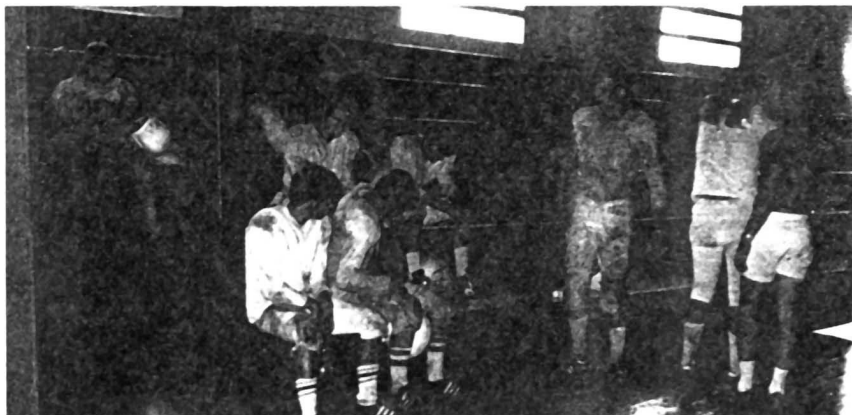


"This year we go to 11 man football. All that does is put 3 more Buffaloes on the field. That makes it all the better. Lets go practice."

Coach Jack Brookins, August, 1970



-Rolling Thunder-



Mud soaked Buffaloes in the gym bleachers after a practice, 1970.

Part Two

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Freshmen

We had made it to the edge of a new plateau. We were genuine High School Freshmen, green as grass, dumb as rocks, and naive as newborns. We amused ourselves and developed our confidence in the coming year by telling warstories we had heard of some of the horrible things Seniors had done to Freshmen in the past. Most had to do with your nether parts and all were disgusting and painful. One particular form of torture I had heard was that they use something on your back to open up lacerations then rub lineament on it. The stinging would last for hours they said. How wonderful. I could hardly wait.

I didn't know what to expect from these sadistic upperclassmen but I decided I'd take my "initiation" as stoically as I could. I figured it was to be something like the Inquisition. I didn't know how close I was to being right.

My first encounter with what I thought was a Senior came in the Ag Shop. During orientation we were allowed run of the place while we were being issued books and dealing with the chaos of the first day of school. For some reason a lot of us wound up in the Ag Shop. It was a fascinating place. There were drill presses, welders, saws, and all sorts of fascinating tools the like of which I had never seen before. I loved to build things and this was to be one of my favorite places to waste time. An a lot of time I would waste in here!

That is when I came face to face with a 6 foot tall guy I took to be a Senior. He looked gigantic and must've weighed at least 180 solid pounds. He looked at me the way a coroner might examine a disgusting sort of tissue. I stood at attention in front of him as he sat on a worktable. He asked me question after question, each couched in ridicule. He grabbed my right arm and circled my wrist with his thumb and fore -finger, exploiting my thin-ness. He had a crowd of some 10 or so other people with him who were having a good time at my expense. I dealt with this situation as best I could and I wouldn't let him rattle me. He did not strike me or manhandle me roughly. It was all psychological. I took what he dished out then I rapidly left the Ag Shop to find my friends and allies, where it was safe.

This inquisition seemed no different from the other harassment I had put up with from my fellow classmates. I didn't like it at all, but it had been nothing new! I think the guy I thought was a Senior had a problem trying to figure me out. He wasn't a senior, but that didn't matter. He was still an upper classman, and a guy who would be a problem in the future, though not a big one.

As time went by other real Seniors had their own special ways of getting to us, or trying to. There was this tall skinny blond Senior girl named Jackie Smith. She looked like an elf, large eyes and thin limbed, but had an aggressive edge to her.

She came to me in the hall, while I was stocking my locker with my books. She grabbed my right arm and said "Walk with me to the end of the hall."

I did so, exclaiming "What kind of deal is this?" all the way to the water fountain where she let me go. I don't know what she was up to. I guess she expected me to take off screaming down the hall and out the doors. I wasn't afraid of girls, as she probably thought, I just couldn't figure them out. Or perhaps she was doing this on a bet; get me and see if I'd walk all the way down the hall with her. Great big hairy deal.

All this petty harassment was a far cry from the obscene bloodlettings and horrifying tortures we had heard about. I felt a bit more confident in my ability to hold up under their hazing.

Some people didn't play mind games. With them it got physical in a hurry. Willie Davis wasn't a Senior but he felt it was his duty to welcome some freshmen to the hallowed halls of highschool. He held my left arm and shook his right hand, limbering it up. Then he let me have such a blow on my shoulder that it sent me reeling in pain. He then walked off down the hall having done his bit for the future of Lone Oak High's new Freshman Class. I rubbed my shoulder, picked up my books, and went on my way. Ho hum. More of the same. Is this the best you got?

Other than a couple of sharp raps on the head from Senior rings not much else happened. I was somewhat disappointed but also I was relieved. This was hardly any hazing at all. I had much worse done to me by Rickey Graham's mildly insane running buddies from Greenville. This was absolutely NOTHING.

I don't know what was done to the girls but it had something to do with rolling eggs and painting your face a deep brown with some sort of coca looking stuff. I think I got a better deal.

High School was radically different from anything I had experienced. We had all seen the high school from the other end of the hall when we were in grade school. It was the Land of the Giants. We knew what it looked like, but we had no idea how it was run. Orientation was virtually non existent, so we did as best as we could, now that we were here. We had a room for each class. Each teacher had a new group of students for each period under his or her specialty. Our books were kept in large wooden wall lockers lining the walls of the hallway. In grade school we just kept our coats in our lockers, if that much.



We were 2 to a locker and it got to be a mess. It was impossible to keep the locker orderly. We had only so much time to get to class so it was throw in the last class textbook and pull out the

other. Paper and pencils littered the bottom of the locker and coats rarely stayed on the hooks. These wooden monsters were made about 1950 or so and some hadn't held up well over the decades. The doors had spring-loaded hinges that worked half of the time. One horrifying thing that could happen was that someone could open the door and all the books would come tumbling out onto the floor, along with coats, gym gear, and a long forgotten cap. Clipboards would scatter their paper in a wide arc and notebooks would land in such a way as to fold at least half of the pages inside.

People would store the darnedest things in their locker. We would find baseball bats and gloves, cleats, gym shorts, sweaters, caps, small girly books, all sorts of things. All of these were found in lockers that were supposed to be empty since last summer. We turned into the office most of the stuff and the lecherous among us kept the girly books and looked at them on the sly in great wonderment. Educational as well as entertaining, the risk of getting caught with this contraband was such that it had to be disposed of at the first opportunity after everyone trustworthy got a peek.

Orientation was, well, strange. Every teacher played this little game of "I tell you about me and you tell me about you." This got yawns all around. Some of the teachers wanted us to write a paper with a brief description of self and goals. Others handed out a questionnaire. More yawns. Like 14, 15, and 16-year-old kids have any idea of just what they are going to be. I filled the thing out for one particular teacher in my History class. It was full of my grand ideas and a full-blown fantasy about being a Formula One racecar driver. I dutifully turned my paper in and was subsequently chastised for not using full sentences. She had enough class not to chew me out in front of the group. She told me as I was leaving her classroom. I found it peculiar that I could fail a questionnaire about myself and my goals. I blew it off and went on to other things, but I appreciated her tact.

I was reluctant to play High School football my Freshman year. I was 90 pounds and 5' 4" or less. Most likely less. There were guys out there who were 6' 4" and weighed 240 or more. Dieing at 14 wasn't something I wanted to do, but the allure of being on the team was strong. I really wanted to wear that red and white, and I had come to love it.



Rickey Graham in 1970

David Morgan and Rickey Graham met me after school at the Fina station. We were talking football. They asked me to go to practice with them that night. Two-a-days were over for the year and evening practices were on. I rode to the well-known practice field with them and entered the Varsity locker-room for the first time as a highschooler. Big guys were all over the place. These guys had mustaches and sideburns, and hairy chests. They were built like wrestlers. They were gigantic, both tall and wide. I felt like a nearsighted gopher in an elephant herd.

The place smelled of sweat, lineament, and dirt. It was musty. I loved it. This was the inner sanctum and I was an acolyte.

The fellows filed out tossing a ball back and forth and participating in the male-bonding horseplay so common to athletes. I scrounged a pair of all black cleats from the hamper and pulled them on. I had no socks. That was a bad move, but I had leather tough feet so blisters were not a fear. I followed the guys out on the field for the first time. I was anxious and wide-eyed.

The coaches didn't run me off, more or less accepting me into the practice. If I had the guts to try they'd let me stay. I did the exercises and I thought I'd die from the heat. Larry Norton, the manager, gave me a salt pill. I had no idea what to do with it so I let it dissolve in my mouth. Finally I just chewed the horrible tasting thing up and swallowed it.

Plays were run and passes thrown. It was much like Junior High but there was a lot more of it. It was faster and harder too. There were about 50 people out here! We were wearing shorts this particular day, so it wasn't a contact day.

That night I went home with a blister on my right heel the size of a quarter. I was otherwise fine. I had started my highschool football career. It was something I'd never regret.

I felt much better about myself and my situation in general the next day. I had actually been there, done it, and nobody gave me a bad time. Not yet.

Games

Class is boring. Once William Dial, a very intelligent man with a degree in mathematics who I figured must have decided to teach and coach rather than probably build spaceships to the moon, assigned us 8 full pages of problems in his math class. Our moans of despair were met with 2 more pages. We looked at this horror in disbelief and got into it as best we could.



William F. Dial, Math Teacher, Coach during the 6 man days, and eventually School Principal,

Had also taught at Boles Home, another one of those odd Lone Oak/Boles Home connections.

Some people will say that girls "dumb down" in school. Not so here. Vicki, Martha, and Julia breezed through these 10 pages before we guys even got 3 done. Julia, ever scholastic, put her completed math problems away and worked on her English. I was amazed.

Enthusiasm for getting work done wanes rapidly when it is so boring I could actually hear my blood pumping. It was hot and the sun light actually put a couple of guys to sleep. To fake being awake guys would put their hands up on their foreheads, rest their elbows on their desks, and bend forward, dozing. It was the dribble coming out the corner of their mouths that gave them away.

To keep going we invented numerous games. One I liked to play was "Bomber". On a sheet of notebook paper I'd draw an aerial map of a river, road, bridge, and maybe some buildings. I'd then place this on the floor. Using a drawing compass or a pencil I'd take aim and release over the target. Bombs away!

The "bomb" would leave a hole in the paper or a mark showing the impact. This would go on for as long as the teacher was gone.

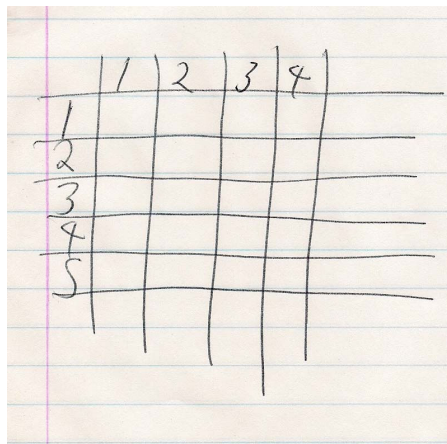
There were many versions of Bomber too, like darts, baseball, just about anything you could do by dropping a pointed object on a target.

Hangman was very popular. Even some of the girls played that. I never learned to play it so I'm not sure what it was about.

Tic Tac Toe was a perennial favorite probably played by monastic priests a thousand years ago and still played today. "Cat" still wins most of the X and O contests. I believe we really had to be bored to play that game, and I was really bored.

Woodyball was a desktop football game played with a piece of paper folded tightly in a triangular shape. The object was to force only part of the ball over the opponent's edge of the desk, therefore scoring a touchdown. The defender then makes a goal post by holding up his forefingers and putting his thumbs together. His elbows rest on the desktop. The offense then thumps the "ball" through the "uprights" like a point after. I think I saw a few girls playing Woodyball, but this was usually with their boyfriends.

Herman came up with the king of all games, but it wasn't popular with many. He merely called it Basketball. It was simple. You made two grids that looked like this:



Each grid represented a team. The top numbers represented a quarter. The numbers one through five on the left side represented an individual player. Names for any team you wanted could be put in there, including team rosters. This made a fast playing and exciting game. All that was needed extra, and this was the scary part, was one six sided die.

Dice were big time contraband in school, and to be caught "rolling the bones" could get us into trouble with teacher, superintendent, and principal. It could get red marks across our hips. It could get us expelled for gambling. It could get anybody into deep do do unless they could talk very very fast and explain what they were doing with dice in study hall.

The Muse of Gaming must've protected Herman and me. We never got in serious trouble for playing basketball with dice.

Here is what a simple game between two teams looked like:

Lone Oak	1	2	3	4		Quinlan	1	2	3	4	
Sheepdog 1	4	1				Ceroy 1	1	3			
Arvo 2	4	3				Red 2	1	4			
Lurch 3	1	2				Bobby 3	2	6			
Alpper 4	5	5				Alex 4	1	1			
Norhamel 5	5	3				Toby 5	1	2			
	19	14					6	16			
	33							22			

As can be seen Lone Oak dominated the first quarter 19 to 6. Quinlan made a better showing in the second quarter by scoring 16 points to Lone Oak's 14 and pulling to within 11 points at the half. I'll let you finish the game.

Herman and I made entire leagues and complete team rosters. We founded a basketball organization that I think only I and possibly he played after graduation. Teams were based on Three Stooges, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, Abbot and Costello, numerous cartoon characters, Hollywood Horror Mosters, and the Harlem Globetrotters, to mention a few ideas we used.

We kept individual stats and Herman figured out a way to compute rebounds and other stats. As I said, Herman loved basketball.

We went on to figure up games for tennis, ice-hockey, down-hill skiing, bob-sledding, car racing, and many others. Herman came up with lots more games than I did. His creative genius was outstanding.

One other game that was risky but loads of fun was "Civil War Navy". It evolved from our paper-wad wars that grew to such proportions in eighth grade. We drew on a sheet of cardboard the top deckplan of an ironclad that was impossibly loaded to the gunwales with cannons. We even put a mortar near the bow. There was a spot on deck for the powder magazine. This was the target. A hit on the powder magazine destroyed the vessel and put you out of the game.

Spitwads were placed on the broadsides and thumped off in a big messy barrage. If the "ship" was located in a clipboard the mortar became effective in a nice fashion. The clip on the clipboard

served as a ramp and when the spitwad was thumped off it, it flew a long way in an arc. It would come almost straight down on the target, if the aim was true, and had a greater chance of getting the powder magazine.

At one time we had about 3 or 4 captains out there blasting away. This left spent ammo all over the place. It was dangerous if a teacher caught you firing a round or if they got mad over the somewhat large amount of paperwads all over the floor.

Our conduct grades were low, very low. I think you can see why.

Non-games

Girls either studied their books in studyhall, or chatted with their boyfriends. Actually studying never entered into our fun loving heads, but when talking to your girl any of the other games came in a distant second.

I saw girls fiddle with each other's hair in studyhall, braiding it, styling it, and so on. They also gossiped some, but if they did anything to get our attention they immediately didn't want it. Boisterous horseplay isn't lady-like. Once Martha got involved in a bit of horseplay and frantically tried to bail out in the most lady-like fashion she could muster.

On totally unfamiliar ground she snarled at us with eyes as big as plates, hissing out "Stop it!"

I shot her down by calling out "Bite 'em, Martha!"

This was followed by male laughter and even more good-natured ribbing.

Martha was in a category all by herself. Like most of the girls in the class she was brainy. When I first saw her in 1964 after I transferred from Greenville to Lone Oak she was a little pudgy and reserved. When she became a teen she changed like a caterpillar to a butterfly. We were all enthralled by the result. She was suddenly beautiful and shockingly attractive.

The other girls all looked basically the same. Martha was a new surprise. I think we were all in such a state of shock over what happened with her that to ask her for a date never occurred to our vacant skulls.

Still, Martha tried to be inscrutable like the rest of the girls, but the sudden attention she was getting was new and totally foreign to her. I think she ate it up, loving every minute of it, but not knowing just how to deal with it after years of being pretty much ignored. I even had a crush on her, and thought she was *fantastic*. She was brainy, beautiful, and not going with anybody, but I never gave it a shot because I considered her unreachable. Martha had a lot of class, and a chapter all her own in here.



Rabbit and Friends

New people come and go all the time, what with us being a mobile society. I have lost some guys I could call my friends. Their families moved away and I can't remember them all. The ones I do remember I have filed away in the deep melancholy dungeons of my memories. Some I have not seen in decades.

My friends are a valuable commodity. To share life with a comrade, male or female, is a gift to be cherished. I can't understand how somebody can go away, forget who they left behind, and act as if these individuals never were in their lives. Worse yet is when you visit these old dear friends they treat you like a guest instead of an old friend. That hurts worse than you can imagine.

Randy Price, who I called Rabbit, came to us out of the nothingness of "out there" (actually Mexia, Texas) and settled among us. He was stoutly built for a fellow his size and tough as nails. He took no b.s. off anybody, and the Jock clique didn't know how deal with him. I first met Rabbit as a buddy when we were in the gym for P.E. class. The sock was flying fast and hard. Herman and I were far from the action where it was relatively safe. I looked up in the bleachers while I was talking to Herman and saw this new guy we called Rabbit sliding on the rail of the bleachers. It was a common practice so I paid no attention to the strange new guy. I looked back at Herman to say something and I head a loud thump.

I turned and there was Rabbit sprawled on his back at the drop-off of the rail on the floor of the bleachers. He was dazed and his secret bag of potato chips had scattered around him.

Amused, but worried, Herman and I walked over casually to see if he was o.k. We laughed at his accident and he didn't seem to like it much. He did, however, seem to like our company. Randy Price joined the Nerd clique shortly thereafter and was the only one the Jocks didn't pester. I guess it was because Rabbit played football.

Rabbit and Herman took to reading my comic strips and cartoons. I happily drew them into the stories. We became astronauts, pilots, racecar drivers, and pro football players. We were especially into the space program because of the moon landing. I had a model of a proposed moon shuttle and with a few modifications it became a Shuttle Freighter. I created a space agency called American Space Program and based it in New Mexico near White Sands. It was where our imagination would spend a lot of time.



1917

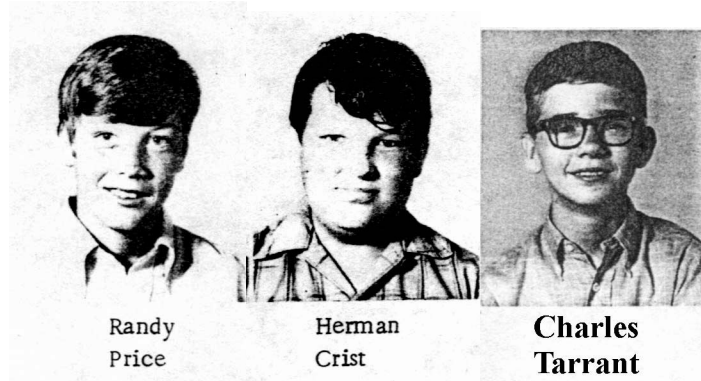
Randy Price was fiercely independent but he liked to follow my lead. I don't know why. I guess he thought I was smarter than he was. That's how it went. If I wanted to play a pickup game of basketball, he'd play too. If we wanted to play dogpile on the mats he'd play too. If I wanted to sit in the bleachers and play dice basketball he'd play too.

One thing we did for a while was "sword fight". We'd make like we had swords and duel all up and down the bleachers. Errol Flynn would have been proud. Sometimes we pretended we were Romans. We had a ton of fun. Life was good.

Rabbit did something that I never understood the why of, but I appreciated it. I took a lot of ribbing and outright ridicule from girls who looked down at me. One day one of them started calling me "funny face". Rabbit started singing "Funny face, I love you!" Out maneuvered, the girl shut up and left in a huff. He must've thought a lot of me. I guess he held me in high regard for my drawing abilities and my friendship. His conduct with the shrews left me confused but pleased to have such a friend. Prior to this I had to just put up with it. Rabbit was held in high esteem by a lot of the ladies and to catch some of his wrath was shocking to them. It also elevated me a little in their eyes. Nobody could give me a hard time with Rabbit around and get away with it. Faster on the wit than I, whenever somebody started playing mind games with me he'd pick up the gauntlet and fire right back. He was not to be taken lightly, and neither was I when he was around. It did a lot to bring me out of my shell and become more outgoing.

Rabbit, Herman, and I became close friends. Because I now had Rabbit to talk to in addition to Herman, I actually talked less in class than before. Herman didn't monopolize my time because I could split it between the two of them. If I drew something I had to show it to both of them. The teachers no longer had a problem with me so they didn't separate me from Herman or Rabbit. We would usually sit next to each other in class. There were some minor incidences, but for the most part I began to behave myself. My conduct grades went up slightly as a result, games and horseplay notwithstanding.

Rabbit was one handsome fellow and he had no trouble with the girls here about. Our class ladies didn't do more than treat him courteously but lower grades like in Junior High went ga-ga over him. He had an outgoing personality. His voice was deep and slightly gravelly. He looked a little like the actor Robert Taylor.



They were my buddies, my friends, and together we would go through many adventures together before fate would send us on our separate ways. Some were good, some were bad, but in the long run we enriched each other's lives greatly.

Eats



Back when the 20th century was young, sometime before the 1st world war, Lone Oak had a Victorian schoolhouse of a most imposing architecture. The thing was lovely, in a gothic sort of way, and was nicely trimmed in wooden "gingerbread" so common at the time. It was several stories high and had a basement. Basements are rare in East Texas because of flooding problems from a high water table. Later, in 1914, the building was destroyed by fire. A new 3 story building of red brick was built and was the school until 1949. At that time the top two stories were condemned and razed and a new roof was put on the lower story. The basement became a classroom, the auditorium and stage, and the school lunchroom.



With better acoustics in the auditorium and permanent seating, there was no longer a need for the stage in the gym. The former stage in the gym was boarded up and became the cherished varsity locker room. The major school complex, housing both junior, senior, and grade schools, was built in front of it out of cinderblock some time in 1949. It was one story high. The old and new structures were connected by a breezeway. The breezeway could be sealed off by a pull down garage door that allowed use of the school restrooms during football and basketball games. The doors to the old school were locked, thus protecting that part of the school.

Our lunchroom was the only cafeteria I have eaten in that was below ground level. The tables were wooden picnic affairs, heavily painted with about 50 or so coats of white enamel. One thing I noticed in schools and factories is that structures are never sanded and repainted. They're just painted over again. For eating we had plastic trays and sectioned off plates to put on the trays. The portions were already set, we just got it and sat down. We had a fork, a dull knife, and a spoon. All of the silverware was wrapped in a paper napkin, cafe style.



Milk came to us in cup-sized half-pints. These were available in white milk or "sweet milk" as the black kids called it, and chocolate milk. We got our straws from a little dispenser that often jammed or flooded the area with straws. I saw numerous industrial experiments with the half-pint serving. There was the time they tried cube shaped cartons. These had a tinfoil seal at one corner. It didn't go over real big. No matter what changes the milk company made they eventually went back to the old cardboard house-shaped carton.

We learned early on to smell the milk before putting a straw in the carton. Often we'd get a very bad "milk surprise" or soured milk that could leave a person gagging and running from the lunchroom. The stuff smelled as bad as it tasted when it went sour. This happened about once a month. Sniffing the stuff avoided an embarrassing case of the retches. Even the smell of a bad carton could ruin an entire meal.

One of the things I liked about being in highschool was that we could eat where we liked in the lunchroom and we could go off campus. In gradeschool we sometimes had to sit by someone we disliked and that made a meal less than a joyful affair. But now I could happily munch next to Herman and Rabbit and chatter away. The noise level in a high school cafeteria was a little higher than in grade school.

Main courses were varied. Some days we'd have Sloppy Joes or Turkey Open Face sandwiches. Other days we'd have some kind of meat or the abominable bar-b-qued chicken. I couldn't stand b-b-q chicken as it was fixed in the cafeteria.

Side dishes were black-eyed peas, English or Sweet peas, potatoes prepared in a variety of ways and usually mashed, greenbeans, or somesuch. One of the most horrible things I ever sampled in the lunchroom was their potato salad. I remember when I first tasted it. I loved potato salad and when I sat down with my food I took a big fork full. I don't think I chewed once. I got up, put my tray with most of it's food uneaten in the disposal window, and hurriedly left the lunchroom. I got in the boy's restroom and spit the stuff out in a garbage can. Two guys who were in there grossed out and ran. I did without lunch that day. The potato salad and I never became friends. In high school we could and did give unwanted entrees away. There were always several guys who liked the potato salad. I happily gave them mine. The stuff was awful. By contrast I loved the crunchy tater-tots, and some people gave me theirs.

Dessert was outstanding, and met with happy sounds by one and all. Sometimes there was jello\fruit cocktail, other times there was chocolate, banana, or pineapple pudding. On rare and wonderful days there was ice cream in single serving containers. If there was an overstock we could sometimes buy another ice cream and happily stuff ourselves. Somedays they'd be cake. I liked this dessert least. I've never liked cake all that much, and I could usually trade for something I liked.

The grandest meals of all were Turkey and Dressing. Those ladies could whip out fantastic turkey and dressing. It was hot, tasty, and every thing on the plate was consumed with gusto. Their tuna fish sandwiches served with potato chips were also excellent. Some people didn't like tuna so I got an extra sandwich or two. Less successful were their attempts at Mexican food. It was still good and quite edible, but not as good as the other stuff. The tamales were canned, the refried beans watery and about as bad as the potato salad, and the Spanish rice was too spicy.

We developed nic-names for some of our food, especially what we disliked. We called the roast beef sandwiches "horse beef" and referred to turkey open face sandwiches as "buzzard open face". As time went by we begin to hold the menu that was posted outside the lunchroom door in open contempt. We'd trot down the hallway and skid to a halt just outside the auditorium. We'd read the typed menu and put out various comments of disgust and mock horror. Then we'd

decide to either go in the lunchroom or go down town to eat. On days when something delicious was in the offing we could get trampled by the stampede.

The lunch period was a half-hour long, just like in junior high. And just like in junior high the idea was to wolf down the food as rapidly as possible then get with friends in a car. Then it was rock and roll music and drive all over town until time to get back to class. This burned off a lot of that teenage energy we had.

If the chow line was too long, no matter what was being served that day, we just turned around and went to the parking lot. There were more interesting things to do than wait in line for turkey and dressing. Friends and buddies and the fun of a half-hour of freedom beckoned.

Sometimes we got seconds, but not often. When the cafeteria ladies took a chance and decided there was enough to feed us twice we could pig out on what was left. It was great. All this for the price of 30 cents.

Off campus food varied. We could call ahead and have a burger waiting for us. Microwave food was rare in those days and very bland when it was got. Sometimes we'd make do with what ever we could get, candy bars or such junk. We'd wash it down with a grape or orange drink, if we were on the team. The coach said to stay away from colas except the fruit flavored ones so we sometimes drank our daily allotment of 1 at lunch. The reason was that it was believed the caffeine in the colas gave you cramps and the too much sugar from the cokes simply wasn't good for you.

Because my circle of friends enlarged, eating became a social event. Nothing beat getting together with friends at a cafe or store to shoot a little pool or just jabber away while our food cooked on the grill. Then we'd joy ride around Lone Oak's 3 to 5 square miles honking at each other when we'd pass by. Every one knew when it was lunch time for the high school in Lone Oak. Kids were all over town.

Some poor souls brought their lunch. The good side of that was that they could just go straight to the parking lot and pile into the car with the food already there. I detested brown bagging my lunch. I don't think we had a communal use refrigerator so anything packed was of necessity bland and preserved. Back in 1970 there wasn't much in the way of creative goodies to bring in a bag. Mostly it was a sandwich, bag of chips, and a candy bar. Microwave ovens as they came to be known didn't exist yet.

Rip roaring along the streets and munching on our lunch in cars we sat in rapt attention to a zany radio show called Chicken Man. We would listen to every word spoken by the players and roar with laughter. The show was about 5 minutes long and done in offbeat installments. It was our juvenile soap opera.

Girls had their own thing and often hung out during lunch in a hostile knot in front of the Abbot's Food Store. When somebody drove up they didn't like they'd shout vindictives or cuss at them. These were the less inscrutable ladies of other grades who had fewer fantasies about what was lady-like. A lot of them smoked. It was said some of them had low moral standards. They scared the bejabbers out of me and they often let me know I wasn't welcome. I kept my distance from these harpies. They would attack people they didn't like, first verbally then physically. I'd run the gauntlet to get into the store or simply wait until my driver got back to go someplace else.



Abbots food store in 1969. This community store sold food, model cars, toys, books, and accessories, what ever a small town might need. It was a well-liked and well-used market.

We were unsupervised in town and that made it even more fun. To my knowledge we never got in trouble of any kind. There were no fights, not even with the harpies, no car wrecks, no stealing, no anything except a lot of kids happy to be free for 15 or 20 minutes from the tedium of highschool. The food was excellent, cheap, and the companionship incomparable. Such was High School lunchtime.

Attitudes

School sports, both High School and Junior High, can be taken too seriously by some people. Certainly its fun, both to watch a be there. I did a lot of watching, and some playing. There are those who look upon it like combat, sort of like city-state warfare in ancient Greece. It might be a clannishness inherited from the Tennessee settlers of the pioneer days. For us it was often "Them thar boys from Lone Oak versus them boys from roit chere." Rednecks were common in each town and outsiders, especially from rival towns, were often ran out by these guys. It could get nasty, but not often.

This was typified in my High School days when Rickey Graham and Lynn McGee went to Cumby with me hanging around for the ride. Cumby was hostile territory. Legends abound there of individuals who have had bad days at the hands of local thugs. Because females were rare in Lone Oak those of us who had cars went to Cumby, Campbell, even Boles Home. None of us wanted to live alone and without a lady when we eventually left school. A girlfriend also makes life more complete and fulfilling. This search for female companionship is also hazardous. She may have a boyfriend, a protective big brother, or an entire redneck family who thinks guys from Lone Oak are a form of vermin or even worse, "Outsiders".

We were on one of the side streets in Cumby, talking to a rather nicely built young lady named Kathy. She had a female friend there who's name I never caught. Here we were, 3 guys and 2 girls. I was basically ignored so I kept a lookout for rednecks. I was amazed at the huge dogs that prowled the streets in the town. We three stayed in the car. Our first visit had gone with out incident.

Rickey had no friends in Cumby. He did have a few enemies. Once in Junior High he was playing defensive tackle. The Cumby guy broke into the open and Rickey actually chased him down and tackled him at top speed for both of them. Both hit the ground rather hard but the Cumby guy was hurt. I think he cried more from the frustration of getting the stuffing mercilessly stomped out of them than from Rick's jarring tackle. The guy didn't get up right away as Rick came to his feet.

Our sportsmanship philosophy says to see if the guy is okay and help him to his feet. For a second or two Rickey hesitated to see if the guy was hurt badly. I'm sure Rick felt bad about it. He was big, but had that sensitivity only big guys like him have. At his feet lay another human being, maybe hurt by his own actions. It can bother someone to hurt someone unintentionally in sports, and it can bother a great deal.

The hotheads on the sidelines misread Rick's hesitation as a gloat. They started to crawl under the retaining cable that marked the field and come after Rick on the field. That was a big mistake. This was Lone Oak, hostile territory for the hotheads.

"You big lug!" one of them called, "You didn't have to hit him so hard!"

Rick's sympathy for the injured turned immediately to hostility for the townies who were stupidly trying to get to him. He didn't back down.

Coaches from both sides and the referees stepped between the would be combatants and kept something nasty from happening. I watched all this in confusion until Eddie told me what had happened.

So now it was much later. We were in high school. We decided to go back to Cumby and see Kathy again. Last week wasn't so bad. She might have a buddy that I could talk to this time. The prospects looked promising. We got there and parked in our usual spot. Kathy and her friend were there as before but that was all. I made the best of it and got to talk to the girls this time. Even talking to a girl at this time was better than a trip to the Dallas Fair, all things considered.

I was there jabbering away with Kathy when suddenly Lynn and Rick both saw something I didn't. Both became very agitated at the same time and Rick got the 283 in the old Chevy to crank. He rapidly bid the girls good-bye and slammed the column shift into first.

I was confused but they told me we were being pursued. We dug out on the gravel and black top and headed for the Interstate. I looked around but I didn't see anybody. I then looked on the floorboards for a weapon and grabbed a tire iron. If some big turkey was going to take me on I was bound and determined he would have something to remember my mangled remains by, other than counting coup.

As we fishtailed down the street in a cloud of dust, smoky exhaust, and gravel I began to seriously wonder what I had gotten myself into. Rick slammed into second and popped the clutch throwing the old Chevey into a power-slide. I was thrown against the right rear door as we shot out of the street onto the service road of the interstate. Rickey gunned it and we roared for the on-ramp of I-30. I still didn't see anybody but I was getting a rush of fear and grooving on the moment. As the car leveled out in a squealing of rear tires I was shot across the back seat to rebound off the left door. Rickey floored it as we hit the on-ramp. We were on I-30, heading for Greenville, leaving Cumby behind at a cool 90 miles an hour. All this high speed movement in a 1962 beat up Chevy.

Finding my voice I called "What happened? What happened?"

"Shut up and keep a look out," Lynn hissed, " They may be after us."

With eyes as big as plates, clutching a tire iron, I peered behind us down I-30. Yeah, there were cars behind us, lots of them. Which one was I supposed to be looking for? The white dividing stripes zipped passed us as the priority shifted from looking for rednecks to looking for the Highway Patrol. Rickey slowed down and we motored along at about 70, five miles an hour below the speed limit. I kept a nervous lookout all the way to Greenville. Lynn put in an 8-track tape and we listened to garbled rock and roll blasting from the rear speakers. This helped calm us down. We turned off on highway 69 and then went to the station to chill out. Rickey had enough of Cumby for a while. I went home to watch T.V. I never went back to Cumby on a girl-hunting expedition again. It wasn't because I didn't want to, it was because I was never invited. I didn't miss it, but I didn't learn anything either. When I got my own car in my college days and traveled to Boles Home in search of a lady I had to learn these lessons all over again. I forgot the past so I was condemned to repeat it. It was not a happy experience but at least I had a steering wheel to hang onto instead of being thrown around by centrifugal force. Ah, those were the days (yeah, right!).

More Practice

The Buffaloes had an outstanding season last year and had drawn the attention of the Greenville paper. When they interviewed Coach Brookins he was modest enough to say he had graduated most of his starters but was looking forward to this "Freshman class who had won their district last year."

That was our first direct mention for high school football in the paper. It would not be our last. Even then they could hear the Thunder.

Big fellows can be openly intimidated by little fellows playing their game. They rightly assume that football is a game big men play. They wrongfully assume only big men can play it. Rick wasn't bothered by my playing. He and I were buddies and he actively encouraged me to play. Gunner thought it was funny that I was out there running into people and getting knocked about. I could get KILLED out there but I wanted to play.

Jerry McGee was Lynn's brother and he knew me from Junior High. He liked to play mind games but he seemed to actually like me a little. His wolfish grin and evil stare would stop me in my tracks. Jerry was a very big, well-proportioned fellow who could run fast and hit as hard as thunder. He had a lot of class, because he never hurt me or slapped me around or mistreated any other smaller fellows. When he was up against guys his own size it was dangerously obvious that he was one powerful individual. Girls thought he was way too cool and gave him their pictures all the time.

Eddie's big brother, Steve, could also run very fast. He was almost as big as Jerry, but not so heavily built. He played split end. This guy liked everybody. He was a darn good receiver too.

Never to be left out were O.T. Williams and Willie Davis. Willie was a handsome fellow who would get a reputation for having passes bounce off his hands and spin on his helmet. He was also one of the few black guys on the team.

O.T. was skinnier than Willie was and somewhat more sensitive. He loved football and was just as big a fanatic as I was. I thought he was kinda neat, but I kept my distance. As much as I like O.T. he seemed to be hard to get to know.

Neither of these 2 guys had any problems with white guys that I saw. In practice or in school it was the same. We were pretty much color blind. A fellow I'll call "Tiger" was another thing altogether. I think he had a rough time with some red necks sometime in the past. He was overly sensitive to anything that even might sound like a racial slur. I found this out when I wrote "Get them Tiggers" on the lockerroom chalk board. This referred to the Leonard Tigers who we were going to play on a Friday. The guys who were with me thought it was funny and okay, but Tiger took it as a slur. He got a little upset about it but not hostile. To mollify him I let him erase it and the incident was forgotten. Most of us wanted no problems with anybody, and would go out of our way to prevent any. It simmered below the surface, as the chalk board incident proved. A simple joke could be taken the wrong way. I was careful after that about what I wrote. I wasn't looking for trouble.

It was time to practice. This was my first practice in pads in high school. I got a bunch of cast-offs, put a t-shirt on over the shoulderpads, and clomped out of the locker room into the autumn heat of East Texas. Footballs flew back and forth and we began our warm-up routine.

There is a fear every player feels. Most keep it locked deeply in their subconscious. Will they be the next guy hauled off the field? Will it be a broken arm or leg, or will someone's skull be kicked in, or will it be any of a number of painful injuries that will put them out of the game forever? It bears thinking about. Football is a dangerous sport.

Things were going okay for my first full padded practice in high school. I was placed at safety again about 3/4 of the way through practice. This was to be the roughest practice I was to ever be in. Every time a play came near me I tried my best to get in on it without hitting late.

On one play I was trying to tackle a guy. I got blocked and had my left hand stepped on by somebody in cleats. I got up and noticed a huge bump in the center of my hand. I couldn't close it. I wondered if it was broke. I looked over at Robin Black who was playing safety with me.

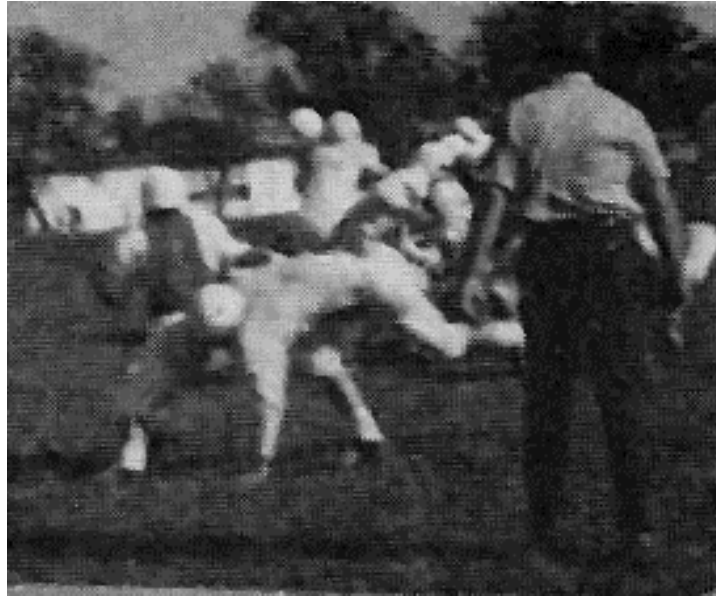
"I got my hand stepped on," I said.

"You'll live," he snarled, not even looking at me.

I thought, "Okay, turkey, be that way."

I got mad, and maybe I got a little reckless.

A play started and I ran to get into it. I got blocked low and hit the ground. Somebody kicked me hard in the temple area, just inside my helmet. Who ever it was fell down on the other side of me with a heavy thud and cloud of dust. It stunned me and my ears rang.



I felt myself go limp for a second then I pushed myself up. If I was hurt I couldn't let them know. They might think me a wimp and run me off the team. I wouldn't let that happen. I wobbled to my feet and got back in position.

I tried to say something but my tongue wouldn't work. I couldn't speak English. This was both terrifying and fascinating. I was unable to communicate with my fellow man and I was in a very dangerous position.

After a couple more plays we switched sides. I got to play offense. I tried to tell a coach I couldn't speak but what I said came out incoherently. They just looked at me and called a play.

I got into position on the end and the play started. I went down about 5 yards and cut to my right, into the heart of the defense where the linebackers live.

Rudy Douglas zipped a pass at me and I caught it in front of Randy Payne. I was surprised he didn't tackle me. There was a roar of approval from all over the field as I looked in Randy's surprised face. He could have killed me, if he tried to tackle me, so I thanked my lucky stars that he was so surprised that little skinny me had caught that pass that he forgot to get me.

I went back to the next huddle and the other series of plays were uneventful.

We did some windsprints and then we went to the locker room to take off our equipment after circling it up and spelling it out. I found a coach and tried to explain my predicament of being unable to speak. I think he understood, but he just looked in my eyes and told me I'd be okay. I trotted off to the lockerroom.

On the trip home I got where I could talk again but I had a headache. When I got home my father was very upset about my injuries. He gave me a lecture. In it he essentially forbided me playing football.

"Them big ole boys will kill you and I caint afford to bury you!"

This was similar to what he told me about playing in Junior High, but here he was a lot more forceful.

"You aint big enough to be out there," he said.

He was right, of course, but I was disappointed. My Freshman year of athletics came to a halt right then. I became a hall wanderer and study hall fixture. I couldn't stand it.

Ironically I was never stunned or injured in practice again as badly as I was that night. This was also the last time I'd have my "bell rung." For the rest of the team the season went on. But it went on without me.

Prosper

Jack Brookins well knew the powerful force he had at his disposal in the form of some 31 young men who were in the red and white. He believed they were a force to be reckoned with, but how would they do in the larger arena of 11-man football? Scrimmages had shown some promise. He knew that. Now came the real test of a game. On September 11, 1970, that test, and Lone Oak's first 11-man game since 1941, came on.

Brookins, Taylor, and Mankin all watched on in exasperation as the Buffalo team proceeded to destroy itself on the field. To some, the press releases later on may have been too kind. It was called "opening night jitters" or the like. Mr. Brookins expected some confusion, but not outright incompetence.



An unhappy Coach Brookins glares out on the field with

Coach Mankin next to him.

The Big Red Machine took the ball to Prosper's 2-yard line. It was a simple thing; either we'd take it in with a crushing run or we'd kick it for 3. Suddenly there were red flags in the air. It was a penalty! On who? the Refs gathered near the goal line and then gave the call. It was clipping on Lone Oak.

Coach Taylor drawled out something nobody could understand. Mr. Brookins stood there with his arms folded, behaving much like Dallas Cowboys Coach Tom Landry. He was not pleased.

The penalty took the fire out of the drive. It spit and sputtered and the field goal attempt was no good. Prosper got the ball back. Prosper proceeded to drive on us. In a short while Prosper scored. The point after kick was good and Prosper was now up 7-0. Lone Oak was behind and didn't like it. More than that Coach Brookins was completely dissatisfied with his troop's performance.

The second quarter was no better. Prosper marched right down field and scored again. Once more the extra point kick was good. They led 14 to 0.

The fellows on our team were big, rough looking guys. They couldn't possibly let this fiasco happen. Something was wrong someplace. Half-time mercifully came and Coach Brookins proceeded to make adjustments. The managers passed out paper cups with water in them for the players. Nobody was in a jovial mood. They could still take the lead in this game. A two-touchdown deficit can be overcome. Lone Oak was not out of this game.

Out the Buffaloes went. The humid September air filled with the cheers of the fans. The pep squad cheered loudest, hoping for victory. Revenge for the first half and a possible victory seemed near as the team took the kickoff and drove well. If the Buffaloes could score and break the ice they could definitely do it again. They had to get their confidence up and rattle Prosper's a little.

Lone Oak went to the 30, drove to the 20. Then they were on the 10. Suddenly they were only 8 yards away from a touchdown, the very first we'd ever score in 11 years. Then it happened again. Penalty flags flew. Once more it was a penalty on Lone Oak, just scant feet from the goal line. We had gotten penalized for holding, and the drive died.

Prosper got the ball back, but this time they ran right into a solid wall of angry Red and White Buffaloes. Mr. Brookins' adjustments to the secondary and different line assignments had made it very hard for the Prosper Eagles to do anything. Coach Brookins chewed his fingernails and analyzed the situation. There was still hope.



It was 4th down and the punt receiving crew went onto the field. The Prosper coach had observed Lone Oak's performance on punt returns in the first half. There hadn't been much of an attempt to watch the men going downfield to cover the punt. This led to a gutsy gamble on Prosper's part.

The ball was snapped and the rushers shed the ends and backs who sped downfield. Everybody wanted to block the punt. The ball sailed overhead in a spiral. It was a fake punt!

The receiver caught the 43-yard pass and scored on us. Lone Oak could not believe it. Our moans of surprise and anguish were echoed by cheers of victory from Prosper's side. Some Lone Oak players who threw down their helmets were promptly chastised by the other players and coaches.

The extra point failed, and Lone Oak got the ball back. I don't know if Prosper expected Big Red to roll over and die, but that was not and is not our creed. To Lone Oak's credit they didn't let Prosper score again for the rest of the game, over a quarter and a half.

This accomplishment rang hollow as the final score was 20 to 0. Prosper celebrated their victory as Lone Oak trudged toward the locker room. There was the unmistakable message that we had truly beaten ourselves with stupid penalties and falling for a fake punt. It was not a good day to lose, or a good way to start a season. The only real solace was that this was not district play. Essentially this fiasco did not count.

But Coach Brookins remembered. And planned.

Crushes and More Boredom

Love is a powerful emotion, possibly the most powerful. It can consume someone like fire if it gets out of control. But it first came gently to me in the fall of 1970. It was Sandy Robertson.



Sandy was the smallest girl in our class, barely over 5' 3". She had a pixish look. She had shoulder length blond hair and was pretty.

She also liked Eddie.

Her problem was that Eddie was stuck like glue to Karen. Karen's long black hair and devastating smile destroyed Eddie. Karen was all his forever. That left Sandy on the outside. I saw this and tried to get close to her. I had no earthly idea what to do, or even how to react to anything she would say.

I was dealing with my first teenage crush, and this was nothing like what I'd feel for a certain girl some 3 years later.

Sandy was real friendly, and would happily chatter away with any one of us. I made up my mind I'd try real hard to get to see her more. I tried to spend some time with her, but she wasn't in our study hall or some of the classes I went to. I never found her during lunch or P. E. Then one day I did find her and I worked up the nerve to ask her if she liked me.

She said she did. I was struck dumb and wandered like a zombie all over the gym. I found out later she also liked Herman, Rabbit, Eddie, and all us guys because we were just her friends and classmates. It was a total misunderstanding on my part and it would not be the last. Once I got the whole story I controlled my crush for Sandy, but I still wished she was my lady. I didn't push it. I was so devastated by this gentle form of rejection that I think it bothered me for a full 10 to 15 minutes while the guys and I played dogpile on the mats in the gym.

Boredom filled the moments after my letdown from Sandy. I had my drawing to keep me occupied but I had absolutely nothing going. Algebra was driving me crazy and I couldn't seem to bring my grade average above a 69. Herman and I spent a lot of time in study hall doing basically nothing of any consequence. Rickey and Rabbit would sometimes be there and talking about that day's practice. They'd say who got clobbered or how neat a certain play rolled. I would listen and be burning with envy.

I wished I was on the team, doing anything. I felt awful about being here as a hall wanderer. When the team went out for practice and the girls went to pep squad practice at about 1 or 2 o'clock the school was big and empty. I think all told there were less than 50 people in the entire highschool section during these times.

When I went to get a gulp of water from the fountain I could hear the boards in the floor creak and echo off the walls. It was sorta spooky. Nobody would be in the boy's room either. The library had a few people but none of them were my buddies. My motivational level dropped.

To liven things up a bit some guys would smuggle girly books and allow peeks. One guy brought some of the raunchiest stuff I ever saw. I don't know where he got it. He kept it hidden from the faculty and never got caught. I just shook my head and walked away.

I was just flat bored, and quite unsure of how to deal with it.

I wore an army cap outside. I had a fondness for these very ugly caps and I wore them almost every where. Wearing a cap indoors was forbidden, so I would stick the bill of the cap in my hip pocket when inside. It was a green Vietnam era "baseball" cap that was available at the old army surplus store in Greenville.

The cap was an advantage in the Ag-shop. It kept hot sparks from the welders out of my hair. The hat often messed up my hair but I didn't care. I'd comb it reasonably back in place, but it was a total waste of time. Dad had kept my hair short so I was still learning how to take care of it. I had a long way to go. That was another reason I wore a hat.

One day in study hall Herman and I were talking. He told me he admired my *ability to talk to girls*. I looked at him like he was insane. Every girl I had talked to had either politely kept me at an arms length, like Sandy, or reacted like I was some bug eyed monster from Mars. He said I could really get them to talk to me. I puzzled over this and decided he was right. I could get them to talk to me but not a lot of anything else.

It began to dawn on me that if I wanted a lady I'd **not** find her in the Lone Oak School District. I scratched my dandruff and wondered what I should do.

I wanted a girlfriend because I was lonely. I also believed she could be that something extra that would make my life complete. She would be that someone to talk to after class in the hallways or to take to Greenville on weekends. I could take her to movies or just out to eat at one of the burger places Greenville had. She'd be at my games, cheering me and my team on to victory. She'd be there to drive away the hurt with kind word and a kiss if we lost. When I got my diploma we'd marry. We would face the great unknowns of life together.

Cynically, I took a good look around and decided this *was all a crock*. If she was to found, where in blazes was she? It wasn't going to be Sandy, I had figured that out. By then I knew she was all moon-eyed over Eddie. There were absolutely NO girls in Lone Oak who would even think about going out with me. So I got me a piece of paper and started drawing, getting lost in my fantasy adventures again. It was the only refuge I could find.

Coach Taylor was my bus driver. He knew I could draw and he pretty much liked what he saw. We'd discuss politics, history, and life in general. He told me that people were basically weak. It was easy to do evil. It was harder to be good and do good deeds. A person had to try real hard to achieve. He said "Set your goals high and try to achieve them."

He was right. Even if someone did not reach that lofty prize, to garner the riches of having tried were what made it worth while. It also had a bad side. It made me look at some of the other classmates as lecherous and evil, which they weren't, and to believe I and my buddies were superior, which we weren't.

On Friday nights while the team went out on the gridiron to do battle I sat in front of the T.V. watching reruns of the Invaders on channel 11. I would find out one way or another if we won. I felt bad if we lost, because I had been there in Jr. High when we hardly ever lost, and I had practiced with these men at least twice.

I wanted to do something. I disliked being in study hall and I disliked being home on game nights. I had a taste of real football in Junior High and a bit more in High School. I played sandlot football a lot with Hiram and Benjy Hart, and that helped. It sharpened my skills and toughened me up. I got used to hitting the ground rather hard. I was hoping I could put this to good use later on. I had no idea how useful this would be. I really really wanted to be on the team. Perhaps more so than to find that one woman. I hoped each would sort itself out in time.

Como-Picton

Mr. Brookins was not vindictive as some coaches are who have lost a game. He would, however, toss something extra into a practice to make it miserable, like extra wind sprints.

We would take off and run as fast as we could then he'd let out an ear splitting whistle and we'd halt. Then he'd whistle again and we'd run like the dickens until he'd whistle once more. These little sprints were of 30 to 40 yards a pop. They would blow us out.

The thing was Mr. Brookins wasn't 100% sure if it was his troops or his tactics. This was 11 man football and entirely new to everybody at Lone Oak. He was willing to wait and see if it was his fault or his players. It was far too early to be sure. He had successfully coached 6 man and 8 man football. Coaching 11 man was something new to him.

So all week Lone Oak prepared and trained for the Como-Picton Eagles. The opponents, no matter who they would be, were always built up to be supermen. Even if they had lost last week, as we had, the feeling was that they could beat us if we did not respect them for the powerful team they were.

Coach Taylor phrased it right when he said "Never underestimate your foes."

With this in mind Lone Oak made the trip to Como-Picton. Como-Picton school is an odd looking building. It is a double-arch facility and painted blue on its metal parts. It looks unique, kind of Sci-Fi. Their colors are an odd blue and black because the Picton Hornets melded with the Como school in the 60's. Black and Blue were uncommon then, as most colors were usually mixed with white. Most school's colors were pure color and white. Trimming in black was never even considered. It loosely follows the rules of Medieval Heraldry.

The busses parked near the locker rooms. Two busses were usually taken. As there were 30 plus men on the team they filled up a bus with their equipment loaded in duffel bags and the space they all took up. The second bus contained the pep-squad. The ladies immediately migrated over to the bleachers to mark off their territory for the night. They usually sat in the bleachers to the right and behind the Lone Oak bench.

With the doors opened the task of getting the heavily loaded bags into the lockerrooms and sorted out began. The managers struggled with the bags of equipment, the tackle box. and other gear. They unloaded the bus. They helped the players suit up and carried water and equipment to the bench.

Soon the game began. All through the first half it was a slugfest. Coach Brookins knew he had his hands full with the blue and black Eagles. He tried to wear them down. It began to pay off. Late in the first half Lone Oak smashed their way down the field. The clock was running out. Desperately they tried to get the plays off before it was gone. Confusion and a lack of experience with playing the clock doomed the drive. Time ran out with the Buffaloes short of a touchdown, on the 11.

It was believed that by all rights the score should be 6 to 0 or better in Lone Oak's favor. We hadn't scored yet in this season with 6 quarters of game time. Each time they were just on the very edge of the end-zone. The team was angry with its performance. This caused some to question their ability and others to express frustration and outrage. These were the very signs Coach Taylor looked for in a defeated and discouraged opponent. He looked with concern at the men in his charge. He confided with Coach Brookins.

Coach Brookins pulled the team back together with his reasoning and calm voice. He rallied his men. They had only run out of time. The other failures were foul-ups by penalties. They can score. They would score. They would go out there and beat the Como-Picton Eagles. The Coach believed in his team. They believed in him, almost without question.



TOMMY SUITS
Managers: LARRY NORTON
JIMMY DAVIS

Managers are the unsung heroes of a team. Often referred to as "waterboys:" and held in Contempt by the jocks, any team without them is in trouble. In Lone Oak in the 70s Managers were eligible for letter jackets.

Questions were asked while Tommy Suits, Larry Norton, and Jimmy Davis sought to the player's immediate needs. Mr. Brookins and his staff listened to reports on the opponents given by his players. Together they processed this information and changes were made. On a clipboard with a pen they diagrammed what to do to react to certain situations. Blocking assignments were changed. Backfield improvements were done. The team left the locker room with renewed confidence in themselves.

In spite of all this it didn't start very well. Lone Oak's quarterback, Rudy Douglas, drew back and launched a pass that was promptly intercepted by a fellow named "Bain". He was to prove to be Douglas' "bane" for this game. Bain ran it all the way back 35 yards for a touchdown. The Eagles had the lead, but their extra point failed.

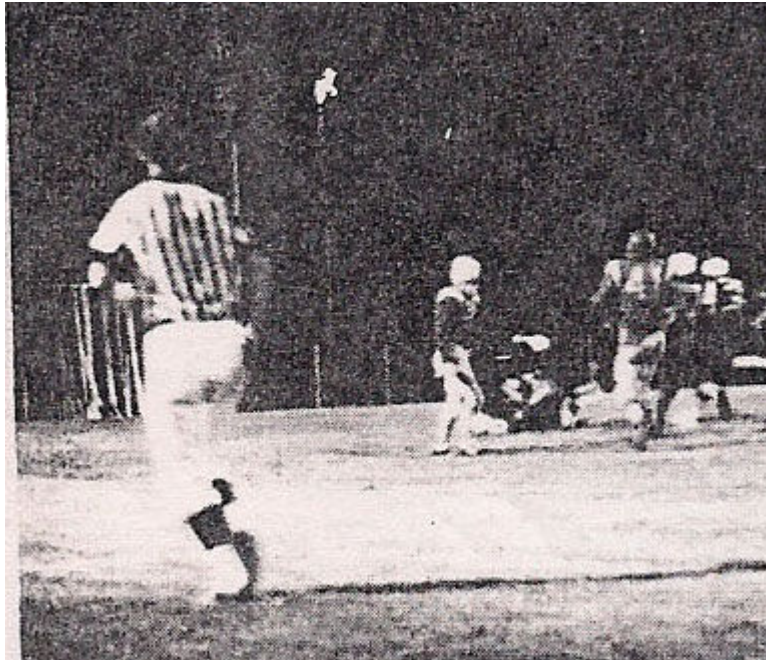
After receiving the kick Douglas threw yet another interception. Coach Brookins knew then that the Eagle coach had made changes to the secondary on their defense. They were keying off Rudy in some fashion. Coach Brookins began to puzzle away at this new development.

Driving hard, Como-Picton got to the end-zone for 6 more. The extra point failed and now it was 12 - 0, Eagle's favor. It stayed that way until the end of the quarter. Lone Oak had now gone 7 quarters without a score!

The 4th quarter began with Norman, Coach Brookins's son, falling on a Como-Picton fumble. He had knocked the center back into the quarterback and had actually caught the ball on the fly. Lone Oak's spirits rose and Norman was the hero of the moment.

Now Rudy was bound and determined to get a touchdown out of this opportunity. He called "31 dive" and repeatedly handed off to #31, Jerry McGee. Jerry carried the ball over and over, driving 48 hard won yards. Jerry was just about blown out when Rudy handed off to him again. This gentle giant of a man careened into the end zone from the two-yard line.

The bench went berserk. Coach Brookins nodded approval. Coach Taylor called out "All right, thats the way!"



Lone Oak had finally broke the ice. Now they were within striking distance of winning this game after going 7 full quarters without a single point. Mr. Brookins called for a two point conversion. It would put Lone Oak within 4 points if they made it.

Douglas handed off to Jerry and there was a huge pile up where he hurled his powerful 6' 2" frame. The team could only see a tangle of bodies, but the raised hands of the reff up in the air told them what they wanted to know. The score was now 12 to 8!



Jerry McGee made history by becoming the first Lone Oak player to score in

11 man football at Lone Oak Since World War Two. (1941 to 1970)

Como-Picton was running out of gas. Lone Oak had built up a head of steam and the Eagles couldn't deal with it. Momentum was in Big Red's hands.

Mr. Brookins pointed at the clock and Coach Taylor nodded silent agreement. They had no time to mess around. They had to get the ball back and score, fast.

Rudy gave it his best shot and pushed hard all the way down to the 8. Frantic efforts came to futility as the clock ran out before he could get the play off. It was over that quick. 12 to 8 was the final score.

Como-Picton celebrated. Lone Oak trudged to the locker room. They got beat by the clock, again. Some guys showed great exasperation. The books closed on another loss for the Big Red Machine.

Once in the locker room guys stripped off their equipment in a disappointed rage, angrily stuffing the gear into the big green duffel bags. They all knew they could play better than this.

Then Coach Brookins got their attention. He told them they hadn't lost this only the clock had beaten them. This made them something like Lombardii's Packers of the 60's. They never lost a game, they just ran out of time.

Como-Picton had not been district play. This hard fought contest of teenaged boys was for bragging rights only. They did not leave the field with their tail between their legs like a whipped dog. They had scored for the first time in 11 man football, on a run by Jerry McGee. It had taken 7 long and difficult quarters to do it. They looked forward to other games.

Coach Brookins began to look them over. Something was missing and changes would have to be made. What were they?



Coach Brookins and Larry Little after a game

Other Things

Growing up is full of traumas and things that kids don't understand. Some of them can scare them until they do grow up and discover that it was just nothing. In my time we had an escapist route through my drawing comic strips. I would draw Rabbit, Herman, and me into a strip, and we'd all get lost in its adventure for a while. I had read the Greenbay Diary of Jerry Kramer in the school library. I learned a lot about football from that and what it was like to be a pro football player.

From that I drew Rise to Glory. It was about football players on a not-so-great N F L team. It was spiced with off beat humor and jokes. The guys liked it, and offered ideas of their own. Kramer's book also let me see that the pain I had felt in practice and the fear I sometimes felt was not isolated to me alone. It was inspiring .

Other kids had other projects. In the 8th grade, Roger, who was once in our class, made some home made 'wine' out of goodness knows what. He buried this near the school so it could 'age'. He eventually dug this up one warm and summery day and chugalugged it down. Upon his return to class after the break he promptly regurgitated this concoction right in the doorway to the 8th grade room. The sight and very stench of this mess drove girls and most of the guys to flee out windows and other exits. Roger recovered, but he didn't want to make any more homemade wine after that.

Football was omnipresent. Even for those of us not on the team, football was everywhere and in every thing. If the players weren't practicing they were talking about it. The Pep-Squad decorated the halls round about the school with posters. If somebody disliked football they certainly could not escape it.

The posters were printed on white butcher paper and some were quite well done. Many were very creative. It was a tradition for team members to sign these posters and put their number on there. Danny Bowman, Eddie Bell, and others all put their signatures over their numbers. In some cases the original message was blotted out by over 30 guys lettering the posters. It was traditional to sign in red.



The Pep-Squad girls, also known as the "Drill Team", had a lot to do with maintaining the team spirit. The team posters, participating in the pep-rallies, buying and making their own uniforms, and displaying a defiant yet sportsman-like appearance to all opponents was their bread and butter. I am afraid I ignored them mostly and Herman considered cheerleaders a waste of time.

"They are not there except to add sex to the sidelines," he'd say.

I couldn't grasp this philosophy. Most of the cheerleaders I had met were a real classy bunch. Being a cheerleader seemed to me to be a real prestigious thing.

One thing was certain, where ever we went we'd never have cold empty bleachers behind us on the sidelines. The chants, yells, and spirit raising done by these ladies plus the cold, wet fields they marched into said to me that they paid their dues. Therefore they belonged there.

Rabbit could care less what Herman thought. He used his good looks to the Nth degree. He had several young ladies crazy for him. Yes, Rabbit was my pal. He was my friend. If I hang around him long enough maybe I could get a cast-off or two. The prospects were intriguing if not absurd.

Then I'd get back to drawing my comics. I didn't have much else to do. I drew a heck of a lot in highschool. It was traditional for the class artist to draw the cover of the school mimeographed newsletter their Senior year. I was told by others that this would more than likely be my destiny. The thing was typed up by the "Bison Staff" with news, gossip, goofy goings on, and "very important" high school happenings. I looked at my turn as a contributor with anticipation.

Community One

I remembered Community from my 7th grade in Junior High. One big individual had knocked me 10 feet and put me out of the game. I had no love for these blue and gold clad people. Yet, I did not dislike these people either. The Community Braves, to me, were just another team. They were an enemy team, but beyond that I had no special grudge.

I think there are some who held Community in a bit of contempt for past affronts to honor and person. Score settling, and can be seen with what we did to Quinlan, is a big thing to us. Some of this can carry over into real life, as with the incident we had in the car in Cumby. A lot of people can hold grudges. For the most part Sportsmanship dictates that this be settled only on the field of fair play. If anyone started a fight on our team Coach Brookins would not hesitate to chastise this person and sit them on the bench. It made no difference who it was. Fighting simply was not tolerated.

Being benched was worse than going to the locker room. For someone to sit there in full pads, watching the game, and unable to "get back in there" could be maddening. They had no one to blame but themselves. Usually under the tutelage of the remarkable coaches we had there were no fights.

The Community Braves were supposed to be the first to have the honor to visit our new stadium. During Ag class we were shipped up there to labor on the field. I beheld what a sorry sight it was. The locker rooms were not even started. Pipe stuck up out of the concrete foundations and there were no roofs or walls. Our press box was taking shape, but it too had a very long way to go at that time. The field itself was patchy and torn up from the construction equipment used to put up the light poles, tug the bleachers into position, and pour the concrete. Mr. Trimble was just unable to bring it up the standards by game time, even with the help of almost 100 enthusiastic but unskilled Ag boys.

Mr. Brookins and Mr. Dial saw that it would not do to have Community visit us with our new home field uncompleted and unprepared. To prevent us from becoming embarrassed for having the newest and crummiest field in the district the Coach and the Superintendent negotiated with

Community. They graciously allowed us to go visit them instead. So without much ado they continued the road trip. The duffel bags stuffed with football gear were piled high in the back of the bus. The Pep-Squad got on their bus and the team boarded theirs.

"Bee! Eee! Aae! Tee! Community!" the girls all cheered. They all thundered off in the big yellow monsters toward Nevada, Texas. Coach Taylor drove the bus with the same stoic-ness he coached with. It was the fate of a rural school teacher to have to drive the big yellow beast. It paid a little extra, but not much. Behind him sat Coach Brookins, engaging some people in small talk. Sometimes he'd turn his presence on a person nearby and tell a few jokes. This man was easy to get along with if a person tried. We pretty much held him in awe and respected his power. He was at once the most powerful man in Lone Oak Independent School District and yet the servant of the School Board and the Lone Oak Community at large. It was a fascinating combination. He held on to his clipboard and waited to see what the night brought. He wanted to beat Community more than any other team. They had cost him a championship or two in the past. Community's field loomed in sight, right next to their picturesque brown brick school building. Cars were parked everywhere.

The team started the roaring battle chant of "Go-Red-Go!" as they pulled into the parking lot. The girls joined in and they stopped near the locker room in the gym. The team bailed out of the bus and opened the rear emergency door. The duffels were tossed out and guys found their own equipment. These were scuttled into the locker room and the age-old ritual of suiting up began.

Community's gym was an odd looking place. The locker rooms were under the bleachers, and the gym was made of red brick in concrete. No mortar was used. It looked an awful lot like Caddo Mill's gym inside.



All that remained of the entire Community School in 1997 was it's Gym, and only because it was made of bricks anchored in concrete. The old gym is red brick, has had a hole knocked in the side, but still had rotting remnants of its floor inside. Otherwise it was gutted and abandoned. This picture is taken from what used to be the football field. The school used to be attached to the gym to the right of the picture.

Notable was the bias relief sculpture on the front of the gym over the entrance of a muscular nude athlete in a winged helmet. It probably represented Mercury, messenger of the Greek Gods. He appears to be boxing. This sculpture probably dates from the 30s, and it is quite a work of art. The team didn't see it, because they went in through the side door. Even if they did they had other, more important things on their minds.



We had gone for 7 stinking quarters without scoring a point. This season our opponents had outscored us by a total of 32 to 8. This was not lost on the coaching staff who knew that if there was a tie for district play penetrations would decide who won. They needed to start scoring and start scoring BIG.

Dressed and briefed for the game they all exited the locker room with enthusiasm, heading for the field.

Meanwhile the girls had made a home for themselves in the bleachers. They greeted the team's arrival on field with great cheers. It was time to get down to business. After the pre-game activities the game began.

Lone Oak got the ball and drove hard on the Braves, all the way to a half yard from the goal line. Rudy Douglas called a quarterback sneak and took it in for the first T.D. of the night. For the first time we had scored a first quarter touchdown in 11 man football. Rudy received justified accolades from his teammates.

Coach Brookins smelled blood. His team was hot and in a scoring mood.

"Good," he told Rudy, "Go for two!"

Troy Haynes was an end. He was blond, wiry, and strong as an ox. He wasn't very big, but he was tough. He had my respect for his speed and strength. He also took no back talk from anybody. Everyone respected him that I knew of.

His first moment of glory in 11 man football was at hand. Douglas called a pass play out to him.

Troy took off as Rudy was centered the ball. Rudy quickly lofted it to Troy for the extra point. We now led 8-0. It was our first score on a pass.

It felt good. It felt right. This was Buffalo Football as we knew it. The team spirit soared as they called to one another.

"Stop us if you can! We are the best! Yeah! Go Big Red!"

Community was still full of fight. Taking the kickoff on the 39 they drove valiantly all the way to score. Because Coach Brookins had gotten the two pointer they had to go for it too. Mr. Brookins gamble paid off as Community's try for 2 failed. Lone Oak still led, 8-6, and still was on track.

Douglas was hot. He hit Larry Little in the endzone with another pass, getting us up a positive 14 to 6. The point after failed this time, and the first half ended after that.

Once in the locker room Coach Brookins made corrections and psyched his troops. We had scored more points in this one game than the other two combined. We had to shut down Community's offense. That would be no small task. With that in mind Lone Oak went onto the field much like in the first half. The kickoff to Community was done and the contest was joined again.

Soon we had the ball again, on Community's 40. Larry Little was in the backfield hungry for more points, and Rudy called the play.

On the snap of the ball Rudy spun and handed off to Larry Little. Larry ran like lightning as the linemen opened a hole for him. The Braves couldn't stop him as he cut a simple run into a long gain. Larry made it into the endzone for the second time that night, putting us at 20 to 6. The point after failed again.

Ahead by over 3 times Community's points, we smelled a victory. We soon got a lesson in overconfidence. One young man named Billy Page got loose on their own 40 and ran 60 yards to score. This stopped any illusions we had about coasting to victory. The score was now 20 to 12 after their extra point failed.

After the kickoff Rudy moved the team forward to the Community 40. He then called a pass play to Eddie's brother Steve Bell. Steve was super fast in track and was one of the speediest guys for his size I ever saw. He had excellent hands for pass receiving.

Steve got open and Rudy hit him square with a pass. Steve turned on the speed and left the Braves behind like a flock of blue and gold birds. He ran 40 yards for a touchdown play to make the score 26 to 12. We kicked an extra point and that made it 27 to 12. Mr. Brookins decided he had a big enough cushion to lay off the 2 point attempts at this time. He was ready to bear down again if need be. Victory was near but not near enough. He was an excellent coach, and saw the situation as clear as if it was spelled on the turf in front of him.

So the 3rd quarter came and went. It was a marvel to see a Brookins coached team working on its foe. This was a fine machine tuned by his sure hand and programmed by his able mind. It was the 4th quarter, the last door to a history making event for Lone Oak.

The sidelines are once removed from the mayhem going on in the field. The bleachers are even farther away from it. Out there on the field was something that few experience but many enjoy. This was football, the American game. This was going on all over the nation in thousands of little arenas like this. For Lone Oak it was a glorious night.

Randy Payne intercepted a Community pass. Dreams of Lone Oak's first 11 man victory danced in our heads. Now that we had the ball Rudy deftly hit Larry Little a 3rd time for a score of a powerful 34 to 12. The offense was clicking. They couldn't catch us now!

Community drove on down and ran it in from our 13. It was now 17 to 34, our favor.

Just before the time ran out Coach Brookins saw something happen he didn't like at all. A Community player broke 88 yards for a touchdown, making the score 34 to 24. This should not have happened and the team knew it. Something was ailing the defense out there, and he wanted to find it.

The clock ticked to zero and for the first time since 1941 the Lone Oak Buffaloes had won an 11 man football game. It was September 25, 1970. The team tore for the locker room whooping and hollering over the first victory. The managers packed up the tackle box and coke cases. There

was a bag of balls that one insisted he carry. The other stayed behind to pick up the cola cases when he noticed Mr. Brookins.

The Coach was still standing on the sidelines, his arms folded over his wide tie. He was not pleased. He was glaring at the scoreboard.

The manager picked up the cola case and quickly scuttled away.



Old film reproduced on VCR. Screen capture of game at Community, showing the gym Cars, and a bus in the background.

After Glow

The Buffaloes were in a festive mood on the bus ride back. Darkness descended as the inside lights were cut off. Larry Little had marveled at his stats. Of our 5 times in the end zone 3 were his. He was the hero of our first victory. We had dominated the game, and most of Community's points come on when the defense broke down. The Big Red Machine still had a few weak points. These would be addressed Monday. Once they got back to Lone Oak they unloaded the busses and went their separate ways.

On Saturday morning I reveled in the write-up they got in the Greenville paper. I got together with Rickey Graham and pursued my own pet projects. Greenville had bright lights, loud music, and roller skates.

Then Monday came and we saw who was next on our schedule. It was our traditional foe, Quinlan. Some of us felt like we had this one won, that it would be no contest. Quinlan was having such a lousy season that the Sports Community in the Greenville paper was making some good natured fun of them. Heck, Quinlan would be a piece of cake.

The week sped by with practice, school work, and the on going task of getting our field ready to go. Quinlan now had the honor of being the first team to visit our new field. We looked upon it as a good beginning. It would be the first game there. We felt like we'd certainly beat them. It was also Homecoming, the first ever at this field. This would be not a bad way to start a field out, with a victory against a big rival.

The field begin to look right, though there were no locker rooms. The teams would dress in the gym at the school and commute here on the bus in full pads. It would be long time before we would have locker rooms on the field.

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Quinlan and Homecoming

"Quinlan does not beat us," Danny Bowman said, looking me square in the eyes, "Ever."

Danny was playing guard this year. I thought it odd for our old Q.B, but passed it off and would later forget all about it. Danny shared my strong dislike for the Panther team.

Quinlan's colors were blue and white. This made them sort of the opposite of us. It was a classic combination. In every toy football game there is usually one team red, and one blue. Quinlan, as a town, is twice as big as Lone Oak. They were also one class higher than we were, being class A to our class B. The school itself is large, and they had a new attractive gym built directly onto the school.

They referred to our contests as the "Catfish Bowl". We just thought of it as another game, and we didn't like them at all. To us, their battle cry of "Go Blue!" was just wrong.

This was Homecoming. There was a bonfire right on the south end of the practice field, about 100 feet north of the shot put pad. The Pep-rally commemorated this once only event. The team gave a speech, Jack Brookins said a few words. There was a lot of bravado and some hubris. This was a special ceremony commemorating this event for what it was, our first home game in 11 man football and the first game on the new field. A new era had begun.

For the next 25 years this new field would be the spot where contests would be decided. Our children would play there. They would know the game from that patch of weeds.

Much was made of it, and we all knew we would clobber Quinlan. We were cocky about it. We were certainly excited about this.

After the pep rally things wound down. School let out, I went home, and the team went to what ever individual things they did before a game.

Around six o'clock the team arrived at the field and sat where ever they could to save energy. Quinlan rolled up in it's busses. Some adult in a bus made disparaging remarks about how " the hicks from Lone Oak didn't even have a place where you could go relieve yourself at their little

two bit field!" Robert Vice heard this and glared at the whole pack. Soon Quinlan debussed and was on the field. The enemy was here. It was time to do some kicking and to take some names.

After the Star Spangled Banner, school songs, and a short prayer, the first Homecoming game got under way. Eleven man football had returned to Lone Oak at last.

Quinlan won the toss, and after receiving the ball they had trouble moving on the Buffaloes. They punted it back to Lone Oak. Driving hard, Rudy Douglas hit Steve Henderson in the end zone from 10 yards out. This was the first ever touchdown scored on the field. Mr. Brookins gave the signal to go for two, but the attempt failed. It was 6 to 0.

It was a good crowd. It was Homecoming, the first game here, and the first home game. The partisan hometown crowd was getting their first look at the new stadium. As Spartan as the facilities were the people loved the bleachers, the very bright lights, and the press box with a real p.a. system. Mr. Ohara could be heard real well. The electric scoreboard was a real treat. It was as if we had hit the big time. The bleachers were full and folks lined the fence. This was a major step up from the old field behind the school where football had been played for some 70 years.

Much to our surprise Quinlan figured the offense out. Both sides were suddenly evenly matched. There were fumbles and penalties galore, and neither side could crack the other's defense. Coach Brookins must have been angered by this. He felt that he had a better team than Quinlan. Then somebody on the Buffaloe team fumbled the ball on the 4, just 12 stinking feet from a touchdown.

Quinlan must've seen the movies of what Community managed to do last game because they broke loose in the backfield of our defense and went 96 yards for a touchdown. This tied the score at 6 to 6. The extra point failed. Lone Oak looked on in disbelief. This couldn't be happening! We had beaten Quinlan 50 to 0 last year!

On our next possession Larry Little broke loose for a 40 yard touchdown run. Now it was 12 to 6 after the try for 2 failed. We got the ball again shortly but fumbled it right back. It was like a spastic game of hot potato. The field was dry so it had to be something else that was causing the fumbles. It certainly was a hard hitting contest.

At half-time the team went to the bus that would serve as a temporary locker room so the coaches could talk to the players. Out on the field the first half time show ever on this field was on. The girls danced to a scratchy record played over the p.a. system. It was an elaborate show, as high school shows go, because of the special occasion. They wore the corsages so traditional with homecoming. The uniforms were red dresses just above the knee, with long white bloused sleeves. White shoes were worn. There were no hats. They had put colored streamers on the goal post crossbar, red and white for us, blue and white for our guest. This was the last time streamers would be allowed. A tradition would come to an end on this new field. No more streamers.

After the half time show the teams came back onto the field. Lone Oak received the kick and "hot potato" continued. Both teams punted back and forth. It was a battle to react to each other's adjustments. No team scored in the third quarter.

In the 4th quarter our defense broke down again, and Quinlan ran 55 yards for a touchdown to tie it up. There was something definitely wrong with our defense someplace. The opposition was continually getting long runs for t.d.s off us.

Quinlan went for a kick on the extra point, and for the first time in 7 full quarters we fell behind. It was now an embarrassing 13 to 12. My friends, my team mates, the men I shared blood and

sweat with, were unable to do much against the psyched up Panthers. "Hot potato" continued, and then Rudy Douglas got a drive started. Memories of running out of time spurred him on, possibly to recklessness. He threw a pass out and a Quinlan player named Daniel intercepted. It was too late now.

So Quinlan sat on the ball and ran out the clock. The last 60 seconds expired and Quinlan celebrated their victory as they stampeded toward their bus.

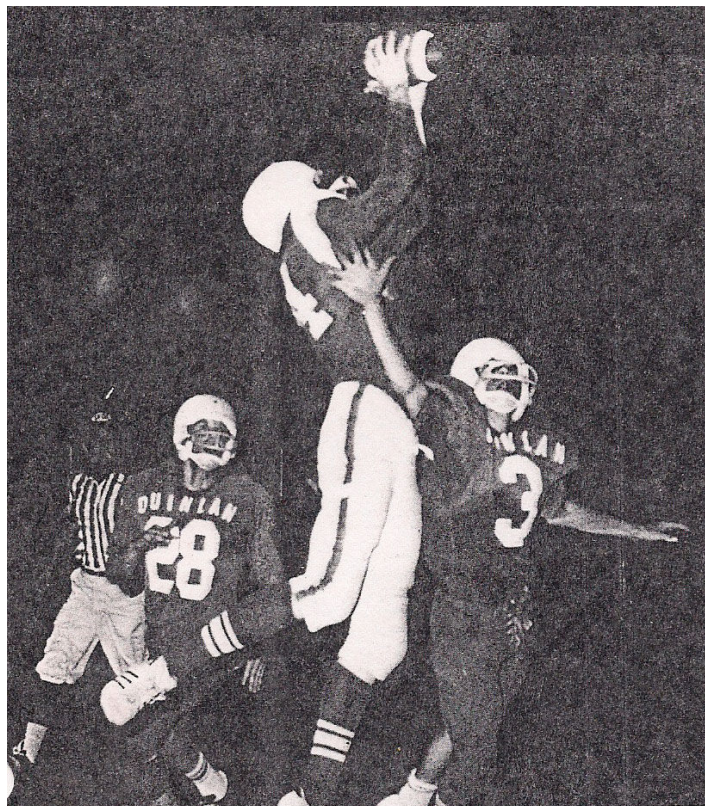
They had beaten us.

The unbelievable had happened. We expected to mop the floor with this team. It was our first game at our new field, our Homecoming, and Quinlan had beaten us! It was awful!

The team still crowned a Homecoming Queen. Diana Bowman was the lucky girl, being the first of some 25 Homecoming Queens to be crowned at our new field.

Then it was over. The fates had decided. The people left and the Lone Oak team boarded the bus to go back to the gym to take off the gear. It was a very somber homecoming in the locker room. Not much was said. Nobody cried or got destructive. Such things simply were not done. Losing a Homecoming game is an embarrassment, but the word spread through the locker room to get to thinking about the next game, the game at Bells. This game was now history.

October 2nd, 1970, Lone Oak lost it's very first home game and it's first Homecoming game at it's new stadium to Quinlan by a score of 13 to 12. For the rest of us it was time to get ready for the Dallas Fair tomorrow, and forget this mess.



Spectacular catch by Steve Henderson-Bell in futile effort.

The Tide, the Fair



Saturday was Rural Youth Day at the Dallas Fair. That meant we got free admission and eats at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas. It was officially the State Fair, but we all called it the Dallas Fair. It would have been a suitable way to celebrate thrashing Quinlan, but it didn't exactly turn out that way. I put all that aside for now as my folks dropped me off at school. My Dad gave me about \$7.00 to spend on rides and souvenirs. Back in 1970 seven dollars went a long way at the State Fair, and all dealings were in cash. I would say this is roughly \$70.00 in 2010 cash, figuring in inflation and all.

I climbed on the bus and found Rabbit and Herman. We were in a boisterous mood. Two bus loads of hormone crazed kids from the sticks were going to the big city! The last time I had been to the Fair in Dallas was either late 50's or early 60's, when my father was more adventuresome. There was a mono-rail and Big Tex talked! In the 1970s I don't think Big Tex talked. Much later on, they got his voice back. I thought I was at Disneyland.



Big Tex about 2010

The busses soon filled up with high school boys and girls. I heard the engines crank. Jack Brookins climbed on the bus that held most of the boys. One look and a dead silence fell over all of us. Somebody had asked about last night's game.

Coach Brookins got on the bus and was angry. He said it so we could hear it. I don't remember it too clearly but Eddie Bell did. He told me what was said.

"You take the wins, I'll take the losses, but after what I saw at last night's game I am ashamed of all of you."

The silence was profound after that. The words burned deep as the bus was put in gear and we rolled off toward Dallas. The hurt subsided but didn't go away. Slowly the conversation picked up as we looked forward to Dallas. Back in 1970 the society wasn't as mobile as it would become. A trip to Dallas was a rare and exciting undertaking. It was somewhat smaller than it is now, but that didn't make it any less interesting.

We crossed the lightly wooded hills near Lake Ray Hubbard on I-30 west. There were few houses to look at, but there were billboards the like of which we didn't see in Greenville. One was a 30 foot tall blond stripper, scantily clad, inviting us to visit her place of business somewhere downtown. In our adolescent state of hormone overload it sounded like a capital idea.

We could see other busses, like our own, but from hostile territory and places I had never heard of before. I looked west and I could make out the Southland Life building and the red Pegasus. I was awed by the Dallas skyline of 1970. I was on the biggest road I had ever seen in my life and there stood buildings the like of which I had only seen on T.V. Truly I was a hick from the sticks.

Mr. Trimble, our Ag teacher, delivered a warning to us; "Don't bother the natives. They are of a violent disposition and they might kill you."

Interesting advice. We got a sample of the local attitudes when we turned a corner in the bus and a small black kid hitched his pants and flipped us off. This was greeted with hoots and wild laughter by all of us at the absurdity of it all.

We pulled up at an intersection and next to another bus that was parked there. I heard an unseen black woman call out to us.

"Y'all got soul?"

The guy at the window that saw her was surprised for a moment by the question. He hesitated a second then blurted out "Uh, yeah."

Welcome to Dallas.

In the giant parking lot was an unbelievable sight. There were thousands of ugly yellow and black busses. I'd never seen so many school busses in my life. It almost made me feel ill. I disliked the mere sight of a school bus and to discover there were so many of them was a shock to the system. There must have been at least a thousand.

Mr. Trimble, sounding like a drill sergeant, informed all of us of leaving times.

"Be here at 6 o'clock or you'll have a long walk home," he growled.

With this gentle push we headed for the gates in a loose gaggle. I took in the sights and smells of it all. Dallas even smelled different than where I was from. It was kind of a flat, musty smell. Mingled with this was the unmistakable smell of corn on the cob, odd food of all kinds, and yucky diesel fuel that ran the generators.

We went into the gates, near a gigantic rollercoaster ride. It swayed along with its screaming passengers on huge white painted wooden trestles. It was a long way up there. Randy Price

wanted to ride it. We took one look at the line to people waiting and went elsewhere. There were rides everywhere. They accepted cash, not tickets.



Rabbit talked me into getting on a wild mouse ride. I had endured one of these monsters some time back at 6-Flags. The nose goes a full foot over the edge before turning. It scared me to death, mixing with my insane fear of heights.

Rabbit put me in front of the car, and grinning evilly, he got in the back. It took us some 20 feet into the air then did a sharp 90 degree turn to the left. I screamed in horror and started cussing the vehicle.

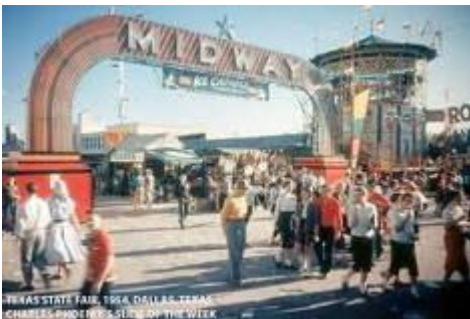
"Stay on, you @\$*&!!"

Though almost crazed with fear, I noticed 2 black clad cops far below laughing at us as I chanted my "stay on" litany. Rabbit thought it was neat and he was laughing so hard he almost fell off the car. When it ended I bailed out and told Rabbit he would never ever get me on a roller coaster again, never never never! At least until the next ride we went to anyhow.

I never got sick on rides. Rabbit took Herman and me to all kinds of horrors and bruisers, but I didn't get ill at all. Perhaps adrenaline and a strong sense of survival prevent nausea.

We went to the Midway and Rabbit thought I was gonna get us all killed when I starting chanting a carnival barker routine.

"Step right up. Everybody plays and everybody wins."



Rabbit hustled me out of the area after we played a few games, and got a sideshow hustler mad at us by fooling with his pitch-ball machine. I saw guys who had the gambling bug wasting dimes like mad on some odd and crazy games. Then we turned a corner and stepped into paradise. It

was called the penny arcade. Its nothing like the electronic marvels we have today. Everything was mechanical. I shot down planes, blew up tanks, and raced cars. It was a real gas.

Then we got separated.

I'm not sure how it happened. We were walking along the Midway and then Rabbit and Herman just disappeared into the crowd. The fair crowd is like a big ameba. It engulfs folks and carries them along. Not only had I lost track of my two buddies, but I was also lost.

Randy sometimes like to play head games with me, so there was a very real possibility he and Herman ducked out on me just for laughs. I wasn't laughing.

I found other guys from Lone Oak and tagged along. We went to the Science Building and I saw Bulldozer again. He was back at school, and I guess he was working nights or something. He and I do not exchange small talk, it is safer that way. There were all kinds of wonders in the science building. We happened by the biology part, and picked up a cone-shaped earphone to listen to the pre-recorded lecture.

Bulldozer, ever the quipper, said to the female voice talking about reproduction, "I'd like to fertilize your eggs." He hee hawed and went elsewhere into the building. Outcast in this group, I went to the space exhibit and took in the Apollo thing. The moon landing was still tops in my thinking, and I was still fascinated with the space program. The space exhibit was not much else than model rockets and pictures. I was disappointed.



Soon it was time for lunch. This was served in the Bandshell. I wandered over there and decided to eat the free food. Maybe I'd find Rabbit and Herman over there. It was a disappointing mess of boiled hot dogs on a bun with maybe some mustard and relish. There was a cola and some chips on the side. I munched it on down then yelled to the incoming people "You'll be sorry!" I then went on my way back into the amorphous blob of the fair crowd. It wasn't bad for a free meal, I was just not having any fun without my two best friends. I missed them deeply. The fun level had dropped to near zero. I was used to being alone but not when I was supposed to be with friends in an event like this. I wandered over to the Midway again, looking for Rabbit and Herman.

Part of the Midway is magic shows and oddities. I was nauseated as I watched a promotional performance of a guy swallowing a coat hanger. He was a sword swallower by trade but if we wanted to see him do a sword we'd have to pay. It was first class icky so I continued on my way. I also had more money in my pocket than I ever had before, and I just did not know what to do with it. I wasn't going to spend it randomly on stuff I really didn't want. I had been told not to waste it. So I didn't buy food, or souvenirs, or toys or anything.

There was a big crowd further down and I found out why. Clustered about in a tight knot was a crowd of males of all ages ogling the adults only show being promoted on a stage to the front. Here were some women of considerable heft giving a preview of coming attractions if we were

A. Old enough

B. Had the money

The place was 'artfully' called the Bust Stop. I did my ogling and observed David Dillon and some older looking fellows deciding if they could actually get in there. I looked like I was 10 years old so I had a snowball's chance in a blast furnace of making it into that strip show. I just laughed it off and went on. Even State Fair strippers were out of reach. I continued looking for Herman and Rabbit.

The day inched along. I went back to the Arcade and started burning dimes into machines. Low and behold, Herman and Rabbit found me! With cries of "Where have you been?" we were reunited.

I asked them if they went to the Bandshell to eat.

"Heck no!" Rabbit said, " I saw the garbage they were serving and we went and bought our own food."

So much for looking for friends at the Bandshell. The pace picked up. I was delighted to be back with my two friends. We exited the Arcade, and cruised the Midway. We then rode some more rides and went into a Bavarian fun house. After that, with money running low, we did the aquarium and watched a chicken play basketball.

Broke, tired, and weathered, we ended our first trip to the fair as teenagers. It had been fun and interesting. I slept most of the trip back. On Sunday we might do our homework then it was back to the business of school and football. District play started next week and we had shamed ourselves in a big way by letting down Coach Brookins.

For the Marbles

Rickey Graham explained to me what was going on. In his lisply Texas drawl he spelled it out.

"Ya'll gotta see that these games we played don't count no more. They just don't mean anything. We all gotta look foward to the next game, week by week. We have been lookin' too faw."

The Coaches echoed this with their "One game at a time" philosophy. Coach Brookins concentrated on his defense this time. He examined his secondary and the line. Some adjustments were unpopular. Some guys had played corner-back or safety all their career. They were certain that moving them to a position like linebacker or benching them would be a disaster.

The coaches did it anyway.

Egos were hurt, but to all of them football was serious business. Some guys who think they "own" a position because they started there sometime back, can get complacent. This can lead to trashy play, and the result can be a string of losses, just like what happened to us. Coach

Brookins had examined his troops. He found them wanting. His strategy was sound. His tactics worked. His men had let him down. We had let him down.

"It was time to fish or cut bait."

When I was told that I had no idea what it meant, but I knew it was important. I did know we had to try harder.

Every one of us Freshmen knew that High School Football was rougher than Junior High. We knew it was different. But to get beat by Quinlan? At our first home game in 11 man football? On our new field at Homecoming?

This didn't make sense.

Practices thundered on through the week. Eddie discovered he could take Rudy Douglas down by hitting him in his sizable legs. Well, he could, but he paid a price.

The play was called and Rudy took off on the practice field with the ball. Most of the backfield of the defense was Freshmen. The bigger Seniors gleefully blasted them out of the way, but Eddie got a bead on Rudy. He launched himself at him, getting big ole Rudy around the knees. It was like hitting 2 tree stumps. Both men went down on the dusty practice field.

Rudy got up and went back to the huddle. Eddie waited a "count or two" for his eyeballs to focus, then got to his feet. He didn't let anybody know he was stunned.

This was a trait of football almost everybody did, and it may seem strange to outsiders. If a player lets his fellows know he is stunned they may believe him to be a wimp. If the Coaches thought he was injured they sit him down out of practice. This was all ego damaging. If a guy could get up and walk he could still play. That was the players conventional wisdom. Peer pressure was high and we could never let our peers down. At the very least we tried not to. Everybody depended on everybody else. It was a simple formula. A player carried his own weight and had to be prepared to carry someone else's if need be. This was called "giving one hundred and ten percent." It was a common buzzword. It also worked very well.

Now it was time for "All the Marbles."

Bells

Bells would play the second game at our new field. They called themselves the Panthers. It was October 9th, and the sun was still warm. The field looked terrible. Dead grass was everywhere, giving the field a khaki look. People came to the new stadium, finding comfortable seats and raiding the concession stand.

Both teams soon arrived from the old gym fully suited up. They unloaded off their busses with much fanfare by the respective pep-squads, then both teams began to warm up. Soon it was game time.

Bells had two gigantic twins in their line rated at 305 pounds. All through the first half Lone Oak did not score. The size of these huge individuals probably had something to do with it. It was definitely a problem. Lone Oak never got beyond the 45.

The Coaches sent Larry Norton, Tommy Suits, and Jimmy Davis, the managers, to the concession stand with a wooden cola case. The concession stand filled up each hole in the case, about 24 slots, with a fountain cup full of coke. The managers then returned to the team, on the busses. The caffeine and sugar in the drinks, it was hoped, would give the team an extra jolt to keep going.

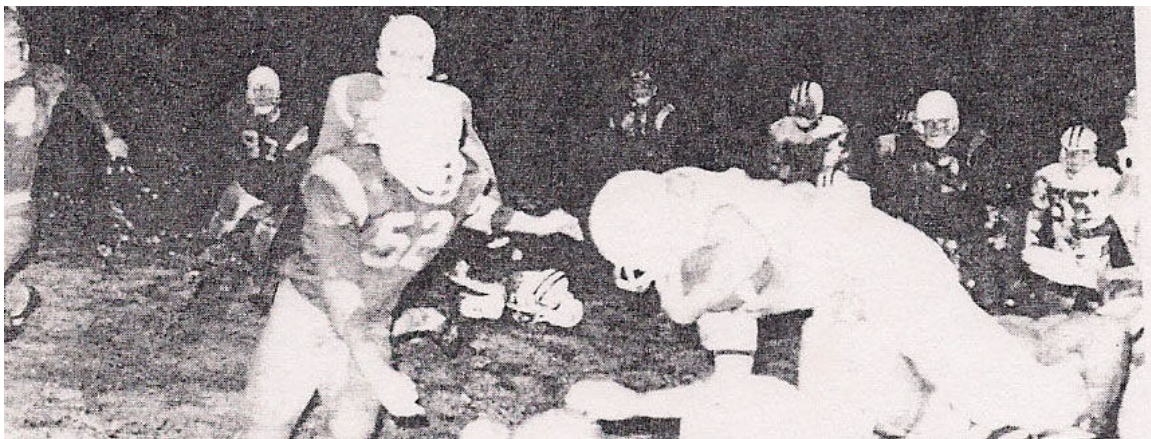


Jerry Evans handles the coke case (from 1973 Yearbook)

Some one said Rudy Douglas had a habit of making up plays in the huddle. I was told it sounded something like sand-lot football.

"You go long, you go down and in. The rest of you block. On two."

Maybe it worked, I don't know. It was risky and took guts. It also took absolute confidence in your abilities and those of your team mates. That was what Lone Oak had going for it.



The team was angry, not at Bells or Coach Brookins, but at themselves. The entire team felt as if it had disgraced itself at Homecoming. When they went back out and the game resumed, the 3rd quarter was as listless as the first two except for one major incident.

Rudy threw a pass to Troy Haynes that missed. Troy turned to go back to the huddle and bumped into a Bells linebacker. Troy barely got out "Excuse me" when the guy kol-kocked him, knocking Troy out. Flags flew and Troy was carried off the field, unconscious. The guy that clobbered Troy

was sent off the field for the two bit jerk he was. When Troy came to he was not pleased with his little nap. He discovered he had his jersey and shoulder pads off. He put them back on, boiling mad. He found Coach Brookins and begged to be let back in the game.

Coach Brookins looked at him briefly and went back to concentrating on the game.

"No," he said to Troy, "You're out for the game."

Troy was beside himself. He wanted only one thing, and that was to even the score with the scumbag that had sucker-punched him. Troy was angry enough to put his entire career on the line. When the backs were rotated out he went in on offense. He ordered Daryl Sewell off the field. Not knowing any better Daryl trotted off the field.

Troy asked Rudy what the count was. Rudy told him "on two". Troy got down in his 3 point stance on the line and saw his target. He was gonna destroy the clod that had smacked him. On the sidelines the coaches were confused, then alarmed. They called out Troy's name and tried to get him off the field. It was too late. The play had been called.

On two Troy clobbered the young man in front of him, smearing him all over the field. Flags flew and Troy was ejected. Much to his surprise the guy he clobbered wasn't even the same who had whacked him. Troy asked a reff where the guy was and the Reff told him that idiot had been thrown off too.

Feeling like a fool Troy went to the sidelines and sulked. He had pulled a real stupid stunt and he expected Coach Brookins to skin him, cook him, and eat him alive. The 15 yard penalty didn't do Lone Oak any good either.

Then the 4th quarter came. If the game ended in a tie that was it. There was no overtime in High School Football in 1970. This looked bad.

Then something happened. I don't know who called the play. I like to think Jack Brookins did. Any way you look at it, it worked. Rudy called a screen pass. Bells bit hook, line, and sinker. Douglas hit Benny Vice. Benny took off and ran 39 yards for our first T.D. of the night. Big Red had the lead!

A screen pass looks like a simple pass. The blockers hold for a count then let the rushers penetrate. A short pass is then thrown over the rushers heads to a receiver behind the line of blockers. The blockers then take out the rest of the defense. When it works its good for a long gain. Here it worked to perfection, using the size of the Bells twins against them.

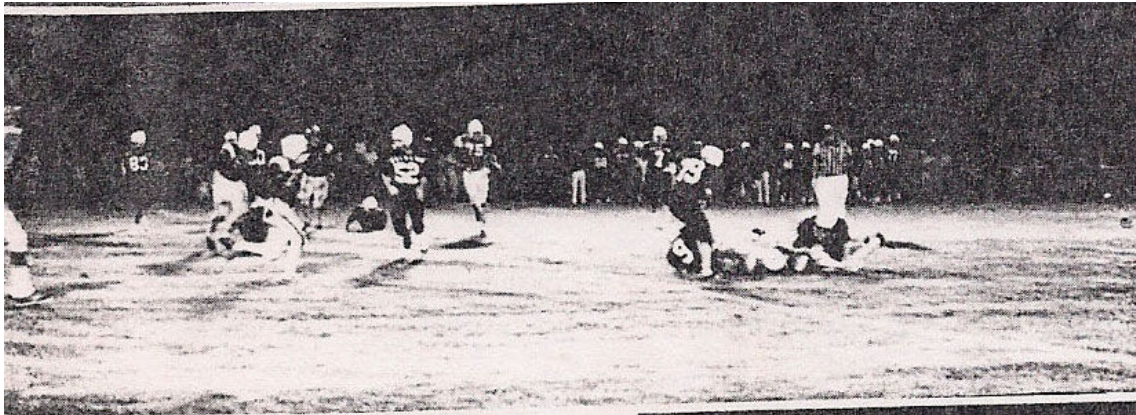
The two point attempt failed.

Lone Oak then held Bells for 4 downs and Dennis Scott crashed the Bells punter. The defense was doing a spectacular job. The Bells quarterback was chunking all over the place and had hit only 3 times in 20 tries.

The Lone Oak offense then got a major break when Bell mishandled a punt to them. Steve Henderson jumped on the loose ball, on the 14 yard line. Bells put up a stiff goal line defense, and Lone Oak only moved the ball 5 yards in 3 plays, to the Bells 9 yard line.

Coach Brookins might have tried a field goal, but he decided to gamble and go for the touchdown. Rudy rose to the occasion, passing to Randy Payne for a touchdown. That took courage on

Coach Brookins part, and a belief in the troops. That Lone Oak succeeded in this play was testimony as to how much the team believed in Coach Brookins and in themselves.



Mr. Brookins ordered the team to go for two. Rudy then hit Benny with another pass, making the 2 point play. Lone Oak led 14 to 0.

After the game stuttered along and ended with our first victory at our new field. It was cause for celebration.

First there was other things. Troy Haynes was looking for the guy he had K.O.ed. He found him and apologized. The apology was accepted, and they shook hands. Troy then found the other fellow who had bushwhacked him. He told this individual that if he wanted to settle it they could do it right there. The guy declined. Satisfied, Troy boarded the bus and felt ready to accept his fate.

Rudy Douglas had hit 6 of 11 passes for 97 yards. He had rushed for 25.

Randy Payne had racked up 50 yards as Lone Oak's leading rusher for the night.

October 9th, 1970, the new field had racked up it's very first victory, 14 to 0. District play had began well. Coach Brookins was pleased.

He even let Troy off the hook.

Reserves

It is said that Victory has a thousand fathers but Defeat is an orphan. Not so in Buffalo Territory. We took our wins and we took our losses. To do less would be to let our Coaches down. It would be to let ourselves down.

If we lost we all felt bad and wondered what we did wrong, and tried to overcome it. The way we thought at Lone Oak was that if we lost we had to be doing something wrong. Winning was expected. If we won we felt good about it, saw what improvements could be made, and got ready for the next encounter. Constant improvement of team and self was the norm regardless of the initial success. A win didn't tell us we had everything O.K. A win just told us we had one in the "win" column. We had to "Keep on Keeping-on" to put more in the "win" column.

How does a player, yourself, improve the team? You give more in practice. You pay more attention to the details. You find out ways to do what you are doing better. Coaches add to this. A coach will open your eyes to a problem you have. He or she will guide you with words and demonstrations to help you overcome this athletic problems. They may give you an exercise program, or show you a new move. They may spell something out in detail to overcome your ignorance.

They may also just jump on your miserable case to let you know what a jerk you are. Being dumb is not an excuse. Stupidity can be overcome by wisdom. They may pat you on your back with a "well done", and make you feel terrific by a task you have accomplished with pinache.

A coach is a person who can guide you down a proper path, win or lose, if he is worth his salt. The only thing they ask in return is that you give that 110%. Not to them, but to the team. Both for them, and for yourself. Such a philosophy can cause a fellow to overcome great obstacles, both on the field and in real life. It lets someone reach down inside themselves and get that little extra something that keeps them going when others give up and leave. I know this to be true because as I have seen my fellows go on in life I have beheld strong evidence of this reserve being called upon. They keep going where others have failed or just didn't have it. I have seen it and I have done it myself. That was just because my Coaches told me how.

That is what being a Coach is all about, and thats why we play this old game of football. It doesn't make pillars of society out of all of us, but it does let someone believe in themselves. In small town highschoools I believe it's in it's purest form.

So we had won our second home game. With the Ag boys I traveled to the field that Monday and gazed upon the devastation. Trash was all over the place. The center of the field from 45 to 45 in an oval shape was torn up soundly. Evidence of the titanic struggle of 22 young men in this cow pasture was everywhere.

I wandered over to the visitor's bench and found old strips of tape, crushed cups, and no really salvageable souvenirs. Mr. Trimble got us into a policing mode and we spent most of the period picking up garbage from all over the stadium. This was to become a regular Monday ritual after home games.

Work on the field continued. The press box was fully erected and the other facilities were being constructed. The locker rooms had made no progress, as there was no money. As long as we had the gym to dress in there was no need to rush building the expensive locker rooms.

Leonard was next on our list. They called themselves "the Tigers". I had never looked upon them before. District 12-B was filled with new opponents who had never heard of each other.

This was the time I wrote on the chalkboard in the locker room "Get them Tiggers."

Well, just who in the Sam Hill is Leonard and what do they stand for anyway? We wanted to find out and this Friday we would. It was an away game, so the team, which I wasn't part of, would go there. They'd have very little time to look them over and marvel at their blue and gold colors.

The posters were everywhere in the halls exhorting the team on to beat, defeat, crown, skin, or otherwise undo the Tigers. These posters ranked from simple wording of what the team should do to imaginative and colorful drawings of a Tiger being degraded or debased. Magazine pictures were even used where appropriate. Some posters merely said "Go Buffs" or "Back our Team". The girls who did these let their imaginations run. It was a part of it we all looked forward to, and it let the team know the blood and sweat during practice was appreciated.

By game day word came down via the Greenville paper that Leonard had been picked to beat us. This was allowed to leak to the players and was greeted with the same enthusiasm as finding a live rat in the refrigerator. We were outraged. This slap in the face by the Greenville paper was taken personally by everybody who cared. Some guys got hopping mad.

Pep rallies in the old gym were fun. The team sat in the bleachers on the opposite side and everybody else crowded into the "home" bleachers. The cheerleaders gave a series of yells after the school song.

"We Love You Lone Oak High School" had a high note in it that went "and always be brave and truuuuue!"

Some thought it ludicrous but I didn't and I still don't have a problem with it. Later the high note was dropped, about 1978 or so, but the older folks still sang the highnote.

At this pep rally the cry of "Go Red Go" was replaced. Often the Cheerleaders would hand the megaphones up to the team in the bleachers. The guys would yell out something though them all through pep rally, something the rest of the crowd couldn't understand. At this pep rally it came through loud and clear. Benny held the red megaphone up to his mouth. It had the "Buffaloes" logo printed on it's length in big white letters. Benny Vice screamed the battle cry out once the gym fell silent.

"WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO TONIGHT?!!!!"

The entire student body responded as one.

"BEAT LEONARD!"

Some one on the team would stand up and give a speech nobody could hear because of the bad acoustics of the giant wooden gym. Then there would be more cheers, often called yells, and maybe a special show. The final episode was a lung buster where the Cheerleaders would pick up the pom-poms and bring them slowly together while we cheered "Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay Red! Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay White, Buffaloes, Buffaloes, fight, fight, fight!"

This could actually leave a person dizzy.

As we filed out the cheerleaders would chant "Go-Red-Go!" while pumping the pom-poms back and forth. I never knew when they stopped.

We not on the team went back to class to wait for the end of the school day and the loading of the busses. Troy Haynes told me about a problem of being wound up by a pep rally. You can get too wound up. You can actually be in such a state as to be on fire mentally. This can block reason and you can act like an insane fool. You take chances, over commit, put out too much. You can be totally burnt out by half-time and no good to anybody. Spirit is good, but too much of anything is bad for a person.

The team loaded on the busses, and off they went to Leonard. I went home and watched T.V. wishing I was there among the Buffaloes.

Leonard

Contemporaries, for the most part, do not appreciate the history unfolding about them. All that matters is the moment, and the overall big picture is often not noticed. So it was with me. Leonard was to be just another game. I was not wholly aware that our offensive passing game was approaching awesomeness. Rudy had a wide variety of receivers and liberally threw to them all. Lone Oak was now a fairly balanced team, possessing both excellent threats on the ground and in the air.

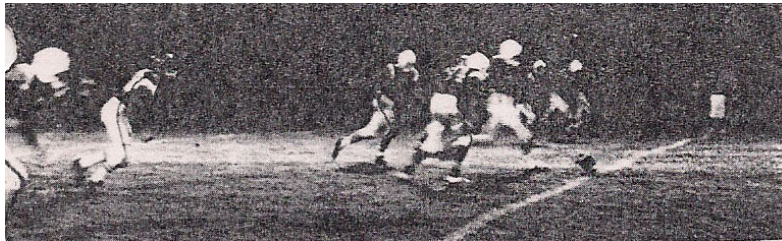
Jack Brookins had seen this early on and honed his team until it worked. Most of them there could have cared less about the trail they were blazing. They wanted to beat Leonard and go on to win district. They were aware that they were the first team to play 11 man football in Lone Oak. The minutiae of what they were doing escaped their young minds. These were the first to play 11 man since World War Two!

These players had successfully taken their winning traditions on with them into this new 11 man game. It had started badly, and some predicted the Buffaloes winning tradition at an end. Others suggested Big Red would be mediocre at best. The schools we were up against were larger, had larger teams, and better training equipment. What we had that they didn't was a most remarkable man for a coach; Jack Brookins.

Now, here Lone Oak was, challenging for supremacy in the brand new District 12-B.

Arriving in Leonard, they pulled up near the locker rooms at the Leonard field. The team dismounted and went to suit up.

By this time of the year it was getting chilly. Soon things got underway in the usual fashion. After the school songs, the National Anthem, and a prayer the kickoff started this contest.



For Leonard things began badly. Worley, the quarterback, was hurt early in the game. There he was, laying in the grass, the coaches looking at his leg. He was messed up, and limped off the field in pain. A man named Myers bravely took his place, and the contest renewed.

Rudy Douglas was hot. He was hitting his receivers all over the field. Apparently he had figured out their defense and with Coach Brookins guidance he began to pick Leonard apart. Yet it wasn't that easy. Leonard held the first quarter scoreless. The Tiger defense had a few holes, but it wasn't a sieve.

The second quarter ticked on. About midway through it Leonard fumbled. David Lemons, one of our small but skilled backfieldmen, leaped on the fumble with the cry of "Ball!" For his trouble he was promptly buried in Tiger blue and gold jerseys and helmets. As the cry echoed up and down the field more men leaped into the thrashing tangle of arms and legs. The refs came over and unplied this mess, and in the end David was there clutching the ball to his stomach. Then Douglas took over. He hit Larry Little for a spectacular 50 yards.

When you're hot, you're hot, so he rifled another for 20 more yards and a touchdown to Larry. This put us up over Leonard 6 to 0. Field goal kicking was risky, so Coach Brookins said go for two. Unfortunately it failed. With that the half soon ended.

Leonard was weakened without it's quarterback, and he tried bravely to come back into the game after half-time. We have to admire Butch Worley for his spirit to try to come back and play. The man had heart, but he simply couldn't stay. The pain was too much. Reluctantly he returned to the bench and the ice packs, with a sense of disappointment.

Leonard punted the ball back to us. Rudy gave the ball to Randy Payne and we quickly scored. This touchdown was called back because of a penalty. When this had happened before the effect on the drive was to halt it and it had a severe effect on morale. Lone Oak had lost games because penalties took away the momentum. The Buffaloes put these worries to rest as Rudy hit Larry Little from 25 yards out to get our points back. Now it was twelve to zip!

The go for two was good as Douglas rifled a pass to Troy Haynes in the end zone. With Lone Oak up by 14 points, the game went into the 4th quarter.

Soon Big Red was about to score again to put the game away. The team was on the twenty. Leonard did not give up. When Rudy lofted another pass, one of 17 he fired off that night, he was intercepted. The interceptor was Leonard's back up quarterback, and he took off running for 85 yards for a touchdown. When the extra point failed it was 14 to 6.

Now humbled by this lesson, Rudy kept it simple and short. Mr. Brookins decided to burn up the clock, so it ended in our favor at 14 to 6. The celebration was great. We had done what the paper said we couldn't. We had beaten Leonard.

We were number one!

It was a sweet, hard won victory. The team looked sharp, played well, and Coach Brookins was pleased with the performance. Rudy had hit for 240 yards in the air.

Lone Oak had won it's first upset in 11 man football, 16/Oct/70, at Leonard in a very hard fought contest. This surprised the nay sayers. Buffalo Ball was back.

Staggering About

I spent a lot of my time sick with something or else. First, was my lower than normal body temperature, allowing me to get chilled easy. Second was the cheap clothes I wore because we could afford nothing much better. I commonly wore t-shirts and jeans, making do with the shiny high "high water marks" my mother would insist I wear. My coat was almost useless in keeping me warm on cold days. The third reason was that there was an open sewer in front of my house in the Dixon community. The house itself was roach infested and unsanitary. I got strep infection a lot and the flu often. This kept my weight down, and me perpetually skinny.

On top of all this other more important things were happening to us that had a lot of us confused. Suddenly without warning one of us would break out with the "zits", or pimples, all over the face, back, and neck. I came down with a massive dose of dandruff flakes that kept me constantly scratching my now suddenly oily scalp. It was horrible and the dander would get all over me. It was embarrassing, too. I would rather have had zits than flakes. Girls would look at me with horror and disgust and run away. I was a walking snowstorm.

To top it all off we begin to stink! If we didn't bathe just about all the time we smelled strongly. Girls were especially conscious of this, and they went to great lengths to remain odorless. How they did it was to stay out of sports and apply perfume and anti-persperants liberally.

Some of us were without a clue. For the more advanced among us, such as Rickey Graham, the novelty of shaving had worn off. To ward off body odor he would apply aftershave in vast amounts to face and chest. For some of us picking pimples became a painful but morbidly interesting hobby. Getting rid of the nasty things became an obsession.

Strangely, nobody seemed to pay attention when we went to school with a face full of zits. It was everywhere, yet everyone was personally sure that one horrible zit they had was being noticed and made fun of by everyone.

Girls are usually much more self conscious of their looks than most boys so a zit is gazed upon by them with a special horror. Skin must remain smooth and blemish free, or they looked upon themselves as lepers. Under their normally calm and serene exterior a girl with a zit is going slowly insane over it inside.

All this was looked upon as "normal".

For us guys, girls were rare in my class and L.O.H.S. in general. Some of the girls who were there were either negatively aggressive, or older, or both. Some of the older girls looked upon myself and others as harmless and did not shun our company. I did not feel uncomfortable talking with them or being around them.

The negatively aggressive ones treated my friends and I like diseased dogs, even resorting to threats and hits. They didn't want us around them, and they went to great lengths to let us know it. This had a reposte in that we could use this dislike of our person to pick on them.

Other girls followed the inscrutable path. They were coldly polite. This was the dominate trait of the girls in my class. Nerds weren't welcome here either.

By now the routine of going to class and going to the lockers was down pat. Teachers had gotten used to their new pupils eccentricities and the pupils had gotten used to their new teachers' eccentricities. Both groups worked around these little quirks. Many teachers found out rather quickly that I could draw, and that I did so a lot. They originally thought it odd that I carried a cigar box loaded with pencils. Soon it was obvious why. In boring classes I would draw things to get me far and away from the droning of the teacher. The teacher would say a phrase or a word that would strike a cord in my mind and the airplanes would be flying again at Mach 2 at 90,000 feet.

If they found out what I was doing there would be swift retribution. I developed a remarkable ability to draw very fast, mere seconds to draw a figure or vehicle. This was put down on paper then hidden away for later observation. I did not throw my drawings away. I have boxes of them stored away to this day. I would show them to Rabbit and Herman. Rickey was near, but not much interested in my art. We were starting to drift apart in little ways.

The Caddo Mills Foxes were up next. They are green and white, and I found this mix particularly ugly at the time. Maturity would change that, but I disliked it then. I thought red and green was neat because it was Christmassy, and black and green had a sinister look to it. Green and white was not pretty.

New posters adorned the walls, and for the first time in 11 man football they declared us Number One. We weren't officially number one, but we were darn close to it. It was seen by one and all that we were roaring on to an unprecedented 11 man record. Things looked pretty good, all in all.

Caddo Mills would be a home game for us. Bad weather threatened.

Caddo Mills

"It was a dark and stormy night". For most of the day and part of the week it had rained on and off, wetting the field. The temperature dropped some but it wasn't uncomfortable. On game day it poured down rain.

Our field was like a layer of hard clay with a cover of grass. Eddie Bell/Henderson in his later career would rate fields by their hardness. He said our field was one of the hardest fields he had ever played on. He also said he could hit on the muck and hydroplane a long way. This mess made a ball somewhat slippery. It also makes the ball heavier, cutting down on throwing and kicking distance. This can play the devil with the game plan.

The Buffaloes had problems early on in the game. They received the kickoff, and Rudy Douglas set up the first play of the game. The ball was promptly fumbled away. Caddo gave Big Red the ball right back, unable to hold onto the pigskin in the wet.

It was pouring rain still, and small lakes began to form everywhere on the field. Guys on the sidelines huddled under army surplus ponchos. It was miserable, but many thanked their lucky stars it wasn't cold.

With the ball in our possession again Lone Oak began a drive. Caddo couldn't control our offense. In 3 hard hitting plays Lone Oak took it 67 yards to a pass to Steve Henderson in the endzone from the 15. This was raw power passing, and in the pouring rain! The two point attempt failed, and it was 6 to 0.

Caddo Mills drove to the 45 and fumbled it back to Lone Oak. Rudy promptly started another drive through the swamp. He hit Randy Payne in the end zone with another pass and it was 12 to 0. The two point attempt failed.



In the pouring rain Caddo tried to rally. Gathering all their nerve they valiantly brought the ball to our 13 before they ran completely out of gas and downs.

By now, some 15 minutes into the game, all the game balls were soaked. Caddo Mills uniforms were now an off shade of gray and green. We were gray and rusty red. Strangely, nobody was muddy, just wet. In this weird water world the slick and wet balls were hard to hold onto. Both sides lost and recovered fumbles.

On a 45 yard pass Lone Oak finally put a stop to the fumblyitis for a while to score. When the third attempt for 2 failed the score was 18 to 0. Now it was half-time. The teams slogged through the water to their busses, for the half. It was still pouring rain, but it couldn't get a lot wetter.

Everyone felt empathy for the pep squads splashing through the swamp that served as a football field. High kicking to tinny sounding recorded music, smiling in the downpour, getting muddy water all over their hand made uniforms and soaking their shoes, they put on a show anyway for the fans in the bleachers.

The ladies retired from the field and the second half began. The Foxes felt that if they could score they could get back in the game. Unfortunately their offense sputtered and virtually died in the swampy field. Their defense tried all through the third quarter, but even their vigorous defensive effort drowned as Larry Little ran into their endzone for 6 more. The final cut came as our 2 point play was finally successful, making it 26 to 0.

Victory was all but assured. Substitutions were being made, to give game time to B-teamers and to ease up on the badly trampled Foxes. Even the B-team went on to score a solid 10 more points in the 4th quarter. The Foxes had been beaten totally.

This victory was a major morale booster for Big Red. Clobbering Caddo Mills felt as good as it was one sided. The Big Red Machine was now hitting on all cylinders. The final score was 36 to 0.

The next day, in the Fina station, Rickey and I were munching sandwiches and he was holding me spellbound as he told me about his adventures in the swamp of the Lone Oak field that night. I was delighted to hear it, and envious as I could be. I wanted to be there.

Young Minds Tend to Think Alike

High School is a little like a singles bar. There are several males and females in a relatively confined space. Just mix in hormones and stir liberally. The end result is a lot of pairing up.

High School athletics allows the kids to burn off a lot of energy and aggression. Most footballers were usually quite a bit less red of neck during class times. I noticed a lot of guys staking their claim to certain ladies in the class. Once these guys made it plain that the girl was now theirs it was very wise to keep your distance of her least someone find your mangled remains upside down in a hall locker, so to speak.

Some of the local girls remained aloof of all local boys. Martha and Vicki Pipkin were 2 examples. Martha was drawing the attention of us all and she was enjoying it in an odd sort of way. She managed to keep us at bay. Vicki kept herself unreachable.

Elaine staked her claim to Frank and it was very wise to leave Elaine alone. Frankie was six feet tall, strong as an ox, and wiry. He was one of the toughest guys I ever saw. Nothing slowed him down and nothing scared him. He certainly scared me. All the upper classmen left him pretty much alone. They respected his rock hard nerve and strength. He smoked like an old car but he could run like a deer. For these reasons I left Elaine alone except on rare occasions. Our days of being boy and girl next door were finished for good.

For all his rough edges, I admired Frankie Payne. He seemed to me to have his act together. The problem was he held just about everyone else in contempt.

Bulldozer had an incident one day that none of us who were there would ever forget. We were in the gym, just fooling around. We had on shorts and cutoffs, and were chunking basketballs around in what was supposed to be a P.E. class. It didn't amount to much of a class. One thing a bunch of football players didn't need real bad was a class on P.E. Especially since they all worked out quite vigorously once a day for hours at a time. The rest of the non-footballers, like myself, tried to play pickup basketball, dodge ball or dogpile. The jocks essentially did what ever they wanted to do.

Phillip Andrews was off to my right, shooting baskets at the north end of the gym. Coach Mankin was trying in vain to direct a P.E. class and was failing miserably. Everybody was just doing what they wanted.

I walked Bulldozer and he started talking to Philip Andrews, just saying 'hi'. I usually kept one eye on Bulldozer because I never knew when he might feel like grabbing me and rearranging my bone structure. Then somebody tossed me a basketball. As I turned to catch it I took my eyes off Bulldozer. I heard a smack and a thud.

I looked back and Phillip was on his back on the floor, stunned. Bulldozer stood over him, his massive fists balled up. He was dangerously angry.

"Get up!" he yelled at Phillip, "Come on, get up!"

Coach Mankin beat feet out of the gym to go get Brookins, Taylor, the Janitor, ANYBODY! Bulldozer was even bigger than Coach Mankin.

I stood there in shocked disbelief. I had never seen a guy punched out before in real life. It happened all the time on T.V. but this was for real!

Bulldozer took off. He was done with Phillip. I found out later Phillip had said something off color about Bulldozer's ex-wife. Intellectual banter doesn't work with red necks. A simple joke was taken seriously and the next thing Phillip knew he was on his back listening to the birdies.

Coach Brookins came in with Mankin and somebody else and they got Phillip to sit up. Somebody got an ammonia capsule and held it under Phillip's nose. He was helped out of the gym.

Bulldozer was expelled and I never saw him again. For the rest of the day we openly gossiped and giggled about what we had just seen. Word spread through school like wild fire, and it was embellished and added to.

Phillip had a big red spot up side his head. He didn't go home early and he recovered. He was okay for the game that Friday, if a little sore.

The Celeste Blue Devils

School mascots, be they Buffaloes, Dragons, Ducks, or Devils, are just that; Mascots. Nobody at L.O.H.S. tried to act like a buffalo, worship one, or do the plains Indians Buffalo Dance because of our mascot. The Lone Oak Buffalo came about in antiquity, about 1905 or so, when somebody remarked that the guys were as big as bull buffaloes. It stuck and was adopted. That's how the legend goes, anyway.

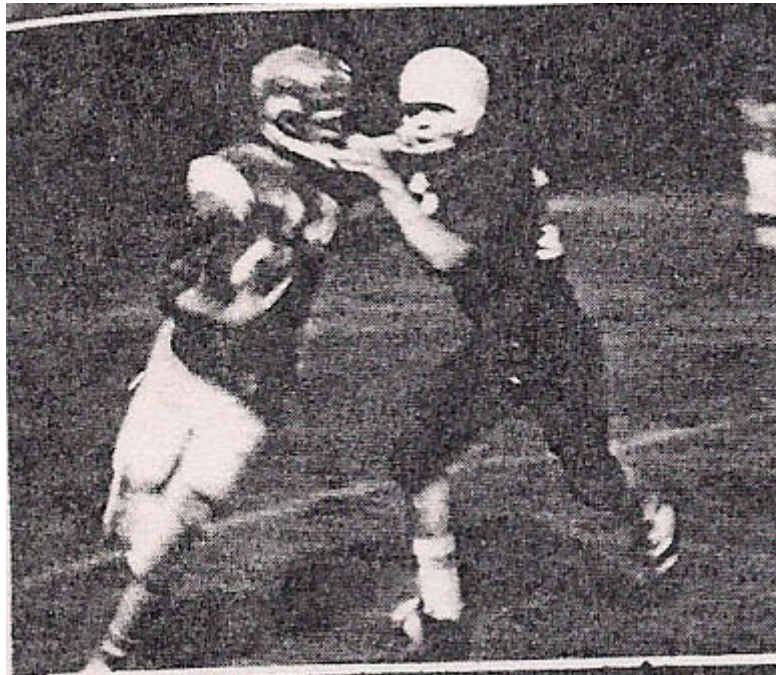
Getting all upset over a mascot is much ado about nothing. Celeste caught some big time grief when a self appointed moralist said the Blue Devil mascot inspired devil worship. He tried to change a long standing tradition by petition. Fortunately he failed. I just hope he found something better to do with his spare time. Celeste's mascot is from a WW1 unit that fought courageously in the nasty trench warfare at the time. They named their team after this unit.

Celeste was a sharp looking team with their deep blue jerseys trimmed in white. They had a state qualified speedster in the backfield named Walker. They were formidable. It was to be a hard fought contest this night.

Celeste was not an arch rival like Quinlan. I had no problem with them at all, except that this chilly Friday night before Halloween they had on the wrong color jerseys to be on the field with us.

Rudy Douglas began his usual steadfast passing game. The team drove 60 solid yards and was eating up the clock. Douglas hit Randy Payne in the endzone after burning up 6 minutes. Once again when we went for 2 it failed. It was 6 to 0.

Undaunted, the Blue Devils duplicated our feat, driving 67 yards for a touchdown. It remained tied when the 2 point try failed. Then began a defensive battle highlighted by fumbles and punts. Celeste soon had the ball deep in our territory, but the defense put up a solid wall of red and white. The threat ceased when Celeste fumbled on our 20.



Lone Oak took over, and Rudy had Larry Little go into the end zone on a handoff to regain the lead. The score was now 12 to 6. Coach Brookins gave Rudy the sign to go for 2. Rudy wound up and threw a whistling strike to Benny Vice, and we now led 14 to 6. A two point try had finally worked.

At half-time the lockerroom mind game began. Players informed the Coaches what difficulties there were, who could get open, and so forth. Adjustments were made on this data, and the teams went back onto the field. It took up where it left off.

Lone Oak took the kick and drove hard from the 8 all the way to the 37. A fumble brought all that effort to futility. Celeste took it and pushed hard. They got only to the 49 and gave it up. This was to repeat itself over and over for almost the entire half. Then Celeste began to show signs of losing cohesion. Some guy tried to pick a fight with big ole Robert Vice. That is something I don't recommend unless the guy wanted to wake up a few days later with numerous broken bones and a memory loss. Fortunately for all involved it got stopped before it got started. After that bit of stupidity the game resumed.

Celeste's final drive came to an abrupt end when someone on Lone Oak's squad, I'm guessing Eddie Bell, intercepted a pass. This set up a clock eating drive, and Lone Oak put it in the endzone for the last time that night. It was 20 to 6.

Time ran out and it was over for this game in Celeste. The Buffaloes began our chant of "We're Number One!" again. This time it was 100% true. The locker room was one happy place. Lone Oak was in first place in District.

Halloween

Halloween in Lone Oak used to be greeted by a lot of weird pranks by the local do-wrongs. Out houses were still around in some spots in Lone Oak and these were vandalized. One was taken up to a gas station on the Katy road and a "Clean Restrooms" sign hung on it. Somebody got into the Volunteer Fire Department and pushed the big red pumper rig out into the town square. In the metal awning covers in front of Lone Oak somebody managed to get a porcelain toilet up there.

There were some people that were left alone. Hubert Dodd, the local blacksmith and junk dealer, was an eccentric fellow. His piles of junk and hulked out vehicles dominated the old lumber yard. A few reckless souls would try to do things to his junkyard and they would promptly come under fire by the irate blacksmith wielding a shotgun. The local constable, Ciecil Kirk, simply could not deal with all the Halloween mayhem going on about him. He could not be everywhere at once. Bottle rockets and firecrackers would be in wide use, and sometimes eggs.

To try to keep this in a little bit of control the school would sometimes held Halloween parties in the gym. They would use it's nooks and crannies for all sorts of ingeniously spooky stuff to keep the youngsters happily terrified. Teachers and other faculty would dress up like witches and such and scare the bejabbers out of the children.

Most of the downtown goings on were harmless and in just good fun. It was the few that caused real damage that got the citizenry angry. Someone thinks its real funny to put dirt in a gas tank. Some get their jollies setting fire to old shacks or pulling nasty tricks on people who gave candy to kids. This would lead to the city council getting an ordinance passed and an effort made to get a regular policeman for the city.

How sad that a few can ruin it for the many.

Back to football. The season so far was remarkably fantastic. They had scored 137 points this year. Leonard had a powerful 180. The defenses of both Lone Oak and Leonard had held opponents to just 92 points. Both teams were pretty evenly matched.

Wandering in the halls I saw posters that told me that Anna, a school I never had heard of, was coming to Lone Oak for our next game. I had a mild curiosity about them, but because I wasn't a player I really didn't care. Not so Rickey Graham. He was happy and winding himself up for the game. I was wondering what was wrong with my Algebra, and I was winding myself up for a Friday night of enforced homework. My parents were really ticked off at my grades. Even if I had joined the team, my lousy grades in Algebra would not have allowed me to stay. I also had developed a cough and runny nose, but I thought nothing of it at the time.

I was in the hallway and I saw the Pep-Squad girls in a tight circle chanting school spirit yells. There was much hand clapping and rhythmic sing song. Everybody else seemed as confused as I was. I got my books and went to the next class.

The chanting went on for a little while longer, ending in a powerful "We're Number One!!!"

Anna Coyotes

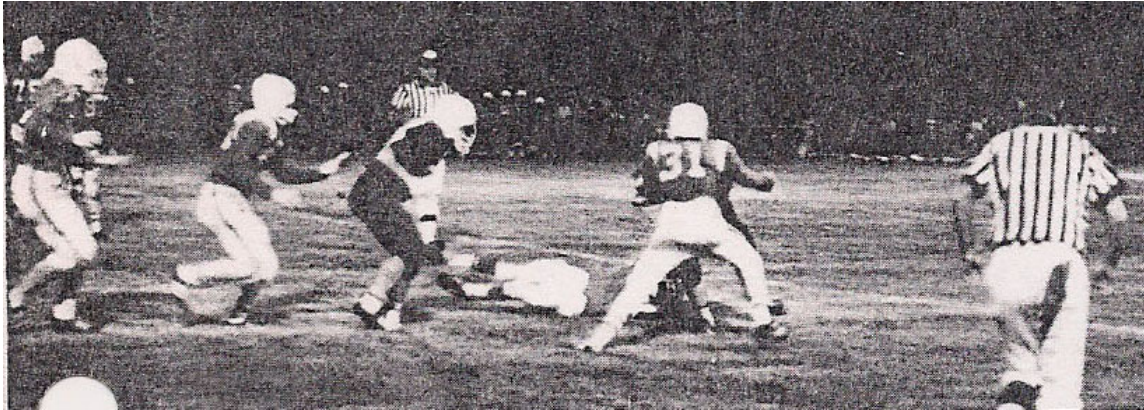
With November came cold weather. I came down with the flu or a bad cold that late Friday. This stuff steals up on me fast. One minute I would feel fine and suddenly I'm sick as a dog. That was exactly what happened to me just before the Anna game. I spent Friday night reading comic books, picking at my supper, and working up the nerve to do my algebra. I felt absolutely lousy. I was left alone to recuperate, near the open space heater in the living room.

Where the action was things were nasty. In spite of showing some power in the first half Big Red couldn't crack the Coyote defense. They kept the Buffaloes out of the endzone until the 3rd quarter.

It was our ball on the Anna 40. Douglas drove down to the 16 in 4 magnificent plays. The Buffaloes smelled a chance to go ahead. Douglas hit Benny Vice from 16 yards out and it quickly became 6-0, our favor. Coach Brookins went for his customary 2 point after, a gamble he always risked.

In spite of the fact that 2 point plays often fail, Coach Brookins knew that with the style of kicking we had 1970 the chance of making 2 was just as high as kicking it. It was a chance he was willing to take. I put the chance of making a 2 point conversion at 50%, and that's probably too high.

This roll of the dice paid off and Douglas hit Randy Payne for the 2 pointer. The score in the 3rd quarter was now 8 to 0. Go Big Red!



Jerry McGee (31) in a play.

I sat in my favorite chair, wrapped in a home made quilt, wondering about the game. It would be tomorrow before I would find out from the paper. Radio didn't carry the game and they might not even get the scores. I suffered at home and wondered.

After the kickoff to Anna their quarterback saw a hole in the Buffalo defense. He deftly put a pass there and the receiver took it 85 yards for a touchdown. Anna could not make the 2 point conversion. Mr. Brookins gamble paid off big time. Anna was 2 points behind now instead of tied with us. It was 8 to 6.

With this score the game rumbled on, then ended. The Big Red Machine had it's fifth straight win!

The next morning I shuffled into the kitchen to see the paper. I looked on the front page and saw the score on the front page header. To my joy we had won 8 to 6! I felt some better and wondered if I wanted to go to school Monday.

Maybe.

The statistics on the game really didn't interest me, but they were great.

Lone Oak had 212 yards on the ground. Anna only had 85. We had 28 yards passing and 14 completions. Anna got 96 yards out of 2 completions. One of the completions was that 85 yarder.

Rudy Douglas was hot. The rushing stats showed we had a powerful running game when we needed one. It was a real well rounded team, but we didn't score much for all that yardage.

Should I go to school Monday? We'll see.

Skid Marks

The big bi-district contest was nearing. Scouts from other teams had been in the stands watching us, as Coach Brookins told the Greenville paper that week. We got a tremendous write up and this massaged our collective egos immensely. This week the team had a 'by' week, meaning they could rest and heal up this Friday. I could try to get over the flu, too.

Community was up next. The team all rubbed their hands in anticipation. Community was having a horrible season, being 1-6-1 in the standings. Coach Brookins, ever alert, told his team that they couldn't go by that. The team had been complacent on Quinlan and got beat. The team had to practice just as hard as if we were going up against Leonard or Celeste. There would be no slacking off.

When I eventually staggered back to school I was just as anorexic looking as ever. I was ready to see my friends again, and participate in the social experiment called public school once more. Missing had put me behind even more in my studies, and I had to hit it hard just to keep up.

We were still working on the field. Many things had yet to be done. Mr. Trimble shuttled us there in his brown and white pickup truck. Sometimes it got boisterous in the back. One time the guys started pushing me from side to side like a ball, back and forth. When they saw it wasn't bothering me and I was kind of enjoying it they stopped.

Another remarkable moment came when we were on our way back. David Morgan, the Gunner, likes to mess with people. He gets his jollies causing problems. He is big and he knows it. Rabbit wasn't anywhere near as big as Gunner, but he was a lot tougher, crafter, and meaner. When it was time to get back to school after Ag class we boarded the truck, almost loading it down to the axles. Gunner got on then Rabbit. There was no more room to sit down so both guys stood. They were right near the tailgate, which was open. Gunner started messing with Rabbit, ooching him back toward the end of the truck bed. He gave Rabbit one last push with his hips. Quick as a flash Rabbit grabbed Gunner and both guys went off the truck at something like 30 miles an hour. Rabbit landed on top of Gunner. I heard the z-z-zip of Gunner's brown nylon jacket as they skidded along the blacktop. Both guys got up quick and made an effort to catch the pickup. They then veered off to their left toward the school, disappearing into the trees and bushes, heading for a small open gateway near the ag shop. The rest of us continued on to the Ag shop. Mr. Trimble was unaware he was suddenly short 2 passengers. Gunner and Rabbit rejoined us during the confusion of unloading the truck. If Mr. Trimble knew what happened he never let us know. Neither Rabbit or Gunner were hurt, and I was amazed. Gunner didn't try to push anybody off the truck anymore.

When we worked at the field, some of the guys got their jollies spitting off the bleachers on people working below. One caught me cold right on top of my head. It ticked me off, but there wasn't anything I could do. These overgrown children were bigger and stronger, so I just called names and went to find some way to get the crud out of my hair. They cackled like a group of vultures. Real great people these, but it was just teenage mischief. I took too many of these pranks personally, and I developed a cynical attitude toward my fellow classmates who were outside my clique. Ag class was total chaos, but it was the cheapest way to get the field built.

Community Two

After this game with Community would come our Thanksgiving Vacation. We all had about a week off to fatten up on turkey and dressing and to pick our toes in front of the T.V. while watching cartoons. We looked forward to the time off and the food. Life was good. For Community it was less so.

The game started and in less than two minutes the Buffaloes scored. Rudy Douglas had handed off to Larry Little and it was 6 to 0. He tried to pass for the 2 and it went no where. Community could not muster any offense and punted it back to us. Rudy then burned a pass to Troy Haynes for 6 more. He then threw a strike to Steve Henderson for 2 more. It was a super fast 14 to 0!



Screen captures from football film of the actual game. Buffaloes in white.

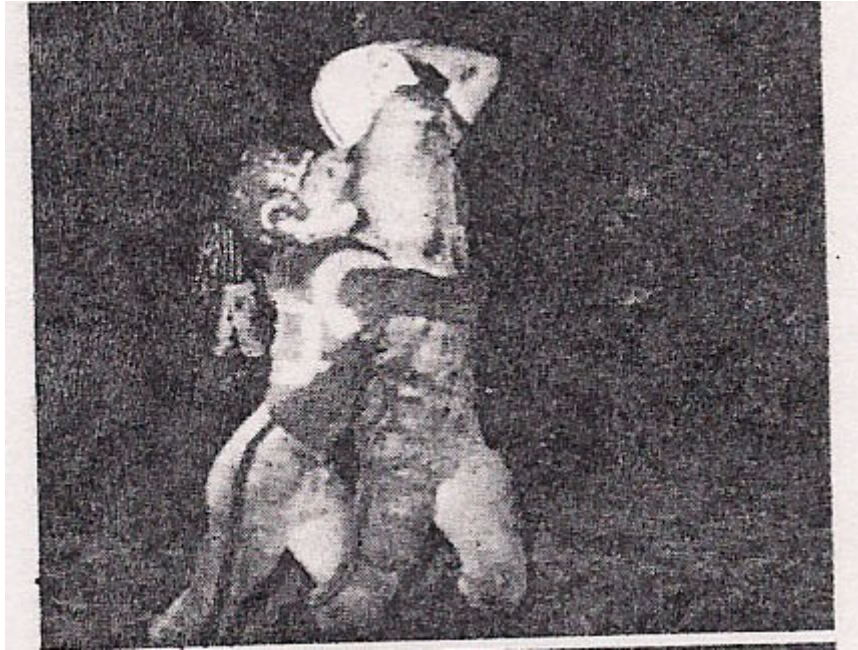
One of the most outstanding men to be on the team was a fellow named Robert Byrd. He had the respect of Troy and numerous others on the squad. He was a first class football player and scholar. He could teach his fellows how to play the game, and gain their respect. He showed how it was done when blocked a Community punt on their seven. The man was unstoppable. I liked him just because he had a cool name.

Offense neatly took over, and with a hand off to Larry Little, scored again on the hapless Braves. Douglas threw another pass for two and it was 22 to 0 in the first quarter. It was barely 8 minutes into the first half! Go Red! This was Thundering!

Community was outclassed and learned it the hard way. The Buffaloes had improved tremendously since the first of the season. Big Red was now a crack team of tough individuals who right now were showing no mercy. It must have been demoralizing on the other side. The second quarter was as horrific as the first. Community could gain no yards and tried to punt. It didn't go very far as the shaken punter tried frantically to get the ball away as a herd of snarling men in red and white came at him. The ball dribbled around a sorry 1 yard after traveling virtually straight up and straight down. Some folks could feel sympathy for the poor fellow who was punting.

It was Lone Oaks' ball on the 10. It didn't stay there very long. Rudy handed off to Gary Bowman for a quick score. He then handed off to Benny Vice for 2 more. It was now 30 to nothing, second quarter.

Brookins, Taylor, and Mankin knew this couldn't go on. It was not good sportsmanship to totally annihilate an opponent. Mercy had to be shown, and soon. It was a while coming, because Rudy threw a 30 yarder to Steve Henderson for 6 more. Jerry McGee ran it in for 2 more.



Coach Brookins pulled Douglas out and put Phillip in at quarterback. I can remember Phillip's coughing style of signal calling. He got right to work and tossed a hot one to Troy who ran it into the endzone. Poor Community was coming completely apart. Gary Bowman got the 2 pointer, and it was and embarrassing 46 to 0 before the half! How horrible it must have been for Community to experience such a drubbing as this! How does a coach speak to his men during half-time at such a spectacle? What does he say to convince them it is worthwhile to return to the white striped green field of horror they had just left? What can be done? How many unfortunate men will lay down their uniforms after tonight and refuse to put them on again?

Only those who truly love the game can have the courage to put those jerseys on again. Only those who can take the pain, the bruised egos, the destroyed strategies can muster the raw nerve to wear their colors again. I salute anyone with that kind of never give up, never say die, attitude.

Nobody quit on the bus. They came back on to participate in a lost cause and to soldier on regardless. It wasn't easy.

Coach Brookins dropped his game plan like a hot iron. He didn't want to run up a score, but this game was already totally out of control! B-teamers and even guys further down on the roster begin to appear all over the place as he made changes. After a while Community actually held Lone Oak to a 4th down. No matter how many yards it took to make a first down Coach Brookins said "punt it."

Phillip boomed the kick away and Troy, Steve Henderson, and Norman Brookins raced downfield.

Troy is an unforgiving fellow, and shows little mercy for his opponents. He took football dead seriously. If a guy didn't carry his own weight in practice he might actually try to hurt them. He remembered last year when Lone Oak was knocked out of the playoffs by Community, 30 to 50. It was our last ever 8 man highschool game, and a lot of players were especially enjoying this pound of flesh they were exacting from Community in revenge.

Fair catch was unheard of in 1970. It was a signal given by the receiver of a punt so he could catch the ball and not be clobbered trying to do so. Troy saw the ball was going to land just behind the receiver so he lowered the boom on him. He knocked the unfortunate chap into the

ball, technically causing a fumble. The ball was recovered in the endzone, giving us 6 more points.

The frustrated Community crowd visiting Lone Oak expressed nothing less than outrage at the thrashing their sons were receiving at the hands of the Big Red Machine. They called for the Ref to call unnecessary roughness on Troy for clobbering the poor boy. Yet by the rules as they were in 1970 Troy was perfectly within the limits set.

This didn't do much for the guy he clobbered as they had to take him to the hospital. It got very ugly, and it was getting uglier. Some body in the bleachers called out "We're gonna get you, 87!" meaning Troy.

Undaunted, Troy yelled right back, "Come and get me!"

Somebody tried to. Troy looked up in disbelief as somebody who looked like a sumo wrestler came over the fence and lumbered toward him.

When the whistle blew for the kickoff Troy took off, mainly to get away from the giant coming to disassemble him. He was off sides, costing us five yards, but he was still alive. Troy limped off the field, telling Coach Brookins he had injured his foot. Coach Brookins let him sit there while the Refs and other folks tried to prevent a riot from breaking out.

There was a lot of crowd noise from both sides of the field. The home folks wondered how they were going to put 100 points on a score board when its made only for double figures. To prevent this bizarre things were attempted by Coach Brookins, such as attempting field goals on first down. In 1970 if a field goal missed the opponent got the ball on the 20. He tried weird plays and strange tactics. Everybody who was suited up got to play that night. Had I been there and a player it would have been my first high school game. Heck, I might have even gotten a chance to run with the ball. It was not to be.

For Community the agony of defeat ended with the blare of the sired on the scoreboard. The big yellow lights showed an incredible score of 78 to 0. The team went onto the field to tell the poor Braves "good game". Mr. Brookins apologized to the Community coach, who's career he probably put in the toilet.

The guy Troy smeared all over the field would be okay.

District play had finally ended. It was over. The new field had endured its first year. First it was a shameful loss to a disliked rival, and now an almost embarrassing stomping of a last place team. I had helped build this field. Now all that remained of the first year was the timeless grass, a deep brown and green in the lights.

Now Lone Oak would go to it's first ever Bi-District game in 11 man football, having won it's first ever District game in 11 man, since World War Two. This score was not a record. In 1924 Lone Oak had scored 87 points to 0 against the Quitman Bulldogs, on October 22.

Thanksgiving and Home Life

Thanksgiving in rural East Texas is, I assume, like many everywhere but different in our regional aspects. We don't stuff the turkey. The bird is roasted basically as is in a covered pan in the oven. Dressing is made from cornbread. Black-eyed peas are cooked. Deviled eggs, potato salad, and

fried okra are prepared. Pies of every conceivable type are cooked, including pecan pie. Somebody usually made a fruit salad and a banana pudding. The smell of food cooking could drive all of us nuts in the livingroom. The house is filled with relatives from all over and the smell of the wonderful banquet cooking.

Privacy and possessions were hard to protect. Children are fascinated by models cars, tanks, and planes. When they break the model so easily they are confused. I frantically tried to store all my possessions away, but I sometimes missed one or two.

Refuge for me was usually on top of the garage if it wasn't too cold. I'd get up there and pull the ladder up after me, leaving the little devils to yell inane insults at me. Little kids have a vivid imagination of what constitutes an insult. Some are downright hilarious, but none come to my adult mind right now. Anyone who has children has an idea of what I was putting up with.

I had no place else to go. All my nearby friends either had their relatives over at their houses, or they were gone to visit them. The Fina Station was closed on holidays. I was odd man out, and this was it.

When the long awaited feast took place it was hap-hazard. We got paper plates and a glass of ice tea. This filled both hands. Now if the tea was put down someplace a person could come back and find his or her glass gone, claimed by someone else. The plate was loaded with everything the eater thinks might be edible. Granny, my sister, or Aunt might encourage someone to eat something the person really did not want to eat. To placate the relative and ensure family harmony the stuff was shoveled on and relegated to a spot on the plate where it would not spoil the other delicacies the person really wanted to eat. After this diplomatic mission was done the next task was to find a spot to eat in peace. If that failed then just to find a spot to sit down and then eat was the next order of business.

My palate was unaccustomed to the rich food I was chasing around the plate with my fork. I usually couldn't eat all of it because I would go for two or three helpings. The "diplomatic food" was mostly untouched. To go for dessert I would get a fresh plate and load it up with fruit salad and banana pudding. Like most teenagers I had a sweet tooth.

The older family members would gather in front of the television to watch the Turkey-Day game. We had a black and white T.V. until about '72 and we didn't even have a phone at all until the 70's. The women would gather in the kitchen, gossiping and putting everything away. The family dogs happily gnawed on scraps of every imaginable type and the backyard chickens feasted on throw aways. I got a comic book and returned to my garage roof to get away from the destructive, nagging, little kids who seemed to be just fascinated by my presence and my being the only teenager there. There wasn't anything else to do.

By late evening everybody would have said their good-byes and stocked up on left-overs. I'd come down off my roost and survey the damage done to my belongings. I would examine my models, take stock, hunt down missing pieces, and try to repair whatever damage they had taken.

Supper would be eaten in more serene atmosphere. My aunt, who was the current relative living with us, my parents, and some others would all join in the second feast of the day. My father and I didn't know each other all that well and each such holiday was a chance to get to know each other a little better. He drove a truck a lot before getting the gas station in Sulphur Springs so we saw little of each other. I was usually gone when he was home, and vice versa.

Because my Mother kept my sisters kids through the week she became deaf to the word "Ma ma". The 3 children called her that constantly, seeking her attention. The only way to get her attention was to call her by her hillbilly nic name of "Beck". No disrespect is intended, it was just

how things evolved in this household. It often shocked those on the outside, but when no protest were sent my way by her it was let pass. I didn't like doing it, but that's how things were.

The same applied to my father. I called him "Sam" and pretty much for the same reason. Dad had badly burned hands, face, and chest from a gasoline truck fire he was in many years ago. He tried to rescue his friend and co-driver trapped inside the burning cab, but it was too late. The man died and Dad carried these scared and mutilated hands to remind him of that horror. Dad was something else!

Dad came from Cumby and people who knew him said he could really play baseball. Some said he was good enough to play pro ball. He modestly denies this, but too many people tell me he was that good. Dad truly loved baseball. He'd make a scorecard out of shirt cardboard. He'd listen to the game and keep a record of it on his cardboard. It was his only hobby besides fishing. He had several games in a ledger he kept in a cabinet. At night he would be next his radio, listening with rapt attention to his game. It was his moment to himself.

Mom liked the sound of her own voice. She would talk constantly. She would walk through the house giving us a play by play of what she was doing, even if it involved something as intimate as going to the bathroom.

Dad put up with this constant babbling. He didn't even complain when she would talk as loud as she could on the telephone, destroying his weekend nap. He let it all go. He was just happy to be home. Dad would get unconscious revenge by talking and having an argument with someone in his sleep.

My mother's side of the family is very clannish. Relatives, including her widowed mother, lived with us from time to time. These individuals from Granny to Uncle Scoot all had hillbilly nic names. There was Polly, Scoot, M.R., Sis, et al.

Those who have children carry this tradition on with names such as Gee Dee, Kat, Susie, Boodle, and so on. My nic name was Lynnie, and I was often referred to by my first and middle name at the same time: Charles Lynn. Sometimes it was pronounced as one word; Charleslyn. Other family members called me Sonny Jack, Hound Buddy, or whatever came to their mind at the time.

The main problem with having aunts, uncles, or some such living in the same house is that they think they own the place and are on equal status as Dad and Mom. They think they are raising the children too. They used authority that I felt they had no right to and it ticked me off a lot. My aunt Polly and I often went round and round. It was don't do this and don't do that and stay away from the Fina station. I would stomp out the door and go anyway.

When my sister and her husband went to work my aunt Polly would keep my sisters 3 kids in my parents house. Both my parents worked too. These beloved nieces and nephews would get into my stuff and be very destructive. When I got off the bus every evening I had their handiwork and them to look forward to. I would often head for the Fina station after dropping off my books at home and if I got a ride with Rick I'd spend most of the evening there. It kept me from strangling the little destructive darlings.

Dad was a fair to good carpenter. His experience ranged from building simple chicken houses to add-ons for our house. The first such add on was when he built me a room out of the back porch. This room was 'L' shaped and about 10 feet to 20 feet long at the long part of the 'L'. It was a bout 8 feet wide. I was delighted to have my own room, both as a refuge and a storage area. I could put all my stuff, which was considerable, in there and happily live in there. I was surrounded by my kingdom, lord of all I surveyed, and just as happy as a clam. This great joy lasted until the winter. The walls were not insulated and Dad didn't quite seal it off from the outside. There was a

4 inch gap where he forgot to put in bird-blocks. I had no heater in this room and the temperature would drop down in harmony with the outside. It could be brutally cold in there. Eventually it forced me out. I slept for a while in the converted couch in the living room and later in a neat folding bed in the back room. It wasn't bad, overall. I had a secure place to store most of my stuff now.

Our house was roach infested. When I was in grade school and junior high I'd play Attack Helicopter on these insect pests. With a flyswatter in one hand I'd press on the wood paneling with the other. Roaches would be crushed in the paneling. Survivors would panic and run out of the top of the paneling near the ceiling. I'd then kill them with my flyswatter, pretending I had flushed Vietcong out of the jungle and was blasting them with my Cobra Helicopter. I had other similar games I played with the vermin. All were designed to kill.

One night I was sleeping in the bed in the living room. I woke up and got my flashlight off the headboard of my bed. I lay there watching a mouse on the floor not one foot from my bed. It was sniffing about, and the light didn't bother it at all. He looked up at me with his beady little eyes and then quietly scurried away. I had felt no fear. It was sort of like he belonged here just as much as I did. Dad often set traps for the mice and gassed the house for the bugs. They both kept coming back, the bugs by the thousands.

One summer night I went into my old L shaped room to get a comic book. I had a 2 foot tall stack on the floor. I dug around in them and lifted up the corner of one. I found there was a snake coiled up in there. I calmly let the books back down and carefully left my room. I found Polly and we got some hoes. We then went into my room with intentions of chopping ole Jake the Snake to tiny bits. I got up on the bed in that room and used my hoe to pull the comic books over, to flush Jake out. He slithered out and Polly screeched then panicked. Hands over her head, she left me there standing on the bed. I hurdled the bed post and beat feet out of there, my hair standing on end. We found Dad. He got a .410 gauge shotgun and went snake hunting in my room with Beck to spot for him. In a few moments there was a BANG from my room. Mom exited with the blasted remains of Jake the Snake on a dust pan. Dad came out unloading the weapon. He went back in later to patch the hole in the floor. From that moment on that room was used only as storage.

Dad raised cattle, keeping an eye on the future. Our first was named "Star". We bought her as a calf back in '66 from my cousin Kenneth. We carried her home in the back of my Dad's 52 Chevy four door. She made a mess, as cows are wont to do, but we just hosed the car out and it was okay again. By 1970 we had a herd of about 8 to 10 to the animals. Fortunately Star was the only one we ever carried in the car. After that incident Dad bought a trailer. Dad had an accurate vision that it would be easier to keep cows than work at his station or drive a truck when he got older.

He was very wise in that. When he eventually retired he virtually lived off this investment in livestock. But it wasn't to be as easy as we originally thought



Painting of my house in Dixon. Painting was made in the 1990s from memory as the place was torn down in the mid eighties.

And Howe

When we returned to school we discovered our opponents for the Bi-District slugfest were to be the Howe Bulldogs. I have no idea where Howe is, even today, and I'll bet that some of them have no idea where Lone Oak is. There is just no reason to find out, outside of curiosity.

School picked up right where it left off. The teachers acted as if we hadn't been gone at all and that our minds weren't numbed from too much T.V. and left over turkey. We would sit there in class in a sort of stupor, hoping our data processors would come up to speed in our skulls.

For the team the first football practice after the holidays was particularly nasty. Guys had gotten a little out of shape and some of them were sucking wind before it was done. I am sure it felt good anyway to be back in there, slamming into each other and sliding across the dust of the practice field. Coach Brookins was not blind. He knew they had gotten off training and fattened up on rich food during the holiday. He made an effort to burn it off them. So went practice.

In school I discovered my favorite classes had become History and English. In history I read with fascination about Egypt, the Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, all the bold and ancient regimes that gave us laws, architecture, art, everything we are today. It was very interesting.

English class was Shakespeare and story writing. The English teachers were the least hostile to my drawing. They looked upon it as creativity, and it apparently didn't interfere with my ability to do my English lessons. A lot of my stories that I wrote had to do with my perceived view of military life. I grew up loving war movies and the Army. My heroes have always been soldiers, and the travesty of Vietnam did not diminish that view. My English teachers seemed to like what I wrote, in spite of my abominable handwriting. I was finding an academic niche.

The entire school was in high spirits for the Bi-District game with Howe. We were picked to only be average at best in our district and here we were on our way to Bi-District. The entire school was living the dream.

The pep-rally was like thousands of others. The Coaches were honored and gave us a speech. The gravity of what the team had done and what the team was about to do was told to us. Special banners were made and attached to the team busses. The situation was just too unreal. How could a tiny school like Lone Oak overcome those greater teams and be where it was? We had about 300 people in the entire school. That was grade school, junior high, and highschool put together. Of that about 100 people were in high school. Of that 30 or so were on the football team, about 1/3 of the entire high school body.

That ratio was not equaled by any other school I have seen at this time. What made so many young men go out for football? Everybody had their own reasons. They ranged from boredom to a great love for the game. For a lot of them there was no glory to be found, no state recognition, no college scholarships. The only thing they had was just to glory of being part of the team and the fun of playing the game.

The Buffaloes boarded the bus and headed for the neutral field at McKenny. We had been scouted out by Howe. They knew us. The team had seen films of them. We knew them. The mind game was on even before the kickoff. Coach Brookins was confident. He had forged a powerful team from the raw material he had started with. All the guess work, the switches, the dazed players laying face down in the dust, the endless windsprints, had led to this championship contest. The winner of this game went on to regional. The loser merely could claim the district title. It was a very steep ladder; District, Bi-District, Regional, and the cherished title of State. Could any of us dare to dream so far? The prospects made my feet tingle. It was scary. The buses disappeared down the road, and I went home once more. I wished I could be there. I wanted to so bad. For me it was T.V. and building model cars on a Friday night. I cursed my drab and dull life, and went into the house.

At McKenny the busses trundled into the parking lot and disgorged the team before the lockerrooms. The guys looked at the field. It was no fancier or plainer than any they had been to before. Some were a little disappointed the field wasn't artificial turf, and it didn't have single strut goal posts, the kind that sort of looked like a Y. The locker rooms were simple, the bleachers a bit more elaborate than back home. It wasn't exactly the Cotton Bowl, though. Lone Oaks first 11 man football team since 1940 went in to dress out for their first Bi-District game, 27 November, 1970, and stepped into history.

The first thing the team noticed when they came out on the field was that there was a huge crowd jammed in to the stands. They made a different sound, a deeper roar, than any we had at home. It added to the unreality of it all. It was stunning.

Lone Oak went to the sidelines after warm up and running through the banner. Team members stood up on the bench to see over the heads of their buds. It was kickoff time. Lone Oak kicked off, and it went to the 46. O. T. Williams showed Howe about Buffalo ball by clobbering their back for a 4 yard loss, ending their first drive. They punted and it was Big Red's ball for the first time on the 29.

Marching down the field, Rudy Douglas called the plays and took it to the 13. He threw a pass to Randy Payne to put it on the one. Howe dug in and put up a powerful goal line stand. Lone Oak couldn't drive that one yard in. Then Douglas took it himself on a keeper to put us up 6 to 0. It was rumored that Douglas was a little shy about getting hit, but when the time came he'd put his head down and go for it. When Mr. Brookins said to go for 2. Howe's strong defense made Rudy throw it incomplete.

Howe was made of some sharp looking dudes. They had stripes on their helmets, colored pants and matching socks. Having color pants meant that when a team wore their home jersey the entire outfit was one solid color. I personally didn't like solid uniforms and I thought we looked cool in all white, but that was just me.

Our defensive quarterback was Troy Haynes. He had the job of deciding the defense. Sometimes he could be heard calling out "Right!" or "Left!" or "Up the middle!". That alerted the defense where he thought the play would go. This could rattle the offense if he called his guesses correctly. If he called it wrong it made no real difference because the defense would react to the play no matter what the setup. Being a little crazy, Troy would sometimes call a bizarre defense, like a goal line stand at midfield. If he messed up they'd get big yardage and maybe score. Troy took the blame on himself for any long gains the bad guys would get on us. But he was playing a mind game with the entire enemy squad and their coaches. They had a game for him, too.

Troy noticed he was getting clobbered by 2 big linemen virtually every play. This began to physically wear him down. He couldn't concentrate on the offensive set ups with 2 thundering linemen coming at him. Part of the job of the defense front 4 is to protect the linebackers as well as rush. They were probably too busy to protect Troy because Howe was a good powerful team.

Howe started moving in the second quarter. They drove deep, but the Big Red Defense formed a wall at our 10. It was tense. It was fourth down and they went for it. Everyone gritted their teeth as the Howe quarterback launched a pass at his halfback. There was a sigh of relief and a cheer as the ball fell incomplete.

Our offense simply could not move against Howe, and punted it to the 45.

Howe came out blistering with a series of short, hard passes throwing under the safeties and above the linebackers. They were really picking on Troy and the other linebackers hard.

They got to our 45 when another short pass broke them loose all the way to our endzone, tying it at 6 to 6. Mr. Brookins eyed this offense and methodically thought of ways to cancel them out. Howe went for a point after kick, and it was successful, taking the lead 7 to our 6.

The entire offensive team was angered by this, and decided to show these Bulldogs what Buffaloes could do.

Douglas threw a powerful long bomb to Steve Henderson for a 67 yard touchdown. When Lone Oak went for two the pass was caught but the receiver was short of the goal line. That put Lone Oak in the lead, 12 to 7. It remained so until half-time.

The coaching staff examined what Howe had done to the Lone Oak defense, and decided to modify it. They switched around the linebackers, putting Troy on the outside. Troy was battered, but he had ganged up with Benny Vice on one of the two guys and they took the guy out by hurting him. A similar attack on the other fellow failed, and Troy respected him after that. Troy told me "He was one tough dude."

Neither side had much of a ground game. Howe had only one yard. It was a passing game all the way. Both teams, now adjusted for the second half, came out of the locker rooms onto the field.

Howe came out with a thunderous offense. They went 84 yards and then threw a 28 yard touchdown pass, getting ahead in the third quarter. Howe then ran it in for 2, and went ahead 15 to 12.

Howe's defense stalled our offense, making it sputter. They controlled it. Rudy couldn't find anybody open and our running game wasn't doing well at all. We punted short to our own 37.

Howe smartly went 63 yards, most of it on a 59 yard pass that caught the Buffalo defense flat footed. Coach Brookins made further fine tuning to his defense, trying to counter what Howe was doing.

The Howe quarterback got into our endzone from the one on a Quarterback Sneak, making it 21 to 12. Our defense did not let them get the extra point, stopping them cold. We were in a pickle now. We needed at least 2 touchdowns to get ahead.



Coach Brookins' changes finally jelled, and Howe had major problems with the Lone Oak defense for the rest of the game. On the other hand our offense was out of gas.

The fourth quarter was a hard hitting jam of players slamming into each other on a cold November night. Neither side could score, and that worked in Howe's favor. They didn't need to score any more, just stop us from scoring. By the end of the game they had succeeded.

My team, our team, the Lone Oak Buffalo team, stood there in deep disappointment as time ran out. Howe was now Bi-District champions and on their way to regional playoffs. The Buffaloes had not felt the sting of defeat since October, over a month ago.

Our first season of 11 man football was over.

Troy was among all the battered, bruised, and bleeding men of Big Red who come here. He sought out the fellow he had injured and apologized.

"Either I hurt you," he explained, "or you were going to hurt me.:

The other fellow seemed to accept this, and said this was the hardest game they had ever played. They said the coach had given them one blocking assignment and that was to clobber Troy every play. It worked, for it slowed Troy down. There were little wars going on all over the gridiron during the game. Troy had lost his. Still, it was 'good game' followed by handshakes and backslapping. Then it was load the gear on the bus for the very last time in 1970. Both teams headed home.

The stats were good. Lone Oak had 36 yards rushing, and a spectacular 191 yards in the air. Howe had 94 yards rushing and 186 yards passing. It had been a hard fought game. The final result was a mixed bag, but we were definitely very proud of our team.

In our very first year of modern rules 11 man football Lone Oak dominated district and the trophy resides in our overstuffed trophy case to this day. Mr. Brookins had shown he was again a coach par excellence, making the switch to 11 man relatively smoothly and victoriously. Those of us who were there would never forget it.

Our team had not won Bi-District. That was to our disappointment, but nobody from Howe could deny that it had been a near thing and it had been a tremendous battle on the gridiron. The team had no reason to hand their heads, and nobody chastised them for losing, either.

Senior guys prepared to celebrate their last football game together in Greenville and at Tawakoni. Others got with their sweethearts and talked out the hurt of losing. Some looked for their parents and a ride home. It was over. Those of us at home or not on the team could only wonder and be envious.

Monday they would turn in their uniforms.



"A woman is the soul of man. It is her radiance

that lights his way. A woman is... Glory."

(Man of Lamancha, 1965)

Ladies

Because the human female is smaller and in general not as strong as males it is a chauvinistic sort of thing to act like they are held in a form of contempt. The thing is to talk about them only in a physical way and judge them by their attributes, primarily physical. This is bravado and a macho covering of deep seated emotions. Few will admit it but to have a lady love you, virtually any lady, is a powerful and fulfilling emotion. Suddenly a person is not alone. He has someone to share your entire life with all at once. She can be taken to places the guy will never go to with his running buddies. She can be shown off.

"She loves me! Isn't she wonderful?"

Girls, Ladies if you will, are a valuable part of any man's life. Without her the world is gray and a little colder. With her the colors are brighter and the sun is shining even if it raining outside. A gentle squeeze of her hand on yours and it feels like you can defeat any foe, climb any mountain, and swim any ocean. Without her, there is only yourself to call on. She is 100% inspiration, 100% confidence, 100% everything. She can change a man entirely, for good or bad. A woman who loves you can have you do things with more élan than you would otherwise, very much like the knights of old. Friends are nice but a lady is wonderful. You can buy her gifts and she'll reward you with a wonderful smile or even a kiss than can make your toes curl. Even the simple thing of merely giving her flowers can evoke words of love from her.

Its all so strange.

I had no idea at all how to deal with it in 1970, but I also had no opportunity. If any girl there wanted to be my lady she never let herself be known. That was unfortunate.

I would be angered by my classmates referring to girls as "meat" or similar descriptions. I took the inscrutableness of the girls in my class as a way of telling us they were superior to us morally and intellectually. I was like Don Quixote in my view of them and like him I took much abuse at their hands.

My male classmates looked upon this with high amusement. The jock clique would often harass me about my lack of female contact, taking great entertainment at my red-faced expense. My friends, who were in a similar situation, were left to take their turn, too.

Bulldozer didn't know it but he was a trailblazer. All of this serious necking was looked upon as nothing really dangerous. Bulldozer was looked upon as stupid, you see. Because of that he got his lady pregnant. Just because he was dumb, not because of sex. The smarter guys among us truly believed there was no way they could get their ladies in a family way. After all, they were smart, you see.

Were I in their shoes I can't truthfully say I'd be any different. I reached the conclusion that they were all cads, and all these guys wanted was sex. In my naive view I saw them as taking advantage of innocent creatures who only wanted love and devotion. It was time for a reality check, but that's how I perceived the situation. Nothing stepped in to change my view, in spite of the shews abounding elsewhere. Some of the ladies were just as adventuresome as the guys. The risk of sex after games or on a date is its own special thrill. As for the virtue of virginal purity, it is something that is held in high esteem yet discarded at the first good opportunity. Ironically, any girl that did was sometimes held in contempt by the very guys lusting for her. How on earth can anyone deal with this?

Guys were under pressure too, by lustful girls. If she went after him and he didn't put out he was also held in contempt by her and probably every girl she told. That is the stigma of being labeled "too nice" by these girls.

My contact was primarily from the male point of view. I was told one thing to do is to feed them a line of bull that you truly love them. Once she is in your control do what you like. If she starts to get serious break it off and go find another. It was this cold blooded philosophy that led me to hold the stud ducks in contempt, but not the girls.

Love is indeed a strange thing. One can give it but not get it back in return. One can also receive it and not even be aware of it. One can take it and not share it in return. One can destroy with it. One can use it to break someone. One can use it to heal someone. One can use it to inspire someone.

The very worst of all is that someone can never experience love. Second worst is to use it to manipulate someone.

Trying to sort all this out at the totally confused age of 15 is impossible. There were times, when I was still in school and later in college that I felt the loneliness and it nearly broke my heart. I'd sit on the trunk of my car or by a campfire and gaze into the darkness, feeling the hurt of this great emptiness burning inside me.

It was strange to go on a hay ride and end up sitting alone on the back of the wagon watching the cars zip past, but I did. I was a wall flower. Women simply did not find me attractive. At the Satellite Skating Rink the only lady I met worthy of note was the owner's daughter. Her name was Skippy. She was the steadfast girlfriend of our new pack leader, Phil Waldrip. I was no threat to his claim so he let her skate with me. She taught me how to skate with a girl, but it was one big waste of time. I never did skate with any other girl there. She was being nice and I appreciated that.

Sometimes I thought I wasn't being aggressive enough. This got fast and negative results. Sometimes I'd get slapped or the girl would laugh 'hoo-ha' so loud she could be heard all the way down the hall in school. Others would run away. Each result would leave me feeling like an idiot. Still I respected what I perceived to be the dignity of woman-hood to the end. I can tell you why.

These are the ladies we marry. These are the mothers of our children. These are the women we'll spend the rest of our lives with. Somewhat remarkable to me was that a great lot of these guys who gave me such a hard time have since married, fathered children, and are spending the rest of their lives with the same lady.

I think I won the argument on virtue after all.

I could escape into my fantasy world drawings and spend a lot of time with my friends to take the edge off the loneliness. We went to places that took my mind off what I wanted most in life. It wasn't too bad. It was just part of growing up. That, my friend, is life!

Basketball, 1970, Begins

In driblets and drabs guys turned their football gear. Some cherished jerseys disappeared, but most practice gear was brought back cleaned and washed. Basketball practice started almost immediately. I considered it wise not to participate in this activity either. I took one look at Jerry

Fry and decided he was just about the tallest guy I had ever seen. I had no business in this game and I never saw them practice basketball. I was back in study hall with Herman, and now Randy Price the Rabbit was there too. Rabbit brought our spirits up a bit. He was an added bit of creativity to our group. His demands were low, and he enjoyed what we gave him of our creations. He never started a league of his own in basketball, for instance, but took one of my teams and played it. Such was Rabbit.

P.E. was still the same. We played dogpile and Can't Stand Fishermen. There was still rope swings and sock tag. Dog pile was started by grabbing some individual and tossing him on the mats. He would then be buried alive by as many human beings as possible. The stack of bodies could get as high as 6 feet! One couldn't help but pity the poor beggar on the bottom. What the hey, it helped pass the time.

Once Larry Briggs whopped me upside the head with a 50 pound tackle dummy, It stunned me and the guys said I thrashed around on the mats like a chicken with it's head cut off. I'm not sure what happened but it scared the bejabbers out of them. Larry decided not to whop anybody with a tackle dummy again. I didn't even have a headache. My guess is he hit a nerve center on my jaw or something. I really don't know.

Wrestling was popular on the mats. Guys would bodyslam each other or try the moves they saw on Saturday night wrestling. At our age we believed T.V. wrestling was real. We had guys try sleep holds, iron claws, all sorts of exotic nonsense on each other. We often wondered why it didn't work as good in real life as it did on T.V.

One time Rabbit and I sneaked into the gym before school started for the day. It was very cold in there. The heaters were turned off at night and the gym became a huge icebox in winter. We hurried into the gym to find the goodies we had placed in there the day before. We put a jersey, pants, and a helmet on a tackle dummy. Somewhere we got a rope, about 30 or so feet long. We threw one end over a rafter and tied the other end to the dummy's neck. We hoisted it up and tied it off.

We looked up at the dangling effigy and freaked out. It was spooky. We beat feet out of there with chills up our spines and left the deed to be found by other people.

Oh, Possum

The Wonderous and Wonderful Martha Joyce Sale



Martha took care of her invalid mother and kept house. Between doing this and being on the pep-squad, she studied hard and kept a remarkable high grade average. If she got less than 90 on a test she felt bad about it. None of this was known to me about her, because I usually paid no attention to her. She was always quiet and in the background. She had wonderfully dark, sparkling eyes behind her glasses, a dry sense of humor, a low and quiet voice, and dark Brunette curly hair she wore short over her ears.

Martha never once showed any real emotion until later in school. She was inscrutable to a "T". When she started becoming the beautiful creature she was to be, we suddenly started paying attention to her. She was an example of all the virtues a fellow really wants in a woman. She is intelligent, has remarkable self control, hard working, dresses nice, didn't smoke, swear, or is openly lustful.

She was one young girl who had tons of pure class and did not do a single thing to exploit it. She was just herself. We called her 'Possum' because she said she might live near Blossum in Texas when she graduated. Gunner called her the Blossum Possum and the name stuck.

Because the class at large didn't know how to deal with a lady like her we picked on her good naturedly. If any outsider or such had tried anything on her, I feel as a group, the entire male section of the class would have rose to her defense. I guess we sort of looked upon her as our collective "little sister". We picked on her, sometimes treated her a little badly, but we all loved her.

Martha's serenity could be disturbed in many ways with hilarious results. One thing was to pick on her about a mule in town that would bray loudly when the electronic chimes would sound in the Methodist Church. About noon or so the chimes would start, and we could hear them through the open windows at school. They'd be ringing merrily for a second or two then there would be this "heeee-hawwww!" of the mule joining right in. The first time we heard it we were busy in class with school work and the class was silent. When the chimes started we mentally acknowledged their ringing. Then we heard the mule.

The entire male population of the class exploded with guffaws of laughter at the absurdity of the sound. I don't know if the mule was Martha's or not, but we dubbed it hers.

When the animal began to bray Gunner would call out "There goes Possum's mule. What do you feed it?"

Martha would blush red and try to remain in control.

"It's not my mule!" she'd protest, letting her barriers down just a bit. Into this we'd fly with barbs about the animal like "did it sleep in the house?" or "does it have a litter box?" and "do you ride it or do you hitch it to a cart?"

Gunner gave a vivid description of how he swore he saw Martha out in the fields plowing with the mule. We roared with laughter, and she turned redder.

None of the jokes were indecent in nature, or meant to hurt, and knowing that group of hound dogs in the class I am surprised at the amount of respect they paid her.

I guess if we didn't love her like a sister we wouldn't have picked on her so much.

Martha could shut us down when we treaded on forbidden territory. Once a nutty science teacher made up a bunch of goo in a beaker that looked like the largest male fertility specimen in the

world. All the guys knew what it looked like and there was much boisterous commentary and jocularly. Martha came in the room as we were hoo-hawing about the gunk. She went to see what we were having such a good time about. She eyeballed the beaker and didn't understand what the deal was.

I looked at her and said "Don't you know what that looks like?"

She locked her dark eyes on me in a menacing way and flatly said "No."

She said a lot with just that single word. I did not push it. I just giggled and retreated without commentary. We sat down and the class started. The beaker incident was not discussed again. I admired the class, wit, and increasing good looks of that woman!

Martha could type like a teletype! She'd sit at her electric typewriter and rip through the lesson like an expert. We guys used the old 1956 model Royal manual typewriters because guys had the light and delicate touch of a Mac truck. Mrs. Baldwyn, our typing and book-keeping teacher, knew this. I think the girls all got a laugh at the guys when we'd try to use an electric typewriter. Gunner or somebody would sit down, figure out how to turn the thing on, and try to type. Seven or eight keys would jump up all at once. The fellow would try to get the feel of the beast, but after pulling keys down and using half a bottle of white-out he'd usually give up in disgust and return to his old reliable Royal.

Martha was justifiably proud she could type virtually mistake free. One day I was having a technical problem and I went over to her to have her explain it to me. I messed up her typing paper by hitting the wrong key on the correction paper and she got a little exasperated.

"Why don't you go on," she said, "and let me fix it!"

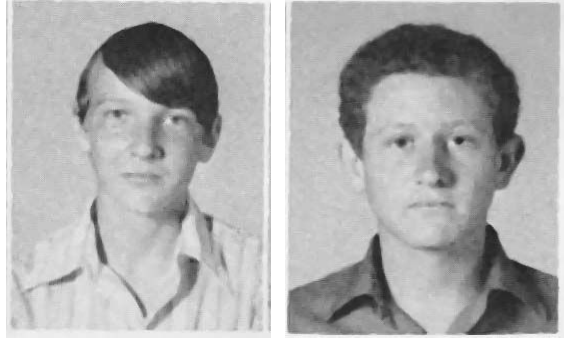
I shrugged and went. I think having a male, any male, that close bothered her just a little bit. We were teenagers, see. Martha kept to her female friends for her own reasons. Me, I had a very controlled crush on her. I knew she was totally unreachable. I didn't push it, and I never let her know I had a crush on her. I also kept it to myself. Had my boorish classmates ever found out, it would have been horrible for us both.

Short skirts were in fashion in the 70s. Martha had a fine figure, and like most girls, knew it. She dressed nice. She also had, without a doubt, possibly the best legs in all the school district. She liked to show them off a little in the most feminine and slightly provocative way. I'm not sure if she knew that this was driving some of us crazy but it was one way to make us pay for bugging her.

Martha was a true enigma. If anyone lusted after her they basically kept it quiet. We all had the raging hots for Vicki, Elaine, Julia, Sheron, Shirley, and just about every girl in sight. Yet for Martha no one talked about wanting to make out with her. When she was discussed it was "She is a sweet girl."

Then that mule would bray and we'd pick on her mercilessly.

Rickey McCallum and Larry Briggs



Rickey McCallum was sort of like our first original hippie. I called him 'Mad Man McCallum'. He was cool to a 'T' and treated everybody well. Very good natured, he just enjoyed life. In Junior High he went out for football yet found it lacking. He was athletic and I discovered two things about him; He loved basketball, and he had a high pain threshold.

McCallum thought Pistol Pete Maravich was the greatest man to ever play basketball, and wanted to be like him. The only problem was McCallum didn't like to play on the teams. This kid was at least as good as Phillip and he could handle the ball better. He was right handed and I discovered I could box him in a corner, but he had excellent peripheral vision and would pass it away. He could hit from all over the floor when he shot.

His only problem was with his free-spiritedness. He had an original Beatle haircut. I didn't think anything of it, to me it was just McCallum's style. It caused a lot of trouble with the powers that be.

McCallum's best buddy and shadow was Larry Briggs. Briggs talked as fast as I do, was strong, and 6 feet tall. He had a head of tight black curls. We always found Briggs and McCallum together, playing Woodyball or something. Briggs was okay, but he was not afraid of anybody, anything, or anyplace. That made him scary. If somebody crossed him he'd fight him on the spot. McCallum's good natured ways kept Larry under control.

One memorable day Briggs and I had a disagreement. Briggs and I got into it and I planted a left uppercut on his face. He went "Oh!" as his head recoiled from the blow.

He retaliated ten fold, raining hits on my back and shoulders as I protected my face and head. Then he stalked away, and I was grateful to be unmarked. He forgot all about it later, and we were still friends. I have no remembrance of what we were arguing about.

Briggs had a beautiful sister who looked like Adrienne Barbeau. He knew I lusted for her and kidded me good naturedly about what horrible things he'd do to me over her. Her name was Mary, and she was very cute. He didn't mind if I messed around with his sister, but if she didn't like it then I'd really have to deal with a stout, slightly crazy individual. I really liked Mary, but she was at best just distantly friendly.

McCallum came up with a game he called "Joust". We had blocking dummies we used for shields out on the field. In "Joust" we used these things to beat the crap out of each other. It hurt and burned like the dickens, but McCallum seemed to enjoy it. It was never real popular, and didn't last long.

McCallum played sock tag like an expert and the bigger fellows looked at him as an equal in the game.

He could be unintentionally mean sometimes. One day he and Briggs grabbed me in the Jr. High section of the gym and launched me off the storage area to the mats below. I landed square on my back and it stunned me. I think it would have killed someone else, but I was light enough and my back was strong enough all I got from it was the breath knocked out of me. They had threw me about 10 feet and I dropped about 7. I inadvertently got revenge later.

I wore a pair of Vietnam jungle boots to the school and played dog-pile in the things. McCallum got up and looked at me through the stars dancing in front of his eyes and asked me to "take them things off." These canvas top boots had a hard nylon sole and a metal plate inside to make them puncture resistant. I don't recall kicking him in the head, but I guess I did. Why else was he seeing stars? I removed the boots and the manly sport of dog-pile continued.

Briggs was a little unsanitary. He'd spit breath mints at people after he had chewed the things up. He'd laugh at our protestations and efforts to escape. He wasn't being mean, it was just his version of 'spit wads' and it was just as nasty.

Nobody ever got mad at him about that other than calling him the nasty hound dog he was.

As loony as they were, as physical as they got, and painful and nutty as it was, my clique genuinely liked both of these loons.

Onward

Some of our best athletes didn't play basketball. I thought this really odd. Jerry McGee, Troy Haynes, Frankie Payne, Eddie Bell, Johnny Hooten, Larry Little, and a host of others found basketball lacked a certain feeling of impact and tests of strength that they enjoyed. I guess I was in pretty good company, because I didn't play basketball that year either. Herman and Rabbit didn't play basketball so I had more people to talk to in study hall, especially the very energetic Rabbit. It took the edge off of being left out of sports and my grades actually begin to improve.

It is testimony to the coaching ability of Jack Brookins that he could coach a nearly crazy bunch of country boys from south of the Sabine into a winning championship-class team. It is also amazing that he could smoothly switch gears and take his powers into girl's basketball. Using the same methodical system he used in football of building and polishing, Mr. Brookins began to tune his girls team with the same eye toward winning. By his own testimony he had no stars, no really outstanding players. He did have some ladies that deserved special attention.

Jackie Smith was a tall, elfin looking lady who was a good outside shooter.

Cindy Hukill was a ball control type of person who had good top of the key shots.

Marylin Fry was a spectacular player who could have played on any boys team. She could dribble in circles around anyone and run them into the floor. She was a ball of energy and never gave up.

Mary Helen Johnson was also a good player, and with Ruby Williams, Fonda Payne, Kathy Graham, and others it was a good team. It had a lot of depth and ability. It would serve notice.

In spite of some of the best athletes not going into basketball there were still enough people on the boy's team to field two complete squads, a varsity and junior varsity squad. They would play together sometimes, and as two completely different squads at others. The first Varsity game was Friday 4 Dec 1970 at the Quinlan Tournament. It was against a team called the Wylie Pirates.

This was a strange name for a team, but not as odd as, say, Buffaloes. A Pirate brings to mind swash-buckling, sailing ships, treasure, adventure, all the Saturday Matinee stuff. A Buffalo is just a big, dumb, animal that will run right over anything in its path, no matter what. No obstacle is too big, so to speak.

Lone Oak boys beat Wylie, 68 to 47. Big, tall, Jerry Fry was the top scorer. The next game was against tournament host Quinlan. Some of the players looked upon this as revenge for the homecoming loss. They were itching to get at the Panthers.



Jerry Fry shoots

Back at school I discovered that basketball was a legal way to skip class. If there was a day game, like at a tournament, team members would leave us unfortunates in study hall. We were in class one day and all of a sudden Rickey, Robert Vice, Danny Bowman, Julia Mahand, and Shirley Funk got up and left.

"Where are they going?" I asked Rabbit.

He casually looked over and said "Basketball game," and went back to his work.

Oh, man! Next year I was definitely getting on the team! I think the teachers enjoyed this respite from constant instruction. It was certainly a break from the tedium. I sat there and cursed my luck. I wasn't going to sit here like this next year!

Basketball season is as different from football season as the games are from each other. It had a different rhythm to it. It felt odd and it was quite hard to get wound up for a game. I can understand why some football players don't like it. Football is linear, basketball is circular. More often than not in basketball we had only a vague idea who were playing.

Some guys had mimeographed schedules they kept in their billfolds. Playing about 25 or so games a season led to a lot of guesswork about the current status of our opponents.

At the tournament Quinlan had put up a fight but in the end they went down 65 to 55. Quinlan had been eliminated from their own tournament. The team had gotten revenge for our botched homecoming game in football. The revenge wasn't complete. It would be football season before we could attempt to remove this blot to our honor completely. We all looked forward to it. For the Seniors like Rudy Douglas and Jerry Fry this would be the best they could settle for. This was their parting shot.

Basketball practice was not all peace and harmony. In my class were several outstanding athletes. There was Eddie, Danny, Phillip, Robert Vice, and Rickey, to name but a few. Because these guys were Freshmen it was expected by some Seniors that the Seniors were just naturally superior. Not so. Just because they were older, upperclassmen, and marginally more mature didn't make them better athletes. Some guys told me they had problems with individuality over teamwork. This led to ball-hogging and elitism on the court. Some Seniors might not pass to a Freshman no matter how open the guy was. That was a shame. The entire squad was a fantastic group of ball players. They just defeated themselves with their attitudes and individualism.

One incident was related to me by Phillip. Phillip was in practice against the starting 5. Rudy Douglas went in for a lay-up and Phillip blocked his shot. Phillip then took it all the way down the court and laid it up for two. This affront really ticked Rudy off. No Freshman had any right to do that, Rudy thought.

Coach Taylor had them do the play over. Douglas got the ball and faked a pass. He bounced the ball off Phillip's nose. Phillip thought his nose had been smeared all over his face. He proceeded to advance on Douglas with malice intent. Douglas stood his 200 plus pounds tall, and Phillip came at him with his less than 160. It could have gotten very ugly, especially for Phillip.

Funny thing about Phillip; he manages to get slugged from time to time. What ever it is, he seems to keep doing it, and keeps getting hit in the head.

Coach Taylor got between the two and told them to go sit down and cool off. Coach Taylor made Rudy sit out the practice for that stunt.

Things like this doomed them to failure in many situations where they should have been victorious. Placing personal ambition and pride over the team is not only wrong headed it is stupid. Had these men all worked together it is my belief that a state trophy might be in the trophy case today. They all looked that good. They had talent to spare.

Girls Round Ball

I think girls look nice in basketball uniforms. I like the jersey that looks like a shirt the best. It gives the entire squad a sort of pajama-party look, where as the guys looked like they were wearing color underwear with numbers on them.

Heavy make-up and elaborate hair styles are shunned by the athletic females in favor of simpler styles. This can give them a quite remarkable wholesome look, and it is a lot less intimidating to fellows like me who were intimidated like crazy by girls of all types.

Two girls in my class played basketball; Julia and Shirley. A lot of our inscrutable females didn't go for the rough and tumble of stomping up and down a maplewood floor in front of about a hundred people. Others didn't have the coordination or physical powers to do it. In the entire high school we had a large amount of young ladies into the program. To them I pay as much honor and respect as to anyone who wore the colors on the football field. They earned it.

Basketball may not be classified as a contact sport, but I have seen girls slammed into rebound mats or bare walls, skidding on the maple on unprotected knees or elbows, and knocked silly by a misplaced arm. It is rough out there.

Mostly the ladies treat each other with respect. I never saw a fight break out in a girls basketball game. Standing at mid-court waiting for the ball gives half the team time to cool off, both

physically and mentally. I have seen girls from different teams having a pleasant chat while waiting for the ball. At least I think they were. They were smiling while they were talking.

The girls represented our school while they were out there. While I was stuffing myself with candybars and colas I would sometimes watch the game. I understood what was going on even less here than I did in a boys game. I would cheer when our guys would cheer and boo when our guys would boo. In this fashion I began to get a grasp of the rules of basketball.

Football is loud, but with my helmet on it filtered much of the crowd noise out. My entire sphere of attention is focused on the opposition and the particular play called at that moment. It is as if the others did not exist. Basketball is louder. It is indoors. The gym holds the sound like an echo chamber and magnifies it.

Some girls get creative in this noisy atmosphere and devise a stomping clapping cheer that rattles the entire gym. It would be something like this:

`Ba-bam! Clap! Ba-bam! Clap!

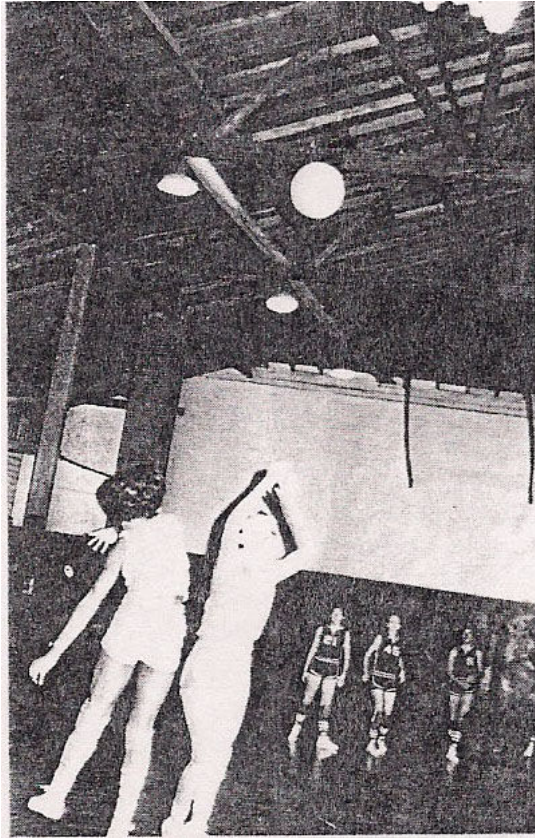
Ba-bam, ba-bam!

Clap-clap!

I think the girls at Boles Home came up with this and it spread all over the district. Nobody does it today. Concrete bleachers doesn't allow the drumming sound so necessary for such a sound to be right. We had pier and beam floors and wooden bleachers back in the 70s. It echoed nicely.

For the guys all we could come up with was to put a paper cup on the floor and stomp it as hard as we could. Done right it would make a loud BANG! heard all over the gym. Sometimes all we got was a crunching sound as the cup collapsed. Oh, well, we tried. In any event a player knew the crowd was there.

Watching these ladies out there playing basketball left me with the impression that females were not all that much weaker or slower than men are. Also, my inscrutable female classmates let it be known on no uncertain terms that they were intellectually superior to us.



"Her voice was ever soft,
gentle and low - an excellent thing
in a woman."

King Lear, Shakespeare

Julia



Julia Merle Mahand was, to me, what I consider a near perfect female athlete. She played everything but football and if they had allowed it back then I think she would have. I looked upon her as a little tom-boyish, but not unattractive. She wasn't as inscrutable as the others and her athletic ability made her outside the clique of the more well-to-do ladies. I would say she was in a class all by herself. Unique, beautiful, intelligent, strong in will and body, she liked everybody except the boors who lusted for her.

I could easily talk to her, and I did so quite a bit. She held me up to be some kind of "boy genius" because I knew a lot about the space program, could draw, and creatively write. She kept our conversations impersonal and technical. I didn't know beans about automobiles but I could talk it up about rockets, the space program, airplanes, and the military. She held me in high respect and I thought she was really really cool in return. I think she had some self doubts, but what teen-ager doesn't? For the most part she had her act together, big time.

It's not ladylike to sneeze loudly. Julia made an art form out of stifling a sneeze. I was once sitting in front of her in history class happily scribbling. I heard an odd >gasp-ekk< behind me. I turned and looked at Julia. Her eyes were watery but it was obvious she wasn't crying. She stifled another sneeze while I looked at her.

"Why don't you just let go and clear all that out?" I kidded her.

She waved me off, shaking her head. I looked at her, shook my head at her idiosyncrasies, and went back to my scribbling.

People didn't usually pick on Julia. At least not like we would pick on Martha. One day David Dillon and David Morgan got a big ole rubber tarantula and brought it to school. It had a squeeze bulb attached to an air hose that made the thing move. They would squeeze the bulb and the thing would jump or crawl a little. We dubbed it 'Boris'. The guys had some fun with it then removed the hose from the spider. Getting evil ideas they put Boris the Spider into Julia's Bookkeeping Book.

Julia glided in from where ever it was she went to and sat down. She sat up her notebook and opened her bookkeeping book. Out fell Boris.

Julia's long golden tresses virtually stood on end. The rubber monster fell into her lap and she proceeded to extract herself from her chair in the most economically rapid fashion possible for a girl wearing a dress.

Neatly clearing the seat back she landed smoothly on her feet. All this without using her hands. They were tightly clasped to her mouth. In less than 1 second she had opened her book and was then standing on rubbery legs staring in horror at Boris. In less than two seconds she had fled the room.

Giggling like gremlins Gunner and David Dillon retrieved Boris. I wasn't sure at the time what had just happened. I was working on a comic strip and saw Julia fly out of her desk. When I saw the rubber spider I guessed the guys had threw it on her. I shrugged it off and went back to what I was doing.

It wasn't over. Julia had managed to get back her composure. She was really stark raving terrified of spiders, but she had found enough character to recover from the nasty fright she had experienced. Later on for the next class she went to her locker and opened it. Out fell Boris. Julia did a rapid flailing dance to get the thing off her. She was all arms and hair for a few seconds. The spider fell to the floor and Julia took off at a dead run up the hall.

I stood there for a moment slightly amused by the really out of character behavior I had just witnessed. We then went to class and Julia was notable by her absence. Some of us guys poked fun at the way she had exploded in the hall. The teacher for this particular class hadn't shown up yet so I got curious and left the room. I saw Julia on the arm of Coach Brookins, tears running down her cheeks. She was seriously upset over the incident, just short of a nervous breakdown. She didn't need to see anybody right now.

"Julia, are you okay?"

"Go on to class, Charles," Mr. Brookins commanded.

One did not deny his gentle commands. I went back. My sense of chivalry told me to help Julia but my obedience to the Coach over-rode my personal feelings. I went back to class confused by what I had seen. I felt a little angry.

"Julia is all tore up, man," I told Gunner and David Dillon, "You guys shouldn't have done that. Once was funny, twice was too much."

"Aw," Gunner drawled, "They weren't no harm done."

"Yeah, shut up, Buzzard," David Dillon added.

Outgunned, I sat there torn between the really funny spectacle of Julia coming apart and the absolute ugliness of what we had allowed to happen to a really sweet lady. Just about everybody, including a couple of girls, had seen the spider in Julia's book. I guess we were all at fault. Had she just hopped and hollered it would have been only funny. This really got to her. That made it not so funny. Normally I enjoy practical jokes just as much as anybody. This had gone a step too far.

Julia went home and the teachers went head hunting. This caused another predicament. You didn't 'fink', or tell on, classmates. If they got caught it was their own tails. Interclass loyalty prevented anybody from telling on anyone else unless it involved your own self. Mr. Chambliss stomped up to our class room door and gruffly demanded who had put the rubber arachnid in Julia's locker. He was met by silence and blank stares. If David Dillon and Gunner were going to confess now was the time. They sat silent. Mr. Chambliss stalked off, very angry.

After class David Dillon and Gunner fled to the boy's room with Boris. Boris was buried at sea and flushed away. No evidence, no paddling. They weren't about to confess. They had gotten away with it.

Julia returned the next day seemingly unchanged by her adventure the day before.

Julia would date other guys in the class. I was told if one asked her out she was good enough of a lady to go out with the guy. I had no car and no money so I never got to date her. That was too bad. She was a wonderful girl. She must've had a lot of self confidence to go out with any one of that bunch of groping lechers I knew. Only one other girl dated in class and that was because she was just lonely. She didn't have the respect Julia had either.

At the time Julia didn't know the high regard and esteem she was held in by most of us boys. She would find out in a BIG way our Senior year.

Celeste Tournament

Winning the Quinlan Tournament was a satisfying victory. The girls also did very well, beating Campbell 33 to 22. The Lone Oak girls had a powerful 17 to 6 lead at half-time. The girls finished third overall.

Later in the week the entire hall was abuzz and copies of the Greenville paper were much in evidence. Rudy Douglas got offensive player of the year for football in District 12 B. He was one spectacular pass thrower. Larry Byrd got defensive player of the year. He was possibly the most respected man on the team. All District players were also named. We had 3 on offense; Douglas, Byrd, and Steve Henderson. Leonard also had 4 on this list, Anna had 2, Celeste, Bells, and Caddo Mills had 1 each. On Defense we had 3; O.T. Williams, Byrd again, and Dennis Scott. No one else had as many on Defense as we did.

This was a tremendous honor, not only for the football players named but for the school as a whole. It wasn't bad for a tiny school in a small town that had just this year switched to 11 man football. There were handshakes and back slapping all around.

Troy was especially happy for Larry Byrd, because he was Troy's mentor. Troy hoped to pull down All District honors for himself someday.

That having been done we turned our attention back to the current season in progress, basketball. Celeste put together a tournament and Lone Oak was one of 16 teams invited, both boys and girls. Our B-team was also there. At 11:40 they loaded on the bus and went there. They had a 'B' game against Bland.

It was a disaster. Coach Taylor watched as Bland proceeded to work over his team. Danny was hot, sinking 21 points. It didn't work out in the end. Bland defeated the 'B' team 53 to 37. It was on to Consolation for them.

There was more bad news. Honey Grove was taking on our varsity boys and had a 10 point lead in the third quarter, having built up a half-time lead of 26 to 17. Coach Taylor went to work and his men put in 16 points in the 4th quarter alone. I was for naught, and Honey Grove managed to remain victorious 45 to a very close 41, only two buckets away.

The girls team fell to Leonard.

Three up, three down. The bus ride back was quiet.

On the next day they went back to Celeste, leaving us non-players at school to our own simple and often crude entertainments. I was curious about one thing, what would have happened if the B-team wins? Would they have to take on the Varsity? It would be an unusual consolation game. What an event it could be! Lone Oak vs. Lone Oak! This was discussed among us, and the possibilities we thought were amazing!

In consolation the Varsity had to take on Campbell. Our B-team had a battle with Leonard. If both teams won and advanced in the brackets they would have the encounter for consolation.

The girls fought for their consolation standing against Campbell. The Lady Buffaloes proceeded to take the Campbell Indians to the cleaners, giving them a first half thrashing of 21 to 8. Cindy Hukill was the high scorer for the Big Red Machine. Coach Brookins expressed his satisfaction with his teams performance, and cheered them on for more.

Campbell came out smoking in the second half, burning up the nets with 16 points, double what they made in the first half. It didn't do them any good, as the final score was 48 to 37.

The Lone Oak girls had done an excellent job, and Cindy had 20 points.

Bland boys won the tournament by mopping the maple with Wolfe City, 50 to 33. Lone Oak did one better by crushing Leonard 61 to 25. It had been 38 to 7 at the half.

Our girls took on Farmersville and gave them a royal shellacking. It was 19 to 6 in the first quarter, and it was 31 to 12 at half time. By the end of the game it was 45 to 39. Coach Brookins ladies had shown they were a good team, and would only get better.

In the final awards, given out on the last day of the tournament, Gerald Fry was awarded All Tournament team. He had made 26 points in the destruction of Leonard. Honey Grove got the Sportsmanship Trophy. Cindy Hukill got the All Tournament girls team award. Overall it hadn't been a bad tournament.

The Lone Oak intersquad consolation championship is lost to history. No record remains of what did happen, and no one seems to remember just what did go on, if it did happen.

We broke for Christmas Vacation and spent several days getting fat and playing with new toys. When we returned District play would begin.

District Play

Campbell had a truly neat gym. We called it "the Pit". It was ten feet down in the ground, giving the bleacher creatures a unique perspective on the play. The benches were invisible from the visitors side of the pit. To see the bench a guy had to stand up, look through the chicken wire that kept people from falling into the pit, lean as far forward as the rail and wire would allow, and glance straight down 10 feet.

It was the end of December 1970. Outside it was a cold night, but inside the crowded gym it was pleasant enough. The boys team sat in the bleachers to watch the girls play and wait their time on the floor. There were goodies to eat at the snack bar, good comrades to chat with, and the spectacle of basement basketball to watch. It was most enjoyable evening.

The Lone Oak girls led at half-time by only 5, 21 to 16. This didn't rattle Coach Brookins or his ladies. He made adjustments, just as he did in football. The ladies came out on the floor in the third quarter with blood in their eye.

Campbell girls were over run by a 50 to 30 final score. Jackie Smith had almost half of the points for our side with 24. It was a very impressive second half.



The boys Varsity came on and did their warm up. This was another fun one for Lone Oak, because at the final buzzer the Campbell Indians were down 64 to 41. Lone Oak had won this one handily, and Taylor's Terrors were here to stay.

Basketball is an odd game. One day we can smear a team all over the maple and the next day they can come back and give us a drubbing. If we have a good team and we let a loss get to us, then we get to sit out the district basketball tournament by preparing for track and field. Some people have really lousy teams. Some people have good teams but lousy attitudes. It can get a person down if they let it. It is mostly a question of wanting to. Some people can give everything they have and still lose. These folks know they did their best and they can go home with their head high and honor in tact. No matter what the score board said they won. It really is how you play the game that counts.

Lone Oak went to Celeste next to continue district play. Celeste had this huge 20 foot tall blue silhouette of a Blue Devil, complete with pitchfork, on the end of the gym. Next to it in equally dark blue lettering was "Celeste Blue Devils Welcomes You." It was the most impressive gym ornamentation I have ever seen. Such flourishes were rare in class 'B' schools.

Our girls lost here by 3 stinking points, but by way of revenge the Varsity took out the Celeste boys team 56 to 35.

Elsewhere a young lady from Boles Home was getting the attention of the entire district. She was popping in an average of 36 points per game. This was an impressive tally in anyone's game. Her name was Vicki Pryor and she wore #14. She was one of the best lady players to ever wear the green and white of the Hornets. She was 6'1" tall. If the Hornets had a more well rounded team they possibly would have been a major power. Lone Oak went to Boles Home to see just how this tall woman and her team mates would do against our lady Buffaloes.

The girls were soon playing and Lone Oak got their first close up look at Miss Pryor. Mr. Brookins knew this scoring machine had to be shut down so he arranged his defense to do just that. It worked, and in the first quarter the score was 24 to 6, our favor. Boles ladies came back strong, pulling up 37 to 20 at half-time. It was still Lone Oak's lead.

The boys went into the lockerrooms to put on their uniforms late in the third quarter. When they came out to see what was happening Lone Oak was still ahead. Curious, they watched the game end with Lone Oak winning 63 to 55.

Happy with the victory the boys came out and did the warm-up. Bole's benches weren't long enough for the entire team so several of our guys sat on the cold floor, usually on a towel or

something. The varnish on the floor made skin stick to it. The guys sitting on the floor fidgeted a lot.

Boles put up an enthusiastic battle, but they couldn't keep up with the Big Red Machine. By half it was 35-20, our favor. Rudy Douglas was already in double figures.

Rolling along in the second half Lone Oak ended it 79 to 49.

Douglas had put in 23 points himself. The trip back to Lone Oak was festive.

Bland and Others

I had no idea where Bland School District was. I couldn't find it on a map because I didn't know where to start looking. Bland is the name of the school, not the town. The town it was in and around is called Merit. The school is divided up between two major buildings miles apart. It was north west of Lone Oak. This game was to be at Lone Oak, however, so I wouldn't be lost.

We didn't have rebound mats on the walls in our gym. The school bought some mats but these wound up being used for wrestling and dog-pile. They couldn't figure out how to hang the things up. If hooks were used they might hurt somebody, snap off, or pull out of the walls. At the north end of the gym we had a 10 foot zone from the out of bounds to the wall. At the south end it was about 5 feet. The hard wood walls were painted and rough as sandpaper. If somebody ran into them hard enough it would make the person look red spotted in addition to black and blue. Sliding on the walls could give road rash. I loved this gym!

Lone Oak's big wooden gym was built to hold between 600 to almost 1000 people. In pep-rallies we could put the entire student body in here of some 300 kids and had lots of room to spare. I never saw that big monster filled to capacity. It was probably the biggest gym in the entire district. Rather than go and sit by themselves visitors usually sat on our side of the bleachers because there just wasn't anybody over there. It must have felt mighty lonely sitting with 20 or so people facing most of the sports enthusiast of Lone Oak.

B-team boys were going to play tonight, along with the usual girl's team and our Land of the Giants Varsity squad. When the B-team game started Danny had a good night. Robert Vice, Phillip, Rickey Graham, and others worked Bland's B-team over. Coach Taylor saw by the third quarter that he had put Bland's B-team away. He started putting in the subs in the fourth quarter. The final score was Lone Oak 50, Bland 34. Danny Bowman had 15 points.

When the girls came on the floor more town's folk came in. The B-games were never a big draw. The girls game was a crowd pleasing melee between two evenly matched teams. Jackie Smith had her moment of glory when she made two free throws in the last seconds of the game to win it for Lone Oak 39 to 37. It had been just 15 seconds from going into overtime.

Now it was boy's Varsity's turn. The game started with the usual tip-off at mid-court. It went rapidly up and down the floor. Coach Taylor tried to slow it down before his troops blew themselves out. There was a lot of fouling, most of it was by Lone Oak. It didn't look good.

By half-time the score was 22 to 12 in Bland's favor. They were outscoring us by almost 2 to 1! If the Varsity lost tonight it would be the only home team to do so, ruining the sweep.

Fortunes looked up in the third quarter. Mr. Taylor had gotten his troops to close it to within 3, 44 to 47. Bland was hitting at the free throw line, really putting them away.

Mr. Taylor and the hometown crowd watched on as Varsity fell, 64 to 57. Freethrows and fouling had done it. It was so sad to lose it like that.

While this tremendous contest was going on I was at home, experimenting with a cassette tape recorder I got as my Christmas Present. It was not exactly roaring excitement, but it was a gadget and had my full attention.

The next game was at Campbell. It was back to the Pit. The girls played first.

It was a low scoring game. In the third quarter it was 29 to 18, Lone Oak. Campbell got up for it and tried to catch Lone Oak. They valiantly got to within one point then blew themselves out. The Lone Oak girls won it 37 to 33 with Jackie making 24 of the points. Jackie Smith could really play that basketball.

The guys came on in their time and played hard. The game rolled on and by half-time it was 23 to 16, Lone Oak's favor. After half-time Campbell came right back, tying the game up. Varsity was in serious trouble. As the clock ticked down they expected overtime. Then a Campbell player was fouled.

The gym erupted in partisan cheering as the people from Lone Oak tried to distract the Campbell player from making his two charity shots.

Swish, he it one.

Dispair caught Lone Oak. There were only 4 seconds left.

Swish, he hit the second one, driving the final nail in the coffin.

Our buzzer beater was nowhere near the basket and Campbell had scored a victory over the Big Red Machine. That was two losses in a row for Varsity. Coach Taylor was disappointed but not upset. It had been a good game in spite of the way it ended.

I didn't go to any of the games because my parents simply couldn't find the time to take me to these little events. If I could have gone perhaps I would have taken my tape recorder to the games. The additional problem was I would have to keep an eye on it. That would take away from the enjoyment of the game. I'd probably get nothing but crowd noise, whistles, and the sound of a basketball thudding along the floor. I wish I had.

A lot of things we did back in 1970 were unique to that time line. Nets were cotton. There were no 3 point shots. Backboards were wooden rectangles. Girls played a sort of half court 3 on 3 game. Most gyms were made of wood by the W.P. A. in the 1930s. Jumpballs or tieballs were tossed up at the nearest jump circle. Dunking, if anyone had the reach to do it, was illegal, even in warm-ups. Uniforms were made of cotton and nylon with the numbers sewn on. All the players wore sneakers, usually high-tops. Gyms were cold and drafty barn-like structures. Locker rooms looked like a converted storage area, with all manner of junk in there. These locker rooms were usually badly lit and had a musty smell. We took all this for granted. Some of these locker rooms were cold, and a player putting on their uniform sometimes got a surprise when they sat down on a cold chair.

At Lone Oak the girl's locker room was all the way on the other side of the gym, in an odd converted building that used to be the concession stand in 8 man football days. I guess we got it the same time we got the 8th grade class room. It was a simple building. There was a room on one side, and a similar set up on the other. In the center was 2 restrooms. The building was connected to the gym by a sort of tunnel built on it. The girls dressed in the junior high locker room before this building was put on the side of the gym.

Once between games we went in the girls locker room to repair a door that was sprung. I was amazed at the mess in there. There were old clothes heaped here and there, sneakers, some cast-off uniforms pieces, and odds and ends. We looked the firetrap over with curiosity but once Mr. Trimble showed up we got to the business at hand of repairing the door. I think what blew me away the most about my little adventure in the girls locker room was how untidy the place was. I had always assumed that girls were naturally neater and cleaner than us males. This was a small surprise.

Now Celeste came to Lone Oak to play, and once more I stayed home and watched T.V.

The Buffalo ladies worked Celeste over. It was battle. At the first quarter it was an odd score of 9 to 1, our favor. Coach Brookins saw that both teams defenses were good, choking off most scoring runs. As the game was divided at half court fast breaks were almost impossible. by the half it was 14 to 9, our lead.

The third quarter was just as slow as the other two, but when the fourth quarter started Mr. Brookin's Lady Buffaloes lowered the boom. For those who kept count the Lady Buffaloes hit 100% of everything they shot in the 4th quarter! That blew Celeste off the floor. Prior to this the fourth quarter performances had been weak. At the final buzzer it was Lone Oak 41, Celeste 20. It was a very impressive showing. Looking at the stat-book for the girls showed that Francis Johnson had a strong 23 points in the game. She was distantly followed by Jackie who had 10.

Celeste girls had a player named Debbie Abernathy who showed up repeatedly as high scorer in their games. This night she had only 12, but it was still over half of Celeste's points.

The Celeste boys fared no better. Randy Payne had put up 21 points, O.T. had 16. The Blue Devils went down to defeat, 67 to 37. This was a night of unquestioned victory, as both squads really began to come together as teams at Lone Oak.

District play continued on the 26 of January with a trip to Boles Home. Coach Brookins must have made some major changes on the girls team from earlier in the season. The team had really came together. The style of playing was different. Instead of fading in the fourth quarter the girls actually destroyed their opponents in the fourth.

They really battled Boles Home. At the half it was 31 to 21. Late in the third quarter the boys went in the locker room to change and then they watched the game while standing in the locker room doorway. The Lady Buffaloes won 47 to 37. Jackie was high scorer with 21 points. The Lady Buffaloes were dominating District 36-B quite handily. They were working as a solid team, and the fourth quarter fade was gone.

The Varsity team played a see-saw game with the Boles boys, with Boles keeping up by 1 point. When the fourth quarter came on the Lone Oak team outscored Boles by over 3 to 1, to get a victory. Nobody remembers the final score, and it is lost to history, but it was another one in the win column for both the boys and girls in the Big Red Machine.

Jerry Fry had popped in 12 points, followed by Rudy Douglas and Steve Henderson with 11 points each. For the girls in addition to Jackie being mentioned as high scorer Francis Johnson

had 19 and Cindy Hukill had 13. These were outstanding numbers. The drive for the district title was on.

So Caddo Mills entered our huge wooden cathedral-like gym to participate in the game of basketball. When Lone Oak was done with them they wondered what had happened.

First the girls blasted them off the floor, leading 29 to 20 at the half and ending it 56 to 31.

Confident and inspired by the girls win the boys team skinned the Foxes 43 to 26 at the half, ending it 78 to 57.

Randy Payne was superhot, getting 30 points. Steve Henderson put in 20 himself. The girls had 14 for Mary Helen Johnson, and Jackie had 13.

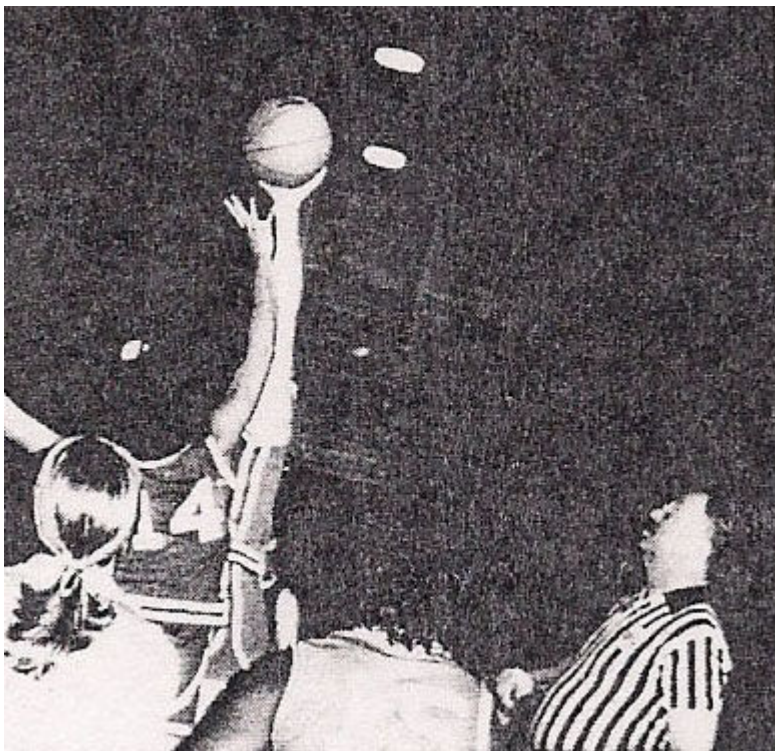
The nets on the goals were really hot that night. District play was almost over. The girls had sealed their invitation to the district tournament with a 7 and 1 record, tying them with Celeste. There was one last regular season game then on the next Tuesday they'd go to the 36-B playoff tournament.

Like most non-players, I was home watching T.V. unaware of the school sports history being made all around me. I stifled a big yawn and turned the page on my comic book. Then I turned the channel to see if any thing interesting was on the television.

Girls 36-B Playoffs

At Celeste our girls met Bland at 7p.m. Jackie got 21 points in the game and Bland went down to defeat in a decisive 47 to 23 point spread. A few days later Lone Oak girls took on their arch rival Celeste. This was a do or die game.

Debbie Abernathy for Celeste was a super deadly shot from the free throw line. Every shot she put up from there hit nothing but net. Eleven times she shot and 11 times she hit. Celeste led at the half 30 to our 23.



Mr. Brookins remained cool, and encouraged his team on. The Lone Oak girls closed to within 2 points in the third quarter. They couldn't quite take the lead and Celeste won this game. The final score was not given.

Fortunately for the Lone Oak girls the vagaries of the Round Robin style tournament did not eliminate our ladies from the tournament. It wasn't over for the Ladies Big Red Machine yet. The next game for them was at the Caddo Mills gym to meet Celeste again.

The Caddo gym is a most unusual gym. It has these massive wooden bleachers on one side. There is a drop from the edge of the bleachers to the floor of roughly 4 feet, protected by a rail. The floor springs out like a desert of wood and is bounded on 3 sides by sheer concrete and brick walls. It gave the whole place a gladiatorial arena feel to me. It is not the ugliest gym by far of any I have been in but it was definitely the starkest. The locker rooms are under the big, noisy, wooden bleachers.

Because this was a play-off game the gym was packed elbow to elbow. This was a grudge match, too. If Big Red went down this was it for the season.

Mr. Brookins used his girls size and height to get the ball under the basket for high percentage shots. Celeste had range and hit from the outside, but that was a low percentage shot. Coach Brookins had his guards refuse to allow the Blue Devils to get the ball inside the paint. Celeste did get ahead, but a tenacious defense and penetrating offense never let Celeste get more than one basket up.

In the second quarter a see-saw battle ensued, with Lone Oak getting into the lead. Jackie was tremendously accurate and she could get into the three second zone for the high percentage shots. Yet Coach Brookins had to think fast. He eyed the Celeste team and repeatedly came up with corrections or new ideas to daunt the opponents. This was a desperate contest. If he lost, if the girls were not victorious, the season would pretty much end here.

After the half Celeste came out with a powerful and accurate attack. They hoped to take the momentum away from Lone Oak in the third quarter. They did manage to take the lead by one point, 29 to 28. Lone Oak took the lead back, though, 30 to 29 on the next shot. The lady Buffaloes did not trail again.

When the final buzzer sounded on this game Coach Brookins applauded his girls team, as the entire bench erupted in celebration. The final score was 45 to 41. The Lady Buffaloes were still in the playoffs.

Now the situation was up in the air. Because of this hard fought win by the Lady Buffaloes another game against Celeste was due in just two days at the Caddo Mills gym again. This was to be the deciding game of the Girls District Championship.

Back at school, posters similar to those used to inspire the football team began to appear in the hallways. These were especially for the Lady Buffaloes, encouraging them to victory by, for instance, "Blasting the Blue Devils" and the like. Cheerleaders who weren't on the team got their uniforms out to go to the basketball games to cheer once more for Big Red. It was a feeling of fierce competition, not unlike football. Cheerleaders at basketball games were a bit rare in those days.

So it was, and so it went. Celeste came out and Lone Oak met them with a strong defense and inside shooting. Virtually a carbon copy of the last game, it was another fight to the finish. The Caddo Mills gym exploded in celebration as Lone Oak won it again 40 to 36, by only two baskets.

Mr. Brookins didn't jump up and down. He did not throw his clipboard in the air and wave his arms, yelling in victory. That was not his style. He stood there with his arms folded, a smile on his face, his team enjoying their victory. Then he shook hands with the Celeste coach and went to get on the bus and go back to Lone Oak.

How can a person have such self control? The team he coached had just won District in a series of close games that had a packed gym on its feet and screaming its head off. Bets had been placed on the games and money exchanged hands by the local gamblers. People had come from all over the area to pay their dollar to see a girl's championship basketball game. For some this was the biggest thing since the Superbowl last month.

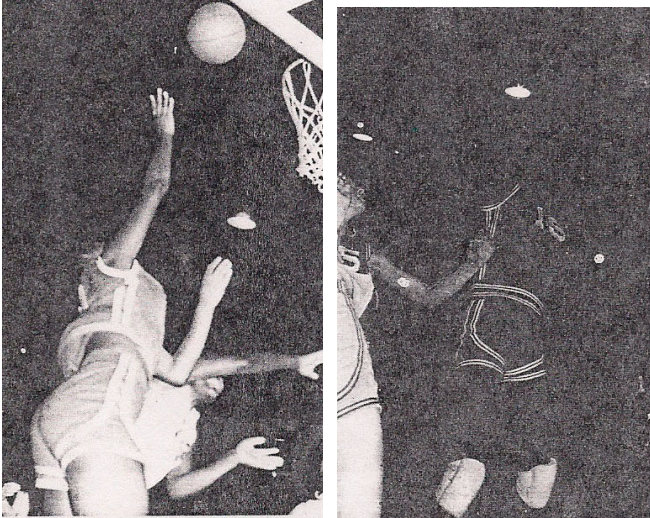
Amid all this stood Coach Jack Brookins. He was so calm and cool in the middle of this maelstrom. It was most incredible.

Boys District Tournament and Girls Playoffs

The girls went to Bi-District on 15 February, 1970, to a place called Priceton. It was to be against a team from Prosper. The gym was filled with a massive overflow crowd. The din of the crowd was louder than any heard before by the freshmen girls fortunate enough to be on this adventure. It was dazzling. The Cheerleaders were there. Everybody who could go to the game from Lone Oak was there. The town itself was quiet and still, except for the occasional barking dog and a diesel rig or two rolling by on Highway 69. This was big time serious sports.

Mr. Brookins and his Lady Buffaloes came out with a will to win. They rapidly scored 8 points to Prosper's 0, causing the Prosper coach to call a time out. This Buffalo attack was frightening and the Prosper coach had to rally the players.

What ever the coach did steadied the Prosper girls and they soon came back to tie it up, 10 to 10. Prosper was able to break inside the guards and hit from the paint. Like dueling fencers Prosper and Lone Oak exchanged leads, back and forth. It was a magnificent first half. The half ended with Prosper desperately clinging to a one basket 24 to 22 lead.



After the half-time changes by Coach Brookins, adjusting his defense and refining his offense, he let the girls go shoot at the baskets before the second half began. What was going through his mind? His ladies were evenly matched by the Prosper team. If there was a mistake or a drop in morale the Prosper team would take the hides off his Buffaloes. No one could tell by looking at him that he was worried about losing this game. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius would have been proud of his composure.

Now it was time for the second half tip-off. Prosper came out fighting, never surrendering the lead through the entire third quarter. The Lady Buffaloes stayed with them, never letting Prosper getting more than 1 goal ahead. Lone Oak wasn't rattled by this. Coach Brookins wouldn't let them give up. If they let up just a little it was all over.

The fourth quarter started badly for Lone Oak. Prosper jumped out to a 10 point lead in 3 minutes and 30 seconds, trying to put the small town Buffaloes away by blowing them off the floor. Then Brookins got a time out. He gathered his six starting ladies around him and told them simply and in no uncertain terms that if they didn't get back in this game it would be all over. There would be no second chance as there was at Celeste.

Jackie, Cindy, Marilyn, and all the others looked at Coach Brookins. What ever they saw in his eyes and heard in his calm voice gave them strength. When they came back out the defense, made of Ruby Williams, Francis Johnson, and Fonda Payne slammed the door on Prosper. Stunned by what should have been a defeated and demoralized team, Prosper's offense faltered. Lone Oak's offense caught fire, hitting from all over the floor. Cindy hit 15 foot shots from the key, Jackie from the corners, and Marilyn got loose inside the key.

The crowd went wild, roaring like some mythical beast. Men, women and children screamed themselves hoarse, jumping up and down and waving their arms. This is what it was all about. In the deafening confines of the gym Lone Oak came back. They took the lead. The girls could hardly hear Coach Brookins instructions, shouted through cupped hands. It was 52 to 51, and only half a minute left.

Prosper brought the ball down the floor with difficulty. Lone Oak was pressing hard, but trying not to foul. Two freeshots and Prosper would go on to Regional.

The ball passed midcourt. A young girl from Lone Oak, her name lost with the archives but known to those who were there, made a decision. If Prosper got a shot off and made it the future playoff hopes were dead. She surged forward, almost fouling the girl next to her and intercepted the Prosper pass! Wildly dribbling the ball toward mid-court, attacked on all sides by desperate Prosper players, she passed it over the line into Lone Oak territory. Prosper's hopes were dashed as the 3 offensive players put the ball into a time-eating stall. The crowd was bellowing with the fever of seeing such an amazing contest. The bleachers were rattling.

The final buzzer could not heard clearly but the three zeros showed on the time clock to one and all Lone Oak girls were now Bi-District champions of 1971! Incredibly the noise doubled in intensity. The girls on the bench screamed in delight at the victory, and leaped high in the air. The noise quickly subsided, and the ritual of sportsmanship began. Opposing players shook hands, and went on their way to the locker rooms. The bleachers began to empty.

Coach Brookins stood there, his arms folded, and took one last look at the clock. It was 52 to 51, and Lone Oak was on it's way to Regional.

A reporter from the Greenville paper interviewed the Coach. Mr. Brookins used his modest style of "no one girl is the star," and said "athletic programs develop leadership and character."

He was asked about the very impressive record of 11 and 2 his ladies had. He talked about how he had an offensive strategy of working the ball close in to get a better shot. Said he, "That way we not only have a closer target but also a better chance to get the rebound."

He called his defense a "half zone, half man to man." Its what the N.B.A. would call a near zone. Each individual was given an assigned person, but the individual may drift to the side where the ball is, possibly engaging in a double team. For 11 games this combination has worked.

He talked about how some other schools had no girls sports. "Girls competitive sports are on the increase, not only in basketball but also in volleyball, track, and other sports. The small schools are taking the lead," he explained. Mr. Brookins grew up where sports were only for males. He said he preferred the system at Lone Oak.

"I am lucky to be here," he said.

We were all very lucky to have known him.

In the boys District Tournament Lone Oak took out Boles Home at Campbell. Randy Payne had 19 points. It was a good start for the boys team. Boles had put up a fight. At the half it was 24 to 20, but the Lone Oak boys outscored them in the third quarter by 8 points. The final score was 62 to 52, Lone Oak's victory.



Checking the brackets on the tournament chart on the wall, told the team that Campbell was to be the next opponent. The boys victory over the Boles Home Hornets was rightfully overshadowed by the Lady Buffaloe's Thunder and Lightning. The girls were on their way to Regional. The girls were slated to play a team from Chicota.

On the next day Mr. Taylor took the boys back to Campbell again. The locker rooms in the Pit were getting mighty familiar. In both sides, whichever locker room they were given, there were spots that were considered personal space. Be it a locker, a corner, or a chair, that area 'belonged' to a certain individual for that night. Once dressed the gear was left in that spot and the team went out to play basketball. I never heard of anyone disturbing anything left behind.



Coach Taylor and team captains. Among them

#15, Lewis Smith, Jerry Fry, and Rudy Douglas.

Taylor's Terrors had trouble with the Campbell Indians at first. Both sides couldn't seem to find the net in the first quarter. The score was an anemic 8 to 8. Coach Taylor made some changes and it looked a lot better at half-time. The score by then was a very strong 30 to 19, Lone Oak's favor. Perhaps it was just tournament jitters, or something. Mr. Taylor continued his pep-talk and strategy session with his entire team at the bench while Campbell shot baskets at half-time.

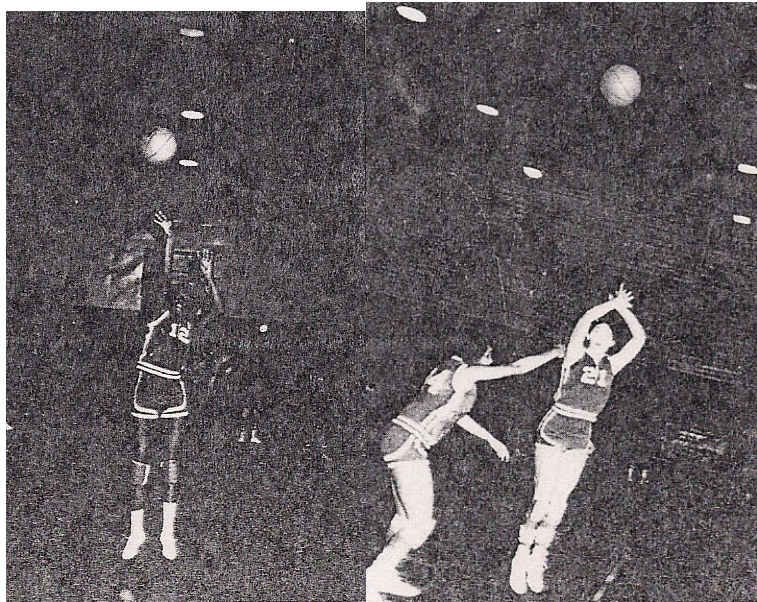
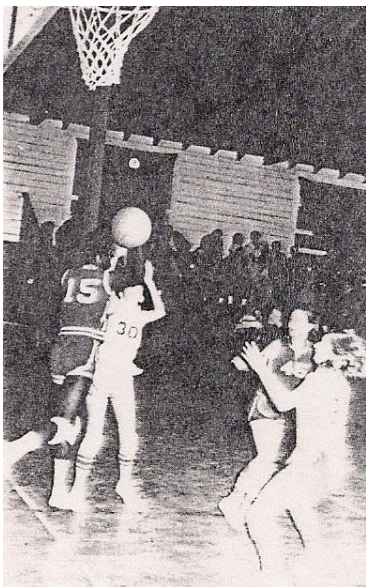
Mr. Taylor now had his team under control. They listened to him for a change and waited for good shots. The score rose as more shots hit home from better location than in the first half. Soon it was 46 to 33, Lone Oak's favor.

Taylor then clamped the defense down hard, choking off Campbell's scoring drives. It became a rout. As if struck by lightning, Campbell began to lose cohesion. Coach Taylor started sending in his 'B' Teamers, letting up on his foes. When the final buzzer sounded Lone Oak had handed Campbell it's head, 70 to 47.

Rudy Douglas had 28 points in that game, Steve Henderson had 18, Jerry Fry had 11 and Lewis Smith, who we called 'Butcher', had 11. Together they had 68 of our 70 points. I can only guess that Danny or Robert had the other two, but of course it could have been Phillip, Willie, or O.T, too. Even Rick or Gunner may have made it. The records are lost to history, so no one will ever know. That 2 points, like the interception by the girls at Princeton, belong to the entire team. Bland was to be the next opponent in the Pit.

Down at Kilgore, while the boys were at Campbell, the Regional Tournament was on. The Lone Oak Lady Buffaloes, Coached by Jack Brookins, met Chicota head on. A lot of Lone Oak people went there to see this contest, more so than were at Campbell.

The girls didn't start well. Perhaps being where they were got to them. Playoff jitters can really work on a team, especially if it gets into the mental process. The offense threw the ball away a lot and took lousy shots. Brookins admired how his defense held, though, and they kept Chicota's scoring low. By the half it was only 17 to 16, in favor of Chicota.



After the half the fencing began. One team would be up by one point, then the other. By the end of the third quarter it was 32 to 31. In the fourth quarter the Lone Oak offense let down a little and Chicota surged 5 points ahead, 36 to 31. Lone Oak battled back to 35 to 38, then 37 to 38,

catching up to Chicota. Desperate, Chicota tried a stall. Marilyn fouled to stop it with only seconds left. The first shot missed, Marilyn grabbed the rebound and flung it up the floor to Jackie. Just as Jackie started to move toward the basket the buzzer sounded. It was that close, 37 to 38. Once more it had been a hard fought game between the finest.

Broken hearted, the girls had really no reason to be so. Everybody who went to Kilgore was proud of them. This was a spectacular season for the Big Red Machine of the Lady Buffaloes. They had made history and gone far. Everyone on the team deserved special recognition for their efforts. Because the last game of this amazing season had ended with a loss it left them with an empty feeling. They had won 11 times, with only three losses. They had at least 3 trophies to show for this year alone. Their record was commendable.

They had come in third place in the Quinlan Tournament.

They were Celeste Tournament Consolation Champions.

They were District 36-B Champions,

They were Bi-District Champions.

They had gone to the Regional Tournament and lost by only one point.

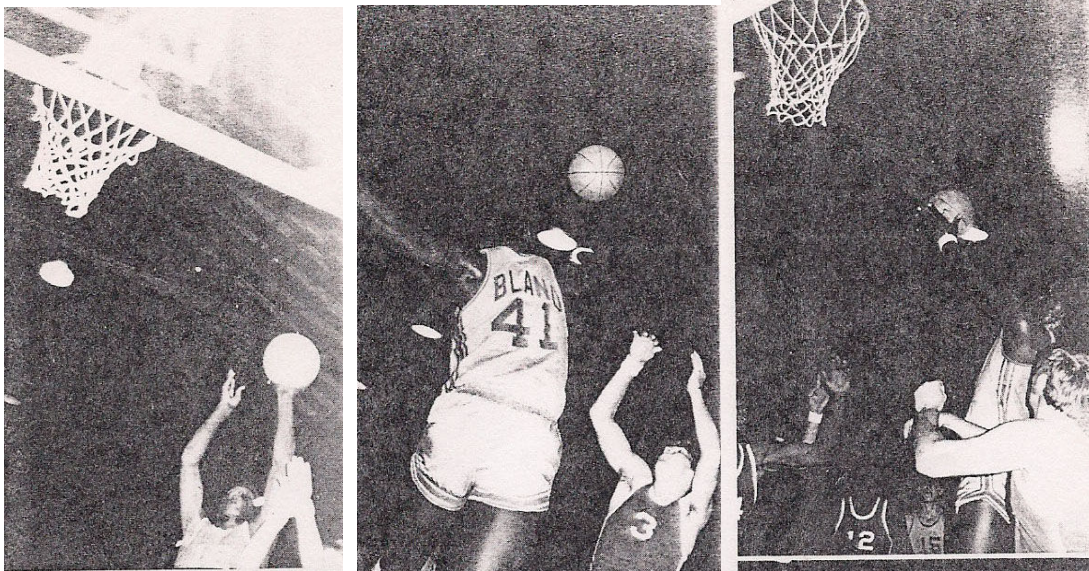
That is a record worthy of the champions they were. Justifiably they could be proud. The entire town was proud of them. Mr. Brookins was certainly proud of his ladies. Few had done what they had, and it would be a very long time before it would be done again.



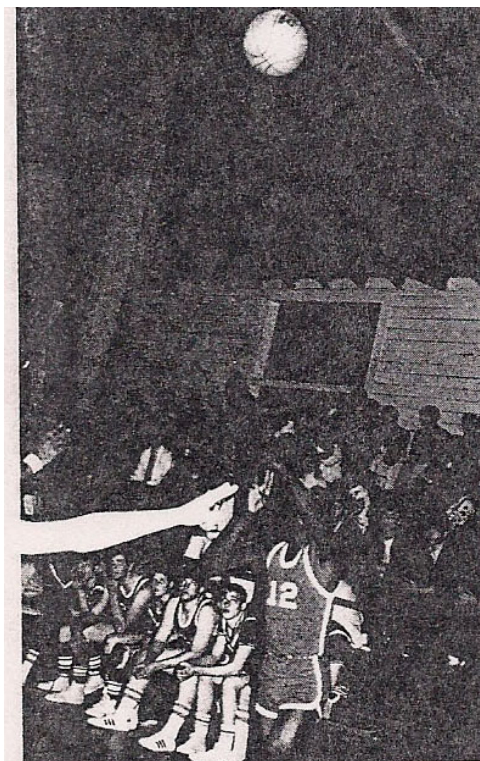
COACH JACK BROOKINS

The Lone Oak girls undoubtedly proved their skill on a basketball court this season. They edged out their long-time arch-rivals, the Bland Tigers, twice during district play and then moved on into stiffer competition. With one defeat by, and one victory over Celeste, the Buffaloes entered the district tournament. Lone Oak and Celeste were obviously the major contenders for the District Title and the long, hard-played championship game ended with L. O. lagging 53-42. This loss only served to strengthen their determination to break the tie and earn the right to a district play-off. Twice more the girls displayed an amazing amount of stamina and all-around team strength. Red took the 36-B title and moved on to take possession of the Bi-District. With shining trophies and a new name, the Lone Oak girls finished a highly successful season.

Once more the Lone Oak boys went back to Campbell, and the nefarious Pit. It wasn't a good night for them. Something had them spooked. Perhaps they were distracted by the girls loss. There were a lot more people in the Campbell gym too, making it very noisy. I can not be sure what the reason was, but the Big Red Machine was not playing up to it's ability. Taylor's Terrors had 'gone to tea'. At the half it was 36 to 26, Bland's favor. Mr. Taylor tried to rally his troops and inform them of the gravity of the situation. It seemed to work.



The third quarter began and the Buffaloes battled back. Soon they were within one point of the Tigers. It went like that all through the third quarter and most of the fourth. In the fourth quarter Lone Oak actually tied them, but fouls began to take their toll.



Wille Davis goes for 2

Bland hit 5 of 6 free shots, and that hurt Lone Oak badly. Bland built up a seven point lead, crushing the rally, and held it to the final buzzer. It was 60 to 53, Bland's victory.

Dejected, the team slouched into the locker room. Coach Taylor told a newspaper reporter that we had lost at the foul line. Free throw shooting was to become an obsession with him. The team had hit only 9 of 25 charity shots, and Bland got 16 of 27, almost twice our total.

Lone Oak boys finished second in District, same as last year.

It was very long bus ride back, and for all of Big Red, girls and boys, the 1970-71 basketball season was forever over.

This season may be gone but the Thunder was still there. It was on that bus. It waited it's chance. We didn't know it, and we couldn't hear it, but it was there.

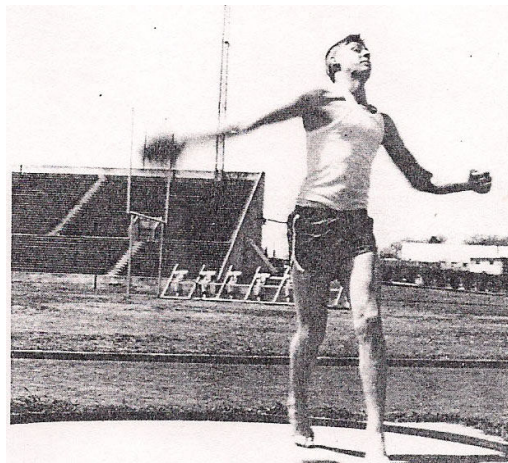
Track 70-71

Track and field is the oldest of all organized sports. Where football, baseball, and basketball are about 100 years old track is many thousands. It is also the most primitive, requiring basically a field to run in and human beings willing to run there.

Late February and early March can be chilly. As I said before if anyone bothers to look at some of the year book pictures of the motley looking track crews they can see some of us in discomfort from the cold. Sweatsuits were pretty much unheard of so we went outside in 50 degree weather in shorts and T-shirt.

Our training consisted of running and not much else. Hurdles were out there and caused some amusement as long legged would-be track stars got tangled up in the awful wood and aluminum barriers. I wasn't on the track team either, but I could watch the guys practice. I would hang around them a little because I felt that this was where I belonged. Most of the rest of the time I was playing dog pile, rope swings, or sock tag.

I liked to mess with the discus, and what I did with it can't be called 'throwing.' Frisbees were a brand new toy on the market and some guys looked at this discus as some kind of Frisbee. The problem was that it was not. It was aerodynamically impossible to get the discuss to sail like a Frisbee. Tossed out there, the heavy flat plate would hit with a considerable thud, often gouging a divot out of the ground. My wobbly arcs from the concrete launching pad at the south end of the field would go no real distance, but it was a kick to launch it.



Danny with a Discus

Coach Taylor and Mr. Brookins went to great lengths to time guys for everything. Guys competed against each other good naturedly. Nobody was held up to scorn by a fellow runner. The little kids all over the play ground were a different story. They didn't like it at all when we came running out full tilt through their baseball games or what ever they happened to be doing. Because we were officially sanctioned by Mr. Brookins the most they did was shout really odd insults at us.

These same kids observed the guys in track with admiration and fascination, too. The track team ran the length of the old football field for a 100 yard dash. From goal post to goal post it was a solid 100 yards. We had really neat starting blocks. One was wood and the blocks were eaten by the golf shoe like spikes worn on the track shoes. The other blocks were aluminum, but still bore marks on the blocks from 180 pound speedsters launching themselves. One other set of blocks was high tech. It had rubber pads on the blocks, and was painted orange. All of these sets of blocks had bridge nails welded to them as permanent anchors.

To set a block on the ground it was thrown down from over the head then stomped down until it was ground level. Some guys found bricks or rocks to pound the blocks in. Little kids loved to carry the blocks for us. Some kids would try the way out of proportion blocks to take off with. Others actually tried to run along with the sprinters, but were predictably left far behind.

All of this let the youngsters develop a sort of hero worship. Steve Bell could fly out of the blocks, he was so fast. He shot out of the blocks at less than 10 seconds in a hundred yard dash. Kids who had a grasp of the situation saw that he and others were very fast.

The kids would try the hurdles. Even I could get over the hurdles with not much trouble. The kids caught on right quick just how difficult it could be.

After a few days of challenging what they considered high school wimps the bratty kids soon turned into admiring fans.

Girls didn't do track in the 70s. Girls played tennis and volleyball. Volleyball was essentially a girls game in the early 70s, and there were no boys leagues to speak of. Our girls went to a volleyball tournament and that was it. They were beaten in the first round.

March 17 was the first track meet of the year. I wasn't on the team, so I stayed at school. The team went to Nevada, where Community School was. Steve blistered up the track in a 440 of 55.6, and did the long, or broad jump, in 18' 11". Phillip threw a discus 111' 8". Community won part this part of it, with 161 points. Lone Oak came in 4th with 73.



In the Junior Division Community murdered everybody. For us Danny Bowman put the shot 40' 5", and Rick flung a discus a remarkable 138' 10"!

Community got 107 points and Lone Oak came in a distant second with 31.

It made us wonder where these speedsters and athletes were when we were burying Community in the muck at Lone Oak during football season. Community was a track and field power!

Elsewhere, Bland won Bi-District in basketball, but got beaten in Regionals. They did okay for a school that was even smaller than Cumby. Celeste had fielded a powerful tennis team that proceeded to blow everybody off the courts.

On April first the next track and field meet took Lone Oak to the stadium at Commerce, at East Texas State University. East Texas State had a big open air stadium they played football in and it had a cinder track around it.



Caddo Mills had come here this day determined to run some track. They smashed all opponents, taking the District crown. Caddo had 140 points, Celeste had 126, Lone Oak had 116, and Boles Home had 83.

In the long jump Steve Henderson tied for second. In discus Steve and Robert Vice placed second and third. In the mile relay Big Red tore up the track at an astonishing 3.59.9. Boles Home won the mile run, 5.16.8. In the 880 O.T. Williams won it in 2.19.1. In the 440 relay Lone Oak won it in 49.3. In the 100 yard dash the Celeste winning time was 11.9. Steve was nowhere to be seen, and Willie Davis came in second. There 440 yard dash was an example of sibling rivalry, as Eddie beat his brother Steve in 59.0. I don't believe Eddie ever let Steve live it down.



In junior shot-put Danny put it out there 42 feet to win it. In the junior long jump Johnny Hooten came in second, Rambling Frank came in third. In the junior 880 Lone Oak came in second, in the junior 440 it was the same, and in the 50 yard dash Rickey Richardson and Neagle came in second and third. In the 60 yard hurdles Sheepdog came in first at 10.7, and Rickey Graham was third. My buddy Rick was not only big and strong, but he was fast.

My classmates had made a very strong showing at the track meet, representing the school very well, and the class in particular.

Winding Down Again

Organized sports were essentially over for the year. Baseball loomed, but it was farm league and a little disorganized. I never played.

Clyde Ross was named City Secretary of Lone Oak. They could not have picked a better man.

Mr. Brookins was already booking scrimmages for next year. He was asking for any Class A or B team to do battle with on August 27 of 71. We could hear the Thunder of the next group of Buffaloes already.

We played touch football and softball to pass the slow hours as the school year drew to a close. All of us now landed in study hall, driving poor Martha to distraction. I drew my cartoons like a man possessed.

Celeste's tennis team went all the way to State, but unfortunately did not win. This was one fantastic tennis team, worthy of all the honors it gathered.

At Boles Home Vicki Prior got Valedictorian, showing that athletes can be brainy as well as athletic.

For us at Lone Oak Candy Mc Crory was Valedictorian and Robert Byrd was Salutatorian. After a ceremony they were gone. My Seniors were leaving, never to be students at Lone Oak again. I can remember their names, and the legacy they left behind:

A football District Trophy.

A new 11 man football field, not quite complete, but a new field none the less.

Two boy's basketball trophies.

Three girls basketball trophies, especially a Bi-District Championship.



SENIOR OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	-----	Ray Dooley
VICE-PRES.	-----	Cristy Garner
SECRETARY	-----	Melinda Mahand
TREASURER	-----	Candy McCrory
HISTORIAN	-----	Jackie Smith
PARLIAMENTARIAN	-----	Rudy Douglas
REPORTERS	-----	Gina Simmons Dennis Scott
SPONSOR	-----	Fred Trimble

I will remember Rudy, Jackie, and the first 11 Man Football Homecoming Queen and the first Homecoming Queen on the new field; Dianna Bowman. There was Dennis, and Crazy Larry Putman who could ride a wheelie on a bicycle the length of Katie Street. I won't forget the lovely

Christina Garner, basketball hero Fonda Payne, Larry Norton the manager, and the indomitable Robert Byrd. My list is by no means complete, but these are the ones I remember the best.

I looked forward to my first summer as a high school member, and some of us celebrated over not being Freshmen anymore. We had made it to the big time, no longer being Plebes.

Kiss my left foot, world, for I was now a Sophomore!

"Cave Canem"

Latin for 'Beware of Dog.'

Summer 71

Rickey Graham let me drive his blue Ford pickup truck from time to time. I had mastered the three speed column shift and the vagaries of a clutch.

Varoom! Clutch-shift-gas!

Varoom! Clutch-shift-gas!

I tore down the back roads of Hunt country at a breakneck 30 miles an hour. Rick liked this because he wanted what he considered a cautious driver like myself to drive his hay truck. Gunner had a big ole blue Airforce reject flatbed and we were going to haul hay on it. Gunner also had a vertical loader to get the rectangular haybales up to the bed of the truck. This green and red monster attached to the side of the truck and swept bales into its maw. It caught them on a spiked conveyor and deposited them on a small platform about 10 feet up. From there the stacker guy would put them on the bed of the truck in a neat stack.

Pay would range from 2 cents to 5 cents a bale. The object was to haul 1000 bales and have running money for the weekend. Rick had no problem hauling hay and did it a lot. He would load his old Ford pickup with bales, drive to the client's barn, stack them in there, and go back for more. This could go on for hours, even well into the night. If Rick hauled 1000 bales he got 50 dollars. That was one heck of a lot of cash in 1971, before we had runaway inflation and gas prices went up from 30 cents a gallon. A good used car could be got for around 500 dollars back then.

Interesting things often happened in the hay field. Once Rick and Jerry McGee were hauling hay together. These two big men could move one tremendous amount of hay. Jerry was picking them off the ground and handing them to Rick who was stacking them. Someone else was driving the truck.

Jerry bent over, grabbed the 85 pound bale by the wires with his gloved hands, and nonchalantly threw it up in the pickup. Rick suddenly bailed off the vehicle, yelling. The driver stopped the truck, confused.

Jerry looked at Rick and asked what happened.

Rick said one word, "Snake!"

There in the truck bed, sticking out of 2 sides of the bale, was a Copperhead. The reptile was very dead, crushed by the compress, but that didn't make it any less scary. They cut the snake's tail and head off with their knives and loaded the bale in an easy to get to spot. They then continued on as if nothing happened.

Jerry had an Impala S S 396. This beast was his wheels. The 396 cubic inch engine generated at least 300 horsepower, and that was when it needed new points and plugs. By modern standards it was 6.5 liters. Now days they call such a car by the ridiculous name of 'muscle car' but we just called them hot rods or just 'cars'. A guy was known by his car as much as his persona.

Jerry had an A.M. radio he hooked to the dual rear speakers in addition to his 8 track tape player. Speakers on the back rear deck was way cool. They could be heard sometimes over the wind blast through the windows and the roar of the engine. Air conditioning took horsepower away from the engine, so it was rare.

This car was about standard for a person of his means and ability at the time. The number one reason a guy spent money on a car with dual exhaust, lots of horse power, bucket seats, a stereo system, and nifty looking wheels was that girls liked them. Girls are attracted by money, good looks, and 'the car'. Jerry had all three, and a lot of class to go with it.

Elaine's mechanically minded father had a garage not far from my house. He did all kinds of automobile repairs there, and had a tow-truck. I once sat in his tow-truck while he flipped cars over to get to their springs and a-frames. I really liked the swarthy cigar chomping mechanic, but he seemed to hold me in mild contempt. He was a tank driver during the Korean war, and sometimes he'd tell me a little bit about it. He once even showed me a picture of him standing next to what appeared to be an M-5 Stuart light tank. I guess he figured I was some sort of hillbilly and only tolerated my presence. He did have a fully equipped garage, so sometimes Rick and his running buddies could get use of the hard to find equipment.

It was for this reason that Jerry had his 396 at Elaine's place, tinkering with the back suspension. He and Rick were installing Air Shocks to give the car a raised tail appearance, that looked very sharp in 1971. Jerry and Rick were under the car, wrenches all over the place. A power bumper jack held the car up. I stood there as errand boy. If they wanted something out of the toolbox or sent me to go get something I'd take off with all dispatch to carry out their request. I had no illusions that I was a mechanic, but I was learning a lot by just being here.

Then along came David Dillon. He came ditty bobbing up and asked what was going on. Jerry told him they were installing airshocks, leaf spring shackles, and spacers to the rear suspension. Jerry was also checking his emergency brake cable and U-joints. Both Rick and Jerry were under opposite sides of the car, length wise. David Dillon walked over to the jack.

"You guys want me to raise it up?" David Dillon called.

"Sho," Rick drawled, "Go ahead."

David dropped the car on them.

As the air bled out of the jack it fell slow enough to react to. Rick rolled onto his back and pushed up on the two ton monster. Jerry had tried to escape, and was trapped by his shoulders.

David frantically tried to get the jack to go back up, as Jerry hollered in some discomfort from under the vehicle. I stood there in amazement, clutching the air shock box. I could not believe someone with as much experience as I thought David Dillon had, had just done something as

dumb as this! David Dillon finally got the jack to go up and both Rick and Jerry rolled out from under the car. They stood there shaken at what just happened and cast hostile glances at David Dillon. David Dillon explained how it had happened. Rick was ticked off and Jerry wasn't real happy. I kept my distance, and they accepted his explanations and apologies.

That episode had been frightening, but nobody was really hurt. Jerry's shoulders were a little sore. David Dillon had almost gotten them killed because he thought he knew how the jack operated. It was a big surprise to us all.

I kept my comments to myself and we finished installing the shocks on Jerry's car. Rick gave me an earful about what a nincompoop he thought David Dillon was as we drove to town that evening. I don't know what Jerry thought.

I got my first chance to drive the hay truck that summer. It was the pickup, not the flatbed. I tooted along while Rick and Lynn McGee threw bales into the bed for some other guy to stack. Each bale brought straw and dust into the cab and up my nose. Rick hauled shirtless and I don't know how he did it. The sun beat down and the dust and straw got all over him, but it never irritated him at all. I spent days scratching and blowing my nose after a haul.

Once we were loaded, the bales were tied off and Rick drove them to the barn. I then got up on top of the load and pushed the bales off to the guys below. It was hot and nasty work.

When I finally got to drive the flatbed it was over at Gunner's place. Gunner's folks had a thing about dogs. Big dogs. With teeth. And bad dispositions. They kept these man eating monsters in a fence that surrounded the house. No thief in his right mind would go there. There was a doorbell attached to the gate. If one of us were stupid enough to get out of our car the dogs could jump the fence to get to eat the person. There was a small chance to ring the bell to alert Gunner's folks so they could pull the gnawed remains from the animals before the dogs consumed all of the guy. The dogs weighed more than I did and I didn't like the place.

Later in life when I was visiting a "Damsel in Distress" who was staying here with Gunner's folks I'd carry my Colt M-1911 .45 Automatic pistol in my car just in case a dog did get loose. That's how bad the big snarling animals scared me.

When Rick and I arrived in Rickey's 65 Ford, Gunner came outside the house and tied all the dogs up. He then came out where we were, grinning all the time.

"Howdy. Big aint they?" he said.

"Mean looking, too!" I added.

"Yeah," Gunner said, as if we were talking about the weather, "They'll bite you. All but that big red Great Dane. He likes to play but he's so big he'll hurt you and not mean it."

We soon got down to business. We set up the truck and got in the field. Soon bales were rolling off the loader with Rick and Gunner stacking away. I couldn't go fast enough to suit Rick so Gunner drove for a while. I went out ahead kicking bales over and lining them up with the loader. It wasn't working out very well.

Soon it was time for a break. I got a plastic cup of water out of a water cooler. Gunner's grandfather was there on a tractor. He had been wind-rowing fresh cut hay so it would dry properly before baling. The old fellow had a weird sense of humor.

I had my glass of water and I was chugging it down.

"That's good water," I gasped.

"Yeah," Grandpa said, in his overalls and straw hat, "I just got through urinating in there too."

I knew he was kidding but I reacted without thinking. I threw my empty cup at him. He haw-hawed in glee and got back on his tractor. I stood there digesting the joke and then we got back on the truck. My sense of humor about such things are minute at best, but the old fellow eventually grew on me.

Later that summer Gunner, Rick, and I were putting hay into a small barn in Donelton, between Lone Oak and Miller Grove. Gunner, being Gunner, couldn't resist the temptation to mess with me. First it was verbal taunts. I flipped him off and kept handing hay bales to Rickey who ignored us both. Gunner then began to bug me physically.

I launched a haybale at him. I could launch an 85 pound bale about 10 feet. He was about 4 feet away. Gunner caught the bale in the midsection, but the weight of it carried him off the bed of the truck. He was there, then he wasn't.

I walked over to the edge of the truck bed. It was about 4 feet to the ground and he went off backwards. I thought I may have killed him, or at the very least broke him up like a china doll. I looked down at him. He was laying in some sun-baked ruts with the bale across his chest. His face showed pain.

"You okay, Gunner?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I think I am," he groaned.

"Good."

I went back to unloading bales, and Rick put in a few words.

"Are you goofballs gonna fight or unload hay?"

Gunner stayed on the ground and helped Rickey. He didn't play any more games with me when we hauled hay. I had his respect in that department at least.

Curiously, I have had many reasons in the past decades to hate Gunner's guts. It seems he'd go out of his way to mess something up. He's made me so mad at times I could have gotten dangerously violent, but I didn't. There are some things I haven't forgiven him for, others I cannot, but I don't hate him either. It's a strange situation, but he is a strange guy.

Swimming was something rare and fun. We'd all get into somebody's car or truck and take off for Rocky Point on Lake Tawakoni. There was a tree sticking out of the water at Rocky Point and we used that as a diving platform. The water around the tree was about 10 feet deep. I couldn't swim.

We got to Rocky Point and went into the water like lemmings. Before I knew it we were way out over my head. With a combination dog-paddle and dumb luck I made it to the tree. I hung on for dear life and wondered what I had gotten myself into. Guys were jumping off the tree and just having a jolly good time. I discovered I could paddle around a little bit and actually swim some. As long as I didn't panic I did okay. Then one guy who didn't know me fell and knocked me off the tree. This time I panicked. I started thrashing around.

"Give me a hand!" I called.

He thought I was joking and casually held up a hand. I grabbed it, expecting help, but instead we both went under. I tried to grab him to get above water. He was no help at all, thinking I was joking, when in fact I was drowning! I thought wildly, frantically. I had to get to the beach! I fought my way there, splashing like ten people, more by luck than by design. When my toes finally hit solid ground I took off as fast as I could go. I got up on the beach, coughing and spitting. I sat in the warm sand, shaking all over.

"Buzzard, are you okay?"

I looked up. Rickey was thigh deep in the water, hands on his hips, looking at me. He had seen me in distress and would have saved me if I went under and didn't come back up. Now he was worried about my welfare.

I nodded I was okay.

"C'mon back in. We aint gonna mess with you no more," one of Rick's buddies called.

I shook my head, an emphatic no. I stayed on the beach, once getting in the warm shallow water, but not for long. I had enough of water for one day. Soon the swimming was done and we took off for other entertainment.

The guy I grappled with talked to me.

"Hey, man, I didn't know you couldn't swim. I thought you were just playing."

I accepted his apology. Rick never took me back to Rocky Point, and I never returned to the tree.

July 4th is one of my favorite holidays. I love pyrotechnics, from simple firecrackers to military airstrikes. I used to have a toy rocket launcher and I could shoot firecrackers 25 to 30 feet with it. Later I worked up the nerve to throw the things in my bare hands. To my very good luck I have never had a firecracker go off in my hand. Later on in life I froze once trying to throw an artillery simulator, but I got it away before it went off. That's the closest I ever came to having any real accident with pyrotechnics.

Rickey had a lot of fireworks in the gas station. He didn't sell a lot but we sure shot a lot of them up. We loaded up a bag full of goodies and ventured off to the lake. The foursome was Rick, Gunner's older brother Robert, who was harelip, Rick's sister Kathy, and myself.

We had bottle-rockets and fire crackers. Bottle-rockets were neat little rockets about the size of a pen cap mounted on a foot long stick. It was called a bottle rocket because they were supposed to be launched out of a cola bottle. The rocket would go up about 100 to 150 feet and pop with a satisfying bang. They came 24 to a bunch and each bunch cost about a dollar or so. We bought bunches and bunches.

Bottle rockets could be held in the hand and thrown. One reason we went to the lake was because here was plenty of water. We could light a bottle rocket hold it until it started to fizz then throw it in the water. It would stay lit under water and bubble along under the surface. Then it would go off under water with a thump like a depth charge. The effect was even greater at night.

Rick and Robert were lighting rockets and tossing them in the lake. I was freely tossing firecrackers all over the place. Kathy was in on the fun, using bottle rockets and firecrackers.

Robert sat on the hood of Rick's car. For some reason Rick got a firecracker from me and lit it. He tossed it on the hood and it rolled right under Robert's rear end.

BANG!!

Robert went straight up like a snake bit him. He hollered "Aiiiiiiiiiii!" and was shocked but unhurt. The jeans he had on protected him, but it must have stung. Rick said it was an accident and Robert accepted that.

"Just be careful, huh?" Robert said, rubbing his rear.

There were no other 'accidents' that night. I found out later that Rick was fed up with Robert making boorish passes at his sister.

I spent most of my weekends and some weekdays at my Father's gas station at Sulphur Springs. That's where I got most of my spending money. The gasoline drove my acne crazy and made my hands rough and smell like gas. The good part was that my father and I began to get to know each other for the first times in our lives. We ate fried chicken under the trees out back, listened to baseball on the radio, and did what ever a Father and Son can do at a gas station.



Dad's station at it looked in 2003, long after he left it. It stood abandoned and deteriorating in 2010.

1st bay was wash bay, second and third was general work. Inseptions were done in the middle bay. It had six pumps and was totally full service. It kept us hopping.

Dad did not like my hanging out with Rickey. I resented that because Rick was not the outlaw Dad took him to be. Dad really didn't know Rick at all. Rickey kept me out way past midnight and I often slept past noon as a result. This was somewhat typical of teen behavior in 1971, but my father didn't know this. There is the chance that Dad was jealous of Rick taking up a lot of my time.

Dad had grilled steaks out in the backyard often. There was a homemade ping pong table out there too. Cousin Kenneth Sherwin who we called K.W. and my brother Mike played ping pong about every night on that table. Dad usually took them on and took them to the cleaners in a game. Dad was well coordinated and could destroy them in a simple game of ping pong.

Dad got a real kick out of my antics one day when I was making laps around the house on my big green bicycle. I was having one of my race car fantasies and grooving on the laps I was ripping out at good speeds. We had a big cast iron pot over the cap to our underground electric water well. I made a turn on the corner and sped for the pump house. The sun was down and this entire side of the house was in shadow. Whammo! I hit the pot and absorbed the shock with my arms. I folded up and hit the ground rather gently. There was no damage to bike or me. Dad saw me hit and guffawed. He had to tell mom, it was so funny to him. I was somewhat pleased he found my accident funny. He never laughed enough to suit me. I got up off the ground and put my big bike away. That bike and I would go a thousand miles together.

One day I found a spot where I could do wheelies. A wheelie is when you get the front tire of the bike in the air and hold it up there a few moments while still moving forward. I knew a guy who could ride for miles on a wheelie. I couldn't do that, and I was happy to just get the front end in the air. I did several wheelies off this dirt ramp near the Fina Station. My forks slammed down hard each time I came down. My front wheel tightened up for a second, then loosened back up. I went for another wheelie. This was a good one except for one tiny problem. My front wheel came smooth off when I pulled up. I knew what was coming next. I let myself limber up, as I had learned in football, before hitting the ground.

Bam! The forks buried up a full 4 inches in the ground propelling me through the handlebars and face first into the turf. I got up spitting grass but I was unhurt. I saw my front wheel roll on to hit the side of a nearby house. I didn't even have a split lip. I picked up my glasses and retrieved my wheel. I put it back on the bike. I was finished with my wheelies for the day.

Summer rolled on.

I spent many nights making laps on the skating rink floor. There was pinball there, too, and Rick spent as much money playing pinball as I did on my model cars. He could be found feeding dimes into his favorite machine, making all the lights come up. I stood there one time, watching Rick master this particular machine, making it ring and pop and sing. I think Rick had his intellectual fantasies when he played pinball. He became the astronaut or the hero depicted on the machine. For those few minutes, he was the knight, the astronaut, the race car driver. Rick was very good as a pinball wizard, and he was no slouch at pool either.



I did not care much for pool, but Rick and his buddies were always playing it from time to time. I didn't even know how to play it properly until my college days. I would sit on a nearby bench and read something while the balls on the table clicked away. I haven't played a game in decades, and don't care to.

One of my all time favorite hobbies was model building. I had hundreds of plastic models. There were airplanes, cars, and tanks. I painted these to specifications or to my own fancy. I used enamel and the smell of drying paint was all over the place. I often went to my room my father built to paint. I was airy, after all. I stored my completed masterpieces all over the room. To put them on display in the house was to invite destruction by small children. I guess I got good enough at it. It culminated decades later with my receiving several ribbons for some models I entered in the Hunt County Fair, in 1989. I've felt good about my model building ever since.

It was not an expensive hobby back in 1971. Model cars cost 2 dollars and 50 cents. The expensive Japanese models cost 5 dollars. Glue was 15 cents and paint was 10 cents a bottle. I could usually paint, assemble, and decal a model in 3 days. It was an idyllic way spend a slow afternoon.

Aside from Rick I had my other buddies Benjy and Hiram Hart. We built a dam in a creek and a clubhouse in the woods, and a bridge over another creek. The bridge lasted until heavy rains washed it away. The clubhouse and dam could still be seen in the 1990s, whats left of them.

I got pretty good with a double edged ax. I cut down several trees for use in the club house and bridge. I had a black plastic German helmet I had bought from Charles Hagerman for head protection. Dry and dead limbs would sometimes fall from the trees I was cutting. Once I was dragging a 20 foot log to be used as a bridge span. I crawled down in the dry creek bed to pull it over, and did so. On climbing out I embedded a thorn on the inside of my right knee. I couldn't get the thorn out, so I just shrugged it off and kept going. I would carry that thorn almost 2 years. We eventually got the club house built.

This sounds like a lot to do in 3 months and it is. School was never out long enough to suit us, so we all put as much activity in the 3 months we had as we could. I can't imagine what the other members of my class were up to. There were no couch potatoes in that group, and there wasn't much on T.V. anyway.

In town a movie came and went without much notice. It was called Theres a Girl in My Soup and had Peter Sellers and Goldie Hawn. In a bit part playing a lecherous young woman was a British starlette named Gabrielle Drake. I didn't see this movie in 1971, but Miss Drake was to become very popular with my school friends and me later on. She was to be an influence on my art and my comic strips in a big way. None of us, not even me, had any idea of that in the summer of 1971. As for the movie itself, its junk.



Benjy, Hiram, and the Samples kids loved to play sandlot football. Benjy and I were the two biggest so I wound up being center for most of the plays. Benjy was hard to tackle because he was built solid. What I had to do was wrap him up and trip him with my legs. We usually hit the ground quite hard. We all got minor injuries playing sandlot ball. I once jammed my arm and Benjy got a big knot on his head when he bounced his noggin off my helmet. We never played in full pads and it was all just for fun. It was also very rough. Some girls thought they could play this game with us, but it turned out to be too rough and tumble. Connie was one of the two Samples girls, being the younger and one of the triplets, and she had enough sense just to be a cheerleader.

Her older sister was Sheila, and she was a very attractive lady. Sheila was going with the very dangerous Troy Haynes. I never saw her or Troy at one of the sandlot games. I guess Troy had better things to do than play sandlot football with a bunch of kids half his size. For that I was thankful. He would have killed us.

The space program was getting ready for the moon landing of Apollo 15. After Apollo 13 blew the side off the service module a lot of people worried if 14 was going to be okay. It landed fine, and now Apollo 15 was to be the fourth manned landing on the moon. I wanted to see it. The pictures from the moon had gone from the fuzzy black and white of Apollo 11 to full color in the most recent. They even showed the lift off of the Lunar Module. I loved the gadgetry and the sheer adventure of space flight. If I could pick anything to be I would be an astronaut. Second place would be race car driver.

Because I knew I qualified for neither I would settle for soldier.

Every August the Hunt County Fair rolls around. People would bring their prize livestock to see if they could win a ribbon. Others would bring arts and crafts. Still others would bring various foods.

None of this interested boys of my age. There were rides galore, gambling, tests of skill, and all sorts of gimmicks to get a guys money. Somebody was giving helicopter rides in an honest to goodness OH-13 helicopter! It cost 5 dollars. I took my first aircraft ride in this dragonfly looking contraption, and I enjoyed every scary moment of it. It was at night.

We choppered from the fair grounds, by Majors Field, up and over I-30. He orbited the town once, then went back to the fair grounds. It was a tremendous rush. I got out and stood by the ground as he loaded up a second group of passengers. I watched the helicopter lift off in a chattering roar and dip of the canopy. Then he was lost in the night sky.

Nothing else in the carnival could compare to what I had just experienced. I was also broke, as my folks had given me five dollars to spend and I dare not ask for more. It had been worth it, though the rest of the night I did not much else of note. I never seemed to make it to the fair when my friends were there. I spent the rest of the evening remembering the chopper ride and waiting for my mother to get ready to take her grand children home.

Later on in life I'd fly in several helicopters all over the place, and I'd jump out of fixed wing aircraft with a parachute. I would even fly a friend's plane back from Tyler, but none of the above was as neat as that very first ride in that tired old chopper that night in Greenville.

Summer was coming to it's unfortunate end. Rickey asked me again if I was going out for football. I told him I had to think about it. My crummy grades and father's insistence had kept me off the team. I didn't know if I was ready to go through that again.

Cheers and Battle Chants

Cheers and battle chants differ in that a cheer is a complicated poem that can't be repeated over and over and sound intelligently. A battle chant is a simple poem of about 4 lines or so that can be repeated, or chanted, until the chanter goes unconscious from exhaustion. Cheers contain a complicated series of handclaps and some pom-pom waving. Chants can be just screamed defiantly at the opposition, some times with fist shaking.

Some of the cheers, notably Shine-On, go way back, possibly to the 20's. Two Bits is certainly ancient, well before the 1940's. The school song We Love You Lone Oak High School, is filled with references to "having the ball" and "cheering on to victory." It also stresses loyalty by "back you when you're losing and we'll stand by you when you fall," as well as "we'll always be in there fighting and always be brave and true."

Most of us lived up to these words, though we didn't know it at the time. It was a simple thing to do in the environment we were in. Most of us were big time fanatics about football.

Cheers were taught to the younger kids by observation. Pep Rallies included the entire student body, so they caught on to the cheers quickly. Young boys saw the jersey-clad football players in the bleachers and knew they would be there some day. Young girls saw the Cheerleaders in their red and white uniforms who were the center of attention, and vowed to be one some day. The seeds were planted early.

On the playgrounds we could see little kids running into each other in sand-lot football games and the little girls playing cheerleader. The girls would dance around waving their arms in a similar fashion they had seen in the Pep-rally. It was what they wanted to be.

Those on the team were these kid's heroes. They looked at the team like they were Greek gods. Normally hyper kids who chattered a lot and had short attention spans would lock on like radar and sit silently while watching a football practice. They would offer to carry someone's helmet or part of the gear, like a squire to a knight.

Mr. Brookins knew the danger to little 8 and 12 year old kids on the practice field, and the practices were held late in the day when it was cooler in the early fall. If a play rolled out toward where everybody was sitting in the dirt a 10 year old might not react fast enough. He could get very seriously hurt by over 500 pounds of armored teen-agers plowing into him. The kids who did watch usually clustered around the coaches of a very safe distance away.

Little girls usually watched the Pep-Squad and cheerleaders with equal awe and a lot less danger. High-kicking in time with about 50 other girls is no simple task and requires some degree of coordination and physical fitness. If anybody could do it then anybody could be on the Pep-Squad.

I had only seen a couple of Pep-Squad work outs and they seemed to do routines to canned music over and over. To put up with this monotony for a few minutes of fame on a cold, muddy field takes a devotion many of both sexes cannot muster. To the girls who did this and to the little girls who wanted to be a part of it I say they deserve as much respect as the football team itself. They could be home, or with a boyfriend, or just getting fat in front of the T.V, but instead they were there learning their routine. It is a cycle that had been repeated for almost 100 years.

I see. I want. I am.

The Cheers and Chants

Battle Chant "Go Red"

"GO! RED! GO!"

(Repeated ad infinitum)

Cheer "Give them the Red"

"Give 'em the Red!

Give 'em the Red!

Give 'em the Red, Red, Red!

Give 'em the White!

Give 'em the White!

Give 'em the White, White, White!

Red, White, Yay, Team, Fight!"

Chant "Thats okay"

"Thats okay!

Thats alright!

Stay in there and

Fight! Fight! Fight!"

Cheer "Spirit"

"We've-got-spirit!

S! P! I-R-I-T!

Come on lets hear it!

S! P! I-R-I-T!

Lets hear it, Buffs, Spirit!"

Cheer "Shine On"

"Lone Oak will shine on

Lone Oak will shine on, shine on.

Lone Oak will shine on

Lone Oak will shine

Shine on, shine on, shine on, shine on

Lone Oak will shine.

_____ will shine on

_____ will shine on, shine on

_____ will shine on

_____ will shine

Shine on, shine on, shine on, shine on

_____ will shine.

They'll shine our shoes!"

Chant "Baskets" for basketball

"Baskets, baskets, baskets, boys!

You make the baskets

We'll make the noise."

Chant "Other way"

"Hey, hey, whaddaya say,

Take that ball the other way!"

Chant "Fight"

"F! H! G! H! T!

Fight, Buffaloes, Fight!"

(Repeated over.)

Cheer "Two Bits"

"Two Bits, Four Bits, Six Bits,

A Dollar!

All for Lone Oak

Stand up and Holler!"

(Very educational way to learn monetary denominations)

Cheer "Victory"

"Gimme a 'V'! Gimmie a 'I'!

Gimme a 'C'! Gimmie a 'T'!

Gimme a 'O'!

Gimme a 'R'! Gimme a 'Y'!

V-I-C-T-O-R-Y!

Victory! Victory!

Rah Rah Rah!

Chant "Whomp 'Em"

"We're gonna Whomp Em

Up! Side!

The head!

We're gonna whomp em up side the head!

Hey! Hey! Hey!"

(repeat)

Battle Chant "We're from Lone Oak High."

"We're from Lone Oak High

And no one could be prouder

And if you can not hear us

We'll yell a little louder!"

(Repeated with rising volume.)

Cheer "We're the Champs"

"We're the Champs! We're the Champs!

We're the C.H.A. M. P. S!

Champs!

We're the best! We're the best!

We're the B.E.S.T, Best!

Yes!"

The Lone Oak High School song titled simply "We Love You Lone Oak High School" is sung gently and softly. One might think the school song of a bunch of ball-playing fanatics would be fast, loud, and short. Not so here. Some school songs are take offs of college fight songs. It was amusing, standing in icy ankle deep mud, listening to a version of the Princeton fight song being sung in the opposition bleachers.

The Boles Home school song "Hail to Thee Oh Boles Home High School" is sang in the same gentle way as ours is, and the first time I heard it I was impressed. It was another version of a college fight song, though. Nobody sang a song that even vaguely sounded like We Love You Lone Oak High School. I soon found out why nobody sang a song like ours. Ms. Sandlin set me straight one night at a football game in 1995.

"In 1950 or 51 a student in the highschool here named Ray Nell Graves wrote a poem dedicated to the school. It eventually became the school song for one reason or another. It was never set to music."

She had no idea where the melody came from. Ms. Sandman added "GET EM, BUFFALOES, GET EM!" at the end as a sort of wake up call, but I personally didn't like it. It was like chanting "U.S.A!" at the end of the Star Spangled Banner. I was thinking it wasn't broke, so don't fix it.

No band played at our games or pep rallies, so the song was never accompanied by music while I was in school. I eventually heard the song played by the Lone Oak High School Band in 1994. The haunting melody is somewhat melancholy in spite of the lyrics of victory, loyalty, truth, glory, and being the best.

Butchered versions of the school songs were made up by creative individuals, such as "We hate you Lone Oak High School, you're the worst and always will be." This was pure sarcasm and a simplistic way to blow off steam. Pure blasphemy about the school song or traditions would get the person thrown off the roof of the gym. Twice. (Just kidding). People who didn't like the school, didn't adapt, or were 100% outcast simply left. That was the easy road. Others, like Gongga, came in and stayed. Gongga never fit in. A lot of people, including myself, treated him like dirt, but he stayed. He even played football. He was one of us and his name is on the trophies we won. Think of that when you sing the school song. Think of all those who came before you and the thousands who will come after you.

Here are the words to the entire school song as it has been sung for decades. Treat it with the respect it deserves. Go Red!

We love you Lone Oak High School,

You're the best, and always will be.

We love you Lone Oak High School,

You mean the world to me

.

You stand for truth and courage,

And for right you'll always stand.

We love you Lone Oak High School,

Lone Oak High School, we think you're grand.

We'll cheer you on to victory,

We'll stand by you when you fall;

We'll back you when you're losing,

Or when you have the ball.

We'll always be in there fighting,

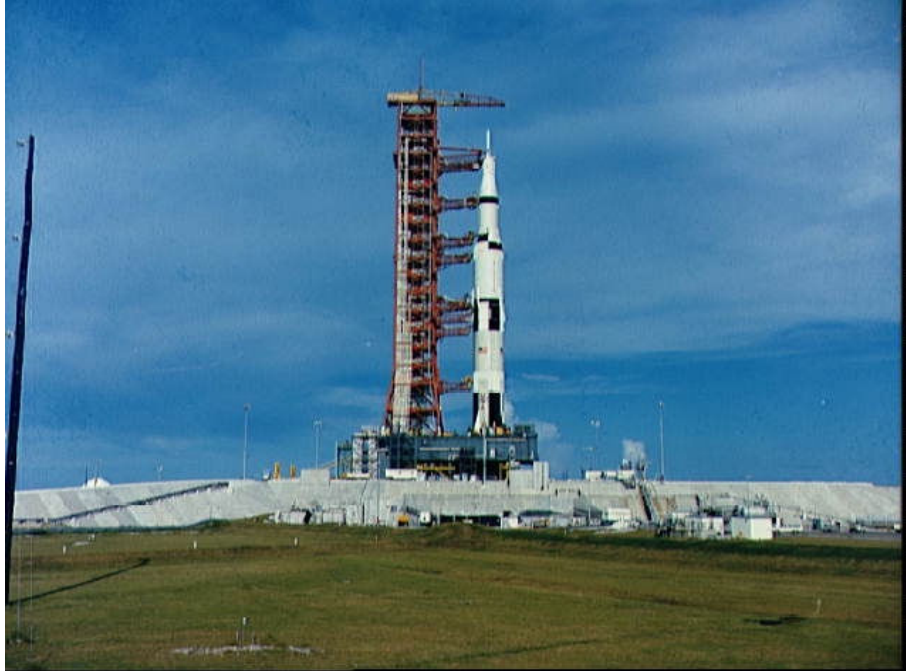
And always be brave and true.

We've got the spirit, we've got the team,

Lone Oak High School, you're our dream.

Hearing the Thunder

August 16th was upon us. With it came training camp with the brutal two a day practices. I wasn't there. I watched the Apollo 15 mission with interest. They had a moon buggy and this little vehicle fascinated me. Live pictures from the moon, in color, were also a neat thing. I had no intention of going to football practice.



Nixon had introduced a wage-price-freeze that was very unpopular. One of the families living in the house next to the Fina station were very angry about this. I didn't have a job so I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. I spent the waning days of summer riding my bicycle and watching T.V.

At night when the house was still I didn't feel right. Inside my mind I could hear the rattle of the shoulder-pads, feel the shock and recoil of tackles, sense the thrill of wild pursuit. I could smell the liniment and the dirt of the practice field. I could hear the Thunder. It was calling to me.

But it was not for me. Not yet. I had gone a full year as a hall wanderer. I didn't like it. I had resigned myself to believe it was all I'd ever do in highschool.

I was too small. I was too skinny. I was too short. I wasn't fast enough. I was nearsighted. I had plenty of excuses. Yet I'd lay in bed, in the dark, and think of playing football. Rick, Gunner, Robert Vice, Danny Bowman, and the others were smashing into each other on the field. A promising group of Freshmen made up of Russell Cook, Nat Wade, Ricky Richardson, Bobby Underwood, and some others had entered our midst. Bobby Underwood, who I called Woody, would be especially interesting. He had a talent unique in the history of Lone Oak. He kicked the ball soccer style. He could kick it a very long way, too, and with telling accuracy.

There were two new coaches on our team. One was Coach McNutt. He was huge and looked like a bear. He had a crazy sense of humor. The other was Coach Royal. Royal seemed to me to have no sense of humor at all and spent most of his time quietly watching the players. McNutt coached the line. Coaches Royal and Taylor coached the ends and backs. The great Coach Brookins supervised it all.

I was home watching T.V. each night the second session of two a days started. Rick was at practice so I had no transportation to Greenville except by bicycle. I often rode there and back all summer during the day, roughly ten miles one way. But the idea of riding back home late at night on highway 69 was suicidal. I waited quietly for school to start. I couldn't get the idea of playing high school football out of my mind. It was something I really wanted to do, even if I tried to tell myself otherwise.

My second year of high school would be a little different from my first. I had gotten used to the traveling from room to room, and dealing with different teachers each class. I reveled in the open campus concept, and I had a more sound idea on how to deal with the free time on campus.

I was 16. At 16 years old, it is said, you have a more even disposition. You are more receptive to constructive criticism. You appropriately share feelings, and are more of a self starter. I found out all this to be pretty much true. I had a whole new attitude about school and myself in 1971. I was motivated and dedicated. By late August I was happy to be back in school.

We got our new books and had very little trouble moving into the lockers this time around. Everybody was pleased to see everybody else. The new Freshmen cast apprehensive glances about the highschool, wondering what horrors lurked within these halls. I was a Sophomore. No more apprehension for me! I was a veteran now!

I found Herman and Randy Price the Rabbit and we chattered freely about our new exploits. Rabbit told me about ball practice. I listened, fascinated by each tale of pain and misery. He then lowered his voice and told Herman and me about the girls he dated in Mexia. We listened mesmerized as he described in vague detail each girl he had met. I was blown away. How did he do it?

They stopped two a days when school started. They were now doing evening practice. I decided to go to practice so I put on a pair of shorts I wore in gym class and wandered out on the practice field. Everybody was in shorts this day, no pads. I joined in the calisthenics going on. I was totally lost by some of the more complicated exercises, but I stuck with it. Soon they broke into two squads, one for linemen, one for backs and ends. I went with the backs and ends, for pass drill.

Rudy Douglas had graduated last year. Coach Brookins had no experienced quarterbacks except for Phillip Andrews who had a "fair arm." He was also trying Danny Bowman out as a quarterback.

I ran patterns and tried desperately to catch the zipping footballs in the fading evening light. Danny had a lot of pepper on the ball. I could be 30 yards away and the ball would zip in at a remarkable speed. The impact of catching the pigskin would leave red marks on my chest.

Nobody told me to get lost, or to leave. I stayed the entire practice.

Rick drove me home that night with words of praise and encouragement. I was sore and I had raw spots on my elbows, knees, and forearms. I felt great. I went into my house after thanking Rick for driving me home.

My folks wanted to know where I had been as I sat there gobbling a cold supper. I told them I hung around school after it let out and I practiced with the football team. Dad reserved comment. This had happened last year.

I slept pretty soundly that night, but I woke up stiff and sore. Rabbit and I shared war stories that day at school. I was one of them again!

We had a scrimmage at Rains. I had never seen a scrimmage before. I went along. My first trip with the team on the bus was memorable. I had never been on a bus with high school athletes before. Duffel bags filled with gear were all over the back of the bus. I sat there surrounded by guys twice my size. The chatter was loud, but not boisterous. They were saving their energy for the game.

The bus cruised up to the appropriate spot behind the relatively new Rains school, and disgorged its contents. Players dragged their gear into the locker rooms. I tried to help the two managers, Jerry Evans and Bobby Land, but they didn't want it. They enjoyed being managers, and took to their jobs with pride. With nothing else to do I went about helping the guys in the locker room, mostly by pulling jerseys down in back. It is amazing how tight those jersey backs can get up against someone's neck.

Some guys wore "horse collars", a padded collar tied to the back of the neck of their shoulder pads. They said it prevented whiplash or some such. I didn't see how, but I didn't ask too many questions about it, least I be mistook for being stupid.

The team went out on the field and I watched them warm up. For the next hour or so I was confused by what was going on out on the field. Offenses would run play after play, well past fourth down, then it would go the other way. Rick explained to me what was going on, but it didn't do much for my confusion. They would run so many plays on offense, then so many plays on defense. Failure to get a first down meant the ball was reset by the offense on the 20. There was no punting and no kickoff.

This wasn't football as I knew it. At first glance it looked like football, but the coaches were allowed on the field to direct and guide their players from close up. Rather than shout the directions from the sidelines the coach would actually talk to a player on a one to one basis in a game-like environment. Time is kept differently and offense and defense are not switched over by each touchdown.

Defenses were tried, modified, or scrapped as seen necessary. The same thing held true for offenses. Sheepdog had to get used to the big 11 man style of offense. He was doing remarkably well. Mr. Brookins was using what he could cobble together in the perceived weak link of quarterback. Danny was proving to be very surprising in his ability. Because he played guard last year he wasn't afraid to hit people, either.

Everyone in pads got their turn in a scrimmage. Everyone gets to play. That is what makes it real, real fun. It is the closest thing a player can get without a real game.

Scrimmages don't count in the overall win-loss column. This allows a coach to see everybody without a fear of messing up. It can also let a coach try that 'really neat play' of that 'new defense' and see what happens. It is far better to find out some bright ideas aren't so bright in a scrimmage than in district play.

Football is a rough game. People can get hurt, seriously injured, and in rare occasions even killed. David Dillon was on the team in '71. He had some attitudes that I didn't like, but I usually didn't have any real problems with him. He never found out how he would do in football because he got his leg broke at this scrimmage. I don't know how it happened but he was someplace in the line when he got clobbered. He would spend most of the rest of his high school time out of sports, except for a brief stint on the tennis team.

I've had my hand broken, my big toe cracked, and a number of stuns, but I have never had a major bone like a leg or arm bone broken. It must be traumatic. That, plus the lack of mobility because of a big plaster cast must be really upsetting. Both David Dillon and Ronald Posey had their legs broken in different football games. Ronald Posey wouldn't play for years and David Dillon wouldn't play again. It wasn't entirely because they couldn't, but because they wouldn't. I don't hold this against them at all. Football is something that a person plays because they like it and enjoy it. If it hurts them and scares them then they should walk away from it and not look back. I enjoyed football a lot. Sometimes it could get ugly, though. In three years I had seen 3 men with legs broken.

The scrimmage ended. On the bus ride back nobody seemed to care whether we had won or lost. Everybody on the team except David Dillon was in a good mood. David Dillon was in the hospital, getting his fracture set. I sat further back in the bus than usual and wound up right next to living legend Larry Little and his buddies. This was not the territory for Nerds, but I had no idea. Larry Little looked me over.

There I sat, very skinny and small, bespeckled, and wearing the jersey #74. I had dibs on this jersey because it was the last one in the box when they were passed out. Nobody told me to put it back, and nobody said I couldn't wear it. Therefore it was mine! It used to be my Cousin Kenneth's jersey, but I didn't know that. Larry Little had seen me in practice so he didn't hold any grudges against me. He felt I had earned the right to wear the colors. What was bugging him was just what sort of creature I was. I think the Senior Larry Little mistook me for a Freshman. He started quizzing me just like Rudy had the year before. I think my answers rattled him a little, inside his conscious.

"Are you going to college when you graduate, Vulture?" he asked.

I thought for a few seconds.

"No," I replied, "I think I'll just find a mountain somewhere and live there all by myself."

He laughed and said I should go to college.

"Why would you want to live on a mountain all by yourself?"

"I don't know," I replied, "I guess I just don't like people."

He laughed again, but eyeballed me curiously. It wasn't typical answers and definitely not what he had expected. I left him like I had left Rudy, thinking real hard about what he had heard. He decided to leave me alone after that. Somehow I had earned this super jock's respect. He was a great running back, but also thoughtful.



We arrived in Lone Oak, unloaded the yellow monster, and I rode home with my folks.

The adventure had begun anew. I was a football player in all but name only.

"...And the Wild Winds of Fortune

shall carry me onward"

(Man of Lamancha, 1965)

Running With the Wind

Our first game was coming up. It was to be against Prosper. I started coming to the evening practices after school.

I padded up for the second time ever in high school on a warm and humid September night. The weight was familiar but odd. I had on an honest to goodness all white practice jersey that was something like a big sweatshirt. All of this stuff I had on was spares and left-overs. I went out there on the practice field behind the school with a very vague idea of what to do but great enthusiasm for the joy of playing the game. The game of American Football is unique in that it is one of the last sports where somebody dresses like a knight of old in bright colors and armor. Europeans do not understand this game yet, just like we do not understand the games of Rugby and Soccer. Of all sports in this country Football is king. Nothing inspires camaraderie and team spirit like it. Only by working together can the team succeed. In basketball there are ball hogs. In track it is almost total individuality. In the game of American Football 11 individuals must pull together as a team or go down to an embarrassing disaster. Like a chain, everyone depends on the others. If another player can't trust the guy next to him it develops friction and a breakdown. A good enemy coach or quarterback can spot a weak link and pick a team to pieces. I have seen this happen to teams loaded with talent.

I got on the practice field and Coach Brookins soon stuck me back at safety. This freed up a valuable player and let the coaches see what I was made of. I was back in the blurry netherworld where I could get run over by a big halfback. Oh happy days! I had watched Rabbit run a few plays before I was put out there and we exchanged a few small laughs. He was glad to see I was out there. Yes, it felt good to be back in pads again. I definitely belonged here!

Then there I was at the disliked position of safety. I watched the play set up as best I could. I had never seen an 11 man setup before, and it was vastly refined from what I had briefly seen last year. At ground level, and from my position it looked like a confusing mess.

"Hut one!" Danny Bowman growled. The play fired off with an amazing amount of feints, fakes, and moves. I had not seen anything like that in over a year. Twenty one other human beings were moving like a wave. I was froze to the spot with awe. Like a curtain opening the center, guard, and tackle blew a hole big enough to drive a car through. Lumbering through this at a moderate pace with head down and ball tucked in with the classic backfield crouch came Larry Little. He came past the linebackers and toward me. He was moving so slow I thought the play was dead. I just trotted up and gave him a 'love tap' with my arm and slid off.

Coach Royal came up like an enraged wolf and got in my face right there. He poked me in the chest with his finger.

"We're out here to play football. Either you tackle or get off the field."



Coach Les Royal

He stomped off and I glared at his retreating back. Coach or not, just who did he think he is?

"Okay," I thought, "you want it, you'll get it!"

The next play was similar and I hit and stuck to the back along with the other safety. Royal was pleased and never dressed me down again. I didn't know the man, and he didn't know me. I had to prove to him I was there to play, I just had to figure out the ground rules. Mr. Royal ticked me off, but he did right. If not for him I probably would not have done as well as I did. I had won my place on the team.

One thing I noticed in the practices was a lot of team action. When a guy messed up a pass he'd call out 'my fault'. When a ball went the wrong way somebody would holler 'heads up!' It was a very interesting environment. I loved it.

As a sort of 'player manager' I was unofficially on the team. I showed up in no team rosters but I got to go to the games. I had my red jersey #74, and I would wear it to games with great pride.

Ronald Posey had football fever like I did. He also had a bum leg from his junior high football days. He hadn't healed enough, both mentally and physically. His leg had been shattered, and he was still working the stiffness out. For that reason he didn't try out for the team. What he did do was get in charge of the popcorn concession at home games. He asked me if I'd like to help. I said I would, because it beat going home.

I read in the paper where Rudy and Toichi got married. I wished him luck and happiness. He was our first 11 man quarterback since 1940, and he left a string of records for all those who came after him to shoot for. The Sheepdog knew this, and in spite of this being his rookie year he was confident he could do Rudy one better.

Danny Bowman was in a unique position. He had been in the line on last year's championship team. He knew what it was like down in the trenches where no glory is given. Because of that he had a great deal of respect for his linemen. I know of no other quarterback in Lone Oak's history that played offensive line then went on to play quarterback and do it well!

Sitting in the dirt, I watched Danny arc up and throw a bomb out there and hit the receiver. I just could not believe his abilities. Here was a 15 or 16 year old kid lofting accurate bombs 50 yards or more. He made it look deceptively easy. Close in he was deadly accurate. If the receiver could handle the zip he put on his passes and hang onto the thing you could really get some yards in practice.

I guess I thought this sort of thing was common. The perspective of being on a truly elite high school team can let a person think the extraordinary is commonplace. I thought all the teams all over the district think, work out, and believe in the team spirit and sportsmanship just like we did. I was to get a nasty wake up call in basketball season.

Prosper

I down shifted, keeping the R.P.M.s up but not enough to damage the Gurney-Ford engine behind me. I shot through the 'S' turn at a tolerable 80 to 110 mph. Soon I was on the short straight and I could see the leader.

Just off the green nose of my Olsenite Eagle was the red wedge of the Lotus Turbine. I think I could take him in this next turn, if I don't get overconfident and tear up my engine. I set up to draft him, and prepared to turn up the boost to sling-shot by.



"Hey Buzzard," Ronald Posey broke in.

I reluctantly came back to reality and looked over at Ronald. Study hall was boring so I was a thousand miles away in Brand's Hatch, England, doing grand prix racing. I put my pencil down.

"Whats up, Posey?"

"We'll meet at the field about a half hour before game time. That'll give us plenty of time to set up the popper."

"Okay, I'll be there."

"Don't be late."

Game day came similar to many I had experienced last year. The major difference was that I didn't go home and watch T.V. on Fridays anymore. The T.V. shows would not be missed. I now had something to do to make my weeknights more exciting. I was on the team, even if it was unofficial.

So it was that after school I got with Ronald Posey and we got the popcorn machine out of the concession stand. We put it on a concrete pad outside the stand and prepped it. We had bags for the product, a huge amount of popcorn ready to be popped, oil, salt, and a hand made poster with the prices on it.

Ronald would start popping just before game time. He had a big metal scoop and we filled about a dozen or so bags with the stuff. These were placed around inside the machine to both advertise and keep them warm. More popcorn was allowed to build about an inch deep on the bottom of the popper. This gave a warm bed of insulation to hold the heat and formed a ready reserve.

We could see the scoreboard and a little of the field from where we were. Popping corn was okay, but it wasn't football. I don't like to eat popcorn but the smell drives me crazy with hunger. We got free colas from the concession stand for our efforts. For the most part it was fun. Sometimes it became an adventure.



I looked up and for the very first time I saw the Big Red Machine in full colors on the field. Out there was where I wanted to be. They looked magnificent! Out there was Danny Bowman. He threw passes around in the drill. The four coaches, McNutt, Royal, Taylor, and Head Coach Jack Brookins looked this over. Quarterback was a weak point, they thought. Danny Bowman hadn't played quarterback in a full year. How rusty was he? He had never played quarterback in an 11 man game.

Danny had on number 19. He had turned in his lineman's number for the quarterback number. Now with Douglas gone and the other candidates from last year he had a shot as the quarterback. Had it been me in that position it would have blown my mind. Danny was as jittery as anyone in his position could be. He made a great effort not to appear so. If he looked less than confident in this position or faltered at all the game could be lost and maybe the entire season. He had to ooze confidence in his teammates, in his ability, and in the game plan as put down by Coach Brookins. Inside he was a nervous wreck.

Troy once told me being Quarterback was a gravy job. You got all the glory and you didn't get clobbered all that much. Gravy, huh? It's the type of 'gravy' I don't think I could handle. Other guys who play other positions usually hold the glory boy quarterback in a bit of contempt.

As for myself I held Danny right up there with cockroaches and rats. That was because of the clique he belonged to, not because of his playing quarterback. I just didn't like him, or so I thought. Deep down I admired his ability and cool. Above all I wanted us to win.

This game started like thousands before it and millions like it all over the country. What made it unique was that this was Texas Small-town Schoolboy Football. No place else was it like this, except in other towns like ours.

Prosper was looking for revenge for what our girls basketball team did to them in the playoffs last year. They had beaten us last year in football and they had every reason to be up for this contest. We would have to wait and see. Prosper must have been confident.

Ronald Posey and I were too busy to enjoy the game. People came around constantly for a bag of popcorn. I glanced up and saw the kickoff and filled popcorn bags.

"Go Red!"

Things went bad in a hurry for the team. With a little over 3 minutes into the game Prosper cracked through the defense and ran 50 yards for a score. I heard the crowd roar and looked up to see the score of Home-0, Visitors -6 on the big white scoreboard.

Prosper's point after failed.

Undaunted, Big Red took it right back. Danny had a variety of plays in his head. One of the major weapons was a 45 quick pitch. This was where Danny reversed out and tossed the ball to speedy halfback Willie Davis. Willie would then trample over the defense, gaining yards behind his blockers.

Posper had no data as to who the new Buffaloe quarterback, Sheepdog, was. They had seen films of Phillip playing, and expected Phil to be the quarterback. Even the press releases Mr. Brookins gave the Greenville paper said so. The Sheepdog and his teammates must have been an unpleasant surprise, especially when Steve Henderson caught a pass for 44 yards and a touchdown.

Mr. Brookins, always crafty, wanted 2, but the point after fell short. The score was now 6 to 6.



I looked up, saw the score, and was delighted. Posey asked me what the score was. A group of people in front of the concession stand would block our view usually so he would send me out there to gawk at the scoreboard and then come back and tell him.

This was my first time at a Varsity 11 man game, and the crowd was very noisy as Lone Oak crowds usually are. Hearing this eerie sound for the first time, I was really enthralled. It was so neat! It was nothing like we had heard in Junior High.

The Lone Oak defense dug in. Troy would bellow our audibles and disinformation, trying to rattle the opposition quarterback. Troy could look either quite insane or extremely intimidating as the mood hit him. Prosper had to punt it away.

In this manner it went back and forth for a while. Danny was calling his own plays and receiving advice from Coach Brookins. After being frustrated by the Eagle defense Danny hit Willie with a pass. Willie then ran 77 yards to the endzone for 6!



Ronald Posey and I heard the crowd go nuts and we both looked up.

"What happened? What happened?" Ronald called.

I took a look.

"We just scored," I said, ginning broadly, "It's now 12 to 6 our favor!"

"Hot dog!"

Lone Oak people feel their best when their team is in the lead. Popcorn sales increased.

"You shoulda seen that!" some guy told us, "Ole Danny Bowman hit Willie from about the 25 and he took it all the way for a T.D.!"

Ronald Posey and I were delighted at the news. All through the game customers would give us little highlights about what we had missed.

The extra point failed again, unfortunately. Now it was half-time. The teams went to the busses. Ronald and I were buried by customers who wanted popcorn. I couldn't see any of the half-time show, but the scratchy music blasting out of the P.A. was audible.

I poured oil and popcorn in the popper then watched on as it popped the kernels very quickly. The top was pushed open by the volume and some of it spilled out onto the bottom of the popping area of the machine. It was how I got my jollies here, watching the machine make popcorn. Ronald Posey handled the cash, and told me how much stuff to make and bag. Together we made a good team. He absolutely enjoyed me being here. We sort of bonded as buddies.

Half time soon ended, and before long it was obvious Prosper still thought they could beat us. Their defense had made adjustments, stopping the offense cold. Phillip was kept busy punting all

through the third quarter. I could hear his foot connect with a thump like a car door slamming. The ball would arc way, way up in the air, zooming along, then it would plummet to earth and out of my sight. From the crowd noise Ronald Posey and I could only guess what was going on after that.

The third quarter war was over. Lone Oak had won it by preventing Prosper from scoring. Now it was the fourth quarter. This was my first Sophomore year game, and I felt good we were ahead. I am sure my team mates felt the same.

Sheepdog had thrown a couple of interceptions by this time but wasn't showing any sign of being rattled. He wasn't doing too bad for someone who had never done this before in 11 man football. Prosper began to tire a little, and I think Lone Oak's conditioning and endurance was higher. Willie broke loose for a 54 yard run to the end zone, and the bleachers cheered him on. This was the icing on the cake. Prosper couldn't catch us now!

As things wound down Ronald Posey and I begin to clean the machine up. We didn't pop any more popcorn, but kept enough bags for anyone that might want some.

Back on the field, David Lemons got into the endzone but the cheers turned to jeers when a penalty negated the touchdown. The final seconds of the game were ticking by and nobody had gone home yet. Lone Oak was driving. They were on Prosper's 25. Danny called 45 Quick Pitch and tossed it to Willie. Willie roared into the endzone, racking up his third touchdown of the night, and our 24th point. The extra point again failed.

Shortly after the kickoff the final seconds were gone. Lone Oak had it's first victory of the year! Sheepdog had played his first 11 man quarterback game and had won! Opening game jitters were gone!

Super Rookie Danny Bowman the Sheepdog had completed 3 of 10 and 2 interceptions. By contrast Prosper had only 1 completion of 12 and 1 interception. Sheepdog's stats weren't mightily impressive, but he hadn't thrown a pass in a game for over a year.

As Ronald Posey and I put the popcorn machine away I was very happy. A victory is a good way to start the weekend and I hadn't seen a game or even been at one in over a year! This was my team, my team mates, and my victory just as it was theirs, or so Jerry McGee told me.

"Whars Th' Owt Howse?"

Every Monday, just like last year, it was go back and pick up all the litter on the field. Just like last year I'd go to the respective benches looking for souvenirs. I didn't find any goodies worth keeping, but there was lots of paper and junk to put in the trash cans we drug along with us. The thought of trash bags hadn't occurred to the world yet.

Somebody had poured the concrete for our locker rooms. Some of us gathered near this hardening slab and looked at it with wonder. The football players among us dreamed of the day they wouldn't have to ride that bus from the gym to here. When the field was wet climbing out of and onto a bus with cleats on was dangerous. It was bad enough in dry weather.

Pipes and plumbing of all descriptions stuck out of the slab. We couldn't figure it out, but some guys said we'd actually have a shower in the locker room. Think of that! An actually working shower with (can we dare to dream?) hot water! No more riding home covered with unspeakable

slime and sweat from the field. The locker rooms were to have toilets, too. Good Grief! There wasn't a single toilet in the old gym except for the one in the girls locker room and a urinal in the lower half of the Varsity locker room. Here at the field there wasn't a comfort station of any kind. I guess a lot of us just brushed it off. Our 8 man field didn't have much to speak of by way of creature comforts, back when we played there. They could use the toilets in the girls locker room that had served as a concession stand back then and they had access to the restrooms in the school through the breezeway. I believed the same thing applied in basketball season.

I wondered what people did when nature called. Some of the local red necks would just push up to the fence in the shadows. For the ladies it was a different story. The only recourse they had was to get in the car and travel home or someplace and come back. Most of the gas stations and the rest of Lone Oak closed up at 5 p. m. and with the gang of thieves we had in the Lone Oak-Tawakoni area all restrooms were locked. I personally never had nature call during a game of any type. If fixtures were there in the locker room guys would line up and take advantage of them. If not we just made do until later. This is one of the perils of small town football.

The flagpole was located near the endzone of the east end of the field. Climbing rungs were welded to it. We all looked at the thing with curiosity. It beckoned to us to climb it. One slow day at this field I decided to try it. I started up the rungs, fighting down my fear of heights. I got up about a dozen or so rungs and about 20 feet. Coach Brookins happened to be there. I saw him grinning up at me with about 15 or 20 of my classmates.

"Keep going," he said, "You're not in trouble yet."

I didn't know if he meant to keep on climbing because the pole wasn't wiggling enough to be dangerous or keep going and I'd get a paddling. I assumed the latter. I started climbing down and I bailed off the pole as soon as I was low enough. With rubbery legs I laughed it off and found something else to do. I respected Mr. Brookins and the considerable power he wielded. I made every conceivable effort to avoid his displeasure. I didn't find that flagpole so interesting anymore. If anyone else climbed it I never knew it.

Back at school the Drill Team girls were making posters for the next game. This had my interest. For the first time in high school I had a football number. Once we got back to school I got a red pen and brazenly signed my name in 2 inch high letters and put my #74 under it. It was my way of telling the entire school, and myself, that I was on the team. Old photos show the scrawl plainly on several posters. One stupid thing I did was that if the poster said 'beat' I'd put 'kill' over that. The poster then read something like "Go Buffs, Kill Community". I sort of made this my project until one day Ms. Sandlin and some of the Pep Squad girls were taking the posters down.

They didn't tell me, but I overheard them say that putting 'Kill' on the posters wasn't too cool. It didn't reflect proper spirit and all that. I think the girls who's posters I had defaced had to do them over. That was bad.

I felt like a clod and I toned down my anti-opponent propaganda after that. At least I did on paper.

I let anyone who cared to know in the student body that I had arrived. I might not pad up for the games, but I was out there in one of the most unique and respected brotherhoods I would ever join. I was a football player for the Lone Oak Buffaloes.

Practice

Practices happened after school about seven o'clock or so. It was a lot cooler in the dusk and night time, so that's when the coaches preferred to have them. After the changes to standard time in the fall we'd start practice right after school. Once I got out of school for the day I went home, usually on the bus. At home I usually ate supper and "crashed" or napped until about 6. Then I'd either get my parents to take me to the school or, more often, I'd get with Rick and go there.

Back at school the players would all meander into the locker room and dress leisurely. If it was Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday we'd put on full pads. If it was Thursday we just put on shorts and T-shirts. "Shorting out" on Thursday prevented injuries in practice. Guys had a tendency to hit a lot harder in pads, and people did get hurt from time to time.

Once dressed, the entire squad of about 30 people would assemble someplace on the practice field in neat rows. Everybody had a place they went to, basically their niche. Calisthenics were done, usually repetitions of 15 each in season, 25 to 50 in preseason.

We did pushups, with fingers extended. There were a variety of bending drills, twisting drills, and hopping exercises. The exercise called '6-45' was especially ugly. This exercise was done laying on your back. On the call '6' we had to hold our feet approximately 6 inches off the ground. On the call '45' we brought our feet up to a more comfortable position. This was repeated over and over. It finished by holding our feet at '6' for several seconds, and it felt like an hour. Groans and moans were stifled by calls and cheers. Sometimes we beat on our stomachs during this to toughen them up, yelling "Go Red!"

Stretching drills were used, but not like they were much later on in the 90s. One exercise was a "Butterfly". It limbered up the legs and looked like a yoga exercise. It limbered up the lower body and legs. The exercise consisted of extending one leg, and tucking the other in the hip. After stretching the extended leg we would lay on our backs and bounce the tucked leg about 10 times. This was repeated for the other leg. Then both legs were tucked tight into the crotch and the legs flexed, looking like a bizarre butterfly.

The Eight Count was a hard exercise to learn. It consisted of bouncing on one foot while putting the arms in eight different positions. On the count of 8 we switched to the other foot and did the arm positions again. This was done about 15 times in practice.

Grass pickers were an exercise where we reached down between our feet and touched the ground 3 times, further back each time. On the third touch we would raise up and clap our hands.

Toe touchers were a simple exercise where we would touch the left toe with our right hand, raise up and clap, then touch the right toe with the left hand, back and forth, counting "One", Clap! "Two!", Clap! back and forth for about 20 times.

Benders were a simple exercise where we pivoted sharply at the waist, first to the right, then back, then to the left, then to the front. It was a simple "One, two, three. One!" count.

Sit ups were done by laying on the back, and putting the hands behind the head. With the legs held out straight we would try to touch our knees with our faces, bending as far forward as we could. It was done 15 to 20 times.

Side straddle hops usually ended the calisthenics, spelling out the school and mascot.

The most bizarre drill we ever did was the helmet flip. We'd plant our helmet on the ground, head and all, and put all our weight on it. We'd go in a circle around it. Then we'd flip over with the helmet now behind and do another circle. We had a firm grip on the sides of the face guard so the

helmet stayed where it was supposed to. It made the neck muscles very strong, and the helmet very dirty.

Sometimes we did three man roll. Three guys got into a drill. One would dive on the ground, roll, and would another would dive over him. The three men would weave back and forth until the coach called it off for another 3 to go at it. Done right it is an impressive drill to watch. It got us used to hitting the ground and getting up real fast. This could keep a guy from being injured in some situations.

Another thing we'd do was 'run the log'. There was a big telephone pole behind the north baseball field. We'd go up there and run it by stepping the left leg in front of the right one, cross stepping for the length of the log. Some guys would stumble and fall down, but because I was wearing lightweight deck shoes I never did.

Wave Drill was fun. The coach would stand in front of 5 guys and wave a football. If he went to our left we went left. If he went to our right we went right. If he pushed the ball at us we went backwards. If he brought it to him we advanced. When he held it over his shoulder we advanced past him and finished the drill. A variation of this was running backwards and fading right or left as indicated by the action of the ball. This developed a natural instinct of reacting to the ball.

A drill we ran that I loathed was called 'Tip Drill'. A coach would toss a ball at a guy. He'd pop it up in the air. The guy behind him would then catch it. Everybody kept this up until each 2 man team had caught the tip-up. Me and a Freshman were soon the only two guys left. The coach was getting angry that we were messing up his practice session, and I was getting scared. Either I was popping it up wrong or the guy behind me needed a peach basket. Finally he caught the cursed ball, and we went on to the next drill. I felt like I had been through the meat grinder on that one. Wow.

I enjoyed the sweat and heat of the workouts. I got sort of a high from it. I really enjoyed being in pads, and most of all being accepted by the team. This is all I wanted. I didn't ask for anything else.

After calisthenics the squads broke up into 2 units; the line, and the backs and ends. I watched the linemen go to their end of the field, and I went with the backs and ends. The line did their drills and backs and ends ran patterns. I was a Sophomore, and at that time I had no idea what the line did while we ran patterns.

The light began to fade at this point, making catching a fast moving pigskin difficult. We had a series of patterns we'd run. They were down and in, down and out, hook, and long. The passing coach would call them out and the receivers would run them. The hook pattern was my favorite. It was run up, stop, turn, catch the ball, then run. I liked it because it made me a better target for Phillip or Sheepdog and made it easier to catch their rockets.

Down and in or down and out were identical 'L' shaped patterns. The quarterbacks would often misjudge our speed because there were so many of us and because of the bad light and throw it too hard. I once came back after chasing down a missed ball protesting to Sheepdog that he was throwing it too hard. He thought I was full of baloney and kept zipping them out there. Live and learn, I guess.

Next came running plays. This is the most fun of practice. The coaches would recombine the squads and form up an offense and a defense. This was full contact and lasted about two hard hitting hours. I sat in the dirt or on my helmet and observed what was going on. The safest place was behind the offense, so we all collected there. The practice field lights were on now, so visibility was tolerable.

Some of the practices were in shorts and that was when we usually practiced kicking. I watched Phillip kick the ball off a tee practicing field goals. I believed I could learn to do that.

After running plays and experimenting with defenses came wind sprints. Practices under Coach Brookins always ended with wind sprints. Ugh!

One memorable night Steve popped Randy Payne in the crotch while in the huddle. This dropped Randy to his knees. I don't know what started that argument but I know what the result was. The coaching staff in general and head coach Brookins in particular were not amused. Bad news.

Mr. Brookins proceeded to make us run wind sprints. When we went beyond our usual number I began to get worried. We were all winded by this time. Some guys had injuries and limped through their wind sprints. We only got to catch our breath just long enough for them to catch up and get ready. Some guys were completely out, staggering to complete the leg. After venting his rage at us in this group punishment Mr. Brookins let us know he would not tolerate such an outrage as he had seen in the huddle.

Mr. Brookins was right in what he did. The men responsible, who ever was at fault, remembered well this gasping, choking, lesson in the dust of Lone Oak.

We then went to an end of the field, usually the south end, and formed a huge circle, clapping our hands. We held out our arms like the wings of a flock of armored birds. This gave us clearance to do jumping jacks and not hit each other.

"Fifteen and spell it out!" the team captain called.

We did 15 four count side straddle hops then spell out as loud as we could "L-O-N-E-O-A-K-B-U-F-F-A-L-O-E-S," then in two more hops "Lone Oak", and "Buffaloes!"

This showed we were not broken in spirit even if exhausted in body. This was also a ritual at the end of each practice, shorts or pads, indoor or out. When we did a practice in the gym it sounded real cool.

En route to the locker room came a battle cry common after each practice. Some one called out "Are we tired?"

Without hesitation the entire team bellowed "No!"

"Why?" it came back.

"We're Buffaloes!"

This was done without prompt by the players and had been handed down through the years. The coach's chests would swell with pride at this display of team spirit.

We were the Buffaloes. We were the Thunder.

Como-Picton

Como-Picton was coming here. A lot of guys remembered last year and were rubbing their hands at the chance. I hadn't been on the team last year so I had no idea what they were talking about. To me, they were just another team to BEAT and I'd be making popcorn again that Friday.

"What are we gonna do tonight?" a player called at the pep-rally.

"BEAT Como-Picton!" came back the yell from the assembled student body.

After the pep rally I waited for school to let out then I went to the field. I was thinking seriously about trying out for kicker. It was the main task a small guy like myself could do. I planned to discuss it with a coach later the next week.

My thoughts were interrupted when Ronald Posey arrived and we pulled the popcorn machine out and set it up. In a while the maddening smell of popcorn was in the air, making us hungry like Pavlov's Dogs.

I watched with envy as the bus drove up with our team doing the familiar battle chant. Posey and I got busy as people in the crowd wanted their popcorn before the game began. When I looked up again Como-Picton in their black and blue was on the field warming up. It was almost time.

After opening ceremonies the game was under way. The team showed early on they meant business. Sheepdog threw Eddie Bell a touchdown pass. Como-Picton must've seen the wrong films because they were at a loss as to what to do with the Big Red Machine.

Mr. Brookins was pleased. After wondering if they had a chance at all with a green quarterback in his offense this sharp display must've come as a relief to him. The entire team was doing a great job. With the great blocking and the powerful backfield of Danny, Willie, Randy Payne, Larry Little, and a host of others it was a well balanced team. Good passing, good receivers, good runners, and good linemen. Go Red!

In the second quarter Danny hit Willie for 6, on a 40 yard pass. This was followed up a little later by another touchdown pass to Troy for 6 more from 15 yards away. Como-Picton didn't give up as they found that hole in the defense and took it 50 yards for a touchdown. Still it was a lopsided 18 to 6.



Como tried an onside kick that was successful and got the ball on the 45. The defense tightened up and Troy intercepted a third down pass on Lone Oak's three yard line. After that the Big Red Machine ate the Blue and Black Eagles alive.

While Ronald cackled with glee each time I told him the score, Lone Oak began to send in the subs. The Eagles discovered to their sorrow that the Buffalo defense had them figured out and the Jack Brookins Wishbone backfield was a Thundering scoring machine.

It ended mercifully with a lopsided score of 54 to 14. The only solace the Eagles could find as they staggered to their bus was that his wasn't a district game.

Danny Bowman had stood tall, as did every man on the team. He had helped defeat handily two teams that last year had beaten Lone Oak. Whereas last year we had only 8 points at this time, we now had 78. All around the district word went out. Lone Oak was the team to beat. We had the Thunder!

As Ronald Posey and I closed out the activities for the night we had the warm fuzzies over the shattering victory. This was the destruction of opponents we remember from the days of our Junior High victories. We gave away excess popcorn, and cleaned the machine up. On the field the managers carried the equipment to the bus and the players made for home or the locker room.

Next up was Community. They were to be the third team on this wonderful home stand. Word had it they were seeking revenge for the 78 to 0 drubbing we gave them last year.

Bring it on.

Forbidden Hopps

Greenville's Pizza Inn used to be one of Lone Oak's favorite after-game hangouts. A good part of the entire team, including a lot of the pep-squad, would go en masse to this joint and gobble down pizza. There were tables all over the place and the booths were separated by partitions and overhead cover. Having no money, I rarely went there in the early 70s, but I liked the place well enough. Pizza was quite a novelty in those days for most of us.

We had won a great victory this night, and Rickey was in a celebratory mood. He had anticipated this night's victory and had a 6-pack of beer stuffed up one of the vents of his 1965 Ford Fairlane car. A strong pull removed the panel, and the 6 pack was passed around for one and all. I was handed one. Okay, now WHAT do I do with THIS?

I looked this over. My Father drank an occasional beer, so I was familiar with this beverage. Now for the first time I had one all my own. I pulled the pop-top and took a swig. It tasted just as bad as any sample my father had let me have. I forced myself to stay with the horrible tasting drink and I worked my way down to half of the can.

Rick drove to Pizza Inn, and in the 30 minute drive I had made progress on my drink. When Rick pulled into the parking lot I was feeling no pain. My fellow passengers had already completed their drinks a while ago and had ditched the empty cans. I still had about half a can, so I sat it on the parking lot and followed my friends into the Pizza Inn. I was swaying a bit, and I felt oddly happy.



I went in and sat down across the table from Rick and the others. I talked to fellow team mates at nearby tables and marveled at the way they smiled at me and paid attention to me. I must be so cool!

"Charles is drunk!" one girl quietly told another, grinning broadly.

The other girl nodded, giggling.

"Drunk as a lord. Listen to him slur his speech!"

Ah yes, I was snokkered. I don't remember what we ate, but I do remember that Rick's jokes were extra funny that night. After I'd eaten, the alcohol was absorbed and also diluted by the tea I drank. I came down and gradually returned to myself. It was not an unpleasant evening, but I had succeeded in making a bit of a fool of myself. On the good side I never got this lit-up again while I was still in school, even when I did get another can of booze.

I Betcha

Boom! A punt soared downfield. The wind caught it and it drifted off course to the left, into a drill in progress.

"Heads up!" Phillip called.

Guys started scanning the skies for the wayward punt and some got out of the way, covering their bare noggins. One guy tracked it and caught it, and rifled a long pass back to Phillip. So was a typical punting drill on a lazy Thursday afternoon.

I was awed by Phillip's punting ability. I'd scratch my ever flaking scalp and watch him boom the punts seemingly for miles. It was amazing. After punting a few times he'd try field goals. I had fantasies that I could be a kicker, so I tried to kick a few times. This was on the remains of the venerable old 8 man field. The goal posts were still in place so we took advantage of them for place kicks. The quarterback was busy running last minute plays so Phillip would tee them up on a kickoff tee. He and I both kicked in the soon to be old fashioned place-kick style. Toni Fritsch had just introduced the soccer style of kicking to the Dallas Cowboys and it was slowly catching on all over. The increased range was phenomenal. With the standard place-kicking style a guy

could get maybe a field goal on the 30. Now even some high school kids were booming them through the uprights at 40 yards or more!

Phillip and I were on about the 30 yard line. Phillip smacked one and it tumbled through the uprights. He seemed satisfied and took the return pass. I teed it up.

"Buzzard," Phillip said, eyeing me incredulously, "You make it from here and I'll give you fifty bucks!"

Accepting his arrogant challenge, I glared at him. Then I stepped into the ball. I kicked it a good one. It tumbled in a graceful arc and cleared the bar, splitting the uprights square in the middle. Phillip's jaw dropped.

I danced a little at my accomplishment.

"Pay up!" I cried, jumping up and down and holding out my hands, "Pay up!"

Phillip thought fast, chewing on the crow I had made him eat.

"Uh, we didn't shake on it," he dodged.

Our kicking practice continued. Phillip kept kicking but he didn't tell me I couldn't do it anymore. I had some of his respect after that. It was a major coup in my book. I had beat a jock at his own game.

I was still kicking field goals when Coach Taylor came walking by. I scratched my itching head and kicked one.

"A scratch of the head and a kickoff the ball," he joked. Then he said "Three points!"

That was from the 20. I was actually a lousy kicker. My bird-like legs couldn't propel it consistently with enough power to ensure accuracy. Phillip's position as field goal kicker and punter was under no threat from me or anyone else so far on the team.

It was sort of strange for me because I was being treated with respect by upper classmen. At the time I took this for granted, not being a Freshman anymore. I enjoyed the equality they gave me. Danny said I was actually inspiring smaller guys to go out for football over in Junior High. Looking at what was going on in the lower grades, I guess he was right.

I will not say I was a hero to the other small fellows who went out for football. David Lemons was about as small as I was, but he was more Bantam Rooster than Crane. I was true nerd. He was an athlete. He was fast and tough, remarkably so. He was more like Rabbit. But Danny said the small guys noticed me more. They figured if I could do it, they could too. All you had to do was try.

There is a saying, "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger." Football had just about kicked my brains out. I was over that, I think. (You never know.) I was in the best physical shape I had ever been in, and I was getting the general respect of my fellow players, my classmates, and my coaches. The student body at large hadn't paid much attention but the kids who watched us practice looked on with a bit of respect, especially when I helped tackle one of the superjocks, like Steve or Larry. That's why I was here, for the acceptance, respect, and excitement.

Larry Little was quite a remarkable fellow, too. He was tall and built exactly like Troy. He was well coordinated. He also drove a red Impala S.S. with a chrome rear panel. After our conversation on the bus he generally left me alone. He once saw me draw a picture of a female character I have called Vicki McClusky. Larry examined the picture without comment and went on his way. Drawing girls embarrassed me if I was watched, but I could rapidly whip out some attractive drawings. Miss McClusky was a female mechanic and race car driver. This was virtually unheard of in 1971. I had her holding a cutting torch and in coveralls. I still don't know what Larry thought.

Once he heard I had a cartoon football team called the Vultureville Vultures. He asked me where they were from. I said in west Texas. He just grinned and walked on. I do not think he could figure me out. That he treated me with the respect he did, him being one of the biggest superjocks in the entire district, sort of blew my mind. Like all upper classmen I considered him to be superior and mature from my lowly perch. To get to the privileged rank of Senior is the ultimate goal. I hoped to be like him in 1974.

Mr. Brookins began a school on penalties. Clipping calls, where a guy is hit from behind, had cost us 15 yards a pop. There had been way too many penalties so far this season. He said if a guy turns his back on you call him a chicken. A sign of too many penalties is a lack of discipline. It could also be a bad case of nerves or jitters. Worst of all it could be a complete ignorance of the rules! The latter might not be too far off base. I wasn't too wise in the rules of most sports myself. We had to get our act together before the next game.

Community was coming. We were as ready as we could ever be. After the pep-rally I went to get some food then I went to the field in my red jersey. I looked up at the gathering clouds with concern. This was Homecoming. I expected a lot of people in the ballpark. I just hoped it didn't rain.

Community, Homecoming

The sky looked ugly. Ronald Posey and I had put up the machine as per usual. We had no idea what we'd do if it rained. It was a little chilly tonight, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Once it came a light sprinkling and we got under the cover of the roof edge of the concession stand until it stopped.

We were encouraged by this short downpour, and guessed it might be all the rain we'd get that night. We proceeded to build up our pre-game inventory of popcorn. Then the clouds let loose. We frantically developed a method to keep our popcorn and ourselves dry. We'd run out to the machine and load the popper then run back to the relative shelter of the concession stand roof over hang. We did this in relays. As usual Ronald Posey would handle the money and I'd get the popcorn. Man, it was pouring down! We were not even sure when the game started.

Everybody had problems. Fumbleitis was rampant on the field. This was our Homecoming, and there was a large amount of humanity getting soaked in the bleachers. It was miserable.

Water begin to puddle in the field, turning it from a swamp to an everglade. There was even some remote danger of possibly drowning a little bit if someone was tackled in a deep puddle. It was really that bad on the field!

Danny had a conversation with Mr. Brookins, and they figured it worked in our favor. Community had some speedy individuals in it's roster. The muck, swamp, and the small lakes would slow these speedsters down. Coach Brookins decided to keep the ball on the ground, hardly throwing

at all. Community seemed to be following the same game plan. The downside was that it ran the clock. Some on their side would swear we flooded the field before the game. As a defacto custodian and co-builder of this facility I can tell you straight out it aint so. The hard clay under the grass just wouldn't let the water drain off.

In an odd sort of way this was the closest thing we'd ever have to an artificial turf. Just a mat of grass over a hard clay surface.

The crawfish that lived under there loved it.

Community had to punt about midway in the second quarter. Both teams had to punt if they didn't fumble it away. Try as they might to keep the footballs dry, only a few seconds in the rain made the pigskin slick and heavy again.

O.T. Williams stood ankle deep on the 30, squinting through the downpour at the line. He wiped the rain off his face and got ready to receive the punt. "Lets get on with it!" he thought to himself, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

He could just barely make the ball out as it spun up into the rain, arced, and tumbled down toward him. He maneuvered under the ball, forming a basket with his hands and arms. He caught it and took off, splashing up the field. The Brave's specialty team broke down in the rain. Blocked down into the muck, they couldn't get to O. T. and lightning fast cuts on this wet field only left the individual swimming face down.

O. T. saw an opening and splashed toward it. Much to his increasing excitement there was nobody between him and the goal line. Getting a rush of adrenaline he poured it on. He slogged into the endzone to the great joy of the soaked hometown crowd. Holding up his arms in victory he tossed the ball to the reff. There were backslaps all around.

Over at the concession stand Ronald Posey and I craned our necks to see what was going on. I looked at the scoreboard. I could barely see it with the waterspecks on my glasses.

"I think we scored," Ronald Posey said.

"Good!"

Danny saw Coach Brookins signal to go for 2. He nodded and called a pass play.

"Texas Left, Red Pass, on two. Ready?"

"Hit!" the men in the huddle responded as they broke for the play.

"Down!" Sheepdog called.

The Lone Oak troops on the field rested their elbows on their thigh pads. The Center grabbed the football. The rain poured down.

"Set!" Sheepdog growled, reaching under the Center.

The team got into their 3 point stance, tensing for the play.

Steve Henderson, the split end, stood gracefully in a posture that looked like he could take off like a deer. He looked over at Sheepdog to be sure he heard the count. The linemen eyed the men in front. It was a goal-line defense, a solid wall of humanity prepared for a quarterback sneak or a quick dive play.

"Hut one!"

Nobody moved except on defense where an apprehensive linebacker moved and yelled instructions to his team mates.

"Hut..."

The Center fired the ball into Sheepdog's hands and smashed into the man in front of him.

"...Two!" Sheepdog faked to a back and rolled out to one side, looking for his target. The Center and the other linemen formed a pocket to protect Danny. Steve cut in and looked at Danny. The ball was already in the air. Steve snagged it like a bird out of the air, for two points!

The roar of the crowd told Ronald and me that something good had happened. I made out the score, 8 to 0, our favor.

"All right!"

It was still raining stoutly, and Ronald Posey and I were miserable. It was a good large crowd, however, and everybody seemed to want popcorn. We stayed busy.

Phillip kicked off and Community knew they had to do something. They did not want to go into their bus that was serving as a locker room at half time and be behind on the score. They put together a drive.



This is what the top part of the popcorn machine looked like. The second picture is pretty much what the entire contraption looked like. All metal and electric.

While this was going on Posey and I got very paranoid about the machine. There was standing water everywhere and the telephone booth like machine was electric. We had the plug and

extension cord out of the water, hanging on a nail, but the machine itself was a different story. It was on it's wheels but parts of it were metal. The 'happy' thought of being electrocuted danced in our young skulls.

Earlier in a study hall Coach Taylor told us a story about an incident he was involved in that had to do with electricity. Coach Taylor would chat with us in study hall. Being a coach he was looked upon as more "one of us" than a teacher. He shared something with us only a coach can and an non-coach never could. It is an exclusive club.

Gunner and I had told him about hauling hay that summer. He told us of his hay hauling days down in Arp in his wonderful East Texas drawl.

"There was this Mexican fella that hauled with us, and he was a mucho of a man. He could pick up a bale in each hand by the wires and put them up on the truck we had. We called him Pancho.

"We had this electric hayloft loader and it would take them bales right up into the loft on a conveyor belt where they could be stacked. Ole Pancho, he liked that, saying it was plenty easy.

"Well, this ole East Texas rainstorm came over, and we kept on using that electric loader. Not far down from where we were lightning struck this barb-wire fence. There were about ten, twelve cattle near this fence and they went right down."

He emphasized by clapping his hands together.

"It killed 'em all deader than a hammer," Coach Taylor continued to our awed expressions, "We all took one look at that and we didn't want to have anything to do with electricity for the rest of the day. I asked Pancho if he wanted to use the loader and he said 'No, no! Too mucho dangerous!"

This little story of natural mass electrocution bounced around in my head while I looked at this wet electric popcorn machine.

Ronald and I used some caution while opening the doors or making fresh popcorn. We used a towel we kept in the cabinet part of the machine to touch any part of it that might be metal. He said he got mild shocks from the machine anyway. This was one interesting way to make popcorn.

Community had made it to Lone Oak's 4 yard line. The quarterback called an end around and handed off to Cox. Cox, I can tell you, was a living legend in local football. He was amazing. Cox was hit and buried at the goal line but not before he got over for 6. It was now 8 to 6.

Troy Haynes was somewhat upset by this chain of events. Last year they had destroyed this team 78 to 0. That was last year. This was a good Community team and a fine example of how a team can turn around. Community had destroyed Caddo Mills last week 33 to 0. They were a contender this year and demanded much more respect than the team of the year before.

With this in mind Troy set up the defense with an eye as to how they had been running at him all night. They seemed to like to go around right a lot. He told this to Coach Brookins and they agreed. It was a gamble, but he set up his defense to stop it there. Then he waited to see what would happen.

Sure enough, Cox took the hand off and went right, trying for two. He was buried again by red jerseys, and it fell short. The score remained 8 to 6.

Half-time came and the 2 teams waded off the field. The rain still poured down.

I happily but cautiously shoveled popcorn, looking at the scoreboard. It was still raining and we didn't have rain gear, but Ronald Posey and I couldn't get much wetter.

Showing their usual fortitude and impressing the news reporters sent here to cover our Homecoming, the Lone Oak Drill Team and Pep-Squad splashed out in the rain to perform their Homecoming Half-time Show. I don't think the Community drill team did their show, and I don't blame them. It was very bad conditions out there. The half-time belonged to our ladies, and they were out there doing their show.

One girl, one of Troy's sisters, fell during a kicking routine. This embarrassed her so badly she considered quitting the Pep Squad. In the end she decided to stay with it. I hope someone told her that at least she was out there and a lot of other girls didn't have the discipline to do it.

These were gutsy, courageous girls. I hope they got a standing ovation.

It was still coming down cats and dogs when the teams came back on. For the most part it became just slosh through the mire, tackle somebody, get up, and do it all over again. Ugh.

It went on like this for 2 entire quarters without much to show for it. Both sides had made changes that countered the other's advantages and the teams staggered through the wet, evenly matched. It became a battle in the bog.

When the fourth quarter came and the game ended, Lone Oak had won it 8 to 6. Jack Brookins 2 point gamble had paid off. Lone Oak had won it's second Eleven Man Homecoming game.

The Community Braves had put up one heck of a battle under the worst of conditions imaginable outside of snow and ice. They deserved the "Good Game" handshakes they got after it was over. We didn't line up and shake hands in those days, we just wandered around the field, then off to the locker room. No special after game ceremony, just get on the bus or go to the locker room and take off the pads.

In my opinion the battle that in the Community Braves had put up against the Buffaloes, Community had avenged their honor for last years destruction.

Ronald Posey and I quickly put the machine away, somewhat grateful to turn the thing off. I then went up the sidelines. I saw Robert Vice. He had a huge grin on his face. There wasn't all that much mud on him, just grass and water. He was thoroughly soaked. I slapped him on the shoulder and said "Way to go."

I stood on the sidelines for the first time next to my teammates and looked through the downpour at the Homecoming Queen ceremonies. I was unimpressed and I didn't understand what it was all about. In the future I would, but right at that time it was just some obscure ritual the team took part in. I then went home and peeled out of my wet cloths.

Coach Brookins had achieved one true goal in this game. We only had four penalties, for 29 yards.

This was our very first victorious Homecoming on our new field and in the return to 11man football, won in the rain, on 24 September, 1971.

Payback Time

"What are we gonna do next Friday night?!" Benny Vice screamed.

"Beat Quinlan!" we screamed back.

What? Who? I looked around. Quinlan? I switched my helmet over to my left hand and tapped Rabbit on the side.

"Did he say Quinlan?"

"Yeah. We're gonna play them at Quinlan. It's their Homecoming."

Oh joy of joys! Oh dream dreams! My first away game in highschool and it's going to be at Quinlan! Oh yes!!

We went into the old gym and took off our equipment in the locker room. Practice was over for this Monday and I was delighted to learn who was next in our sights.

'Get your mind on the game' indeed! All that week I had Quinlan on my mind! As the days rolled tediously by one by one with school, practice, and other things I was really getting wound up. Nobody told me Quinlan had beaten us last year. If I had I known I had forgotten about it, anyway. I just didn't like the only team to ever beat us in 2 years of Junior High football.

From my spot in the regular crowd I yelled loudly in the pep rally that Friday. Everyone on the team seemed to have a similar enthusiasm, especially the players who were my classmates. They didn't like the Panthers at all.



Chopped up picture from Yearbook. Note Team members with Cheerleader Megaphones.

Rickey Graham, David Morgan, and I went to the "Bean Pot" cafe in front of Lone Oak. It was owned by Gunner's mother and we would eat there before going to the game. This was becoming a game day hangout. The three of us would go here, eat, shoot pool, and get ready for the bad guys.

I sometimes think that eating before a game is a bad idea. But the last meal we had was at 12:00 or so. The game was between 7:30 and 8:00. Football burns up a lot of calories. Eating was a good idea. The guys who didn't eat would be ravenous by game time and starving afterward. They would burn out faster and not have the reserves of strength to call upon. We ate our food and thought about the game.

I was up for this game. I had seen the Panthers destroyed 2 years ago and I got to participate. I wanted to see what kind of team they were in high school. I wanted this game.

Red jersey #74 and all I got on the bus and picked a spot by the window. I looked around at the team. Danny Bowman the Sheepdog was really bouncing for this battle. He was more animated than usual. Rick didn't like to talk before the game, so I tried to find Rabbit or somebody to chat with. Talking to Rabbit was when I found out Quinlan had beaten us last year.

"No!"

"Yeah, thats right! They did. It was our Homecoming, too!"

"NO!"

Well now, even a BIGGER reason for revenge! Go Red!

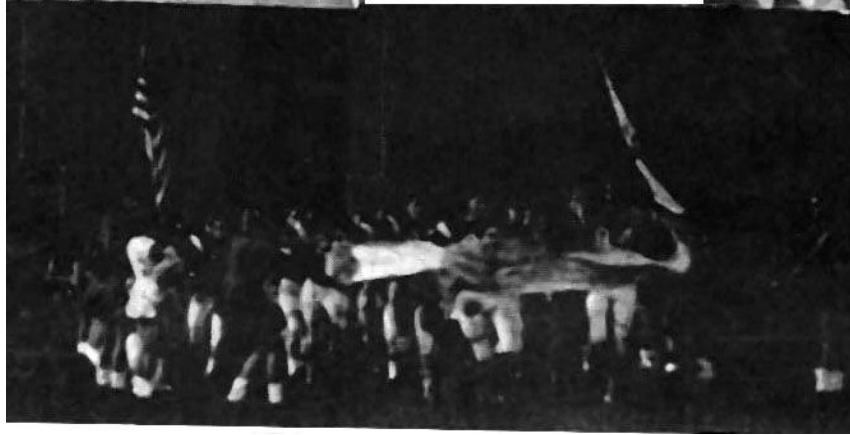
We pulled into Quinlan and started chanting GO-RED-GO! and pounding on the sides of the bus. Nobody was destructive but we were on the hairy edge of it. The chant stuttered and died as the bus stopped and we hopped off.

I looked around and saw familiar sights. There was their stinking hump back field. There was their stinking scoreboard, and there was their big blue team suiting up for the stinking game. I sneered at them arrogantly and then helped unload the bus.

It was payback time.

Quinlan's Homecoming

I listened to my first pregame speech by Coach Brookins. It was short and to the point. We all responded with whoops and hollers then we exited the locker room, running onto the field. I went with them, setting up in the last row for the warm up exercises. I did the warm up with the team. I stayed out of the way for pass drill and plays, sometimes chasing a missed ball or two.



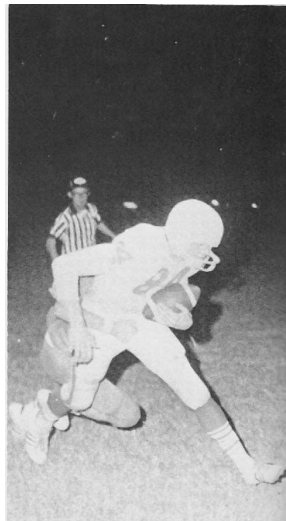
Running through the banner.

Soon it was time to start the Catfish Bowl, as they called a game when Lone Oak played Quinlan. We lost the toss and had to kick off. That was okay, because that means we get the ball first in the second half.

Quinlan came out passing, looking for that hole in the secondary we had last year. I started yelling things out to the players, much of it was quite infantile and immature.

"Come on Red! Tear their legs off!"

Quinlan drove on down to our 3 yard line. We were very excited and the coaches had to repeatedly tell the guys on the sidelines not to go beyond the 20 and not to step on the field. Everybody wanted to get as close as they could to the play. We were up for this game!



Quinlan scored from the 3 and made the follow up kick for the extra point. I was beside myself with anger. It was 7 to 0, Quinlan's favor.

The Buffaloes came back. Danny Bowman the Sheepdog was calling his own plays, only getting occasional plays sent in by the coaches. In this manner the team went to work on Quinlan.

Highlight of the drive was a quick pitch to Willie for about 33 yards. Quinlan's defense held, however, and Phillip had to punt it to them.

Back and forth it went for two more times. I was getting frustrated and even more vocal. I stomped up and down the sidelines screaming mayhem and destruction at the enemy. A reporter from the Greenville paper looked at me like I was truly nuts.

"Bloodthirsty little fellow, aren't you?"

I just stared at him and went back to egging on the troops. He was an outsider. He couldn't understand. This was, to me, serious business. Forget him!

Sheepdog was just as frustrated as I was. His dislike for Quinaln was just as deep as mine, but he could not be as vocal. He had other ways to express his displeasure.

One way was a quick pitch to Randy Payne who thundered 24 yards before the sheer weight of the Panthers hanging off him brought him to ground. Then Sheepdog tried the same play with Willie to the other side. Willie got ten more. Danny asked questions of his people in the huddle, processing the input rapidly. He set Quinlan up.

For two more plays he drew the Panther team in close, expecting him to keep it on the ground. After all, ole Sheepdog was a Rookie, wasn't he? Heck, last year this dude was playing guard! Man, Lone Oak must be desperate!

Wanna bet?

Danny took the snap, faked, and threw a long bomb downfield. Steve Henderson was tearing up the grass, blazing downfield. The Panther covering him was desperately trying to stay with the long legged speedster. Steve looked up and so did the Panther. The ball fell into Steve's outstretched hands and Steve fell into the endzone for 6! That made it 7 to 6!



ZOWIE! I jumped up and down and yelled congratulations. I slapped the back of Steve as he came off the field. Oh yes, this was much more like it!

Coach Brookins tried for 2, of course. It failed, to our great disappointment. The score was still 7 to 6, Quinlan's lead.

Phillip kicked it off to Quinlan and the game continued. As I wandered up and down the sidelines screaming abuse at the bad guys and encouragement to our side I think some of the people in the stands thought I was crazy as a loon. Who was this skinny kid in the red jersey hurling abuse like a madman at those on the field? For all my screaming and cat-calling no one ever told me to shut up. Maybe some folks thought I was the mascot or something. I looked like I was out of Junior High. It certainly must have been odd, but it wasn't out of character for a youngster.

For all my nonsensical noise making on the sidelines there was a balance. Ronald Posey's brother Gary kept statistics on a clipboard for the coaches. Occasionally he would call out "Go Lone Oak!" as he walked up and down the sidelines. I personally thought this battle cry needed something, but it was his style. It said something in it's simplicity and elegance. It wasn't crude like "Kill!" or "Tear their legs off!", it was just simply "Go Lone Oak!" It had more power than my exhortations because it was as traditional and sporting as it was simple. I was impressed, but at that moment this lesson in sportsmanship would elude me. I thought it was just plain dumb.

During the game an incident happened that put a dampner on my childish cheering. Jerry Morgan, a player for Quinlan who I did not know at the time yet is an easygoing fellow, was a runner in the backfield. The Quinlan quarterback handed off to him on about the 20. He recalls getting hit by about 8 guys in red jerseys and going down hard on the turf. It broke his leg. For all my raving about mayhem, for all my dislike for Quinlan, I didn't want anybody to be hurt. This is, above all else, just a game. Jerry lay in the grass on the field, attended to by his coaches. I looked on in genuine concern. I felt somewhat guilty. When they helped him to the sidelines we applauded him in the traditional sportsman-like manner. Jerry was out for the season, but he attended the school Homecoming dance the next day. He didn't even know he had a broken leg until the next Monday when he decided to go to the hospital.

The game resumed. Old Blue couldn't budge Big Red so they had to punt. Hungry for points the Buffalo offense went onto the field. Sheepdog called the play and looked square into the menacing eyes of Rickey Graham, his center.

"On two."

Danny had confidence in his team mates. Rick was big and stout and fast. Robert Vice was a powerful tackle. Randy King was a gigantic guard. Norman Brookins was a good center and guard. Eddie Lively was as powerful a lineman as anyone could ask for. Rick Conner was a hard hitter. These were the men up front, in the trenches.

Behind the line there were the excellent backfield of Larry Little, Jerry McGee, Randy Payne, Benny Vice, Willie Davis, and David Lemons. Out on the ends were Steve Henderson, O. T. Williams, Johnny Hooten, Troy Haynes, and many of the backfield men who rotated out there. This was a scoring machine. It was a powerful force. Mr. Brookins was delighted to have such excellent talent. The entire team had confidence and trust in each other. They were magnificent. To me, to just have the privilege to stand on the sidelines left me in awe. They were the Big Red Machine; Big Red, the Buffaloes!

Danny faded back and tossed a hot one to Steve. Steve leaped high in the air between two Panthers and wrapped his hands around the ball. What a catch! The two Panthers pulled him to the ground immediately, on the four yard line.

The half was running down, we knew we had to score. When Danny looked to Coach Brookins for any changes all he saw was a confident gaze. Danny called the play.

Boom! Danny handed off to Randy Payne. He bowled over the guys in blue to make 6. We had just taken the lead! On the sidelines we went collectively nuts! We had the lead! Now it was 12 to 7. The two point try failed, and then it was our half-time.

I witnessed the world of High School Lockerroom Half-time with interest. Some guys got retaped. Others had injuries dealt with. In front of the Coaching Staff was a small half-circle of the most elite players, giving information and receiving instructions. I kept my mouth shut and looked on. I helped where I could, getting a roll of tape, or handing someone water. The real managers were busy with towels, drinks, or repairing equipment.

Then, adjusted, rested, and ready, we went back out on the field. The third quarter war was upon us. Quinlan was expected to put up a big fight. This was, after all, their Homecoming.

We received the kick. Then Lone Oak pushed hard. The third quarter war had to be won. Danny handed off to Troy Haynes who took off like a lightning bolt. He ran 76 yards, chased by the Panthers who never touched him. The two point play worked this time and it was 20 to 7. I thought I heard the Big Red Thunder, rolling deeply in the sky.

Phillip boomed a kick far down the field, the Quinlan receiver taking it on the 12. Either our specialty team broke down or the Panthers did it just right, but what ever it was the guy ran through the Buffaloes and sped upfield. The Quinlan crowd went nuts as this young man went an incredible 89 yards to score. Their extra point try failed. It was 20 to 13.

Eddie Lively was a big (BIG) fellow with good speed and agility. He was as big as Jerry McGee. Coach Brookins was experimenting with big fellows as full backs in the back field to give his offensive backs blocking power and short range hard driving ability. Eddie had played in the line for most of his career. I'd not want to be the guy who had to face a backfield composed of Jerry, Randy Payne, Eddie, and Sheepdog. It would be like trying to tackle a tank. In practice I had ran into this gentlemen with the same results as a bug running into the windshield or a Mac truck. The game was too tight to let up, but not too tight to risk something, like letting Eddie play end or back. Tight end was something a lineman can do nicely.

The team had driven down the field. Like a powerful machine the Buffalo offense pushed the Panthers back, eating up the clock in the process. Lone Oak put the final nail in the box we had the Panthers in by Sheepdog swinging out a pass to Eddie Lively for 6 more. That made it 26 to 13. Our final extra point try for the night failed, but we didn't care.

We watched the clock run out on this one then celebrated as we dashed for the locker room. Quinlan had to crown a Homecoming Queen and we didn't want to be in their way. At the very least we could stand with respect on the sidelines while the coronation happened, but I don't think we had any business there. We had, after all, hurt two of their players and put one of them out for the season.

We had revenge for last year, and a victory. Last years defeat had been washed away by this 26 to 13 victory. Did I hear the Thunder?

Fair II

This was my second trip to the Dallas Fair. I was itching to go. Rabbit, Herman, and I had it all planned. We even had a map of the place that had been published in the Greenville newspaper.

Now we could find all those neat places we wanted to see and go to, and especially a rally point to go to if we got lost or separated again.



Not the map we used, but some idea of what it looked like

The bus ride over there became eventful when Stoney stopped our bus on I-30 just outside of Greenville. He got out and looked at the front wheels. Some of us got out to take a look. The retreaded tires were losing their treads. On one it had separated visibly from the tire itself. Mr. Brookins was in another bus. He halted behind us, got out, and ordered all of us back into our bus. I watched out a window as they had a conference. Do we get another bus and repair the tires on this one or try to make it to Dallas and get it repaired over there?

There were 3 busses in our caravan. Each bus had a spare tire and a jack. That gave us 1 tire extra if we lost both of our front tires. The decision was made to go on.

I saw the now familiar sights. There was the big red Pegasus on the skyscraper. There was the billboard with the girl with the provocative strut. The Freshmen on the bus were just as surprised as I was last year. Where we came from women just did not flaunt it like that, and certainly not on a 30 foot high billboard.

Soon we pulled into the parking lot and I saw that nauseating ocean of yellow busses again. The illness passed when I saw the huge wooden roller-coaster. Rabbit, Herman, and I swore we'd ride that monster today. It was a long way all the way to the top of the first hump on that beast.

Using our maps, Herman, Rabbit, and I plotted where we wanted to go. Word reached us there was a N.A.S.A. exhibit near the Cotton Bowl. After a few rides of little redeeming value we took off for the Cotton Bowl. We entered a vast chamber of seeming epic proportions. It was dimly lit and the air conditioning made it chilly. We rounded a corner in the many curtained hallways with various booths in the place and beheld a wonderful sight. There was a moon buggy and a mannequin in a spacesuit standing next to it. It was lighted in such a way that it looked just like the Moon. Gray cement dust doubled for moon dust. It was wisely roped off, so nobody could get into the multi-million dollar display and mess it up. I stood there fascinated. Here was my fantasies made real. The moon buggy, the space suit, all of it stood before us. The three of us stood there and commented with as much reverence as it we were in the presence of the original Declaration of Independence or the Holy Grail. After a while we had to move on. I didn't want to leave, but there were more things to do than stare in fascination at a static display of space hardware.



Once outside the Cotton Bowl the three of us watched as a Bell Jet Ranger executive helicopter flew and landed some V.I.P.s in the Cotton Bowl. Texas-O.U. weekend was near, so chances were these were faculty from one of the schools checking out the arena. We walked a circle around the Cotton Bowl, looking for a way in. The place was like a fortress. I wanted to see what artificial turf looked like. Soon we found the 'tunnel', common to all stadiums of similar size. We knelt outside a gate and we could just see inside the place. Looking at the field we were spellbound by the beauty of the innards of the place where the Dallas Cowboys played. We could make out the helicopter, looking very toy-like on the surface of the field. It was a rare and wondrous sight for us, I wondered what it would be like to play in there. Rabbit said we'd get our chance when we went to the State Championship. That was a happy thought.



Other entertainment now beckoned us on. We got into a house of mirrors, bouncing off the plexiglass hard. Rabbit's sense of humor ran wild in the room where the mirrors distort the reflection. He just about had us helpless from laughing.

Rabbit seemed to know where he wanted to go, so Herman and I followed his lead. He took us into a haunted house, and the hair on my neck stood up. I didn't like these places because I get combative. This is all in good fun, but I don't enjoy being in a fake environment of danger, unarmed and everything. I don't enjoy being scared like this. When the ordeal was over I told

Rabbit I didn't like places like this. He looked at me in a funny way, but accepted it. We went to another haunted house nearby, but in this one we rode in a buggy. I decided to stay outside. In a few minutes the came out laughing and told me I should go in there. I refused, so off we went to other things.

The smell of food filled the air and we decided to eat. We swore we'd die of hunger before we'd eat those hot dogs like I had last year. Basically we munched on junky Fair Food while plotting our next move on our maps.

We ended up at the aquarium and science building. We looked at the abundance of space exhibits. I guess we were all frustrated Astronauts. Only in my drawings and our imaginations could we go to the moon or fly airplanes. We took it all in and loved it.



Once outside and on the Midway we got separated again. Wandering about I ran into Gongga. He wanted to go into that stupid spook house with the buggy ride. I reluctantly went along. After a few seconds of hair raising fear I buried my face in his jacket, actually afraid to look at what was around me. If 'it' came over to me I was afraid I'd either bail out of the buggy and run through the place or I'd fight what ever it was trying to scare me. The buggy almost tipped over once, and Gongga tried to get me to look up. When we came out of the facility I looked up and did not want to go back.



Shortly after this adventure with Gonga I found Herman and Rabbit. We continued our little expedition. There was a lot to see and do, and as long as the money lasted, we saw and did it. Rabbit was fascinated by the freak shows, and he went especially for the girlie shows. I was running out of energy and money at the same time. Rabbit saw this, and so we took in as many free exhibits as we could. We wandered around in the crafts buildings and blew some money on the Dancing Chicken. We were fascinated by the Basketball Playing Chicken.

Soon I got my second wind and we tried a few more rides. One of the places we loved was the Bavarian Fun House. We went in there about 3 times.

Soon it was time to go. Loaded down with souvenirs and junk we merrily made our tired way back to the bus.

In my hands I held a treasured souvenir. It was a Mongram model of a Saturn V rocket that I would spend the next 2 weeks building with meticulous care. I had seen the moon buggy, the astronauts, and now I had a rocket I could call my own. It had cost the princely sum of \$5.00 in 1971 money.



Friends, adventure, food, fun, souvenirs and all, it had been a great day at the Fair. The best ever.

"If ladies be but young and fair,

They have the gift to know it."

('As You Like It', William Shakespeare)

The Cheerleaders.



I saw them practicing in front of the gym, in a small courtyard like area between the school and the gym. There was Neicy Simmons, Nandale Bowman, Sheila Samples, and Marilyn Fry. I watched them as I walked toward the entrance to the big wooden gym. They were doing a kind of dance and chant, working the routine to get it just right.

Neicy, Nan, Sheila were common in the history of Lone Oak. All 3 were very attractive, energetic, and good with the books. Like every one else involved in school activities they had to keep their average above a 'C'.

The real stand-out here was Marilyn Fry. I had never seen a black Cheerleader before in my 7 years at Lone Oak. I didn't think it was unusual but to best of my knowledge she was the very first black Cheerleader in the entire history of our school. I didn't think this great first was any different from anything else that happened at Lone Oak. Its just the way things were done here.

Lone Oak was integrated in 1964/65. I was in the 4th grade under the teaching of Ms Irene Dodd. I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about, but I had never met anybody black in my life, so I was delighted. In this fashion I met my good friend Johnny Jackson and we became buddies to this day. When Marilyn broke the ice as the first black Cheerleader of Lone Oak High I didn't see it as unusual. After all, why not? Still, the more Red Neck elements said she was given it by the faculty. I didn't buy that because I knew Marilyn fairly well. She was fully qualified for the job, with a good grade average, personality, and all the class to do it.

I can remember the first Cheerleader I ever met, back when I was in Grade School. I was in the breezeway and 2 of the highschool cheerleaders were eating and selling ice-cream from an ice-cream freezer we kept in there. I looked at the high school cheerleader towering over me and one of my friends. She was about 5'4", but to me she looked like she was ten feet tall. Her name was Pat, and it was embroidered in a megaphone patch sewn to the front of her Cheerleader blouse. Pat wore glasses, and she had that usual outgoing personality that most cheerleaders have. She wore the white uniform, with the red trim. She looked like a goddess to me, dressed like that.

I knew I was in the presence of greatness, so I remained humble and quiet. She was chatting with her co-worker, and she took off her glasses to clean them with a paper towel. I thought she looked better with the glasses off and like any little kid who didn't know any better I said so. She took it as an insult and in an indirect way told me to get lost. I shuffled away, embarrassed for having insulted one of the greatest ladies I had ever met at that time. Pat was a Cheerleader. That made her well known throughout school and the town itself. She was, in effect, school royalty. I never worked up the nerve to talk to her again.

Of the girls I knew on the squad in 1971-72 the one I liked the most was Neicy. She had a big friendly smile that a guy could die for. I never talked to her, remembering the fiasco with Pat, and I never told anybody just how neat I felt Neicy was. When Rabbit or somebody would talk about her in lustful tones I'd join in, but that was just guy talk. She was one classy lady, and to say I held her in high respect for what she was would be an understatement. She had a wholesome look about her that made her seem very friendly.

Nandale was okay, and her laid back attitude and easy going style made her easy to talk to. Because she was a Cheerleader I kept my distance. Nan seemed to like everybody.

Sheila was somebody I had known since childhood. Elaine and I would visit Sheila's family when I was a grade schooler. I would get assigned a Ken doll and would spend a confused evening with the girls. Sheila dated Troy, and that made her extremely dangerous to trifle with. She was very good looking, and loved to laugh.

Of all the Cheerleaders I had seen since Junior High it seemed that they all had a certain type of high class that set them apart from every other girl in school. Everything they did was magnified under the fishbowl environment they lived in because they were Cheerleaders. Everybody knew their name. Everybody saw them at pep-rallies. If one of them did something wrong it reflected on the entire squad. They had to be much more than just another girl in school. They had to radiate charm, class, and intelligence. All the time I was in High School I saw nothing less. They knew that nothing less was expected of them. To me the Cheerleaders represented a type of girl who had class, personality, brains, and good looks. They were a special bunch of really cool ladies to be admired, treated with respect, and in return to entertain us at pep-rallies and cheer like crazy

at games. They cared for the team, believed in the spirit of Big Red, and were as near fanatics as any guy on the team.

The girls in the Drill Team and in the student body who thought they had what it takes could try out for Cheerleader each year. There were only 5 slots in the early 70s so it was a very competitive bunch that gave it a shot. I am certain some egos were bruised by not winning that place on the Cheerleader Squad that some of them wanted so badly. Being a Cheerleader was a glamorous and prestigious position in High School.

Cheerleader uniforms were both attractive and functional. Expensive to make, buy, and difficult to wear in the very muddy environment they were forced to be in, the girls seemed to take it all in stride. The kit consisted of a pleated skirt, with a contrasting color to the outside, a sleeveless blouse with name or some emblem on the chest, and a heavy pullover sweater of wool that hung loose over the blouse to keep the arms free. The girls usually wore knee high socks and low top lace up shoes with tiny belled pom poms on the instep. The colors seemed to alternate from year to year. One year they wore a red outfit, the next year a white one. The head cheerleader could be set apart by wearing the opposite color of her squadmates. There were sometimes two complete sets of uniforms, one red and one white. That could be very expensive.



One of the most interesting outfits the cheerleaders wore was a sort of glossy red jumpsuit that had short sleeves and was cut short. It zipped up the front and had white trim. This was about the most daring thing I ever saw the Cheerleaders wear and when they did it drove a lot of us guys to want to go chew bark off trees.



The megaphones were very large three foot long funnels. They were made out of a thick cardboard-like material and weighed about 3 pounds. On the speaking part was a metal mouthpiece made from stainless steel. About midway up the funnel was a handle, made from stainless steel. The handle made the megaphone easy to carry. The front of the megaphone had a rim of stainless steel. The cheerleader who was issued a particular megaphone usually up-ended the thing and put her pom poms in it when she took her gear from place to place. It looked like a giant sized sno-cone. The lettering on the megaphones sometimes had 'Lone Oak' on it, but usually it said 'Buffaloes'. Sometimes the megaphones were red, sometimes white. Usually one megaphone was an opposite color to the rest, and the odd one belonged to the head cheerleader.

During pep-rallies the megaphones were handed up to the football players in the bleachers. The players used them to holler incomprehensible things back toward the cheerleaders. I once asked Nandale if she understood what was being said. She said sometimes she understood a little of what was being called out but not all of it. For instance, our huddle breaks were "Ready-Hit!" and the team started chanting that during a pep-rally. The cheerleaders were all confused, having no idea what that meant. When the chant stopped they cheered with enthusiasm because it must have meant something.



The team up in the bleachers during a pep rally and Coach Royal gives a speech.

For me, I worked out and practiced with the team, I went to games, but I did not sit with them in the pep-rallies. That was one thing I felt I hadn't earned the right to do. Pep-rallies and the cheers were for them. I wasn't one of them. Not yet.

Bells

I went to Bells High School with the team, looking forward to another away game. Once off the bus and after helping the guys suit up I took part in the drills. I then trotted over where Phillip was thumping field goals through the uprights. I practiced his stepping up and through the ball, mirroring him. He suddenly started missing and I asked if I was throwing him off. He said I was and I stopped mirroring him. I caught the thrown back footballs and gave them to the holder.

The game soon got under way and Bells found out they were in deep trouble from the Big Red Machine. Quickly, effectively, the team jumped on Bells and proceeded to dismantle the hapless Panthers. This was the night I saw the Thunder break loose for the first time in high school. It was magnificent.

David Lemons scored the first T.D. followed rapidly by two more by Willie Davis. I watched on the sidelines delighted by the slaughter. Jack Brookins himself was relatively pleased by the way it was going. The Buffaloes were easily dominating the game. Sheepdog had his passing and running game under control and the tough defense put up a formidable wall. It was the Thunder for sure this time.

The game rolled relentlessly on. In the third quarter in a effort to burn up the clock and not run up the score the offense kept it on the ground. Still and all they drove 68 pounding yards and Danny took it in on a one yard quarterback sneak.

Bells was totally unable to do anything and fumbled their next possession away. Danny was pulled and Phillip went into the game. For 6 plays Phillip drove the team down the field and took a quarterback keeper 16 yards for his first touchdown of the season. Then he topped that off with a 2 point pass to Steve Henderson.

For what was left of the game B and third string players got game time and that was the end of it. Then we did something strange, and I did not see it repeated during my time in school. We circled it up and spelled it out after the game. I joined in. I do not know why we did it, and I don't understand why it was done. Perhaps it was to celebrate our coming together as a team. Maybe it was a spontaneous act by the players. Anyway, we yelled our town and mascot defiantly to the sky and went to the locker room. To my knowledge this was the first time this was ever done, and it was definitely the first time it was done in 11 man football. Decades later this would become a standard way to end games. We did it first that night on the 8th of September 1971 at Bells after beating them 52 to 0.

O. T. Williams was angry at not being played as much as he thought he should that night. He sat dejectedly in the bus and fumed. I found a nice comfy seat and dozed off. Most of the team read the statistics and chattered noisily among themselves. The deceleration of the bus awoke me and we were in Lone Oak. Guys were lining up to get off even before the bus entered the parking lot. I stretched and got ready to disembark. We were home. We had the Thunder.

Espionage



Leonard was one of our most dispised rivals. Last year's game had been a hard fought contest with hard hitting and some blood letting. Coach Brookins knew it wasn't going to be easy. He did everything he could to prepare his team. Some members of the team did a little preparing of their own, according to the legend.

Rabbit and I were wandering the halls of our ancient institution, books in hand. Rabbit was telling me about Leonard and how low the team in general and he in particular held the Tigers. There were equal with snakes, bugs, and other vermin. Then he told me somebody had gotten a Leonard playbook!

Playbooks are guarded like holy relics. A player is never to let his get lost. In the pros if the other team got a playbook it meant they could get all the formations, routes, and strategies of the team. In college it is a similar disaster. In high school all that really means is that somebody has a team's playbook and not much else.

There are only so many plays that can be run from certain formations. An experienced defensiveman can anticipate a pass or a run just by looking the offensive set-up over. I can still do this today, and some of my non-football playing friends are amazed by this when we watched arena ball or pro football on T.V. High School formations in class 'B' were conservative, simple, and usually very direct in application. Grabbing somebody's playbook was not really a major advantage, if any.

There are two stories as to how the playbook was snatched. I tell them here with much embellishment and tounge in cheek.

One of the stories was most bizarre. It seems a group of Lone Oak guys, either team members or not, took a midnight ride to Leonard. There upon they proceeded to locate Leonard's gym.

Picture this, if one may. Here are several guys in Leonard in the middle of the night, nobody has ever seen them before, and they are driving around looking for the Leonard High School Gym. Tooling about in the dark in the virtually asleep town our intrepid bunch of spies finally happened upon the school and it's attendant gym.



Clothed stealthily in blue jeans, T-shirts, and F.F.A. jackets that bore the town name of Lone Oak in big yellow letters embroidered on it, they moved about like ninjas. Tripping on sidewalks and stumbling in the dark, the teenaged, deranged, ninja Buffaloes went about their work.

Finally locating the entrance to the gym, they shrewdly tried the door-knob. It turned, but a mighty push of the door brought only a rattling sound audible for blocks. A dog began to bark somewhere. Wide eyed, but encouraged by alcohol and a teenaged thrill of dancing on the precipice of lawbreaking, the spies sought out another way into the facility.

They looked up and saw a window just in reach. Boosting a member of their team up they got the window open. The second story man, with great difficulty, entered the dark, cavern-like innards of the gym. It must have been as spooky as entering a tomb.

"Unlock the door!" one whispered up to him.

Adrenaline pumping in his veins, the second story guy looked around. Suppose they had a night watchman in here, like Ciecil Kirk at Lone Oak? Good grief, some old codger could come out of the locker room with a shotgun and blow him away! Every noise was amplified and echoed through the gym. It made his skin crawl. It was time to work fast!

Feeling his way down the bleachers least he fall and break his stupid neck, the spy found the firmer footing of the floor. Somewhat relieved, he tried to remember which door his buddies were at.

Outside, the others were getting the creeps. That barking dog wouldn't shut up and Leonard might have a town cop. Suddenly the door to the gym opened up, causing them all to flinch.

"It's unlocked," the second story guy said, "It opens out. You tried to push it open, you geek!"

"Shut up and lets get on with it."

"Is this the light switch?" one guy said.

He was tackled before he could turn it on.

"Are you crazy? You want the entire town down here? They find us in here they might decorate a tree with all of us!"

Another guy looked around.

"Where do you suppose the coach's office is?"

"I don't know, look around!"

"Anybody bring a flashlight?"

"Huh?" was the reply all around.

What a group of commandos! They were well equipped, the mission was well thought out, and they were obviously well prepared.

Soon they found an open door to an office. One guy turned on the light, scaring the bejabbers out of the rest.

"What?" he asked with a gaze of non-intelligence on his face, answering the looks his fellows gave him, "We gotta see, don't we?"

"You get us caught, and I swear I'll kill you. The spies proceeded to look in file cabinets and desk drawers. How they located the 7 odd pages of mimeographed plays is anybody's guess, but apparently they did.

Grinning like evil cartoon cats the stealthy spies stumbled and tripped their way out of the gym, playbook in hand. Perhaps they had enough presence of mind to close the drawers and file cabinets and even turn off the lights. They may have even closed the door and perhaps the window. Maybe.

Back in the relative safety of their car they took off, maybe they didn't rack the dual exhaust or spin the tires on take off. They did get away, bringing their ill-gotten gains to Lone Oak, and some of the players who looked at the pilfered documents with interest.

That's one way it might have happened. Another story went like this, equally embellished:

"Come on, Baby, if you love me you'll do it."

"But I don't wanna. It's not right."

So went the conversation on a Hunt County back road in a darkened car late one night.

"You can do it. Just ask one of the guys if you can see his playbook. You can copy it on notebook paper and give it back to him. You can do it. All you gotta do is batt those big ole eyes of yours at him and ask to see it."

Unable to put up a good argument on her behalf, the young lady was desperate to prove her love for this Lone Oak guy. He was so cute, and strong, and he had a nice car. She didn't want to lose him. So she would betray her school, her friends, and her football team by copying a playbook and giving it to her boyfriend from Lone Oak.

It probably was easy to do. She found the geekiest guy on the team, the most love starved, shy, and outcast dude she could locate. (Probably a scrawny guy with glasses who drew a lot.) She figuratively held her nose and engaged him in conversation, asking him about football.

"Do you guys have a piece of paper with the plays and stuff on them? I'd like to see it."

"Duh, like, uh, why?"

"Oh, so I can understand whats going on when the team is on the field."

"Oh. Well. Yup. Yup. Got it right here. Yup. Here ya go."

"Thanks," she said, taking the mimeographed pages, "I'll look at this in study hall."

"Hey, like, don't, uh, lose that, or you'll like, you know, get me in one big heap of trouble."

"I'll have it back to you in 3rd period class."

Not having any idea what the Xs and Os and the strange squiggly lines meant, she thought football was all so dumb. But this was what her Lone Oak boyfriend wanted.

She never gave the playbook back to the guy and had nothing else to do with him for the rest of his life. Confused, but not unaccustomed to being treated like dirt by the fairer sex, the player went on to his other pursuits, like picking his nose and watching cartoons. Girls were weird. He'd never tell the coach he lost his playbook and therefore would keep his fanny out of the fire. He didn't play much anyway.

Later the girl gave the stolen playbook to her boyfriend. He showed his gratitude by dropping her like a hot potato, not returning her calls and not answering her letters. He had gotten what he asked for and now she had shown she couldn't be trusted. She had betrayed her school. What kind of girlfriend was she if she was that low? She had no sense of honor, and there were other fish in the sea.

This last story is the more likely version of how the playbook fell into our hands. I know for a fact that none of our coaches knew about it. If they did I feel they would have shown outrage and maybe even informed the Leonard coaches. Things like this make football into something it is not. It is a game to be enjoyed by players and fans alike. It's not to go out and win at any costs. It's not to go out there and hurt somebody. It's to go out there in your school's colors and do the best you can. If it's not good enough to win, then you go home knowing you gave it your best. If you know you did all you can do and gave that 110% then no matter what the scoreboard said you and your team went home a winner.

Never, ever, disgrace yourself and your school by doing less. Losing is easy. Playing dirty is not only wrong, it reflects bad on all on the team. Victory at the price of honor is a despicable thing. Honor is worth more than victory. It is only a game.

I saw some of the guys reading the playbook in the locker room. They beckoned to me. I went over. One of them handed me a yellow and light blue mess of mimeographed pages with plays on it.

"Do you know what that is, Buzzard?" one of them asked, grinning conspiratively.

"A playbook," I said, wondering what the big deal was.

"That is *Leonard's* playbook," he said, "Take a look."

I actually held it in my hands and looked at some of Leonard's plays. It didn't do that much for me, but the novelty of holding somebody else's playbook was sort of cool. I didn't ask how they got it, but I heard the stories later.

I gave the book back and went on into the locker room. I did not see that playbook again.

Later in the hallway I was signing posters with Rabbit. The posters said what we were going to do to the Leonard Tigers. We signed one and then Rabbit and I were thrown into confusion. One poster said "Cage the Tigers". Up above it was one that said "We Tear the Lions Up," showing a dismembered Lion.



I looked up and down the hall. Nobody was in sight. I put a line through the word "Lion" and wrote "Tigers". Rabbit thought I had guts to do that. I didn't think I did any big thing. I scratched my head and went on my way. It's going to be one crazy game.

Practice and Dieing Dreams

We went to the football field to practice in pads. This was a special treat for me because I had never worn pads on the new field before. As winter bore down on us Jack Brookins scheduled practice about right after school, and in some cases during last period. Thursday practices were held during school hours, too. This was when the grade school kids would watch us with interest.

When we got to the field we noticed that the grass was remarkably lush in each end zone. We made an effort to stay out of the center where it was all beat up. Coach Brookins decided a practice on the new grass wouldn't do any harm to it and would let us learn the insides of our home field better.

After our warm-up exercises we split into two teams of the starting offense and what amounted to be the victims. The A-team proceeded to eat the second stringers alive.

Guys on defense were given a red pull-over vest to put on so offense could tell us apart. Practice jerseys were all white cotton affairs and had no numbers. Some guys washed their practice

jerseys about once a month. The stench was overwhelming. The red pullovers were not much better. Some of them were really torn and dirty. Sometimes the offense wore the things and it made a convenient grab as the back went flying by.

I was deep in the end zone of the new field. Danny had been picking us to pieces. There was Red Pass, White Pass, Killer Pass, Option Left, Option Right, Option Pass Right or Left, 22 Counter, 32 Trap, 44 Dive, Sweep Right or Left, 32 Cross Buck, 21 Dive, Bootleg Reverse, Bootleg Pass, 35 Quick Pitch, 21 Counter Pass, on and on that was thrown at us defenders. Plays were run over and over until the coaches felt it was done right. It left me bewildered but ready for anything that might come blasting like a shock wave out of the line. I was out here where I wanted to be, and I was doing what I wanted to do.

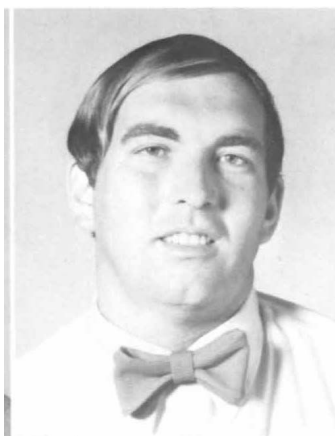
I was in the safety position again. I couldn't see much detail, being almost blind as a bat. Coaches think just because it's called safety it's a safe place to put a little guy. Blockers and backs come thundering at a safety at high speed. Ends are running routes at top speed, and will run right over anybody. I could get blind-sided from any where. That was the safe place I was in.

The thing was, I was an extra hand. There were several other guys sitting on their helmets nearby. I wasn't even on the team and I was out here playing. I shrugged it off as a common experience and watched for the play to develop. Why did they play me like this in practice? I can't say.

Danny called a play and fired off a pass to Troy. Troy deftly caught it in the east end zone and stiff armed a guy who tried to tackle him. I lined up for the kill and he saw me coming. he made eye contact and raised an open hand menacingly. I stopped and just grinned at him. He raised one eyebrow and trotted back to the huddle.

After that it was time to practice field goals. That meant we all got free shots at the linemen. They dove in to form a wedge while Phillip kicked it. We tried to knock the bejabbers out of them, getting a little revenge for being blocked, knocked down, or otherwise abused. Nobody ever blocked one of our field goals, either in practice or on the field.

After that it was spell it out and go to the gym. My first practice at the new field was over.



MR. DON McNUTT -
Social Studies - Asst.
Coach, M.S. E.T.S.U.

Later in the week I talked to Coach McNutt. He was approachable because one day in his study hall he saw Herman and me rolling dice like crazy, deep in one of our basketball games. He asked what the blazes we were doing and he was quite taken by the ingenious simplicity of Herman's basketball game. We showed him the notebooks we kept the games in, packed with games, schedules, and statistics. He let Herman and me play dice basketball after that with no questions asked. Because of the constant use of math in the game, it actually helped my math grades to play this game. I think he saw the advantages to that.

I had big (pipe) dreams about becoming a football player. I didn't want anything big, just to play football until I couldn't. Maybe I could in college. I asked Coach McNutt what he thought, one day in the teacher's lounge.

"No," he said, being brutally honest, " You're way too small, kid. I don't think they'd even let you suit up for a try out."

I started grasping at proverbial straws.

"Is there something I could do on the team now? Maybe holder on kicks or something," I asked.

He shook his head. Holder was a position a quarterback or running back could easily fill. To create a special position just for a holder would be a waste. Besides, I didn't realize that a holder had to be able to run or even throw the ball reasonably well in case something went wrong or it was a fake kick. To put me there would handicap that position because I wasn't a passer and I certainly wasn't a running back.

I left the teacher's lounge feeling mightily low. Thoughts bounced around in my head of hanging it up, quitting. Why was I pounding myself out there each evening if there was no future in it? I sat in study hall and fumed. Why keep on? Why? Why? Why?

Leonard

I sat in the empty bleachers, my foot on the front handrail. I pushed with my foot on the wooden rail listening to it squeak. I imagined it sounded like trumpets, summoning the team and myself to the contest today.

It was October 15, 1971, and the sun was still warm. The field was in decent shape. I was here by myself. Rickey had dropped me off after we had eaten at the cafe. The field had no gates at the entrances so getting in was no big deal. I spent these few moments to meditate on my football future. I wasn't satisfied with my kicking ability. It was going nowhere. Still, nobody was picking on me in practice and I actually had more respect in the school than they let me know about. I was oblivious to all this. I was getting fed up with football. My thoughts of being a ball holder were a pipe dream. Were all my thoughts about football a pipe dream too? I had trashed my ideas of ever being a kicker and seriously considered trashing my ideas of ever putting on the pads again. I was in one serious dark mood. I continued squeaking the handrail and listening to the "trumpets". I was thinking how bad life was, and feeling very sorry for my miserable self.

I looked to my right and saw the ladies arrive to open the concession stand at the west end of the field.

"Well," I thought, "Here we go."

I clomped down off the bleachers and headed for the concession stand. Tonight I make popcorn with Ronald Posey. I wasn't exactly thrilled, but it was something to do, I thought.

Posey showed up, we put the popcorn machine up, and soon the air filled with smell of popcorn. Ronald Posey was jovial and like Santa Claus in his ability to spread good humor. He let me draw the price sign and I happily hung it up. As people came into the stadium I put my trivial musings of earlier away and prepared to do the now familiar task of shoveling popcorn. Bags begin to fill and sell. Between Ronald Posey and staying busy I got into a better mood. When I could look up both teams were on the field.

I felt a pang of wanting to be out there. I then bent back to the task at hand, filling pop corn sacks. I wanted to play real bad. That's what was really wrong with me.

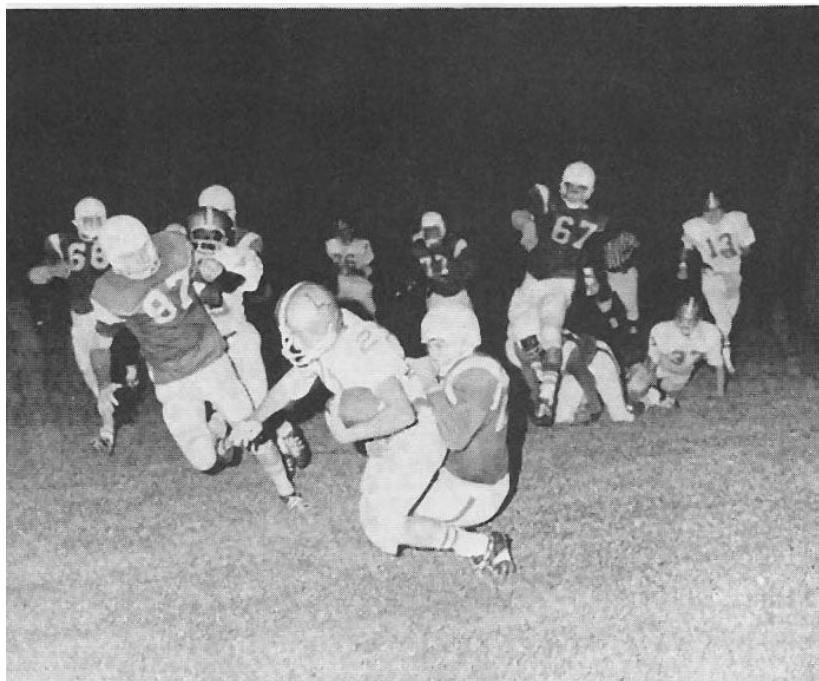
Almost everybody in town came to see the game. They expected a hard fought contest and they would not be disappointed. Leonard and Lone Oak were both excellent teams. Leonard came out fighting hard, driving on our powerful defense only far enough to try a field goal. It missed.

Lone Oak discovered much to its consternation that Leonard also had an excellent defense. The Big Red Machine ran into a solid wall and punted it away.

Leonard got the punt and almost broke it for a touchdown, going a full 65 yards before the receiver was brought down. Fortunately a penalty nullified the Tiger run back, but Leonard still had the ball.

Under heavy pressure, the Leonard quarterback launched a desperation pass just as he got hit by a Lone Oak linebacker and some of the front four. The ball wobbled into the mitts of Randy Payne, prompting the stands to cheer like mad.

Back at the concession stand Ronald Posey and I would look up and I'd go look at the score. I'd come back puzzled by the 0 to 0 results. I couldn't figure out what the cheering was about.



Danny drew back and launched a 30 yard pass to Willie Davis, wowing the fans and the news reporter here to see the game. The people here were definitely getting their dollar's worth. All the cheering and spectacular plays came to naught as the ball was later fumbled away, ending the drive.

The Buffalo defense stood firm, holding the Tiger's drive to a total of only 23 yards and stopping them on about the 45 yard line, well out of field goal range.

I didn't have to hear the siren to know it was half-time. We were suddenly swamped by people wanting popcorn. Once Ronald Posey and I could catch our breath I looked at the score. It was still 0 to 0 at the half.

That didn't feel right. I started to worry.

After half-time both teams came back on the field with blood in their eyes. Danny let the ball get away on a fumble and Leonard now had it. It was a hard hitting game out there and my team was having a hard time holding onto the ball.

Leonard began a powerful drive, looping a long 23 yarder, followed by a penalty on us. Danny's temper was up, and I could hear him calling at the refs in frustration. I then knew things were definitely not going our way.

Leonard ran a sweep play. That's where all the backs and a pulling guard run around one end. It is difficult to stop with just linebackers and safeties, and Leonard made it to our 5 yard line.

Troy called for a goal line stand, and Mr. Brookins thought fast as to how to react to this new development. For 2 plays the Buffaloes fought to defend their goal line. Leonard made it to the two yard line, and next play they gave it to a back who broke through into our endzone.

Leonard's bleachers roared loudly. I knew something was wrong. Ronald Posey sent me to look at the score board.

"It's 6-0."

"For who?" Ronald Posey asked.

"Leonard," I replied.

Then we heard the crowd roar again. I looked once more.

"Leonard just made a 2 pointer," I said.

Leonard had faked a kick, getting an 8 point lead on us. Ronald Posey was not pleased. Neither was the Buffalo team. Faking a kick on us made us mad, but it wasn't enough to get mad. We had to out think the Tigers.

Our offense couldn't get the plays to click against the strong Tiger defense. After a 5 play drive we had to punt from our own 30. Leonard definitely had seized the momentum in the third quarter.

Phillip stood back in the punting position, his big hands spread wide.

"Hut one!" he coughed.

The ball spiraled back and he set up to punt it. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a Leonard player barreling at him like a tank. He tried to get the punt away.

Whammo!

The punt bounced off the Leonard player going straight up in the air. It was a live ball. The Leonard guy tracked the ball up into the night sky, deftly caught it, eluded Phillip who made a grab for him, and then ran like crazy for our end zone. It was now 14 to 0.

I was dismayed. We were definitely losing now! Leonard kicked the extra point making it 15 to 0. The Tigers looked Lone Oak over, expecting us to roll over and die. They celebrated their victory. The fourth quarter was near and they had us by over two touchdowns. The Buffaloes were proving to be just a bunch of turkeys in their eyes. The much vaunted former guard quarterback was not so much to them. They now planned to watch the Lone Oak team just give up.

They reckoned not with Jack D. Brookins and his ability. Down a full 15 points late in the game it was time to get serious. Explaining to his troops what had to be done, he sent them back out on the field. Expecting a beaten bunch from Lone Oak to come out with their tail between their legs, what Leonard got in the fourth quarter must have come as a nasty shock.

The Buffaloes were hitting just as hard as they were in the first half! Willie was running hard and proving difficult to bring down. Danny was hitting his receivers with renewed vigor. It was as if the game was still 0-0!

Leonard got an even bigger shock as Lone Oak scored first 6, then a 2 pointer. It was 8 to 15, Leonard's favor. The Tigers began to worry, and they had ample reason to. Big Red was mad, rolling, and had momentum. Hope returned to Ronald Posey and me when I told him the score. This game wasn't over by a long shot.

Posey and I were distracted when a couple of girls from Leonard came over to buy popcorn. They thought my sign with it's crazy artwork and lettering was amusing. Ronald turned on the charm and I looked at him with disbelief. How did he do it? Here were a couple of girls he had never seen before and probably would never see again, and he had them laughing and carrying on like he was an old friend. I was stunned. Wow, man, like how?

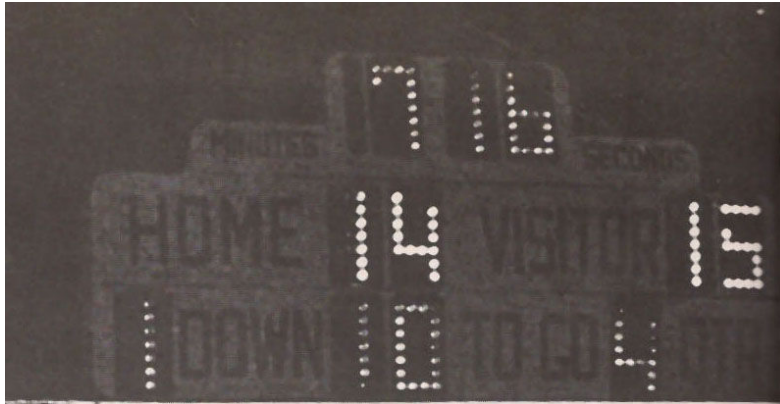
Out on the field, Leonard couldn't do anything with the ball. The Lone Oak defense wasn't as tough as it was in the first half, it was tougher! Somehow these guys had reached down and got that extra power and unleashed it on Leonard. Leonard was tiring and the guys from Lone Oak were still coming on strong. Perhaps that all out third quarter effort had blown the Tigers out.

Getting the ball back, Danny, Willie, Larry Little, and the rest took it all the way to Leonard's end zone again, shocking the Tigers and wowing the crowd. Now it was 15 to 14! Leonard was only one point ahead now. Lone Oak had come back from being a full 15 points down to get this close!

"Go for two," Jack Brookins said.

Wide eyed and growing desperate, the Leonard team knew what was coming. Everybody in the park knew what was coming. If Lone Oak made a 2 pointer and took the lead it was doubted Leonard could put together a successful drive on the Big Red Defense. It was a gamble and Jack Brookins took it. The stands fell silent. Coach Brookins watched on emotionless as the play fired off. He did not react as the Ref signaled the play had failed. He looked at the clock and it told him

it was not over with yet. Time remained. Victory was still near and Leonard was not showing the horsepower they had in the third quarter.



Lone Oak's first electronic scoreboard shows the score.

After the kick Leonard held onto the ball for only 4 plays. With great apprehension they punted it away with only a minute remaining in the 4th quarter.

Ronald Posey and I were closing up shop. Everybody was staying in the stands watching the incredible contest on the field. We had popcorn left over. I wanted to go to the bench and be with my team mates, really bad. Ronald Posey let me go.

"Are you sure you can handle it?" I asked him.

"Yeah, sure. Go on."

I took one last look at him, then I trotted off to be with my team. He knew how much this meant to me.

Lone Oak was driving. Leonard was putting up a desperate battle. Big Red was soon on their 30 and closing in. Time was also ticking away. The Offense had quick huddles and thought quickly for each play. Time outs roared by.

I stood next to a team mate and just gawked. I was caught up in it and I was almost speechless.

"Come on, Red," was about all I could say.

Soon there was just seconds left on the clock. Lone Oak had no more time outs. Danny called a play and went up to the line. He glanced at the clock. There was just enough time for a quick play and there were no time outs. He came up to the line and quickly called the cadence.

He called "Hut One" just as the final second was gone. The Refs declared the game over! One even grabbed Steve Henderson to prevent him from running his route. It was over and we had lost by one point.

I cringed with my team mates and looked back.

"It was only one point but it may as well had been a mile," Roy Ohara, our announcer, said.

I trudged back toward the concession stand. My folks would be looking for me there. I wanted to go to the school and share in the pain with my team mates, but it wasn't meant to be. I rode home dejected and angry. I hadn't seen a Buffalo team lose a game since I was in Junior High. I felt like we had been robbed. We were almost on their goal line and the Refs called the game. I don't know if we could have scored or not on that one play, but for a lot of us it would be looked upon as the night we felt like we were cheated out of a victory.

I pitied our next advisaries.

The Ugliness of It All

Did I quit? No, I did not. After what I had seen and felt last Friday I could not. Though I was not really one of them I felt the loss, the pain, and the disappointment. I felt it. I now wanted revenge as bad as they did. I was not one of them, but I threw on my pads and cinched my helmet down tight and gave it my all in practice as best as my uncoordinated self could. I had bonded with these men, and I could not walk away from this.

We swore we were not going to lose another game this year. We almost won that one last Friday, but almost wasn't good enough. I personally was really ticked off, especially after the low tactic of snatching a playbook. We didn't even salvage our honor out of that contest! We deserved what we got and the way we got it. We had it coming, in spades!

Things were bad all over. Our Homecoming Queen; the most prestigious honor a girl can receive in our high school, dropped out and left the entire town under great controversy. We now had no honor and no Football Sweetheart.

Coach Taylor had chastised us for the loss of the Leonard game.

"Ya'll thought we was the mighty, mighty Buffaloes and expected Leonard to just lay down. Well, boys and girls, it didn't happen, did it? You now know how the cow eat the cabbage."

We had gotten arrogant, and paid for it.

I sat in the space where I kept my pads and listened to the coaches take their turns telling us what we had done wrong. I didn't have a real locker like the guys who were really on the team, but nobody looted my gear like those low-lives in Junior High had. There was a real sense of honor up here among the greats, we hadn't lost it all. I was still angry at myself and the team, though.

Out in the dirt of the practice field we discovered the remains of Lone Oak's last 8 man football Homecoming Bonfire. There were nails and odd bits of metal on the ground here and there. Part of practice was to discover a piece of metal or charred glass and fling it some place else. It usually didn't get it off the field, but it did spread it out. Maybe we wouldn't land on it again if we were lucky.

Sheepdog was practicing the option. Coach Taylor begin to take an interest in my talents and put me in at left middle linebacker. Coach Royal pointed to Frankie Payne in the back field and told me to stop him, no matter what.

Okay. It didn't make sense to me, but I would do it.

The Sheepdog faked to Frank into the line. I wrapped my arms around him and down we went into the dirt.

I did the same thing next play. Then I got him again and we spun down into the choking dust of the field.

"What are you doing, Tornt?!" Frank spit at me. I was making him mad, and probably aggravating his bad leg.

"They told me to stop you and thats what I'm doing."

Unamused, Frank went back to the huddle. The next play fired off. This time it was 22 power dive right over me. Boom! I got hit by the center, the full back, the guard, and one of the halfbacks. They drove me back a considerable distance, but didn't knock me down.

"Didn't get him that time, did ja, Tarrant?" Danny taunted.

"I was blocked," I yelled back angrily. This school room crap didn't scare me out here on the practice field. Out here they were no better than I was.

Taylor and Royal were amused. David Morgan told me what they said.

"Is this kid crazy or what? That would have scared the bejabbers out of some guys, and he wasn't even took down one notch!" McNutt laughed.

No, I wasn't going to quit, and these arrogant jocks couldn't make me.

Rick looked out of the huddle at me and grinned to himself. He knew. He knew all along.

Sticks at Caddo Mills

I was delighted to be going to an away game again. Caddo Mills had gotten a stomping by Anna last week but that didn't mean we let up in practice. Everybody was in a bad mood. We didn't ever like to lose, and by getting beat by Leonard it had thrown the district into a 3 way tie. Bells, Leonard, and Lone Oak were battling for it.

To make matters worse, O. T. was not having a good week. After being the hero of the Homecoming he was now not getting enough game time to suit him. He was near tears and complained to Coach McNutt. Coach McNutt let him down as easy as he dared. Willie was a better back than O. T. and because of that O. T. wasn't getting as much time on field. That hurt bad enough that O. T. was considering quitting. I could empathize. O. T. didn't quit, though. He was a true Buffaloe, sticking with it and hoping for the future. It was all we had to go on.

After our last practice for that week Coach Brookins told us a few things. We could not let up. Any team out there, even the last place team, could beat us if we let them. If we couldn't go out there and give it all we had, then we really didn't belong on the team.

I glanced up to see if these words were being directed at me. They were not. I felt kind of funny. Did I belong on the team? I was here in the locker room with 30 other guys. Nobody said go away. Maybe I did belong. I looked at my raw elbows and bruised hands. Maybe I had paid my dues. Still, I wasn't sure I belonged here, I wasn't sure I was one of them.

Mr. Brookins went on to say that we were a better team than Leonard and we're certainly a better team than Caddo Mills. This Friday we had to win or we were not living up to our potential.

Everyone in the locker room looked at him. He was our Coach. He was THE Coach. How on earth could we disappoint him? It was time to do some kicking and to take some names.

After the Friday pep-rally I went home to catch the bus en-route to the game. Once I got on I found a seat and saw a lot of somber faces. The team was focused and wound up. Caddo Mills was in trouble!

One we got to Caddo we unloaded and started dragging the duffel bags into the locker rooms. I was anticipating a bloodthirsty night of screaming on the sidelines when Coach Taylor came over to where I was.

"Hey, Charlie-O, they need somebody to run the chains. You want to?"

I looked at him, a little confused. Run the chains? What was that? It was a new experience, so I wanted to do it.

"Yeah, sure," I said.

He led me off to a referee. I shook the guy's hand and we exchanged names. I was wearing my jersey so it was obvious where I was from. I was given a quick familiarization with the equipment that I was to be a part of the 3 man crew of tonight. The Chains consist of a 10 yard chain stretched between 2 seven foot tall metal paddles. This is used to mark a first down. The paddles were silver and have a large circular plate welded to the top. This makes it easy to see by the Refs and the crowd in general. It shows up well on the black and white film in use back then too. There is a down marker to mark the location of the ball and indicate which down it is. This held 4 two sided square plates with numbers on them, painted large enough to be seen in the stands. The reff would indicate with hand signals what number he wanted to flip on the marker. All three poles had a short spike on the bottom to secure them to the ground so they wouldn't slip or slide. The Ref was to indicate by his heel where he wanted to ball marker put down on the sidelines. With this quick schooling, I was prepared for a night of football from a most unique perspective. I ran the chain for the first half.

I was sent to Caddo Mills' home side of the field, and I had on my colors. This was met with hostile cat-calls and derogatory remarks by the players and some of the townies. I let them run their heads. The real battle was going on out there on the field. Go get them, Red!

That the Big Red Machine was angry soon became very plain to the green and white Foxes. Danny looped a 20 yarder to Troy who stepped into the end zone, just like he did in practice a few days before. The two pointer was successful. I cheered my guys on, but I never lost perspective of where I was or what I was doing.

I got a lot of grief from vocal younger players from Caddo Mills, but every time Big Red scored I just ignored them. We scored early and often on this night of Thunder.

Lone Oak drove again down to Caddo's 6 yard line. I watched on with interest as Danny took a keeper the full 6 yards into their endzone. The 2 points were again good.

Caddo took the kick off and fought hard to about their own 30. They were behind 16 to 0. Benny Vice covered their primary receiver as he went out on a desperate route. Benny leaped up and

intercepted the Caddo pass, then rambled a stomping 37 yards for a touchdown. That made it 22 to 0, first half.

Caddo Mills wasn't very happy and some vented verbal wrath on me. I just grinned and pointed at the scoreboard, letting that do the talking for me.



Troy Haynes with a double fistfull of football and heading for the end-zone!

Coach Brookins pulled Danny and put Phillip in there. It was time to let up, least we look foolish. The game was fully under control and the Buffaloes were mopping up the field with the Foxes.

Phillip showed he could do it too. He called a long pass and launched it way out there to O. T. Williams. O. T., somewhat delighted to be in the open and with the ball in his hands, burned a path 72 red hot yards down Caddo's field. I watched his 82 get smaller until he got in the end zone and raised his arms in victory. That made it 28 to 0, but our extra point failed.

Once a play swirled like a hurricane at the chain gang's direction. Wide eyed, all three of us froze, then got behind our metal sticks for protection. It looked like a freight train coming at us! Nobody hit us per se, but the poor players got tangled up in our sticks. A Reff chastised us, telling us to drop the sticks and get out of the way next time. The Caddo coach told us the same thing.

Probably unlike my two co-members on the chain gang, I had seen such a thundering herd of players like that before and I had even been in the middle of it. But this time I wasn't in pads and like them I panicked and froze. My training had told me to dive into such a pile, but that was certainly out of the question here. The next time a play came our way we didn't hesitate. The sticks hit the ground and we were long gone before the play got there.

Half time came and I put my half of the 10 yard marker down and I went to join my fellows in the locker room. Everybody was in a better mood than before but still dead serious about the task at hand. O. T. was reveling in his touchdown catch and feeling a lot better about himself and his situation in general. There were no thoughts of quitting now.

Wow! We had about 50 yards of penalties this half! This was put down to our over revved state of anger. Guys were hitting late and at the wrong time. For instance Danny had thrown a magnificent 77 yard touchdown pass to Willie that had been called back by a clipping penalty. I remember that because the guys at Caddo gave me a hard time about it. I said out on to the field "Just wait, we'll get it back." Sure enough we did. The Caddo guys didn't like it, but that was their problem. Our problem was playing a cleaner version of football. We could pick up some bad habits here.

We exited the locker room and I trotted back to my chain gang position after the half. I was given the down marker this time.

True to form, Coach Brookins came out shooting with the A-teamers. Danny handed off to Larry Little and he took it 29 yards for a touchdown. If Caddo Mills had any hopes of a comeback this was stuffing it down their throats. Jerry McGee got the ball a little later and ran 44 dive for 45 yards and a touchdown! A 44 dive is a short yardage play. Caddo had essentially given up. When Danny dove over for the 2 pointer it was 42 to 0.

There were a lot of unhappy people on the Caddo Mills sidelines where I was. One guy looked at my 74 and yelled at me if I thought I was Bob Lilly of the Dallas Cowboys or somebody. I ignored him and just let him rattle on. The 42 points my brothers in the Red and White had put on the board said it all.

The Caddo Mills offense was like it's defense, virtually non-existent. They kept the ball and average of 3 plays then punted it. When Big Red got it Caddo got a stomping. It must have been painful out there for those guys in Green and White. With the guff I was putting up with I felt no pity. Caddo punted to us and Phillip went back out. Time was ticking away for this lopsided farce, but Phillip was having far too much fun to let up. He drove down to the 28 and threw a strike to Benny for the final 6 of the night. The extra point try failed, and the last few seconds ticked away. The final score was 48 to 0.

My team mates left the field in delight. I could hear some chants of "We're Number One!" and see the upraised first finger indicating our status. I glared with hostile contempt at the turkeys on the Caddo bench and I let go of the down marker. It crashed to the ground. Several of them said "You'd better pick that up!" I just sneered at them and trotted off to join my team mates. I didn't even look back. Forget them!

In the locker room and later on the bus it was one very happy place. We had once more drank from the cup of victory. After last week's loss to Leonard we all needed this. Like our primitive ancestors we were celebrating a victory, with no thought of our foes. This was what we felt football should be all about. If Leonard had lost tonight we could be on top again! The paper would tell us tomorrow. For now, it was the wonderful feeling of victory! The Thunder rolled! Victory! We are number one!

On the Town for a Saturday Night

Rickey Graham picked me up at my house about 6 O:Clock and we rode to Greenville in his sputtering 65 Ford Galaxy. The 8 track player was blasting out Mississippi Queen and then House of the Rising Sun. Oh yes, we were a couple of happy, football playing fools!



GREENLIGHT



In dash 8 track tape player/AM radio. The dashboard was metal so they were usually hung underneath in brackets. Example of one of the two Fords that Rick owned, one red, one white.

The only disappointment was that Leonard had won their game last Friday. It was still a 3 way tie for first, with Anna leading the way.

Rick and I were headed for the Satellite Roller Rink. I had in a suitcase-like carrier a pair of ancient roller skates I had bought off Elaine's brother Johnny Dale for a paltry 5 bucks. These were my skates. I was proud to have them. To have my own pair meant that I didn't have to rent some skates. The carrier was Mom's old Avon sample case. The skates just fit in there. They rode in the back seat and soon Rick and I pulled up to the rink for a night of tooling about with wheels on our feet.

I paid my ticket and got to a row of chairs where I happily shed my deck shoes for my skates. The shoes went into the caddie with a towel and the caddie went in a locker they had just for such things. I wheeled out on the floor and started doing laps.

The floor was hard wood and covered with a chalky-like substance that prevented us from skidding. We all rolled along counter clockwise. Most skates had wooden wheels. These were serviceable and they gave decent traction on the corners. I could sometimes hear a strange grinding skid noise and I took a corner at high speed as the wheels rolled on the floor. The much sought after Urethane wheels were known and for sale there, but there was no way I could put down the 14 dollars for a set.

Some skaters could really dance. These guys were real hot dogs. They were nowhere near Olympic status but they could out skate everybody else in the rink. Some could do a type of dance, others could actually spin on one leg, still others could do a spinning jump. Even Rick had worked up a series of moves that looked quite graceful for a guy who was 6' 6" and over 200

pounds. It was a sort of a dance, with elaborate footwork and hand moves. It was quite impressive.

I tried to skate backwards and all I ended up doing was decorating the floor. I fell early and often.

The benefits of skating were many. It improved balance, it kept legs and lower body in good shape, it got a person used to falling on a hard surface, and it let a person keep control while sliding.

As I made happy laps I wondered where Danny, Robert, and all the other Lone Oak Mafia were at. I never saw them up here skating, but I fully expected to. This was a universal hangout. Just what did they do on Saturday nights? Where did they go? I find it hard to picture the great Sheepdog, the greatest quarterback I would ever personally know, sitting in front of a T.V. with a comic book and a cola watching re-runs of Flipper the Dolphin or something on Saturday night.

Jerry McGee skated. He wasn't bad on rollers. He looked 10 feet tall on skates. Girls seemed to flock to him. His outgoing and gentleman manners blew the ladies away. He was just one cool fellow. During doubles skating he usually had a lady on his arm. This man was one of the greats.

While doubles skating was on I would sit in the snack bar with the rest of the drones and drink a cola or nibble on an ice-cream bar. I had no girlfriends but I didn't think anything about it. I just knew I was happy to be here and not at home. Life was good! A shattering victory on the football field, a night at the roller rink, snacks and pinball! I was very happy.

Sometimes they would let us skate as fast as we could. This was fun and scary. Nobody wiped out, but if they did fall down they'd probably skid a long way. It was a great sensation of speed, tearing along on skates. I don't know how fast we got up to, but it felt like 100 miles an hour.

After regular hours the rink charged a second admission for those who wanted to stay longer. It cost about 50 cents and most of us could pay it. The youngsters left about this time, leaving mostly teenagers and adults.

We had guys on the floor dressed like basketball referees who were bouncers. Going too fast, skating dangerously, or just acting stupid would get them to blow a whistle at the person. They could bodily throw offenders out of the place, if they thought it needed doing. They were the enforcers. I didn't see any fights at the rink, and these bouncers were more than likely the reason why. I was glad they were there.

Even with staying late at night at the rink always ended too soon. When it was time to leave we would take off our skates and put them in the caddies. The caddies went into the filthy trunk of the Ford and Rick would load up with his buddies. Somebody would call 'shotgun' and get to ride in the passenger seat next to the driver. I was tail gunner and I sat in the back, where my job was to keep a lookout for Cops or badguys. Cops loved to stop a car load of guys and search the car to see if we had beer. Nobody did any type of dope. It was considered stupid in the first degree to do dope. Most of the time we didn't even have beer. All of the time we didn't have any girls. Girls would have been welcome, but there just wasn't any. This was male bonding by a group of guys from 4 different towns with no place else to go. Bored, harmless and looking for some kind of adventure, we took off.

After leaving the rink our next stop was the Steak House on I-30. Once while we were leaving the rink I saw the headlights of a '57 Chevey behind us. As I watched in disbelief they tilted a full 90 degrees and disappeared. I notified Rick and he slammed on the brakes, throwing everybody forward. He backed up about 50 yards down the dirt road we had come and stopped. We bailed out of the car.

There, in a deep ditch, lay the black '57 that had slid off the road and lay on it's side. Nobody was hurt, but getting that car out of there was going to be a major problem.

Once we made sure everybody was okay we went on our way. The Steak House was about the only place to eat at midnight or later in Greenville in 1971. It was a motel-restaurant. We would go in as a group. Some of the patrons tensed up visibly at the sight of 6 young and tough looking kids coming into the place all at once. We were well behaved. Rick and most of the gang knew the owners and the cooks. We were smart enough not to insult our hosts or the person who cooks the food so we kept it cool. We looked like trouble but we were really harmless.

Sometimes in the dining area was Highway Patrolmen. They watched us out of the corners of their eyes and got real uptight if one of us walked behind them. I can't blame them. Nobody ever shot at me and I never pulled over a bunch of people for speeding. They lived in a dangerous world and I was grateful they were out there. They had to deal with people who were dangerous, and we looked like the enemy to them. Still and all I felt a lot better with the cops nearby.

All of us dug around in our pockets and put all the money we had in a pile in the middle of the table. This was counted by Rick or somebody and it was decided what we wanted to eat. Mostly it was chicken fried steak washed down with iced tea. One delicacy I loved was the Mexican Dinner. This was more expensive than chicken-fries and Rick was reluctant to buy it. Sometimes he would, though. Most of the time it was chicken fried steak, and it came with cream gravy, french fries, and a side salad. We'd eat like a herd of horses, happily munching away.

Partially due to this protein diet and playing football I began to grow noticeably. I shot from 90 to 110 pounds in a few short months. It was all solid muscle on my lanky frame. With what I was involved in it was grow or die, so I grew.

After eating we drove back into Greenville and dropped off those who left their cars at the rink so they could go home. It was around 1 or 2 a.m. so we then had two choices. We could go park on Wesley Street or on the Kroger lot to see if anyone was still around, or we could simply go home. If we went to the Kroger lot we'd sit on the hood of the car so people driving by could see that it was us. Very rarely would anyone stop and chat.

After this we went home. If it seemed too early to suit us we'd flop on the trunk of the car and talk about the stars, personal problems, girls, cars, anything that came to our tired and sleep starved minds. It was at these times Rick was at his most intellectual. He had strong ideas about right and wrong, truth, honor, and loyalty. He seemed surprisingly wise for a 16 year old boy and I took a lot of these ideals to heart. Rick was like a big brother, and I looked to him for his advice. It would get me through some very bad times to come. His ideals and Coach Taylor's gave me my outlook on life.

Just about sunrise or so Rick would drive himself home and I'd stagger into my house to find my bed. I'd peel off my cloths, leaving them in a heap next to my bed and fall on the mattress. I'd be asleep in seconds.

My father would often wonder what on earth we did at night for so long. He would look upon my staying out all night with great distaste. Like all suspicious parents he thought we were up to no good. Little did he know just how harmless it all really was.

Concrete and Cinderblocks

It was sad. It rained so much off and on that it was delaying completion of the very important locker rooms. The Seniors would look at these cinder blocks stacked on the concrete bases and know they'd never get to suit up in there.

Just like last year, every week we'd go to Ag-class, hop on the truck, and go to the field for more work on the area. It was boring and labor intensive to pick up hot dog wrappers, popcorn sacks, and paper cups, but it beat sitting in a class room listening to a teacher drone on about how to feed cows or till crops. Each week we'd note how much further the locker-rooms had progressed. I hadn't had to suit up with the team for a game, so I had only a vague idea what it was like to ride the bus from the gym to the stadium.

Located next to the field was an eccentric recluse named Haskil Willis. He drew the attention of us all because he was a small town philosopher and astronomer. His place was a marvel to behold. In his back yard was a 30 foot tall wooden tower with a rather large telescope bolted to a hand rail. The tower\observatory was nicely built. Next to it was a smaller tower that had an unused look to it. Mr. Haskil often put up hand painted wooden signs of philosophical doom and such. One featured the skulls of a cow and a calf bolted to it. The sign said "The young will die, the old must." Like everything else we could not understand it was met with sarcastic mirth by us. I had seen Haskil himself only a couple of times. He wore bib overalls, a long sleeve shirt, and an alpine hat. He looked like most of the people of his generation from the 30's. There was an absence of color to the man, making his entire person look like a black and white picture. He wore mostly grays, blacks, and dark blue. He always had lace-up boots or shoes on. I can not say much more about him, because he kept to himself. I secretly wished I could have looked through those telescopes he had pointed to the sky. I do not know what he was looking for or if he was just a stargazer. Could be he had some idea he was looking for the "Second Coming". It takes all kinds, I guess.

Philosophy ran through several of the older generation of Haskil's era. There was a certainty that the world would end in 1980. We were once told this sure and certain fact by a teacher. It was stated with as much heartfelt honesty as if it was a proven theory in one of our texts. Some of us left the class wondering what we were going to do with the 9 years we had left. The majority of us just blew the prediction off and it left me feeling very cynical about the self appointed prophets of doom. As the years went by I noted with interest how the date kept getting pushed further into the future. It was always just around the corner, and on catchy dates. Times like 1980 gave way to 1984. Then it was 1999. Then it became 2001. Later it became 2002 and 2020. Some said 2050. They never stop and they never say they are wrong. I just go back to my book and let them talk on. I do not hear their words, but many have. It has made many doom talkers rich and powerful.

MR. FRED TRIMBLE -
Agricultural, B.S.
Texas A & M



In the more material world of the school, there was a debate in the faculty over the building of the field. Mr. Trimble wanted it built one way and complained to us in class about what the faculty was telling us to build what he considered wrong. We gave no comment and none was asked for. For our part we knew long ago not to get involved in conflicts between adult leaders. No teenager ever came out winners in an argument like that. One side or the other was going to stick it to the teen after the battle was over. They might not be able to retaliate against the other adult but they can do things to the teen's existence to make it less easy than it was. It was far better to remain neutral in this situation than to get slammed by an angry adult in a position of power.

First there was the debate over using fertilizer on the field. One side said it would get the grass to grow faster, another said it would contaminate open wounds and cause infection. The fence incident was next. Chain link fence was put around the sidelines of the Home and Visitors sides of the field. It was about 4 feet high and made to keep people off the sidelines. The fence had barbs at the top and none at the bottom. Because spectators liked to lean on the top bar of the fence they bent down the wire up there to get the barbs out of the way. Mr. Trimble had talked against putting the fence in barbs up, and the fence being bent all out of shape proved him right. When we were told this we sat in stony silence. What could we say? I couldn't understand why he was venting this at us.

Mr. Trimble was right about a lot but he could be wrong, too. Once Eddie told me Mr. Trimble had plowed up the field that summer and resowed new grass. The end result was a field as hard as concrete with a small covering of grass. I thought it still grew nicely in the endzones, however.

Aside from all this in-fighting and tom foolery we had our practices. Practice was always exciting and gave us all on the team a chance to blow off steam. Between the stress of class work, dealing with cliqueism, lack of female companionship, and a perceived gloomy outlook rooted in teenaged insecurity, to have these 3 nights a week to pad out, holler, jump, scream, run until we almost dropped, and to hit someone as hard as we could made life seem better. It was remarkably relaxing to work off all that frustration, hostility, and nervous energy. I think it made a lot of us more level-headed and less prone to anger when off the field. We'd take all this pent up emotion we all had and blow it all away in the dirt, grass, and nails of the practice field. It was sweaty, painful, and in some instances a little bloody. It was also a kind of cleansing of the soul and mind.

Locker Room Pass

Thursday was a quiet day. We had our evening practice in shorts and went to the locker room to hear what the coaches had to say. I sat on a table holding a football, listening.

The coaches gave us these speeches to let us know exactly how they felt. It killed rumors and let us know what they wanted. Mr. Taylor would speak in his East Texas drawl, spicing it up with his sayings such as "How the Cow eat the Cabbage", or "Eat his Sack Lunch". All of these colloquialisms were solemnly delivered and very serious. After Coach Taylor was finished Coach McNutt or Coach Royal would say something. Then Coach Brookins would deliver the final speech, wrapping up all else that was said. The locker room was always quiet and everybody was listening, even if we were not looking at the speaker at the time. It was known by the way we behaved that we knew the gravity of what was being told to us. We didn't have to stare at our coaches for them to know we were heeding their words.

District 12-B was in a mess. By losing to Leonard we had thrown everything into chaos. We had to beat Celeste and beat them soundly to keep our scores high or we'd fall in the overall standings. District ties were settled by what I considered stupid things like "penetrations", or how much yardage one team had over the other, and the amount of points scored versus the amount allowed. The most idiotic thing of all was a coin toss to decide a champion.

I would have preferred a playoff game between two tied champions. Also, I believed and I still do that if one team thinks the other has an ineligible player on the team and takes it to court what should happen, instead of forfeiting all the games that player was present at, they should replay every game forfeited. The chances of that ever happening are slim indeed. It would extend the season beyond reason. But by replaying, sour grapes can prevent lesser teams from claiming a district trophy from a true champion without paying a price. Greenville went down in the courts to Plano because they had one guy on the team who was 19 years old and wasn't even a starter. Greenville's record was 12-0, and Plano was given the district title. Plano got a similar thing done to them, but took the entire team to Austin and appealed it. They got to go to the playoffs, but didn't get far. A new idea of not allowing any ineligibility charges to be filed right before the playoffs by sour grapes teams is being mulled over by the lawmakers. This nonsense certainly has to stop.

Back in our wooden cathedral-like gym, in our sanctuary "chapter house" of a locker room, we sat listening to Mr. Brookins. I had a practice football in my hands, quietly rolling it. Not far from me was one of the biggest guys on the team, All District Lineman Randy King. He looked right at me and opened his hands. I lightly tossed the ball to him and he looked surprised. Nobody seemed to notice and Coach Brookins kept right on with his speech.



Randy King

The Coach seemed to be doing a version of a speech Coach Taylor gave us after the Leonard game. But when Mr. Brookins gave it, it cut really deep.

"A few games back we thought we were the all mighty Buffaloes and expected Leonard to just fall down in fear of us. You all remember what happened? They beat us, right here and on our home field.

"Are we going to let that happen this Friday with Celeste?"

A few voices said "No."

Firmly but gently Coach Brookins said "Whats that? I didn't hear you."

"NO!" boomed the entire squad.

This was serious business. The watch words were "Get your mind on the game and keep your mind on the game." It would be so easy to get the big head and think we were the best and expect Celeste to just lay down and die. There could be no letting up.

Later Randy asked me why I did that, why I had passed the ball to him. I said I thought the wanted it, and he told me never to do that again. I had embarrassed him. I shrugged it off, but it was interesting that he treated me like a member of the team. Both of us forgot it soon after this conversation. We had to get our mind on the game.

Celeste

I had Rick drop me off at the field. I waved goodbye and looked out on the deserted arena. For the next half an hour this place was all mine. Then I'd make popcorn for the very last time in 1971. I walked out on the field and looked around. This was our last home game, and probably the last time I'd ever get a chance to see it like this. The white chalk lines, yard markers, and end zone marker flags fluttering in the wind gave it a special look for the game to come. It was the calm before the storm.

Filled with teenage self doubt and feelings of inadequacy I looked at the field and wondered if I'd ever go out there in a game. I wouldn't trade this utterly fantastic Sophomore year in high school for all the tea in China, but I still felt like I didn't deserve to be on the team. Randy Price and Rick told me I deserved to be on the team. Other guys on the team welcomed me as one of them. Even with that I still had my doubts.

There are 3 types of teams. There are Elite Teams like Lone Oak and Leonard, who constantly put out winners. There are losing teams like the also-rans who just can't seem to get their act together in football. Then there are unpredictable teams like Community who have a devastating losing season and come back the next year to give a team the fight of their life. Our opponents for this night, the Celeste Blue Devils, were just such a team.

Celeste was totally unpredictable. One year they'd look like old dogs and the next year they'd come out like a pack of blood thirsty wolves. It was factors like this that make playing teams like Celeste interesting.

Last year Celeste's lady basketball went head to head with our girl's basketball team, defeating them once and almost winning district. Celeste knew how to win. Never underestimate any opponent. Halloween was very near and tonight's game was like a championship of two towns. Onward to Victory!

I trotted over to the concession stand as the ladies opened it up. Soon Ronald Posey showed up and we made the popcorn machine ready. Posey and I got along okay for two fellows from different backgrounds and with such different outlooks on life. Still, there was something about him that made me feel a bit uneasy. Perhaps he smiled too much. Perhaps I wrongly thought he wasn't actually genuine in his sincerity. What ever it was I never felt a true bond of trusting friendship with him like I did Rickey Graham or Randy Price. There seemed to be something lurking behind that happy, jolly exterior that I couldn't grasp or understand. To be frank, I didn't trust him. He was part of the jock group, and that, I guess, was the problem. He liked me well enough, and treated me with respect.



Ronald Posey in 1972

For this night we were a team, and for the last time. This was the last home game and the last time he and I would make popcorn. It had been a good adventure. We had been in the rain together during Homecoming, risking electrocution to fill popcorn bags. We had made it through all the home games. After this, no more. After 4 other nights of making this snack food we had gotten good at it. It took less and less time to set up, tear down, and clean up. Because of our efficiency it became less of a chore and we had more time to eyeball the game.

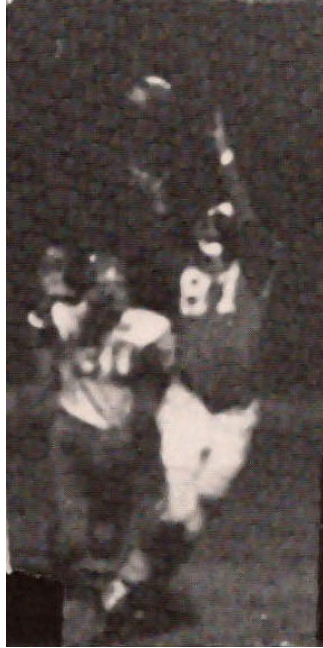
My team mates arrived and soon began their warm-up. It got dark fast and the other-worldliness of the lights and the carnival smell of popcorn made it just right. Celeste was soon there and everything was made ready.

The Star Spangled Banner came scratchily out of the P.A. system. Then the lilting melody of our unique school song softly came from the bleachers, followed by the Celeste School Song. Then came the prayer to bless and keep all the players and spectators safe. Then it was time.

Lone Oak kicked off to Celeste and the Halloween Championship between the Blue Devils and the Buffaloes was underway. Celeste had problems immediately.

Celeste controlled the ball for 3 quick minutes and 4 downs, then punted it away. When Lone Oak got the ball the wings of Victory began to spread for our side. Victory can be a fickle maiden, so we had to beware.

Danny Bowman handed off to Willie Davis on a 35 Quick Pitch. Willie made like an N.F.L. running back and dodged his way 34 Thundering yards for our first touchdown of the night. There was celebration all over the home side. When we went for 2 Danny hit Troy and that made it 8 to 0.



Troy Haynes catches a pass

Celeste had come clear across Hunt County to play here this night. They weren't about to give up, not yet. Showing they had grit and drive they took the kickoff and drove a spectacular 71 yards. They scored and tied it up with a 2 pointer, making it 8 to 8.

Sizing up the Blue Devils the Lone Oak team decided they would see just how tough the Celeste boys were. In the second quarter the Big Red Machine unleashed theThunder!

Randy Payne took a hand off from the one to cap off the next drive. When they untangled the bodies Lone Oak had 6 more. Danny drilled a pass to Steve Henderson for 2, making it 16 to 8.

Not to be outdone, Celeste started down the field again after the kickoff. They were intent on making this a "You score, I score" fight. Steve Henderson got an interception and put a stop to that.

Danny then smartly quarterbacked the team to Celeste's 38. He then faded back and rocketed a pass to Troy Haynes for a touchdown. Danny then called a quarterback sneak, and got two more. That made it 24 to 8!

Boom! Hear the Thunder!



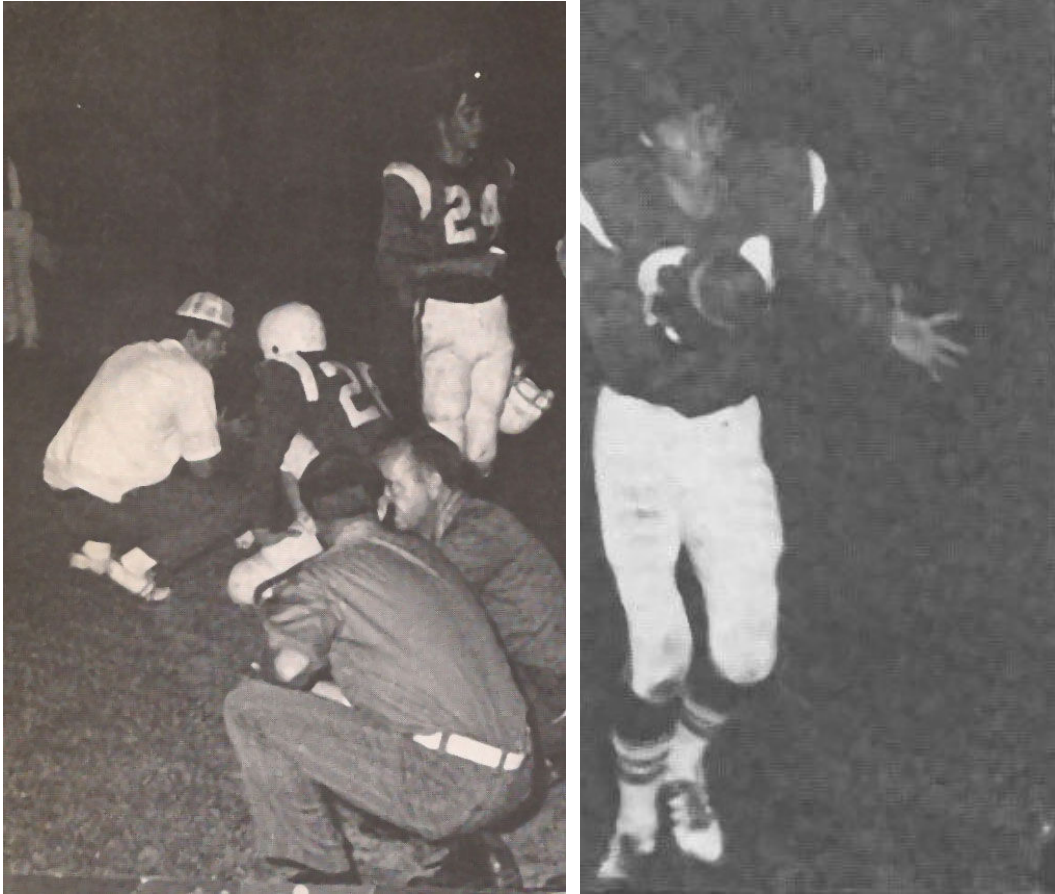
Willie Davis running!

Celeste was now what we call "Snake Bit". They couldn't do anything with the ball and punted. Red jerseys were everywhere, fouling up all their plays. The ball was taken just the other side of the 50 yard line.

Lone Oak then began another strong drive. They went steadily down to the 3. Danny then handed off to Eddie Bell, making it 30 to 8.

The extra point failed and Celeste received. It was obvious that they were overmatched by the Big Red Machine. They gave it up in 4, and Lone Oak took it the other way. Danny tossed it right to Steve who was wide open in the end zone from 25 yards away. Letting up on the Blue Devils, Mr. Brookins had Phillip kick it for the extra point. Big Red rolled on, Thundering 37 to 8.

I personally thought that this was a great way to have our last home game of the year go. Everybody on the sidelines who was suited up would get game time, it was very plain to see. Ronald Posey and I sold popcorn and I felt very happy for my team mates.



Halftime in the endzone. Talking tactics. Steve Bell during warmup prepares a punt. Note white shoes and stripes on socks.

After the half the A-team began the game as usual. They drove down and Sheepdog took the ball on a Keeper for a full 20 yards to score again. I thought that this wasn't bad for a guy who played guard last year.

Then David Lemons, a small fellow with a heart as big as all Texas, ran one an incredible 39 yards for a T. D. Lone Oak was blowing Celeste off the field. The poor fellows were done in. They must've put everything they had in that first quarter drive. When Steve intercepted it must have broken their spirit. Now they had nothing left.

Phillip was soon back in, quarterbacking with enthusiasm. He drove it down to the one, handed off to Eddie, and got 6 more. It was now 55 to 8. The end of the game was mercifully near.

People began to leave early because of the blowout. Ronald Posey and I gave away popcorn, having made too much this night. We were cleaning up the machine for the last time when Lone Oak got the ball again. O. T. had another good night and Phillip passed to him for 30 yards and another touchdown. This Hero of our Homecoming Victory now had 3 touchdowns to his credit. The glory was his, and all of the team shared in it. Had he gave up and quit earlier in the season this would have never happened for him. O. T. was there, and 6 of the 61 points belonged to him.

Danny teed up Phillip's extra point kick. As it sailed through the uprights it became the last points we would make that year at home. This was our last home game of 1971, and it was 62 to 8.

As the time ran out my team mates were very happy. Most, if not all, had gotten game time, even if only for a play or two. At Celeste's expense we had won back some of our lost honor. Victory was ours again.

Ronald Posey and I put the machine away for the last time. He shook my hand and left for his tan colored Dodge. Where he went after that I didn't know.

I walked out on the field where the contest had been played and stood on the 20. I looked at the emptying bleachers and the cars leaving. I saw the managers packing up the equipment and walking toward the busses. There was paper cups, hot-dog wrappers, frito-pie boats, and our popcorn bags all over the spectator areas.

The yardlines had been torn up by cleats and the impact of bodies. Here and there a strip or two of tape lay curled up in the grass like the worn out skin of a snake.

It was over for the team at our Home games. We'd practice here a couple of times, perhaps, but the second year of our new field was over. I felt sort of misty eyed. As I stood there in the near empty stadium somebody turned out the lights that bathed the field.

Then I walked away to find Rick or call home.

Why Do It

We did some really unusual one time only drills from time to time. One was a drill to develop reflexes, to teach us to react as fast as we could but not too fast. It involved facing a different direction as Coach McNutt called it out. If somebody messed up that person took a quarter mile lap. I knew I had to be able to react as fast or faster than my team mates because of my small size and light weight.

I was blasting through this drill. Several guys had already messed up and put in a lap or two. One thing it did was teach us not to anticipate. I was bouncing around this agility drill like a pro. I got to thinking "Hey, I'm hot! I'm really good at this!"

Then I messed up. I took my lap, thinking to myself "Get arrogant, and you goof up!"

I thought I had to push myself. I thought I wasn't doing any more than anyone else. Everybody else seemed to be having such an easy time with pass drills and running plays that I felt like I had to push as hard as I could. It was like the coaches said; give that 110%. I felt like I was always trying to catch up. The other guys were just too good, too fast, too big.

There was Troy, Jerry, Danny, and Robert Vice. All that complicated stuff in the playbook seemed to come easy to them. I looked at them in wonderment and thought about how much I wish I could do it like them. I was eaten up by feelings of inadequacy. I was never good enough, no matter how hard I tried.

Sometimes I would sit in the dirt, really angry at everybody on the planet. I was so involved in myself I didn't see what was going on around me. Guys didn't pat me on the head or tell me what a great fellow they thought I was because it just wasn't done. I had their respect, but I didn't know it. On a team like the Lone Oak Buffaloes I couldn't ask for anything more than that. This was one very exclusive club I belonged to, and membership is special.

The coaches put me in practice and marveled at my bull-headedness. I would be out there in pads 3 days a week, shorting out on Thursdays, and without any hope at all of playing in a game. I was just out there because I wanted to. There was no other reason. I enjoyed it. I was there. More people than I knew respected me. To me, at the time, I was just doing practice and nothing else. I simply wanted to be a Buffalo. Yet I wasn't one of them. I kept my distance in formal occasions like pep-rallies. Unless I got invited I felt like I had not any business sharing their glory.

Lone Oak has a tradition, just like most small schools. No matter how little athletic ability someone has, if they go out for the team and take everything thrown at them and come back for more they have a spot on the squad. It may be on the bench, but they will be on the team. This kid will be one of them. He will represent the school and it's decades of traditions. He will be there in front of hundreds of people. They will see the person in the Red and White. No matter that he blends in with the other players. He is there. He is one of them.

It had not happened for me yet, but I was not unhappy. If I had gone to Greenville I would not be on the team at all. If I was not on the team I would have lost interest in school and probably not finished my education. I don't know how many people this happened to. Even today I can go to school where they play 6 man football and see tiny kids out there, who wouldn't have a chance in 4-A schools, giving it their all for the glory of it. Just like me, they can't give a real sound reason why they are out there tripping over their own feet and dropping passes. Yet they are out there, everyday. It was never easy. It would be impossible in larger schools.

In Lone Oak it was possible. I did this because I wanted to.

Anna

Leonard had beaten Bells. Somehow that made Leonard number one and us tied with Anna. At least thats the way it was described in the Greenville paper. I found Danny Bowman and asked him to explain it to me. That was a mistake.

"If we beat Anna," he began, "we'll be tied with Leonard but if Leonard loses and we win we'll be tied for first because Leonard beat us in that one game. But if Anna beats us they'll be in second place and we'll be in third unless Leonard loses. If that happens we'll be tied with Leonard and Anna for first place unless it's a tie. If that happens it'll be a dead heat for first place and everything will be up in the air. If we beat Anna and Anna doesn't lose any more games and Leonard loses their game they'll be tied for second. "

I just looked at him and nodded as if I was following what he was saying. I think he stopped when he saw my eyes start to glaze over.

"Do you understand?" he asked.

I nodded and staggered out of the locker room more confused than when I came in.

Not soon after this there was a team meeting. Curious, I tagged along. Coach Brookins had a look on his face of worry and the other coaches were solemn. Once we got in and sat down they told us what was going on.

Anna had somehow gotten two ineligible players on it's team. There was something about a violation of the transfer rule, what ever Mickey Mouse rule that was. Anna had to forfeit all it's games!

I felt a number of emotions all at once. This guaranteed us at least second place. That was good. Anna had won on the field of honor but had lost in the courts. That was bad. I disliked for something to go down like this. It also messed up the careers of two young men who came from someplace else to play football. High School only happens once in your life and to get goofed up by some obscure rules not intentionally violated is really an awful thing to have happen.

I felt like Anna should play it's games over again somehow, but that was almost impossible and just not the way it was done. I can't say what happened to the 2 unfortunate young men who forced Anna to forfeit.

Mr. Brookins looked us over. He looked like a huge hawk. The seriousness of the matter burned deep into us. Nobody felt like celebrating. This was a bad thing. Coach Brookins spoke.

"Just because Anna had to give up all it's games to this point doesn't mean we can let up. We are only one game behind Leonard. If Anna beats us it will count against us. We can't let that happen."

The other Coaches all nodded agreement.

"If Leonard loses their next two games we'll have district. Even if they lose just one we'll have to toss for it. So we have to keep on giving it our all. It's that close."

It was quiet for a long time. Nobody else said anything, and eventually we were dismissed.

"Wow," I thought, "This is something else! We can still win District!"

The pep-rally was fun. The Cheerleaders messed around with Coach Royale good naturedly and Coach Brookins gave a powerful speech that had all of us stock still in our seats. In his presence of being and his mannerisms he was most like Julius Caesar. We were in awe of the man.

After school we loaded the bus, stuffing it full with our equipment and ourselves. I had eaten at the Cafe downtown with Gunner and now we were ready for a night of football action.

Coach Brookins had said that Anna would be out for blood tonight. They had been slapped in the face by the courts and wanted someone to take their outrage on. Well, here we come. Bring your best!



It started out as usual. We got ready and went out on the field. I did the exercises with the team and I stayed out of the way in the drills. Once I was on the sidelines I saw the reporter from the Greenville paper that had been at our Quinlan game.

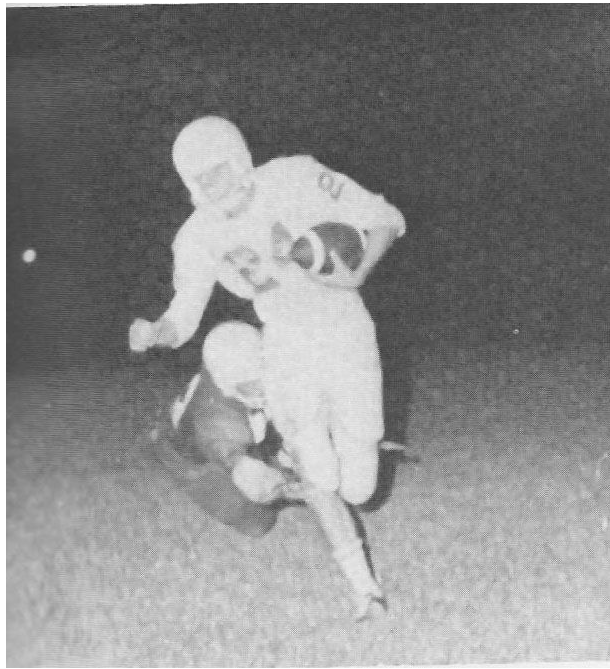
"Hi! Remember me?"

He looked me over.

"Oh, no. Not you again!"

I just laughed and watched my team mates. I discovered that I couldn't call out the same bloodthirsty cat calls I did in the past. I tried to do that to intimidate the reporter, but I couldn't. Perhaps I had matured in the couple of months since my first away game.

Things went bad fast. I cheered on with enthusiasm as the team drove all the way down to Anna's 3 yard line. Something went wrong and there was a fumble. Anna recovered it and started back the other way.



It was soon obvious that we were evenly matched. Neither side could crack the other. Every time we would rally and get a drive together a turn over or penalty would take the spirit out of it. We had even scored on one drive, but it was called back. That meant we could drive on Anna, but not all the time. It was soon half-time and we went to our locker room to sort out this mess. It was 0 to 0.

Not much happened in the locker room. We were told to take care on the penalties. Penalties were killing us, and we were playing a sloppy game. That said, we went back out.

On one play in the second half Troy Haynes took a whallop and got his bell rung. With his eyes rolling in opposite directions and a steady ringing in his ears he went to his defensive huddle. He couldn't get his brain to work. He bent forward to call the formation and nothing came to his thoughts except that he was very tired.

"Come on, Troy, call the play!"

"They will be lining up soon, man! What defense?"

Troy raised up and looked around. He needed to sit down and rest. He took off walking for his end zone. The other ten guys on the Lone Oak defense looked at him in disbelief. He was really out of it!

I didn't understand what was going on. I thought Troy was going back to receive a punt, but then he took off his helmet and sat down with his back to one of the goal post supports. He couldn't figure out what to do next, he just needed to rest.

Coach Brookins and another coach came trotting up. A couple of concerned team mates had walked over by now. Time out was called.

"Troy, are you okay?"

He looked up at Coach Brookins.

"Hey, Coach. I'm okay. I'm just a little tired, is all."

While the amused crowd watched the coaches got him to his feet and he wobbled over to the bench.

I looked at him as he sat there. He was virtually oblivious to all that was going on. I had thought maybe he was playing a joke, but I could see that it was serious. I had never seen anyone with their bell rung before so I was fascinated. Big ole, mean ole, tough Troy was sitting there with a bag of ice on the back of his neck, looking totally unconcerned. I thought he was still one tough son of a gun, and I believed that anybody else would be out cold by now. This was certainly spooky.

One of the managers was given the job of keeping an eye on him. If Troy went unconscious or fell down he was to get Coach Brookins right quick. Troy just looked bored with it all.

I got back to cheering my team mates on, and yelled for some sort of revenge for Troy, and after a while we got 6 points. When Coach Brookins ordered 2 points Anna managed to stop us. Soon after this Anna got a touchdown of their own, and the Buffalo squad prevented their 2 point try, tying up the game. It was 6 to 6.

I was somewhat confused. Penalties and our own mistakes were killing us. I don't know if it was because we were not up for the game or because we were trying too hard. Anna was also a good team, and fighting for their team pride. This was an all out war by them, and they fought us to a standstill.

As the final whistle blew I stood there in disappointment. For the first time in my life I had seen a Buffalo team tied. I bit back my distaste and disappointment and went to the locker room with my fellow teammates.

Troy was still bonkers. Somebody had helped him get out of his gear and they had kept an eye on his condition. Sheila was very concerned but she couldn't come into the locker room. Finally he was able to dress himself in spite of what ever fuzzy other-world he was in.

Somebody in Anna's side of the locker room started chanting "We're Number One!". It was joined in by several others. We could hear it through the wall. Angered by this affront, the Lone Oak team erupted in chanting it right back. It was a sad situation. Anna had to forfeit all it's games and tried to salvage it's pride. Lone Oak tried to cheat on Leonard and had lost in spite of it.

Here we sat in our respective locker rooms in various stages of undress chanting something we didn't really believe. Two teams trying to tell the other this lie. What a fiasco.

We loaded Troy on the bus and left Anna far behind. We were not number one, Leonard was. They had won their game tonight and we hadn't. The battle for District was essentially over.

Electrodes, Codes, and Planes

The old gym had an opening behind it where anyone could get into the area under the Varsity locker room. Under there some fellows smoked and could peek into the gym itself through cracks in the wall. Guys who didn't want to go to gym class hid out under there. The school used this area as a storage facility, putting planks and pieces of sheet metal in there. Why they hadn't simply boarded it up I don't know.

I don't smoke, and I loved gym class, so the few times I was under there was just curiosity about it. It was short enough under there to walk around only slightly bent over. I didn't see any pipes or electrical connections, so I was baffled as why it was left open. There were places under there where we could sit down. Large planks were fastened at the corners and we could sit on them. One was strategically placed where we could sit and look out on the gym floor and observe both bleachers.

Watching the gym teacher, who was usually Mr. Taylor, the "People Under the Gym" could leisurely watch his activities. If Coach Taylor got wise that someone was under the gym he would exit one side of the gym to go get them. The lookout would see him and exit, alerting everyone else in there. They would then evacuate the hidey hole and go to the opposite door to the one Coach Taylor went out of.

Coach Taylor, being no fool, exited out the back door. This made the class skippers head for the long run for the front door. Coach Taylor merely came around the corner and observed who was running toward the front door.

Gotcha!

One thing that was done was to observe the Pep-Squad practicing. The pseudo-naughtyness of watching them through cracks in the wall was pure baloney. The girls acted no different than they would if the boys were sitting in the bleachers watching them. The real draw was that it's where people went to smoke and shoot dice without the teachers catching them.

I was on the gym floor one day when I saw some idiot under the gym stick his finger through a crack in the wall into the gym. A couple of girls immediately noticed and walked over to see what was going on. There was much giggling and pointing by the girls.

"Someone is under there!"

"Ooo! Neat-o!"

If a person could peek into the gym the people in the gym could peek back at that person. One of the girls did.

"There's a bunch of boys in there!" she said, " And some of them are smoking!"

Her buddy ran off to tell Pep-Squad Instructor Mrs. Sandlin. There was an immediate raid. People went out both doors, outflanking the huffers and puffers. Realizing their predicament, some went through the barb-wire fence behind the gym, getting into the underbrush and low areas behind there. Others were caught and sheepishly led away.

I took great pleasure in watching these fellows being led off to punishment. Many of them considered themselves real hotshots and I did not like them in the least. They knew how I felt about them, too. There was no love lost here.

One of them got revenge on me of a sorts. Up in the Varsity Locker Room was a hole where about a foot long section of plank had been snapped off, into the Junior High side. This was on top of the screened-in storage area, so thats how who ever broke it off got to it to snap it off. In the Junior High area it was about 20 feet up.

Always looking for something to do we noticed an abundance of old shoes in the Junior High area. We decided to make a game out of trying to get a shoe through the hole up there into the Varsity Locker Room.

Quite a few of us were chunking the shoes up there and a couple would disappear into the hole. We all thought that was really neat, and kept on throwing shoes. Then I threw a shoe and it bounced off, neatly taking out a window over the cabinet in the Junior High Locker Room.

Everybody fled the room. This fellow called Mongoose thought it was funny.

He gleefully cackled like a crow and started yelling "Buzzard broke a window! Buzzard broke a window!"

He had just violated an unwritten code of trust. I told him to shut up but he just kept hollering "Buzzard broke a window!" while grinning from ear to ear.

Mr. Taylor showed up seconds later.

"Uh huh, Charlie-O, broke it right out, didn't ya?"

I stood there with my hands thrust in my pockets, red faced and scared.

"Yes sir."

"What in the sam hill were you doing?"

"Throwing shoes at that hole up there."

He cocked his head to one side and gawked at me like I was some odd creature he had discovered. He simply couldn't believe I had done that.

"Throwing shoes? What were you doing something that stupid for?"

I just shrugged. I wasn't going to tell him that I was one of about 6 guys. It wouldn't have made it any different anyway. Then Coach Taylor pronounced sentence.

"Well, Charlie-O, you're gonna have to pay for that window. That'll be five bucks."

"I don't got five dollars."

"Then pay me with what you can until you pay for the damage."

He stalked off.

I stood there boiling mad at Mongoose. He had a biuuuuuuuig mouth! Now I had to rake up five bucks somehow.

For the next few weeks I hocked in coke bottles for a nickel each, counted up my pennies, and everything else I could do to get that 5 dollars. Little by little I did it. For all that trouble the blasted window was never fixed.

Between Mongoose finking on me like a low rat, Coach Taylor being mad at me for being stupid, and the window never getting fixed, I was not in too happy of a mood about any of it. I was especially displeased with Mongoose. His attitude had told on him in other ways, too. Because of his finking on me not many others trusted him anymore, at any time. He wasn't exactly shunned, but he wasn't trusted with any secrets after that. He was pretty much left out of any behind the scenes activities.

But Mr. Taylor saw the honorable effort I made to settle my debts and he never brought up the incident again. He could forgive a lapse of judgment. That was what made him a good coach and all. He understood a lot more than we knew.

One day I wandered back behind the gym and saw the area underneath the locker room had been boarded up. There was a trap door and a pad lock on it. I figured this stopped the people under the gym, but a few days later I passed the same area and saw that the trap door had been torn off it's hinges. Somebody not only liked this hidey hole but liked it enough to be wantonly destructive. To me that didn't make any sense, but senseless destruction went on every day, so I didn't think that much of it.

The reasons I and others often went behind the gym was that it was a short cut from the baseball fields to Ag and Science classes. Of all the classes we had Ag shop was the most dangerous overall. In football we could get a concussion or broken bones. In Ag we could get actually blown to smithereens or lose a limb or two.

Classroom instruction in Ag was an unholy bore. We were issued these little yellow booklets on Parliamentary Procedure. There were doodled on and defaced by everybody in the class. They were used to bat away thrown objects from paperwads to pecans to lug nuts.

Lug nuts. Really. I'm not kidding. My booklet alone had gouges in it from smacking away such projectiles.

Girls were rare in High School, and there were no girls at all in Ag. They all went to Home Economics, called Home-Ec. There the girls learned to cook, sew, and all sorts of obscure things that they'd put to good use later on in life. In spite of the fact that the smell of food wafting out of the place was inviting it was looked on as a strange place for a guy to walk into. It was an all girl domain. We mostly stayed out of there. Some guys were invited in, like Jerry McGee. Ah, the joys of the Alpha Male!



Jerry and various ladies at the breezeway icecream freezer.

Back in the Ag Shop, one thing I wanted to learn was Arc-Welding. The ability to join two pieces of metal together to build all sorts of nifty things fascinated me. The prospects of the things I could build was astounding. Rick and one of his buddies called Charles Hagerman started showing how to use the arc welders we had. These were big, heavy, monsters in a light green sheet metal box. The things weighed about 300 pounds, and had no wheels. There were three electrode plugs, one for the ground and 2 for the electrode used to weld with. On the box itself was the power adjustment knob. Jokers in the class would take great pleasure in putting the your power too low or too high, or sometimes just turning off the machine all together. Mongoose and David Dillon especially went to great lengths to mess with the welders. I really hated their living guts for that, but it was to get worse.



Posed for a picture, Troy touches the electrode to the "car stand" Charles Hagerman and Rick Graham

Had built in this Ag Shop. We all made hundreds of personal projects, but not all made it home.

Mr. Trimble was surprised to discover that some of us actually would like to learn to weld. He then decided to have a class on it. We had to learn terminology like Fillet Weld and what a Bead was. We learned about safety, about the 60 amp welders and the proper rods to use in the hand-set. Then we started building cattle trailers out of kits to learn both practical use of the equipment and to fill the coffers of the Ag-Shop fund. We also built bar-b-que grills from split oil drums. These drums were cut open with a power jig-saw. Broken jig-saw blades were soon all over the shop.

We got very innovative in building these grills and had Mr. Trimble climbing the walls in exasperation over some of them. Rick's father, Doc Graham, was a welder who built ships in WWII and had a shop in Greenville. Rick picked up a lot of his father's skills and knowledge but not his wisdom. Some of Rick's ideas either didn't work or were expensive in execution.

Because I could draw, I had hand control. Therefore I could also weld in places a lot of guys had difficulty getting to. Being small helped, too. Using the standard 2 handed grip I could run a very tight bead of molten metal several feet in length. I tried to practice this often but the pranksters or self appointed guardians of our expensive welding equipment often made this difficult, if not impossible. They harassed me, Macallum, Herman, Rabbit, and others constantly.

On our particular grill Rick Graham and I were building we had more difficulty than usual. First came guys who monkeyed with my welding machine, causing me to burn holes in the metal. I later had to fill these holes up by using a lower setting and colder rods. I got fairly good at this. Rick decided he wanted to get innovative and instead of a mesh grill he wanted an all metal griddle-type set up. He found a sheet of steel, proceeded to cut 3 inch vents in it with a cutting torch, and welded it to the removable grill frame.

Mr. Trimble voiced complaints to us about this, because the sheet metal Rick had grabbed was a special project Mr. Trimble had in mind, and now he had to go get another sheet of steel. He didn't stop us, however, and we completed the project. The finished product looked just like something built by a bunch of teenagers in an Ag-Shop.

Rick and I delivered our grill to it's customer, collected the 5 dollar fee, and went on our way. The grille never did work as Rick had hoped. His sheet metal wouldn't let the charcoal breath so it wouldn't stay lit. The guy we sold it to eventually got a replacement grill, this one with a more standard top. Bright ideas aren't always good ideas.

Just about the most bizarre thing we did was when we had a half inch thick piece of steel, about the size of a man-hole cover, on a platform. There were about 4 or 5 of us around it with welding helmets on and grounds from 5 different welders attached to the steel. Our welders were turned all the way up just for funsies and we proceeded to heat this steel plate up with the electrodes. We could change rods without even having to raise the helmet. We must have lit up the shop like an A-Bomb blast. Big globs of molten metal fell off this plate as we proceeded to cut it in two. I didn't know we could cut with an arc welder and this discovery was fun. With a loud clang the two halves of the plate fell to the floor, making us dance to get out of the way of the white hot hunk of metal. That was really neat, we thought, with laughs all around. Its a wonder we didn't get killed or blow up the Ag shop.

We discovered that steel could fool us. We could dip it in water and it would still be hot enough to burn us. We would test it by spitting on it. If it was hot there would be an audible hiss and the stuff would boil. This was also a way to tell when something we had welded into place was cool enough to touch.

One way we had of testing the structural integrity of small assemblies was to throw them as hard as we could against the cinder block wall. If the parts stayed on the assembly the weld was good. If something broke off we rewelded the assembly and tried again.

The cutting torch and I were never friends. This gizmo had valves, levers, hoses, tanks, gauges, regulators, and warnings all over it of the potential explosive danger. I couldn't tell if I was opening a valve or closing it. I had to use a striker to light the torch, and my first attempt shot an oxygen rich flame about 5 feet out like a rocket motor. Whoosh! I had the immediate attention of the half dozen or so guys in the shop as I tried to figure out how to turn the thing down. I held the torch like it was an annoyed rattle-snake. I tried first one valve then another. My eyes had gotten so large they were bigger than the goggles I had on my head. Finally Charlie Hagerman came up and took the torch from me. He deftly adjusted it to a decent flame in just a few seconds and handed it back. I tried to cut with it and it popped and went out. I decided to give up on it. I hung it up, hoping I had cut the bottles off, then I got away from the oxycedalyne set up and I didn't go back. I found my arc-welder and happily stayed there for the rest of my school days.



Charles Hagerman

As can be seen, the shop is dangerous, very dangerous. Horseplay got a bunch of guys hurt from time to time. One time Briggs came up behind me and started messing with me while I was drilling a hole in a piece of steel. I swung the drill motor around to fend him off and the bit caught in the shirt sleeve of his shirt. It rolled right up around the powerful electric drill, and I thought I had got him in the arm. I tried to pull it free.

He went "Oh," and grabbed his upper arm. I almost panicked, I certainly was scared. I put the motor in reverse, and it unwound his sleeve. He got loose and was otherwise unhurt, except for a mangled sleeve and a few light scratches. I was shaken and it took me a while to regain my composure. Larry thought nothing of it, but was sad his shirt was torn. He must have learned a lesson, though, because he didn't come up behind anybody when they were working anymore. Little by little we all learned our lessons the hard way.

Once Mr. Trimble bought a "planer". A planer is a table sized machine that has a large horizontal rotating bit in the center. The purpose of this thing is to remove a layer of wood off of a board. We

discovered we could make signs and name plates from scrap lumber. We did this by locking the drill press at a certain depth and bored into the board what ever we wanted the board to say. Most often it was a name. It looked a little like wood burning, and it made an attractive shingle for the house or mailbox. Once we had the name bored into the wood we spray-painted the surface black. When it was dried to satisfaction we took it to the planer. A layer of wood was removed along with the surface paint leaving the bored in lettering still black, with a sort of "Ranch House" look to it.

The planer was dangerous and Mr. Trimble told us not to get overconfident in it's use. One thing it would do was kick back. The least that would do was bark someone's hand, the worst it would do was take the hand into the bit.

Just about everybody in the shop got enthusiastically into making signs. It was a real fad. One day we came into class and Mr. Trimble was nowhere to be seen. We got into the usual horseplay mode until someone discovered what had happened.

The class before ours had been happily making signs. Russell Cook was leading his sign into the planer with his left hand guiding it in. There was a sharp "Crack!"

Quick as a blink it kicked back 3 or 4 inches. Before Russell could react he got his finger into the bit, neatly amputating it. After the group's initial stunned shock and disbelief of it all somebody got Mr. Trimble. Russell, who was Freshman Center, was taken to the office to see what could be done for him.

Then we came into an empty Ag Shop. The planer was off and there wasn't any blood anywhere. Somebody then told us what had happened and David Morgan the Gunner got curious. There was a deep pile of sawdust under the planer. Gunner actually rooted around in this until he found Russell's finger! He put this thing up on the planer and howled with glee at the horror of it! Nobody got within five feet of the finger. We all stared with fascination. It had turned green and bloodless from the sawdust. It was perfectly awful! I think some of us turned as green as the finger. Some guys would walk up and gawk at the thing, swear, and run away. It was gross! The bizarreness of the situation was incredible.

Later I saw Russell with his finger stump all bandaged up. Going into the 'stupid mode' like the time Eddie bit his tongue, I asked him if he wanted to see his finger. Russell declined. Then I asked him if it hurt, hoping the doctor had pumped him full of pain-killers. He said it hurt, a lot.

The Ag-Shop was truly a dangerous place. We never saw the planer again.

Gonga



Gaze upon him, if you will. There he is, 6 foot 6, 200 clumsy shambling pounds, all of it butterball. This large individual was 100% outcast from all groups. I did not like him either, and I treated him cruelly.

He had a lack of coordination, he was slow moving, not impressively strong, looked upon as weird by one and all, and he had the guts to play football. Every day he was out there, taking vicious hit after hit. Some guys openly tried to hurt him. Virtually nobody liked him, with the exception of Rickey Graham. We called him 'Gonga'.

Robert Vice once tried to take Gonga's head off in practice. Robert was on defense where he was particularly fearsome. Gonga desperately tried to keep him from getting to the quarterback, and grabbed a handful of Robert's jersey. The next play Robert intimidated Gonga openly.

"You're holding me, Gonga. I'm gonna have to hurt you!"

When the ball was centered Robert clobbered Gonga with a forearm, sending Gonga reeling back. As I watched this I reserved comment. Robert scared the bejabbers out of me and several other people. Gonga came back the next play. Robert continued to punish him, but Gonga remained there. He was taking all the pain Robert could dish out, and that was a considerable amount. Before it was over Gonga could just barely get up off the ground.

I didn't know what to think. I didn't like Gonga, but I despised Robert. He and Danny had what I perceived to be smugness at being the jocks in the class and it made my stomach turn. I didn't help Gonga up, but this display of Robert dealing out this punishment didn't improve my opinion of Robert. I knew it was rough in the line, and I eventually passed this off as a commonplace event. After all, he had held Robert illegally. It was his problem.

Gonga and Rick began to come together as friends. Both were outcasts from the jocks and didn't fit in with my bunch, so they got to enjoy each other's company in study hall. Otherwise Gonga spent most of his time alone or bothering one of the girls who all looked at him like he was a leper.

In spite of all this he kept his grades up enough to play ball and he played ball every year he was with us.

Gonga's abilities were no better than mine. In some ways I guess I was better at football than he was. I wasn't used to this. He was big. He should be powerful. He should be a jock. He wasn't and it blew my mind.

I honestly couldn't deal with it. I guess I didn't like him because he was big and didn't fit the pattern. That made him a very rare oddity in Lone Oak. He seemed to effect everybody else the same way.

Usually, when he wasn't sitting down or walking around he'd stand there with his hands protectively over his crotch. This odd behavior invited confrontation.

"What are you covering up for? Do you think I'm gonna kick you in the crotch or something?" I'd snarl at him and advance menacingly.

He'd just back away, grinning, and saying nothing. Mostly he was a gentle, quiet fellow. That made him another great big oddity. Guys like him in bigger schools belong in band or art class to build their creativity and cultivate their gentle nature. In Lone Oak he had only the choice between sitting alone in study hall or playing football.

He was totally harmless and everybody gave him a hard time. There was something about his personality, and body language that made us dislike him. He just did not fit in with the rough and tumble ways of the class. Some of it he invited on himself, by his attitudes and actions. He ticked some people off by his words. Had he thought more often before he opened his mouth he'd probably had a better time of it.

Still, he was tough enough to stick with it all. He put up with a lot of harassment, but he never got mad, he never quit, and he never took revenge. He had a lot of guts, and he did it all alone. One has to admire anyone with that kind of inner strength. But he does a lot to drive people away.

Open Week

As teens we were sometimes very hard on ourselves as the confusion of approaching adult-hood would bear down upon us. The first thoughts of life outside of school began to make inroads into our psyche. To ease this confusion there were distractions.

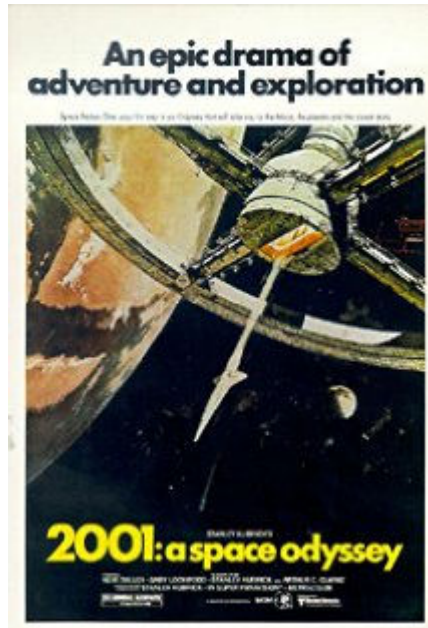
Community was up next. Unless Leonard fell completely apart against Celeste this was to our last game of the 71-72 season. It was also Community's Homecoming.

For the Seniors it was to be their last game, and they prepared with vigor in practice. It was turning chilly and practice was right after school. It was too cold to practice later in the day.

Thanksgiving Vacation would be upon us, and that would let us put our skulls back in order for what ever awaited us in basketball season. I would be there, too. I wanted the entire experience. Except this time I would officially wear the colors and be on the team. I wanted it all. I wanted to be a Buffalo.

Before Community came open week, giving us one extra week to practice together before it ended.

Rick was very happy I was going out for basketball, and he treated me to a movie. There was a movie in town at the Trail Drive In that he wanted to see, and he didn't want to go by himself. The movie was Evel Kneival. Off we went.



I had only seen Island of the Blue Dolphins, 2001 a Space Odyssey, and a very few other movies. My family "didn't get out much" to go out to eat or movies. This was my first drive-in movie. When Rick drove in, put the speaker on the window and the screen lit up, we sat in rapt attention as the trailers of upcoming movies and commercials went by. I was very interested in the electronics and gadgetry of how this was being done. The monster screen loomed before us and I took all this in.

Rick's hero was Clint Eastwood and he tried to be like the on screen persona. My tastes ran more to Errol Flynn and Robert Stack, but I liked Eastwood well enough. I hadn't seen any Eastwood movies, but I knew who he was from T.V.

Oddly for Rick, the Evel Kneival movie had George Hamilton, not Eastwood, but it was about a daredevil motorcyclist, so that fit our interest. When the movie began we watched every detail. Motorcycles fascinated both of us. I hadn't ridden one yet, but Rick had an overgrown motorscooter he tooled around in from time to time. We watched Hamilton ride the big Harley and thrilled at the incredible jumps. I saw the film of Kneival crashing at Caesar's Palace with horrified fascination. Having been knocked about in practice I could empathize with his amazing impacts as he broke nearly every bone in his body. It was in slow motion, too!

"What a way to die." I thought.

Yet in spite of the bone crunching horror I had just seen I felt like I really wanted a motorcycle someday. Rick was definitely going to get one. We were hooked. At 16 we believed ourselves immortal.

Rick and I looked at the screen as the final scene came up. Hamilton as Kneival said something like "I am the last of the Gladiators..."

Rick soaked all this up. It went on.

"My death will be...Glorious!"

It showed a view of the Grand Canyon where Knieval wanted to jump. Rick repeated it as the credits rolled on.

"My death will be...Glorious!" he said in his lisping East Texas drawl.

I just looked over at him.

"Maybe, maybe not," I thought, but I believed Rick would leave some mark on the world. He was my best buddy, after all. That made him special.



We left the drive in and went to get something to eat. Rick had a dark side to him. He'd let it come out in the short stories he'd write in school. Mostly these were about people lost in dark caverns and being mysteriously murdered by knives coming out of nowhere. It was really creepy.

In Grade-school he and I played superheroes on the horizontal telephone pole behind the baseball diamonds. It was our secret headquarters. I was something like the Human Torch and he was a Mr. Fantastic, who was living rubber and could change shape at will. We battled evil villains and amazing creatures daily down in the Amazon Basin. It was how we spent recess. I went on in a computer game called "Freedom Force" decades later and using a downloadable program, made our characters for that game. I also had some miniature figures painted up to represent them in some of the Superhero Role Playing Games that were popular in the 80s.



Childhood superheroes imagined electronically and in metal. The comic book cover is a fake I made in 2004. Some of the things in school stay with you.

Most of the times I spent with Rick were good times. But he didn't take any back talk from me and in his darker moods he referred to me as "Dumard". Usually though, we had fun. He wasn't part of the jock clique because of his lisp and non-conformist ways. He didn't get into my clique because he considered us immature and maybe weaklings. He was essentially a loner in school. It weighed on him heavily, but for the time being he bore it up well.

Danny Bowman respected him because he was fast for his size and very strong. He made an excellent center, and was one of Danny's favorites.

Back at school we heard talk of an "Exes" game, where former players come back and suit up for a game among themselves. They use what equipment fits then go out to relive glory days one last time. The school would allow this once in a while. Due to possible injury and lawsuits, this is not done anymore.

We were told to put our names on all our equipment with markers so we would get it back. I sat there in my spot labeling my gear. I wrote my last name on the back of my practice jersey. I looked at what I had did with silent disgust. I left out the 'N' in my name, spelling 'Tarrat'. Feeling like an idiot, I made the 'T' into a passable 'N' and added the final 'T', finally getting it right. Embarrassed, I looked around the locker room to see if anyone had noticed. Sometimes my brain just didn't work.

The first Friday of the open week felt strange. First of all there was no pep rally. Practice consisted of choosing up sides and playing touch football for about an hour. Then it was go home and watch T.V. Still, it beat what I did all year last year.

Things got back to seriousness on Monday. Community had fought us to a standstill in our homecoming game and we anticipated our last game of the season to be a brutal affair of hard hitting and low scoring. The films we had were somewhat useless. In one Community was getting destroyed 78 to 0. In the other they were all slogging around in the rain. Still, it gave us some idea of what to expect.

I always watched these films with fascination. I had no idea what I'd look like out there in pads. In the Caddo Mills game I always looked for myself and I did see me from time to time. With my feelings of inadequacy I thought I was one funny looking kid.

Around and around we went in practice. Running into each other, trying new plays, trying desperately to bring down Jerry McGee or Eddie Lively, chasing Steve Henderson and just keeping up a stride or two before he would leave me and anyone else chasing him far behind. We banged heads with Willie and grabbed a handful of jersey in a frantic effort to bring the speedy, strong fellow down. We would watch Danny burn a hot pass to O.T. in our secondary and fruitlessly try to chase long legged O.T. down.

It was 3 long fun days in pads. By the end of it I sat wide eyed and my tongue lolling out, totally spent. It was worth it, for Community was a tough team and we had to be prepared. Every raw elbow, every bruised hand, every ringing ear was preparation for the final game. This battle was to be fought with honor and dignity come what may!

"By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap

To pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon,

Or to dive into the bottom of the deep,

Where fadom line could never touch the ground,

And pluck up drowned honor by the locks"

('Henry IV, part II' Shakespeare)

Community, What Was Lost

We stood on the side lines, our hands over our hearts, singing the National Anthem. I stood shoulder to shoulder with the men in the pads, wearing the red and white. I hoped we had regained our sense of honor. As I stood among them I felt as proud as if I had ever been. These

were my team mates. I was privileged as I could be to stand where I was. We sang our school song. I looked around.

Coach Brookins held his head high. Next to him was Coach Taylor, arms folded, singing right along. There was also Mr. McNutt and Mr. Royal, hands in pockets, looking out on the field. The entire season would stop for the Big Red Machine right here on Community's field.

We were in white jerseys, except for me. I wore the red 74. Community looked resplendent in their beautiful blue and yellow-gold. They had our respect. We were honored to be their guest for something as important as their Homecoming. There was a rivalry here I did not know about going back at least to 1955. Community was a team Jack Brookins loved to beat.

We formed a huddle around Coach Brookins, hands to the center.

"This is the last one. Lets let them know we're Buffaloes. Ready?"

"H I T! !"

Out on the field the Big Red Machine went. I watched them with pride and fire in my eyes.

"Go Red! Go get 'em!"

These were truly my team mates. They were the first I ever successfully became a part of in High School. This was the last game of the season, and I didn't want it to end. I wanted this season to go on and on forever. I wanted time to stand still. With the kickoff I knew better than to even hope that. This was the last one, so lets get on with it!

Community began with a stubborn defense against us, but after a while we put together a powerful drive from the Lone Oak 26. Eating up the clock, Danny handed off repeatedly to Randy Payne and Willie. Getting to the Community 9, Sheepdog called a Keeper. He faked to Randy Payne and carried it to the endzone for our first score of the night.

I cheered and hollered, stalking up and down the sidelines. I was nearly crazy with enthusiasm.

Told to go for 2, by Coach Brookins, Danny faded back and rifled one to Randy Payne for the points, making it 8 to 0. The Thunder rolled.

Community got the ball and held onto it as the quarter ended. They found the Buffalo defense tenacious and unyielding. The Braves would drive a few downs, then they hit the wall. This may have been Community's Homecoming but it was our last game. We wanted it badly.

Community punted it away and it was Big Red's ball on the 36. The team sized up the defense and the situation. Input from the Coaches in general and Jack Brookins in particular were helpful. Willie told Sheepdog that the guy covering him wasn't doing it tight, and he might be open on the sideline.

Danny, taking the cue, called a play right to that spot. He hit Willie wide open. Willie spun and took off like a rocket up the sidelines, throwing turf off his cleats. He ran a full 64 yards for the touchdown, chased by exasperated Community players.

Once more Coach Brookins asked for two points. The offense tried and failed, but it was now 14 to 0.

As the game rolled on Community discovered they too many men on the field. One of them fled off the field to our sideline. I gleefully pointed him out to a reff, hoping for a penalty. None came. The athlete ignored the crazy skinny kid in jeans and a red jersey who was pointing him out. He was concentrating instead on the contest at hand. He had his back to me, and I don't remember his number.

I looked at this specimen of high school footballer. He was about 5'10", was clad in blue and gold. He looked like a cyborg. It was hard to tell where the nylon, plastic, and cotton ended and he began. Quick as a flash he went back on the field and disappeared among his team mates. I had beheld the enemy in all it's magnificence. I was suitably impressed. On the field more young men like him were propelling themselves into violent contact with men not unlike themselves, but clad instead in the Red and White. This was small town football.

I had no personal animosity for Community. To me they were just another team. For some of my older team mates it was a different story. In our last year of 8 man football Community dealt us our only defeat that year in High School, spoiling the perfect record and preventing Lone Oak from going to Bi-District. That was why Lone Oak lowered the boom last year, tearing them up 78 to 0. Revenge can be a brutal thing.

As the half neared the end, Sheepdog called a pass, faded back, and flung it downfield. Cox, of Community, intercepted the pass. This would give Community hope as we went to the locker rooms for the half.

In the locker room it was serious business. We were only ahead by 2 touchdowns. With a team wound up as tight as Community it was unwise to let up or sit comfortably on our lead. This was spelled out in no uncertain terms. I watched this with mixed emotions.

No team on earth could match us, I thought. We were the Buffaloes. Why were we worried about a dinky team like Community? I was very naive. I couldn't understand why Mr. Brookins was worried.

All was not smooth sailing for the team, either. One of the tackles disagreed with Coach Brookins over something or other. He quit. Looking for a replacement, Coach Brookins had my classmate Randy Oaks take off his #45 running back's jersey and put on this guy's #60. This was to have far reaching effect on Sachs, as we called Oaks, for he would play in the line for the rest of his time in school, and he would keep #60.

Phillip kicked off to Community and the Braves took it on their own 33. Community had to come out hard, trying to salvage a victory. They began a strong drive. Running hard and putting out as much effort as they could they drove into Lone Oak territory.

With play after play they went past the 45, then to the 40. I watched on with my team mates with growing anxiety as they pushed down to the 35.

"Come on Red!" we called out, "Stop 'em! Get that ball!"

Uneasy, I looked over at Coach Brookins. I read no emotion in his face. I looked back out on the field. I knew if Community scored it would be bad for us. What I didn't know was if they did score it would give them the drive and heart to come back at us as strong as before. They could even get control of the game and maybe beat us. I didn't know all that in 1971. I just wanted us to get the ball.

Community was now on the 30, looking like hungry wolves at the goal line. Then lightning struck. A running play started and the ball got loose! Cries of "Ball! Ball!" could be heard. Wham! Bam! There was a pile up. When the Refs separated the Red and White from the Blue and Gold, Lone Oak had the ball.

We had stopped them! We had the ball! Community began to visibly deflate. They had worked so hard, gotten so close, and now this fumble had ruined all that hard work. Still, not ready to give up, Community fought on defensively. Mr. Brookins saw that the Braves were covering his receivers more tightly. They stopped us. We had to punt it away.

Phillip punted one downfield, and Community had the ball back. They had another chance to get to our end zone.

This opportunity didn't last long. As the fourth quarter neared the Community quarterback threw an interception. Lone Oak had stopped them once again.

Danny Bowman called an option play, and as the play unfolded Randy Payne was almost trapped in the backfield. Using a heads-up play Sheepdog turned from quarterback to blocker and piled into the Community player in front of him. Willie took out another. Randy Payne broke free and into the open!

"Go, man, go!"

He ran 34 yards to the thunder of our wild cheering and whistling, getting a touchdown. Victory was now very close for us at 20 to 0.

The two pointer failed, and Phillip kicked off. Community didn't have the fire they had earlier, but they hadn't given up either. They were not beaten. Not yet.

Into the fourth quarter we went. Community stubbornly put on a drive, but it failed to go anywhere as the defense shored up hard against them. We had momentum back and, by the Thunder, we were going to keep it!

Looking at the clock it was obvious time was running out. The offense got going again, utilizing Randy Payne and Willie as methodically as before. It was great to behold. Pushing all the way to the 3, Danny called a Power Dive. This was not unlike the play they had used to run over me with in practice that time. Sheepdog handed off to Randy Payne. He slammed into the Community line and fell into the endzone for 6 more, making it 26 to 0.

Coach Brookins still wanted 2 more. Embarrassed over the failure of the last extra point attempts Sheepdog took it in himself on a Quarterback Sneak. That made it 28 to 0.

Thud! The other shoe had dropped. The game was out of reach.

On the sidelines one of the Lone Oak assistant coaches chided a Community player who looked at the man with disbelief and hurt. This got Coach Brookins attention. He took the Assistant to the side and quietly dressed him down.

Coach Taylor stood just out of earshot of this conference, but he had some idea of what was being said. High School Football was to develop character and confidence. It was to let someone find their own limits and to develop a sense of teamwork. This wasn't a 'win at any costs' environment like some colleges. Victory is sweet, but not so sweet as to be taken at the price of personal honor. Football itself is a sport, not a war. Sportsmanship is to be practiced and handed

down to those coming up. Coaches must set the example. No matter how bad they beat us or we beat them we always offer a handshake, and tell them "Good Game." To do less is to be less than what any man should be.

Humbled by this, the Assistant went back to the sidelines and thought on what he had just been taught. He was just starting his career, and I wonder if the lesson took?

The game finally ended with 28 to 0. We did not leave the field. Coach Brookins asked us to stand respectfully on our side of the field while Community crowned it's Homecoming Queen. Though we had beat them, we would honor their traditions.

As we looked on Sherry Hendricks was crowned by the Community Braves as their 1972 Football Sweetheart and Homecoming Queen. While I stood shoulder to shoulder with the men I had practiced with for this year I felt something coming back. Here we were mutely participating in a ceremony honoring someone we did not know, paying homage to her and her school.

I felt it but I could not yet identify what I felt. I did not understand it fully, but we had just regained our honor that night. After debasing ourselves against Leonard and becoming merely 'that Team from Lone Oak' we once more became and could call ourselves the Lone Oak Buffaloes. The spirit of Big Red had once again considered us worthy. I held my head high and looked at the men around me.

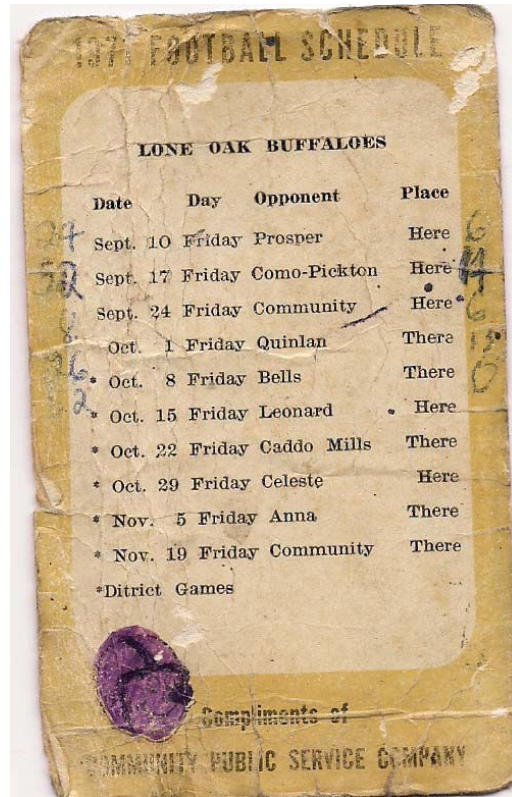
For some of them, this was it. No more would they don cleats and pads then Thunder out on the field striking terror in the hearts of lesser foes. I wondered what they felt. I wanted to thank each and every one of them for this marvelous season I had hung onto. It had been incredible. Now it was over. Community exited the field and we went to the locker rooms.

Reluctantly, off came the pads. Into the duffel bags they went. Everything was loaded on the bus and then with only a few backward glances Lone Oak left Community. As I dozed the trip away others marveled at the stats.

Randy Payne had 208 yards, 22 carries, and 2 touchdowns. Willie had 128 yards and 14 carries. The team totally had 504 yards and 22 first downs.

These were the men I practiced with. These were my first high school team mates. I had just had one magnificent season because of them.

We had finished second in district.



Football schedual I had kept in my wallet during this season.

"Dis Aliter Visum"

(the gods decreed otherwise)

Roman Saying

The Eye of the Storm

So it ended. I turned my 74 jersey and all my practice gear. I had enjoyed myself more this season than at any other time that I could remember. I regretted it was over. So we went to Thanksgiving holiday.

It rained heavily during this time and Greenville was flooded. When my father and I went driving down the road near Graham park on some errand I looked with awe at the massive lake and the houses visible in it. It looked like north Greenville had been washed away!

Back on the grid-iron, Leonard had to take on Celina. I read the write-up about the up-coming game in the Greenville paper. I noticed with some satisfaction that we had 210 points this regular season to Leonard's 137. As I read on I saw that the Leonard team was depending on their kicker for an advantage against Celina. This left me scratching my head in confusion.

How can a kicker be a major advantage in schoolboy football? All he does is punt, kick off, do some point after kicks, and very rarely attempts a field goal. This sounded weak to me. Perhaps the coach was putting up a smoke screen as to his real strategy. That's what I came to believe. I also believed we were a better team than Leonard. All these thoughts were swept away by football on T.V. and the feast of Thanksgiving.

I remember my Mother sitting at the kid's table when the badly worn camp chair she was in collapsed. Nobody was hurt and this was met with great laughter. Mom had added to the hilarity by her reaction to the slowly collapsing chair and her cry of surprise. That's how it went for us at Thanksgiving. Good food and lots of it, no school, and time with friends.

I got the Greenville paper not long afterward and turned to the sports section. Leonard had gotten a shellacking by Celina. They went down 27-0. I don't know if Lone Oak could have done any better. I kind of doubt it. Celina was one powerful team, taking Leonard apart like that.

That ended it for all of us. The district was now inactive. What a mess it had been! First a three way tie for first, then Anna had to forfeit, and Leonard took district. We had cheated by getting Leonard's playbook, we had lost our Homecoming Queen, and we ended up second in district. Some incidents had been downright strange.

In one game, I don't remember which, Larry Little came off the field limping and hobbled over to the bench. Coach McNutt came over to him as he peeled his baseball sock down. Troy Haynes and I went over to see what was wrong with Larry. Larry was very angry. I looked down at his leg where Coach McNutt was tending to him. He had an odd pattern of holes in his leg, sort of in a circle.

"What happened," I asked, "Somebody cleat you?"

"@#%&, no!" Larry profanely replied, "Some \$%#@ bit me!"

I was astounded. Troy, Coach McNutt and I guffawed. Troy joked at Larry and he just gave Troy a dirty look in return. I walked away, grinning at the absurdity of it all. Some mental midget was out there biting people! Larry was mad all night long in that game.

Looking at the stats I can see that overall it was a good season for our team. We had a total of 322 points and gave up only 68. Compare this to last year's 238 made and 119 given. That included the Howe Bi-District game, too. That said we had an awesome team, on both offense and defense. Why we didn't win district, go on to regional and further to state is unknown. All I can say is it was God's will.
