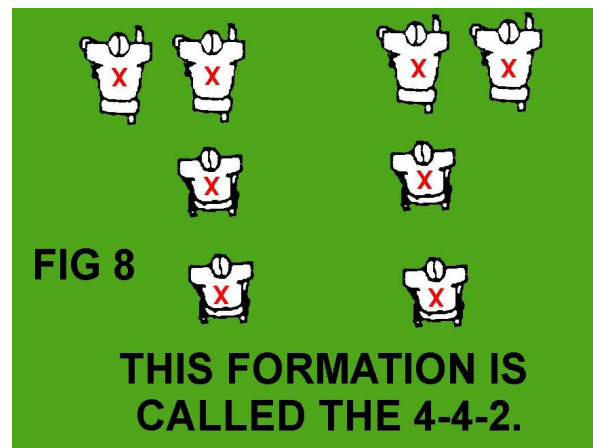


## Halftime

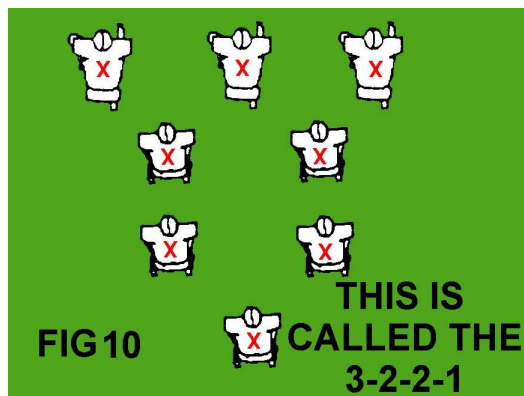
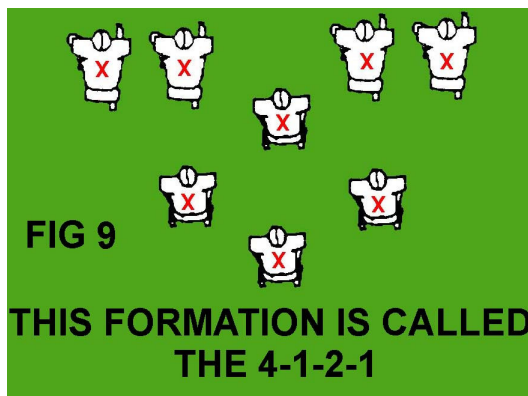
I never saw a complete halftime show. They were rare in Junior High anyway. When the halftime whistle blew we'd trot across the field and into the lockerroom, bus, or one of the end zones depending on the facilities at the field we were at. We were sequestered as much as possible from the outside. This avoided distractions and discouraged less than helpful advice from parents. With no distractions the coach critiqued us about our performance in the first half. Generally it was quite congratulatory, with advice about how to improve the situation. Coach Taylor would listen to what information the players could give him, and would inform the players how to improve their performance.

On some occasions some adjustments would be made, such as a new defensive set up, or a change in the setup of the offense.

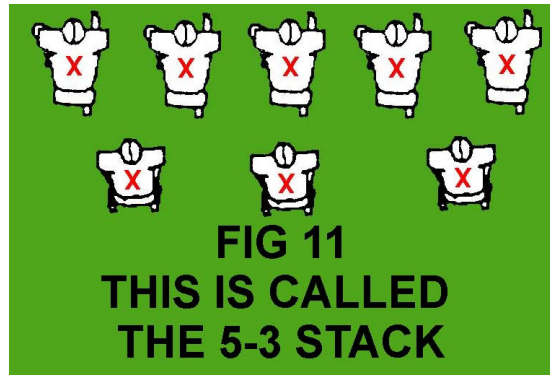
For instance, the normal setup might look like this on the defense as shown in figure 8.



A change might be to the formation shown in figure 9, or figure 10.



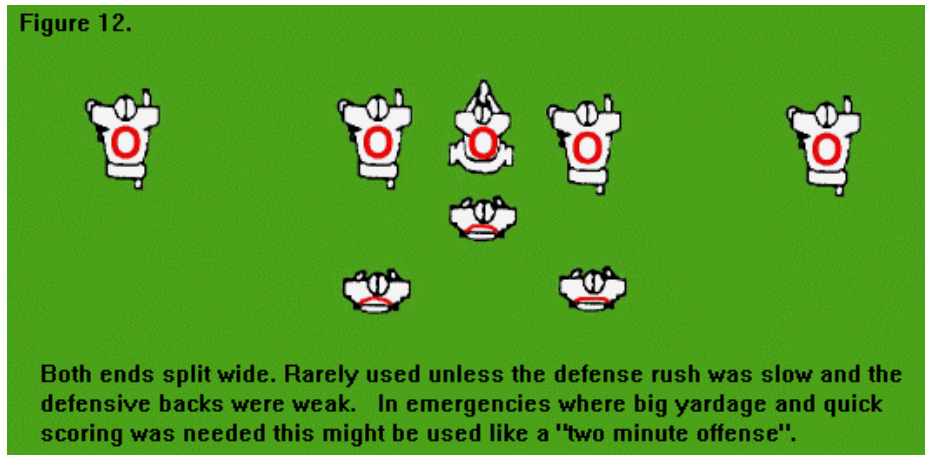
If they were heavy into a running game the formation might be the very nasty 5-3 stack, as shown in figure 11.



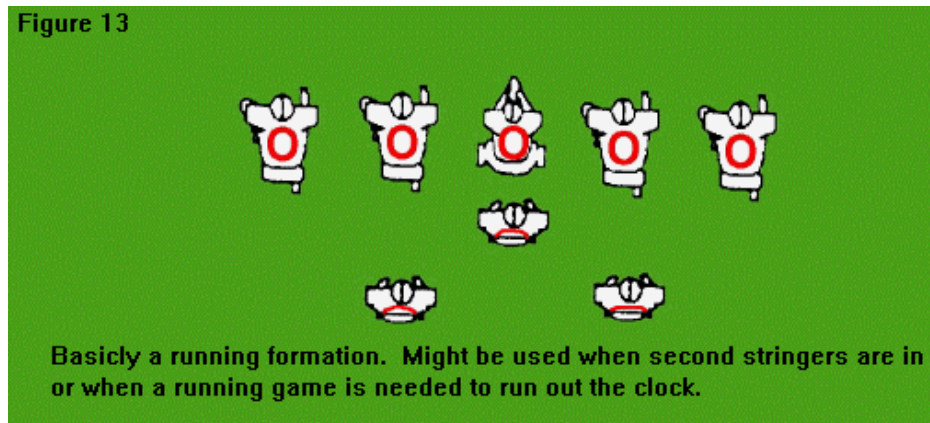
The 5-3 was vulnerable to the pass but if they had a turkey for a passer this massive rush could rattle him badly. We rarely used it at Lone Oak in 8-man football, but we had it used with varying degrees of effectiveness against us. Coach Taylor used to speak to me of the 5-3, and teams who used it, with a hint of respect bordering on awe. To have a team that could run this defense "you had to have some savvy cats on the squad." That meant good rushers and a secondary of men with great speed, agility, and cunning. The teams who used this on us were probably good, but Danny Bowman the Sheepdog was infinitely better. If they tried to rush him he just tucked it in and ran like a bullet toward their end zone. Jerry McGee was also a Quarterback, and he was bigger than Danny! Both men were a huge threat.

In addition to possible changes in the defense, there might also be some changes in the offense. One such possibility might be splitting both ends, as shown in figure 12. Just the opposite is shown in figure 13.

**Figure 12.**



**Figure 13**



Other variations are possible and some rare spur of the moment setups might be used. Some plays were modified to suit the unique situation of the team we were currently engaged with.

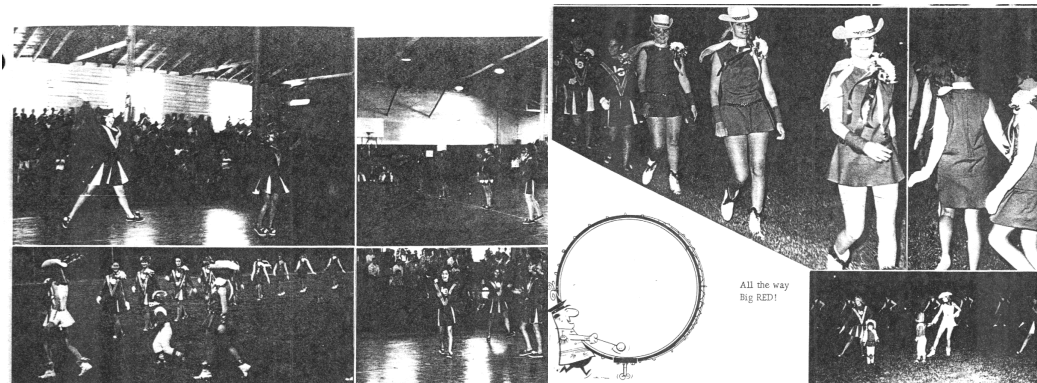
Junior high kids are usually a boisterous and difficult bunch. While we were in the locker rooms, or on the bus at halftime, or even kneeling in the endzone at halftime we remained quiet and attentive. Perhaps not all of us listened with rapt attention to what was being discussed, but we did keep it very quiet. A sharp rap upside the head from a teammate awaited any blabbermouth kid who didn't shut up. Usually it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop, with the exception of the coach talking.

When he needed to work us into frenzy you could probably hear us yelling, chanting, or growling clear out onto the field from whatever locker room we were in.

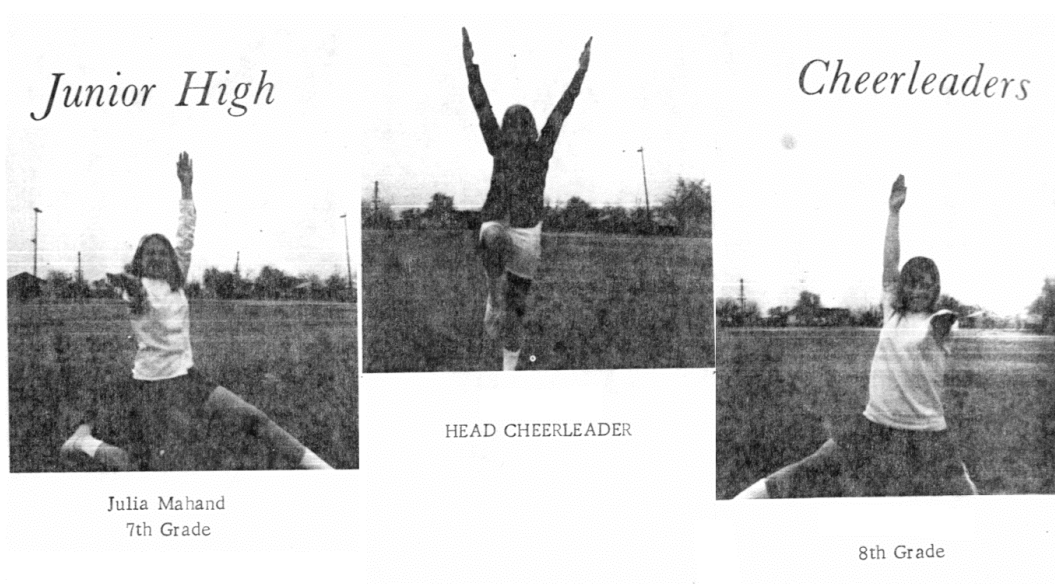
Football is played in the fall to early winter. To get grass to stay alive or even grow at that time is difficult. When you have 16 boys thrashing about on a wet field, the middle, in an oval shape from about the 35 to the 35 becomes a muck. Usually it is a cold wet muck, akin to a combination bog and swamp. Often the entire field would be like this, in varying degrees. Playing a game in the rain usually causes this.

The players were heavily equipped from helmet to shoes and we sometimes had old army ponchos to drape over us to keep reasonably warm and dry. We could even stand on the bench to keep out of the mud if so inclined. It was once so cold I built a small tent out of two ponchos and tried in vain to keep warm. As rough as we had it there was some group of people who had it much worse.

They are called the "Drill Team", the "Pep Squad", and other such titles, and I must admit they were a gung-ho bunch of brave girls. These young ladies wore short skirts and pep-squad uniforms, white boots, and not a lot else. They had to march out onto the mire created by the highschool teams actions and get very wet, muddy, and cold for their short bit of fame as a member of the Drill Team.



We didn't give this much thought in junior high or high school because we rarely saw a halftime show. We had a game we needed to finish and hopefully win. We had no pep squad at all in junior high, as our girls we on the high school drill team. In high school the Pep Squad was removed from our small battle on the field by their being in the bleachers. The Cheerleaders directed their cheers at the crowd and cheered like crazy when something neat happened on the field. They had to keep an eye on the game and keep the crowd entertained too. Even in Junior High we had cheerleaders.



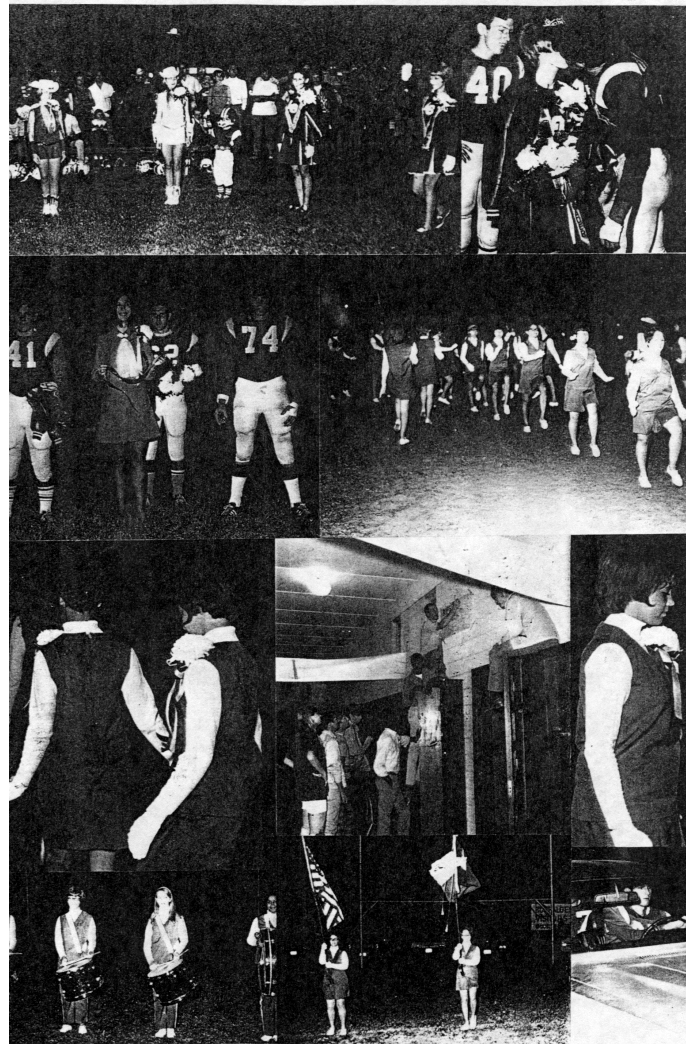
### ***Jr. Hi Cheerleaders Julia Mahand, Joan Bellah, and Maxine Kirk.***

All cheerleaders had a greeting for the cheerleaders from the other side. This was done in the finest traditions of sportsmanship. This exchange of hellos happened every game and was only a minor distraction for us involved in keeping warm, dry, and wondering if we'd get to play this half. I never understood this bit of ceremony but I understood it had to do with sportsmanship. I also believe it to be as traditional as anything we did as players.

The Pep-Squad and the Cheerleaders were there, they belonged, and they were a part of the team. To this day I do not know how these young ladies kept reasonably warm during the cold nights we had games.



A frozen field presents it's own set of problems. Because winters are mild in Texas frozen ground is rare. When it does freeze it's as hard as concrete and more often than not very uneven. For the girls marching and high-kicking on this rocky, uneven surface it must have been difficult to maintain their footing. I heard of some girls who fell down on this rock hard surface and some who splashed down in the muck. Our uniforms were made to get dirty and we were heavily padded. These girls bought or made their own uniforms. I can only imagine how hard it was to get the mud stains, paint, grass stains, and chalk out of their uniforms. How they got those white and tasseled boots to stay white I have no idea. The boots were also cut cowboy style, which meant water and mud probably got inside the footwear. They had to have had cold toes and chilly feet. Through it all they would smile and look pretty. They must have put up with a lot of discomfort and bother. I have to admit we didn't give them the recognition they deserved.



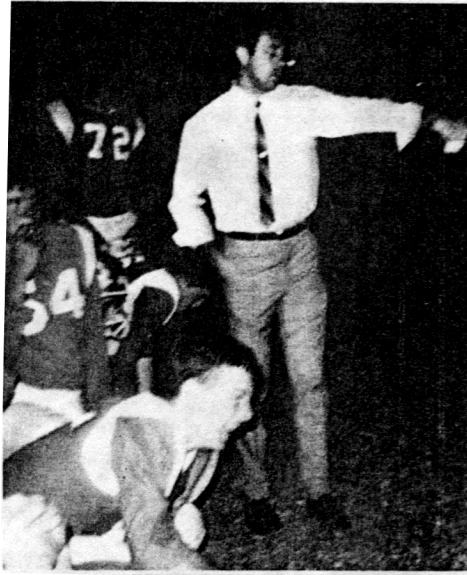
By some signal unknown to me we were informed halftime was over. We beat feet back out of the endzone, bus, or locker room. It was done with enthusiasm and panache to let everyone know we weren't tired, or ready to rest on our lead, or if we were behind that we were not going to lay down and die. We would not quit.

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## Second Half: "Go In For...."

The more experienced of us knew what to look for in the opposition to see just how much cohesion they had. If the other guys were complaining or talking in their own huddle, or even just downright angry at everything we knew we had them. When their teamwork began to collapse it was the beginning of the end for them.

The 'A' team started the second half, always. Even if we were ahead by a substantial margin this was done to show the other guys that we could still hit just as hard and we could pile up even more points. This was psychological and kept the other team from getting up their morale and regaining their confidence. When we put in the 'B' team and 3rd stringers they would be unable to take advantage of it. This also felt the other team out to see if they made any changes that might be a problem for us. Any surprises were dealt with by the 'A' team and changes were made by the coach. This also allowed any changes made in our formations to get game time and see if they functioned in a game environment as they did in theory. If they showed remarkable results the changes would be permanently incorporated into the playbooks. Anything that didn't work was dropped like a hot potato. If we were behind (Good Heavens!) the methods Coach Taylor used were never desperate. I never saw him lose his cool, treat us in less than a dignified manner, or berate us for failures. Such a man is rare, especially in his amazing ability to deal with a bunch of energetic, impetuous and high-strung young men. Stupid statements by others and myself were usually exposed for the stupidity that were. This was done in a fashion that makes the speaker see his folly. Still, no one was held up to ridicule by the coaches and we were expected to behave in a dignified and sportsman-like manner. Sportsmanship, above all, was stressed.



If the score was high enough Coach Taylor began to make substitutions. This let loose a deluge of boys begging to be let in the game. I wanted out there just as much as anyone else, but I had strong misgivings about going in. This was tempered by the fact that I had not the slightest idea what to do if I got put out there.

My first time out on the playing field I was scared and confused. We had the ball, and it was a home game. When the coach put me in I ran onto the field buckling my helmet. The guys in the huddle saw me coming and looked at me curiously. I called out the guy's name that I was to replace. This was met with a disappointed swearing and he reluctantly left the huddle. Discipline being what it was he didn't dare tell me to get lost. He ran off the field just as fast as I ran onto it.

I leaned into the unaccustomed spot in the huddle and tried to figure out what play had been called. We broke huddle and got into formation.

"Down! 100, 200, 300, set!"

I got down on the end and looked down the line. It was all unearthly, almost dream-like. The helmets shown with the glare of the lights. Familiar faces looked wild and animalistic in the armor. Sweat and dirt marked the uniforms. The boys on the other side had an even more vicious look to them. The white plastic face guard kept drawing my attention. It was like looking out of a T.V. set.

"Hut one!"

I took off and ran as fast as I could. The line slammed into the guys in front of them and then fell back to pass block. In the confusion I saw Rambling Frank zip out and catch a pass. I kept up with him all the way to the end zone when I lost my balance. I caromed off him like a rubber ball. I landed on my back and skidded in the wet cold grass.

"Good grief," I realized, "We just scored a touchdown!"

I was amazed I was unhurt and trotted off the field as the specialty team came on. I told the other guys who had yet to go into the game "what it was like." I think Rambling Frank hated my guts for the rest of my life because he probably thought I tried to tackle him.

Coach Taylor rotated us in and out. In the back of his mind was the roaring terror of having one of the young boys under his care injured grievously. Because of this I had my one moment of glory for this night. For me, it was over for this game.

That was pretty much what football was like in Junior High back in 1968.



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## Victory and Defeat

Victory, as the cheerleaders go to great pains to point out, is spelled Vee Eye Cee Tee Oh Or Wye. For the most of 1968 that is what we had. One by one, week by week our foes fell before our onslaught. Only Quinlan marred our perfect record. Quinlan's colors are blue and white. Their battle cry is "Go Blue". They are a larger school. Their brand new gym was built right onto their school building. It doubled as an auditorium and had a stage in it. The school was new, modern, and big. They were the Panthers.

They had something that blew my mind. They had an *electric scoreboard*! I remember during warm-up staring at the thing. I took to taking my glasses to the sidelines to tell what was going on and I could see this technological marvel clearly. It told us how much time we had, what the score was, and what quarter we were in. It had a buzzer that sounded at the quarters and halves. The colored lights and all made it look sort of Christmassy. I was astounded.

The field itself was unlike any I had ever seen. It was a small hill, sloped on each side. Curious about this strange feature I inquired of the coach why it was so.

"Its like that so the water will drain off, Charlie."

Drain off?! What a novel idea! What a concept! But it was so ugly. I stood flat on my feet on the sidelines and I could see the bad guys on the other side. I could only see them from the knees up. Some of you math people out there can probably take that and figure out the slope of this humpbacked monster that was in front of me.

If a play went to the opposite side of the field the tackle would disappear over the crest. It was difficult to tell where the ball was spotted, and if it was spotted correctly.

The battle that night was a whopper. It had been one of our hardest fought contests of the year. Notable here among other horrors was we had a seriously injured player. Never before in my young life had I ever seen such a seriously injured person. This individual was a fellow teammate, and somebody I knew from my days in Greenville school. He wasn't one of my running buddies, though, like Rickey, or Herman. His name was Rickey Fowler. Sometime in the second half he got hurt. He was a big guy, and in good shape, but that didn't stop him from getting his leg broken. It happened somewhere below his knee or his knee proper. When he went down and didn't get up they took him to our bench.



Rickey Fowler

Several people I never saw before looked him over. They loaded him in an ambulance and took him to the hospital in Greenville.

Morale crashed. We were outraged. These turkeys had hurt one of us bad enough to take him away. I remember making a stupid statement like "I wouldn't go in even if they asked me." Yeah,

like I had a snowball's chance of playing that night. I chewed my mouthpiece and sat on the bench. I was confused and worried about Fowler. Our season ended with one loss, 12 to 18. Quinlan had beaten us. *It would not ever be forgotten by anyone on this team.*

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## Bus Rides and Telephones

There was a major bus accident in mid-October. It happened after school.

"Stoney" Burks was the bus driver. He was pretty much a man of all skills. He drove the busses, worked on them, did janitorial work at the school, and had a cool sense of humor. Everybody liked him a lot.



GLEN BURKS  
Bus Maintenance

The big yellow monsters looked like armadillos with their curved bodywork. On that faithful day Stoney drove the crawling yellow monster through the intersection of FM 513 and FM 1571. A woman driving a '59 model sedan slammed into the bus. She hit the bus so hard it blew the rear axle off and away. The bus fell hard on its right side and skidded about 35 feet!

People heard the crash and ran disbelieving toward what they saw. Stoney had been shook up. His leg was bleeding. He had no idea how bad he may be hurt, but he knew he had to get those kids out of that bus. The danger of fire was very real. He smelled the gas leaking from the tank that was on the down side of the bus. The kids were screaming and crying. Some were in shock. Stoney crawled out where the windshield used to be. It must have been blown out by the crash. Stoney started pulling kids out, getting them away from what could become a pyre at any second. Two young men inside the bus grappled with the emergency door on the rear of the bus and got it open. Hinged on the right, it fell open. A bystander helped get kids out that way. Someone got a water hose and washed the spilled gasoline away, lessening the danger of fire. Folks from all over began to arrive, including teachers and faculty from Lone Oak School itself. People started taking kids to the hospital, all the way to Greenville. In 1968 there was no Care-flight, no paramedics, and an ambulance was a station wagon with a stretcher and an oxygen bottle. Twelve people, 10 of them children, made the trip. Mrs. Irene Dodd, a 4th grade teacher who arrived on the scene, went with some of the children to the hospital to offer comfort and assistance. Two kids had head lacerations and were kept overnight.



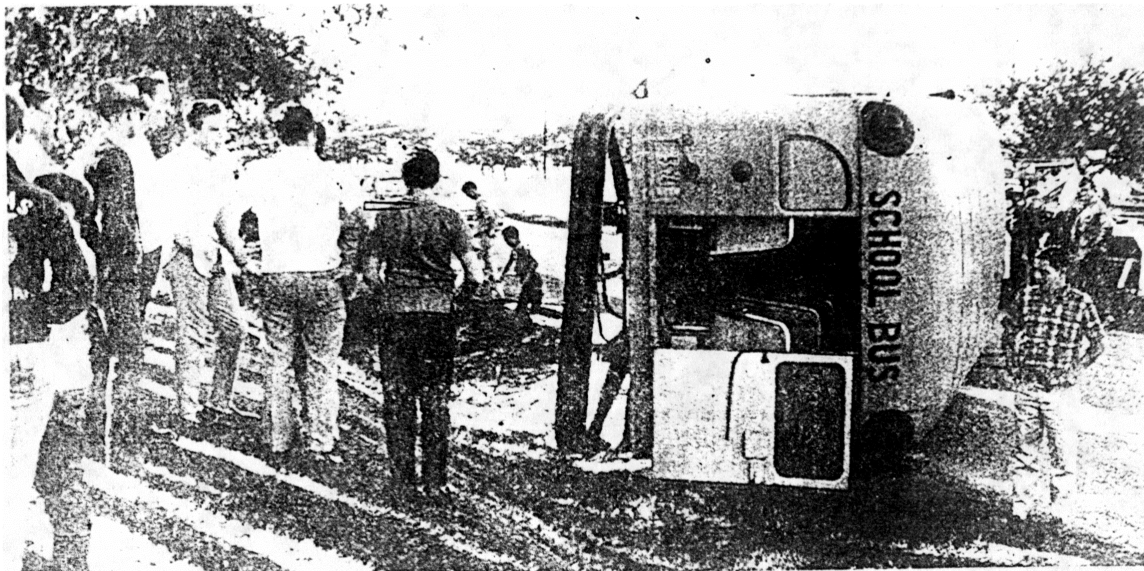
MRS. IRENE DODD  
Fourth Grade  
M. Ed. E. T. S. U.



Stoney had only minor wounds. The woman who had hit the bus had broken her nose, but she was otherwise fine.

Who ever the guardian angels were that day they did a wonderful job. Nobody got killed or seriously injured beyond the 2 who had to remain overnight. It could have been a deadly conflagration with 20 charred bodies and a burned out bus frame. Instead it ended very well. All the ingredients were there for a disaster.

The crippled bus lay there most of the day, and the curious gathered to look at it. A large contingent of Lone Oak people gathered around, among them was my cousin Kenneth Sherwin. He got his picture in the Greenville paper, standing there with about a dozen or so people who had their backs to the camera.



It had been such a near thing. When Ricky McCallum came back to class the next day we all asked him a dozen questions. Nobody, not even him, had known just how ugly it could have gotten.



In Junior High we sometimes wore our entire football uniforms back to the school from away games. Facilities being what they were, especially for junior high, we would wear our uniforms there and wear them back. The bus was noisy and often cold. It rattled and rolled. I found a seat next to a friend and chatted or napped the ride away. Somebody sometimes brought a transistor radio. A.M. was all we listened to in those days because nothing was on F.M. The F.M. radios were hard to find anyway. This was even before the 8-track tape.

Politics were beginning to make inroads into our awareness back in the 7th grade. A guy I called "Cutter" and I sat in class one day and discussed politics. I liked Hubert Humphrey because he was a Democrat. Everybody else liked George Wallace. This put me on the outside again, just like my fondness for Fords. Anyway, he wasn't much into the election that November so he

couldn't tell if I was talking about Wallace or Humphrey. What does one expect from a 13-year-old?

One memorable night we were rolling and rattling along and listening to the election results. Nixon was being elected and as died in the wool Yellow Dog Democrats we didn't much like it. Rick, my best buddy and mentor, was particularly angry. He pounded his helmet on the inside of the bus roof and yelled "to Hades with Nixon!" In his enthusiasm to show his displeasure with Mr. Nixon he broke an overhead dome lamp. After we settled down I saw other guys picking plastic out of the recess where the light was. Nothing else came of it.

I was to spend many a game night in both football and basketball on these busses. I would also ride them to and from home each day. They were dark and the noise level was high. How the coach could drive this beast and concentrate on the road I'll never know. I liked to sit up near the front if I couldn't get a good seat elsewhere. I started talking to Coach Taylor a lot. He would listen like a second father and offer advice and words of wisdom. His views of life influence me still. Prior to that I had no one to give me some real guidance in life. More than anything else these talks gave me the nerve to keep going. At this point in my life I was often hit with bouts of depression and fits of inadequacy. I believed that I had to prove to these classmates that I could do what they could, but more than anything else I had to prove it to myself. I never wanted to let my coaches down.

I had no mobility and no money in my early life. Going to town was a once a week experience and I never went anywhere at night. I had been to the movies only twice in my life by 1968. This sudden travel to towns that I had never even heard of was a priceless adventure. To see places I had never been to and behold people I had never seen was fantastic. I was going to places I never would have gone to otherwise. In spite of the fact that this was in places I considered hostile territory I loved every minute of it and I had my friends with me.

On rare occasions I could get on and off at my house on highway 69. This enabled me to eat a home-cooked meal and relax at home before zipping away to the game. It would sometimes get very lonely and very cold at school waiting for the gang to show up.

We would roll to our school after away games. I had no other transportation except my parents. After the game we'd break up and everybody else's parents would pick them up and take them home. I'd trudge downtown and find the only pay phone in town. I'd get the operator, make a collect call to home, and wait the 45 minutes or so it would take my parents to come and get me.

Sometimes they'd go to the game and I'd get a ride home immediately. They didn't make many of the games, so I often made the call, and waited. I don't know if anybody offered me a ride home, but I think some people did. I did not take any offers because I believed that if I got a ride home it might make my folks mad by accepting charity. I did get some lifts to the phone, however.

I would sit there, next to my gear, and put my ear up to the metal door on the concrete switch house where the payphone was located. I could hear the machines clicking and rotating in there. I could tell when someone placed a call and when someone hung up. There must have been motors and solenoids all over the place. Listening to the clicking and whirring passed the time.

There was one horrible night the phone was wrecked and I didn't know it until I arrived to place my call. I fought down panic and looked for someplace where I could call. I knocked on someone's door and they allowed me to use their phone to call. This absurd situation of calling and sitting in the weather would not improve until I got into highschool. Rickey would get a car and he would take me home after games so I would never have to do this again. But that was a couple of years away.

Some experiences on the bus rides were neat. I remember coming into the pothole strewn school parking lot and thinking how much it looked like the surface of the moon in the bus headlights. To pass the time I flew jet fighters, napped, or talked with whoever would listen about anything at all. But talking had it's dangers. Some of the guys had experience with cars and knew a great deal about them. I was no mechanic by any stretch to the imagination. I could only listen and guess what they were talking about. Nobody would explain anything to me about cars except Rickey. He had more patience with me than anyone else on the team. He even gave me money, a quarter or two for cola or something. Money was something I had very little of, along with experience.

Girls were a subject I avoided talking about. It seemed I was the only guy on the bus who had absolutely no girl friends or any worthwhile contact with a girl. Once the conversation went to girls some unfortunate soul would be harassed as being "wimp of the day". I often found myself on the receiving end of this harassment by a group of laughing, leering, 13 and 14-year-old jocks. I managed to muddle through it. This nonsense often made me dislike the jocks even more, and it made me even more determined than ever to overcome their smugness.

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## The Old Gym

It was was the day after our game, either a Thursday or a Friday. Beat-up and sore we returned to school that morning. High School football game days were neat because it was never a full day during football season. We'd be sent to the pep-rally for the highschool football team in the big old wooden gym.



***Ricky Graham, looking at Camera, Herman in striped shirt,***

***Johnny Hooten, and me with glasses sitting one row down,***

***Enjoy a pep rally. In front of us is Mrs. Sandlin and Jackie Smith.***

***Picture from yearbook***

The gym was amazing. It was without a doubt the largest structure I had ever been in that was made entirely of wood. The only concrete was in the piers in the huge floor. It had 4 brick chimneys. Even some of the doors inside the gym were made of boards nailed together. This

architectural wonder was built about 1935 by the W.P.A. workers who got about 50 cents a day for their craftsmanship.

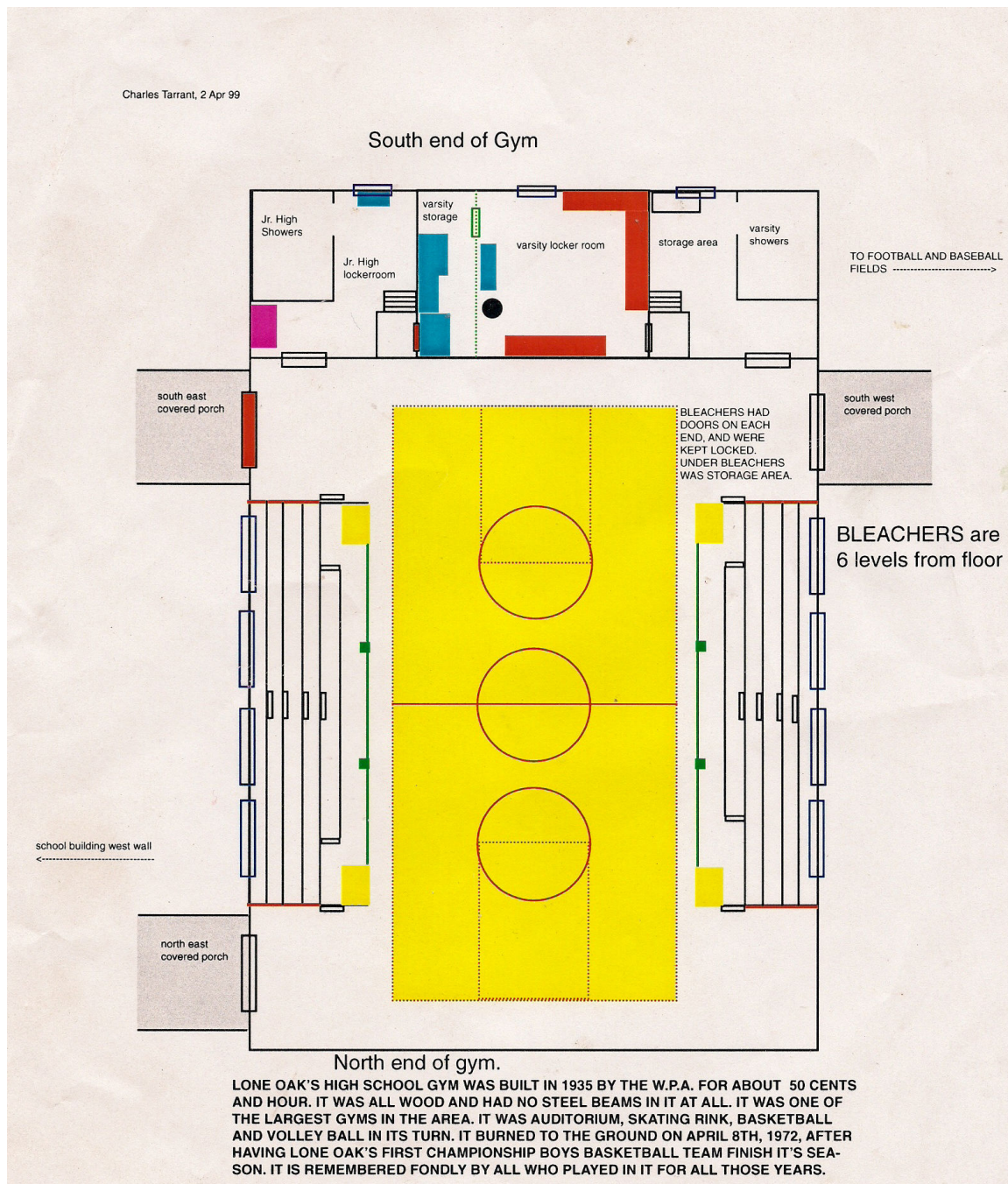


*(Gym as it appeared near completion in 1935)*

*Picture courtesy Boots Bowman*

There were originally 4 different entrances with double doors at near each corner of the gym. Each entrance was like a little porch. It was covered over the top and had walls down the side. In the ceiling of each entrance were the remains of a light fixture. The northwest entrance was removed altogether. On the gym's massive white exterior walls were a series of windows located about 15 feet from the ground. For some reason the windows over the entrances had been sealed. I was later told this was cut down the substantial glare on the gym floor from the sun.

Charles Tarrant, 2 Apr 99



Inside its confines were the permanent bleachers on the east home side and the west visitor side. The bleachers were partitioned off inside and used for storage. On the visitors side I think one end served as a janitor's closet or something. We found old roller-skates on the south end, where the door was broken. We spent some time with the skates clipped to our tennis shoes trying to skate in small circles.

These were very old skates, requiring a skate key that nobody had. The skates had large metal wheels. I don't know why the school had them in the first place, but I found out later skating used be allowed in the old gym in the 30s and 40s. They stopped because it tore up the varnish on the floor. Now we had fun tearing up our shoes and falling on our tails. We were real careful to stay



off the brightly varnished playing floor, so we skated in the areas at the south end of the west bleachers. Then one day somebody repaired the busted door and put a new padlock on it, permanently locking up this end of the bleachers. The Buffalo Skating Rink was forever closed. It would never open again. We were the last people to roller skate in that gym.

As can be seen this old gym was one heck of a playground. It was the closest thing to Disneyland Lone Oak would have. It had all kinds of fun things to do. For instance, there was exploring dark and forbidden cavern-like areas under the homeside bleachers, there was dodge ball, handball, half court basketball, roller skating (of course), empty hand fencing (pretend sword fighting), dog pile, wrestling, various forms of volleyball, a form of hurdling where we ran around the gym and jumped through the volleyball net tiedowns (often snagging a foot on the tiedown, smacking the hardwood floor a hard one, and skidding several feet), piggy-back war, and skydiving. The skydiving was done by upper-classmen who jumped out the gym windows. The school put a stop to that by putting 1 X 8 board rails over the lower windows before I got there. The windows were about 15 feet up and some of them were over sidewalks. .

Two sports I want to go into detail here are "Long Range Sock Tag" and "Rope Swinging".

Sock Tag was something that just seem to happen. A large group of boys with little or nothing to do during break will find some way to keep themselves amused. One fellow found a rather large white stretch sock and filled the foot end of it with odds and ends such as other socks, foam padding, and what have you. The rules were simple. The object of the game was who ever had the sock had to hit someone else that was playing the game with the sock. The person so tagged was "it" and had to tag somebody else. It was played all over the gym and led to some rather interesting chases. It seemed like everybody from junior high to high school seniors played this during their play-period in the gym. In between gym classes the sock was hidden by the latest "it".

One guy was chasing a fellow I called Rabbit. His real name was Randy Price. Rabbit dived over the end of the bleachers, grabbing the railing. He hung down about 6 feet from the floor, then let go. The guy who was "it" threw at Rabbit and missed. Rabbit took off and away from the guy and the fellow had to go all the way down the bleachers to get the sock. By the time the sock was retrieved Rabbit was clear across the gym.

An interesting thing to see was the bomburst effect or live grenade effect. A cluster of participants would be in an area of the bleachers and talking among themselves. Sometimes they'd be so involved in talking about girls or cars they'd forget about the game. Then, BLAM!, one would get hit by the sock. Suddenly brought back to the present the entire group would scatter in all directions looking back to see if the new "it" had picked up the sock yet.

Another thing to observe was the ambush. It started just like the group meeting above, except one guy would be labeled the "sucker". He would be engaged in conversation and the real "it" would suddenly take out the sock and slam him with it. Then the entire group would scatter, laughing evilly.

Unlike predators in the wild the big strong guys preferred to tag big strong guys in return. Small fellows like myself were eligible targets but not preferred because it was no contest to bop us with the sock. We were relatively easy to evade once we were tagged. Once I got tagged and after some time of vainly trying to hit somebody a jock came up to me and told me to hit him. He had a vendetta against a guy in the pack and wanted to get him with the sock. I tapped the guy, he grabbed the sock, and took off like a B-52 after his target. I rejoined the pack and spent the rest of the week fleeing all over the gym.

This game lasted over a year. During that time the sock grew to interesting proportions. It weight increased and it could be thrown a lot further. It stung a bit when it hit, too. In the end the game

just died because the novelty had finally wore off. One day we got the sock and emptied it out. As best as I can recall it contained 2 or 3 other large socks, a kneepad, a thigh-pad, assorted pieces of paper, some cut foam padding, a chinstrap, somebody's old mouthpiece, a t-shirt, a ragged old tennis shoe, and other odds and ends. It weighed as much as 2 pounds. Toward the end of the game the sock packed quite a whallop when it tagged you. It was loads of fun.

Up in the Varsity Locker-room was a large climbing rope. To the best of my knowledge nobody ever used it for what it was hanged up there for. It was well attached to the overhead rafters about 15 to 20 feet up. The varsity team had 2 man open lockers that were nothing more than shelves and racks. These were ideal to stand on top of and the rope reached just enough to grab with both hands. From the top of these lockers we could swing, Tarzan-like, across the room and back. I thought this was great. There was a crew that consisted of myself, David Neagle, Johnny Hooten, and a couple of others.



***David Neagle***

We were the Rope Swingers. The power we felt from the full Gs of the swing, coming up to near weightlessness, and then back again was really cool. It was addictive. Every day I'd look forward to P.E. and the thrill of the swing.

It was scary on top of the lockers, but I could lead back against the wall and feel a little safe. David would reach out and grab the rope for me, then he'd hold me so I wouldn't fall until I got a grip on the rope and could swing out. Out I'd go, hit the apex of the swing, and the pendulum effect would take me back almost all the way back to the lockers. Dismount was simple. I just let go and gravity did the rest.

The big thing to do was to swing over a big basket-like hamper and drop in. The hamper was mounted on casters and had a substantial amount of old uniforms, pads, clothing, and junk packed down on the bottom. Once we got to the top of the swing and over the hamper we'd let go and land in it. Sometimes somebody would grab the hamper and spin it around and around. Then the guy on the hamper would go on a ride somewhere in the locker room. This would end by being dumped out of the hamper. We all thought this was great fun. It did beat hanging around the bleachers and had more to it than sock tag. The teachers must have known we were in there, pretty much unsupervised. It was amazing how long we got away with it.



***Close resemblance to the hamper we used.***

The closest anyone came to getting hurt was when John Hooten decided to try to swing out of the attic over the lockers. The attics were wide open and their floors were the ceilings of the lower locker rooms. It was about 20 feet from the locker room floor in there, and about 25 feet from the shower floor. Johnny got up there and he was handed the rope. He had no fear of heights and was a very strong boy (and a little nuts). He swung out.

He traveled very fast out of his lofty perch. When he hit the down point of the swing he must have been pulling about 3 or 4 Gs. He slid down the rope like it had grease on it and kamakazied into the floor. He landed on some pasteboard and skidded some 10 to 15 feet. It knocked him out. Not knowing what to do we were afraid to touch him. After a short while Johnny got up and painfully examined himself. He was bruised but unhurt. That was the only time I ever saw anyone swing out of the attic. Later on I heard he did successfully swing out of the attic.

We could climb all over the place like parakeets, and did so. One day Coach Taylor came up there and saw us all over the place like ants on a cake. He ordered us out. The place was locked after that. That's too bad because it was a real blast and a great escape from all the mundane slowness of PE class.

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## Seventh Graders

Ms. Oney's Dungeon

Our studies in 7th grade were not much different than in grade school. We were taught a lot about Texas History, the regions of Texas like the Blackland Belt where we lived, and the Piney Woods region where Sulphur Springs was located. We also were taught science, biology, math, literature, English, and all the common classes we had all seen before. It filled a lot of us with boredom. The girls all seemed to attack this with an enthusiasm I simply could not comprehend. Most, if not all, of the ladies in our class were scholars.

To fight the boredom off I came up with many oddball ideas. History was embellished and rewritten by Herman and me. When the history book mentioned that Stephen F. Austin was taken

prisoner in Mexico it pointed out "all he had to do in his jail cell was watch a lizard and think." This line gave us "Austin's Lizard."

In our fractured version of history Austin took the lizard back to Texas. When Santa Anna found out about this he dispatched General Cos to bring the lizard back to Mexico City. In the real history General Cos was to seize an arsenal in Texas, sort of like a second Lexington and Concord.

The Liberty and lizard loving Texans heard of the General's coming to seize the reptile and prepared a hot reception. A small cannon was loaded and there was a group of armed militia. A sign was made with a likeness of the lizard saying "Come and Take Him!" In real life the sign read "come and take it", a defiant challenge to the General to seize the arms.

In both histories General Cos had a bad day. Not only did he not get the lizard, but he managed to get some of his men killed. Out gunned, out manned, and out one lizard he retreated. The Texas war had begun! All that fractured fantasy came from one line in a history book.



Ms Oney had a large billboard in the shape of Texas. It was about 6 feet tall at the panhandle. It was made of plywood and stood by itself with an easel-like set up. This contraption migrated all over the room. Sometimes it would be by the blackboard, sometimes next to one side of the room, sometimes in the back corner. The billboard was divided up into the regions of Texas and we had to pretty well know them all.

In the back of the room was a free stand coat rack. If somebody wasn't careful about getting a coat off the rack they could tip it over and spill the coats all over the floor. Then the person would have a dozen or so irate individuals wanting to pound him.

As an escape from the boredom Herman and I invented an alien sci-fi world and spent much of our Jr. High and High School time inventing and drawing spaceships. I got into a lot of trouble talking to Herman. That didn't even slow us down.

Herman played football with the gang and me but he didn't like it. He never developed the "warrior spirit" and "killer instinct". He loved basketball, and played a lot of pickup games through school. I was his call, and I respected him for it, but he came to regret not playing football.

In football I remember being out on the sidelines and I watched Herman and a pack of our guys gang tackle some poor fellow about the mid-field line. Herman threw the guy down, and this was the most violent I had ever seen him get. Herman was very easygoing, quiet, and dependable. He was the first friend I had in school that seemed to really like the things I did, we both talked on a similar intellectual level, and he didn't give me a hard time about my quirks. Like me, he was a bit

of an outcast. Today, they'll call us "Nerds", but that word didn't exist back then. "Bookworms" was the closest they had, and that wasn't discriptive enough.

Back to football. I remember being on the receiving end of a massive block delivered to me by someone from Community. I was at safety and as I had my glasses off the world was very fuzzy. The glare off the incandescent light used for illumination in 1968 didn't help my vision one bit. I had no idea what to expect, therefore I had no idea what to do when the Community Q.B. started the play. I stood there like a confused deer in the headlights of an oncoming truck.

## **K A W H A M!**

This gigantic fellow got me square on the right shoulder, just below the collarbone. The impact knocked me several yards, not including the skid. The first thing that hit the ground was my head. I had an incredible sensation of the world being tilted 60 degrees. The play swirled past me on down to the 20. I tried to get up. All I could do was roll over on my stomach.

"Oh no, " I thought, "I'm hurt. *How embarrassing.*"

I tried to get up, and I did manage to get to my feet. I staggered badly and a coach from the visitors side asked me something. I waved him off and somehow made it off the field on my own. Coach Taylor immediately looked me over. He was more scared than I was. I was only stunned and I wanted to go back in. He kept looking at my eyes and said that they were "dilated". He refused to let me play anymore that night. Dilated? It was night, Coach! What do irises do but get big and dilated at night? I was actually okay, and the real reason he wouldn't let me go back in was my getting hit by some 180-pound lineman on my 75-pound frame had scared the bejabbers out of him. I made up my mind that I would not let this stop me, ever again.

Herman kidded me a little and a friend of mine named Benji Hart escorted me to the locker room where I got out of my uniform. I returned to the sidelines and watched the game, wearing my glasses and my Jersey. In retrospect Coach Taylor was correct in what he did. I could have been seriously hurt as small as I was. My cynical contemporaries expressed the comment "Looky there! Tarrant is hurt!" as if they expected it. I had heard the comment while I lay in the wet grass, wondering which way was up. It was part of the reason I got to my feet. What they didn't expect was that I wanted more.

Cumby was a tiny school as of this writing. In 1968 they played football just as we did. They wore maroon and white, giving them a brownish purple look. They came to the land of the Buffaloes and I saw them for the first time. My family settled there in 1880s, and a street is named after our clan. This was my dad's home town. I didn't know this back then.

I got to play against this school. I was beginning to understand how football was played and I was getting the message as to what the rules were. It was still like feeling my way along in the dark, but I had a better idea of just what I was supposed to do.

Coach Taylor realized how fragile I was. When he put me in as linebacker in this game I had big ole Rickey Graham in front of me. Intentionally or otherwise, Coach Taylor put me behind the one guy on the team who would go out of his way to protect me.





Rickey Graham was big as a horse and my buddy. He wasn't as outwardly intellectual as me and my nerd buddies, but he and I spent more time together out of school. He was a lot more intellectual than people gave him credit. He was the one who talked me into playing football. He was the same age I was and my surrogate big brother. I loved him like a brother as much as anyone could. In the game Rick kept the guard and center off me and let me get more time to read what was going on. That saved me from much injury. Once on a play we were chasing a guy at an angle and I was lining up for the tackle. Rickey reached out with a huge hand and grabbed the ball carrier by the helmet. He clothes-lined the guy, at a dead run.

After that bit of success, Cumby called the same play again. Rickey got buried under the guard and center. As he struggled to get them off him I saw the runner break outside. The center was normally supposed to get the linebacker, but Rick was a much bigger threat than I so they took him out. Our defensive end took out the blockers and that gave me a clear shot at the ball carrier. I came at him and lined up to head him off. He stuck his arm out to stiff-arm me. That was a bad move as I grabbed a double fistful of maroon jersey and held on like a pit-bull. We went round and round as he tried to shake me off. After the third time around the mob hit us like a huge wave, toppling us in a great pile of bodies.

I thought it was great. I had got him! My celebration was cut short because Coach Taylor took me out. My getting in on the action had made him cringe, remembering what happened to me at the Community game. I complained loud and long as I angrily came off the field. That had been a great personal triumph. I was high as a kite. Rick built me up, mentally. He said "You didn't tackle him but you did slow him down so we could get him." Like most big guys he sometimes treated me badly but more often he told me I could do it, that I could make it. To this gigantic lisping Scotsman I owed a lot. When he loaned me quarter or two so I could buy a candy bar or coke, he would joke that he would call in his loans and I'd owe him thousands. I truly miss him. I do not believe I could have made it at all in school if he hadn't been there to guide me.

Coach Taylor tried to figure out what to do with me. I was a puzzle. I was too light to put anywhere. The usual spot was safety. But my bad eyesight and crude knowledge of the game made that a bad choice because if a Q.B. got wise he'd burn me every play. That was one reason I only played a down or two. They couldn't figure us out that way. Coach Taylor wasn't about to let a game get lost because ole Buzzard had no idea what to do. Then he came up with the ingenious idea of putting me on the special teams.

Oh no.....

The guys on special teams are the ones who run at breakneck speed on kickoffs and returns and collide at full speed. The pain of tackling someone at full tilt can not be described. Its something like grabbing 100 pound burlap bag full of potatoes and running into a wall. Special teams also spent very little time on the field and always come off after the play. It was a simple solution and kept me off his mind except for rare occasions in the 3rd or 4th quarter.

I spent the rest of my time on the bench trying desperately to keep warm. My natural body temperature is 97.5 degrees so I had a horrible time of it. I never wore a pair of Long Johns until I was well out of high school. My idea of how to keep warm was to wear a coat, sometimes with a cap. I got sick a lot. I missed some games and a lot of practices and school. Practices made my day, though. Here's one incident I remember.

Dennis Scott was a tall wirey guy who played halfback. I was deep into a feeling that I wasn't getting any respect one particular practice. I was at safety again, Coach Taylor deciding to let me get more practice time. Quite a few guys had quit the team for their own reasons, so it was another reason I got more practice time. So I was out there when the Q.B. handed off to Denny. He came clomping out of the back field all feet and arms. A linebacker tried to get him but was blocked. That left me. I had took the fake, but I corrected and lined up on Denny. I left my feet and spiked him on the right foot, pushing it into his left leg. He clomped on 3 more steps, staggering, and fell in a disorganized heap. He got up and we exchanged angry words. I said I tackled him and he said I tripped him. This ticked me off and I refused to take off the treasured white helmet I wore to make it a sign of protest. Herman told me what a fool I was as we sat out the next series of practice plays. I sat on the ground and fumed. I do not think Denny and I ever spoke to each other again. Herman repeatedly told me to take off the helmet, but I kept it on until the end of practice. Some of us had white helmets this day because Coach Taylor saw what a horrible fit the red helmets were. He took pity on us and let us into the varsity lockerroom. We were to get helmets only. No pads, no shoes, nothing but helmets. Varsity practiced much later than we did so there as no problem with us using their helmets. We practiced during "gym class", about 2:30 or so. This was arranged to be the last class of the day so we wouldn't stink up the place with our sweaty bodies. Showers were avoided because the bare concrete floors of the showers were an inch deep in muck, didn't work properly if at all, and nobody had the nerve to get naked in front of the other guys.

I once saw a High School varsity guy exit the showers. That's how I found out the showers in the Varsity side worked. He exited the shower, soaked, wearing track shorts. He looked about 10 feet tall and built like a statue of David. I kept out of his way and finished my business in the area of getting some footballs for practice. We were underlings, and being as how I was a nerd I had to be especially careful to avoid the wrath of the guys in High School. I found out later that this only meant we hadn't proven ourselves to them. You have to earn respect, it is never given. Paying your dues is a necessary part of life. I didn't know it, but I was already putting in my payments. Our first season ended, we reluctantly gave up the pads, and went to basketball. We had only one loss in our first year in organized football. It looked promising.

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## B-Ball

Basketball season of 68-69 is a blur. No records survive and until I was researching this book I wasn't even sure I played 7th grade basketball. I do remember Coach Taylor fighting down exasperation and actually grabbing ahold of me to show me how the zone defense worked. I just stood there like a small tree with my arms out, and he tried to show me how to go with the flow. I had no idea what he was talking about.

I didn't know what the 3-second rule was. I ended up playing a spastic game of tag with the free throw zone to ensure I wasn't in or out of it for 3 seconds. I had a very difficult time trying to get the basketball to even hit the rim. I was barely over 5 feet tall and I think I weighed about 70 to 80 pounds. That put the rim a long way up there on that backboard. I'd get a volleyball just to ease my ego and toss it around up there. Because of its small size and very light weight I could hit like crazy with volleyball.

Our old basketballs back then were leather covered rubber bladders. The rubber bladder had leather strips glued right to it. These strips peeled a bit on the older balls making for some spectacular dribbles and wild bounces. Because of the leather strips the balls could not be patched so if they developed leaks they were used only for p.e. classes from then on. Teachers would often let us into the varsity locker rooms so we could air the balls up. They often went flat between P.E. classes. The leather strips were never glued back down either.

Fiberglass backboards were a novelty then and only the bigger schools had them. Wooden plywood backboards were common. Nobody could dunk a ball in Junior High of course, and I couldn't jump high enough to touch the net. Basketball sneakers were common, but again I wore cheap deck shoes.

No championship was given for junior high in 1968. I have not found any records. I do not know how good we did or how bad. All that remains is a confused patchwork of memories. But I can still hear basketballs bouncing in the old gym. It is a deep thudding sound, hollow and somewhat eerie, as though it was calling us to adventures to come.

Being a small fellow with very little experience and even less training I had to learn fast. My favorite time was warm up because I got to go out on the floor. We would form two lines, one to shoot the other to rebound. Sometimes was a 3 man passing drill called a "star drill". I never got this right. I still can't, not even when I went to college. This would drive some of my teammates to distraction but I ignored them.

Basketball back then was different than it is now. Jumpballs were very common. The game and half started with them. When two people got control of the ball at the same time the reff blew a whistle and it was jumped at the nearest circle. That's why the free throw lines have a circle around them.

Girls played a remarkable game with 6 people on the team. This was a slow game with the teams divided into 2 squads of 3 each. One was defense, another offense. Basically it was 3 on 3 at each end of the court. It was hard to get the ball past midcourt and into the other half. It was unique and fun to watch. Fast breaks were impossible. The young ladies never got winded. I think this style of basketball would be good for older guys my age to play.



Girls' uniforms looked less like sleeveless t-shirts and shorts than a casual wear ensemble at the mall. The shirts were baggy with sleeves and a collar. The shorts were almost knee length, like bicycle shorts. Some girls wore panty hose under their shorts. It gave their legs a nice glossy sheen but would be impossible to wear such a combination and play full court.

Usually the girls were to play first unless we were at a tournament. In a tournament any team could be playing at any given moment. We sat in the bleachers at the appropriate gym and waited our turn.



***top row: Eddie Henderson (Bell), David Morgan, Eddie Lively, David Neagle, Danny Bowman***

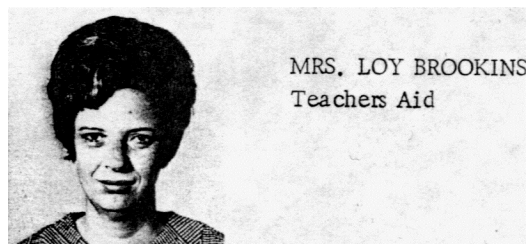
***Middle row: Coach Brian Taylor, Rickey Graham, Dennis Scott, Phillip Andrews, Jerry McGee, Robert Vice.***

***Front Row: Bobby Underwood, David Lemons, Larry Hukill, and Frankie Payne. Yeah, I missed this picture too.***

I missed the team picture again because I thought we'd suit up first. By going to another location instead of where everyone else was I never got the word. This infuriated Coach Taylor because he disliked incompetence. I was somewhat incompetent, and it cost me my little spot in history.

In Jr. High it was common for boys to wear the basketball uniform under the street clothes. This was because most of us had nothing to carry the uniform in when we went to a game. Some guys kept their uniform and shoes in a brown paper bag. I wore the same shoes off court as on. It was no big deal. I don't think I had much game time in 1968. I wore the old deckshoes left over from football. The soles had no grip at all and on a hardwood floor I skated more than ran. The shoes cost about 2 dollars so when one pair self destructed Dad would get me a new pair. I had very large feet. I was roughly 5' 4" and my feet were 8 1/2 sized in 1968. Coach Taylor remarked that I had a "firm foundation."

One thing that was very scary for me was a long-range high-speed pass. I had trouble catching a basketball and this thing blistering through the air actually had the potential to knock me down. I had small hands and thin arms so there wasn't much there to absorb the shock of an almost 2 pound ball smacking into me. I spent some time in P. E. class with Mrs. Brookins tossing a ball back and forth. After chasing it down a few times I began to relax and develop a passable method for catching the ball. I appreciate very much the time out she took with me to show me how to catch the thing. Coach Taylor just didn't have the time and everybody else was busy.



During games Rickey and I would sit on the bench glaring at the bad guys and cheering on our guys. These were pretty much the same people we stomped in football and they wanted some form of revenge. Rick would often tell me who was who and where we had met this school before. In the bleachers we'd munch on candy bars and talk sports. Rick and I never had much in the way of girlfriends in school so our talk was all boytalk, cars, and athletics. The concession stand sold popcorn, candy bars, and colas. Nachos were unheard of. Fritoe pies were available at some places but we never ate any. Microwave ovens were yet to be invented. Popcorn was made fresh in a popper, and the smell of the stuff cooking could drive us crazy if we were the least bit hungry.

My basketball uniform was a puzzle. It was of undetermined age and the shorts were of a satin like material. They were very glossy. My mother sewed elastic in the waist-band of these baggy things so I could keep them on. These things were a little risqué. They fit more like a kilt than shorts. My "bird legs" stuck out under them and I was reluctant to jump because the shorts might fly up. I had in basketball a white jersey #4. This jersey became mine and when I finished my sports career it retired to my sock drawer.

My perception of basketball was like this. They'd jump the ball. Somebody would get it and dribble it to their end of the floor. Full court presses were rare, so this usually happened easily. Everybody got back on defense and stood there with their arms out like a 'T' facing the offense. There was some random passing around and either the ball would be lost or shot at the basket. I was very confused. I did not understand what constituted a foul. This often got me into situations



that drove Coach Taylor to distraction. Mr. Taylor also disliked ball hogs and demanded the ball be passed around. He tried to fight bad habits early, but he was only one man and he was stretched thin with all the boys and girls he had to teach and all the teams he had to coach. As for myself I was with my buddies and having a good time. That is what counted. Our basketball season was soon over and I went on to other things that drew my interest. I have no records of what happened during that season.

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## 68 A. B. (After Basketball)

Seventh grade was boring. The classes were boring. The entire thing was lackluster and drab. Some classes held my interest like the study of protozoa and some of the more action packed parts of history. Basketball took the bite off this because we sometimes had day games. That meant going someplace else besides to class. When that was out of season we ran track.

Track was odd. We ran and ran and ran. We'd throw a discus. We'd toss a shot-put a few feet. I had interest in the pole vault but we had very little in the way of equipment for that. We had no javelins.

We had a soggy old bug infested sawdust pit behind the south endzone of the football field. We could dig down about a foot in this smelly glop and get earthworms. Yeech. We had no mats or pole vault cushions. Hurdles were something else. In low position they came about up to my lower crotch. I'd watch the other guys stomp through them. I read a story about a Greek slave teaching boys to hurdle. It said it was like soaring. I tried it and got a nasty raw spot from my knee to my thigh for one of my efforts at these barriers. All I could do was run up to a hurdle, stop, and hop over. Other guys did it in a similar fashion, but they did it a lot faster.

I loved to fling a discus. I would watch Robert and Rick. They could make the wobbling discus travel a good distance. When I tried it all it did was wobble a few short yards and crash. It looked so easy on those very popular Italian Steve Reeves *Hercules* movies on T.V.

Relays were something else I loved, too. Carrying that baton and handing off was cool. It was a team effort, and in practice Coach Taylor tried to create balanced relay teams so the jocks would not dominate.

Our track went around the football and baseball fields. Markings were crude at best. Usually these were just wooden stakes driven in the ground with odd numbers on them. Often we went to other schools and used their tracks. Sometimes we went to E.T.S.U. in Commerce and used their cinder-covered track. Running on that made an interesting crunching sound.

I didn't go out for any particular event but I guess Coach Taylor listed me as an alternate in some event or such. I went to the meets, and watched. Once more it was hang out with Rickey Graham and small talk. There were no concession stands at track meets. Sometimes we'd be allowed to go someplace nearby and chow down. I always ate a lot when I could, and I loved hamburgers. Guys would see me wolfing down this delicacy and gaze at my small frame. They would declare I had a tapeworm. I never put on any fat in school.

We wore parts of our basketball uniforms because there was no such thing as a track uniform. A t-shirt was usually worn rather than the game jersey. Track meets lasted all day, from about 9 am to 4 or 5 PM, but it was fun. I'd wander around the events and watch guys high jump or put the shot. Danny, Eddie Henderson/Bell, and others could run very fast. It was fascinating to watch

them burn up the track. There was usually one meet a year and that finished the season. After that we ride the bus back to class. It was back to boredom, but it wasn't always boring.

Our 7th grade teacher left us to go take care of some errand or other one day. We had this very gregarious young African American girl in class nic-named Powla. When Ms. Oney left Powla got up in front of the class and got behind the desk. She started a hilarious routine of being the teacher. Our response was immediate. Somebody flung a wad of paper. More followed. Tension was released as hundreds of wads of paper flew at her along with good-natured calls of derision. She became the target of all the pent-up frustrations we had. When Ms Oney came back she was mad as a wet hen.

"I could hear you all the way to the Superintendent's office (some 50 to 75 yards away)! Look at all these paper wads! Pick this mess up!"

We stifled our guffaws and set about cleaning up our substantial mess. Never before or since have I witnessed such a blizzard of paper. It was too cool, and all of us in the class remember it. Seventh grade was usually less than fun, but as can be seen, we had our moments.

After Track we fooled around with sandlot baseball. I always got picked low and got to go out in the outfield, somewhere harmless, like in rightfield. A person hasn't lived until they've chased a skittering hot grounder and thrown their glove at it in a vain attempt to stop it. There were several inside the park home runs. I would sometimes get a hit. The ball would go bouncing toward second base and I'd toss my bat and then dig out for first. I discovered I could bat right or left-handed. I didn't know it but I was ambidextrous. Being left-handed was discouraged back then. Still I thought it was kind of neat that I could bat from either side of the plate.

My father was a first class baseball player and I think he could have played in the pros. I hope I didn't disappoint him by not playing baseball in school other than the sandlot pickup games. He seemed to take some pride in my football playing. I often wonder what he thought of his small skinny son bouncing off the big jocks during a game.

In class to escape the crushing boredom Herman and I drew our space aliens and cartoon basketball games. We chatted whenever we could but Ms. Oney kept us separate. She singled me out for special attention because of my drawing. I drew all the time and I still do. Tanks, planes, sports, anything that caught my fancy I put down on paper. One day Ms. Oney got exasperated and attacked my notebook. She confiscated and destroyed about a dozen or so drawings. There was nothing I could do, and these drawings were lost forever. I was a bit more careful with my drawings after that.

Summer arrived as slow as Christmas. After that we were free. I waited with apprehension for the final verdict of pass or fail. I had failed the 3rd grade in Greenville when I went to two different schools that year, Austin School and Lamar School. This trauma left me with a huge paranoid doubt over passing any grade. Much to my relief I passed and I'd never have to do the 7th grade again (except in my nightmares)! Summer was here! I was free!

In retrospect, I can say that Ms. Oney wasn't that bad. She was strict, but not an Ogre. Because of her pushing and pushing and pushing, I made it out and with some knowledge of the subjects she taught. I never got the chance to ever thank her for her efforts. Being a teacher is never easy, and success can only be measured in what they have learned from your efforts. She taught us well, and I remember quite a bit about Texas Geography and history because of her.

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## The Good Old Summertime

Recently (1998) there is talk of having children go to school all year round. How can people be so cruel to their children? Its bad enough to steal part of a kid's childhood and put them in school. To take all of it is a crime.

I got along good with Rick and reasonably well with his odd collection of thuggish running buddies. They were rude to me, and held me in low esteem, but that was a price I paid to be with Rick. Rick had a beat-up old '58 Ford truck his father had used in the welding business. We'd load up in this thing and off we'd go. We would travel to Greenville, go swimming at Lake Tawakoni, or travel anyplace that suited our fancy. This new mobility was heady stuff and often left me dazed. Prior to meeting Rick I rarely went outside my backyard. Going to town was a once a week event before this. It was wonderful to travel and go places.

Skating was what we liked to do the most. Every Friday it was skate night. I learned to skate a little, but not real well. I kept all 8 wheels on the floor and fell often, but there were no major catastrophes. Sometimes if there was money we'd also go skating on Saturday. The rink was in Greenville, and it was called the Satellite. It had pinball, colas, lots of people to meet, and it was away from the dictatorial glare of parents.



***Picture from an advertisement in the Greenville Herald Banner about the Satellite Roller Rink.***

***Girls wore white skates, boys black. The wheels were wooden, but most people who had their own pair had the cool urethane wheels.***



***These are my skates as they looked in 2003. Wooden wheels, black hi-top leather.***

***Note the rubber brake on the front. I bought them from neighbor Johnny Weatherly for 5 dollars back in the late 60s.***

Rickey built me a bicycle one day. He had this huge monster of a bike he rode that had massive 26/28-inch wheels. It had huge stingray type handlebars and a massive banana seat resting on a gigantic sissy bar. The thing weighed about 30 pounds. Rick delivered his Grit newspaper on it. It was big enough to support his 13-year-old 180-pound frame and the bag of newspapers to boot. As junk bikes and parts were to be had in a hundred junkpiles all over the backwoods Rickey went on an expedition and found me everything I needed to build my bike. A lot of it came from cast-off bikes at his home. We threw together a bike almost as big as Rickey's with the exception of the drive cog. His had a gigantic drive cog to fit the huge size of his bike. We had no fenders and chainguards because these often rattled off. These were huge road bikes, pedal driven Harley Hogs. It gave me a first taste of freedom to travel that I love to this day. It was my bike, and I built it. It was one of the most satisfying accomplishments of my young life. I rode my bike all over the place for 6 years. It had a warped back wheel that rubbed but it built up my legs and increased my endurance. It was green, but I once painted it light blue and lettered "U.S. AIR FARCE" on the bar. It was my freedom, and I loved the old heavy bike.

Rick and I traveled all over Greenville. I bought Matchbox cars and Rickey took me to pool halls. I rode the paper route with him as he delivered and collected money on his papers. We ate Bar-B-Que sandwiches downtown in a place with a sawdust covered floor called Ernies. There were stores of all kinds everywhere and I visited them all. I had learned every downtown street by location but not by name. It was carefree, simple, and the very best of the good life.



These summers are a fond memory, and I was very lucky to have them. I pity the kids who may have to go year round. They are missing something. But like all good things this summer, like all summers, ended and it was back to school. It was to the eighth grade, and Mr. Ross, my first male teacher.

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## A Sound of Distant Thunder

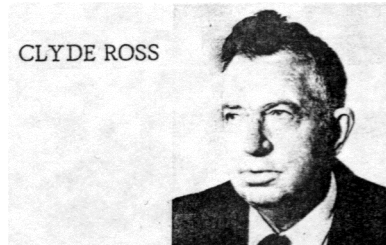
Who were we? What right did we have to wear the hallowed red and white, the school colors since 1905? The answer was simple. We were just a bunch of athletic kids, just like all the other thousands of athletic kids all over the state who went out for football. So here I was, smack in the middle of it all again. Coach Taylor never gave it a second thought. Charlie was back, but he was accustomed to the skinny kid "with lots of grit" as he put it.

In the back of my mind and the minds of all the other Eighth Graders on the team was revenge. Revenge was what we wanted against Quinlan. The Panthers had beaten us last year, but we vowed that this year would be different.

Training started just like last year. I had a better idea of what was going on and I knew the routine. There were some changes. We dropped the audibles of "100, 200, 300" in the cadence.

This had taken up too much time, what with calling the play, setting up the formation, and centering the ball. The number calling wasn't missed but it sure was neat!

In school 8th grade was a whole different kind of environment. We moved into an old building the school had acquired when the towns black school district was absorbed. This building contained at least 2 classrooms. One was a science room that was never used and the other was our 8th grade class room. Our teacher was one of the greatest human beings I would ever know, the truly wonderful Clyde S. Ross.



Mr. Ross was my very first male teacher. Those of us in the class were somewhat in awe of the man. He was truly amazing, and he loved kids. He knew riddles, jokes, magic tricks, and he wasn't a bad teacher either. He is the most beloved of all my teachers, professors, and instructors throughout my life. More on this man later.

We explored our new classroom. It had a cloak room where we could store our coats, hats, and assorted other items. Having a room separate from the rest of the school enforced our ideals of being a separate entity from High School and Grade School. We would put a special heading on our paper, labeling it L.O.J.H.S. We loved it out here in our little building that was all our own.

Back in football practice, Coach Taylor tried to use the same "hands on" system he used in basketball. He got behind me and tried to direct me by brute force to the play. This didn't work well for me because I was really distracted by him putting his hands on my shoulderpads and directing me toward the flow of the play. After a play or two of trying to deal with him and read the flow, I broke away and shooed him off. He never tried this again, but only after he got a similar reaction from David Morgan. It was sort of like having a large fly buzzing around your head while trying to concentrate on something. Mr. Taylor was now trying to take the time to give a little individual instruction to the ones who needed it most. He was learning just as we were.

Philip Andrews was our quarterback behind Danny Bowman, the Sheepdog. We were practicing in the north endzone of the football field and I was at linebacker, my favorite spot. I was in a killing mood. Philip was one of the disliked jocks. I had taken a ribbing for my "White Helmet" protest from last year and I was very wound up this particular practice. Philip called a play and the halfback ran smooth into him, BAM! Philip failed to follow through. Either the back stunned him or he was just plain disgusted at what happened. He just staggered a little. I came through the gap between the guard and center who had opened up a hole for the back that had hit Philip. I don't know what happened to the back. I leaped at Philip, got as big an armful of his helmet as I could and put my entire 80 pounds on his neck. I bull-dogged him down to the ground. Philip was a little upset, but he learned the world doesn't stop just because the play went bad. Flip never made a mistake like that again and I was getting some respect. Coach Taylor gave a look I didn't understand but it was sort of a stylish Awe look coaches give players who do something unusual.

Something new was added to practice in the six foot plus physique of a crazy guy I'll call the **Bulldozer**. This guy was a towering monster. He was a true red neck and he had no fantasies about life in general and his station in life in particular. He was frightening to behold, and frightening to deal with. Coach Taylor tried him out as a blocking back.

Twice Bulldozer and I met on the practice field. Fear and pain doesn't accurately describe the meeting. I was chasing a play and this looming beast would come lumbering at me like a huge bull. I didn't look twice. I reversed my field and ran from him in stark naked fear! He was 3 times my size, solid muscle, stupid, and dangerous. As he approached me to deliver the Coup de Grace I fell into a quivering heap in front of him. He tripped over me and fell onto the ground with a very loud crash. I figured he'd get up and squash me like an annoying insect but instead merely got up and went back to the huddle. Perhaps I was so inconsequential that tripping over me didn't mean anything to him.

Later in the season it happened again. I ran around the end and here he came! I did a fast cut and ran as fast as my skinny legs could go, back the other way. The only way I could describe what this was like is that it is similar to standing on a railroad bridge and a train is coming. All I wanted was to get out of his way. Desperate, I dived into the grass of the practice field like a frightened rabbit. He tripped over me again. Just before he tangled up in my fear crazed body I heard him groan "Oh, no!" I felt the impact of him hitting me and the displacement of the very air as he soared overhead. He landed in heap, shaking the earth.

Fortunately for me Bulldozer was no scholar and he had a short football career. I was thankful he left the field later that season. He was frightening.

I loved to watch kicks. Philip Andrews was our all-purpose kicker. He was like those quarterbacks that come in an electric football game. He could punt, pass, and kick. Everybody wanted him on their side when we played "back 'em up." When he was calm he could boom that ball a remarkable distance. His one major drawback was his nerves. He could be rattled, distracted, and un-nerved. From Philip's display of kicking I thought it was easier than it actually was. I developed a fantasy that I could be a kicker too. I had big feet so maybe I could put them to good use. There was the problem that my kicks went 10 yards on average. Still, I'd put the ball on a tee and jam my big toe trying to kick the thing. What I did learn was not to kick it on the laces or the seams of the ball. Other guys actually taught me how to angle it properly and several guys showed me how to toss it out there to punt it. Even Danny gave me a hand, but his style was to toss the ball way up in the air to punt it. Danny's style amused Coach Taylor and I was surprised to discover something the Sheepdog couldn't do, even if his kicks went a very long way compared to mine. I was amazed at the guys taking the time to try to show me how to kick and at this acceptance, so I believed that kicking was the way to go. It wasn't easy to kick a football when I looked more like a great blue heron than a real jock. To this day I still haven't mastered punting and I avoid punting the ball myself in pickup games. The shoes I wore were very unfit for kicking. The deckshoes gave the feet no protection and every time I kicked it I'd get a sharp pain on my instep. That's one reason I disliked kicking the football.

From what I remember of our team we had without a doubt some of the finest kickers, punters, and field goal specialist ever to put on the uniform. I am proud to have been in their presence. In spite of our minor personal differences, they were a great group.

Our first game was heading toward us with a mixture of anticipation and foreboding. Were we as good as we were last year or were we in for a nasty surprise? Coach Taylor remained enigmatic on this question. I think he wasn't sure either. This first game was a major test. If we failed it would rattle our confidence for the entire season. Losing would be a very easy habit to develop.

In practices we got the usual sportsmanship speech of "Not if you win or lose, but how you played the game." I absorbed only part of this philosophy. I believed in winning, but not at all costs. People meant something to me. I had been among the outcast and down-trodden, so I knew what it was like. We must beat them, but not rub it in. We must pick them up when we knock them down. We must tell them they played a good game. If they are injured we must show genuine concern for their wounds. We must not under any circumstances fight, play dirty, and don't act like a jerk. I could have paid more attention to the last part.



Soon it was game day for our first game of the season. Every player wore their red jerseys with the white trim and numbers. These ancient garments dated from the 6 man football days, and were older than some of us, but we did not know this. The 7th graders were really excited. This was their first time to don the hallowed colors. I remembered the feeling, but I looked upon their excitement with a bit of contempt. They did not know what we knew, we blooded veterans, and they had not yet proven themselves worthy. We had passed the test and served our time as rookies. Now it was this bunch of 7th graders turn in the barrel.

It was a typical East Texas afternoon. The sun set with oranges, reds, and yellows, contrasting to the blue of the sky and the deeper blue of the clouds. It was warm when we pulled on our red and whites. We ran out onto the field from our lockerroom, Coach Taylor mother henning us. There were only about 15 of us and we probably didn't make as impressive a warm-up show as our pre-adolescent minds thought.

Coach Taylor and his counterpart from the opposition met at mid-field to discuss ground rules. It was always friendly and cordial. No matter what the outcome, it was only a game, and nothing more. It was to be played for enjoyment of everyone there.

Danny and Philip threw passes at us with quite remarkable force and good accuracy. For me it was the same as last year. They'd bounce off me or go through my outstretched arms. I'd still make a reception or two from time to time in the warm-ups. I had improved over last year but mostly it was an exercise in frustration. I wanted to be as good as Eddie, Johnny Hooten, or any of the jocks. Every time I had to chase a ball down I cursed myself.

There was a ceremonial coin toss at midfield with the reffs and the team captains. We lost this particular toss and had to kick off. I got on the bench with about half a dozen other non-starters and chewed angrily on my mouthpiece. I wanted us to receive. I wanted us to be on offense. I wanted to catch just one blasted pass in warm-up. I wanted us on the 35 for the kickoff. What were we doing on the 30?

The reffs and Coach Taylor caught it and had the kickoff team shift up 5 yards to the proper kick-off line. I bellowed out "Idiots!" and was ignored by Coach and teammates. One guy did look at me from off the field with a mix of confusion and anxiety and he shifted his position. Philip kicked the ball in the grand old style of the head-on method. Nobody kicked soccer style yet that we knew of. The kick zipped end over end in a graceful arc and was received about the 20 or so.

Red jerseys were all over the receiver in seconds, and in 3 downs they kicked it back to us on a punt. The defense gave them an awful time. Rick, Robert, Danny, Eddie Henderson, Rambling Frank, Philip and others had worked like a well-oiled machine to disrupt, discourage and then destroy the opponent's offense. Our anxiety over our abilities turned to elation. We were just as able as last year. We could do it. We could win. Under Coach Taylor's ministrations we proceeded to give the visiting team a very bad time of it.

Before 8 o'clock that night the sun was gone and so was the game. The stunned survivors of the visiting team staggered to their locker room to remove their gear. On the wooden scoreboard the score was a very one-sided 46 to 0. We had won again. This was the first time in 1969, and the newbys were on cloud nine.

I rode home with my folks and I had a great feeling of accomplishment. We were on our way again. I don't think our victory had much effect on the high school team. Chances were they paid us little attention, if any.

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"His life was gentle, and the elements

So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up

And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

(Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare.)

## Clyde S. Ross

Never have I met a man so full of life and who enjoyed the company of children than did Mr. Clyde Ross. In the early days of the 8th grade year he'd let me draw on one of the 2 chalkboards in the class room. One board was 90 degrees to the seats in the class and virtually useless to write instruction on. I'd doodle there during off time, or breaks.

He had a character named Digger O'Dell the Undertaker and I made it 2 dimensional for him. He'd give me a joke or situation and I'd illustrate it. We shared many laughs.

This man was usually exceedingly easy to get along with. As the heat of August and September melted us in our seats, he not only shared our plight but helped a great deal to overcome it. There was no air conditioning. Open doors and windows let in what little breeze there was. Box fans were everywhere, usually the type that swung automatically back and forth. These blew paper and equipment off desks. Forearms would sweat and stick to paper. Girls especially did not like to perspire and got very self-conscious about body odor, even if there was none at all. Make-up was checked repeatedly lest it run or smear. It wasn't a sauna but it was far from comfortable.

Suffering in this heat we were stunned when Mr. Ross made a here-to-fore unheard of suggestion. In the back of the room were 2 wooden cases of empty soda pop bottles. We all assumed that it was a stash of teacher's empties because the teachers had pooled their money and had a cooler of colas in their lounge. These 2 cases of bottles were the property of the eighth grade. Mr. Ross said that we could pool our cash and he'd go into town with a couple of "stout young men" and get us a cola of our choice each. At first we were, as I said, stunned by the announcement and then elated. This was too good! Not everybody had money but nobody did without. This wonderful man paid for several person's colas, myself included, out of his own pocket! In the heat of late summer, 1969, this was fantastic. Herman drew a cartoon of one of our space creatures in a pose of deep thought. In the word balloon were the creature he wrote "dreaming of a drink."

Not one teacher, instructor, professor, or unit leader since that time or before had done that for my friends or me on such a large scale what Mr. Ross did for us. He did this for all the kids in every class he taught for years. We thought we were in "tall cotton" for this addition to our otherwise boring classroom life. Class may have been boring, as usual, but Mr. Ross went out of his way to make it bearable.

Mr. Ross also knew some magic tricks and puzzles. We'd gather around his desk and there would be this pencil there. He did a sort of bogus chant like "meno-mino, follow my fingo" and the pencil would follow his finger, rolling across his desk. We'd look on in wide-eyed wonder. Later he showed Herman and me how he did it. He had a sheet of plastic on top of his desk. When he'd press down with his finger the pencil would roll forward into the depression and follow his finger for as long as he pressed down on the sheet. It was so simple it was ingenious, and it had worked on us.

He jokingly referred to Martha Sale as "Martha Sailing out the Window". She'd blush a bit and say nothing.

He also had a saying that went something like "he was bold and brave and suddenly, In flew enza!"

This was probably a joke referring back to the horrid enfluenza plague that struck the U.S. after World War One. I don't know how old Mr. Ross was, but he seemed to have a lot of home spun humor. He was priceless.

He told riddles and jokes and everything, and we loved him. He could be hard, too. He could be downright mean. Some upperclassmen who had experienced his less than gentle ministrations called him "Old Man Ross" or "Clyde" behind his back. If anyone got on his bad side he could be very tough to deal with. I sometimes danced on the edge of getting on the bad side of Mr. Ross, and that was a stupid thing for me to do.

My close friendship with Herman was always a problem for all my teachers. The solution was to separate us, so he did. I was hyperactive and every chance I got I communicated with Herman. This got one or both of us into trouble, but mostly me. Mr. Ross tried to put my desk near his on the dais near the front of the room. I kept right on rolling. He put me across the room from Herman. The results were the same. He simply could not get me under control when it came to Herman and the reason was that Herman was the very first intellectual friend I had in school. He and I had similar interest and so I valued his company more than my conduct.

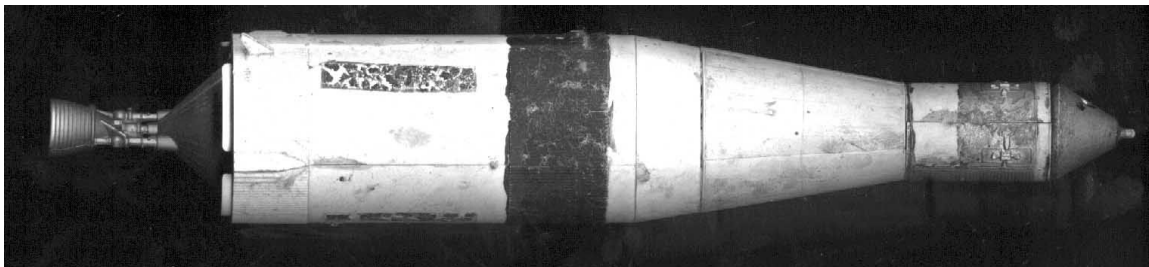
Along about Thanksgiving Mr. Ross' sense of humor took a noticeable dive. I think he caught flak from some fink who didn't like him going for cokes for us. I do not know who this individual was but I will say he or she is a dirty no good slimeball for halting the cola runs. The cola cases disappeared. To top this outrage off Mr. Ross stopped letting me draw on the blackboard. I was a little confused and hurt. This, plus a number of other restrictions on my activities made me feel persecuted. I got angry. About Christmas he was downright irritable. Our relationship, as student to teacher, was not at it's best. It wasn't just me. The rest of the class was feeling the tension also. Something was very badly wrong.

Mr. Ross was part of the supervisory faculty and had the job of Jr. High superintendent as well as teacher. He often had to leave, to tend to business. Thus began the paper-wad wars. Several dozen could be made from one sheet of paper. Some guys chewed them and the dampness gave the paper wads extra range. The air was soon filled with spitwads within seconds after Mr. Ross left. Some were launched by rubber bands, most were thumped across the room by thumb and forefinger. It blew off a lot of steam, and we were getting tense by his sudden crabbiness. He soon came back and just sat down. He looked up, commenting "Where did all these paper wads come from?" He then went on with the lesson. We swept up sometimes in the afternoon so I don't think he cared that much about floor litter. Heaven help you if he saw you launch a paper wad, though! The girls as a group did not take part in this childish behavior. They merely chatted among themselves or went on with their school work. They showed obvious irritation when a spit wad would land on their desk or bounce off them. We left them to their uppity attitude and showered each other with ammo.

Part of the reason Mr. Ross developed an attitude as he did was the fact that he was dirt poor. Not being able to get his beloved students even a little something ate at his sensitive nature. Had we known we would have told him that we loved him as he was and he needn't get us anything. We did contribute to a fund to get him a little something. He owed us nothing. He gave us hours of instruction, patience, and his love. We could never pay all of that back.

Herman had model of a Saturn 5 rocket. July 20, 1969 had just happened so everybody was in love with the new and bold space adventure taking place at NASA. Herman brought the 3rd stage of his model to school to show it to me. I stuffed it in my desk. The desk we had were wood and steel affairs that were most unkind to the posterior. Mine looked like a box with a chair attached to the top of it and a table bolted on as an afterthought. I liked it because it could contain all my books and my pencil box. I still used a notebook but this was falling in favor of a clipboard.

The book storage area was open on both sides. Books were usually shoved in one side and pulled out the other. All kind of junk collected in there, like paper wads (of course), forgotten pencils, and all sorts of odds and ends. I frequently cleaned out this area but I am not a tidy person. Within a couple of days it liked a dumpster again. I would look at the very trim and orderly girls' desks and scratch my head in amazement. Into this mess of mine I stuffed Herman's very precious Apollo rocket. I figured it would be relatively safe in there until break when I could take it out and admire the thing with scientific wonderment.



### ***What Herman's Apollo/Saturn 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage looked like***

Mr. Ross completed a lesson. We closed our books, shoved them into our storage areas under the seats, and grabbed the books for the next lesson. I pulled mightily on my history book and out fell the Apollo rocket, rattling on the floor! Herman's eyes got about the size of saucers and he fought the overwhelming urge to dive for it. Mr. Ross looked right at us. I was sitting behind Herman at the time. I grabbed the wayward space model and jammed it back into my desk. I got my book open and wondered what would happen next.

It went by without an incident. I think that Herman and I both sweated out about 10 pounds sitting there in stark fear of losing an expensive model. Mr. Ross said nothing about it, but Herman never brought a model to class ever again.

I was put near the windows once, in a row all by myself. Mr. Ross was really giving me a hard time. He thought my low grade average of "C" was the fault of my drawing and talking to Herman. My real problem was that I just disliked school-work and I loathe any type of paperwork to this day. It had nothing to do with the instruction, the course, or the instructor. I just had a strong dislike for schoolwork. I kept my grades high enough to stay active in sports but other than that I had no reason to push it higher. I was simply lazy. As an example of how it could be both Danny and Julia Mahand had straight A averages. They applied themselves, and both were superachievers. I could possibly have done the same, but I just did not want to do it.

One of my new friends was a stockily built fellow I called the "Chevy Man". He loved Chevrolet hotrods, like most of the class did. I was a Ford lover so I was outside again. Chevy Man and I talked a lot about what little we knew about cars. He liked my vivid imagination, my knowledge of the space program, and my drawing.

Chevy had a bit he did about this car hop, like at a drive in, that comes to the order window with a huge order for "47 hamburgers, 10 pizzas, 75 cokes, etc, etc..." When the order arrives, he as the

carhop, looks on in horror at the gigantic load of food he has to carry to the car. It was funny in its own way, and we liked the joke. Chevy moved away after this year, and I never saw this jolly fellow again. Such was the way things were done in school. Had he stayed he probably would have been a permanent part of my clique.

Christmas in 1969, for me at school, was lousy. We all drew names as per usual and put our cash into gifts for those whom we must buy for. I am not sure what the girls got each other. We had a dollar limit. I do not know how much costume jewelry and cheap perfume a dollar can get. Aurora Models made a very cool series of cheap models back in 1969. They had the movie monsters like Dracula and Frankenstein. They also had a series of 1/32nd-scale model cars that came with a pit crew. Most of the male population of 8th grade wanted them. The cafeteria had served a delicacy of turkey and dressing, then we had our Christmas party with more munchies and drinks. We all dived into these goodies with the gusto only preadolescent kids can do. Then it was time to pass out the presents.



***Larry Briggs looks at the camera with his Dracula model on the desk.***

***In front of him is the "Chevy Man"***

Larry Briggs got a big Dracula model. The much in demand model cars were unwrapped along with the airplanes and tanks. Girls made much over the trinkets they got each other. I saw one fellow unwrap his model. It was a Ford Mustang model with lots of chrome bits. It contained the pit crew; a guy with a fire extinguisher, another with a lug wrench, one with a clipboard, one guy waving a checkered flag, a driver, and a girl. All these extras made a simple and small model very neat. My gift was soon passed to me. The package was flat and too small overall to be a model. Struck with apprehension I unwrapped this gift. To my disappointment it was a box of dress handkerchiefs! This was not an appropriate gift for a 14-year-old and I certainly felt it. I had absolutely no use for this. I was shocked. I just stared at the thing and never opened the plastic cover. I choked down my disappointment and talked with Rick and Herman.

"What did ya get, Buzz?"

I showed them and they quietly went back to their own goodies, not commenting on what I got. That's how bad it was. The high point was when Mr. Ross got his gift. He unwrapped the dress shirt and thanked us all. It felt good to see that he liked what we got him.

We went home for 2 weeks for our Christmas vacation. The bus ride home was filled with kids showing off what they got. I kept my gift wrapped in my coat and refused to show it to anybody. When I got home I gave this well-intentioned but badly received gift to my father. I pretty much forgot all about it as I got into vacation and all the freedom that comes with it. Christmas morning I

got a Hotwheels car set with dual Superchargers and miles of track. I wore it out with my collection of cars. I happily got lost in my wonderful gift that Santa brought.



Later the fellow who got me the kerchiefs asked me what I thought of my gift and I flatly told him that they were lousy. He got mad and we exchanged hot words. We didn't have much to say to each other for the rest of the year.

I had an experience in the cloak room. A lot of us kept our coats in there because they were out of the way. The common way for years was to hang our coats on the back of our chairs. They often fell on the floor off the chair backs. The ladies liked to put their coats in the cloak room, even bringing coat hangers to put them on. Stylishly made rabbit fur coats did not belong on the floor. I usually just wadded my cheap, thin jacket up and stuffed it on a shelf in there. It fell on the floor I'd just grab it and fling it back on the shelf. The jacket didn't keep me warm anyway, so I had no love for it.

I went into the cloak room one day to get my coat. It was free time and the class room was mostly empty. I was untangling my coat when one of the larger girls in the class entered the cloak room and grabbed me in a bear hug. She was just fooling around but I gazed at her with horror.

"Leggo!" I protested, struggling in her grip.

She said something mock-sexy and asked me how I liked it. I was close to panic. Her running buddy was in there enjoying the show and she was really getting a hoot out of my struggles. I broke free and fled. I found Danny Bowman and tried to explain to him what happened. He just gawked at me then broke down in laughter. Not much came of this, and I thought it was funny myself. I told no teachers and I let this incident slide for what it was; just fooling around.

Mr. Ross made our life richer in many ways. He was my bus driver. Kids burn up a lot of energy. When we'd get out of school at 3:45 we'd be in need of some sort of a snack. Jack Evans had a gas station next to the Sabine River Bridge. We'd pull in there on our route and everybody would bail out of the bus. We'd buy colas and candy. The can cokes had to be opened, as there were no pop-tops in '69. I got my grape soda with one hole in the top to prevent spillage. We would then load back up on the bus with our treasures. Mr. Ross wasn't the only driver who did this. The Weiland route bus would stop in here too. Mr. Evans seemed to like our short stops at his store. I'm sure it was good for business.

A cola company once came out with an amber colored drink called "Pomac" that was popular with the older riders on the bus. It was a fad to get one of these drinks and pour a pixie stick into it. Pixie Sticks were like pre-sweetened cool aide in a straw you unwound as you ate the stuff.

I tried a Pomac once and I wasn't particularly caught by its taste. I went back to my grape. I found out later that the drink had about 5% alcohol content! That may be what made so popular with the older guys. The drink was pulled off the market about 1970.

I don't think they let the busses stop at stores anymore. That is a bloody shame. Little things like the store stops made school bus riding, usually a boring and pleasurable experience, bearable.

In spite of the fact that I had many friends I considered myself a loner. I spent a lot of my time that way; thinking, drawing, or simply wasting time. Sometimes after school I had my playmates and Rickey Graham. Rickey and I would have many weekend adventures in downtown Greenville. What made me feel on the outside was that I had no running buddies in Lone Oak. Herman was just somebody I met during school days. I didn't even know where he lived. Danny, Robert, Johnny, and the others were mostly aloof. These people were in a clique that excluded outsiders, including Rickey and myself.

The girls in the class were outnumbered at least 2 to 1. They were a rare thing in my class at least. They seemed to know their status and reacted accordingly. They picked and chose who they talked to and more often than not went after boys from other schools or even other parts of the nation.

Drawing became an escape from this environment. By including Herman and other members of my rapidly growing circle of friends in this cartooning twilight zone I often held their attention for hours at a time. We were astronauts, soldiers, jet pilots, racing drivers, and any other adventure I could think of. We gravitated toward each other and formed a clique of our own. The jock clique looked at this with amazement. They had dominated since first grade, and now the "nerd" clique was suddenly gaining status and numbers.

In spite of all this rivalry it was the true outsiders who posed a real threat to life and limb. Rick was showing me the rudiments of how to make myself look presentable. I was learning to comb my hair so it didn't stick up in all directions. This was an earth-shaking event for me in 1969 because prior to this I had very little hair to comb. My hair was close cropped by insistence of my father. Gary Thomas Dooley the Parrot brought a cigar box full of cheap (very very cheap!) multicolor polystyrene combs and sold or gave away them all. I got one myself and Rick showed me how to properly comb my hair. All we did was soak the combs with water and run it through our hair. The wet hair was combed into place and the results were tolerable.

I developed a nervous habit of pushing a lock of hair off my forehead back into my hairline. Bulldozer, ever the red neck, caught onto this and every time I'd do it he'd repeat the movement on himself while giving me this wide-eyed stare of defiance. His reasoning for this is beyond me. The Bulldozer was a true outcast. He was big, somewhat lacking upstairs, and a ticking bomb waiting to go off. He was too "out of it" to be in Danny's elite clique, and too big and vicious to be in my nerd clique. He frightened me and a lot of other people, but perhaps he was lost and trying mightily to figure out how to fit in, anywhere. He was best left alone, and if he did anything we just let it slide like his odd habit of making fun of my pushing my hair out of my eyes. It was his way of seeing how far he could push me. Because I ignored him he couldn't figure out what to do next.

In spite of the lack of females in the class Philip and Eddie were two fellows who could readily get to "first base". Eddie looked like Toney Curtis and was probably the most handsome guy in class. Philip was tall, looked like Charlton Heston, had a soft voice, was a snappy dresser, and managed to "go with" almost every new girl that arrived each year. He reminded me of a hound dog on the hunt.

At the first of the year when we were staking out our claims to desks he and I were talking, happy to see each other again. A new girl came into the room with a load of schoolbooks and



parpheneilia. His head came up and his eyes locked on her. I noticed her too, and thought she was pretty. In a few moments he was standing next to her engaging her in conversation. I was seeing what I considered a master at work, and I was amazed. If I had shuffled over there I was sure she would run screaming from the room. Philip just moved right in and introduced himself. He may have been jumpy on the field but he didn't seem to have any fear at all when it came to the ladies.

My friend Herman and I had a most amusing event one day. Being as how he and I were science fiction fans we thought War of the Worlds was the best movie ever filmed. We taped the sounds of the movie on our portable reel to reel tape recorders to listen at our leisure. I took my recorder to school. I stowed in my new desk's wire book basket with all my other junk. When gym period came we went to the gym to listen to the sound track. I turned the recorder on and there was a scene where this Martian camera is looking for the heroes hiding under a wrecked house. The sound was a really neat throbbing sound, much like a spaceship. Herman and I listened to it outside the entrance to the gym. We were just a few feet away from the history room and it's open windows.

Herman and I were really grooving on the sounds when the bell rang in High School. A large group of high school students stood up all at one time to see what the noise was outside their class room windows. They saw Herman and me and exclaimed "its a tape recorder!"

That was funny. We had them confused and curious and we didn't even know it. It was time to go into the gym and that was the last of the incident.

Herman didn't play football anymore. This was to haunt him later in life. For me, it just joyfully rolled on. I enjoyed the practices, blowing off steam and frustration and showing the jocks that I had what it takes. It wasn't easy, but it was fun.

As much as we wanted to get revenge on Quinlan we did not look forward only to that particular game. The thinking was from week to week, and we concentrated on the opponent of the week rather than who we wanted to clobber.

Concentration could be broken by traumatic events at any time, however. Once we were practicing in shorts and Eddie bit through his tongue. He spent about a half an hour in the middle of the field on his hands and knees spitting blood. We all stood around and stared at him, asking stupid questions.

"Are you okay?"

"Does it hurt?"

No and yes to each of these questions. Eddie had given me this toy skeleton he had made in a Thingmaker. I felt like a fool standing there with this rubber skeleton watching Eddie spit blood all over the grass. I wanted to help him but I didn't have any idea of what to do. Coach Taylor came to the rescue by calling us all over to run plays. He kept an eye on Eddie and kept us away from his misery.

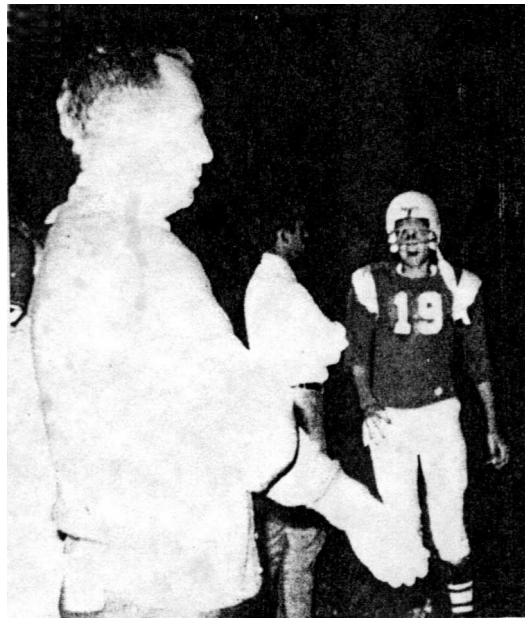


***This is the same Mattel Thingmaker Skeleton Eddie gave me the day he got hurt.***

***Its made of a rubber-like substance, flesh colored, and I decorated it with multicolored ink pens to make it look gross.***

During our game at Blue Ridge I don't know how Eddie managed to play, much less eat. He did play, and we gave our opponents at Blue Ridge a major thrashing of a merciless 36 to 0.

Ronald Posey got his leg badly shattered in this game. Our revenge for him was the stomping Blue Ridge got at our hands. Ronald's leg was really messed up, but some of us didn't know how badly. Rickey was sure Ronald was faking it. On the bus ride home Rickey reached over with his helmet and tapped Ronald's injured leg. Ronald let out a howl and convinced Rick that he was not faking it. As for myself I had both my knees cracked on specialty teams and that was the worst I got.



***Coach Brookins (closest to camera) observes Coach Taylor (in background) and his play calling as the Jr. High team mangles yet another foe.***

Our confidence was growing in our abilities and Coach Taylor was showing positive signs that he was pleased with our conduct. On the edge of our camp, giving expert advice and tempering it with a barbed sense of humor was the great Coach Brookins. He looked like Dracula and scared the blazes out of me (and probably everybody else). He was a first class coach, though, dating back 1955. He was also the school superintendent. He wielded great power. He was soft-spoken and very psychological in his approach to kids. He had the ability to make you feel 3 inches high if you did something wrong or invincible if you needed building up. He was a most remarkable man. He made Lone Oak School into what it became.

I do not know what all he did for Coach Taylor in the way of advice or changes, but I know Coach Taylor was gaining notoriety as a coach. His junior high teams had only lost one game last year and this year it looked as if it would do at least as well. One thing was certain, he could get kids to play football.

In our third game of the season, after Blue Ridge, we destroyed our foes in a 48 to 12 dance of destruction. Junior high had only 6 minute quarters, so it can be seen what kind of engine we had. This last team made themselves notable by being the first team to score on us, racking up 12 points. Danny and Robert were angry, blaming the B-team and reserves for letting the bad guys score on us. They wanted shut-outs.

Everybody got to play in this game. I spent a confusing 4th quarter running around out there and trying to stay out of trouble. I couldn't see from my safety position but thank goodness I didn't stay out there very long. Coach Taylor was reluctant to release me to the full fury of football. He let me have my moment in the game and that was it.

"We're saving you for next year, Charlie-O."

We had our blood up. Other teams in the district begin to hear about us and began to fear us. It was as if they were hunkered down behind a hill, and could see our dust cloud. They could hear the distant thunder of a stampede of angry Buffaloes heading right for them. Fear us, we are mighty!

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## Hop, a Skip and a Tanned Hide

I like gym class. We could roller skate or goof around in the bleachers. It was right after lunch in our 8th grade. I thought of it as a long break from being in class. Other guys did too, but in a different way.

We could go directly from lunch to the gym and start messing around in there. If we finished lunch early we could go on in and shoot a few baskets without anybody bothering us. We even hid balls to play with during our times in the gym. I had a beatup old ball hidden in the crawl-space under the junior high locker-room. This was a crafty way of making sure I could have a ball on this break. I called this my "sentimental ball" for no other reason than it sounded neat.

I'd get this old ball that had strips of leather gone and chunk the under inflated thing at the basket. I'd get some gratification when it would sometimes go into the net. I had no illusions that I was a basketball player. I just wanted to learn to play the game. Nobody showed me how so I tried to learn on my own.

Mr. Ross pretty much left us to our own devices in gym-class. Sometimes Mrs. Brookins helped out. Mostly it was pick up games that were wild and crazy. These were played half court to often half-understood ground rules. Often there would be an exchange of words, like this:

"You fouled me, man!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

I was unsure what a foul was. Nobody had explained it to me. All I knew was that we couldn't tackle each other. Other games were rough and tumble. Once in the 7th grade we played a piggyback game in the gym. It was sort of like wrestling or something. I was on Jerry McGee's back. We were battling somebody and I got a push. I lost my grip on Jerry's neck. I hit the maple floor from about six feet up with my upper back. I had learned how to fall by playing football, so my head didn't hit the hardwood.

B O O M!!

It felt like somebody had whacked me across my shoulders with a baseball bat. The air burst out of my lungs and I was stunned. Jerry immediately turned around and looked at me like I was dieing. I thought so myself.

I gasped out "I can't breathe!"

Coach Taylor came to my aide, grabbing my belt and pulling up so my lungs could expand. Soon I could breath again. He and Jerry picked me up and put me on the bench where I sat to regain my wind. It scared everybody in the class. I don't recall anymore piggyback games. Fun in the gym. Ouch.

Once I went off campus for lunch with Rickey, Ronald, and David. They went into the cafe in front of town and ordered their food. Rick bought mine. There was a pool table in the cafe and after eating they fed quarters into the table for game after game. I didn't pay any attention to the clock but after a while this seemed like an awful long lunch period. Soon they put their sticks down and we went back to school. We arrived in time to go back to class. I was surprised we had eaten lunch and played pool all the way through lunch and gym-class! I love my gym time and I didn't want to miss it just to knock a few billiard balls around. I didn't even like pool. Therefore I decided to not go back up town again with them.

One day Mr. Ross decided to call roll before we went to gym class. Somebody must have seen the youthful members of 8th grade come back late a few times and asked questions. Right after lunch we all went into the classroom.

When Mr. Ross took the roll he discovered much to his anger and surprise that Rick, David, and Ronald were missing. The rest of us were sent on to gym class. I spent my usual half-hour chunking at the backboard and having a good time. All too soon it was over and we all went to our 8th grade fortress on the lawn.

Oddly, Mr. Ross wasn't there so we engaged in horseplay and the usual nonsense pre-adolescent kids do where there is nothing else going on. This came to a quick halt when Mr. Ross returned leading our 3 pool players. They had been caught. Mr. Ross was visibly shaken by their misuse of his trust. Each had gotten 3 licks by the teacher, and Mr. Ross didn't like it one bit. Then he laid down the law.

"From now on everybody will come to this room and we'll call roll before going into the gym. Nobody can go into town for lunch unless they have a note from their parents. Nobody can leave the lunch-room early."

Oh, man! Thanks a lot, guys! You just cut some 10 to 15 minutes off my favorite time of the day! I sulked for over a half-hour.

I once accidentally violated this rule by going into the gym right after lunch by habit. I was chunking away wondering where everybody was when in marched my classmates.

"You're in trouble, Charlie!" some of them gleefully told me.

I felt a quick surge of panic and wondered what to do. Mr. Ross came into the gym and saw me holding my sentimental ball and looking confused and about ready to cry. I hadn't done anything wrong, I just went to gym class early.

Mr. Ross quietly went up into the bleachers to sit in his eagle's eye perch to watch us. When we went back to class later nothing happened. Mr. Ross didn't think I was one of the type to skip class so he let it slide.

This time.

That he trusted me made me feel better about my lapse of the rules. I didn't do it again, but I did beg him to let us go to gym class early from time to time. He never did, and I suspect he was hand-cuffed by the school. He may have wanted us to go to gym class early but they wouldn't let him. He sure was one great guy, and I loved him like a grandfather. Perhaps he trusted us too much.

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## High

Victory after victory is a heady narcotic drug. It can convince a person that they are invincible and can do anything. It was reflected by me in my disdain for school-work and by others in different ways. Fed by this narcotic a lot of us begin to take risks. Part of this was sexual in nature. It was to have powerful repercussions.

Nothing in life is pure. There are positives and negatives. Confidence building and faith in a persons own abilities is a positive part of athletics. Soldiers develop this and carry it to its extreme in a large part by aggression. This is why they often become arrogant and promiscuous. I saw this happening to us, but at the naive age of 13 or 14 I didn't know what it was. Mr. Ross tried his best to understand our aggressiveness and keep it in check in his classroom at least. Perhaps I am wrong about my observations. Maybe when kids enter puberty the hormones overwhelm all sanity. I don't know. I think this over-confidence that we "could do anything" led to many a problem in the future.

Lightning first struck when Bulldozer impregnated a cheerleader who was in the seventh grade. This was looked upon by the rest of us with a large amount of snickering, amazement, and snide remarks. A great deal of pregnant jokes made the rounds. After all, it couldn't happen to us. We were smart enough to keep our remarks to ourselves when Bulldozer was in earshot.

Bulldozer was, as I said, an outcast. As such he was looked upon as big and strong and stupid except by my group who looked upon him as big and strong and stupid and dangerous. Nobody could talk to him and some of us looked at this predicament with something like horrified confusion.

Bulldozer did the decent thing, he married the girl. There was no legal abortion in those times and the Victorian moral values were still quite strong in society. Bulldozer left us that year. We would see him one more time this year, and again in highschool.

I remember the first time I paid any attention to Bulldozer's girl. We were sitting on the bus waiting to go to a game. There weren't many of us on the bus. The coach hadn't shown up yet and we were unsupervised. Gunner was making a lot of noise as usual and was feeling aggressive because we were going to have a game that night. He also loved to be the center of attention. Anyone was fair game for his somewhat amusing and snide remarks. Bulldozer's girlfriend came on the bus in her cheerleader outfit. Nobody knew that she was pregnant at the time. We only took one bus to the game so cheerleaders and players rode in the same vehicle. Gunner lit into her, asking her questions like "what was it like to have all that equipment?".

She was pretty and built spectacularly well for any girl her age. I looked on and wondered what was going to happen next. I expected her to draw back and knock the daylights out of Gunner, but she came right back with some remarks of her own before she beat a tactical retreat off the bus. She went elsewhere, where the air was cleaner and the natives less boorish.

I was taken aback by this conduct. Why she didn't tell on Gunner and get him the paddling he needed I don't know. I could not understand why she just accepted this treatment. I guess she expected boys to behave like that. I didn't like it but as usual I did nothing about it.

So it was that Bulldozer and his cheerleader lady disappeared from our midst for most of the rest of the year. It made practice less dangerous for me and class time more peaceful. I filed the incident away and forgot all about him and her. I never saw her again at school, but I did hear of her. Even if she did come back to school, what could I say to her? "Hows the baby doing?" I think not. At any rate we never talked to each other, so I didn't miss her all that much. Unfortunately she was to engage in debasement and self-destructive behavior for most of the rest of her life. That was the real tragedy. She was to indirectly touch my life again in the near future.

Back in the more sane and simple world of Texas football Coach Taylor looked at his troops with a pleased expression. Our 4th game of the year was in progress and we were dismantling the opposition with touchdown after touchdown.

I was bouncing on the balls of my feet and yelling abuse at the bad guys. This took my mind off the cold weather that was getting worse by the week and it kept me reasonably loose and warm. I'd soon come down with a cold or the flu and would miss a game, but everytime I was there I was a cheerleader for our side.

Out on the field Danny had hit pass after pass. After a while Philip was allowed to quarterback. Danny called out his signals in a growl. Philip sounded like a cough. His voice was a little halting. I could tell who was quarterbacking just by the style of signal calling. Eddie would carry the ball and thunder into the hapless defenders blocked by Rick, Robert, Nat Wade, and others. They

simply couldn't stop us. We didn't just beat them, we destroyed them. Johnny Hooten and Frankie Payne gave them fits.

By the time the last whistle blew the confused and beaten opposition had lost by 48 to 8. Even high school coaches began to take notice, on both sides. This up and coming talent was to be a force to be reckoned with the next year.

We went to the locker room and then to the bus, for our trip home.

Boisterous horseplay, general kidding around and high noise level dominated this ride back. In the back of the bus some of the guys and girls participated in heavy necking, curtailed by darkness. I'd sneak a peek at this somewhat open display of affection and wonder to the pit of my soul what it was like to have someone love you like that.

As I figured I came down with the flu and missed the next game, and much to my dismay Picture Day too. My contribution in the game was not missed as our guys pummeled the bad guys by a sturdy 48 to 12. I disliked missing another chance to get game time. I sure hated missing picture day. Somehow Woody wound up with MY jersey for the photo shoot. There was a shortage of Jerseys, so a lot of numbers duplicated. Rick was number 54 in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade team photo at bottom.



***44:Roy Crow, 70 Lynn McGee, 67 Rickey Richardson, 50 Nat Wade***

***30 Bobby Underwood, 75 Ray Higgins 35 Fred Cook***





***54:Rickey Graham, 62: Robert Vice, 31: Randy Childress, 24: Philip Andrews, Managers David Dillon, and Jimmy Payne***

***20: Danny Bowman 44: Frankie Payne 86 Eddie Bell***

***87 David Morgan 90 Rickey Smiley 39 Rickey McCallum 94 Glen Cook***

***Not pictured: 46 Charles Tarrant***

I had been weakened by my illness but I did as best I could during practice. I had forgotten who we were playing next and I didn't notice anything special about our training. I went through the routine as usual.

It was a home game and I ate my supper that evening at a local cafe. Alone in my jersey, I munched my hamburger and drank my cola. I then went back to the school and sat out of the wind in front of the gym. Slowly guys begin to filter in. Coach Taylor arrived and opened the gym. We streamed in and went to the locker-room.

I dressed in my uniform and picked up my helmet. I placed my glasses on a 2x4 board nailed to the wall as a sort of coat rack. The glasses fell between the board and the rough painted wall!

Horried, I managed to push them up with my fingers and got them out of there. The lenses were deeply scratched in 3 or 4 places, but at least I had the expensive things back. I put them in my locker and went out on the field. I wondered if the accident was a bad sign.

Thinking on this I trotted out with the guys and we went through the warm-up and drills. Then I suddenly noticed who we were playing.

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Quinlan

It was them! It was the team we had vowed revenge upon! It was the only people to beat us last year and break Fowler's leg in the process. They were here now, on our turf. Their hump-backed field was miles away across the lake. This was the night we had waited all year for. Quinlan was going down!

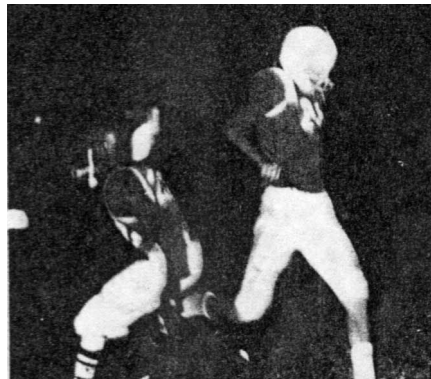
I stood in line in a drill and looked a scant 5 yards to my left. There stood a member of the Panther team. He had a large white Q on his blue helmet and a Gumout bubblegum decal on his helmet front. I had a similar decal on my helmet back and for a brief second or two we were brothers on the gridiron. Then we each advanced in line and broke eye contact. We did not see each other again.

I think they may have feared us. Their solace was that they had beaten us last year. Maybe they could do it here. Perhaps they could, and only time would tell. Warm-up was over. It was time to settle the score.

Philip sent the ball down the field in a tumbling arc to them. They caught it and came forward. The defense was all over them and they soon punted it back to us. The people watching us cheered with every tackle or play. When Frank or Eddie broke free for a long one or Danny rifled a pass to Johnny Hooten or Philip everybody yelled with glee. We had Quinlan. They could not control us at all. The Panthers were drowned under a tide of powerful running, accurate passing, and our huge defense. They simply could not handle the defense. Robert Vice and Rickey were all over them. By halftime it was decided, 40 to 0. We went to the locker-room filled with the pleasure of vengeance. Fowler had been avenged, now the stain to our perfect record would be eliminated.

Coach Taylor also had a most unusual predicament. We were up 40 points to zero at the half. He didn't want to run up a score of unbelievable proportions, yet he didn't want to blow it and look like a fool either. It was entirely possible he'd get a score of 100 points! That would be embarrassing. He had to pull his big guns off the field and soon. Philip was already quarterbacking and Danny was having a fit. Danny loved to play. He loved to win. He had a heart as big as all Texas for sportsmanship, so reluctantly he accepted his fate and fidgeted on the sidelines. Coach Taylor let him play on the defensive because it kept Danny calm and we needed him out there to pressure the pass.

I was on fire. I wanted at Quinlan. I wanted out there! I asked Coach Taylor to let me in and he did. We went back out. It happened fast. Philip threw another pass for a touchdown. Coach Taylor almost bit a hole in his lip. It was now 47 to nothing. He was getting antsy. I was sent in on the kick-off. Roy Crow was the only black guy on the team and he was out there with me and the 6 other guys. Philip kicked the ball and we took off.



***Roy Crow signals 'GO' as Philip Andrews prepares to kickoff.***

Nobody blocked me, nobody. I saw the guy catch the ball and run at us. I bent down and braced myself. The impact was tremendous. It knocked me down and flattened me. I don't know what kind of shape the guy I tackled was in but I was okay. Roy had seen me tackle the guy and was shocked. He had hit him on the fly and got up laughing at me in disbelief. On the sidelines Coach Taylor looked out on the field and was confused for a second. He looked at Gunner, standing next to him.

"Who made that tackle?" Coach Taylor asked him.

"Charlie," Gunner replied.

Coach Taylor's eyes widened a bit.

"Is that right?" he exclaimed, amused.

Later I went back out. I messed up because I didn't cover my area. My only excuse was that I was almost blind and didn't know my area of responsibility. Because I was so nearsighted putting me at safety was a bad move anyway. The Quinlan quarterback completed a pass to a wide-open receiver in my area. Coach Taylor pulled me out but he let me back in again to finish the game at linebacker. I had an excellent time and loads of fun. Rickey did his usual terrific job of protecting me.

The final score was a very lopsided 66 to 12, but we really had no place to go celebrate. Coach Taylor was relieved that we didn't totally destroy the Panthers. It was a unique position to be in, to try to keep the score from going too high.

There was school tomorrow and we would go to the High School pep-rally to wish our counterparts well. That's where we would celebrate our victory and our revenge. I rode home with my parents. They expressed some concern over the way I had tackled the guy from Quinlan, but I shrugged it off. They worried that I'd be hurt all the time I was on the field. I didn't care. I babbled about how great it had been. I was on cloud nine. Go Big Red!



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Winding Down

I don't remember waking up the next day with any soreness. If I did I'm sure I relished in my battle scars. I do know there was a general feeling of accomplishment and the satisfying feeling of revenge. I do not know how Fowler felt about it, and I won't say we did it for him only. We did it for ourselves and our sense of honor. That may sound greedy or big headed, but as a team up until we met Quinlan last year we hadn't lost a game. Now we had avenged that loss.

Thus we had one game left. For those of us in the 8th grade it would be the last Junior High game ever. All the guys wanted us to have a perfect season and end our last game in a big way. We trained as hard as if it was our first game of the season. The more fatalistic among us, like Herman, realized the finality of this last game. No more would we wear the red jerseys with the white inserts over the shoulders. I took my jersey out of the stack of clean clothes and looked at it for one last time. I wanted to keep the beautiful thing, forever. Some guys somehow managed to get their jerseys, but I would never score a single jersey. I stuck my gear in my bag and took it to school for the next to last time. It would be washed after tonight's game and turned in on Monday.

Mr. Ross had learned long ago not to go berserk with the homework on game nights. He had been a coach once himself and he knew not to load us down. Most of the class day was spent on instruction and no homework. It allowed us to get our mind on our game and not be distracted by something else. It was just one more thing that made Mr. Ross great in our eyes.

Danny and his pals got their wish. So did I for that matter. This last game was as big a blow out as all the others. If they got the ball we stopped them in their tracks. When we got the ball we scored. I believe I got to play some, mostly because it was my last time on a Junior High field. I think everybody got game time. Our last and final Junior High game was 48 to 0.

It was a fitting climax to a rare season of never knowing defeat. We had slammed everyone with an average of over 40 points per game. No one had beaten us this year, no one had even come close. It was a stunning season. We felt awesome and something like the Greek heroes of old. We had gotten the Golden Fleece, beaten Medusa, destroyed the Minotaur, and had defeated Xerxes and his Persian Hosts. We had conquered the world. We were undefeated.



***We got our water from an Army "Jerry Can" back in those days. Eddie Bell sits on the Bench, closest to the camera. Danny Bowman, 20, leans to his right.***

The school even presented us with the first team trophy I can ever remembering us receiving. It was wooden, chrome, and brass, like trophies anywhere. On top of the trophy was a 4-inch high figure of a football player. On the square base was 4 more similar figures. It was inscribed "District Champions" and had on the tower part '1969'. We thought it was just grand, of course. Thirty years later the school still had it, in mint condition, residing almost incognito on the bottom shelf of a well-stocked trophy case.



We looked forward to our highschool days. We smelled State Championships and T.V. time. There was the possibility of playing on that unique surface called artificial turf. There was the chance to get in the Greenville Paper and score bigger headlines than the Greenville Lions. We thought big and we believed we were a dynasty about to happen. Local teams and the news media could ignore us at their peril.

This was the last season of 8 man football for Lone Oak and many of it's traditional foes. This also was the last season for the old field behind the school. The field that had been used for pre-World War II eleven man, 6 man and 8 man football would be no more after this week. We had given it a wonderful last game, and last season. We had made history and did it without a single loss. It was a fitting end to a long tradition.

Feeling a little disappointed that we didn't have bi-district and regional games like the High School teams did we made ready for other things. Things like field trips and basketball.



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## Field Trips

We had a field trip coming up to the Museum of Natural History. This was way too cool, and so really neat that Herman and I just could not believe it! We looked forward to seeing dinosaur bones, stuffed animals, and all the neat stuff in there. Mr. Ross himself was in a good mood and joked with us before we left on the school bus to go there. Once he took a sheet of paper and wrote on it "A B C D Goldfish?"

I said it out loud and he replied "A. R. No Goldfish."

Then he wrote "O.S.M.R, C.D. Tail?"

This was a funny way of showing us how letters can represent words in a certain fashion. It was very interesting. We had a popular nonsense verse we said in 1969 called "Two Dead Boys." I was surprised he knew it. It went something like this, but there are numerous variations:

"The sun was shining bright that night

When two dead boys got up to fight

Back to back they faced each other

Drew their swords and shot each other.

The deaf policeman heard a noise

Pulled his gun and shot the 2 dead boys.

If you doubt my story is true

Ask Sam the blind man,

He saw it too.

Mr. Ross could be very amusing and he loved us all. I think he did not know how much we loved him back.

We eventually loaded on our dilapidated and uncomfortable school bus and made the trip all the way to the Museum of Natural History in Dallas.

I don't remember what the building looked like, because I was overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the big city. I do remember that we were kept together for the tour. We even had a guide and she showed us around. She also read us the riot act on the rules. We weren't to touch any exhibits and not cross into any roped off areas. We were to stay with the tour at all times.

It was a truly marvelous place. I saw animals that I had never seen before, like the Bald Eagle. It was beautiful, even stuffed and mounted. I looked with interest at the stuffed Buzzard exhibit, looking over the bird I had as my nickname. Then we all stayed overlong at the Buffalo exhibit,

admiring the big shaggy bison that was our school mascot. The hugeness of the animal was not lost on us.

I was disappointed by the dinosaur exhibit. All I saw was a pile of unidentifiable bones embedded in sandstone. The description said Mammoth or Mastodon, but I wanted T-Rex or something really dinosaurish. I had expected a standing skeleton like at the museums in the movies. That was the curse of too much T.V.

Another disappointment was the art gallery. I saw mostly photographs and really inane globs of paint and lines on canvas. As the class cartoonist I had my own ideas of what was art and what wasn't. I would have loved the old masters and such, but what I looked at looked like kindergarten junk. I still refer to such as "forgettable art."

There were all types of animals, all stuffed and mounted, on display everywhere. There were lots of things to see and look over. I could have spent hours in the place, but all too soon it was time to go.

We went to the Fair Park Science Building, mesmerized by everything in there. The little earphones that we could listen to made the 3 dimensional exhibit very entertaining. We could go where we wanted to and look at each exhibit for as long as we wanted to.

There was also the aquarium next door. Fish the likes of which country boys only dream about populated the huge tanks. It was cool in the place and we enjoyed our time in there.

On yet another field trip we had gone to the Dallas fair grounds to the Great Hall. This magnificent structure with a 7 foot tall bronze Statue of Liberty outside is boring as sin to children but I learned to appreciate the things that were explained to me that day. There is a mural to the left as a person walks in. This amazing work of art was explained to us by a tour guide, telling us who the people in the history-spanning painting were and what the many things in the painting meant.

It represented Texas History, from the Mezo-American days to the time of it's creation to about 1935. A person can examine this picture for several hours and discover something new each time it is looked at. In 1969 most, if not all of us in the 8th grade were bored by what we considered at the time nothing more than a very elaborate doodle on the wall.

I examined the building. I discovered an odd series of double doors in the wall of the building. Herman was with me. Over the doors was a name plate, with two dates on it. Herman and I took two steps back. Was this somebody's tomb we were standing in front of? Was the mouldering remains of some Texas celebrity from ages gone by just inside those steel doors? I never knew, but at the time the place was suddenly creepy in the extreme. Good grief, were we in a mausoleum?

I felt relief when we eventually left the building, but I remember it well. I don't know if anyone is entombed in the wall, and I have done no research to find out. I do remember the painting and part of the lecture. Every time I went back over the past decades the building had been locked, but I have always came up to the glass doors and looked at the painting, barely visible in the great hall.



I have often felt that basketball has never been good to me. For the most part, I guess I was wrong. The future held adventures in basketball the like of which my young mind could not even imagine. If someone from the future was to come to me back then and tell me what was coming up I would have labeled that person stark raving mad. Basketball was okay, but I didn't like it. The reason was that I knew nothing about it.

I had not improved much since last year. I had ball control problems with my small hands, and I could not dribble at all with my left. I practiced dribbling at every opportunity, even sitting on the bench during daily practice, but all I managed to do was get to where I could dribble a little without looking directly at the ball.

The other guys more than made up for my shortcomings. Danny Bowman and even big ole Robert Vice could play one spectacular game of basketball. I would watch with envious fascination as Danny, Robert, and Philip set fire to the nets. Philip had a bad habit of dribbling once before he shot. This enabled a defender to get into a better position on him, to try to block his shot. Rick was big and tall but not as fast as he needed to be. He also had a bad eye, and that left him at a disadvantage in the fast moving world of basketball. Gunner had some ability, but he wasn't even close to Danny. Herman, and eventually Frankie, and Eddie, didn't want to play basketball. Herman surprised me, because he played basketball a lot in pickup games. He told me he had asthma and didn't think he was coordinated enough to play school basketball, as if I was. Go figure.

Even in the 7th grade a lot of guys could play better than I. Of that group only a couple of them even tried to play. One day I was exasperated and I asked Rick why the dickens I should play this stupid game. He said it'd keep me in shape. So I played and well as I knew how, which wasn't very well, and practiced just to "stay in shape."

I began to develop an aggressive attitude in practice. I'd attack the ball, attempting to slap it out of a guy's hands or trying to block his shot. This drove Coach Taylor nuts as it pulled me out of position, leaving an entire zone open.

I learned to keep an eye on the basket in warm-ups. We would form a ragged arc and shoot at the basket. Some guys would rebound but most guys had a ball they wanted because they liked it better than another for some reason. If anyone rebounded that particular ball the guy wanted it back, like now. If I took my eyes off the rim chances were good I'd get beamed by a ball. It doesn't hurt, but it sure is embarrassing. I had balls passed to me unexpectedly blasting my glasses off or smacking me on the side of my head. The earpieces of my glasses block my peripheral vision at a certain angle. This was my blind spot, and I still have it today. I learned not to wear my expensive glasses in basketball games. If I was on the bench I'd sometimes wear them there, but I preferred to leave them in the locker room. I couldn't see the numbers on the scoreboard without them, though.

On picture day for Basketball we went into the gym and formed two rows on the top of the bleachers. I was sitting next to Rick at the end of the top row and happy as a clam. Then the photographer wanted me on the front row because of my small size. Nobody would move over so I shoehorned in between two guys who just sat there like stumps. They ignored my protestations that they move just a little bit. In this uncomfortable position I had my first team picture made in school.



***They wouldn't move over and Coach Taylor said nothing, so I just squeezed in and dealt with it as my first team picture was taken.***

In mid-January we went to Campbell and played in a tournament there. We let loose Thunder on the hapless kids from Cumby, destroying them 69 to 19. Danny had scored 25 points and Robert had 21. Eddie fouled out, really making him dislike this game of basketball. I sat on the bench and grooved on our win. More games happened soon.

On the 18th we wound up in the consolation bracket championship. I don't know who beat us, and I really didn't care. We were in a championship game and that was cool. We were up against Bland. Who was Bland? I never heard of them before. Rickey set me straight.

"Bland ain't got no football team. All they play is basketball, like Boles Home and Campbell."

"If they play only basketball," I said, "then they must be good at it."

"Yeah," Rick replied, "That's why it means we are good at this if we can beat a team that only plays basketball. It is beating them at their own game."

Satisfied with this explanation, I settled in to watch the game after we warmed up. Danny took it to them early, and the defense handled Bland very well. We scored 7 points and Bland scored none. Into the second quarter Bland broke the ice, but just barely. By halftime we had 16 points to Bland's 3. Coach Taylor knew he had a victory, and this was one game a lot of guys were going to get to play in. After the half time shooting Lone Oak lowered the boom again. We put in 12 points, boosting our score to 28, and Bland put in only 1. Mr. Taylor took pity on the hapless team and dumped in the reserves. Bland's scoring went up dramatically. Ours remained the same. With only seconds left Coach Taylor sent me in. I got on the floor, baggy shorts and all, and the ball was jumped at the free-throw line. Confused for a second, I took off up the court followed by my teammates. Philip took a pass at the top of the key and in about 2 strides laid the ball up for 2. I just kept out of his way. Running around like a chicken with it's head cut off, I was frantically looking for somebody to cover when the final buzzer sounded before Bland could toss the ball in.

We had won the 1970 Campbell Tournament Consolation Championship, beating Bland 40 to 14. Danny Bowman alone had scored almost as much as Bland's entire team, with 13 points. Mr. Taylor knew he had some good talent on his team, and he wondered what this group might do in High School.

All the holidays came and went. Mr. Ross seemed to be leveling off attitude wise, and things were getting better all around. What messed this up was that I missed the bus to a game once and spent most of the night at the empty school by myself. My folks were supposed to get me at a certain hour. They weren't home, so it would do no good to call. I was marooned. I sat on the steps in front of the school when someone drove up in the parking lot. It was one of the highschool Superjocks. He was real popular with everyone including the ladies, and was looked upon as one cool dude by one and all. I told him why I was there and he said he'd take me to the game. We drove around Lone Oak for a while and he talked about football and girls.

We returned to the school and we went into the gym. There were several guys in there already with the lights on and shooting baskets. I sat in the bleachers and wondered when he would take me to my game. He then told me that he wasn't taking me to the game. I don't know if he lied to me or I just misunderstood him. At any rate I was there for several hours. The guys left and I returned to my perch on the front steps. I had the unique perspective of watching the bus return from a game that I was supposed to be at. Everybody was stunned to see I was still there and some thought it funny. Nobody ribbed me about it however, and that surprised me,

I didn't miss another bus to a basketball game for a very long time. I didn't forgive the Superjock, either. A man I held in high esteem had broken his word to me. I did not forgive, or forget.

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## End of an Era

Track and field came and went. Rick showed remarkable speed for a fellow so large. Danny Bowman and Eddie were also very fast. Johnny Hooten was a very speedy guy, too. We got our picture taken for the yearbook on the side of the 8 man field. I had on a sweatshirt with a Buffalo emblem on the front and it had "Lone Oak School" around the emblem. I wanted the emblem in the picture so I am the only guy on the front row of the Junior High Track Team that isn't clutching his ribs from the cold. It was very cold that day! There we were in shorts and t-shirts acting like it was the long awaited summertime and freezing our tails off. Any awards we won that year in track were put away with thousands of others ranging from volleyball to tennis.



**Robert Vice, Philip Andrews, Rickey Graham, Randy Childress, Frankie Payne, Eddie Bell**

**Johnny Hooten, Rickey Smiley, Charles Tarrant, Glen Cook**

Bulldozer returned to our midst. His marriage was annulled after the child was born, and he got on with his schooling. He was even on the track team. I guess they had cut him some slack or something. I half anticipated his ex-wife coming back, but she did not. Bulldozer wasn't as aggressive as he used to be, but he was still best left alone. I did so. He didn't bother me either.

While we ran track the girls played volleyball in the district. It was never a big draw, and girls did not run track back then. The greatest female athlete we had was Julia Mahand. She was a fine intelligent lady and I think she could be an example for her peers. She would talk with me and I thank her for letting be a friend. Females were seemingly so distant then. Even Julia could make it quite clear when she wanted to be left alone.

In class Mr. Ross' attitude took a turn for the worse. Wondering why, we found out he was going into retirement. He really didn't want to, but it was said he had to for health reasons. He felt bad about it, and the system, but we forgave him for his gruffness. Every one of us loved him for as long as he lived.

A notable incident happened just as the year was coming to a close. T-shirt weather was back and everyone had spring fever. David Dillion, one of Elaine Weatherly's boyfriends, was a tough edged fellow who was a rival of Rambling. The two of them had disagreements over Elaine Weatherly and she enjoyed the attention. David Dillion also liked to push close to the edge with his behavior. He came to class with a tee-shirt that was very risqué. It said in large letters "BIG RED CATS ARE DANGEROUS" and had a drawing of a snarling red tiger. Below that in much smaller letters was inscribed something mildly obscene. The shirt was aqua blue, making the red lettering stand out.

So attired, David Dillion sat at his desk. Mr. Ross was in a good mood that day. He wrote something on the board. He turned and bent over his text. He happened to look up and spied David Dillion's shirt.

"Big red cats are dangerous?" Mr. Ross read out loud.

Dillion broke into an embarrassed grin.

"You know any big red cats?" Mr. Ross asked, jokingly.

David Dillion just shook his head and his face turned bright crimson. The final line was just below David's desktop so Mr. Ross didn't know what the t-shirt really said. Danny and his group were guffawing and grinning. My clique just stared and grinned. The girls stayed inscrutable. It was a riot and a perfect way to end the year. Mr. Ross had his sense of humor back and we felt his warmth one last time.

David turned his shirt inside out at the first opportunity, and he never wore it school again.

One day the guys all left to go to the "Fat Stock Show". I didn't go, because it didn't interest me. So I sat in a class full of girls and did my lessons while my buddies sat in a smelly cold barn in Fort Worth and looked at cows. For some reason someone took a picture of the girls and me in the classroom. Why someone took this picture I do not know. When the guys went they went fast because the books are still open. I had a pleasant if boring day.



Our graduation from Junior High to Senior High was a big affair. We even had a graduation party in Prairie Valley, where Vicki Pipkin and Anita Green sang a song. The food was not at all bad either. My mother took me to the Sam Swartz store in Greenville and bought me my very first suit. It was an ugly brown thing and I didn't like it all that much. It was needed for our graduation, so I dealt with it.



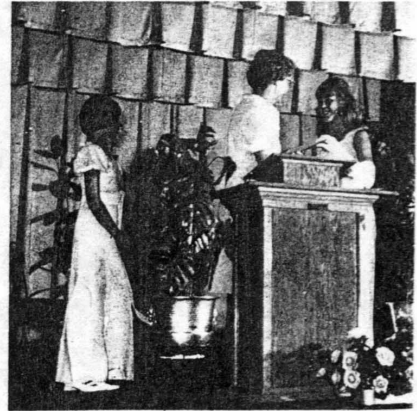
JULIA MAHAND  
Valedictorian



CARLA BELLAH  
Salutatorian

At the appointed time we lined up, dressed in suits, evening gowns for the ladies, and marched into the school. It took place in the auditorium. Julia Mahand was valedictorian. She delivered a speech that was received to thunderous applause from the sympathetic crowd in the auditorium. She had just recently lost a parent, I think it was her father. For her to recover and do this and do it so well showed a strength of character far and beyond any we had shown on the gridiron or maple. She kept her grades up, her chin up, and wowed them at the graduation. One heck of a lady!

After Julia's address, we listened to Carla Bellah give the salutatorian speech. Then we filed onto the stage in alphabetical order and we were given our diplomas. It was a right of passage from childhood to adolescence. For me it marked a milestone of great proportions. Having failed once in school I wanted to never do that again.



We had some sort of party later to celebrate our graduation. I saw Herman's parents for the first time and I was impressed with the scholarly syntax of Herman's father. As former grade schoolers who were now Freshmen in High School we chatted for one last time before the summer break, then we went our way.

Summer was here and we were free!

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## The Park

All through Grade School and Junior High, at the end of the school year, we'd have a big bash at the Greenville City Park. It is now called Graham Park. These outings were wonderful times.

I knew a lot about this place because when I was 4 and 5 years old we lived in a house over the hill next to the rail road bridge. Nothing remains of that house, but the cattle barn behind it and some of the foundation stumps. We used to go to the park for entertainment when I lived up there. We used to fish in the lake, and feed the ducks. There also was a minature golf course next to the park. All that remains of that is some of the bases and buildings, overgrown with weeds and brush.

The park had huge slides, swings, gigantic merry-go-rounds, and a train on a big oval track. The track was about 1/8th of a mile. The train consisted of an engine and 3 cars. You could ride in the thing and it was the most popular attraction at the park. The Engineer would take his tickets, board up, then take the screaming passengers on a few laps of the circuit. There was a tunnel-like garage the train went through. The girls on the train loved to screech as they went through it. Everybody enjoyed it.

The park also had a small zoo that I liked. They had bears and monkeys. Both types of creatures knew how to beg for handouts of candy or popcorn. The cages had an outer fence that protected us from the animals and the animals from us.

The monkeys were Rhesus Monkeys from India. They had a substantial colony in a big cage. There must've been well over a hundred of the primates in the enclosure. They were indifferent to our presence because if a monkey looks right at somebody it is a threat. They would beg for handouts by sticking their arms out of their cage. They spent most of their time in the social behavior of grooming and sitting. Sometimes one or two would take off in the "rips" around the cage, amazing us with their ability to move at high-speed around the upper parts of the cage.

There used to be a gigantic cigarette smoking chimpanzee located near where the swings are now. He had a cage about the size of a bathroom and spent all of his time sitting on a trapeze. Somebody would toss him a cigarette and he'd puff away. He was big, hairy, and skinny. When he died there was a rumor somebody poisoned the old fellow. I can't confirm this, and I don't think it happened. He was very old. He was called "Lucky", I think. At least, by us.

Oddities and rumors abounded. This big man-made boulder held a plaque. Some of us would climb on it and tap on it to hear the hollow sound inside. It was rumored said they sealed up somebody inside there years ago. It sent chills up our collected spines. It was part of the mystique of the place, even if it was a big fat fairy tale.

In addition to the train and other rides mentioned earlier there were amusements. The Engineer might call in his helpers, and they would go to work setting up the entire park. They would put up a boat ride in real water, sort of like a merry-go-round in a tub. They'd put up some cars in a similar set and a carousel. It was loads of fun for the pre-teen sect.

We all wore out the see-saw, the big slides and swings, and climbed all over the monkey-bars. There was the largest merry-go-round I have ever seen. We could get on this monster and rock it in a wobbly circle, crashing into the mast. It was dangerous, but a thrill.

Some of the big guys like Ronald or Robert would overload the spring rocker horses causing them to bend to the ground. This would throw the big guy off and the horse would recoil back into position. It was great fun.

There was this trinket and junk shop on the parking lot. When word got around to the proprietor that he park was flooded with kids he'd open it up. We'd gleefully buy tons of worthless junk, from pendants to ankle-bracelets. Engraving was free. I managed to bum a quarter off Rick and I bought me a neck chain. On the pendant I wanted them to engrave my C.T. emblem that looked like a 4. What I got back looked like a J- because they did it sideways. I think I still have the thing somewhere.

We bought grab-bags that had tabletop croquet sets, with plastic stand-up wickets and finger-sized hammers. The game could be played, after a fashion, with a marble.

My personal favorite was a palm sized maze that had 3 plastic mice in it. The object was to get all 3 mice in the center circle. It was just like a video game, except this was 3-d.

God has a sense of humor. Without exception at each of these little outings it would rain, hard. The only thing was it would only rain for 10 or 15 minutes. Boom! It would pour down rain and kids would run screaming in all directions to get out of the cloudburst. As fast as it came it would be gone. We'd stand there in the blazing sunlight looking on in disbelief at the water dripping off the trees and overhead covers.

The day wore on as the Teachers cooked hamburgers for us. We got bags of loot from the junk-shop and trading began. If somebody had something they didn't want maybe they could find somebody who would trade for it. Some of the enterprising would have something for sale. So the day would go.

By that evening we had been fed, got nasty sunburns, and were worn out. It was a first class way to end the school year, and go into summer.

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## Summer 1970

David Neagle, who had taught me to swing on the rope, was defacto leader of the gang. He was short fellow, but strong. His main drawback was he had a violent temper. Around me he seemed to keep his anger in check. I think the reason he was the way he was is that his father treated him like dirt. Mostly he was a good guy, and I saw a lot of his decent side.

Rickey and he were shade tree mechanics and got a variety of derelict cars and pickups running for our transportation. This enabled us to go to the skating rink and to the I - 30 Steak House.

Rick's folks bought the gas station 100 yards south of my house on hiway 69. This was a rally point and everybody of Rick's gang would gather there for a day of adventure and fun seeking. There were no girls, unfortunately.

Once we visited David Neagle in Prairie Valley. Rickey and I piled into his car and went over there. Dave's house was on a farm and had a water cistern well just inside the crawl space. Rick and I hopped out of the old '59 Ford and walked over to the crowd working around the well. They were pumping all the water from the well and Dave had his shirt off. He acknowledged us.

"Whats going on?" Rick asked.

"Two cats fell into the well and drowned," Dave said, " I gotta get 'em out."

I looked in the well. Two cat corpses bloatedly floated on the surface. They were in a major stage of advanced decomposition, just about the extremities separation stage. The stench wasn't so bad but the water was fouled beyond recovery. It was a sickening mess.

Dave had a little brother and a cute little sister. The sisters name was Connie. She grew up to be one handsome young lady. I wished I could have dated her because she wasn't intimidating.

Dave's brother was named Mike. He looked in the well where I was looking.

"How did the cats fall in?" I asked Mike.

"They liked to play on the well," he replied, "jumping back and forth. I think they collided and fell in."

My B.S. alarms went off but I was naïve enough to believe him. I prefer to initially take people at their word. After all, why would he lie to me?



Then Dave was ordered into the well by his father. That was scary. I had a fear of heights and I couldn't swim so I watched Dave with horrified curiosity. He got on the well rope and was lowered into what essentially was a cesspit. Much to my and his relief the water only came up to about his knees. He then used the well bucket to scoop in one putrefied corpse and have it hauled out. I choked down my gorge as his little brother dumped it out and sent the bucket down for the other. I found something else to do while the task was repeated.

Years later I came to the less than Sherlock Holmes style conclusion that the reason Dave's father ordered him into the well was because he or his little brother had thrown the poor animals in there roughly a month before. That was ugly, but believable from what I knew of them. If Dave had a mother about I never saw her. I still like Dave to this day, though I have lost all track of him. I eventually found out he passed away.

As for his sister she made a brief appearance at Lone Oak and I remember her fondly as a cute young lady. She returned for a Homecoming decades later and was a beautiful woman. Ah, what might have been!

With Dave we traveled all over Hunt, Rains, and other nearby counties. We went swimming, drank beer we acquired illegally, and worked on cars. Rickey's store was a major hangout. We rode bicycles and motorcycles all over the place. The machoism of riding a motorcycle was especially captivating. It was exciting and risky. It was death on two wheels.

We knew fun, excitement, death and rage at the store. Dave had one of his friends die of wounds received in an automobile wreck. I botched the attempt to cheer him up and I still feel guilty about it. Rick also lost his older sister to a terrible poisoning accident. I had learned my lesson and kept my mouth shut about this to him. It was a bad time for all of us. I didn't know Rickey's sister, but I knew the friend of Dave's. I felt lost and out of place when these incidents happened. I had no idea what to do. I would lose my infant neice Tracy Evone to Hepatitis about this time. It was a sad time, it was a fun time. That was how it was. We lived with it.

One night at the Fina station a small war broke out. There were some guys who lived up the blacktop road and hung out at the store. They were involved in horseplay while I was inside listening to rock and roll on KLIF 1190. I was talking to Rick between songs. Suddenly we heard shouting outside. Dave and one of the guys were having a nasty argument. It seems one of the guys pickup trucks had been hit with a rock damaging the windshield. Words were exchanged and B.B. guns brandished like weapons.

The blacktop guy got into his truck and tore off into the night and Rickey went out to try to find him and calm him down. I stayed inside the store with Dave and tried to calm him down. David was hot.

"I oughta take this B.B. gun and shoot out his headlights," he railed.

I reached up to try to persuade him not to and accidentally slapped the muzzle and front sight into his face. Fire shot out of his eyes and I thought he might hit me. He gained control though, and I think the incident actually made him calm down. Rickey defused his part of the situation. It was scary but nothing came of it. It was a hotter and sadder summer than it needed to be, but it wasn't all bad.

Things were different back then. Color T.V. was a novelty. Very few houses where I lived had them. There were no microwave ovens in homes. F.M. stations were blank. Everybody listened to a.m. top 40 rock, or WBAP country. 8 track stereos were new. Everybody wanted one. Cellular phones didn't exist. The neatest engine you could get was a 427 cubic inch Chevy four barrel.

The Camaro was the hottest car. Gasoline was 30 cents a gallon. Cars had lots of chrome and no seatbelts. They averaged 300 horse power.

There was a war in Vietnam that we watched every day on T.V. America was telling itself the reason there wasn't peace was because of the South Vietnamese, not the invasion from the North.

Drug use was on the rise, but I had never met anyone who was a user.

Richard Nixon was president. Coach Landry was at his prime with the Dallas Cowboys.

Computers were something mysterious, big, and noisy. They took up entire rooms and floors of office buildings, but our teachers told us someday we might have one on our desks before we graduated.

Six Flags was relatively new and located in a large open area with very few buildings around it.

Greenville had a bustling downtown with many department stores and shops. Gibsons was just getting started. The hospital in Greenville was right next to the Senior High School.

It was a very different world than what we see now. When summer ended I would return to school. This time I would be in High School, and I would be a Freshman. I wondered what awaited.

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