beside me. This all happened in the day time, not a dream, not a trance, just a clear motion picture-like scenario taking place right in front of me.

It began with vast plains of land as far as the eye could see, and I could see for miles and miles in any direction. The sky was dark with dreary clouds hung low, with an oppressing feeling about them. People were

everywhere, going to and fro, but seeming to have no place at all to go, just wondering around with no clear direction. In the middle of this darkness, surrounded by the emptiness of the open but familiar foggy landscape, was a mountain. Although the prairie was ugly, the mountain was as if the sun was shining brightly upon it, even though it was treeless, it did have one tree that grew right on the top of this inviting mountain.

It seemed that a group of the people in the flat land, were trying to escape, or maybe just reach this mountain of refuge. As I began to look toward this beauty of a skyscraper, I could see that the bottom of the mountain was almost as dark as the land itself, but as my eyes crawled slowly up the hillside, it became lighter in color until my eyes were looking directly on the top, where I could see a beauty that I have never seen before. Truly, the top was where I wanted to be, and the rest of the people gathered at the bottom also wanted. The mountain itself was filled with pitfalls, cliffs, and boulders of many sorts, but the top, especially the tree, was a splendor that I cannot describe, it had a peace about it, and the tree seemed to be the light of the whole valley plains. It was much, much brighter on top of the mountain, but as my eyes descended back down and then again across the level, but dreary land, I could see that the farther one was from the light, the dimmer it was. Then I noticed large birds, I believe that they were buzzards, flying

low in the sky. These buzzards were attacking the people attempting to make it to, and climb to the safety of the mountain, where several, but certainly not all, wanted to be. These large fowl were pecking, knocking over, picking up and puking on the ones closest to the bottom of the refuge, but also those who had already started up.

As I stood in amazement, a large white and beautiful owl suddenly was standing beside me, and as he began to speak, I could hear a gentle softness in his voice that immediately gave me a peace. Things didn't just get better with his presence, it was better, and he said: "Ross, The valley that is before you, is the world you live in and is called, egypt, babylon, and the flesh, the buzzards are demons which are the thoughts of the mind, the people wondering around, are those with no direction in their lives, and those trying to get back it to the mountain and climb it are called christians, and the vomit is oppression and depression. The tree on the very top is the Tree of Life, and the Light shining from it is our God... bye-the-way, and then introduced himself by the name Wisdom."

There were many things that happened in this vision, many steps to climb, and many obstacles to overcome, and many times the Owl talked with me. At this time, I'm only going to focus on a small portion of the vision,

the part that changed my life in an astounding way, in that I will never be as I was before.

I was led to that mountain by the Spirit, and was told to reach the top anyway that I could, but to reach the top. As I began my upward ascend, the going was rough, wet with puke, littered with those also attempting to climb, and at places almost straight up. I would climb up one cliff and then another, only to fall back down. Soon I found that if I kept my eyes focused on the Tree that sat on the summit, the slime was somehow a little less slippery, even though the going wasn't very easy at all, it was getting a little easier with each step that I took. As I climbed, and still occasionally falling back, I'd made it to a large ledge, this took about four hours, the ledge was dark, damp, and wide enough to set down and take a rest upon. My arms and legs were just about to give out, so I sat on a flat rock and leaned back on a bigger one. As I sat there looking around, I noticed, off from my right side, was a very large cave. After a few minutes, I walked over and went inside this giant, darkened, hole in the ground, and there, discovered that on the inside were many doors.

Doors of every color and shape, some were brightly lit, some had music coming from them, some had voices that sounded like sermons coming from them, and all had a 'welcome' sign. And as I was pondering these doors, the

Owl was suddenly beside me with his hand on my shoulder. “Ross, it’s not always the bells and whistles that one should look for, the road is not always easy.” That’s all that was said, and as suddenly as He appeared, He was gone.

Walking and looking as I toured the darkness, wondering what each door was, I notice a door stuck way back in the corner, or maybe I should say, at the end of this dark cave, that had no light, and I could tell was seldom, if ever, used at all. I stood in front of that door for what seemed like hours, just meditating, praying and thinking why such a door would be here, and realized that because of the scariness of it, it was seldom used. I perceived, or maybe it was a feeling from the deepest part of me, that each door was a way to the top and eventually to the Tree that sat on this beautiful but frightening mountain.

Brushing away the cob-webs, I reached for the handle, but could not find the strength to grab it. Stepping back to reconsider this act that I was about to do, I realized that if I did open the door, it was a must that I go through it. I somehow knew that the other doors were not the ones to open, so I contemplated on this darkest of all doors only, and also remembered that I could go back outside and continue the climb up the mountainside. Looking again and again at this rustic door, I noticed a small, old piece of wood, it was a decaying sign that was completely covered in dust,

as I brushed it with my hand; I saw that it had written on it “Judgment.” This made an alarming situation even scarier, so I stepped back again to rethink this, what seemed like hours, but it could have been weeks or years.

A very soft voice that sounded much like the Owl’s said; “The road well-traveled, seldom goes anywhere.”

My mind was made up, I was to open and pass through this door, and endure what I must. “My life as it is now”, I thought, ‘is not taking me to where I long to be, in the safety, security and peace of my Daddy.” I WAS determined to go through it.....And I did.

I saw things, and I saw myself, in that room of darkness, that was so hurtful, bitter, sad, and just plain painful, that I bent over in agony. But all that I saw was true, it was real, and worst of all, it was me. Yes, I was staring at my own life, all the stupid and foolish things that I had done, and could see all the people that I had hurt. “Why did I choose this door’ I thought, ‘what have I done by going through that door?” Again I heard that gentle voice of the Owl say; “It can hurt now, or you can choose the easier but slower way to reach that Tree.”

I found strength to suck it in and persevered down that long corridor of the dark emptiness of my life.

I saw many things about my own life, many of which I will not relate to you. Even though I loved and pursued the Lord, and thought I was living life as I should, with all the learning and growing that had taken place in my life in the last five years, I still fell far short of how life could be lived, and how I was still blinded to the many things of this world, and not seeing things that God had in store for me. So before I finish telling the rest of the parts that I'm going to share, let me step out of the vision for a few minutes and explain a little of what happened in the next couple of years.

I had a talk with my God, after many hours of contemplating and agonizing moments, and with a determined voice and mind-set said to Him: "Lord, I know you as Healer, I know you as Savior, I know you as King of kings, Lord of lords, I know you as Deliverer, I know you as Beautiful and Wonderful, I know you as Truth, and I heard you as Wisdom, but I do not know you as Judge. I lay my life before You to be judged."

The next months and years to come were the most awful, heart wrenching, belly-aching, life changing, and WONDERFUL time in my life.

In the vision I went on to eat of that fruit of the tree, and many things were given to me by the Owl, It was truly a life rendering experience that would show me things that I

would have never seen otherwise, if not for this vision. I was given a Gift, an inward ability to see things, and situations, not as they appear, but as they really are in the allegoric, and also the inner secrets of the 'games people play.' There was many, many events in this climb up, and then back down this mountain of God, most of which, I will not share at this time, but all were truly, not of my flesh, given to me for a purpose that only my Lord will reveal . But I will share one more short story of what happened that made a great impact in my learning process.

As I was descending from the top of the mountain, where the Tree of Life grew, I was about two-thirds down and stopped to take a rest from several ordeals that had just taken place, and was standing there looking over the valley before me. I noticed about a dozen men, christians, that were walking down a gully towards a prison camp that contained hundreds and hundreds of prisoner, all of which were christians. As I stood watching, I saw that two hundred yards ahead of them were several, if not scores, of the demons hiding in wait, behind rocks and the many cracks that were in the land. Just as I was going to shout a warning to these men, the Owl again appeared. "Ross, don't warn them of the upcoming attack". "But Lord,' I spoke back in a snappy tone, 'our people are going to be slaughtered." And grabbing my right hand with His right hand, looking in my eyes He and said; "Tribulations is what

all have to go through, This is all given to us from the Father to bring about a purifying and special blessing to those who love the Father and Me. They must be tried as with fire.”

As I continued to stand there watching as this was playing itself out, I noticed that each of the men marching to the rescue of those in prison, had armor on them. Feeling a sigh of relief, I studied as the attack began. The armor was helping, but was not keeping them completely protected, for each time the christians turned their backs, where no armor was, they were hit by the fiery darts that were thrown by the demons. Many casualties occurred that day, but none were killed. All had retreated back to the mountain where they came from.

3a I learned that day; don't put your hand on someone's business, or even God's purposes, unless you hear from God to do so. We may think we're helping, and to even bring about a change, but we can easily cause damage in another person's life, by stopping the redemption Power of the Lord. Our trials and tribulations are there because God loves us; not to hurt us, but to bring about a change in His time..... This is the Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ.

Looking at myself, after seeing this vision, was a very hard thing to do, as what I was seeing, just made me sick to my stomach. It seemed the closer I'd gotten to God, the farther away I was. This scared me, thinking I might be on the wrong track.

For weeks, at least once a day, I would lay prostrate on the living room floor for lack of ability to stand. I would just lay there seeking Christ and His answers that I knew were far beyond me and my earthly way of thinking. This was a very sobering experience for me that I would not trade for anything else that I had ever experienced.

Then with that soft and oh-so gentle of a voice that I'd heard before, God spoke; "Ross, you are not getting farther from me, you're just seeing yourself in an earthly way, and the closer you come to me, the more your eyes are being opened. The light is getting brighter, and the brighter it becomes, the more you can see into the secret cracks of truth of the heart."

22. ROSS DIES

In the spring of 2000, I was laying in my bed early one Saturday morning, when the phone rang and it was Dale. After a short chit-chat conversation, he'd asked me if he could play a song, a Gospel song, that he wanted me to hear.

"Dale, I've heard all the songs I want to hear from people trying to make money off the Gospel." His reply was; "Let me play you fifteen seconds of this song, and I will not bother you again."

We knew each other well enough to argue back and forth a couple of times, and I finally told him to play the darn song, I think just wanted to get it over with.

After listening to that song, for those fifteen second, I asked if he would play a little more of it to me, and of course Dale said “yes.” When the song ended, I told him, instead of asking, that I was on my way to his house to listen to the whole tape. Didn’t take long to get there, so we listened, and I got to bring this tape, and several, more home with me. The tape was sung by some man named Kirby Dies, whom I had never heard of.

I got the tapes home, and spending a couple of hours listening to them. I was impressed that someone would be bold enough to say something like this for the public to hear. Kirby was singing about several of the things that God was dealing with me about, and I wanted to know more. On the tape was the address and phone number of the recording studio in Nashville, so I called them. I don’t really know how, but I talked them into giving me Kirby’s phone number, so I called him.

When someone answered the phone, I’d asked if this was Kirby Dies, and it was. My response was a little strange, but it worked. “Kirby, my name is Ross Dies, and I have listened to your music, and would like to have your address, and directions to your house, because I want to come over.” Guess I caught this man so far off guard, but he gave it to me without hesitation. Within three hours, I was knocking on his door.

We sat together for the rest of the day, just talking about our walk in Christ, and found out that we were both at about the same place in our walk, and many of the same things that God was speaking to me, He was saying to Kirby as well.

This was a wonderful experience for me because, at this time, I thought maybe that I was crazy, and didn't have any idea that God was speaking the same things to several people all over the world. I just knew that He was saying stuff to me that was not main-stream, and certainly different than what I'd been taught in the church. So it was a pleasant experience to see that God had kept a remnant scattered all over the world that could see through much of the hoop-la that many continued to teach, but is not biblically sound.

Through the years, I have had the pleasure to meet several of God's remnant, and noticed that no two of the people that I met lived within thirty miles, (and many much farther), of each other, and all had a special love for the Lord, and were seeking a deeper, and more intimate relationship with Him than I had experienced in the institutional meeting places that met on Sunday, or for that matter even the home groups that I had participated in.

For the next four years, I was learning and growing on a daily basis. In fact, for a two year period, I was receiving two, sometimes three revelations a week. Many mornings, as I would wake up, sitting silently on the side of my bed, I would hear the voice of my Father. I was given more than a few short sayings and many definitions, or maybe I should say insights, that have continued to help me when piecing together the Word of God.....I can only sit here a name a few, but the revelations were coming at an enjoyable speed, that this time in my life, it was more than pleasurable to be in His hands.

To mention a few:

*If you like what you got, keep doing what you've done. Or, if you don't like what you've got, then you can't do what you've done.

*The definition of Hope; The expectation of a positive change.

*The definition of mad, and the purpose of it is; to bring attention to yourself.

*The definition of happiness; It is the level above of what you expected.

*The definition of frustration; Trying to control an uncontrollable situation.

And many intimate revelations that I will not mention, mostly they were about me, me having a closer and intimate relationship with my Father,

A. RECAP

I'd like to very quickly piece together my life and how it evolved into the man that I have become, that still today, I'm sure many would want to say, is not much.

I guess coming from a knot-head of a kid to the man I am, or could say, the man that God sees me as, has been a strange road. Having no regrets, even in the stupid and foolish things that I did in my life, because all have been a lesson to learn, and a means to grow by. As a young child, I started life with a handicap, that taught me to become independent, not needing so many other people's approval. I am what I am, and if someone compliments me, or chastens me, I am no better, nor worst, of a person than I was before they commented about me. God began early to separate me from the world, and though I struggled many times, and fell backwards often, He sustained my life for a purpose.

Yes, even had a time in my life that I'd stolen, and told more than a few lies, and thank God that I'd gotten caught, and the times that I wasn't caught weighed heavy on me for many years, until it worked its work to enable me to see Truth. This too has helped me to understand the pain it causes to others, not counting on myself, but I did learn to be straight and honest with people. To say what I mean, and mean what I say. In other words, to be careful of what I say, because I have to live with it, and carry it with me throughout my entire life.

A lot of frightening and strange stuff happened in my growing up years, my youth, but much of it was fun and entertaining, especially to a young, and then teenage boy, that thought he was a man, or at least wanted to be a man, but didn't have a clue as to how to make it there.

It's comical to look back at my life, and for me to see that I, as a child, thought through a child's brain, acted as a child, and had many toys and feelings of a child, but was really doing nothing wrong, just thought I did, for in each situation, God's hand was in it, or at least working through it.

Hey!..... There ain't any twelve year olds thinking as an adult; our brains aren't developed well enough for that yet. Maybe I was a slow bloomer, and I think this was

because I had shut down my feelings to keep from getting hurt, so I really didn't put enough thought into things to even see if they were to be hurtful to me or anyone else around me. But that's what kids do; do it, and then, maybe, think about it later.

I wanted to be a man, but all my thinking, all my evaluations, all my prospective, was coming from an independent little boy that still had his feelings suppressed, and no one, and I do mean no one, can come out of childhood until they know themselves, willing to feel and own their inner child as what he is; an inner child. Our child is not, and was not, supposed to be an adult; we are created to grow.

Even as adults we hurt, there is nothing wrong with this, but as adults, our hurts don't change our behaviors. In other words we will respond to a situation and not react to them. Children play games, blame others, have to be first, strut instead of walk, and have to be right all the time, but MEN don't. This is true, except that children cry, big boys don't, but MEN do. Men are not afraid to show their feelings, are not afraid to express themselves, men are men, and don't have to prove themselves right. Men aren't afraid of being wrong, and will readily admit it.

It was a rough life growing up for me to become a man, and I don't think that I would change a jot or a tittle of any of it. I'm thinking it took every little, or big, foolish thing that I did, to mount up, and accumulate, before I was ready to step over that threshold to manhood.

Whether it was playing king-on-the-mountain, or speaking like an idiot to my wife, or thinking I always had to win, or cheating someone out of the money I owed them, each thing, each happening, every little story that was in my life, had to run its course before my eyes were to be opened.

Looking back, I wouldn't take away a single struggle, a single lie, a single tear that I had, because of believing that they had to be wallowed-through to cross that threshold.

I do hate it that so many others got hurt in the process, and part of the reason that I'm writing this is to say to them: "I'm sorry" and that I'm thankful for them for putting up with me...THANK YOU. I didn't mean for it to be at their expense, but I was a Boy, what else could I do.

23. PARABLES AND REVELATIONS.

Before the foundations of the world, we were. God knew us from the beginning, our mind does not comprehend that, but none-the-less, it is true. In His creation, He created us Man, male and female he created.

What I mean by this is that in every man, there is a woman, or should I say a female, and a Man also. In every female, there is a Man, and a woman also. The Man within is Christ. So, before the foundations were made, we were there with Him. Each and every one of us was made in His image, in the similitude of God, therefore we are in Him and He is in us.

I mean that the Man, meaning Christ, or the Spirit, is built into each and every person, whether we are, on this earth, born male or female, each was given the fullness of God within. We were born into iniquity, but still were given a sort of head start, by having the Man within. The woman in each and every one of us is represented as the soul. This is what Paul was writing about in Ephesians, chapter five, when he was speaking of the marriage between the man and his wife. The Spirit in man coming together with his soul to be united in marriage, spiritually speaking, as one, rendering one to the other in the harmony of God. So individually, we are to unite, come together as one with our soul, that we would not be divided within, but instead, as Christ did, the two, working in a union, as if they were one, and they were. Spiritually this is called the marriage.

Let me speak here a little on the esoteric messages of the bible, especially in the Gospels. The allegoric symbols given to us have an entirely different meaning than that of the earth level, or could say the literal level that we see in print. Therefore many have not had an ear to hear, nor an eye to see, as many were taught that the scriptures were a history book, instead of its intended purpose, speaking on this level an individual can understand the man within.

So let us take a short look at the parable of the ten virgins. This parable is about reaching a higher level, called

the Kingdom of God, and the five wise and the five foolish virgins are our relating point. These virgins were not some abstract person, they are us. Whether we are of the wise or the foolish, is determined if we seek the higher level of God or satisfied with the literal, or the earth level, which many were taught.

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom comes; go you out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, not so; Not so lest there be not enough for us and you. But go you rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, verily, I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the son of man comes. K.J.V.

The wise were distinguished from the foolish by possessing oil, and refused to give their oil to the others, but instead told them to go back to the world, the place they relate too, and buy oil for themselves. The parable must be viewed entirely away from its literal meaning. The lamp represents light, understanding, not the literal light, but the comprehension of Truth, but in itself cannot give light unless it has oil, which is the Word understood in its higher level of meaning. This understanding is over the head, and far beyond man, in his earthly thinking on the lower level. Darkness is what we walk in when walking only in the sunshine. This light, the lamp with the oil, is a level which brings us out of that darkness, when we put on the mind of Christ. I could say repent, but not the repenting we've been taught, but the Greek translation is 'changing of the mind', to change the way we think, so then looking at life in a whole different illumination, allows us to see through the carnal, earthly dimensions, and begin to see in depth.

The five foolish virgins accepted that there was a higher level of truth, light to be had, and believed it was true that they could have it, but did not possess it in their everyday living. Therefore they were still living in the 'do something for the reward system', or lower level, and were called foolish. The foolish, knowing about the teaching of the higher level, still chose to get theirs from the world of buying and selling, from reputation, from having good

morals, having respect, moving up in this world and conforming to the social rules of society, therefore not possessing oil, or the understanding of the higher level of Truth, had to go back to their known world, in the hope that the flesh of this world could help; but it couldn't. All of which is, in the Word of God, and can be seen when we look at the deeper meanings, and not view it as earthly, or could I say literal value, to find the mysteries that are hidden within it. While the foolish, (our outward soul), were gone seeking in a different direction, the bridegroom came, and the wise, (the spirit within), entered and then the door was shut. Notice here that scripture does not state how the door was shut, but none-the-less it was closed. The bridegroom did not shut the door, the five foolish virgins shut it on themselves. That's exactly what we do when looking at God's Word from the literal standpoint of view, and not seen or comprehended by the man within.

The ten virgins are all together one person, you or me, and represent the five senses, the carnal senses of man, that if are adhered too, as in the foolish, or, the five senses that have been laid down, that we are able to follow Him whither He goes.

I want to touch on a subject, just a little, about Adam and Eve, the garden of Eden and the two trees that grew in it.

Adam was God's first creation of man and there is a story in these scriptures that is worth looking a little deeper into. Sometime after Adam's creation, Eve made by God as Adams companion, out of his rib.

Now I'd like to approach this with; Adam is the Spirit man, the tree of Life man that walked with God, and Eve, taken from Adam, and made by God, as part of the creation of Adam, was separated from her husband, and the two walked in harmony together in the Garden of Eden. Eve is represented here as Adams soul, and were at this time one flesh as were both walking with God. Until the day that Eve, listening to the lies of the serpent, took and ate of the fruit and gave to her husband also. Adam knew the Father, Eve only knew the thought of Him, and the riches from her well, so to speak, were not deeply developed, and since the soul is to follow the spirit, which didn't happen, the fall began its progress.

The soul of man is that part of us that contains our personality, our demeanor, our attitudes and the place where our feelings come from, our soul-ish realm (the mind). And the serpent played on that with Eve as he seduced her with a lie that they would become like God, and don't forget the

delicious taste of the fruit that he tempted her with, her senses were her leader. Then giving to her husband Adam, he ate of it also, as Eve tempted and seduced him.

At this point they surely died, and their eyes were surely opened to the things, and the products of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as are we today that partake of that same tree. They then saw their nakedness and tried to hide their shame from God, for their newly acquired knowledge showed them both of their condition .

I'll just fast forward here to remind you that Jesus (the second Adam) that went to the cross to redeem man back from his sins, (the attitudes started in the Garden), was then stripped naked, shamed, and tormented for our sins that began in the garden, that through this act of obedience, redeemed man back from the curse of the tree of good and evil.

God, in creating Adam, was His crown, and Eve, made from Adam, and being made to be by his side, was to subject herself to her husband, so then Adam was the crown of Eve.

The two trees are represented as the duo man, that is to say the two natures of man. One from Heaven, the Spirit man, the tree of Life man, and the other part of us as the flesh man, natural man, the tree of knowledge of good and evil man. One is of Heaven, the other from below. From the

earth He created him in His own image. One lives life down, the spirit man, but the other, the soul, won't let life go. One nature of man is hidden, is plain, and is simply not desiring notoriety, the spirit man; and the other, the soul, wants to be seen. One abides in Truth, the spirit man, the other, the soul, will be destroyed in the brightness of God's revelation. One shall be taken and one shall remain, unless the marriage of soul and spirit is completed.

We are not to yield to our soul as Adam did to his, his wife Eve. Our tree of Life man, the Spirit man, is what keeps us in fellowship with God. So the lie that was started in the Garden is still very much with us today. It's in religion, our thoughts, our attitudes and everything else that man can conjure up to promote himself.

Since the tree of knowledge contains both evil and good, can we not see that since no tree can produce both good and bad fruit, that both evil and good are the same things? Both are the efforts of man, and good can do nothing to help in maintaining us in a right fellowship with God. Therefore man has become his own idol.....But one life that has been crucified changes everything that's known, and we can now walk in that Life by faith of what was done on our behalf by Christ.

Religion is based on doing 'good', and has its foundation built on the works of man, and can certainly not be depended on, nor can it ever pay for man's sins. The Cross, when it is ignored, and not received of what has taken place there, is man's way of saying that the goodness in him, that is his good deeds and his efforts, are what's going to maintain him in fellowship with God. And therefore will justify himself..... AND IT WILL NOT.....We will heed to our own good deeds, or the cross, but not both. The tree of good and evil will never, in a million years, justify that man is lost, and out of the fellowship of God. We are not out of the Love that God loves us with, but out of the offered fellowship.

The Tree of Life does justify man as represented as Jesus hanging on it, because it is a gift that can't be bought, nor earned.

A. ACORN TREE

The man has been placed in every child, and I liken it to an acorn. Now an acorn is not a tree, but a seed. It was sown in every man before the foundations of the world. The man, or seed, or in this case I'll call it an acorn, was planted in every living being. This seed can, and has laid dormant

until birth, probably should say awakened, and only then can it germinate into its growth.

The acorn is not a tree, much less an oak tree, but within the seed is a potential tree. We are going to look at this as if the acorn is man, or better said the potential man, sowed in all that was made in the similitude of God, the man within the man. Some were sown, or fell by the wayside, some on stony ground, some among thorns, and he who is among good ground is he who hears and understands, evolves, or changes from an acorn to a tree that bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty. For those that produce thirty fold, are those that believe God exist; those that produce sixty fold, are those that hear the Word and know it to be true; those that produce a hundred fold, are those that walk away from this world and what it claims to hold, and enters into the Kingdom where true and total Love prevails. And notice that in Matthew 13 that the seed is referred to as 'he'. Those that hear the Word at varied stages of their lives, may receive the Word on a fleshly level as in stony or thorny ground, or by the way-side, these are they that are either snatched up by the wicked one (the mind), or are choked out (deceived), or the cares of this world enables him to become unfruitful. Simply put, this means the acorn will not grow to become an oak tree because of the literal, or again I could say fleshly, level he has received the Word.

The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, Christ said, and is seed, and is waiting to turn, to be transformed from an acorn to an oak tree. The acorn is not going to be reformed to a tree, but transformed. It is not to change from a seed to a seed producing tree, but must begin its tree life as a sapling, a twig with two small leaves. And as our ears and eyes are opening, so the twig will grow, with the potential of producing fruit, in this case, acorns.

The seed, the man within, was planted inside of me, as in each one of us, as a child, actually, before the foundations of the world, we were created with Him, and even though I struggled through many years of my life, the seed began to grow to a man, and again I will say a twig, (the makings of a man). A twig is an oak tree, I admit as small of a tree as one can be, but an oak tree never-the-less. So the seed within had been waiting to be transformed, and thus continue growing until it also will produce fruit, acorns in this case.

Let's look back to when we were young, and when I say young, I'm talking of the teenage years, but more precisely our young adult years. The young adults could be in their twenties, thirties, even in their fifties or older, the adult child is what I'm referring to, the boy in a man's body. You girls or women are in this too, and will have to place

yourself where you belong, but for the sake of talking about this I will speak of boys and men.

As immature people, we saw our self as if we were on top of the world, as having the bull by the horns, as cocky, we had things figured out and knew somewhat of where we were going, when in fact, we only had a small clue of what this life is about, and very little knowledge of how to live it. Many, so-called adults, still think the same way today. We would get ourselves in and out of many varied situations, and not having knowledge of how life should be lived, were tempted many, many times to go in this or that direction. So by trial and error we managed to get by, and often don't really know how we got here, whether life was like a box of chocolates, as Forest Gump says, or were we just floating or guided by a breeze, settling where we fall as Lt. Dan saw things. We somehow all got to this place that we're at right now, and it probably wasn't from our design, but today, if determined, we can step into the next level of our growth.

Folks, it was the struggles in life, the temptations that brought us to where we are, that, and good teaching, and bad teaching for that matter, that we learned from our environment. To put this in a prospective, it may have been designed individually for each and every one of us. We certainly know that at least many of the bible characters

were ordain, if you will, by God to live a specific life in a specific way, such as John the Baptist, Joseph, Judas, Abraham, Moses, even Jesus, and many, many more. Have you ever noticed that each one was tempted, and I mean tested by God to bring them to a higher level, to a place that God was going to use them. Each had to go through trials and tribulations to be strengthened, to obtain what God had stored up for them.

No man is tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted. But temptation is allowed to strengthen those that are called to follow Him.

John the Baptist could have backed down in front of Herod, Joseph from the multi-colored coat, and his brothers, Moses through his threats from the Egyptians and his own people, and Jesus by His hunger and many other trials and temptations. Each one of us are built upon, by what we call 'bad' situations in our lives, and have either grown or suffered, and continued in these trials until we see and understand what they are all about. Yes, I believe that God, in all His blessings, blesses us with these temptations until we have seen the glory of His power and submit to Him all of our earthly qualities. Without any temptations there will be no transformation. As Moses was led into the wilderness, actually pushed into the wilderness, (a bewildering place, dry, plain and without the convenience of

familiar life), by the Spirit, and the Israelites with him, were in this place of refuse and dryness to bring them to a level of acceptance of the will of God, in this case the Promise Land, and what it took to get there. You and I are in the same place, a place of bewilderment, a desert, a place to accept that our inadequacies and qualities are not sufficient to carry us to any higher level. And have you ever noticed that the ideas and plans that worked before, no longer do what they use to do, and we sense that our lives have stagnated from the same-o-same-o? That is unless we have filled our lives with lots of stuff, earthly stuff, therefore having a lot of noise around us, and cannot hear the Spirit as He is speaking.

We are being tempted of every aspect of our self; that all that is useless is put behind us, and all that can understand and grow is put in front. Everything or person that can aggravate us is being place smack dab in the middle, by God, of our face, until we can see through them and then, see what has been in store for us. We are as God's remnant, being purged of the flesh and all that pertains to it. This is not a terrible thing, no, it is the time, the season, to let go of what this world and the traditional teachings have given to us; for He preparing His children to begin preparations to cross that river Jordan, and step to that land, where nothing else matters but Christ, called the Promised Land.

Laying down our life, and all the traditions, all the unscriptural teachings, all that promotes man, all of our doings that are done to get something back, and our ways of thinking, and come to that area that the child within is replaced, by transformation, to the Man within. Really it's not appropriate to say replaced, but transformed, not reformed, as a seed that would sprout into a tree. Jesus spoke; that he that shall be first shall be made last, and he that is last shall be first. The first is the flesh man, or can be called the lower level person, and the last is when we have entered in to the understanding of the man that God has created inside of us. When the development of this understanding has taken hold in our Spirit man, or inner man, he takes precedence over the outer man, that is to say flesh man. Then the flesh man, who was first, takes a back seat, and only then will the Spirit, which use to be last, will then become first. The lower man, flesh man wants to be seen, wants his appearance to be noble, wants attention and to be obeyed, will likely stick to the truth of the law, the letter of the law as did the Pharisees, but never find the goodness of the law which leads us to the Grace that was given to us through the teaching of Jesus; LOVE.

The law was not given to us as an end, but as a means to the end, that the law itself becomes not a stumbling block. Once this way of thinking is apprehended

inside of man, we will then begin our transformation to the new man, Born Again.

The only enemy that a person has had in their adult life, with the exception of guns, knives and true threats, is within the flesh man, our self. We, as adults cannot use the blame game of what we were taught or anything else that has happened to us, because if we did not put away our childish toys, we could have. Granted, when we wanted to learn things, and felt a yearning toward the things of God, we went to the only meeting places that we thought were right to teach us, this thing that we call 'church'. We were sincere in wanting to grow and worship the Lord, and by tradition, we knew of no other place to go. They did make clean the outside of the vessel, and were true to their traditions, and talked the talk that they were there to bring us to the saving knowledge of the Lord, but were instead, were full of dead mans' bones.

I'm thankful for the days that I spent in this thing we call 'church', maybe even grew a little, but not much past the first grade. What else could we do, where else could we go, we were babes in Christ, we didn't understand that He can teach us in our closets, or under the trees, nor did we understand that the Holy Spirit can, and will teach, us all things, that man need not teach us. This experience was an 'all thing', and did work together for good.

We were taught the law, and the law as an end, but still again were not taught that the law was a means to the end, which was Christ, and Him living in us, for the law was made manifest to us by Love of Christ, by God's transformation in us.

B. 153 GALLONS

Let us look at the first miracle of Christ in the marriage at Cana, as spoken of in John chapter Two. Here we can see that literally there was a marriage, and Jesus turned the water into wine, but looking closer, on another level, we can see the higher truth of which He spoke about, and then can maybe understand more of why these meeting places, just simply don't work.

And upon the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was bidden, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus says to him, They have no wine. And Jesus said unto her, Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come. His mother said unto the servants, whatsoever he says unto you, do it. Now there were six water pots of stone set there after the

Jew's manner of purifying, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus said unto them, fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he said unto them, draw out now, and bear onto the ruler of the feast. And they bare it. And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water that now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calls on the bridegroom and says to him, Every man sets on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worst: you have kept the good wine until now.

Notice here that Jesus' mother is there and represents His former life when saying 'What I have to do with you?' And will be eventually destroyed by the people of His former life that His mother represents. The marriage itself represents a union, or a new stage in His life. We must look at this in the esoteric, that is to say allegoric message, for the literal story has little meaning, save that of the history of Christ, or the literal meaning of having 153 gallons of water and wine. Have you ever noticed that the first miracle had 153 gallons of wine and the last miracle had 153 fish?

So looking at the turning water into wine, we see six stone water pots, which represent earth, the flesh, the literal man as he is in this world. Stone is what the ten

commandments were made of, or what Adam came from, or what Moses' rock, that he struck, that poured out water (truth), therefore stone means the literal truth, from which all began. The truth that was taught to us as a child, by our parents, school teachers, Sunday school teachers and such, it is earthen, ridged. Water here is a higher form of truth that can be attained by looking slightly deeper into the meaning of truth, and its' values, such as the water that poured from the rock that Moses struck. Water is the intermediary as his mother also is, that takes us to a level that we know something is there, a transition place, but just can't quite get a handle on it. A deeper truth, but not really quite there yet, a stepping stone to cross. But wine is something completely different. The Truth at its' highest level, sometimes called the Kingdom of God. The complete understanding of our existence, a level that raptures us from this earthly vessel to an understanding of the deepest meaning of Truth and its' Goodness, and a place that we act on Truth and Its' goodness without having to think about the goodness in the truth. Making our selves manufacture a goodness, is acting on the 'water' level, but on the 'wine' level, goodness is the main-stay of our Man within. A possession in the inner man that takes us to that higher level of thinking, and understanding, a place where we are transformed, not reformed, into the body of Christ, that is to say; fitly joined together in Christ, and Him as the head.

There are five ways that our Lord is named in the scriptures that I would like to address. They are: Jesus, Jesus Christ, Christ, Christ Jesus, and the Son of man. Each of the five have a different meaning and can give us a deeper insight to exactly what God is saying to us as we read His word.

Good or goodness is symbolized as Jesus. Truth is symbolized as Christ. Goodness as it pertains to Truth is symbolized as Jesus Christ. And Truth as it pertains to goodness is symbolized as Christ Jesus, and the Son of man is the Mary side of Jesus that has overcome. So when reading, we can place a little more value on exactly what God is telling us in the higher level of thinking. You know, I could say; changing of the mind (repent), or putting on the mind of Christ, for when we repent we completely change the way we think. Never-the-less, all that is in the four gospels are in parable form, and must be viewed at this higher level of thinking before they are to be even slightly understood.

24. MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS

3b. Let us take a quick and short look at the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary, that lived in the town of Bethany. The purpose of this story is to show us that there are three types of believers, and each one of us can find our self in this parable of believers.

Martha's name mean mystery, and she was master and lord of her house, she was a worker, doing something, always busy serving and was much detracted, wanting her sister Mary to help in all the preparing, as spoken of in Luke ten. You could say she was caught up in all the stuff this life can bring about. Maybe more than a little controlling, as we see in her trying to get the Lord to make her sister help in

the chores. Martha can't see beyond her on needs, self keeps getting in the way, finding fault in those that don't think the way she thinks, she leans on her on strength, so busy that she never finds her freedom in the Lord to just set down and enjoy Him. Probably thinks if she don't do it, then the work won't get done, not ever knowing the rest and peace she could have in the Lord because of her busyness and running to and fro. So all the Martha's out there, let the potter mold the clay, there's so much that God can do if your flesh wasn't in the way. The only thing that the Martha's are hearing is the call, but not the caller, if they'd place their eyes on Jesus, the Shepherd, for He alone can bring them to that peace and rest.

Mary's name means contrary and rebellious, and her attitudes are like the ones that were left in the wilderness with Moses. She has put her past life behind her, enjoys sitting at the feet of Jesus, but still looks upon Him outwardly, wanting to know more, wanting to be closer to Christ, but still not quite getting there, for her outer eyes see the outer man in Christ. Mary is broken to the point that she wants Him, and is always mentioned in scripture as being at Jesus' feet, always listening to her Lord. But still has a distance to go, before she receives all that Jesus speaks about, and can then enter in. Mary knows Christ and loves Him, but still sees him outwardly, and as long as she can see Him, her faith seems strong. Just as Peter, as long as

he was looking at Jesus he could walk on top of the water, both are completely dependent on Christ to be next to them, but have not, as yet, received His truth internally. Thomas also had to have proof that the risen and returned Christ was truly that of Jesus. The Mary's of this world love the Lord and seek Him, but do not as yet totally understand, nor receive Him as the completion of their faith.

Lazarus' name means 'God is help', and it is here that we understand that our flesh has, or can say, shall be brought to its' end or destruction. Lazarus was dead to this world, and his will on this earth had ended. He was dead, buried and by now stinking, but when Jesus had arrived and spoke in that loud voice, Lazarus could not hear Him, since he was stinking, his ear drums were probably beginning to turn back into dust. So when he was raised from the dead, and the grave, it was because of the power in Jesus. So then we can say, that only the words that Jesus spoke, only the power in Christ is the reason that he now lives. Not only is he totally dependent on Christ, but would not have any real life, if it were not for Him, for Jesus alone sustains Lazarus, and he is no longer in the same world as that of Martha's or Mary's, but one with the Lord. Lazarus is now resting over on the other side of life, alive, at peace and enjoying the fruits of his sustaining Lord. The last we ever hear of about him, is that he is feasting with the Son. The death of himself is now recognize, he has ceased from all his works, there is

no more strife within him, an emptied vessel; the things he knew in life, the knowledge, the worrying, the fears and frets, and so on, are now left far behind him, as he and Christ are one.

Now Martha, she's that outer man trying hard to win, work and earn her way to the Lord, while Mary is the soul that doesn't realize Christ is within. Lazarus is the Spirit that lives in harmony, not hindered by his flesh or soul, he walks in liberty.

Now, here is the tabernacle found in the wilderness; Martha is the outer court mentioned in Revelations eleven, where we begin our rest. Mary is that Holy place, the inner court, where the priestly work is done, the place where our lives have been transitioned from the fleshly, outer man, now sitting, and seeking, and listening to our Lord. Lazarus is that most Holy place, the Holy of Holy's, where God and man are one.

Yet some would choose to be a Martha, and some may choose to be a Mary, but Lazarus doesn't choose things any more. The power that is now keeping Lazarus is the Lord, and Him only. The last thing that kept brother attached to humanity, was his grave closes; and Jesus commanded that they should be removed, and to set him free. Yes, Jesus came to set us all free from the perils of this

world, and to walk and eat with Him, in that harmony that the world, or the outer life, could never give.

25. *3c* FOLLOW ME

Let us take a quick look at the followers of Jesus, the process of becoming a disciple, just a plain ole person that loved what Jesus was, and what He had to give unto them, the ones that recognized the power and the truth He was to give to those that had ears to hear.

Now when Jesus walked this earth, there was a group that followed Him. And there was nothing really special about anyone of them.

They ranged from tax collectors, smelly fishermen and such, Whores and great deceivers, murderers and thugs. The only thing they had in common, the only

thing that I can see, is the same way they responded when Jesus said to “follow me.”

There are those that call them saints, because of their great deeds, but these were common people, just the same as you and me. They were not some super human that could bring about world change, but they each had an encounter, and their lives were rearranged. And none of them were chosen for their great abilities, but it’s the way they all responded when Jesus said to “follow me”.

We see them all at their beginning, their motives are revealed, some are just pretending, the others’ hearts are real. It’s not long before they realized, this will be no easy task, they can’t follow after Jesus, like those leaders of the past. There is no one else to turn to, He gives life each time He speaks. They overcome just by responding, when Jesus says to “follow me.”

So it’s only as we follow Him, that change will come about. Like the children in the wilderness, Jesus is that cloud.

We leave that old man in the desert, as Joshua leads us to a new land. Joshua’s

name means Jesus, and He's leading in the new man. To those who may have fear and doubt, I have a word for you. Jesus chose a Thomas to show He is able to take us through.

The Gospel Jesus left us is the power of God's salvation, His words are Truth and Spirit, and bring our liberation. In the call is God's ability to transform us all within, our own strengths, and our abilities will only hinder Him.

There's no guilt, nor separation, there's no condemnation at all, there's only Grace awaiting those responding to God's call.

We can see here in these lyrics by Kirby Dies, that there are no big guys nor small ones, just those that respond, and those that don't

4a Most people were like me in the sense that we were taught all that we know about the scriptures, and how they were to be understood, by the only source, or institution, that we knew of, that were out there teaching; the structured called the 'church'. Most certainly we were taught to take the scriptures literally, even boasting to our peers that we believe that the Word is to be taken at face

value, which can be understood that way, but only the shallowest of interpretations will be received. That is to say, that only the flesh will be appeased, only the outer man will be fed, while we each are starving for that fullness that comes from eating His body and drinking His blood. Since God is a mystery, and will never be fully comprehended, He has also given us an in-depth look at Himself by the parables and the hidden messages that they contain.

Whether we are studying Adam and Eve, or Noah and his ark, or Moses and his journey through the wilderness, or Jacob and his sons, or even Hosea taking to himself his wife Gomer, all can be seen and understood when we look past the literal meaning, and see what God is saying, individually, to each one that has that thirst for Truth about themselves. In Mark four it tells us that; Jesus, “without a parable, He did not speak to them.” This was, that those without could not understand, but those within His covenant, those truly following Him, could understand all things by the Spirit. Even if I wanted too, I could not go through each and every story or parable in the Bible and relay what each one is about on the higher level, for that is the place that only the Holy Spirit can, and will, involve himself at the deepest level of our heart..... The Man within.

I know that the many years that I spent reading the Bible in the literal sense, with its literal values,

that my approach kept me away from the fullness that God was speaking of. I spent my first twenty years in this thing that is called “church”, either learning, teaching a Sunday school class, or preaching from the pulpit, before Gods’ Spirit opened up a whole new approach of looking at Him. You know, even then, the years I learned of Him this way, I could hear His presence showing things in a different level, but just didn’t have the confidence to dig a little deeper, being encouraged not to do so, by them in charge of the institutions. Each little group, or could say denomination, had its own set of rules and regulations and wanted each of us to conform to their ways of life

Like the folks that lived in Babel that were united in their thinking, and thought they could build a tower unto Heaven. They began to make bricks made by their hands, instead of using stone, (stone is not man made and is the foundation of Truth), to build unto themselves a tower, and used slime for mortar. This is not a history lesson, nor a trivial account of some insignificant story about a long lost group of people, but an insight of today, and what we, as Gods’ children, are doing with the institution that we are promoting today with man as the center of the empire. We too have, and are, continuing to build this “thing’, and call it for God, or from God, and it is not. For the Temple of God, the Kingdom of God, is not made by the hands of man, nor can it be locked down in any certain place, cannot be

named, nor can the temple have a bank account or charter, nor can it promote itself with the power of money, for the Kingdom lives in the heart of our inner being. It is, just like Jesus said; “in your heart”.

Just as Babylon was in the hearts of the Israelites, and Gods’ people were in bondage in those yester-years, the religious spirit continues to prevail today in this thing that is called “church”. The brick and slime were man made doctrine, creeds, traditions, and the attitudes that are still carried on today with the same captivity and Babylonian traditions as it was in those, and did not change, for it is embedded in the hearts of Gods’ people far too deep for man to turn around, at least within his own strength.

But, all things are possible thru Christ Jesus.

What would you call a people that only are attracted to their own kind? In this case we might call them homo-sectarian, (or in this sense maybe should call them homo-secular.) If you look into the denominations you will find that maybe the Baptist secretly despise the Methodist, the Lutherans avoid the Presbyterians, the Church of Christ have no respect for the Pentecostals, and the so-called ‘full-gospels’ think themselves a notch above the rest, or any other arrangement I might put together, even if called non-denominational. But all these forms of religion, are just

that; forms of man-made doctrines that have no value in the Kingdom.

Heck, within the religion of the Jews or the Catholics, there are different sects that don't even get along among themselves. Any way you look at it, it is not what Jesus spoke about when referring to His Church. Somehow, through mans' intervention, and even could say man trying to create God in his own image, we have missed completely the Mark that Jesus had intended. The reason that I call "it", (the church), a thing is because a person can touch or see with the flesh, things, but cannot see nor touch the Ekklesia, the Church built by Christ. Ekklesia is the Greek word used in scriptures for the word translated Church, which means; 'called out ones.' The Ekklesia, or the true Church, is people, people not necessarily going to a building to meet with other fellow believers, but those seeking a walk, or better said a closer intimate walk with God, fitly joined together as God's remnant, with Christ reigning supreme, and not man's ideas.

Did you go to church today? Was church good today? Where do you go to church? What is the name of your church? All are questions asked on a weekly basis that doesn't even make sense, when we see that Church, Ekklesia, the called out ones, or better said "You" is the rock upon which Jesus shall build His Church..... We are the co-

operate son, the many membered body of Christ, for it is He alone that leads, and the carnal flesh cannot participate.

If we really speak of the true definition of what the word Church, as defined in scriptures means, our conversations would sound something like this: Did you go to “you” today? Was “you” good today? Where do you go to “you”? What is the name of your “you”? Folks, this doesn’t even make a lick-of-sense, the word itself is not a noun, its a pronoun. Where did it get so screwed up that we have completely lost track of what Jesus had intended? When did the “thing”, the institution, place man over and above what Christ was building within each person that came to Him? We, those that come thirsting for Christ are the Church, fitly joined together making up His body. Man was not to promote himself, organizations, committees, programs, titles on a marquee, vacation bible schools and such, and place them above His foundation, the Church, to whom He shall receive unto Himself. We’ve gotten way out of line when we reached towards our self and created an institution that is very similar to the tower of Babel.

Like the Pharisees’, we have organized, incorporated, and deployed systems to make, or should say take up money, manipulating many to give, thinking they are to get something back, all in the name of God, to be seen and recognized in our communities to be the ‘man-in-charge, and not that of a

humble Spirit, which is required for the Kingdom to grow within.

God has set his Kingdom up in the heart of those seeking Him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life, in the Spirit man within us, the Ekklesia, the Church. We are His sons, we are His way, His truth, and His life, and He is within us, not some place or thing. When Man intervened, to set up the called out ones into an institution, we then ceased to be governed by Jesus Christ. Jesus was not crippled, He has always been steadfast, never changing, but we did cut the legs out from under our selves. When man gave the meeting place, which was in one house and then another, a name, he then promoted himself above the Rock on which Christ was building the fellowship of His believers. I long to fellowship with those that love and seek the Lord, and those willing to be “the body of Christ”, but not willing to come under the bondage, nor the games they play to be a member of an institution that man put together to promote himself.

I realize that I’m speaking on a touchy subject that is close to us all, and I’m not trying to offend anyone, but it is now time that the true believers that are gathered in the wilderness, come together with Christ as the head. Listening silently as the Spirit has something to give to each and every one of us that we may build up each other in the

body. We do not have to agree with one another, but we can come together with love and respect and the desire to seek that which Christ is leading us to, and agree with Him. There is no separation or condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, just lively stones fitly joined together, with Jesus as the head.

The true house of God is made up of and measured by the love, joy, peace, respect, hope, life, faith, grace, forgiveness and mercy of those willing to lay down their lives, and follow as His Spirit moves within His own body of believers. Church is not a place you can go to, or a 'thing' you can have, or a building with a sign out front, a place to pay your tithes, a thing to join, nor does the true Church have a parking lot, it is those of us meeting to build up each other in the gifts and to minister one to another as God has given us severally.

Again, I understand that this is a sticky subject, especially to those that think that serving the church is the same thing as serving Christ. Jesus is a person that lives within all of those made in the similitude of God; therefore it is the serving of Christ in man, not man himself that we are to come together to worship; God and Christ through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This 'thing' that is called church, as we have come to express 'it', has been taught to us as the only 'thing' that resonates the only place where God supposedly gathers His people, and 'it' is not. We ARE to come together, we are to grow together, we are to help and be helped by each other as Christ gives to His own body.

26. THIS ‘THING’ CALLED CHURCH

I come from a small rural farming community in East Tennessee where I live, and have loved the pleasant atmosphere of the country and the country people that live here. What I’m about to talk about is maybe even a stickier subject, and again, have no intentions of offending anyone, but must be addressed.

We as a people, and a nation, have approached this “thing called church” as did the children of Israel to the leading of God, while in the Sinai Desert forty years, before they were to cross the river Jordan. And when they went to whoring around after other gods and idols, and provoked God too jealously with their counterfeit ways of reaching

Him. We too have been reaching for other gods in the same counterfeit way by promoting our programs, our preachers, our building, our titles and positions in the community, our denominations, and most of all, our selves; which scriptures refer to as 'gone whoring'. To be a harlot we would have to sell ourselves or, our take of what God is, and fashion it to suit our own needs.

When in-fact the Kingdom of God will be forwarded by a laid down life, getting out of His way, humbling our self in His sight, and decrease that He can increase that we come not to be a stumbling block, preventing others in seeing the Truth that God has set before us from the beginning. The Kingdom, thus far, has been shielded, by those that built these systems with the same brick made by hands, and pieced together with the same slime as those of old. The Kingdom itself still remains, but man in his attempt to empower himself, has worshipped this structure with the same enthusiasm as did the Israelites with the golden calf, or as the folks in building the tower of Babel.

The Israelites were in the desert for forty years and were not allowed into the Promised land until the old man had died. All had to die with the exception of Caleb and Joshua; and Moses (the law) wasn't to be partaker in the new land. It is exactly the same today, we too cannot enter

in until our religion and our ideas, our flesh has died unto this world, and no longer rules or regulates our lives.

Whoring, or playing the harlot is nothing more than an extension of our self, the act of uplifting man, and his willingness to be promoted, and the silly programs that we conjure that are an attempt to look superior, when in-fact we are to settle for the back seat, so-to-speak, and watch and learn as God moves within us, and among His People. We are whores when we sell our self or our wares, our books, our songs, our preaching tapes, our name, or the meeting place that we so often frequent. When one places anything above the name or position of Christ, we have then gone a-whoring around. Placing any thought, imagination, sign, principle, creed, building, or anything in the stead of Gods' plan is having another god before Him, and will be reckoned with. Those that promote or condone this are called pimps.

Just stop a minute and think about this; what's the difference between the money changers back in the days of Jesus, and what is going on inside the Temple today? Remember, the bible was not given to us as a history book, but as the living Word. If He over threw them, what would He do to us?

Folks, God is not looking for the pretty people, nor the ones that can speak or preach well, the ones that can play music well, the ones that can talk the talk, the ones that look well, dress well nor any other attribute that man has, but He IS looking for those that are after His own heart.

Are we thinking yet that it's time for a change, a time to repent (change our mind)? Can we see that a total change in the way we think, is in order?

Moses said; Let my people goJohn says in Rev.18:4 Come out of her, my people.

27. TEXACAN TO MAN

Born a Texacan and virtually raised to be a hillbilly in the foothills of Tennessee. I started life off as an independent little cuss, to graduate to a full blown, mischievous, insecure, but fun loving teenager. Even the people in Tennessee said that I talked and sounded like a backwoods hick and I guess I still do.

When a feller goes through some of the stuff that I had to, anyone might learn to not put so much emphasis on what others say. Polio did play a major part in my growth, and probably still does, but now, I take this defect as an attribute. It has given me an insight in the things and people

of this world that I very much needed. I know the pain of others and the struggles of overcoming them, and it is through pain and suffering that each of us can grow.

I think as a young child, and as a young adult, I did just about every knot-headed stunt that a Knuckle-head could do. I just wasn't that afraid of anything, the mystery was more fun than the punishment could be bad, at least at this time in my life. Polio, and the stigma that went with it, did help me to see that I could get along without so many people around me, but can still have a detrimental effect in the rules of relationships, as far as my boy-hood years was concerned. And in boy-hood, I mean until I grew to be a man at the age of forty-three.

If not for getting caught stealing, who knows what would have happened, so I take that as, God took this piece of stupidity and turned it into a life changing incident.

I sure had fun in my school years, was a sort of happy-go-lucky kinda guy, but when I got married something triggered that "I just got the pee-pee scared out of me feeling", that took many years to resolve.

Remember me telling you about the vision of being something about John the Baptist? This feeling, or inner sign, never did leave me, as I thought about him often throughout my life, and later on saw that God had given me the same

Elisha spirit that John had; a voice calling from the wilderness. When I finally did quiet down my life, I could hear Gods' voice and began to develop in His teachings that did set me apart from most people that were caught up in this world and what it has to offer. I could sit here and pretend that God didn't treat, nor raise me to be any different than most religious folks, but He did. He honored my very first prayer, as a very young person, to not allow me to be that average christian that I saw so often walking through the doors of each meeting on Sunday morning. I'm not saying, by any means, that I'm a better person than these, I'm certainly not, just different. Yes, I stumbled a lot, and maybe even caused others to stumble, but I continued to grow, in spite of all the falls.

Thought I was a man when I was not, but then again, learned what a man was, and yet still wasn't one. I had to screw-up, I had to be stupid, I had to hurt, and I had to do every foolish thing that I did, to learn what it was to be a man, and hear God's voice. It was the getting caught, and seeing the pain that I caused others, and falling down just to get back up so I could fall down again, that brought my life to a place that I had to take a long and sobering look at myself, be ashamed, repent (change my mind), so my life could be led by God without interference from me. He did set me aside and showed all the things that were going on inside of me. Folks, this wasn't pretty, when I asked God to reveal Himself to me

as Judge, no sir, it wasn't a pretty sight, but He told the truth.

For twenty something years I was an A.K.C. registered, full blown thoroughbred, straight from the pit A--hole. Wasn't proud of it, not even a little bit, but this too had be gone through, before my eyes were to be opened. I'm sure that there are plenty of people out there that I hurt, and don't even know I did it, and probably didn't care at the time, but I sure do now.

I walked away from the 'so called church' in the mid-90's, after several years of listening to God show me what was going on, but it was an addiction that was so very hard to break. I quit the pagan practice of celebrating christmas and easter as they are practiced in today's society, and have somewhat walked away from so many of the things this world has to offer, or at least, claims to offer.

I'm thinking that the called out ones should walk in the shadow of Christ, and not that of man. We really are to lay down our lives and follow Him, and not the towers that man has built unto himself. The world was the inventor of these so-called holidays, they are there to entertain each other with, to pretend to do what's right, to help make them think they are pleasing God, to appease their own self-

servicing appetites, so let the world have it back, where it belongs.

In the book of 1-John it says that; now we are the children of God, and what we'll be is still unclear, but when we see Him, and we will see Him, we will be like Him, and see Him as He really is. This is not a statement from our Lord of something that will happen after our life on this earth is over, but now. We already have that which Christ has given us; we have just not realized it, for Christ lives in all, but maybe He hasn't been revealed, or received, as yet. We each have His Man within, He is there in us, and when we finally see Him, then our lives will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We will be changed, and at that point, to forever be with Him, as He is revealed within. If the Kingdom of God (and it is) is in our hearts, then we no longer have to wait, as we were taught, to forever be with Him. God is the God of the living and not that of the dead.

Peter, after several years of being with the Lord night and day, still saw Him as ruler on this earth. Peter could only see Him on the outside, and when he did say that Jesus was the Christ, it was only for that short moment that Peter was out of the way of himself, and was yielded to the Spirit. A few minutes later, Peter proclaimed he was going to protect Jesus no matter what, and was rebuked by Christ to get back out of his flesh, and referred to Peter as satan. We too have traveled

that same road many times, but Jesus didn't tell us about this walk in the Kingdom because it couldn't be achieved, but that it could. If all the good stuff happens after we die that physical death, then why do we not go ahead and die unto our self now, so that we could live His life while still on the planet?

The exploits of my life, each had significance, whether they were something I should have done, or something that I shouldn't have, led to an individual (me) that was made up of his surroundings, and I'm not completely positive that I, or any, had much of a choice in the matter. God has a plan for each one of us, and I'm not sure if we are capable of hindering Him, once He has set His sights on us.

So whether I was being a man of principles (a boy), while standing up for my rights while working at Y-12, or selling a truck for much less than I paid for it, or Tevin, my grandson, being born, or even laying on top of that mountain with those sparkly little flecks coming out of my mouth, all this was very important for my development, as this was my walk, and no other could walk it in my stead.

Many have asked if I'm ashamed or embarrassed about the foolishness that was in my life, and my answer is always No.

Anybody with any sense at all could see that I did as many dumb and stupid things as I could dream up. But,

looking back, all had a purpose that I'd not want to live today without.

So all and all, I like myself today, have come to a peace in my life, and am satisfied with the journey that God has placed me in.

There is no way any of us can avoid problems in life, they are going to come with, or without, our permission. I've thought for a long time, that problems is what makes the man, and brings him to success in life, if heeded as coming from God; we will learn from His Spirit, therefore we can begin that walk again, that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

As children of God we cannot look at things the way other people do. What the world calls evil, God meant it for our good. Each and every trouble is custom made, just for us, designed and engineered to bring us back into relationship with God. The way that man can overcome, is to quit looking at the troubles in life as coming from satan, or some the cruel thing that has come our way, as bad, but as a lesson in disguise, sent by, and used by the God of all the universe, a true blessing.

The disciple Thomas had problems believing; King David had problems with Saul and his lustful eyes; Moses had Pharaoh; Abel had Cain; Daniel had the lions; Shadrack had to deal with fires; and brother Paul went through many

tribulations such as assassins, snakes, the Romans and so-on. Even Jesus was not spared the many problems in His life. Each person in the Bible, each one of us will have our opportunities in life with trials and tribulations that will be sent our way to teach, to strengthen and purge us as with fire. To bring us to a place where we will either except that which God is giving us, or be left in a bewildered state, and maybe have to do it all over again. All things work together for good to those that are called up to this life, we all have our burdens to bare. Believing this, we can count it all a blessing when troubles come our way..... Do you think it might be time for the children of God to quit murmuring and whining, and turn to Him?

I'm certainly not saying that I'm all grown up now, or that I don't have a ways to go. Because when I look at myself I have just begun, and have far more before me, than there is that's been placed *behind*.

Maybe.....,

I'm just enjoying the ride.

Can you really picture Jesus wearing a custom made suit, with diamond rings, a Rolex, patent leather shoes and then chauffeured in a limousine?

Preachers involved in the Gospel to make money, or to spread their own doctrine and belief, are not going to like what was said in this book, and will therefore attempt to dispel it..... The church is the only organization I know of on earth, that kills their wounded.

I'd like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my beautiful family that I love so very much. If a feller didn't have much, but had all these wonderful people as their family, they could call themselves rich.

Andrea is my oldest child, and with her husband Deny have four great kids; Anessa, D.J. whom I call Shorty, Alex, and Analeise whom I call Dough-Nut.

Susan is my youngest daughter, whom I call Lucy, and Eugene also have four great kids; Tevin, Darian, Daxia whom I call Curly Sue, and Tarris whom I call George. Some years later Jordan, (M.J.) was born.

Matthew, my son and his wife Amy, also have three great kids; Hannah the oldest and only girl, Silas, and Abram.

Count 'em folks.

That's twelve grandchildren, if that don't make me a rich man, then I don't know what rich is. There ain't a throw-backs in the bunch. I'm proud of each and every one of them, and with good reason.

I thank you, all of you that read this knuckle-heads' book, and especially thanks to those that did not get too sore at me for opening up a can of worms, that I believe needed to be poured out on the table to see where they take root.

The purpose for this book was to share several stories with you that, more or less, are common place in many middle aged people lives, especially those with adventurous spirits. Each and every little happening in my story is just a happy little mistake, or a path that nourished and nudged me into the life that God had for me from the beginning. I have no regrets, because now, I understand the ending. I had to go through all that crap, and feel the pain, the torment, the misery, before my eyes were to be opened to the beauty of God's mystery, while we still live on the Earth.

The Children of God

*3d Now are we the children of God and what we'll be
is still unclear.*

*The world didn't know Him, and it won't know us, for
the Fathers' voice we here.*

*But we know, when we shall see Him, we shall be like
Him.*

For we shall see Him as He really is;

Lord of our hope, Healer of our soul,

Redeemer of our life, Holy sacrifice

*The first and the last, the end of all our past.
God wisdom shown to man, the Rock on which to
stand.*

Health, Truth and Grace, the first of His own race.

*He's manna from above, the epithet of Love
The hope of every nation, in every generation,*

A counselor and a guide, the Lamb was born to die.

Blessed King in glory, God's redemption story.

*The Father of all host, the captain of our souls,
A Light in His own tower, the God of every power.*

*His name is called Emanuel, His name is called
Wonderful,*

Hallowed, exalted, Majestic, Everlasting Lord.

*The Light of every man, that's born into the world,
The Truth, the Way, the Life, the Branch, the Tree, the
Vine.*

*The Word of God displayed, the Son that rules the
day.*

He's King of every king, He's Lord of every lord.

Of whom the angels see, the savior of the world,

*He's the Sower of the seed, the supplier of all our
needs.*

He's Health to all our bones, an anchor to the soul,

*He's the raiser of the dead, to the Body He's the
Head.*

He's light unto the blind, He calms the troubled mind.

The divider of the seas, He sets the captives free,

He's water from the Rock, the shepherd of the flock.

The great Passover Lamb, the eternal great I AM.

The holder of the keys, He bore our sickness and disease.

A Friend that we can trust, the Voice of the burning bush.

The bearer of our cares, the scars we gave He wears.

The Light to guide our way, He's hope for each new day.

*A friend that never leaves, He beckons us with pleas.
Now we are the children of God and what we'll be is still unclear.*

The world didn't know Him and it won't know us for the Father's voice we hear.

But, we know when we shall see Him,

we shall be like Him,

for we shall see Him as He really is.

Kirby Dies

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the following books and songs as having been very influential in my beliefs and in the writing of this book. I have not quoted directly from the books however I feel that it is only right to give credit to them for having molded my Man Within.

- 1a *'Lost in the Shuffle' - Robert Subby*
- 2a *'The Final Quest' - Rick Joyner*
- 3a *'Reach Your Hand Out Suddenly' - Kirby Dies*
- 3b *'Tip of Types' - Kirby Dies*
- 3c *'Follow Me' - Kirby Dies*
- 4a *'The Harlot Church' - Charles Elliot Newbold*
- 3d *'Children of God' - Kirby Dies*

also

'The Christ Within' – Maurice Nichol

and all excerpts of scripture come from the KJV Bible.

You know, every person I have encountered in my life has been influential in helping me to become the man I am today and should get credit for helping me to write this book. Even the movies and the books I've read.

God, as I walk this life, and at times fumble badly, will you be with me in every step? Would You awaken in me Your Spirit that I may have eyes to see, and ears to hear? There is no other god that can stand beside You, for You alone are creator of all that is created. Please teach me to appreciate the things and people in life that are set before me, for I know in my spirit, that each were given to me to add one more element of truth, and also an opportunity love as You Love.

I thank you for not ever leaving me during my foolish life of youth, and also of today, for I can see that your love is far greater than that which I have yet achieved. Would You help me in my unbelief, for my belief in You is true, but immature?