



"Boys, don't fall for those fakes and get up in the rafters. They'll eat your sack lunch if you let them. Let's go out there and see how well they're put together and show them How the *Cow Eat the Cabbage*." Coach Taylor, 1971



COACH BRIAN TAYLOR

# -The Centurions-

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"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some  
have greatness thrust upon them."

(Twelfth Night, William Shakespeare)

## The Power and the Glory

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Listen! Do you hear it?

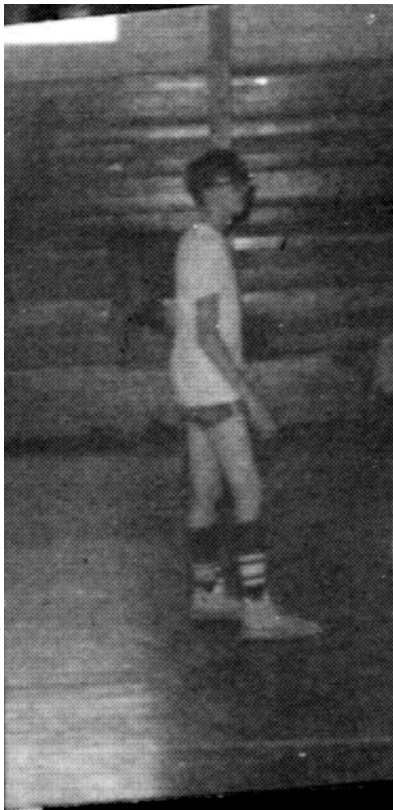
Thud! Thud! Thud!

It's coming from the gym, inside it's massive wooden confines!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Open the door! Go inside!

Thirteen young men of widely varying degrees of ability do precise drills on the court under Coach Brian Taylor's tutelage. I am one of them. For the first time in my life I am part of a high school basketball team. The honor of being a part of this is indescribable. I am thrilled.



As big a deal as it was for me, it was equally as exasperating for Coach Taylor. He watched as I chunk my shots at the backboard. I have the accuracy of a worn out catapult. He makes a mental note to try to do something about that when he has the time. Right now he is stretched thin trying to be a teacher, bus driver, Junior High Coach, and so on. Like everyone else in the faculty he is a man of many hats.



My teammates are the most magnificent group of basketball players to ever set foot in the wooden gym. There was Willie Davis, who blew them away in football and now takes his speed and abilities to the maple. I see Steve Henderson, who treats me decently and is remarkable in his ability with a round ball. Underneath one of our brand new see-through fiberglass backboards is Lewis Smith, called Butcher. He is a quiet individual that I never saw before. There is O.T. Williams, forgetting all about any problems he may have had in football and looking forward to a good season of basketball. Bouncing a basketball with casual skill is Danny Bowman the Sheepdog, a spectacular athlete if ever I saw one. Philip Andrews is here, ready for a new season of basketball. Larry Hukill, the smallest man on last year's team, now brings his steadfastness to this year's team. Gunner, a legend in his own mind and making sure everyone knows it, is doing his thing here. Dana Webb, who I call Spider, limber as a rubber-band, has the ability to hang in the air when he jumps. I have a new buddy here in Bobby Underwood, called Woody. He is the only Freshman with enough nerve to join the team. Standing solid as a tank is Rickey Graham. Dissatisfied with our final football performance, he is here to see how far we can go in this sport. These are my very first official high school teammates. There is only one person I have a problem with. It is Randy Payne. We don't see eye to eye and he is too powerful and easy to anger. He is strong, fast, and agile. I warily keep my distance. He is dangerous to mess with, and he flat out doesn't like me.

Coach Taylor looks his 1971-72 team over. The new fiberglass backboards he takes as a good sign. It is a step up from the old plywood backboards that are now put on the walls for others to shoot at. He is not overly impressed with this new crew. Heck, he had about the same quality team last year. In many cases last year's second place team was a little better. Having Willie, Randy, O.T., Steve, and Butcher back are good, though. Danny is a year older and a better player than last year. Folding his arms, Coach Taylor contemplates the possibilities. He has enough boys for a J. V. team again. If he was very very lucky he might get a district trophy out of this, he felt like he'd certainly get a runner up. They might even get a tournament trophy this year. Some of these boys were excellent athletes.

Some of them.

Coach Taylor once said "There are 5 or 6 players and about 10 other wannabees. You have to know how to balance the situation."

Balance indeed! But I'm having a tremendous time. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing but, by golly, I was out there! I wondered where Troy, Larry Little, Jerry McGee, Robert Vice, and especially Ricky McCallum were. All were good athletes and I was surprised McCallum didn't go out for the team. It didn't make sense to me. I remembered last year how incredibly bored I was and I couldn't understand how they could stand it. What I didn't know was that some of these fellows had girlfriends who kept them otherwise occupied in study hall. McCallum didn't have a lady, so I could not understand what he wasn't here. Herman, too, wasn't here. I never knew why. I guess he didn't like the jocks. They gave a few reasons not to like them.

Coach Taylor schools us in the very basics of what he wants. Our offense and defense is an identical 2-1-2 formation, man to man. It has its problems, but it is simple to run and simple to do. I don't understand it, and that is that. I watch and learn.

"Plays" are based on this where guys move into different areas, set picks or blocks, and travel back and forth through all the dangerous 3 second lane. I fear the lane, and I don't understand it. I have never read a basketball rule book in my life. I know virtually nothing about the game.

I thought I was decent shape. I had worked out with the football team for about 14 glorious fun filled weeks. When Coach Taylor got us out on that floor I found out my physical condition left a little to be desired. Running up and down the bleachers was murder. Going up was rough, all the

way to the top. We touch the wall then come down. We ran into the rail, turn around, and go back up. I think we did about 10 or 15 runs. If one of us stumbled he barked his shins on the bleachers. Line touches was almost as bad. Run up and down the floor, touch a line, run back to the wall. Touch the wall, go back out, touch the next line. Repeat until entire court has been touched.

There was a lot of ball handling and even more shooting. I couldn't dribble without looking at the ball and I couldn't dribble at all with my left hand. Nobody had the time to teach me, so I made do. In the shooting department I tried to imitate the other guys, but I didn't have the range. My small hands couldn't put much back-spin on the ball so everything I put there was essentially "dead" and usually bounced out.

One thing I could do, when I was just fooling around, was hit a certain shot from the top of the key. A couple of guys and I were just messing around at mid-court and I just started chunking at the basket. I got the ball, wound up, and shot at the top of the key. It hit nothing but net. I discovered I could do this repeatedly. Even when I missed it bounced off the back of the rim and came right back to me. This was my shot, as useless as it was.

Watching the starting five tear up the floor was amazing. I sat on the bench or stood out of the way and looked on in admiration at the performance of these athletes. I saw team-work, precision, and a winning will. Lewis Smith, Steve, Randy Payne, O.T, and Willie knew this was their last chance to leave behind something of note. They put everything they had into it. Never before had I seen the like, and it would become the standard by which I would judge all others. Could I hear the Thunder? In basketball? Lone Oak is a football town. Basketball is just another sport. It must be my imagination.

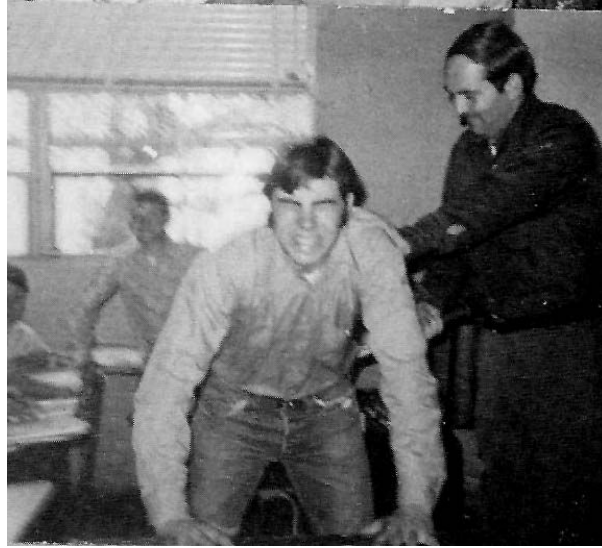
This was the Big Red Machine of my first year of High School Basketball, and I was one of them! Man, was I happy!

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## **Bored of Education**

Thus, Basketball Season was upon us. The girls were also gearing up for their season. A very jocular attitude had come to the class rooms, now that football and pep squad were over with. All that energy that was usually burned off in practice was still there, looking for an outlet, and making it's presence felt.

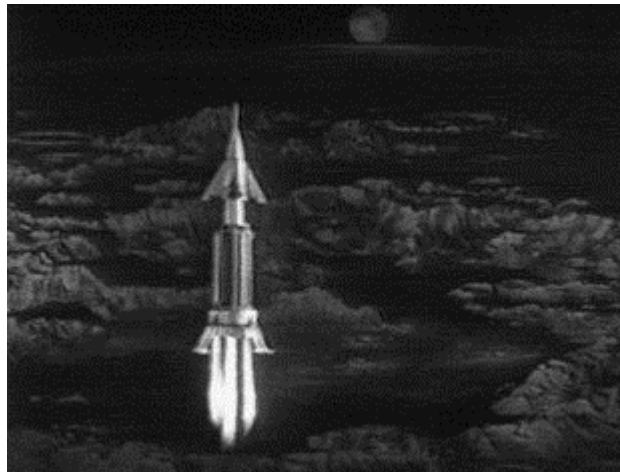
Coach McNutt taught history and civics. He also liberally handed out paddlings as he saw fit. His licks with the wooden board wouldn't kill a fly, and it was all in fun. Sitting in his class was never boring because something crazy was usually going on. Once he called Bobby Land to chastise him for some offense or another. He had Bob bend over the teacher's desk. Danny Bowman thought this was hilarious and made a remark about Bob's large posterious. Bob turned and glared at Danny Bowman, and McNutt told Danny Bowman that he was next. This was the only other time I ever saw Danny Bowman get licks, even if it was just in fun. Sheepdog took his paddling grinning from ear to ear.



***Eddie Lively receives "punishment".***

This idiotcy went on for some weeks. Then came the time McNutt and Eddie Bell got into it.

I was in the command module activating the five J-5 booster engines on the Shuttle-Freighter to begin re-entry procedures. I had just started the computer sequencer to activate the start-up when I heard Eddie call out "Kiss my buttocks!"



***Picture from "Men into Space"***

Shocked back into the real world I put my pencil down and looked over at Eddie, then at Coach McNutt. What Eddie had done amounted to swearing at the teacher. I figured Eddie would get a lick with the paddle and that would be it. Eddie refused to accept his paddling. This put the seriousness of the situation up one more category. Now it was insubordination and swearing at the teacher. Off they went to Mr. Brookins' office before the situation got out of hand, leaving the rest of us alone in class. Speculation ran rampant. The volume of conversation increased until we were all talking in quite loud tones.

When they came back it was a strange story we managed to piece together. Eddie had told McNutt to kiss his rear end, but used a technicality to say he didn't. In essence, to Eddie's way of thinking, your buttocks aren't part of your hips. In that case your chin isn't part of your face. It didn't matter. Eddie didn't get a paddling but he was told to watch his mouth. The paddlings in McNutt's class more or less came to a halt. All of us thought this defiance of authority was somewhat strange, but we all soon returned to our old routines.

Over in the science building there was a paddling to end all paddlings. It happened near the end of this school year. Our new science teacher, who replaced the highly intelligent and respected Mr. Tasa, was an eccentric son of a gun. He had us catching toads, turtles, salamanders, all sorts of creatures for his science room menagerie. These animals were kept in aquarium tanks for observation and student enjoyment. This teacher lived in a world other than this one and we all knew it. He would chatter on aimlessly about all sorts of subjects. He said he kept a tape recorder on when he was out of the room and told us he could separate individual voices on the tape to hear what was said while he was out of the room. Perhaps it could be done, but not with the technology available to the public in 1971. He truly didn't have a clue as to how to deal with teenagers. His science classes and study halls were chaotic. Often we went on safari for more inmates for his personal zoo. It would break down with us chasing a rabbit at high speed across campus. The faculty tolerated this craziness up to a point. One day he finally broke the patience of the powerful.

We were sitting in his class digging in our Biology books. The science teacher said we had all violated some sort of obscure rule or other and everyone was to get a paddling, even the girls! Immediately Julia, Karen Smiley, Sheron Stewart, and Vicki Pipkin sat bolt upright in their chairs.

"Say what?!"

We guys started to nonchalantly line up to take our turn at the paddle. The ladies were obviously very upset at his corporal punishment coming their way. Just about all of them had never had a paddling in their entire lives. To receive even a little tap on the buns at this point in their lives was a major blow to their female dignity and overall it was just not a good idea. For some of them it was traumatic!

Everybody got a light whack, *even the girls*.

After we sat back down a most eerie calm set over the class. Most of us thought nothing of it. The novelty of seeing our high and mighty ladies receive even a token pop with a paddle was somewhat humorous.

But to paraphrase Shakespeare, "Hell hath no fury like a woman."

When I went home that evening I had pretty much forgotten all about the incident. I had basketball and my comic books to keep me too occupied to worry about something stupid that had happened in what amounted to a meaningless science class. It was all stuff and nonsense. On the other hand, Quinlan was having a huge basketball tournament with 26 teams invited. I was looking forward to our first game of the season against the Cooper Bulldogs. The anticipation was high. I was to be a real Buffalo for the first time in High School.

For the girls it was a totally different story. Once our ladies got home the incident in science class was related to their parents. In less than an hour the phone began to ring off the wall at Mr. Brookins' house. Outraged parents demanded swift retribution. Mr Brookins himself was somewhat angered by the stupidity of what had happened. Quickly, the proverbial executioner's axe was sharpened and the block made ready. Heads were going to roll for this one.

Oblivious to all of this I stood in the cold wind of my driveway the next morning, half asleep. Under my arm was tucked the books I had half-heartedly looked at and my clipboard stuffed with last night's drawings and a couple of dice-basketball games. I yawned, expecting another totally boring day at school. I got on the Yellow Monster and went to school. Once I got there the school was wild with the latest news.

"Hes gone!"

"Who?"

"The Science Teacher, man! They had him pack his stuff this morning. He is out of here!"

Wow! Who was gonna teach Science now?

Because of this incident, individual teachers had to turn in their paddles. All future incidents of Corporal Punishment were to be handled in the Superintendent's office by or under the supervision of the Superintendent and the Principal. Well, it was fun while it lasted, I guess.

Mr. Dial took over the class, and the Science Teacher was given a non-teaching job for the rest of the year. Mr. Brookins had refused to fire the fellow, for for his own reasons. He would not be hired back next year, though.

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"Once more, into the breach, dear friends!"

("Henry V", William Shakespeare)

## Into the Breech

Across the lake and into Panther country we went. In our bus was an assortment of paperbags containing tennis shoes, uniform parts, and other parphenelia. I dozed lightly in my seat, wearing my red windbreaker.

Danny Bowman and one of his buddies were amused by my predicament. I was asleep, but my glasses were hanging on by the ear-pieces. The were about to fall off and every bounce of the bus brought them closer to falling. My chin was almost on my chest and I was resting my forehead on the metal bar of the seat in front of me. The bus hit another bump in the road and lightly tapped my forehead on the bar. I woke up.

Without thinking I pushed my glasses back up my nose and batted my eyes. Where were we? Danny Bowman broke into laughter. I couldn't figure out why. I just put it down to another weirdness of the hated Jock Clique.

There were guys and girls both on this bus. It was packed. Marilyn Fry was a ball of energy and talked with everybody. She was definately ready for basketball season.

Usually here was Elizabeth Hagerman, whom Rick was showing some interest in. She kept the scorebooks for us, and would all season. She did a credible job of doing so. She considered it an honor.



***Scorekeeper***

***Elizabeth Hagerman***

The classes had different numbers of people on the teams. There were only two girls from my class on the basketball team; Julia and Shirley. The Freshman class had about 6 girls here. Oddly, the Freshman class had a reverse ratio to the number of girls and guys. In a class of about 30 or so there were only about 8 boys. I think it was an interesting problem. Still, most of the girls followed the maddening habit of having boyfriends elsewhere. That left a lot of us high and dry and girl-less. Rabbit didn't seem to have that problem, and I envied him a lot.

Rubbing the sleep out of my eyes I looked around the bus. Julia sat quietly in her seat with her mouth closed. She had a mouthful of wire. She had gotten braces and was somewhat self-conscious about it. They were probably causing some discomfort. She kept her mouth closed and kept to herself. I guess she thought the braces made her look ugly or something. I didn't think so. Julia had a wholesome beauty that really set her apart from most of the girls who put on a lot of makeup. She was down to earth, approachable, and I found her unintimidating. She never called me by my nickname. Overall Julia was a very pretty lady. Just having a temporary fix to her teeth didn't ruin the whole picture.

The really dangerous thing about this was that if Julia got hit in the mouth during a game it would split open her cheek or lip like a knife. It would also lacerate the arm that hit her pretty badly, too. To prevent this from happening she got a football mouthpiece. She wore this over her braces when practicing or playing in a game. To my knowledge she is the first and only girl at Lone Oak to wear a mouthpiece. Julia was nothing if practical.

Soon we rolled into Quinlan and disembarked from the Yellow Monster. I went into Quinlan's gym for the first time I can remember. Had I ever went in there in Junior High I would have recalled it. What a place! It was brand new. The floor was very shiny and reflected the lights brightly. There were lots of people in there and I heard cheerleaders doing a cheer. I could smell the new of the place. I could also smell the very familiar aroma of popcorn.

Standing next to me taking all this in with me was 'Big Al' James Kelly. He was a fan of books about infamous Mafia boss Al Capone, and that got him this nickname. He was team manager, and in charge of towels, water, and the mesh bag of basketballs we took with us to the games. He would come to the gym with our huge black tacklebox of tape, scissors, all sorts of various goodies left over from football, and would put this next to Coach Taylor. He'd put the basketballs where they could be watched, usually near the coach. 'Big Al' James did his job well, and enjoyed it a lot. He was a lot sharper and intelligent than he let on.

Most of us sat together to await our first game. Sometimes at a tournament there was a game going on, and we'd watch that. Some of us would go over to the concession stand for a cola and

a candy bar. I would do this, but I would never, ever buy popcorn. I had lost my appetite for it back in football season.

If there was a team on the floor we didn't care to watch then some of us would explore. I found myself wandering about Quinlan's new gym with Rick. Coach Taylor called us over then sent us to the bus to pick up something we had left behind. Going down the hall of Quinlan School we bumped into an old flame.

"Hi, guys! Hello Charles! How are you doing, Rick?"

I felt my toes dig through the soles of my deckshoes and into the floor tiles. It was Sandy!

"Hi," I said, grinning from ear to ear like an idiot.

Sandy had left last year and did not return this year to Lone Oak. I felt sort of stupid that I hadn't noticed, but then people left all the time. Here she was! Oh, man, she was still just as cute as ever!

She chatted with Ricky and me. I asked her how she liked coming to Quinlan to go to school. She said she didn't like it too much. Everybody knew she was from Lone Oak and that made her sort of an outcast. I just looked at her, frantically trying to find the words to say. Why does my brain lock up when I want to talk to a girl I really like?

"Are you coming to the game?" I managed to ask.

She shook her head.

"I'm just going to say 'hi' to everybody and go."

"Bye Sandy."

"Bye bye."

She walked away. I watched her go toward the gym. I wanted to tell her so much but I couldn't. It would be nearly 25 years before I would see her again, and she would be married and with a family of her own. I didn't think all that much about it right then. We had a game to play, our first game of the year.

Our game was at 3:30 p.m. and we watched the Lone Oak girl's game in front of us. Looking on, we watched the girls tie Cooper 35 all as we went to the locker room. Quinlan's locker rooms were spacious, clean, all concrete and stainless steel. We even had individual baskets to store our street clothes in. This was too neat.

I pulled on my big basketball shoes and put on the Red and White as a legitimate player for Lone Oak High for the very first time, Thursday, December 2, 1971! I looked at my outfit. I had red satin shorts that had white trim. I wore a deep red jersey also trimmed in white. Emblazoned on the back and chest was what I considered my lucky number since the first grade, number twelve. It felt like that this is where the journey really began.

Everyone on the team except James Kelly had purchased red Buffalo wind breakers. We would wear these to games and use the flimsy garment as a warm-up. On the left chest was a picture of a charging Buffalo and the inscription 'Lone Oak Buffaloes' all in white letters and lines. We were

the only team to ever wear such a thing in the entire district, perhaps the state. It made us look distinctive on the floor.





***Shiela and Danny in the windbreakers from a yearbook photo. This is my windbreaker, probably one of the last***

***Surviving examples. I donated it to the school to keep in their "museum" in 2010.***

Some people thought we looked odd, wearing a baggy windbreaker with the basketball shorts and our long legs sticking out of there. It was a "team" thing and Coach Taylor liked it. It showed elan and esprit de corps. Nobody made us buy these windbreakers. We just thought it up and did it. To us, it was the spirit of Big Red.

As we stood in the doorway with Steve and Randy Payne clutching basketballs, we watched the Lone Oak girls go down to defeat 38 to 35. They had gone into overtime and didn't score, but Cooper had only scored 3. It was a tight defensive game, and Cooper had done enough to win.

Now it was our turn in the arena. For good or ill, come hell or highwater, the Lone Oak Buffaloes Boys Basketball Team (A.K.A. Taylor's Terrors) were about to start the season. GO, RED, GO!



Out we went, and I did my first warm-up with the team. This opening ritual was soon over and we formed a huddle around Coach Taylor and joined our hands in the middle.

"This is our first game of the season, boys. Lets go out there and make it count."

We brought our hands down with the battle cry of "Go Red!"



I found a comfy spot on the bench next to Woody, the lone Freshman on the team, and watched our starting 5 go out to do battle. It was Randy Payne, Steve, Lewis Smith, Willie, and O.T.

"Go get 'em, Red!" I called and got into the groove of the game. Butcher was going to jump the ball with the tallest guy Cooper had. The Ref got everybody in position then launched the first jump ball of our season. It got started. To Coach Taylor's practiced eye it became very obvious that Lone Oak had some rough edges. Lone Oak paced Cooper to a rapid exchange of baskets, but soon the Bulldogs were out ahead. By the end of the first quarter it was 18-15, Cooper's lead.

"Slow it down out there," Coach Taylor cautioned, "and try for a high percentage shot."

I wasn't enjoying this at all. I was used to yelling and cutting up on the sidelines. I glared at the game and desperately wished I could do something.

In the second quarter Lone Oak fell behind 10 full points. Everything Coach Taylor tried to tell his troops to do just didn't seem to sink in. The half came with us behind 36 to 26. It was halftime so those of us on the bench reached under our seats and pulled out the basketballs we had put under there. Dribbling, we went out on the floor to shoot while Coach Taylor talked to the starters and tried to get their heads in the game. I chunked gamely at the basket then rebounded for the starters when they came out to shoot. This was a ritual I was to become adept at.

After a while the game was underway again. It went badly. Cooper maintained their lead and even expanded it. They soon led 54 to 41. Big Red was in serious trouble. All I could do was sit on the bench and holler.

"Watch 'em, Red," I'd yell, my voice booming in the confines of the gym. I surprised myself by how loud my voice was indoors. I wasn't alone. Up in the bleachers the girls added to the support, cheering the team on. They wanted at least one Lone Oak team to win today.

All the way down the bench from where I was sat Coach Taylor. I don't know why, but I always sat as far from the coach as I could. Perhaps it was because the starters usually occupied the positions nearest the coach. Anyway, that's where we sat on the bench. Coach Taylor would call out advice from time to time. That night he called out "Watch your passes!" a lot. The guys were

also finding out about the 3 second lane the hard way. Mistakes and turnovers were killing us. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, when the counting was done, we had lost 80 to 65. I looked down at my big tennis shoes and sighed. We then went into the locker room to dress.

On the bus ride back I noticed not much was made of our defeat. We were still in the consolation bracket so there was a chance for getting something out of this tournament. One reason nobody seemed to really care was that this was just basketball. Lone Oak was a football town, and basketball was not a big deal. In spite of showing well at many tournaments the Buffaloes hadn't gotten even a district title for a very long while. It was expected of us to just show up, put in a battle, and leave in second place or lower down on the list. There was no Thunder in basketball.

Mr. Taylor didn't believe in this philosophy. Being an outsider from Arp gave him strange and unusual ideas. Ideas like he could forge a powerful basketball team out of a bunch of football players. Yes, we were still thinking 'football'. We had a tendency to attack the ball, block, and run too much. A good solid hit may look good in football but in basketball it'll get a guy thrown out of the game.

I looked at the up-side of this night's experience. I had been a real part of a highschool team for the first time. I was now officially 100% a Buffalo. Wow!

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## Quinlan Tournament

Thundering down the road at 70 mph, Vicki Pipkin drove the Driver's Ed Car. Herman, Karen Smiley, and I sat in the back seat, white with fear. This nearsighted blond had our lives in her hands. Mr. Dial sat in the co-pilot seat, totally relaxed.

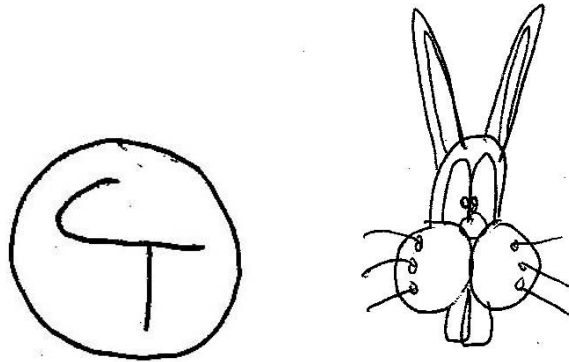
In spite of all this, and perhaps calmed by Mr. Dial's demeanor, my mind wandered back to Quinlan. I thought about the tournament, and Sandy. I wished she could be there again, and I wanted her to see us win. Drivers Ed itself was an experience that varied from stark fear that the nut driving would get us killed to a raw lust for speed. This year was turning out to be one of the best times of my entire life! Basketball, Driver's Education, being on the football team, it was all just grand! I thought it didn't get much better than this!

Preparing for the Saturday game, I would first go with my Dad to the Enco Station in Sulphur Springs then I'd go to the game that evening. Compared to last year this was like a trip to Disneyland! I was having a ball! Randy Price the Rabbit didn't like basketball, but he was always nearby at school. He played dice basketball and put a team in my league. We usually played up in the bleachers during P.E. class. Herman was there, too, but he had a stronger sense of independence. He had his own basketball league and preferred to take me on with his champions. Rolling a die on the wooden bleachers often led to wild bounces. To get this under control one day I put a handkerchief that was made like to look like a Confederate Battle Flag down to cushion the rolls. It worked and Rabbit and I used it for every game. After a game or two I'd roll the flag up and stuff it in my coat pocket.



***Identical replica of the actual flag. The original was lost.***

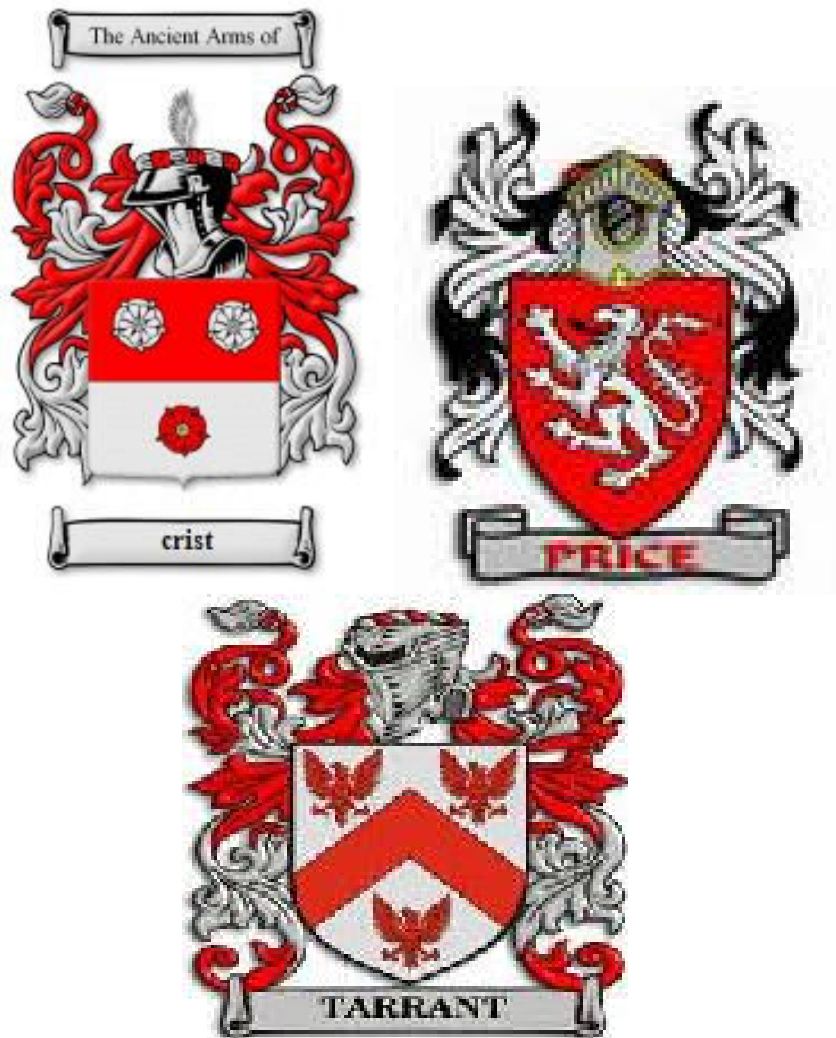
I came upon this flag in my brother's sock drawer after he moved out for about the third or fourth time. He left this old flag behind with some dirty old clothes and messilaneous junk. When I found this flag I noticed it had an odd, grassy smell. It wasn't until I got much older that realized that this was where my brother had kept his stash. I wanted the flag, and after shaking out a few stems and seeds then washing it, the flag was mine.



Herman, Rabbit, and I had personal emblems. It was kind of a highschool Heraldry. I had an emblem that looked like a 4. It was an interlocked C.T. For Rabbit I copied an oddball rabbit head doodle I saw once drawn by a girl on her book cover. I added muscles to it, giving it a Rambo look. Rabbit let me draw it in chalk on his locker. After I went to great effort to get it right it would mysteriously disappear overnight. One day Mr. Brookins saw me drawing the Rabbit and watched me for a bit. Then he said he wanted me to take it off. I looked at him unaware that I had been doing anything wrong. If he wanted it off, I would take it off! No problem here, sir! Randy obliginly helped and with wet paper towles we removed the Muscle Rabbit from the lockers forever. It was no big deal, and Mr. Brookins was savvy enough to know it wasn't being done as mischief.

In addition to the primitive heraldry we also had our personal colors. Mine were red and green, Randy Price's were orange and light blue, and Herman's were black and orange.

In the world outside school many decades later I found our "real" colors and emblems dating back to medieval days; our families' Coats of Arms.



Odd coincidence here, notice each and every one of them is RED AND WHITE, the school colors!

Rabbit surprised me many times and in many ways. He was strong, had good looks, the ladies liked him (a lot), he was totally fearless, and he thought I was cool! One day in English we had to write an essay, choosing from a variety of topics. I wrote about aircraft or something and quickly turned in my 5 or so pages of nonsense. For me essays were easy. Rabbit later showed me what he had written. He wrote about his best friend. He wrote about ME! I was totally taken off guard, and humbled by his tribute. I read what he had said. He described me in detail, from the eyeglass support strap I used to keep my glasses on to my fondness for drawing. It was a very nice way to pay homage to a friend. Like I said, Randy was everything I wasn't and couldn't be. Yet, this handsome guy admired me and my style. I simply didn't know what to say. Nobody ever told me I was a cool fellow before. I felt unworthy to have such a friend as this, much less to have him think of me as highly as he did.

In return for Rabbit's and Herman's friendship I put them in my comics as major characters. They enjoyed reading about themselves as astronauts. It was, in my opinion, poor exchange for something I valued as much as their friendship. Having been essentially an outcast for most of my early life, to suddenly have a loyal circle of friends was amazing and wonderful.

When Saturday came I was bleary eyed and dragging my tail. I went with my Father to Sulphur Springs to open up the Enco Station. I spent the entire day there and I did not know I missed the first game of the day. While I pumped gas and wiped windshields Big Red was on the maple with Royse City. To Coach Taylor it looked like the end of the tournament for his 1971-72 team. Lone Oak fell behind in the first quarter 25 to 16. It did get better by the half where it was 41 to 39. Coach Taylor noted his troops were gaining on the Royse City team.

After the halftime activities of shooting at the basket the contest resumed. Royse City made only 12 points and Big Red surged ahead 59 to 53 by putting in 20 points! For the first time this season Lone Oak boys had the lead!

Coach Taylor saw traces of greatness begin to show in his squad. Perhaps they could claim the consolation trophy later tonight! The final seconds ticked down and the first victory of the season for the Lone Oak boys went into the books at a strong comeback victory of 78 to 69! Oh, what I had missed! Our first victory!

Earlier in the day the Lone Oak girls destroyed Wolfe City 36 to 17 to make it a near perfect day. Larry Hukill's sister, Cindy, scored almost as many as the entire Wolfe City team with 16 points to her credit. I had missed it all!



When I got home, I changed clothes, grabbed my bag of equipment, and got my Mother to take me to school. Soon as I got there Woody asked where I had been. I was shocked that I had missed our day game. I made up my mind that I wouldn't work Saturdays for a while. I didn't want to miss anymore games, no way! This must have disappointed my Father, because I think he was trying to teach me the business so I could take it over some day. I never did, and by 1990 the gas station was just a memory, becoming a tire store after it was sold and had sat empty for years. The coming so called energy crisis and the wild inflation of the 70s would doom it as a gas station.

Over the lake, across the 2 mile bridge, and along the Tawakoni road we travelled. Then up to the Quinlan School building where we halted and unloaded. I sat foot once more in the land of my old enemy, Quinlan. I tightly clutched the brown paper bag that held my uniform and shoes, and we entered the school. We crossed the hall into the gym and looked around. I looked in vain for Sandy.

Big Red had arrived. Schools we had beaten in football looked at us with anticipation. Lone Oak had a reputation for being mediocre in basketball and it was a fine way to exact revenge by

beating us on the basketball court. It had been that way in the past and there was no reason to expect that it would be any different now. Death to the Buffaloes, they wished.

The girls went to prepare for the Consolation Championship game and Rick and I went to the snack bar. I saw Coach Taylor sitting on the girl's bench. He was having a full year, coaching the girl's team, the boy's varsity team, and the junior varsity. He was given the reigns of the girl's team by Coach Brookins. Mr. Brookins was very ill, but none of us on the team knew it at the time. He was slowly turning his responsibilities over to other people. We all just shrugged it off, figuring that it was just the way things were done. Mr. Brookins stayed around, however, to take some of the load off of Coach Taylor. He wasn't as actively coaching as he was last year. It was a great loss for all of us.

I got up in the top of the bleachers next to Rick and munched my candy bar and cola. Being at the top gave us a good view of the floor and let nobody behind us. I didn't understand this logic but I considered it the thing to do at the time. Always protect your back, was Rick's way of thinking. He didn't let anyone behind him in the bleachers if he could help it. After all, we were in hostile territory.

Still hoping, I gave one last look around for Sandy. Of course, I didn't see her. I felt disappointed about not seeing her pretty blond hair and sparkling eyes. She seemed happy and sad at the same time. It was like she was putting up a positive front to mask some sort of inner loss. I was so sorry she was gone. I shook it off, talked tactics with Rickey, and never thought of looking for her again. She was pretty much gone for good.

Rickey and I thought up nasty things to do to the opposition. We thought maybe we could take out the starting 5 with some really dirty fouls. We would never think of doing such a thing for real because it would get the person thrown out of the game and Coach Taylor would not hesitate to throw the individual off the team. No one person was invaluable to the team, from my meager skills to the awesome abilities of Randy Payne. If we violated certain codes, off we went.

Rickey and I watched a tornado of scoring by the girl's teams from Princeton and Lone Oak. We hoped our girls would win, but Rick wasn't a cheerleader, so he and I kept it quiet. The girls put up one heck of a game, but Lone Oak lost 43 to 42, by just one point.

We did our warm up and I found my usual splinter-free spot on the bench. Randy Payne and I had gotten into it in the locker room over nothing, but our feud would continue. He had to make sure I knew my spot in the pecking order, and I flat didn't like his combative attitude. In spite of it all, I watched with glee as Big Red took the lead and held it in the first quarter 17 to 12. Wylie, our opponents for this bracket, kept up the pressure for a while. Then they fell way behind as Lone Oak put on a surge of scoring. We led at the half 47 to 29. Our starting five overmatched them badly.

At halftime I went out and heaved balls at the rim, watching them bounce off or miss altogether. I thought I looked pretty dumb 10 feet from the basket so I tried to shoot from 15 or so feet away. My ego had been damaged by Randy Payne and I was pretty angry about that still. Fortunately the Varsity guys came on the floor and saved me from further self pity as I rebounded for them.

Coach Taylor looked over the foul tally. We were in trouble. He looked at his bench. He had Philip Andrews, Danny Bowman, and maybe Gunner, Spider, and Rick. Everybody else, including me, were just so much decoration. It wasn't critical, but it could be if it got out of hand.

Second half began and Wylie came out gunning. They made 23 points to our 17. A couple of our guys fouled out. Wylie came on strong, and it was 64 to 52, our favor. Danny Bowman and Philip Andrews were in the game, but they were overmatched. Our scoring dropped off sharply making

only 8 points the last quarter. Wylie made a full 27 points and won the game 79 to 72! I couldn't believe it!

Nuts! It was a spectacular come from behind win for Wylie, one for the books.

We all hung around for the closing ceremonies and trophy presentations. Twenty six teams had come to this huge tournament. Cooper had won it, in both the boys and girls brackets. Consolation somehow went to Royse City Boys and Princeton Girls. That hurt, because I thought we had beaten Royse City earlier but they had somehow managed to stay in the tournament to win the consolation. In a tournament this big the brackets were most confusing.

We went to the bus, rode back to Lone Oak, and everybody else went home. I walked from the school to the phone switching station and called home. I sat there in the cold wind and fumed. I hated losing. It had been a lousy tournament for me, and not too great for my team. There was no Thunder here.

This was going to be a lousy season! Nuts!

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### Vicki Pipkin



She was a very good looking blond with the type of hair one sees on movie stars. She resembled Barbra Eden of 'I Dream of Jeannie' fame. She followed the glamour track in high school with great success. She was without a doubt the most photographed girl in my class, and newspaper photographers loved to shoot her picture at halftime in football games. I called her Vicious, because of her somewhat quiet ways and non-confrontational attitudes. She had the classic blue eyes that were always a twinkle. She had the figure to go with the face and always dressed very nicely. She started in the Pep-Squad as a common high-kicker and rocketed up through the ranks, to become Head Majorette. She looked pretty darn good in the white Head Majorette outfit, too.

Vicki Pipkin was academic like all the girls in my class. She did all the schoolwork with an apparent ease and neatness that I couldn't comprehend. She felt at home in the less violent world of Pep-Squad, Academics, and fashion than in sports. I think what convinced her to get out of sports was an incident she had with Shirley in Junior High.

She and Shirley got into an argument in the girl's locker room, and it escalated quickly. Shirley was from a lower middle class family and stronger than Vicki. What ever got them started went to hand to hand, or rather hand to hair. It was an honest to goodness cat fight! When it was over



Vicki decided that school sports definately were not for her. She looked elsewhere for her niche and found it. She still loved the team, and had the typical fanatical fevor about it like everybody else.

Vicki Pipkin was the number one typist in school. Even with her long fingernails she had no problems with the electric typewriter. I'd be pecking out the first word on my manual typewriter and she'd finish the first line and return the carriage on her machine. It seemed like a steady rrrrrt!-ding!-rrrrrt! from her station. I think she put out about 90 to 110 words a minute on that typewriter. I have no idea what she can do on the word processor P.C. she eventually learned to use.

Vicki Pipkin embellished the 'I's in her name with daisies, drawing petels on them. None of the teachers ever said anything about it so she continued to do this for the rest of her time in High School. It was thought of as creative and on some places around in Lone Oak I could find signs she painted for her father's hardware and livestock feed store with her flowered signature on there.

Vicki and Martha were buddies. I could always find them together, on and off campus. Nobody picked on Vicki like they did Martha. I guess it was because Vicki looked the same she always did. When they pulled the rubber spider incident on Julia somebody threw the spider at Vicki with the result being that Martha threw the spider back at me! I protested my innocence and Martha said nothing. (Why'd she throw that spider at me of all people?) Vicki Pipkin didn't have the acute fear of spiders that Julia has. Martha and Vicki were as close as me and Herman and Rabbit.

Vicki Pipkin was nearsighted as a bat. Vanity prevented her from wearing her glasses in public, though I often saw her with them on in typing class and the like. The glasses didn't take all that much away from her good looks but she refused to wear them anyway. Often this had funny results.

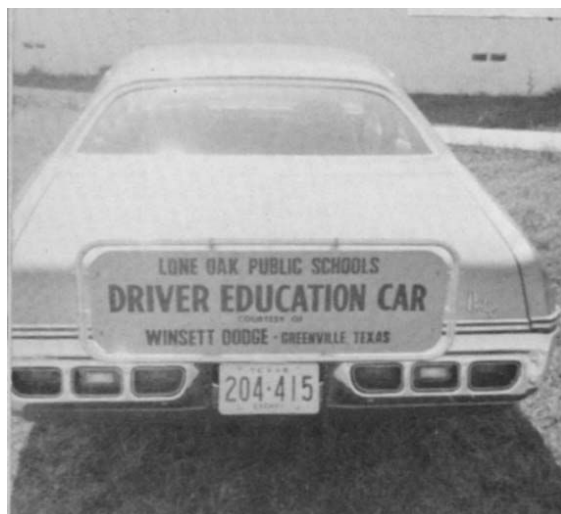
Once she was driving along with Lana Slemmons and Martha down one of the numerous farm-market roads that wind through out the county, like a mad-man's version of a superhighway. The twisting, turning roads force the driver to pay strict attention to the road and only catch the scenery out of the corner of the eye. Vicki Pipkin saw something out of the corner of her vision that blew her mind.

"Lana, stop! Stop! Back up! That was the biggest sheep I ever saw!"

Lana stopped the car and she and Martha broke into laughter. Vicki grinned with embarrassment. On the other side of the barbed wire quietly chewing it's cud was a huge white Charlais bull with curley hair.

"Some sheep!" Lana laughed, and drove on.

In Driver's Education Vicki would most of the time forget to wear her glasses. Our foursome for that class consisted of Vicki Pipkin, Karen Smiley, Herman Crist, and myself. Herman and I could drive anything from tractors to dragsters but the girls had practicly no experience with manual shift vehicals. The clutch horrified them. We had a manual shift military green ex-army car and a brand new (and ugly) dark tan Plymouth 2 door sedan to choose from. Mr. Dial promptly put us in the sedan because the girls had shown they simply could not handle the 3 speed column shift on the junky Army car. When we tried out the Army car I watched the girls with amusment. Karen Smiley shifted from first to reverse. The transmission protested loudly with mighty grinding noises and she fought to remain cool. Mr. Dial neatly reached over and put it up into second before she could ruin the transmission. After that we would only drive the Sedan.



Herman, Karen, and I were in the back, observing how Vicki Pipkin drove the sedan. She got along real well with the automatic transmission. This car was big with high-rise seats. The seats made it impossible to look over the shoulder to see behind the car. We had to lean over to see back. I disliked this car in spite of all the powered garbage it had, like automatic transmission, power brakes, and power steering. The thing handled like a truck. The long wheel base of this ugly tan-colored monster made it lousy in the corners. The girls thought this car with all the power goodies was just fantastic.

Vicki was driving and we crossed Highway 69 toward the service road that went by a church and Vicki Pipkin blew right through a stop sign that used to be there. I saw the big red octagon zip by just as Mr. Dial did.

"Didn't you see that stop sign?" Mr Dial asked her in his baritone voice.

Vicki paled.

"Huh? What stop sign? I didn't know one was there!"

I picked on her about it later, but it really wasn't funny to her. She had too perfectionist an attitude to even let a simple mistake like that go by lightly.

Remarkably, Vicki Pipkin and I were friends. She liked my short stories. I think because she appreciated my writing and drawing was why I never was lustful for her. She was very attractive but I think something about her overshadowed any base thoughts I had about her. I didn't put her on some pedestal but I did think quite highly of her as a human being all through high school. The other guys' thoughts were not so lofty. Vicki was sort of a class project for some of them. A guy I called Ripper lusted for her badly, but of course he lusted after every other girl in school too. Gunner would tell me graphic stories of his fantasies and he would howl with laughter as I would turn red. Danny Bowman would laugh his huge jawbone laugh and ask me what I would do with her. All Rick would say was that she just needed somebody to bring her down a notch or two. I thought that strange, because Vicki Pipkin wasn't stuck-up around me. I was not an angel myself, but I didn't go around talking about it either.

The only guy I knew she even let drive her anywhere was a guy I'll call Ripper. Ripper's overall attitude about women in general made my hair stand on end. He really had a way with them. They seemed to trust him like a brother. Somehow, by some miracle, I got into a car one night

with Ripper, Vicki Pipkin, Tina Abbot, and a girl I think was Martha. We took Vicki Pipkin to her house to pick something up. Ripper reached in the back seat and was playing with one of the girl's hands, without looking.

I deftly slid my hairy, calloused mit over the young ladie's and Ripper was so gone on what he was doing he didn't even notice the difference. I watched in cold amusment as he continued to rub my hand like it was an object of affection.

Vicki Pipkin came back and started to get in the car. She took one look and couldn't believe what she saw.

"Charles! What on earth are you doing?"

Then Ripper looked back and saw who's hand he had. The girls cackled and Ripper groaned with embarrasment. I just grinned. Gotcha!

I was a mere cartoonist. Vicki Pipkin was an artist. She went totally bonkers over this guy from out of state called Peanut. I met the guy only once. He was a walking statue of David, pure Alpha Male, but beyond that I knew nothing about him. They had an engagement photo made her senior year and Vicki Pipkin actually did a sketch of it. It was very good and the girls in Home Ec commented on how she got the eyes 'just right'. It was quite an accomplishment and I knew from experience that the hardest parts to draw of a human being are the hands, the eyes, and the mouth. She had a control and neatness in her artwork and took great pains to get it just right. As a person who draws I was very impressed at her style.

At the time I thought Vicki Pipkin was just about the neatest girl in L.O.H.S. and she was my friend.

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## Celeste Tournament

"What, another tournament?" I asked.

"Yeah," Rick replied, "This one is at Celeste. There's gonna be 'B' Team games, too!"

Hot Dog! 'B' Team games meant my chances to play went up enormously! I was filled with anticipation and a stark raving fear. The fear was that I had never played in a High School basketball game in my entire life and had very little game time in junior high!

We left about noon for Celeste. It was clear across Hunt County so we had a nice trip through Greenville and beyond. We had the Varsity Girl's team on the bus with us. They would play before us, of course. It was a tradition. The bus trundeled into the town of Celeste and I saw their gym. It was similar to ours, all wood, and cavernous inside. When we went in there I was immediately impressed by two things. The first was that it was cold as all get out in there and the second thing was the enormous blue silhouette of a devil painted on one end of the gym.

"Celeste Blue Devils Welcomes You" was painted on the same wall near the silhouette. This was one cool gym. Rickey and I camped out in the bleachers and waited for our girls team to come on. I reached in my coat pocket and discovered I had the Confederate flag with me.

"Now, what am I going to do with this?" I thought. This was something I couldn't just carry around. Public display was not done, either. It was impolite, even in Texas in 1971. I stuffed it back in my windbreaker pocket and watched the game.

Out on the floor the Lady Buffaloes gave Blue Ridge a horrible time. Blue Ridge came back powerful in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, but the Lone Oak girls hang on to win it. We were very happy for our ladies. Mary Helen Johnson had 18 points and Francis Johnson had 13. Our ladies looked good so far in this tournament.



### ***A game at Quinlan***

We went to our locker rooms to dress during the girl's game 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. I took off my street clothes and wondered what to do with my flag. I didn't want to leave it in the locker room. The lockers were a joke and somebody might steal the flag. I decided to take it out with me. I stuck it back in my windbreaker and waited for warm-up. We soon went out when the girls left the floor. It was terribly cold out there in those basketball suits and windbreakers. I was freezing. I guess we looked patriotic, with red and white basketball suits and blue skin.

There were a lot fewer of us for this 'B' Team game, about 7 in all. It felt strange to suddenly have a team so tiny. After warm-up I sat on the bench with Larry Hukill. Our starting 5 was Gunner, Rickey, Woody, Dana "Spider" Webb, and Philip Andrews. Philip Andrews would be able to play on both J.V. and Varsity. He was without a doubt the best player on the J.V. squad. He gave us some kind of real firepower on the backboards.

Round and round it went on the floor. I took my flag out of my windbreaker pocket and put it on my right knee. It was neatly folded in a square so it didn't look like much. I fiddled with it nervously. The game was much sloppier than Varsity. Coach Taylor said this was all for fun. I guess it had to be. There were bad passes, double dribbling, walking/travelling, 3 second violations, and lots of fouls. Some fun.

We led at the half by virtue of Philip Andrews's abilities. Coach Taylor had seen the difficulty we were having with a man to man defense and he was experimenting with a zone defense. It appeared to be working. During halftime nobody wanted to go shoot, so I went out there on that cold floor all by myself in front of God and everybody. This was scary, and the more I shot the

more self-conscious I got. I felt like an idiot, but my stubborn streak kept me at it. I looked up in the bleachers to my right. A couple of adults were looking at me and grinning.

Aint I cute?

I almost ran off the floor in embarrassment, but instead I kept shooting. With my face as red as my windbreaker I kept chunking it at the basket. Once a basketball got away from the other team whose guys were shooting at their goal. I caught it and gave it back. I recieved a smattering of applause for that from the bleachers. I wanted to be a turtle. This was so embarrassing! Finally the buzzer sounded to restart the game. I sat down and tried to be small.

After the half we pushed ahead of the team we were playing. Coach Taylor and James Kelly had kept track of the fouls and decided it was time to rotate some people out. He put Larry Hukill in for Bobby Underwood. Woody came out and sat down, tickled to death we were ahead. We slapped hands and we looked back at the game. I was getting revved up with anticipation and anxiety. I wasn't trembling just because it was cold, either.

I noticed Rick had a very unusual move. If he went down for what ever reason he'd roll backwards to his feet. I thought this to be awful strange, but Rickey told me it let him get to his feet faster. I guess so, but nobody else used it. Still, he knew a lot more about basketball than I did.

Time was called. Mr. Taylor took Spider out and sat him on the bench next to Woody. Coach Taylor looked at me and motioned toward the Score-keeper's Stand.

"Go in, Charlie-O."

My hair stood on end in naked fear. I trotted to the station and told them my name and number. Liz Hagerman noted it and I gave the Confederate Flag to Woody. Then I joined the huddle around Coach Taylor. Gunner pointed to the 3 second lane.

"Stay outta there," he growled at me.

I looked at the court in confusion. There were lines and circles everywhere. What did they all mean? Now, for the first time in High School, I was going out there for real. I was horrified.

"Go Red!"

We brought our hands down and out I went. I slipped into a guard position opposite Larry Hukill and near the top of the key. I had no idea about what to do. We went up and down the floor. We got into a 2-1-2 on our end and somebody fired a hot pass at me. It was about shoulder height and bounced through my hands, out of bounds. Oops! Wilt Chamberlain I wasn't. It continued on and then somebody fed me the ball outside and off one side of the key. I think it was Gunner.

"Shoot it! Shoot it!" he yelled.

I launched a brick. The airball missed by a foot and everybody missed the rebound. It bounced out of bounds and that was it.

When the buzzer sounded we discovered that we had won our first J.V. game of the season! I was elated at having played in my first High School game. I was on cloud nine on the long bus ride back.

It was December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1971, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

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"Cowards die many times before their deaths;

The valiant never taste of death but once."

(Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare)

## A Team Without Honor

Unlike football, basketball requires a certain finesse and individuality. In football we run into the other fellows as hard as we can. We can't do that in basketball. We had to change our entire way of thinking. Basketball can also be very frustrating to those who do not play it well.

I did not play it well in 1971 and in spite of getting good enough to hold my own at the game I am not a really great player to this day. Coach Taylor saw I was gung-ho as the dickens when he had put me in the last game. The only problem was that I had no idea what I was doing. He would watch me practice and marvel at my shooting ability. He probably wondered if I was merely badly nearsighted or completely blind without my glasses. Rather than try to arc it into the basket I'd chunk it because of my poor upper body strength. This would either miss altogether or bounce off the rim with considerable force. Coach Taylor suggested I try banking it off the backboard into the net. I started doing this and I met with some success.

I watched Danny Bowman, O.T, Willie, Steve, and the others do jumpshots. They seemed to wrap their hands around the ball and shoot from their foreheads. These would arc gracefully and seem to float into the basket or snap through the net with a satisfying pop. I tried this shooting style and threw bricks. Some of my team mates eyed me warily. Some even wondered why I was even trying to play basketball. Randy Payne especially decided I had no place on his team. Yet Coach Taylor had an open mind and miles of patience. He treated everybody equally and tolerated an awful lot, especially from hyperactive skinny kids with flat trajectory dead-shots.

The 2-1-2 zone defense was showing good results. Coach Taylor would shift in and out of this type of defense confusing the enemy. Man to Man was based on a 2-1-2, so it was a simple shift to the zone. The zone was easy to run. Just by staying in a certain area with their arms out the defense could make it difficult for any offense, and not run themselves out like in a man to man.

A certain magic had come to our team. We had won our first "B" game. I had accidentally brought the flag with me. Prior to this our basketball performance had looked bad. Two plus two equals four, therefore the flag was good luck. It had become our mojo, or talisman. I would take it with me to every game from now on. Woody believed, too. Something had us playing better. It had to be the Flag.

On Friday we went straight from school to the Celeste Tournament. The entire team went this time. Talk of the bus was the fight Mongoose got into with somebody. Mongoose had lost a lot of prestige, and this incident didn't improve his standing with anyone. Not many guys in the class had anything to do with him. I sat in my seat feeling very smug that I was getting mental revenge on the fink. It make it almost worth the five dollars.

When we went into the gym with my buddies I felt more confident. All of us were here and I had the flag. Victory was assured.

Savoy was our first contest in the tournament. Big Red took it to them right away. In the first quarter Lone Oak had 18 to Savoy's 13. By the half it was 33 to 25. I liked what I saw, and Woody egged me on about the power of the flag. I didn't go out to shoot until the other guys did. I was too embarrassed to go out there by myself again. Halftime was uneventful, fortunately. After the half Big Red came back on the floor and put Savoy away 58 to 45. Victory was ours!

As the girls teams came on to play Leonard we changed and went back up into the bleachers. Rickey and I, being outcast from the jock clique, had basically only each other to talk to. Teams usually get up in the bleachers in a gaggle. There is safety in numbers but I didn't realize this. I also thought the idea of sportsmanship was universal as it had been taught at Lone Oak. It wasn't and I was to find this out.

Sometimes we wore our uniforms under our street clothes. We did this because we had no gym bags. We felt like hicks carrying around a paper sack with our shoes and gear in it. Besides, the bag was just something else to keep track of during the hustle and bustle of a tournament. The extra cloathing also kept us warm.

This particular night I was unable to find Rick after the game, and I couldn't find anyone else I felt like talking to. I took to exploring and walking around the gym. I ended up dangerously deep in hostile territory on the wrong side of the gym, right next to the guys we had whupped in a J.V. game. I had my game shoes slung around my neck, tied by the laces. They saw my red and white jersey peeking out the top of my shirt. These guys collectively decided to give me a hard time. I was soon surrounded by about 8 hostile individuals wanting me to "step outside."

Honor was at stake here, mine and my school. They not only insulted me but my team and my school. I could not let my team mates down by letting these swine get away with it. One punk wanted to fight me real bad. We went outside. None of my team mates on the other side had seen what had happened. I went to the bus to throw my tennis shoes on board and I was surprised to see that there sat Lynn McGee, Rickey, and Gunner's brother Bob! They saw I was upset.

"What's wrong?" Rick asked, catching on right quick that something wasn't right.

I was scared really badly and close to crying, but I was still going to fight them. At least, that was what I thought.

"I got a bunch of guys from that team we beat last Tuesday who wanna fight me," I choked out.

"Oh, do they?!" Rick exclaimed.

Rickey, Bob, and Lynn rushed passed me and headed straight for the guys who wanted trouble.

"So they wanna fight, huh?" Rick bellowed, his huge hands balled into lethal ham-sized fists.

"Lets see if they wanna take on someone more their own size!" Lynn chimed in.

"Come on, try us!" Bob called.

These 8 strong, brave basketballers took one look at the potential Lone Oak mayhem thundering in their direction and took off in blind panic. One guy dropped something and they almost tore the frame out of the gym side door getting back inside.

Realizing the kind of situation I had gotten myself into I was escorted by my three friends for the rest of the night. They made sure I wasn't about to get ambushed, ganged up on, or dragged off. We even tooled around in Bob's car, defying them to come back out.

After a while I went back inside. I found the guys who earlier were so eager to get a piece of me. They had no fight in them now, even though they had outnumbered us 2 to one. I looked them in the eye.

"I didn't come over here looking for a fight," I said, lecturing them, "I came over here in the spirit of good sportsmanship. If you don't believe in good sportsmanship then you all shouldn't be playing the game."

They said nothing, but just looked at me. I was alone now, though Rickey had an eagle-eye on me from where he sat in the far bleachers. They could have jumped me, but they didn't. I turned on my heel and left. They were slime. They had no honor, no pride, and no team spirit. What a bunch of low lifes! Forget them!

I rode home with Rick, Lynn, and Bob that night. I forgot all about the turkeys I had met at the game. Being with my buddies there made it all better. I had gotten myself into a bad situation. God protects fools and idiots and so I had the remarkable good fortune to find my friends who got me out of the stuff I had stepped into. I guess Rickey thought I was pretty gutsy for not backing down from the 8 red neck kids who thought I was going to be a quick kill. It would be some time before Rickey would let me out of his sight again.

Back in basketball, the girls took on Leonard. It was a low scoring battle. Lone Oak took a one point lead, but by the half Leonard pulled ahead 15 to 12. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter Leonard expanded it's lead 24-19, then finished the game 31-22, beating us.



***Halftime conference with the starters***

Mary Hellen Johnson and Cindy Hukill had only 8 points each to be the high scorers. We hated to lose to Leonard, even in basketball.

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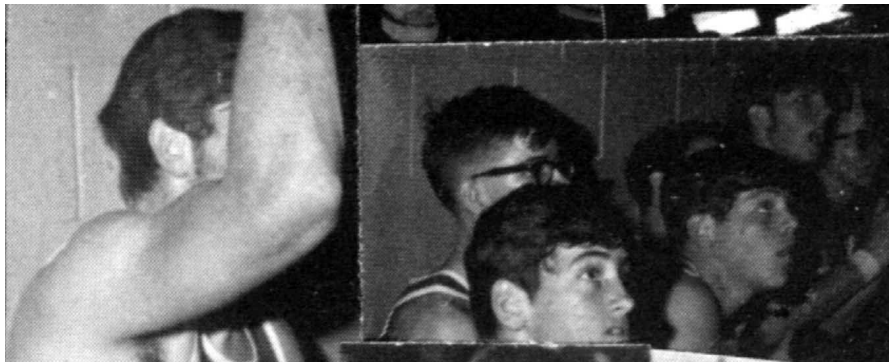
## Talisman

I do not know what would have happened had I fought those 8 guys that Friday night. That I would have gotten a major stomping and the crap beat out of me I have no doubt. I wonder what the other guys on my team would have done? Would they have gone head hunting and exacted measure for measure in revenge? Would they merely have thought me stupid for getting in that predicament in the first place? It would have had a major effect on the tournament. No one would have been allowed to leave the gym until their team had finished for the day. There would have been tight security and cops there. I might even have gotten a visit from my coach and some of my team mates while I was in the hospital. Some would even have brought flowers. How nice!

I thank the Lord it didn't happen.

On Saturday, December 12, we had a long day in Celeste. We were to play 2 games if everything went our way. We were matched up against Bland that evening. Bland is a tiny school but it is a basketball powerhouse. They live, think, eat, sleep, and breathe basketball. Basketball is all they play. They are fearsome on the court. We had our work cut out for us. About 4 O:Clock it began.

I watched with growing frustration at not being able to do anything. I decided to throw good conduct in the toilet and razz the opposition players. One guy I saw was a remarkably thin, tall, black guy. I called him "Stringy". Stringy began to lose his cool as the game went on. As the Bland basket was in front of our bench I took to hollering "Shoot it!" when Bland had the ball in front of me. As I kept this up some of the other guys on the bench picked it up until the entire bench was barking "Shoot it! Shoot it!"



***Rickey with arm in air, Woody, me, David, unknown, and Philip Andrews. The second string.***

With that and picking on Stringy I had made a total jerk out of myself and those who were on the bench with me. It was unsportsman-like, not in the true spirit that Lone Oak Buffaloes are supposed to have, and it was not cool. Coach Taylor remained silent about this, putting it down to youthful enthusiasm. Actually it was youthful stupidity. He had a perfect right to send me to the locker room or at least tell me to knock it off. He did neither, so being a teenager I took this as approval. I kept it up.

Bland went down to defeat, angrily going to their locker room. They had been eliminated from the tournament. We dressed and happily waited for our second game. There were a lot of people from all over the area in the Celeste Gym. It was packed. Rick and I got in the top row again, protecting our backs. We watched the other games going on.

We watched Blue Ridge and Savoy mix it up. There was this fat guy in the crowd, about three rows down to our left, right in front of the rail. He would get up and do a sort of hootchie-coo dance when his team would score a basket. This wore on Rick's nerves. He told me he'd love to push the guy over the rail and watch him splat on the floor below. I knew Rickey's mean streak and I thought it sorta funny. The guy wasn't bothering me, so I just laughed it off and find ways to pass the time. When Lone Oak wasn't playing I was just bored. I couldn't draw at a game, and I never flew my mental airplanes at games. Later on Rick and I went to the other side of the bleachers.

While we sat there Woody came over with Gunner. I noticed that nobody seemed to travel alone around here. Everybody went at least in pairs. Nobody had asked me about the fight I almost got into early on. It seems as if everyone had learned a lesson. I had learned it the hard way. We chatted with each other and watched the championship girl's game on the floor below. Celeste was in the process of destroying Leonard. Celeste had a powerful girls team and they turned their considerable ability loose on the Leonard Tiger girls. It was 15 to 5 in the first quarter, and 27 to 9 by halftime. They were literally scoring 3 times as much as Leonard.

After the half Celeste kept it up. There was much cheering from the hometown crowd and Celeste rolled ahead 40 to 16. As victory drew near for Celeste I saw a display that stuck in my craw. The Leonard boys occupied the bleachers like a group of buzzards and they were not enjoying the slaughter of their girls team on the floor below. They started chanting something I couldn't make out at first. Then one of them held up a hand made sign saying "42 - 6". They were chanting "Fourty Two to Six", the score they had beat Celeste by in football. My razzing of the Bland players and yelling "Shoot it!" was just a game thing. This "42 to 6" stuff was pure arrogance. In spite of this arrogant chant the Celeste girls won, 50 to 23. They stuffed the '42 to 6' chant down Leonard's blue and gold throat. I didn't like Leonard's unsportsman-like conduct at all. It was to get worse, and even cause me some personal embarrassment.

Honey Grove was all that stood in our way to the Championship Trophy we wanted. The warm-up began with enthusiasm and we were pretty well wound up by tip-off. Honey Grove was in for a beating.



Lone Oak scored early and often, showing remarkable mastery of the floor this night. I had the Flag and Woody and I kept the mojo-magic going. It was thought the more we unfolded the flag

the more powerful the magic. To unfold it completely was not good. It caused bad vibes to unleash too much Mojo magic all at once. Woody and I were conservative with the flag. Other things were about to get conservative, too.

Coach Brookins was here to observe the game. I was wound up and started my "Shoot it!" routine again. The entire bench was soon at it. Coach Brookins looked at us all, but said nothing. He was displeased. When a time-out was called both Steve Henderson and Danny Bowman told us to shut up.

Now I was embarrassed. My own team mates were mad at me for what I was doing. I shut up and would never holler "Shoot it!" at an opposition team again. After all, the magic flag was definately enough. I would never forget how low I felt about doing what I did.

We had a dandy lead on Honey Grove and there was speculation about game time for 'B' teamers. The score was something like 36 to 28. I knew I was low man on the totem-pole so the only chance I'd get on the floor was at halftime. I decided to make the best of it. I went out on the floor to do some hot-dogging. I wound up at mid-court and let fly at the top of the key. Swish! Nothing but net! I did this a few times and some in the crowd began to cheer when I made it. Now days these would have been 3 point shots. The crowd was really beginning to enjoy the display.

When the starters came on Steve actually gave me a ball and told me to shoot it. I shrugged at him, and did so. The people in the bleachers were really getting into a frenzy over my shots. Halftime ended and I went to the bench with applause from the crowd. This was too weird!

Third quarter rolled along, and the stomping of Honey Grove continued. Lone Oak played like a well oiled machine, hitting shot after shot.

I was not a good shot. My long shot from the top of the key was nothing but junk. In contrast was Danny Bowman's stunning corner shot. He'd set up just outside the red line in the corner. Willie or O.T. would feed him the ball and he'd arch it to the basket. It would hit in such a way the net would fly up over the rim on the opposite side. Even Coach Taylor marvelled at this shot. Danny Bowman could hit with it about 30 to 50%. It was such a successful shot that most of us worked on a corner shot like it. Nobody could hit like the Danny Bowman, though.

Fourth quarter came and Philip Andrews releaved the nearly exhausted Butcher. Butcher would come over and sit on the floor during time-outs. He smoked like a chimney and this activity wore him out. Soon Spider and Rick were sent in, and then Gunner. That left me, Woody, and Larry Hukill. The crowd on this end begin to chant "We want 12!" I thought that was pretty cool. Then they started chanting "We want Buzzard!"

That ticked me off. My avian nickname is for acquaintances and friends only. They had absoutely no right to it.

They kept it up and I stood up and yelled "I hate Leonard!"

My voice was lost in the roar of the crowd in the gym. Woody pulled me back down on the bench. I had done enough to embarass myself in this tournament already. I was getting angrier by the second and I wanted to know how these '42 to 6' chanting low down dirty stinking rats found out my nickname! My brother might say I got pretty 'swole up' about it.

The game ended at last and I was happy to see it over. We won at a handily 71 to 56. I seethed and steamed about the chanting. I had gotten full payback for hollering 'shoot it' earlier. I'd never try a stunt at halftime like that ever again. I made a silent vow that night. Never again!

Awards were given out soon after the game. I watched on as they were passed out. Our game was the last of the night, so we all just stood there in our windbreakers and shorts, watching the ceremony. When the Sportsmanship Trophy was given out I felt another keen sense of embarrassment. I knew we'd not get one of those, not with the way we had acted.

The Celeste girls got their tournament trophy. Randy Payne got an individual "All Tournament" trophy. He averaged about 20 points a game. In spite of his confrontational attitude he could play a mean game of basketball.

Then we got our tournament trophy. It was big and silver. It was neat looking, glistening in the gym lights. Randy Payne held onto it with Steve. I wanted to touch this beautiful trophy. It was the first one I had ever had even a small part in winning.

On the bus ride back I finally did get to put my hands on the trophy. Even in the dimly lit bus it was very beautiful. The silver trim and the figure of Victory at the top of the trophy all gave it a wonderful appearance. We had won this for our school. We had done real, real good. I was so proud of my team mates, and to be a part of all this. Did I hear Thunder? Did I dare?

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"This was the noblest Roman of them all"

(Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare)

## Much of a Man

It was late. We were coming back after a long time in the gym at Celeste. The trophy we had fought for so long and so hard for was secure in the seat next to Coach Brookins. The coaches decided to stop for eats some place in Greenville. This late there wasn't much open so they decided on Pizza Inn. The bus rocked into the parking lot, 'Lone Oak I.S.D. ' inscribed in big 10 inch letters on it's ugly yellow sides. We rolled to a halt and I was looking forward to the novelty of eating a pizza.

We unloaded in a gaggle and leisurly strolled toward the pizza parlor. The smell of the place got us all to salivating. Some of us hadn't had any real food since lunch. Junk food in the tournament can only take a person so far. The first of us were already at the door of the place when a red neck on the parking lot started razzing us. Everybody turned and looked. This idiot stood next to his pickup and called obscenities at us, and referred to us as Buffalo Dung.

"Oh, yeah?"

Several of the larger players took a step toward this individual, Randy Payne at the head. This fellow was in for a bad night, or rather he was going to have one until Coach Brookins stopped us.

"You all go on inside," Coach Brookins said to us, "I'll take care of this."

Reluctantly we filed into the restaurant. I hung back to see what was going on. Mr. Brookins was just beyond an arms length of the guy and giving him that frightening 'Vampire' stare he could unleash. Coach Taylor saw me and waved me on inside. I hesitated, then went on into the pizza place.

Outside, Mr. Red Neck had pulled a jack knife on Coach Brookins! Coach Brookins merely glared at him.

"You might want to put that up before I take it away from you," Coach Brookins calmly said. The way he said it and the inflection in his voice sent chills up Coach Taylor's spine.

The Red Neck froze. He looked at Coach Brookins and saw something there that sobered him a little. The stare, the evil smile, and the confident stance of Coach Brookins got into him. All of it told him that he had trifled with the wrong man. This hick had never seen the like of Coach Brookins. He put his knife away and got into his truck like a whipped dog.

Inside the restaurant we heard the truck spin its tires as it tore out of the parking lot. Coach Brookins and Taylor came into the restaurant as if nothing had happened. Had we known that the Red Neck had pulled a knife on Coach Brookins the guy would have been torn limb from limb by us. Our respect for Coach Brookins was total and complete. Sure, we may have called him Jay Bee behind his back and stuff like that, but he was above all our coach and the number one Buffalo of the entire school. For him we did the difficult every day, and the impossible only took a little bit longer. For some scum-bag to threaten a man we mutually looked up to was a blasphemy we could not tolerate. Had the idiot pulled the knife while we were there they'd be picking bits and pieces of him out of the trees.

Mr. Taylor was mighty impressed. Coach Brookins didn't even blink, and his eerie calm had unsettled the knife wielder visibly. Nobody told us about the knife, so we sat munching burned pepperonies and hot cheese blissfully unaware. We had won a tournament and looked good doing it. The world was good to us.

The wisdom of our Coach was considered awesome. Even Coach Taylor himself held the man in some awe. In all his experiences he had never met the like of Jack D. Brookins. Mr. Taylor ate some of the pizza and kept a respectable silence across the table from Coach Brookins.

The bus was soon rolling down highway 69 toward Lone Oak. It was about 11:30 and I got off at my house. I knocked on the front door and my bleary eyed father answered it. He unlocked it and let me in.

"How did yall do?" he asked.

"We won. We got a trophy."

"That's good."

Then Dad shuffled off to bed. I tossed my dirty uniform into our dirty clothes pile in the bathroom and staggered off to bed. Man, what a night! It would be more than 20 years before I knew the entire story.

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## Centurions

I gave Elaine and Shirley a piece of my mind. They couldn't understand why I was so upset. All they did was tell Leonard my nickname during the tournament, that's all. Why was I so mad? It looked cute to them.

Think about it girls! It was Leonard! the crumbs who beat us in football. You do remember football? Leonard had no business knowing who I am and especially my nick name. I told them to never do that again. I got plenty hot about it. I guess they just tossed it off to just one more of ole Buzzard's eccentricities. I tell you, I was so mad I could have spit nails.

So far this basketball squad had done nothing unusual. Tournament victories happened often. There were lots of tournament trophies and consolation trophies in the cases. The Greenville paper dutifully reported our victory, yawned, and forgot all about us.

We were supposed to have a 'B' game Monday, but it got rescheduled. Campbell was to meet us here for our first Varsity district game, and the first game of the season played in the old gym. The next day, Tuesday, December 14, I went into the home Varsity dressing room to put on red and white for the very first time at home in my high school. It was sort of like a personal homecoming. We had a long night in the gym tonight. First we'd have our J. V. game then the girls would play. Varsity boys would come on and that would end the night.

Dressed in windbreaker and uniform we proceeded down the steps. The guys took one look at me and stopped.

"Get rid of the hat, Tarrant."

I was wearing my beat up old army cap. I resisted a little, but repeated protestations persuaded me to ditch the cap. We all took a look around before going on the floor. Campbell hadn't come out yet, so we waited. It was tradition for visitors to go out first.

There weren't many people in the stands. It was early, people were still feeding livestock and eating supper, so not many folks could come yet. 'B' team games don't draw big crowds anyway. We really didn't care. We were all excited. This was our first home game!

Campbell 'B' came out of the locker room at last and we finally got on with it.

After warm up I sat on the bench while Campbell worked us over. They had a much better 'B' team than us. During halftime I did not do my long shots and I merely chunked at the basket. After that Campbell continued it's tromping of us. I was grateful when it was over. I don't have the score, but the notation in my personal notebook said they had beaten us badly.

When the girls came out we sat in the bleachers and looked on. No score exist for this game either, unfortunately. Then the Varsity boys played they took Campbell apart, 58 to 69. This score was found in the yearbook, so I had it. The Big Red Machine had come to stay. Victory was ours for the first district game of the season!

Outside the big wooden gym it was coming a tremendous storm. I was worried it would be cold tomorrow.

The next day I saw what the storm had done. A Martin bird house we had blew away. Not far down the road from where I lived a trailer house had rolled and collapsed on itself. That made an impression on all who saw it. When we were in the gym and we all thought it was just coming a hard rain. To my knowledge nobody had gotten hurt in this storm.

On the 16 of December, 1971, we travelled to Caddo Mills. I packed two jerseys in my kit, one red, one white. I also had my Confederate Flag. I never left the Luck behind. In the mud of the storm I had stupidly gotten my basketball shoes filthy. I managed to hose them off. They looked a sort of off-grey, and very ugly. I should have washed them, but I didn't have the time.

Caddo had a stark brick and mortar gym. It had bleachers on one side. It was packed wall to wall and I couldn't figure out why. There were a lot of Lone Oak people here. I shrugged it off and sat next to Rick while the girls played their odd game of halfcourt basketball on the floor below.



I quickly became bored and I wasn't paying much attention to the game. The noise level was high, I figured, but not extraordinarily so. I had heard louder in the Celeste Tournament. I looked forward to what I believed another ho-hum night of bench warming. As the final quarter reached the midway point for the girl's game we boys went to our locker rooms to dress.

I methodically unpacked my stuff and started dressing. Everybody has a routine they do. Some guys asked if we were wearing red or white jerseys tonight.

Others had a way of putting on their equipment that was a ritual that they hoped would bring them luck. Steve Henderson was having a problem. He had brought only his white jersey, and we were to be in red tonight. Being as how I was the player least likely to play I gave up my red number 12 that I loved so much reluctantly to Steve for the night. I slipped on my white 4 and we went out to warm up. I felt sort of awkward in my white jersey and unbelievably ugly shoes, but we had on our wind breakers so I wasn't worried. I looked like everyone else.

"GO RED!"

Out on the floor Big Red thundered toward the green and white Foxes. I looked out on the floor in horror. I had left bits of dried mud where it had fallen out of the treads in the soles of my basketball shoes! I blushed red at the embarrassment of messing up somebody's gym floor. I had been taught since day one not to get mud, sand, or anything on a gym floor. Wearing hard-sole shoes or boots was a major no-no. Well, it was too late to do anything about it now.

Butcher jumped with the guy from Caddo and the game got underway. I watched Steve roll up and down the floor with my #12 on his back. I guess the jersey felt like it was on a Cadillac, even if it was stretched tight over Steve's big frame. The first quarter zipped by, and it was obvious

that Caddo was in trouble. We had them 23 to 14. This was an unusual score, but I thought nothing of it. What interested me was that we had the lead.

Onward it went. Caddo had problems big time with us. Our guys could move faster and were hitting just about everything they put up. The girls in the stands really got into the game, chanting and clapping. Caddo Mills was cold, missing their shots and sputtering badly on defense. By the halftime it was 49 to 29.

We didn't shoot during halftime in the windbreakers, so I shed it and went out to shoot at the basket. I stood out like a very sore and infected thumb with my yucky shoes and white jersey. I concentrated on my shooting and hoped for the best. Then Steve offered me a ball to take my 'long shot'. I looked at him and shook my head.

"No way!" I had to shout over the boisterous crowd noise," I don't do that anymore."

He just grinned his friendly smile and took a jumpshot. Some people in the crowd wanted me to take my long shot. There weren't many, but still, it was coming from the bleachers loud enough for all of us to hear.

"No," I thought, "Not tonight, and not ever again."

The calls kept up. Steve offered me the ball again.

"Come on, Vulture. Take a shot."

Okay. Just once. Maybe that will shut them up! This wasn't what being on the team was about. I didn't like it. I got the ball, wound up at mid-court, and let fly at the top of the key. It boinged off the rim.

"Awwwwwww," I heard from the bleachers.

I said something unprintable under my breath and went under the basket to rebound. No more long shots. Everytime I got a rebound I'd pass it to one of the Varsity guys. I heard a couple of people cheer when I rebounded, thinking I'd go take my long shot, but I'd pass off. When the buzzer sounded, ending halftime, I stomped over to the bench and sulked. What am I, some sort of one man halftime show? If I wanted notoriety like this I would have joined the pep-squad or went out for cheerleader. I wanted to be a Buffalo, and part of the team. The only way I wanted to stand out was if I did something good in game. This half time stuff was pure baloney. I disliked it.

I buried these thoughts in the dark recesses of my mind as the game restarted. I will tell this, though. If the halftime cheering and shot request had continued I would have quit the team. We rise and fall as a team. I didn't request or want any special attention, and by drawing attention to myself for a totally useless shot I might be causing dissention among my team mates who had worked so hard to accomplish so much. I was either a part of the team, cheered on and recongnized as part of the team, or I was not. That's the way it was in my book!

I picked up the flag from where I left it on the bench and put it on my right leg to get the mo-jo going. Tonight it was boo-coo powerful! I couldn't believe it myself. A sort of electricity began to surge through the crowd. Somebody was counting the numbers. If we kept this up we'd score over a hundred points!

By the end of the third quarter it was an unbelievable 73 to 43, our lead.



Coach Taylor began to substitute freely. Philip Andrews was in, soon followed by Rick and Gunner. Time rolled on. Big Red soon had 80 points. Then we had 85. It surged passed the red line to 90. Coach Taylor put in Woody, then Larry Hukill. Still the score climbed. It went to 95.

"Go in Charlie."

I snapped my head around and looked at Coach Taylor. I was going to play in my first Varsity game! I did the ritual of telling the scorekeeper my name, Liz Hagerman duly noted it, and I was honked into the game. I was scared to the point of terror. The noise, the starkness of the gym, the glare of the lights, all of it was dazzling.

Up and down the floor we went. Then Larry Hukill sank two making it 97 to 50 something. As we fell back on defense I cheered at him, gleeful for his having sank a basket. Caddo Mills threw it away and somebody zipped a bullet to me just passed midcourt. I caught it and looked for somebody to pass it off to. Dribbling never occurred my adrenalin supercharged mind. Dribbling made it too easy to steal from me, so I would pass off rather than try to move the ball myself. As I scanned for a red jersey I was suddenly double teamed by two very large and long limbed green and white clad Foxes. I was in deep trouble. I frantically tried to pivot out to find a passing lane. I thought I felt my pivot foot move.

"Tweeeeeee!" squealed a whistle.

Well, I messed that one up, didn't I? I looked for a ref and tossed him the ball. I looked around and something didn't make sense.

"One and one," the Ref said.

What did I do, foul somebody? I looked around in great confusion. We were under our basket. The ref pointed to the free throw circle and motioned me over. I was going to shoot!

In a state of shock and total disbelief I stepped up to a place I had never been to before. The crowd noise was totally unbelievable. People were cheering for me (ME!) to make this shot! It was for real! The ref told everybody on the lane that it was one and one and handed me the ball. My heart was racing and the blood was pounding in my ears. I was shaking like a leaf and sweat poured off me. The crowd noise was deafening. I couldn't think. Oh, man, this was scary! Just what did 'One and One' mean, anyway? Suddenly, the gym fell deathly silent. I looked at the basket, and concentrated on it. I took aim and let fly.

The ball bounced high off the rim, up over the inside square of the backboard. It hit the other side of the rim, seemed to hesitate, then finally made up it's mind to fall through the net. The gym exploded. I had scored!!!!

I took off up the floor like a shot. I had to get on defense! I stood there at the top of the key, the ref waving for me to come back. I still had one more shot!

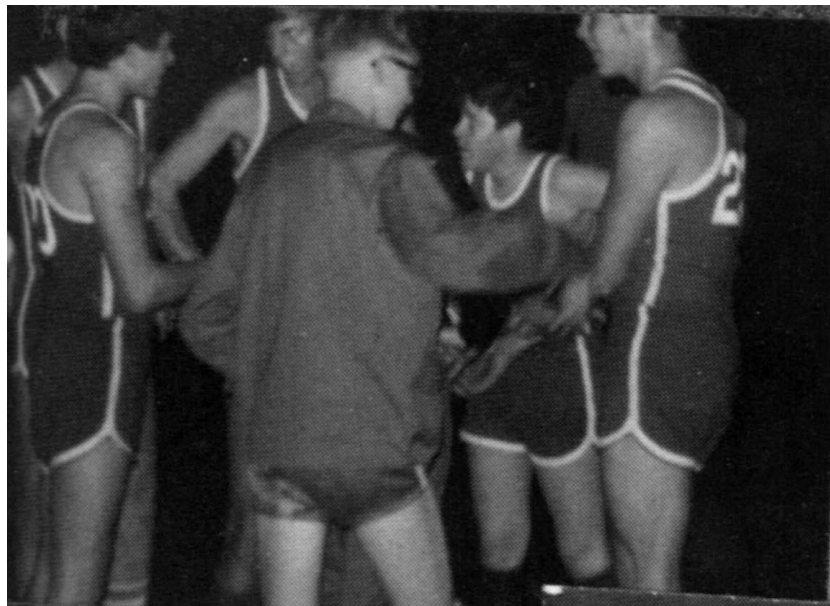
Embarrassed, but super high on my own adrenalin, I wobbled on weak knees back to the free throw circle. Once more the gym fell silent. Once more I took aim. This time I threw a brick. It missed rim, net, and everything, bouncing harmlessly out of bounds. Had I hit the rim or backboard it might have been rebounded by us and put up for 2. That's the way it goes, I guess. Now I could get back on defense.

Caddo came down the floor, scored, and we went back the other way. Up went a shot. It bounced off the rim, and several hands went up in a desperate ballet to rebound it. The ball flew away and

down to me. I got it and rifled as hot a pass as I could to somebody in red, I don't remember his face. He put it up and in for 2 more. We had just broke into 100. The gym was screaming. On the floor we couldn't hear each other yelling at each other from less than a foot away.

Slackjawed I looked at the clock. It said '00' on our score. We had actually scored 100 points! Nobody that I knew of had ever seen a high school team score 100. This was unreal! This was fantastic! *This was the Thunder!*

Down came Caddo one more time. They passed around near the top of the key, where Larry Hukill and I were. Somebody rushed the ball handler. He stopped dribbling and looked for someone to pass to. Quick as a cat, I was on him. I grabbed the ball and he wrestled it free, but the reff blew his whistle. It was a tie ball! The bleachers went wild. The tall black guy looked at me with disbelief. Lone Oak was dismantling his team and now some kid in dirty shoes and the wrong color jersey had just tied him. What a horrible night for him and his team! He couldn't believe it.



***Philip looking to right, me in windbreaker, Hukil, and Rick.***

We went to the circle near his basket. The reff made sure everyone was in position. The people in the bleachers were very amused at the odd sight of 5'3" me and 6' plus him preparing to jump for it. The reff tossed the ball up and it got nowhere near me. I never saw where it went, because it wasn't long after that the buzzer sounded. Lone Oak's rare moment of scoring 100 points had come at last! It was over. the final score was Lone Oak 100, Caddo Mills 57.

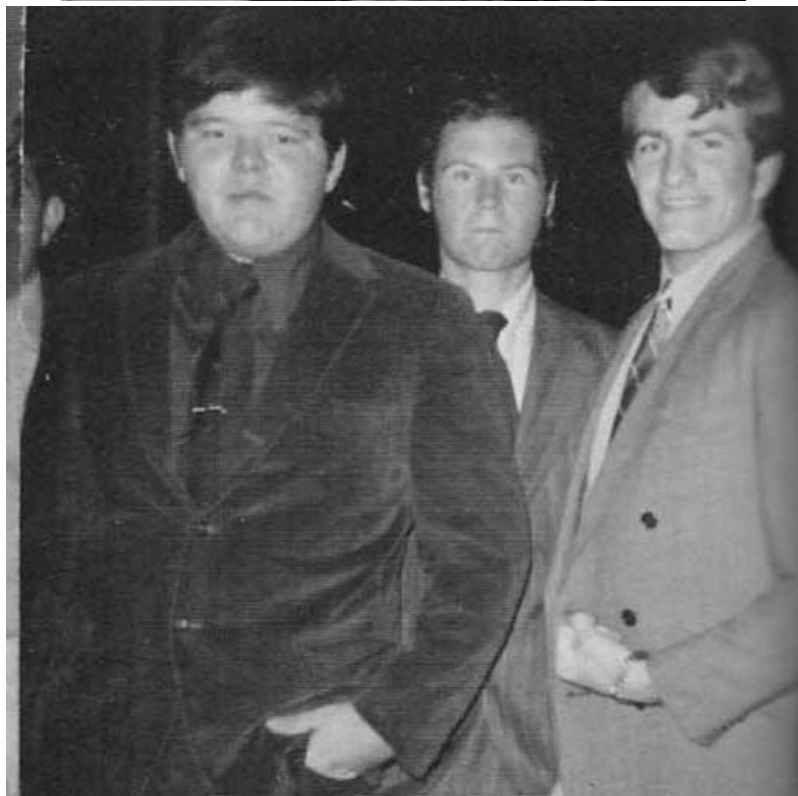
Into the locker rooms under the bleachers we went. People were still calling to us. It was glorious. Steve Henderson had 23 points. Danny Bowman had 19. Willie Davis had 18. Larry Hukill had 2 and I had 1. The other 36 points were distributed liberally all over the rest of the squad.

December 16, 1971, the last game of 1971 and the second district game of the season, Lone Oak defeated Caddo Mills by a rare score of 100 points to 57. One of these points was forever mine!

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Holiday Vacation, 71-72

Our thrashing of the Foxes was overshadowed by the Football Banquet that was on December 17, the very next day. I was honored and overjoyed that I got an invitation to it. I was listed as a manager, so that made me more or less officially on the team. I was probably the only manager in the school's history that padded up for practices but didn't suit up for games. This invitation caught me a little by surprise. I wanted to go to the banquet, but all I had was my suit from my Junior High graduation. This thing didn't fit me some 2 years and several pounds later. I took in all in stock after some frantic rushing around. My suit didn't fit, we didn't have the ready cash for a new one, so that and a few other factors forced me to cancel out on my first chance to go to a Football Banquet. I blamed nobody but myself and let it go at that. Had I been more astute I would have put together my best clothes and gone anyway, but that never occurred to me. I think my mom suggested that, but I was too stuck up about it. No suit, no go. The entire fantasy trip would have been to go, and to take Sandy with me. I had my dreams, the only problem was to turn them into reality. December 17, 1971, I stayed home. Rabbit would fill me in on all I missed when we returned to school.



***Elaine, Shirley, Martha, and Sheron. Looking Terrific. Randy King, Jim Wooddruff, and Jerry McGee looking sharp.***



At school, all the classes had a Christmas party but mine. That ticked me off, but we all made up for it by our home room teacher having us singing fractured Christmas Carols and rewriting the poem "Twas the Night Before Christmas." That made it fun.

School then let out and I happily settled into the lazy, crazy holiday thing. Livestock wise, Dad had got some pigs that I loathed, and my aunt Polly and I went to Greenville for more Christmas lights.

Christmas day I fed my racing fantasies with a new spring powered slotless racing set. I discovered the cars were somewhat fragile. One flipped off the track and blew it's mainspring. I also had a model of a Wankel rotary engine that I carefully built. The rotary engine fascinated me, and a lot of people believed it to be the engine of the future. It wasn't. It turned out the real engine suffered from overheating problems. Another good idea falling short.

The high point of my vacation was going to Grannie Tarrant's house in Sulphur Springs. She loved us all and I liked being with my relatives here. We were there for a New Year's Eve dinner. My cousins the Halls from San Antonio had come up with sorts of gadgets and goodies in their car. They had 8mm movie cameras, expensive radios, walkie talkies, and all kinds of fascinating electronic toys. I would marvel at the stuff with envy. There was no way we could afford these goodies ourselves.

I had two cousins who I ran around with in town. One was Ronnie, who really got along with me like a brother. The other was Cindy, who I thought was pretty and really cool looking. She really seemed to be fascinated that I could draw, play football, and I was on the High School Basketball team. I thought it was really neat to just go someplace in town with a girl, even if she was my first cousin. I treated her with all due respect, but we spent a lot of time going all over town together. She had a driver's license, and I knew the town, so we went to places to grab a hamburger or just drive around. It was a wonderful time.

I spent some time helping out at Dad's gas station. We pumped over 1000 gallons one chilly holiday night. It was getting really cold out there pumping gas and wiping windshields. It was worth it to spend this time with my Father.

I spent the last day of Christmas vacation watching the Dallas Cowboys on T.V. win the New Year's Day game. I had a stack of Dallas Cowboy Weekly magazines to keep me company and help me follow the players on the field. Ronald Posey would give them to me after he had read them. He had a subscription, for which I was grateful. The magazine was printed on newsprint and was packed with photos of the players, at home or on the field. It made the Cowboys more human to all of us. Most of us knew the team roster by heart.

Much to my chagrin, school started the next Monday.

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## For One Of Us, It Ends

Monday was an ordinary, if cold, day at school. The next day a sleet and snow storm shut down school for 2 days. My house felt like an ice box, but I didn't care. I enjoyed my time off and at home.

That Wednesday there was no school, but the roads had thawed enough for our basketball game that night. I thought this was quite a novelty. We got on the bus and rumbled for Merit, where Bland school is. It was January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1972, and our first game of the new year.

Sitting up in the bleachers we all speculated about the odd looking floor in Bland's gym. This gym had the most unusual floor any of us had ever seen. It didn't look like wood, or concrete, or tile, or marble, or brick, or clay. It looked for the world like it was, of all things, PLASTIC! It was an odd pinkish color and had a shell-like pattern in the surface. Guesses ran wild as to what it was we were looking at. We eventually asked Coach Taylor what it was. Without hesitation he pronounced it was fiberglass.

We looked at it in silence for a while then the head scratching and speculation began again. How did they get that much fiberglass in there? I still thought it was plastic and said so. The other guys looked at me and said I was stupid. It was fiberglass, and no greater an authority than Coach Taylor had said so, so there. I just shut up and looked at the most fascinating basketball floor we as a group would ever see.

Watching the girls play showed that the floor was very hard. Some of the girls hit the unforgiving floor and got up slow. If anybody went to their knees on that floor it literally ate the flesh off the person's kneecaps. Looks of dread began to appear on some of our faces.



***Quinlan's gym. Notice the stage in the background at mid court.***

"We gotta play on that!" one of the guys whispered.

Not far away the Bland boys grinned like barracudas. Welcome to the man eating floor of Bland High School.

Our girls won, but we were all in awe of that odd floor and didn't pay any attention to their victory. We dressed and came out for our turn. After warm-up came rebounds so I tried out the floor. No, it wouldn't let a person skid if they stopped right quick. The rubber on the tennis shoes grabbed that hard plastic-feeling floor and would throw a guy down if he wasn't careful. I knelt and examined it. It was hard as armor plate and felt like plastic. This promised to be one rough night of round-ball.

Thundering up and down this rock hard gym floor, Bland fought us to a standstill. The Lone Oak Varsity traded basket for basket with Bland in this chamber of horrors. I saw Willie go down and zip open a quarter sized hole in his knee on the floor. During a time-out James Kelly daubed it with towels and then sprayed it with a disinfectant that just about tripled the pain. Willie almost bit a hole in his lip and went back out there on that floor, limping visibly.

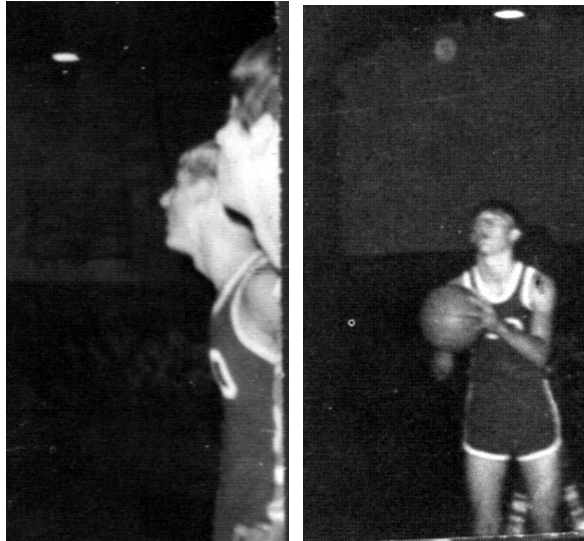
At halftime I enjoyed the novelty of this place. I even tried a half-court, top of the key shot, just to see how it felt in this strange place. My feet came down with loud smack, and the impact told me just how hard this floor truly was.

I looked up in the stands. There weren't that many people in the gym. Schools had been closed, but the games played. It was very cold, and the weather had been awful. I'd guess there were about a hundred folks in there. It felt big and empty.

The game rolled on, and Big Red battled it's way to a lead over Bland. First it was one basket, then two. Bland believed this was their one best chance to beat us so they never gave up. It was tense, and I unfolded the flag one more square. Then for some odd reason I didn't understand,

Coach Taylor put me in the game. I gave the flag to Woody, checked in, and I ran up and down the floor, totally lost. Nobody would dare pass to me. I glanced once at the clock and I was shocked at the score. There were mere minutes left and we had only a 4 point lead. Whats going on here?

This guy from Bland got the ball and moved behind me. I turned and broke down into the lane from my guard spot, to almost under the basket. I put my hand up to block his shot and we leaped into the air as one. He brought his hands up for the shot and his elbow caught me solid on my chin, snapping my jaws shut. The shot made it.



Back we went. Coach Taylor called time and pulled me out.

"Rough out there under those backboards, aint it, Charlie-O?"

It was obvious he was angry about something.

I nodded and sat down. The coach had rested one of his big guns and stuck one of his worst players out there for some reason. It was a nutty gamble, and I didn't figure out why he put me out there instead of Philip Andrews, Spider, or somebody else. Maybe he was punishing somebody for being stupid. That was more likely. What ever it was, when he told his troops what he wanted they listened to him this time. He risked much to get his point across.

This battle royal continued. Bland wanted to beat us, and we wanted to win just as bad. They wanted revenge for what happened at Celeste. I can assure you by my bruised lower jaw they had gotten plenty of revenge for the 'Stringy' episode and all my hollering of 'shoot it'. Perhaps that was why Coach Taylor threw me to the wolves. Maybe it was a pay-back, more likely not. That score was even now. It was time to end the game.

I sat pretty much mute on the bench, except for cheering my fellow team mates on occasionally. The mo-jo and the steadfast skill of the Varsity on the floor pulled us through. We had won by 53 to 57, by the mere skin of our teeth. There wasn't much skin left on our elbows and knees.

From now on the watch words for a game at Bland was 'don't fall on the floor.'



The floor was actually wood. It was made of big pieces of plywood, laid over a solid concrete floor. There was no pier and beam set up to reduce the shock of an impact. The plywood was painted and several coats of varnish put over that. One of the last coats of varnish was patterned on its surface somehow, giving the shell pattern. This was to stop any skidding that might occur on a smooth surface. The end result was the odd pinkish color and the pattern we all saw. It was the most unusual floor we would ever see.

We now had 3 straight victories.

Randy Payne didn't make a couple of games. I didn't notice because I didn't like the man. I just kept on playing basketball and trying to figure out what to do.

January 7<sup>th</sup> was cold in the drafty old gym. I sat on my end of the bench, freezing. Earlier on our girls team had destroyed Boles Home, not letting Boles get but 6 points in 3 quarters! The final score was 51 to 23. It was one of those games where all the girls got to play. As we had 21 girls in all on the team, the last quarter was nothing more than putting girls into the game, and taking them out. Francis Johnson had put in 23 points, a good score in anyone's game.



Now it was our turn. Rumbling up and down the floor, Boles was being scored on an average of 2 to 1. At the half it was 41 to 20. By third quarter it was 68 to 29. Coach Taylor called off his dogs and began to rotate his troops. In went Philip Andrews, then Spider. In went Gunner and Rick. In went Larry Hukill and Woody. I sat on the bench wondering when my time would come. I looked at the clock and at Coach Taylor, back and forth.

The score continued to climb. It was 78 to 35. Soon it topped 80. Boles got to 38. Lone Oak then got 82. Boles got 40. I looked at Coach Taylor. When was I going in? My answer came when the clock ticked to zero. I glared angrily at Coach Taylor and headed for the locker room. Of the entire team that night I was the only fellow who did not play.

James Kelly figured up the points and told everybody in the locker room who had what. Steve had 23 points. Danny had 20. O.T. had 17, and Willie had 13. Only 9 points had been made by everybody else.

While I felt sorry for myself about not playing, and not remembering that I was practically the only 'B' teamer to play at Bland, a big loss to our team had occurred. Randy Payne's scholastic days were done. He had been to Arkansas and somehow got himself married. When he returned he begged Coach Taylor to be let back on the team. Coach Taylor had no choice but to turn him

down. His hands were tied on the situation because the school rules said a married student can't participate in sports. That was all she wrote for Randy Payne.

Some people think Randy Payne was taken off the team for allegedly showing up drunk at a game. That wasn't so. Others believed he should have kept quiet about his being married and not told Coach Taylor. This would have cost us every game from that point on once somebody found out. I can assure you that somebody would have.

If Leonard can find out Anna violated Transferr Rules we can bet that somebody could find out if Lone Oak had an inellegable player on this dynamite squad we had. We were not exactly loved throughout the district. There was a lot of people looking for any chance to bring the high and mighty Buffaloes down.

About Randy Payne himself, I will say he was one tremendous athelete. He played football and basketball with equal ability. This young man was scholarship material to a college somewhere. People who knew him better than I did tell me he was the best basketball player on the team. His scoring ability was incredible. That I could not call him friend was only a result of the cliqueism and the clashing of our two strong personalities. I regret I never got to know him better. That I had the privaledege to serve on the same team with him is an honor I shall not forget.

Once more fate had walked up and kicked someone off of their pedistal. Most of us payed it no heed. We were young and on a red hot basketball team. We had won the Celeste Tournament and 4 straight district games. Steve looked upon Randy Payne's departure with mixed emotions. Together he and Randy made a fearsome pair. Now he had to pick up the slack. He decided he'd try to score over 20 points per game from this time on.

Steve hated Coach Taylor for not letting Randy back on the team. He would never forgive him for that, in spite of the fact that Coach Taylor could do nothing about it.

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## Onward and Upward

Coach Brookins had put his usual ad in the paper advertising for opponents for next year. What made this unusual was two things. The first was that Coach Brookins was asking for three opponents instead of just one. The second was that we were moving from Class 'B' Football up to Class 'A' next year. Danny read this with interest. We had destroyed a lot of teams in our district. That was possibly the reason Coach Brookins was now looking for three teams to play non-district games against. Some people may not want to play us anymore! The other thought was that we were moving up into a district where we were playing schools much larger than ours. This had a bad feel to it right away. Danny wondered what the upcoming season of football held as he picked up his basketball uniform and trudged off to school.

It was January 11, and our foes for this night was Celeste. Our girls were having a good season, tied with Celeste for first place. This would be a key game for them tonight.

That evening I sat on the island in front of the Bean Pot Cafe next to Highway 69. I was thumping gravel off onto the highway, pretending I was kicking fieldgoals or firing a cannon. I had eaten my burger and cola, and I was waiting for Rick to come here from his house in Weiland where he lived. He went home to eat supper and I'd pick up a ride with him from here to the school. He was also to become my lift back home if I didn't get off at my house en-route back from Celeste.

Bored and listless, I sat there with my back propped on the 'T' shaped reflector. I had my uniform bag next to me and watched the traffic pass in front of me while I waited for Rick. Occasionally a car would turn off into Lone Oak. People would look at me but they wouldn't offer me a ride. Once a bunch of locals came tooling by and told me to get off the island before I got ran over. I just looked at them and stayed put.

Soon Rick showed up and I happily jumped into his 65 Ford. We roared up to the school. In a cloud of dust and gravel we arrived next to the bus. Rick and I got out, grabbed our gear, and hopped onto the bus. There were only a few folks there right now. We had virtual choice of seats.

Rick was not enjoying himself. I didn't know it, and he kept it to himself. In spite of his speed, his size, and his ability he was not an outstanding basketball player like Danny. Rick had a big rivalry with Danny Bowman and Robert Vice. That he was being outdone by even Gunner was just about more than he could stand. This was a great blow to his ego.

As the worst player on the team I wasn't all that upset about my position. I was on the TEAM! I was on a Buffalo team, right where Rick said I belonged. If I belonged here then Rick certainly did. He was much better at everything athletic than I, and my main advantage over him was that I could draw and he couldn't.

Soon the bus was full, the coaches arrived, and off we went to Celeste.

The Greenville paper was really beginning to pay some attention to the Big Red Machine south of the Sabine. Our girls were doing very well and the boys team was rolling right along. Tonight was a big deal for all of us.

Soon we arrived at Celeste and the girls teams suited up and began the game. As we watched this contest between the two girl's teams we knew who ever came out of this would be leading the district. We cheered our ladies on until it was time for us to go dress.



Our girls had a lead at the half, but Celeste came back powerfully strong in the second half. They took over the game and beat the Lone Oak girls 35 to 19. With this telling victory Celeste girls now led the district.

We did our warm-up, then I found my spot on the bench. I took the flag out and got the magic going. It didn't look too good for us. In the first period Celeste outscored us 10 to 9. Could we win against a powerful foe without Randy Payne?

Woody had me unfold the flag one more square. Somebody in the other side of the bleachers saw it was a Confederate Flag and called out "You better put that up!"



I paid him no mind. What did he know?



Still, we got another bad scare in the second half. Lewis Smith, the Butcher, got into a battle for a rebound under our backboard. He landed on his left foot wrong and went down like a sack of bricks. In considerable and obvious pain he crawled off and out of bounds on the far side of the court from us. His face was lined deeply with pain and worry.

Those of us on the bench yelled at the ref and pointed at Butcher. We wanted the Zebra to call time, but that wasn't how it was done. Celeste shot and scored on this power play. When we got the ball Coach Taylor called time out. He and James Kelly went across the floor and looked Butcher over. The gym fell silent. Coach Taylor got Butcher's big boat sized tennis shoe off and looked his ankle over. Willie Davis came over and stared, offering words of support to his injured friend. Everybody else on the team gathered around the bench and looked on. This was a bad thing, a real bad thing.

Willie, Big Al, and Coach Taylor got Butcher to our bench and Philip Andrews was sent in. There was a round of applause for Butcher from the bleachers. The game restarted and Coach Taylor taped up Lewis' ankle. No ice was put on it. I sat next to him and offered him a towel and a water bottle. Butcher took a slug of water from our drinking bottles and he was ready to go back in. I looked at this big silent fellow. He was intense on the game. He even hollered an encouragement to the fellows on the floor. I was awed by his presence. He looked a lot different than during practice or time outs. He was in game mode, and ready to get back at it. At the first opportunity he was sent back in and he played on. He wasn't hurt badly, it seemed, and he refused to come back out. Big Red then unleashed the Thunder on Celeste.

By the end of the third quarter we led 47 to 21. Coach Taylor decided to ease up again. He took Butcher back out and began rotating in his best second best players. Lewis Smith had 19 points, to be high scorer for the game. I wanted my turn on the floor.

Coach Taylor put in a lot of 'B' Teamers, but I wasn't one of them. When the final buzzer sounded I was still planted firmly on my end of the bench. The final score was 59 to 29.

On the bus ride back I sulked at not having played in the last two pastings of our foes. To me, it didn't make sense. I reached a conclusion that Coach Taylor personally had something against me. This was erroneous, because in my youthful naevness I could not see that coaching is a major juggling act. Putting a skinny B-Teamer in a game was the last thing on his mind at the time. There were 12 guys on the team, and one of them was injured at the time. I was just one of them.

I was sitting in a class the next day. We were doing Mid-Term tests. There was an announcement over the P.A. system asking all members of the football team to go to the gym. Did that include me? I looked around. Rabbit and Rick told me to come on, so I guess it did include me. Off I went with them. Nobody had any idea what this was all about. It was January 12, 1972.

While going to the gym I saw Troy and Larry Little exchange a rapid series of jabs and blocks to rival any Kung Fu movie. I don't know what they were arguing about, but something had both of them on edge. Neither guy landed a punch home, and we were very close to where the coaches were, so they stopped arguing. I figured it was best to stay far away from either of them for a while.

We gathered around the west end of the locker room, facing the coaches who were on the east side. Mr. Brookins stood before us with his hands in his pockets. I sat on a wooden box and wondered again what was up. Mr. Brookins allowed us to settle in then broke the following silence with his voice, speaking low and precise as he always did.

"You all know what happened to our Homecoming Queen."

Everybody nodded.

"Well, I asked Sheila Samples if she would like to take her place. Sheila was voted second and that's how it stands. Sheila said she would. I just want a show of hands up here to make it official. If there is somebody else you want to be the Football Sweetheart you all can nominate her instead, and vote on it."

Silence.

"All right. Those who want Sheila to be Homecoming Queen, let's see your hands."

All team members held their hands up.

"That's it then. You all can go back to class now."

We exited the locker room without much to say. Once upon a time I thought this all was stuff and nonsense. Not anymore. Being an actual Lone Oak Buffalo team member let me see just how much ceremonies and traditions meant.

Sheila had only 2 votes less than the unfortunate lady who had won the crown during the season. As runner up Sheila had dibbs on the title. It was merely a formality that the team okayed it.

That was how Sheila Samples, Troy's girl, became the second official Homecoming Queen of the 11 man football years. She wore the crown ably and deservably. To Troy's somewhat prejudiced eye there should have been two homecoming queens because the votes were so close. For myself I thought it sort of neat that someone I knew as a family friend for many years was now part of high school royalty. It was a noble and good thing to thus honor this lady.



The sad part about all of this was that the girl Sheila had to replace had done the whole Football Sweetheart/Homecoming Queen thing before leaving school. She had sewn the hearts on her outfit, got the newspaper picture, and all of the honors that go with it. She was very much loved by her classmates, and her loss was greatly felt. It is strange how someone can soar to great heights only to come crashing down from circumstances totally unforeseen. It happened to Randy Payne, and it had happened here. We all should have taken such lessons to ourselves, to make us wiser, but at the age of 15 we thought we were immortal. We all did.

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### Rejoycing in the Pit

Mr. Trimble looked his grade book over with disbelief. After calling out the usual Honor Roll students he came to my name and almost choked. I was exempt from Midterm tests in Ag because my grade point average was high enough. He simply could not believe it. I happily left the class room to go shoot some baskets, look to see if any of my friends had gotten out of

Midterms, goof off, or just find a happy spot in the sun and draw. I felt like I had really accomplished something, and the look on his face said it all. He didn't understand how I had done it.

The answer was very simple. I wanted to be on the team. To be on the team I had to keep a good grade average, at least above a 'C'. With that incentive I dove into the books a little harder and put out good grades. I was a Buffalo, so I could do no less. Go Red!

I shot baskets in the gym and found out what was up next on the schedual. Campbell was the next game, in their pit, and this was to be an 'A' team game and a 'B' team game. I planned to suit up for both games. I had done this before. Coach Taylor didn't object but Randy Payne did. With him gone there was no one who really cared one way or the other. Philip Andrews had been suiting up for both games because they needed his abilities to give them depth. I just started tagging along. Now it was becoming a habit, and one that I loved. Had the other guys on the team objected to my suiting up for both games I would have protested and gotten angry, but in the end I would have settled for just suiting up for 'B' games. My team mates cut me a lot of slack. I have no idea why.

After school I went to the Bean Pot Cafe and chowed down with Gunner. there was a second floor on the building and we had the run of the place. It had several rooms up there like an apartment building. I was told this had once been a doctors office or the pharmacist lived here way back in the day.

Bored, I whacked at a set of drums somebody had up there and I was told not to quit my day job. Having Tintinitis does not a good drummer make. As the evening counted down to time to go back to the schoolyard and board the bus I played a little pinball and relaxed. About 4:30 we went back to the school.

After a short bus ride on the twisting and turning Prairie Valley road we arrived at Campbell. I marvelled at the pit, and kind of wished we had a gym like this. This was a wonderful place! Campbell had the distinction of having the most unique of all basketball courts. It was time to suit up for the 'B' game.

Playing basketball in a basement is an odd sensation. There are sheer walls and the crowd seems very removed from the action going on below. It feels very much like a gladiatorial arena. The place is very loud, even as gyms go. A lot of people from Lone Oak were here to see their teams play.

The B-team game was just exhibition. There were no playoffs for us and no trophies to recognize our efforts. As Coach Taylor had said, this was just for fun. The Lady Buffaloes were in contention, still battling for district. The Varsity boys were leading the district with a fantastic 5 and 0 record. Everyone was out to beat us. We were leading the pack, and had Hornets, Indians, Blue Devils, Foxes, Tigers, and I don't know what all chasing us.

The one thing I never got used to was Campbell's colors being the same as ours. I never heard a battle cry of "Go Red" or any cheers similar to ours. I don't think Campbell liked us very much, and they didn't play football, so we held them in a bit of contempt.

So there was no love lost on the floor when the two sides met. As the 'B' game rolled on I got put in by Coach Taylor. I don't remember if we won or lost, and all records of this game's scores are lost forever, but I do remember I had a grand time. I felt like I was getting what was due me, even though Coach Taylor owed me nothing. The sheer joy of being in the game was enough. When the final buzzer sounded for this game I went into the locker room in a much better mood.

Because I got to play I can only assume that we had won that game, because for me to play the score had to be high enough to offer no risk.

I sat with Rick watching the girls play. It was a vicious and hard fought game, close all the way. If Lone Oak lost it would be difficult to make up the ground on Celeste. Campbell was fighting for their own reasons, and I do not know where they stood in the standings. In the end Campbell managed to hang on to a slim lead, and they won it 36 to 33.



This was a small disaster for our girls, as it put them 2 full games behind the powerhouse that is Celeste.

As the Varsity went off to dress for their game I decided to go with them. I didn't expect to play, but so what? I just wanted out there. I actually preferred to sit on the bench and scream and yell rather than sit in the bleachers and scream and yell. Screaming and yelling is what I do best in basketball, and if I could do it with both teams I would certainly do it.

The game started with Butcher jumping the ball with a tall guy from Campbell at midcourt. From that second on the Thunder blasted Campbell. I watched on with Philip Andrews, the only other guy on the bench with me except James Kelly and Coach Taylor. Philip Andrews had gotten the spot on the Varsity after Randy Payne had left. I was very happy for Philip Andrews. We were definately enjoying this game. It was great. The score was a lopsided 40 to 25 at halftime.



***Odd man out! I'm in red, Danny and the rest of the team are in white.***



***Notice Coach Taylor in a coat. Its cold in there!***

At the half I tossed a few buckets then rebounded for the men I was grateful to be on the floor with. Nobody seemed to have any problem with me, so the game continued.

As the second half came on Campbell was not having a good night of it. Willie was red hot, hitting just about everything he put up. Butcher and Steve were burning up the nets, too. Coach Taylor sent me to the scorekeepers station to check on who had how many fouls. I was feeling very useful, and I was very happy. The score was about 57 to 37. Liz told me and I told Coach Taylor, and went back to sit on the bench.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter Philip Andrews was sent in for the heavily sweating and hard breathing Butcher. Butcher sat next to me on the bench, James Kelly gave him a towel and some water. Butcher had 20 points already. Butcher didn't say a word, being in game mode again. Like everyone on the starting team, he was on fire. The intensity of these men was incredible. I was in the presence of greatness, and knew it.

The game was nearing it's final minutes. We had about 70 points to Campbell's 44. That was when I heard something I thought I'd never hear twice in one night.

"Go in for Willie, Charlie."

Willie was in foul trouble but I hadn't thought anything of it. Butcher would go back in and they would rotate Philip to Danny's forward position and let Danny play guard. That was the way it was supposed to be. To have him tell me I was to go in was a surprise, and a good one at that.

I didn't question my good fortune. I hopped over to the score-keeper and told them who I was. Liz looked at me like Coach Taylor had lost his mind. I knelt in front of the scorekeeper station and glared out on to the floor. This was a Varsity game and the guys out there were at the very least 10 times my ability. I channeled my aggression and apprehension and focused on what I had to do. At the proper time I was honked into the game.

Out onto the floor I went. Willie reluctantly came out and James Kelly tossed him a towel. O.T. essentially ignored me and the rest of the crew just figured they had a game to finish. Zoom! Zoom! Up and down the floor at what seemed like a breakneck pace we went. I was experiencing the Thunder and it was unbelievable at the way everybody moved. It was a blur of motion and red and white. I got open under the right hand side of the basket. Danny kept it and put it himself for 2. I slapped the ball, doing a spike, before going back for defense. This was just too cool! Somebody then called time.

The floor emptied as we went over to our respective coaches. Coach Taylor gave some advice then looked at Danny.

"Didn't you see Charlie open under the basket?"

Danny just looked at him and said nothing. I was impressed. Coach Taylor didn't want any ball hogs on his team, and in spite of the fact I had a low percentage of making the shot he believed Danny should have given me the shot. All thoughts that I had of any personal problem I may have had with Coach Taylor evaporated once and for all right there. The buzzer called us back onto the floor.

It was only a few short minutes before the final buzzer sounded. We had put our 6<sup>th</sup> straight district win in the books. We were undefeated at the halfway point. If by some peculiar chance of

fate we collapsed and we lost every game from here on out we'd still have a winning season. The Thunder was rolling for us in this odd indoor game.

James Kelly loaded his stuff on the bus, then got the score books to be passed around. In the semi-darkness of the bus ride home Willie Davis saw he had 21 points, and Butcher and Steve Henderson had 20 each. Our final score was 77 to Campbell's 49.

Roll on, baby, roll on! The Big Red Varsity Boys were awesome.

I kept my own council on the ride back. I do not know why Coach Taylor allowed me to play on both squads. That I played something like nearsighted stork on rollerskates was beyond question. What I did do was allow him to have an extra body when he needed it so his people could avoid injury, rest, or get instruction. This actually gave him some depth on his varsity team, sort of like having a spare tire for a high powered sports car.

I felt like I was getting away with murder. Only Philip and I played both J.V. and Varsity the same night.

The Varsity record for the Boys was 6 and 0. The Varsity girls stood at 4 and 2. The Junior Varsity record was not being kept track of by many folks, but we felt like we had won more than we had lost. More than likely that was true. That we all were having more fun than any of us thought possible was a surprise. The bus rolled on, and with it, the Thunder.

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## Splatter

English class was chaos. Mrs. Harris was having one awful time with us. I personally referred to this 5 foot tall young firebrand as Unholy Harris and held her in open contempt. English was the easiest of all classes for me, so it involved no real effort on my part to do what was required. But she was a taskmaster and piled on the homework in the effort to show who was boss. It was a wasted effort. None of us ever bowed to her will, powerful as it was. But we certainly did pay for it by doing a lot of extra homework!



MRS. JANICE HARRIS -  
English, M.S.L.S.  
E.T.S.U.

It wasn't always bad in there. As our basketball team thundered along, showing the most remarkable skill of any yet seen here, school spirit began to be directed at us with unheard of enthusiasm. Posters and rally banners began to appear in the halls and in the classrooms. The Thunder could be heard by everyone.

Mrs. Harris had a poster in her room that said "Lets Support Our Basketball Team!" I took one look at this and my twisted imagination ran wild. When Lewis Smith wasn't intense he always looked totally blown out. I picked him as my subject for the poster. I drew an exhausted player in red and white being propped up from behind by some guy in street clothes. I put the caption on it that Mrs. Harris had, giving a whole new meaning to 'supporting' the team. Mrs. Harris thought it was funny and let me tack it up where everyone could see it.

For the life of me I simply could not figure why Herman and McCallum did not join the team. They loved basketball, and McCallum was one tremendous player. I think he and Herman were thinking about getting on the team next year. Herman believed he was too short and uncoordinated to even get on the team this year. Of course, I thought that was a very lame excuse. If I was there, who had only a vague idea of the game, there was no reason he shouldn't be. As for McCallum, I have no idea why he didn't join us. We could not have too many people on the team. Everybody we could get was needed.

While we were piling up victory after stunning victory in arenas at home and in other towns, Herman and Ricky McCallum settled for playing basketball in P.E. Class. It was usually a game of 2 on 2. On this particular day Herman was having an awful time covering McCallum. McCallum would do a fall-away jump shot and swish the net repeatedly over Herman. This began to grate on Herman's nerves. He was being outclassed by McCallum but refused to accept it. Everytime he tried to cover McCallum all he saw was the guy's belt buckle as he shot.

After a bit of this Herman had enough of it. When McCallum went up for another shot Herman took his legs out from under him, in a rare display of violence. Mac hit the unforgiving maple with considerable force.

After waiting for his eyes to refocus Mac looked up at Herman.

"Did it go in?" McCallum asked, as if he was asking what time it was.

Exasperated, Herman replied "Yes, blast you, it did."

He helped Mac up and they continued their game.

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## Fox 2

On January 18, 1972, Caddo Mills came to Lone Oak. This was looked upon with a great deal of anticipation. There was talk of getting a second 100 point game. Coach Taylor knew better. He wasn't out to blast Caddo off the floor, even if we might be. Coach Taylor knew he had one powerful basketball playing machine here, and he had learned how to keep it in check. He knew when to dump in the second string, and when to recognize signs of an opponent that was broken.

Rickey Graham had a similar attitude. When I told him how cool I thought it would be to get 100 points again he said it wouldn't be right if we chopped Caddo up once more. There was no reason for it. I looked at my big hulking friend. He wasn't enjoying our season nearly as much as I

was. Something was wrong, and I didn't understand it. He was getting disenchanted with basketball really fast. Still, he was correct about it not being right.

We hoped our girls team won tonight. We wanted them to zip along with the season with a winning record and bring back a trophy too. For that reason and school loyalty we rooted like mad dogs for them while they played Caddo Mills. It looked good. Our ladies surged ahead a powerful 18 to 4 by the end of the first quarter. As we cheered them on they had outscored Caddo Mills better than 4 to 1 at the half, an astonishing 29 to 6. We loved it.

After the half time basket shooting by the girls their massacre of the Foxes continued. It was a fast third quarter and we went to our locker room to dress. Not wanting to miss any of the action we dressed quickly and massed in the area next to the west bleachers to see what was going on. We were not dissappointed. Our ladies won, 43 to 24. Coach Taylor had played as many of his benchwarmers as he could. Our girls had their confidence back. They had played one excellent game with Francis getting 23 points, Cindy with ten. The lady Buffaloes were ready for a district match, having a record of 5 and 2.

Now it was our turn at the bad guys. This time I was not the raggamuffin I was at Caddo the night of the 100 point game. I had on my red jersey, and my tennis shoes were washed. The poor shoes would never be white again, but at least this time they were not filthy. I blended in with the team, and it was exactly what I wanted and where I belonged.

As expected, we tore Caddo Mills up. By the end of the first quarter it was 14 to 5. We all got to see Butcher doing his rebounding and digging in at center, dominating the backboards. Steve hit from his forward position again and again. Willie would catch the long passes and he and O.T. wore the Foxes out with fast break after fast break. Danny would hit his odd corner shot, throwing the net over the rim and forcing the reff to use the ball to knock it back down. It was magnificent to watch these young men, the most powerful home team to ever set foot on the floor of that gym. I was in paradise, watching the best players I had ever seen do the job they were doing on the hapless Foxes. I cheered them on, with as much class as I had been taught by these men. No more 'shoot it', no more insulting the opponents on the floor. I had matured, and learned from these men that wore the red and white. They were my team, and I was one of them. We were the Mighty Buffaloes. Hear our Thunder!



CAPTAINS:  
Willie, Steve, Lewis  
and O. T.

Soon as halftime rolled around I shot conventional shots and rebounded for the starters. There was no cheering from the stands for me, and no shouted request for the oddball long shot. All that was gone forever. I was finally seen as a team member, not some hotdog. I had made the team. We had other things on our minds. There was an air of anticipation among the team members. We knew that everybody would get game time tonight.

By third quarter Coach Taylor was sending in the subs. I watched Philip do his odd rebounding, where he would dribble once before shooting. I saw my good buddy Rick do his backroll to his feet. Diminutive Larry Hukill remained cool, even when pressured by the Fox guards. He had been doing this for far too long to be rattled by simple things like that. Dan Webb leaped up into the air, so high, and seemed to hang there as they fought for a rebound. Gunner, with the finesse of a tank, would lever lighter foes out of the lane to get an advantage for a rebound. Bobby Underwood showed remarkable calm for a skinny freshman, doing nicely out there. He had promise.

I went in late in the fourth quarter, when it had become nothing more than a 'B' team game. Almost all of the starters sat on the bench, watching us with amusement. When Coach Taylor sent me in he cautioned all of us not to foul.

Amid all the crowd noise I misunderstood what he had said.

I looked up and asked, "You want us to foul?"

A chorus of voices from my team mates came back sternly, "Dont foul!"

So instructed, out we went.

I got at the mid court line, looking menacingly at the Foxes who were throwing the ball in. My teammates quickly called me back to my guard position. Caddo Mills was already spent, both physically and mentally. They didn't do much, and in our position there wasn't a lot we could do wrong. It was over soon enough.

We didn't get another 100 points, but we did beat Caddo soundly 85 to 49. Steve Henderson had 17 points, and was the lowest scorer in double figures. Willie Davis and Danny Bowman had 18 apiece. O.T. Williams burned up the nets to get 20 points on fast breaks and long shots from his guard position, making him high scorer for the night. Fifteen points went to the rest of us, but none of them were mine. I was on the team, and thats all that really mattered to me. This game made us 7 and 0.

The Greenville paper dispatched a reporter to cover all our games from now on this season. Something very rare was going on down here. For the first time in memory, in spite of our second place finish last year, the Lone Oak Buffaloes Boys were doing something else besides just showing up.

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"Who are the Buffaloes?"

We are the Buffaloes!

The Mighty Buffaloes!

Fight!

Fight!

Fight! Fight! Fight!"

(Pep-Rally Cheer, 1971)

## Fun and Games

Boisterous behaviour is common among adolescents. If allowed to get out of control it can be destructive as they push the limits of trying to see what can be gotten away with. Getting suddenly too restrictive can also lead to problems. Mrs. Harris was having a very bad time with us. Discipline had just about totally broken down. To retaliate for this she would over react to just about any situation that came to pass.



***Mrs. Harris and Ronald Posey goofing with the photographer.***

Once I bent over to pick up a paper wad I found on the floor. Mrs. Harris saw me. The confrontation was immediate. She was not going to chastise me for throwing paper wads, because I wasn't. Nor she was not going to paddle me, or put me down for misconduct. Over my dead body she would! We went to the Principal's Office, mainly because we were getting louder, and I was mad as the dickens because she doubted my honor. Once in the office I angrily declared my innocence and Mr. Brookins believed me. I had fired off quite a few thousand paper wads in my time, especially in my Civil War Navy games, but not this time. I was sent back to the classroom, none the worse for wear. When I returned I was given a lot of wide eyed looks by the class. Some, especially David Dillon, asked if I got licks. I angrily told him 'no'.

This was not to be the end of it. One of the current going pranks was to actually throw people out of the school windows. Once, just before English class, a couple of jocks got Gary Dooley and bodily tossed him out of the large windows that lined the walls of the school building. He hit the ground running and made it back inside before the bell rang.

One day Mrs. Harris had an errand to run before she could start class, so she went to take care of it. Rickey and David Dillon of all people suddenly grabbed me. I wasn't surprised by the behaviour of my buddy Rick. He often took out his frustrations by grabbing my neck or verbally abusing me. I put up with this because he was actually a friend. In the end he was always there when I needed him. David Dillon was another story. He was real dangerous and got his jollies in

many vicious ways on me and the members of my clique. I didn't like the boy. For them to team up on anything was odd to say the least.

I put up a fight against these somewhat strong individuals but it was mostly futile. They got me to the window and tried to throw me out. I grabbed the frame and they couldn't force me off the ledge. Because they couldn't push me off I just stood on the ledge. The window opened in such a way that I couldn't get back inside. I just stood there, framed in the window, like some grade school window decoration.

Mrs. Harris came in, saw me in the window, and motioned me to come with her with her finger. I hopped off the window to the ground below, and made my second trip to the office that week. This idiotcy had to stop!

In the classroom everyone speculated about what would be done to me, and it all came to a rapid conclusion when the P.A. speaker in the ceiling called Rickey Graham and David Dillon to the office. I returned to the English room and sat down, angered by these two affronts to my dignaty in just a few days. Back in the office Mr. Brookins was probably wondering if everybody in Sophomore English Class had collectively lost their minds or had Mrs. Harris completely lost control of a gang of rampaging nuts. I think it was a mixture of both. Ah the joys of youth!

Aside from all this insanity was the more ordered world of basketball. There was no fooling around here. Bland was our next opponent and we all wanted to see what they were like on our wavy, rolling, gym floor. They had their plastic-like, flesh eating, monstrosity and we had our floor of many surprises. It was hoped to be a night of action. People in town were waiting to see it.

Our girl's team, the Lady Buffaloes, was also looking forward to playing Bland. They had mopped the floor over there with the Bland girls. This game, if won, would put them that much closer to a good bracket in the District Tournament. I think only about 4 teams get picked to go to the tournament. That is decieded on the win-loss record. Our girls had to keep winning or they might fall by the wayside. We boys had our position in the tournament all but sewed up. We thought it would be nice to have our ladies there.

I was walking down the hall and saw a poster for basketball, just like the kind we had in football. I saw that some of the team members had signed it, just like in football. I took a red pen, signed my name, in normal sized letters, and put my number 12 under it. I had signed a poster for the first time as a real Buffalo Team Member. I put my pen back in my box and walked down the hall feeling ten feet tall. Onward to victory! Go Big Red!

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## "Miss It, 24!"

Bland had come to our house, our place, our gym. This was to be one of the biggest battles in the district, for the boys. I mostly looked at it as just another game, but that was because I didn't know any better. If any team could knock us off our pedistal and ruin our so far undefeated season, it was the Bland Tigers. These guys were the best basketball players in the district, second only to us. Our last battle had been close fought to 4 points. They had won the championship last year and we had come in second. I wasn't there for that, but that was then and this is now.

Now Bland was in our gym. This big old drafty dark red and glossy white painted monster had been the best playground I have ever had. I found its cathedral like confines to be friendly, if not cozy. For nearly a decade it had been a fun part of my life. To get to play basketball with a

championship class team was an added pleasure. Tonight, on our wild and crazy floor, Bland would fight for supremacy in district.

True to form, the Lady Buffaloes destroyed the Bland girl's team 41 to 18. Just as the girls had inspired the boys team last year, this year the courtesy was being repaid. We cheered for our ladies, and they fought hard to make the grade for the soon to happen District Tournament. Francis Johnson had 13 points and Cindy Hukill had 10, looking good in this contest.



***Very rare look into Girls Locker Room.***

When our turn came I went over to examine sections of our floor, down by the south side of the gym. The south wall had a huge white billboard of sponsors who bought advertising space on it in 1 foot by 2 foot blocks. These people helped keep wood on the floor and shingles on the roof. It kept this monstrous wooden structure going.

We were in the shooting part of the warm-up and I dribbled a basketball on the soft spot in the southeast corner of the floor. It didn't come back with as much force as it would on the more sound portions of the floor, and it also seemed to come up at a different angle. I stood on the soft spot and bounced lightly on the balls of my feet. Even with the thudding of the balls in the gym I could hear the creaking of the floor.

Back when I was in grade school I once got down and looked at the floor with my ear on the wood. I saw the rolling, wave-like terrain of the floor of the gym. Anyone who was unfamiliar with the contours of this old floor could get a surprise trying to dribble on it. The old barn had settled unevenly, and in spite of all efforts to keep a level and even floor, the place still had bulges and waves.

I laughed to myself and went back to rebound for my teammates, and shoot some myself. I hoped Bland found out that they weren't the only ones who had a difficult floor to play on. When the buzzer sounded for us to go to our bench and start the game I felt confidence in my team.

I sat on the bench as the starting 5 went out. The game started and we all cheered the team on. Woody sat next to me, and we worked the magic with the flag. We would need everything we had. This was one tough game. Bland kept up with Lone Oak, trading basket for basket. Woody,



the entire bench, and myself got worried. I think the whole gym was uneasy. It was 14 to 13 by the first quarter.

After that Bland made a go-ahead basket, and then several times the lead switched back and forth. This was what the old hands called a 'Barn Burner'. It was wild and wide open, with two evenly matched teams roaring up and down the floor in what could easily be the best game of the year. When the half-time buzzer sounded it was 24 to 23 our favor. Nobody went home yet, and some people came late and stayed. This was definately worth a dollar.

Because it was halftime and a very close game that was just hanging in the balance, I knew the only time I'd get on the floor was at the half. So, I went out to shoot along with the rest of the non-starters. The north half of the floor was the best half of the gym. I thought it was nice of us to let the visitors start on this half. There were no soft spots here. I think it was because of the fact that this was the north side of the gym. Most of us played our half court games on the south side. The south side doors were rarely opened in winter, but the north doors had folks going in and out all the time. That made the north side colder. All the heat usually went to the south side too. The south end was pretty worn for that reason. The north side of the gym had some sort of panel board on the walls, sealing it from most of the drafts.

Soon the game restarted. It was still a close fought contest. Neither team had lost any momentum during the break. Greatly concerned, I looked on and offered the occasional "Watch 'em Red!" or "Go for two!" My teammates were equally concerned in their own ways.

The situation was still in doubt by the end of the third quarter. We had 36 and Bland had 35. It was one nasty seesaw war. Coach Taylor saw that we had several players in deep foul trouble. Philip was already in there, with Rickey and Gunner up next. Bland was in a similar situation, throwing its second string into the fray also. It was a bench war, unlike any other game we had played this season. Coach Taylor looked his wanna-bees over and evaluated our chances.

Larry Hukill, Bobby Underwood, and I were virtually useless. Bland would eat us for dinner and wouldn't even bother to spit out our bones. Dan Webb was out with the flu or something. Rick had potential in that his 200 plus pounds gave him an advantage under the backboards. Gunner wasn't too bad out there, and that made him pick of the litter.

Up and down, back and forth it went. Lone Oak would score, Bland would score, then Willie fouled out. Mr. Taylor put Gunner in and hoped for the best. The fourth quarter was ticking away. If Lone Oak could just hold on we could make it through this one. Then Bland tied it all up, 41 all. Coach Taylor bit his lower lip and I wondered about overtime. Our situation was not as good as it could be. Either side could win, or lose, this contest.

The wild melee continued. Gunner broke open like a lumbering truck and O.T. shot a pass to him. In a gamble to intercept the ball a Bland player bounced off Gunner, fouling him. The Reff blew a whistle and called One and One!



***Coach Taylor talks to a member of the girls team.***

***Notice the heater fan over the bleacher rail. Bleachers are painted deep magenta red***

***And the walls are glossy white. The heater is a medium green.***

***The large column in front is actually a chimney.***

Gunner went up to the free throw line at the north end of the gym, far away from our bench, and the Ref prepared to hand him the ball. The gym fell into an eerie silence. While I sat there on the bench I noticed some of the Bland girl's squad had positioned themselves in a tight knot in our visitors bleachers. It was cold in the gym. They were not too far from the downblast of the big green heater-fan located nearby. I'd never seen anybody over there before during a game and I thought this was unusual. While I was thinking about that and watching Gunner prepare to shot his free throw I didn't notice that it was so quiet we could have heard a pin drop, if not for the whirring of the heater-fans. Gunner got the ball, and lined up on the basket. He took aim at what was probably the most important basketball shot he'd ever make.

"Miss it Twenty Four!" a Bland girl called from the visitor bleachers.

The gym erupted in a roar! Bobby Underwood and I leapt to our feet off the bench in surprise. We turned and looked behind us.



Everyone on Lone Oak's side was on their feet and most were yelling at the girl on the opposite side. Many were telling Gunner to pay her no mind. Gunner had tucked the ball under his arm and walked around in a circle inside the key, grinning sheepishly. He looked at the bench for some kind of support. All we could do was smile and wave, and hope like the dickens he hit at least one of those shots.

The crowd calmed down. I looked to my left at Woody. We were both wide eyed with surprise. We hadn't realized that over half of the town was in the bleachers behind us. This was spooky, and really, really, neat to be a part of.

Gunner went back to the freethrow line to take his shot. It was now very quiet in the gym. Gunner let fly and it hit dead center. The crowd and all of us on the bench cheered loudly. We had the lead back, 42 to 41. Again it grew quiet. All eyes were on Gunner and the girl who had spoke up earlier. Not a peep was heard from her. Gunner took his second shot.

We cheered as the ball fell through the hoop. Gunner had made 2 of 2! I slapped hands with Woody and we cheered Gunner on. We had the lead 43 to 41 and that seemed to rally the guys on the floor. As we watched on with mounting joy the two points held and we eaked out a victory 48 to 46! The buzzer sounded and we jumped off the bench and cheered. We had protected our perfect record against the biggest threat in our district! The crowd roared in the old gym. Never before had I seen or heard the like! Never before had I ever been a part of something as remarkable as this! Big Red was rolling along, riding the Thunder!

Everybody has their one moment of glory they are remembered for. Mine came at the Celeste Tournament for my long shots and more deservedly later at Caddo Mills when we all became Centurions. It changed a lot of people's view of who I was and what type of fellow I was. For Gunner his moment came this night. "Miss it 24!" will forever be etched in his memory as one of the greatest moments he ever had.

Steve Henderson had scored a hard 22 points, battling for every one. The high man for Bland had 21. It was a close contest, so very close. Lone Oak was now 8-0 for the first time anyone could remember. Bland was 5 and 3. The Lone Oak girls were still in the running with 6 and 2. This was one unbelievable season.

On the down side, Rick had been stung by the fact that Gunner went in and he didn't. Rick considered himself a much better athlete than Gunner. It had been a major blow to his ego, but he masked it in our celebration of this wonderful victory. Still, he was not happy.

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## Forney

Coach Taylor had us doing our 'B' games with just about anybody who would play us. On January 22 we had a most unusual contest with Forney. This game was little known, not covered by the paper, not many people came to see it, and the only documentation that exist is 2 sentences in a note book I kept at the time. This was a Saturday game against what I called "The Boys from Tawakoni" and I can only assume it was the Forney Jackrabbits.

The remaining 'B' team members were there for this odd game. There were not many of us left. Philip must have been allowed to come to this one, thank goodness, or Forney would have mopped the floor with us. Spider had left the team and I don't remember seeing much of him at school. That left Gunner, Rickey Graham, Bobby Underwood, Larry Hukill, Philip, and myself. It was a lonely bench. If Philip had not been there I would have been starting and the result would have been most embarrassing for all of us. When one of us fouled out there would not have been any reserve to put in. I think it strange that we had such a powerful basketball team and so few on it.

Somehow, someway, by some odd twist of fate, we actually tied the Forney team. How this was accomplished I cannot say. I remember looking up at the scoreboard and thinking that we were going into overtime. When the fourth quarter ended all of us thought we had an overtime period still to go. Mr. Taylor told us there was no overtime in 'B' games. Confused by this, but not displeased, we went to dress and go home. Some of us could not understand why we did not merit overtime. It felt anti-climatic. The simple reason was that it was a Saturday and all the faculty at both schools wanted to go home and not spend any unnessessary time at game that didn't mean anything anyway. Both teams seemed satisfied with the results, so both teams went home.

This was the only time in my life that I was on a basketball team that tied the score, and the game ended that way. Truly this was a season unlike any other.

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## In the Middle of the Green

Boles Home is a place I had never been to in 1972. It was known as an orphanage or something like it back then. At Lone Oak we pictured the place like a Father Flanagan's Boy's Town, with barracks and such. The kids did live near the school, but in family-like "cottages". We also assumed that all the kids were orphans. It wasn't quite that way.

Once I went my Father to scavage some hay that someone had lost on the side of highway 34. Boles Home was just up the road, less than a thousand yards away. I looked at the place with curiosity. This was the first time I had ever seen the place. There were several nearly identical red brick buildings of a most attractive colonial style located along blacktop streets and on the crests of the hill. It had a definate institutional look to it. It was in my way of thinking the most unusual place in Hunt County.

Their team had come to Lone Oak and I had remembered it bitterly by not getting to play that night. Now we were going there for the first time in my life. I looked forward to it, both for the adventure of going to the place for the first time and the opportunity of maybe getting to play that night.

On the night of the game we arrived at the place after a meandering journey through Dixon, Weiland, and Cash communities. It was a little after sundown, and I rubber-necked, looking at the buildings near the gym. Nobody had any idea what they were. Then we went into the gym.



***Boles Gym as it appeared in 2009.***

The Boles gym was a converted aircraft hangar, possibly donated to them in the '40s by Major's Field. It had a College size floor, making it slightly larger than our home floor. It was also solidly set in concrete, without a lot of soft spots or big bulges like we had. The gym had wooden fold-up bleachers on each side that I thought were a neat innovation. Both sets were on wheels and they could be rolled completely out of the gym, freeing up a lot of floor space. The steel rafters and inside roof were coated with blown yellow fiberglass insulation. The rafters were a bit low for basketball, being about 15 or so feet above the floor. Long passes hit them sometimes, carooming off with a funny sounding bong. The entrance had double glass doors. The locker rooms were located on each side of the entrance, with one of the girls locker rooms on the left in the entrance hallway, and the other girls locker room and the boys locker rooms on the right in the gym proper. These were nice locker rooms, too, with baskets for all our stuff. When we sat in the bleachers in this gym we were practically on the floor. The bleachers were small and there were no rails to separate us from the sidelines. The overall effect was that we were right on top of the action. Every seat was a good seat. Because of the roll away bleachers the gym looked smaller than it actually was. It was quite large, and a first class facility in its day, despite the low rafters.

I looked at all the kids in green and white and I couldn't believe there were all that many orphan kids in Hunt County. I was to find out much later on that this was a state sanctioned institution and kids came here from everywhere, some out of state. Only a small proportion of them were what they called 'true orphans' too. As a rule, they are very distrustful of "Outsiders".

The culture shock and psychological input was great. Like all the guys who visited this place for the first time, like Woody and me, we held the place in a sort of curious state of awe. We had seen nothing like it.

While fooling around in the visitors side of the bleachers on the north side of the gym, we made an interesting discovery. When we stomped our empty paper drink cups and it popped it made a real neat echoing sound through the curved cieling. We bought the small colas from the concession stand just for that reason. We thought it was too cool. Tomfoolery slowed down some as the girls got on the floor to play their game.

As we watched on the Lone Oak girls handily defeated the Boles Home lady Hornets 48 to 30. It was a good game to watch, but a lot of us were getting hyper on the colas we were drinking. Vibrating like an alarm clock, I went to the locker room to change into my uniform with the rest of the team.

Everything was going well until I put on my tennis shoes. I tugged on my shoelaces to get them tight and one of the laces neatly parted without even making a sound. I looked at it in disbelief. What ever was in the mud that had stained my canvas shoes permenantly grey had also caused the cotton to rot in my shoelaces. This was bad, and I had to get some new laces, right away. I found James Kelly and he said we didn't have any shoe laces left. I didn't know what to do. If I couldn't tie my shoes I couldn't play. It was time to panic.

Several guys in the locker room noticed my distress. They told me to just tie the shoelace back and then put the shoe on as normal. Finally, after my fiddling with it a bit, Rickey Graham came over and unlaced the broken lace out of my shoe. He then relaced the ragged thing back in, tied the broken end on, and by skipping a couple of holes he was able to make it long enough for me to tie my shoe. The shoe didn't fit as tightly as before, but I wasn't going to have to sit this game out. I was very happy about that. I was grateful to my friends.

Thus repaired, and with my spirits lifted again, I joined my team mates as we went out to warm up. We all went to our bench after a typical warmup. After Coach Taylor gave the starters a quick pregame speech we put our hands together, gave our battlecry, and the game began.

Quickly it became obvious that Steve Henderson was having a great night. Willie or O.T. would get it to him inside and it was a virtual guarantee for 2 points. He was really into this game. Danny Bowman was hitting his corner shot, wowing the crowd. Sometimes the net would pop over the rim and the Reff had to stop the action to pull it down. The Thunder was here. By the half it was 35 to 24. Those of us with no chance at game time went out to shoot at the basket.

After the half I had the Mojo flag on my knee. Thunder rolled and lightning struck as Lone Oak worked on Boles Home. We felt great confidence in our team, and at the third quarter it was 53 to 44. Boles seemed to have one guy who was scoring all their points. This was unusual to me. I believed a team was supposed to pass the ball around and work the ball in close for what Coach Taylor called "a high percentage shot." Boles put all it's firepower in one man.

Danny had a secret weapon for such an individual as that. Danny had a method for drawing a Charging Foul. It was 90% acting but it worked a lot of times. If the high scorer was driving in Danny would set himself and let the fast moving fellow move into him. This put a foul on their high scorer and made the ball turn over. In one and one situations Danny might even get to shoot. I liked this technique so well I even worked on it myself in practice. I had to learn everything I could to improve my abilities and get a chance to go to the basket. Unfortunately I never got much game time so I didn't get a chance to use this dirty trick myself.

Subconsciously I admired Danny. I refused to admit it to myself, but there was a lot about this slightly crazy and jolly guy I really liked. He was without a doubt the best basketball player of the Sophmore class. I imitated a lot of his techniques, but I was nowhere near the athlete he was.

The game rolled on, and I watched the entire thing from the bench. We had won it handily, 70 to 58. It was amazing. This was our 9<sup>th</sup> straight win. Lone Oak people in the Boles Home bleachers applauded us as we left the floor. We were at a place where we had never been before. We were Undisputed District Leaders.

Our stats said it all. Steve Henderson had 26 points, Willie Davis had 11, Danny had 19, and Butcher had 13. We were undoubtedly dominating the backboards. If the Boles forwards tried to cover our center or forwards too close, Willie would hit. If it boinged off the rim or backboard Lewis Smith, Danny, or Steve would pull it down and put it in for 2. Everybody got to handle the ball. Compare this to the guy from Boles Home who had 33 points. The closest guy to him on their team had 13. We passed it around and shot from all over the floor. Our team had 5 guys out there at a time. Other teams seemed to have one guy who shot all the time and the others were just there to pass it to him. That wasn't right, and it was easy to defeat that type of offense. Basketball is a team sport and it must be played as a team. Unfortunately for the other teams, not everybody had the talent we had in our squad.

Our time would come to be on the recieving end one of these days. But for us at that time there was only one game left in the regular season and then it was on to the District Tournament. We had the Thunder.

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## The Windbreakers and Other Stuff

The windbreakers were the garments I had described earlier. They were not school property, but they were owned and worn by every player to every game and in every warm-up. After the initial layups and drills the windbreakers were deposited in a heap by the bench to be watched over by James Kelly while we all shot and rebounded. To avoid confusion people put their names at different locations on the thin little jacket. I put mine in military fashion on the left side just below the Buffalo emblem. I didn't like the way that looked so I took a piece of white surgical tape and put on there. On this I neatly wrote my name in permanant marker. I liked the way it looked.

All of us on the team were being treated like minor gods by everybody. Even Herman and Rabbit were envious of my being on this team. That our team was the most awesome thing we had ever seen on the maple here was agreed by everyone. No one had ever did it before like we were doing it now. We were truely blessed, but I was too naeve to know it. Once more I took the extraordinary to be ordinary and paid it all no mind at all. We were, after all, the Buffaloes. How could we do anything less?

I sat in the lunch room with Herman and Rabbit, munching on the meal of the day. We were talking science fiction and having a good time enjoying our friendship when in walked Steve Henderson and Randy Payne. They were loading up their trays when both men saw me in my windbreaker. Both leaned over to read my name-tape.

"Whats that say?"

"It's my name."

"Thats stupid,:" Randy says.

"I like it," said Steve, "I think it's sort of cool. How did you do that?"

I told him and he winked at me and gave me a thumbs up. I was duely impressed. To make an impression on two of the most outstanding men on the team was a tremendous achievement to my way of thinking. It left me speechless. Rabbit and Herman looked around and said nothing. I had wowed the big boys, so enough was said.

As I had said, the windbreakers had pockets, and that was where I stored my flag between games, and when it wasn't on my knee. The pockets were open topped, without flaps or anything. The cuffs had buttons, but the button matched the material and was almost invisible. It gave the sleeves a 'bloused' look when fastened. The buttons were lightly sewn on and often came off. The zipper was the most well made part of the windbreaker. It was made of steel and canvas. It closed up the entire front of the jacket. There was a collar, but no hood. The thing didn't keep us warm worth a hoot. It was nothing more than a simple red jacket, yet it had a lot of special meaning to everyone who wore it. Everyone in school tried to get one, to wear to games. As our unbelievable season roared along we could spot them on many people up in the stands. Kids wore them all over the school, too. The basketball team made a fashion statement. It was all so unreal that some of us, in particular myself, found it hard to comprehend. Was this what it ment to be a Buffalo?

From that activity of being on the team there were more mundane tasks to do. Rabbit got himself and me envolved in a study hall activity that ate up time, kept us out of trouble, and gave us something to do. Stoney was our only janitor and he spent most of his time working on our busses, driving them, or ferreting out the plumbing problems of this ancient institution. To ease his considerable workload Rabbit talked me into volunteering with him to sweep the floors. We got the huge dust mops out to the janitor's closet and we went about polishing the floors. The study hall class would drag all of it's chairs over to one side of the room and do what ever they did in study hall while Rabbit and I swept that side of the room. After we finished that half everybody would then move over to the just swept side and let us sweep the other half. This was fun to do and it gave us a bit of freedom of movement.

Being kids we developed games with the broom. One was racing, the other was blocking a thrown broom the way the character in the old Kung Fu series would block spears thrown at him. We usually did that when nobody was looking and in places were nothing could be broken, like in the Ag-Shop. Rabbit would get pretty good at it, but the down side was that if it was blocked wrong he would get dust all over him. If we got caught we would never be allowed to sweep the floors again, but with our incredible luck we never got caught.

We had a lot of fun. Being able to legally goof off and do a good deed made it that way. We would sweep our room, the study halls, the entire school hallway from end to end. We would race in the hall. We swept the Ag-shop when we weren't chunking the brooms at each other. We swept the gym floor with respect, putting a little something extra into that to get it to really look good. When the gym floor was properly swept it shone like glass. We often tried for this effect, and we'd stand there admiring our work. This was a good time of life.

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## A Devil of a Night

"Come on, Red! Let's go!" I cried. It was a cold rainy night, January 27, 1972. I sat in a packed homeside bleachers yelling for victory. Our girls team was in a do or die battle with Celeste, and so far they were ahead. The gym had as big a crowd as it ever had in it, outside of pep-rallies. There were even people sitting in the bleachers on the visitor's side. I guessed the gym about two thirds full. I had never seen it so full of town's people before.



Nobody told us when to go to the locker room, but on that unknown signal the Senior boys started toward the north end of the gym. The rest of us on the team rose up and followed. We stopped briefly before crossing the back of the out of bounds when a play came our way. Then we continued on.

Attrition had taken its toll. Eleven of us were left on the team now. Rickey was unhappy, but he was still here. Willie Davis and O.T. were up for the game and ready to go. Steve looked at this game as he had countless others. He had played with this gang since he was a kid. They knew each other and each other's moves well. They were a team. The only problem was that he had the flu, and that might make tonight more difficult than it needed to be. Moving loosely across the out of bounds with his head down was Lewis Smith, the Butcher. What was he thinking? I couldn't tell. He never said much unless he was spoken to. He always looked tired. Danny was bouncing along with boundless energy, big eyed and smiling, ready for anything. Gunner just cheered once for the girls then strided across the end of the floor. Larry Hukill, having the best season of his life, held onto his uniform bundle and went on his way. He had a good natured, but cunning, smile on his face. Then there was my buddy, Woody. The only Freshman on the team, he could not believe his good fortune. We slapped hands and went into our locker room. Philip, the only real player on the Junior Varsity squad, brought up the rear. We went to dress for our last regular season game of the year. This was it!

In the locker room we were all going through the ritual of dressing that we had come to accept as common. We had changed so much from our first time to suit up this season. All of us had grown. All of us now knew each other as brothers on the team. We had gotten used to some idiosyncracies and forced the others to eliminate those that were intolerable. I had grown up a lot in my time here, as had others. We were a team, we were together.

I heard Steve cough. I took the flag out of my windbreaker and wondered to myself if the magic could hold out.

I had new laces in my shoes. They were dark brown, but it was all the Fina station had. I had to use what I could get, I guess. My baseball socks didn't match either, so I wore my white socks over the stripes that were about ankle high. What I didn't know was that Philip's socks didn't match either. We could have traded and evened up, but instead we made do, ignorant of each other's plight. At least we looked equally tacky together.

With our windbreakers on we did our warm-up. Our girls had lost by one lousy point, 33 to 32, so we would show Celeste no mercy. We felt sorry for our ladies and decided to take revenge for them. We had to blame somebody, so we blamed the Refs. It had to be bad calling, we thought, and not very fine game playing that had cost our ladies this victory tonight. They were in second place in the district.

Once on the bench I spread the flag. Woody and I watched the action. Mr. Brookins was on the bench with us, making it all the better. On to victory, Big Red!

Celeste tried to shut off Steve, thinking to choke off our offense. They did not know he was ill with the cold or flu, but covering him tight wouldn't even slow us down. We had 4 other men on the floor just as dangerous. Double-teaming Steve left Willie, Butcher, O.T. and Danny wide open. It was 23 to 9 in the first quarter.

Our Thunder rolled on relentlessly. The guys set fire to the nets with our Lightning on the floor. By the half it was 37 to 18. I sat there and told Woody that this was one really great way to end the regular season before going into the playoffs. He nodded his enthusiastic agreement. We were on cloud nine.

Our ladies in the bleachers became a Pep-Squad, chanting and cheering just like at a football game. During halftime I was shooting my junk shots at the basket and taking all this wonderfulness in. We were heroes among heroes. Everyone knew our names. From the least of us to the best of us we were looked up to and smiled upon by everybody we met. It felt so unreal. We could watch Hollywood movies with stories like this on T.V, but we thought we would never live an adventure like this for real. This simply couldn't be happening, but it was. It was here, it was now, and we were a part of it.

After halftime Lone Oak came back to the floor with a powerful ovation from the bleachers. The starting 5 proceeded to run Celeste off the varnish. By the middle of the third quarter Coach Taylor began to rotate people in, but not many. It was 54 to 34 by the end of quarter number three.



***Bench session. This appears to be Jack Brookins.***

***Coach Taylor had to miss a game for personal reasons.***

I didn't care if I played or not. Just being on a team doing what we were doing was too much for me already. I was hanging on a star, and caught up in the tide of this undefeated season. I was happy for the guys who did get to play, though I sat on the bench the entire game myself. It was as it should be in my way of thinking. I was very privileged to have been lucky enough just to sit on the bench with them.

At the final buzzer it was another victory, making this a perfect regular season of 10 - 0. Big Red had put 23 points on the board in the last quarter alone, and at every score Woody and I would slap hands. If it was a really neat move we would slap both hands. Lone Oak had beaten the Celeste Blue Devils 77 to 43.

When we looked at the score books from Liz Hagerman it showed Steve had only 10 points. Sick as he was, and with 2 men on him all night long, he still managed to get into double figures. Willie racked up 23 points for himself, and Danny got 21. The other 22 points went to the rest of the team that had game time that night.

The season ended. Next was the District Tournament and a couple of B-team games. This was my first real high school team. No matter what the future held I would remember them all with a fondness in my heart. They were forever my brothers in the Red and White.



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## Bland B.

I stood once more bleary eyed at my bus stop in front of my house. It was January 28, 1972. It was very very cold to a skinny kid in a cheap coat. The Yellow Monster came out of the oil top road by the Fina and pulled onto highway 69. It lumbered up to my house and opened it's doors. I saw the smiling face of Coach Taylor and I grudgingly entered the bus. I disliked school busses. I didn't like riding them. I even disliked looking at them. In particular I disliked the rowdy gradeschoolers that infested the insides of the Yellow Monsters bringing chaos to what I needed to be a quiet and serene morning. It was not to be. It was loud, out of control, and all kid stuff. Still, I was left pretty much alone. Some of these kids knew I was on the basketball team, and I think that made them respect me for what was rapidly becoming a legend among them. I was one of the big guys. I was one of the guys on the team.

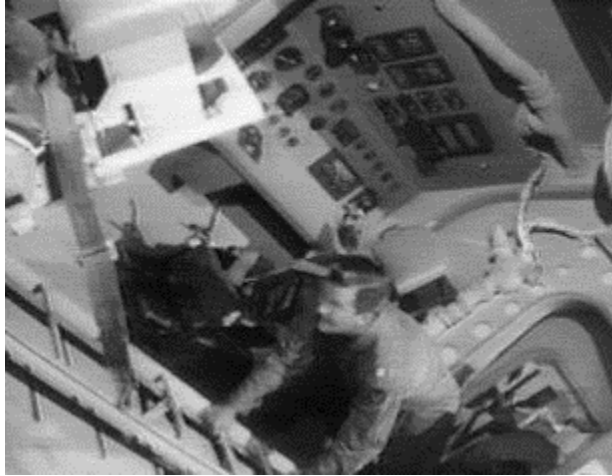
Last night we had completed the most monumental basketball season in Lone Oak history. Tonight I would go with the B-team to Bland to take on their B-team. Everywhere I looked it seemed like Bland with their man-eating gym would be popping up. They were in our tournament games, in our district games, and now they were in our "B" games.

In spite of our winning everything since the first of the year I was in a bad mood. Our crazy Science Teacher had promised us the day off out of his class if we had beaten Boles Home. He didn't keep his word and we spent a nauseating half hour dissecting a cow eye. Gary Dooley had cut the thing up and I don't see how he could stand to even touch the icky thing. He even held up the cornea for all of us to see.

To top this off I had a lunchroom war going on with a friend of mine from a lower class, called Lane. He threw salt on me in the lunchroom while I was eating. I got revenge a couple of days later when I mussed his hair over his plate. One of the lunchroom ladies said I shouldn't have done that because I got crud out of his hair into his plate. I told her I knew that and that was exactly why I did it. Both of us declared a truce after that, and the war ended without incident.

Today was just another boring and totally done in day. I spent the day hoping school would be over. It was a Friday. We had our 'B' game tonight. The weekend was coming. Everything I

wanted to do was waiting for 3:30. To kill time I started drawing on the space comic I did for my friends. I got high up into Earth orbit in my Star Frieghter. From there I piloted the beast on to adventures only a teenaged kid can imagine. There were improbable malfunctions, space walks, and hair raising re-entries. Had a real space service had such a record it would have been shut down in weeks. When my Apollo style command module parachuted down into a village in Ireland the final bell rang for the day. I put all my drawings and narration away and happily went home to get ready for tonight's game.



***Picture from "Men into Space"***

I got on the bus after dinner at home and they took me to a place on the other side of Hunt County. I stood once more in the Bland gym, eyeing that man-eating floor with curiosity. I rebounded balls for my other team mates. There were only 6 of us. It was my buddy Rick, with his shock of black hair falling in his narrow dark eyes from time to time. Gunner was still at it, shambling about like an out of control truck, grinning at some private joke. Smiling Larry Hukill dribbled the ball around, cunningly trying to get some sort of advantage on the Bland fellows. Of course Woody was here, and he asked me if I had brought the flag. I had. Philip, tall and skinny but without a doubt the best Junior Varsity player, took effortless shots from the sides of the key. In contrast I chunked and either hit the rim or missed all together. As they went out on the floor to start the game I sat on the bench with Coach Taylor and James Kelly. I called out words of encouragement to my team mates.

To our delight, Bland's 'B' team was having a rough time with us. The score went back and forth. We had played these fellows before. They had an awesome 'A' team. They were the most powerful in the district except for the Buffalo Varsity. A person can never judge a school by it's Junior Varsity squad. All the really good players are on the varsity, leaving the Wannabees on the 'B' team. Beating them repeatedly only means all the good ones are on the Varsity. We couldn't get cocky and think that Bland didn't have anybody up and coming that could play basketball. That would be a big mistake. Bland would be a power in basketball for quite a time to come.

On the floor the game got close. Rickey was in foul trouble. Mr. Taylor began to calculate who to move to where if and when Rickey fouled out. Rickey's blind side caused him to foul more than he needed to. When Rick got to 5 fouls he was replaced by me. Coach Taylor moved Gunner to center, Woody to forward, kept Philip at his forward position, and put me at guard with Larry Hukill on the other side. I glanced at the bench. Rickey sat dejectedly on the bench. He was really starting to dislike basketball.

When Larry would pass to me I'd eyeball the 2-1-2 formation. I had to find a clear passing lane for my weak passes. I would usually pass it back to the more capable Larry Hukill and he'd try to get it to Gunner or Philip. I didn't dare dribble, and charging forward was out of the question. This had the very bad effect of making our offense one sided, but I simply did not have the training or experience to do much else. Once I tried to dribble and a Bland player charged at me. I stopped dribbling and instantly lost my mobility. I quickly got it to Larry before they were all over me. I figured I wasn't doing the squad much good, but in the long run nobody gave me a hard time. I was doing okay, actually. Even Gunner knew I was not a very powerful basketball player.

In the final tally Bland just barely got by us. The score is forever lost to history, but my personal notebook records the loss. I was disappointed when we went home. I had become accustomed to victory. I was not singled out for any blame, and neither was Rick. We played as a team, and we lost as a team. That was what it meant to be a Buffalo.

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## Ensign Without a Banner



In the days of the Napoleonic wars, about 1810, young boys of noble families would go with the troops into the field. They were dressed in the uniforms of the regular officer corps, but most did not carry firearms. Being between the age of 11 and 16 they had no command duties. Their jobs were to carry the flag of the unit they were with. They protected this flag with their lives, for it was a tradition since the days of Rome never to give up 'the colors' to the enemy. They were called 'Ensigns', after the banner they were to protect and carry.

The simple flag-hankerchief I was carrying was for good luck. It was more or less our banner. Because I was in charge of it I was the Ensign, though I was never called that. This night at the District 36 B Tournament at Boles Home I brought it once more to the battle.

Sometime earlier our girl's team had won an relatively easy victory over Bland, 58 to 23. They were rolling on. Francis Johnson had 22 points, and Mary Hellen Johnson had 13, showing how high the offense was riding. All of us wanted our girls to win District. It would be nice to have both

teams from Lone Oak winning the District titles. We had powerful feelings that we would win District in the boys brackets. Our first opponents were Caddo Mills.

Caddo Mills had pulled its act together. The season had allowed them to mature as a team and no one had destroyed them like we had that night.

On our side, Coach Taylor had tinkered with the defense a little. He had gone to a near zone, switching entirely away from the man to man we had started with. Some players would have individual assignments as deemed necessary by the coach, but most still just guarded a zone. Our rebounding had improved a great deal. The only thing Coach Taylor was dissatisfied in was our free throw shooting. It wasn't as good as he felt it ought to be.



***Boles Home High School building as it appeared in 2010.***

On this Monday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1972, we quietly rolled into the parking lot in front of the gym at Boles Home. I cast a curious glance at the collection of buildings near the gym, just across the street. They looked like dormitories or something like that. I wrongly guessed that was where they housed the children here. What it was I was looking at was their High School building. Nearby was the two storey elementary school, with their Junior High. In the front part of this building was their cafeteria that was also was an auditorium. Standing outside in the dimming sunlight I thought this was an interesting looking place, though none of us had any idea what the buildings we were looking at were. The institutionalism of the place made me feel kind of creepy, so I quickly followed my fellow team mates into the relative security of the gym. That was the one building on the whole place that I knew exactly what it was used for.

We rapidly dressed for the game and I tucked the good luck flag in the waist-band of my shorts. Then we went out to warm up. Sometime during the warm-up routine, probably while we were doing lay-ups, my flag fell un-noticed out of my waist-band and lay in a small incognito square on the gym floor. Warm up completed we sat down. I searched in my wind-breaker for the flag. I couldn't find it, much to my horror. Bobby Underwood tapped me on the arm and pointed up the

floor, 80 or so feet away. With wide eyes I saw the red square as it lay just inside the 3 second lane, just about even with the east side backboard.

I had to get that flag!

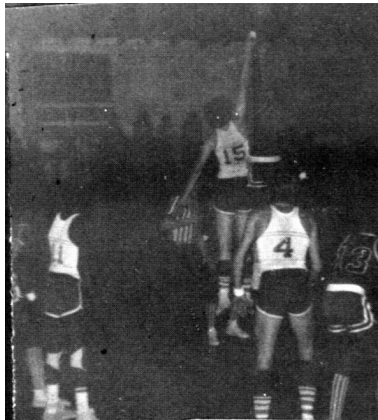
Coach Taylor was briefing the guys and before I could move they hollered "Go Red!" and took to the floor. Before I could speak to Coach Taylor I saw someone scuttle out onto the floor and get my flag! I sat down and Woody looked at me.

"This is bad," he said.

"Very bad," I replied, wondering what to do next.

There were a lot of people in this facility. There were lots of teenaged kids, grade school kids, and a smattering of adults. My mojo was somewhere up in that multicolored mass. I had to get that flag back!

I sweat bullets as the battle for the district title began. Rickey told me not to worry about it. It was just a piece of cloth, after all. I don't know if it was the thrill of playing in the district tournament, the unreality of the situation of having an undefeated district season, or my not having the Talisman, but Lone Oak didn't play up to standards in the first quarter. Caddo Mills actually tied us 8 to 8. Coach Taylor made some adjustments and got some heads out of the clouds. As I watched on, sweating freely, I wondered if I'd ever see my Stars and Bars again. I had to anxiously wait for half-time before I could begin a rescue mission.



In the second quarter, mojo or no mojo, Big Red thundered ahead to end the first half 30 to 16. We could see it happening before our eyes. Caddo would shoot it. The ball would bounce off the rim and Steve Henderson, Butcher, and Danny would do a ballet with the opposition under the backboard to rebound it. Willie and O.T. would take off down the floor. Once Steve or somebody else had rebounded the ball they'd loop it way down the floor to one of the speedy guards. If either Willie or O.T. were covered, Danny would break loose short and they'd pass to him.

Looping a long pass didn't always work in the Boles Home gym. Often there was a spectacular 'Whong' as the ball caroomed off a steel beam in the roof. Both sides had done this and sometimes it got very frustrating, especially when we were trying to beat the clock. The crowd loved it, though.

Halftime came none too soon. I launched my rescue mission for the flag. I walked down the floor to the Caddo bench. I talked to a guy I assumed was the coach.

"I dropped something out there during warm-up and I saw somebody pick it up."

"That would be our manager," one of the players said, "See him."

When I tracked down the manager he said he gave the flag to a couple of kids up in the bleachers. I almost fainted. My mind was screaming at me to get that flag. I calmly told the guy I needed the flag back. He pointed to where the kids were. After a bit of searching I found the 2 youngsters who had my flag.

"That's mine, " I told them, "Can I have it back?"

The two kids looked at me with simi-hostile expressions. My intimidation factor was too great for them. I was a high-schooler, dressed in my red and white basketball uniform, demanding the flag they were playing with. I got it back.

Very relieved, I went back to my bench. I stuffed the flag in my windbreaker pocket, where it belonged. That had been too close for comfort. I'd not take the flag out onto the floor again unless it was in the windbreaker pocket.

Woody came to the bench as half-time was winding down.

"Did you get it back?" he asked me.

"Yeah. A couple of kids in the stands had it."

"Wow, man, that was lucky!"

"No lie."

Second half was a lot better than the first. When Big Red got the ball they scored. When Caddo got the ball they scored sometimes, but mostly they'd get out rebounded. There would be a loud stomping of many feet as the ball came down the floor in the middle of a pack. This would be climaxed by the barely audible sound of the ball passing through the net.

It would go 'Boom-Boom-Boom-Boom-Boom-Swish!'

Not exactly the sound of little feet, as the average shoe size out there was 10 or greater.

The Buffaloes led the Foxes 46 to 22 by the start of the fourth quarter. I figured my chances of playing in such an important game were slim and none, so I was not surprised when I sat on the bench for the rest of the game. I just enjoyed the first playoff game I had ever been to. I was also the most vocal guy on the bench.

"Watch 'em Red," I would call. It was a good neutral statement, showing my concern for my team, and proper spirit. It insulted no one.

Caddo was taken out 67 to 33. Some of our 'B' team got to play, and I was happy for all of us. This scary night for the flag had finally ended. We shook Caddo's hands and told them it was a good game. It was right that we do it this way. We would never sit up in the bleachers and chant '100 to 57' no matter what the future held. We would never holler 'shoot it' to the opposition players again either. We had become a class act, as Buffaloes should, and we hoped to remain that way.



Steve Henderson had 23 points, followed by Willie Davis with a fast breaking 19. The rest of the squad averaged about 4 points, but some had scored at least twice that much. The entire team had done well.

We figured we had to battle Bland next. We figured right.

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## 1946

February is a cold and miserable month. In spite of the fact that both my Mother's and a girl I once loved have their birthdays on this month, I do not like February. Efforts to cheer it up usually fail. Some folks even refer to it as the Month of Mondays. Rolling into this cold and wet month of misery, we went for the finals in the District Tournament.

For some reason we continued to play 'B' games. We went back to Bland and that horrid man-eating floor. I guess as long as the Varsities were active the 'B' games would go on. This was our last 'B' game of the season, though.

To get to Bland's gym we must enter the school building's front doors. the gym is located exactly in the center of the school building itself. Once we come in the building the trophy case is off to the right, festooned with trophy after trophy. A lot of them are basketball and baseball honors. This impressive hoard puts a psychological slap on the opponent entering, letting them know that this is the land of a basketball power. It warns all who enter to be prepared.

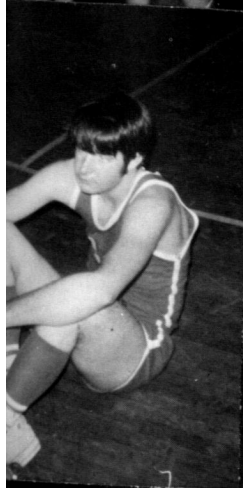
Junior High was with us on this trip. They came with us on a lot of our 'B' game excursions. Woody knew some of the kids in Junior High and messed around with them, but I didn't know any of them. I kept my distance. I'd know their names soon enough when they got into High School.

There isn't much to say about the games played that day. No records remain to fill in the blank spots. If anything of note happened it is lost forever. The only record that survives is another note I wrote in my personal log that says "Junior High lost, we won." That was it. To me, that was an excellent way to end the 'B' team season. Beating Bland, and on that floor, was the ticket. Sadly, I can't recall how many games we played in or how many of those games were wins or losses. So much documentation has been lost that can't ever be recovered.

Three days later we were on our way to Boles Home for the most important game we were to play so far this season. If we lost it was the end of our perfect season. If we won we would have the District 36 B title. If we lost tonight we would have to play once more in a play-off game. Our record gave us a one game cushion.

If we wanted to we could goof off in this game. We could do something bizarre like start the 'B' teamers, play Woody, Larry Hukill, and me the entire game. We could let Bland run up 150 or even 200 points, just having a great time. None of that would ever happen. Integrity had to be maintained. We could not afford to look like a bunch of idiots. We would knuckle down in this game and every game after that. For the first time in a long time at Lone Oak boys basketball was serious business.

If we won tonight the title of District 36 B Champions would be ours free and clear. Everybody from Lone Oak wanted to knock Bland out tonight, so it was Go Big Red!



Coach Taylor came to talk to us in the locker room. Normally a coach does not come into the basketball locker room, but this was one of the rare times he did. Lewis Smith, the Butcher, got dressed and sat up on top of a rack of lockers with his knees drawn to his chest, looking like some giant tired-looking bird. He didn't show it, but he was a bundle of nerves. I was more impressed by this out of character behaviour by a Senior classman that I was by Coach Taylor's pre-game speech. I expected what Coach Taylor had to say. We all did. We still needed to hear it, just one more time to get our minds right and our confidence up.

He told us what most of us already knew. This was the Big One. We must win it. Watch the passes. Try for a high percentage shot. Don't try to run with Bland. Keep it slow and work it inside. No hot dogging.

"Lets go show them how the cow eat the cabbage, boys."

Thus inspired and now fully into the game, out we went. We had a mission. This game wasn't simply for us. Our girls team had been knocked out of the tournament by Celeste. We had to win for our ladies, too. This was to be a night of dead serious basketball, with no clowning around. Our honor, and the greatest boys basketball season ever known at Lone Oak was at stake. Steve had recovered from the flu he had a while back. He was now 100%. The rest of us were wound up, raring to go. The Thunder rolled, and we were the Thunder. We were the Lone Oak Buffaloes.

Our warm-up was traditional. There were a lot of people in the Boles Home gym and many of them were in Lone Oak red and white or Bland's blue and gold. I didn't notice. I discovered that I could shut the people in the stands out as if they didn't exist. I didn't see them, and for the most part I couldn't hear them.

The flag was ready. The jumpball to start off the the game was ready. Out there with Bland's finest was Steve Henderson, Danny Bowman the Sheepdog, Willie Davis, O.T. Williams, and Lewis Smith the Butcher. I called out encouragement. Up went the ball and it began.

Our team played magnificently, fantastically. Passes were sharp and the shooting was precise. The ball was passed freely all over the squad. Nobody hogged it. By the first quarter's end we had Bland by a two to one ratio, 18 to their nine. I was wowed, and so was the crowd.



***Jack Brookins, Coach Taylor, and the rest of us.***

Onward it went. There were fast breaks, and once or twice the ball struck the rafters. More often the ball was caught and put up for two. This caused us on the bench to stand and cheer with a hand slap. This was like I had seen it so many times before. This was the Big Red Machine in all it's glory.

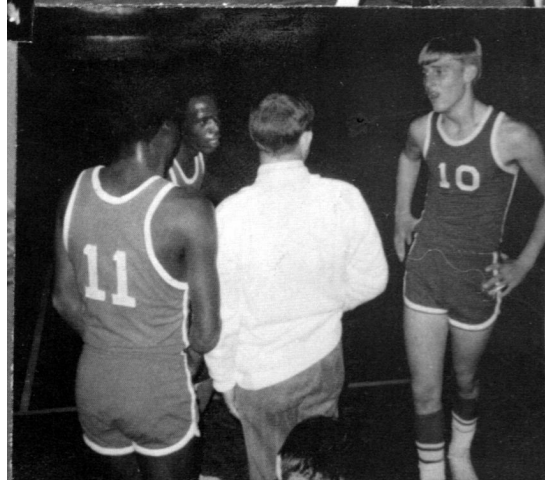


***O.T. Williams***

In the roll away bleachers were some Lone Oak cheerleaders. They had come here on their own to cheer us on. To have Cheerleaders at one of our basketball games was great, and very rare. I liked it very much, and I am sure everyone else on the team did too. Support from the people of the town, school spirit, honor, and all the glory that goes with it made us all feel ten feet tall that night. We played beyond ourselves.

The half came on and I looked for my little time on the floor. Shooting baskets at halftime was something I did not take for granted. This was the only time I'd get out here, so I made the best of it. We led Bland 28 to 17 now. Steve had something like 11 points. Nobody was in serious foul trouble. The team was rolling along. Go, Red, Go!

Shooting my halftime shots I chatted with Woody. Some of the cheerleaders, Nandale Bowman and Niecy Simmons, were leading a cheer not far from us. This was way too cool! It began to settle on me that we were indeed doing something unusual. When Varsity came on to shoot their halftime shots I noticed everybody looked loose and happy. I tossed rebounds to Danny Bowman and Willie. Bland was going to be beaten tonight, without doubt!



***O.T., Willie, Coach Taylor, and Danny Bowman.***

In the third quarter it rolled on as before. Lone Oak took it to Bland, maintaining at least a 9 point lead.

"Baskets, baskets, baskets, boys! You make the baskets and we'll make the noise!" came from the bleachers. There was also a clap-clap, stomp-stomp, "Shoot Two!" battle chant that was common. This was amazing. I looked at the score at the end of the third quarter and it said 42 to 33. I joined the huddle around Coach Taylor as we went into the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

"Okay, boys," he said, "One more quarter and we've got this one wrapped up. Lets go!"

"Go Red!" and the hands came down. This was it. If Bland was going to come back and beat us this was when it was going to happen. It was now or never.

Bland gamely kept up, never really gaining on us but never letting us get further ahead than 10 points. Lone Oak played a conservative game, and a tough defense. Bland couldn't gain on us, and Big Red was still ahead as the last buzzer neared. Woody and I looked at the clock and counted the final seconds down.

"Three! Two! One!"

The buzzer sounded. We had won! The entire team and the Lone Oak fans went crazy over the joy of our victory. We had just won district! I slapped everybody on the back and shook a few hands. I was on Cloud Nine, and so was most of my team mates. Somebody wanted to cut down

Boles Home's nets and take them with us, but we never got a chance. That was also looked at as not very sporting in someone else's gym.

The score said Lone Oak 58, Bland 48. Steve Henderson had put in 22 points. Willie Davis had 14, Danny had 12, and Butcher had 10. It was a well balanced team, with lots of guys scoring. This was the highest margin we had ever beaten Bland with all year long.

There was a ceremony, not a big one, where the trophies were presented. Celeste got their's for the girl's team, and then we got ours. I felt 10 feet tall, along with my team mates. This was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me in High School sports.

Coach Taylor viewed the award ceremony with his usual stead-fastness. His team had just claimed the district trophy with style and skill. As he stood there enjoying the moment of glory, and old timer from Lone Oak reached out and tapped him on the shoulder. Coach Taylor turned and gazed into the happy old eyes.

"I want to thank you," the elder said.

"You're welcome," Coach Taylor replied.

"This is the first time Lone Oak has won a district title in basketball since 1946!"

Mr. Taylor's eyes enlarged visibly. He had no idea what his team had just accomplished. This was incredible! The old fellow shuffled away, leaving Coach Taylor dumbfounded. The Coach shook his head.

"Is that right?" Mr. Taylor whispered to himself, "Is that right?"



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## Forward

The season wasn't over! Not yet! This trip into a Never-never land of basketball championship was still going on. We brought the trophy home and put it where it remains to this day in the Lone Oak trophy case. Some of us would stop and stare at the thing en-route to class. We had done that. All of us. From Steve and Danny Bowman all the way down to Woody and me. It was a simple chrome and wood object but we had put it there next to hundreds of others for various accomplishments, many of them archaic and forgotten. Mr. Taylor had not told us that 26 years had passed since Big Red had brought a district basketball trophy home. Even if he had I don't think it would have sank in. Twenty six years is like a thousand years to a teenager. It's difficult to grasp, so we wouldn't have even tried.

That weekend Rickey and I treated ourselves to a movie at the Texan Theater in downtown Greenville. It was my first James Bond movie, "Diamonds are Forever", and I thought it was moderately amusing. I thought the moon buggy they had in the movie was so much junk. I read in a magazine about the vehical and I was unimpressed, mainly because I had also read about the real moon buggy that went with Apollo to the moon. James Bond himself struck me as being

smug and amoral, more like the people I didn't like, rather than Robert Stack's Elliot Ness character I admired so much in "the Untouchables" on T.V.



Rick sat through it twice because we came in late. True to form we sat in the back row and protected our backs. I looked around. The Texan Theater had a balcony, but I never went up there. I'm surprised they never opened it, and I never saw anyone up there. The movie ended, Rick and I grabbed some food someplace, and went home. We were District Champions. There was more to come.

For the time being we had an off week. Teams were being lined up to scrimmage us in basketball. This was to keep us in fighting trim for our upcoming Bi-District Championship game.

In the middle of all this revelry the School Board decided to lay down the law on dress and hair. Some of the girls's skirts were viewed as a little high. Some of the guys had hair that was a little long. A lot of us went around with our shirt-tails out. Shirt tails? I wore a T-shirt almost all the time. I shrugged and dutifully tucked it in. Some of us had moustaches. The Schoolboard demanded we be clean shaven. I looked at the barely visible peach fuzz on my upper lip and wondered if I should shave it. Some of the girls had more hair on their upper lip than I did, and I wondered if they would have to shave too.

Ricky McCallum had a Beatle haircut. His ear-covering locks got him took to the office with a number of offenders who had on the wrong clothes or who had long hair. The line was about 20 feet long, and included a number of people who had never been sent to the office in their lives. I thought this was unfair, but in absence of parent the school had essentially the right to tell us what to wear and to do what they said within reason. In 1972 it was not unreasonable to demand a dress code. If they told us to wear parocial style school uniforms we would have done it. Those among us who didn't want to follow the dress code had a variety of other schools in easy reach to go to.

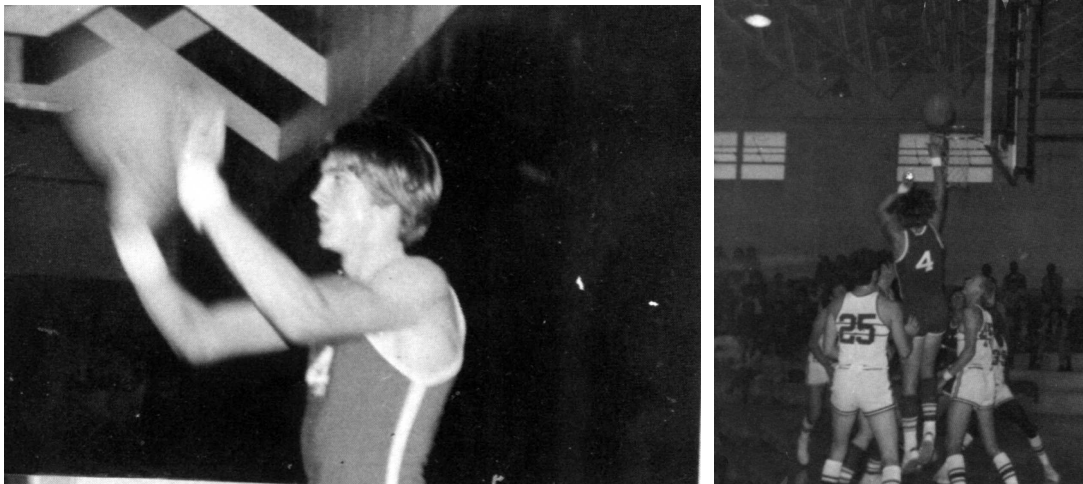
McCallum eventually cut his hair, but it was obvious to one and all that he did not like it.

One thing the dress code did put a stop to was guys who were going to or coming from practice wearing not much else but track shorts. I thought nothing of it as Troy Haynes or Larry Little would go padding down the hall during track season with nothing on but their track shorts. Of course I'm not a girl supercharged on hormones either. Some of the teachers thought this behaviour most indecent. We could still wear track shorts in the building but we had to have on a shirt of some kind.

For myself, things were going well. I hadn't gotten the flu yet this year. Because of that I was able to keep my grades very high and stay off of six week exams. I thought this was just great. Perhaps it was too great, because I had no idea how to spend the extra time I was to have.

We called every bad cold we had "the flu" because it was what was done then. Bad colds and such were treated as the flu, when in fact all it really was is a simple case of the common cold. Just as contagious as the flu, yet not nearly as deadly. Its origins probably go back to the horror days of the 1919 Flu Epidemic that killed thousands. Every bad cold since then was labeled as "the Flu."

Our first practice game was against a school with the most impressive name of North Hopkins. We loaded up Monday, February 14, and went to a town called Birthwright, where North Hopkins school was. The game was no contest. I sat happily on the bench grinning from ear to ear as the team whopped them 77 to 49. I enjoyed it, as did the team, the Lone Oak people who made the trip, and Coach Taylor and Mr. Brookins.



***Steve messing around dribbling a ball on the wall, and going up for two points.***

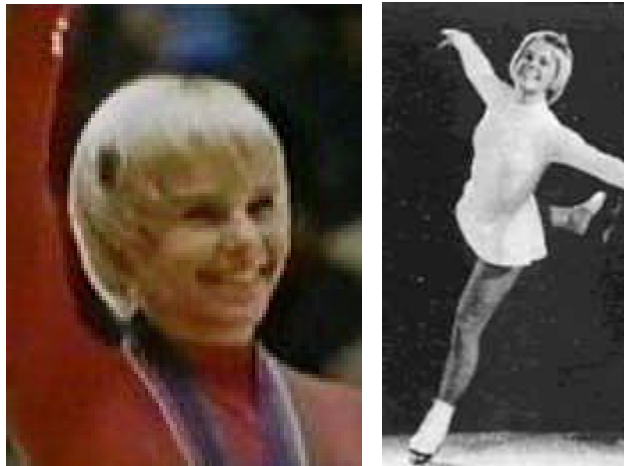
Steve Henderson/Bell scored his personal best in this route of North Hopkins, getting 31 points. My personal best at this time was 1 point so anyone can imagine how I felt about it. I thought Steve was one awesomely terrific individual. His gentlemanly behaviour and his kind actions toward me as a member of the team put him way up there on my list of people to admire. I liked him as a fellow team mate and upper classman. His high scoring and his actions toward even the least member of the team made him stand out.

Back at the school we could walk around the place and people would look at us with quiet admiration. Photographers followed us to practice and took pictures of us just messing around. Posters calling on us to go on to victory were on the wall everywhere. Little kids down the hall in



grade school were showing their admiration for us by playing basketball with enthusiasm. Ordinarily at this time of year they would be thinking baseball. We were small town schoolboy celebrities. It was a wonderful time for all of us.

Something else drew Herman's and my attention for a while here. The '72 Winter Olympics were on in Japan. Herman had a subscription to Sports Illustrated. I was glancing through a copy when I noticed a really cute blond on ice skates in one of the pictures. Her name was Janet Lynn and I had never seen the like of her before. Herman and I both thought she was super cool, and sort of fell in love with her from a distance. She just made something click in our heads that told us that she was the type of lady we'd love to be married to. She was pixish, sort of like Tinker Bell. I think she would have been right here at home at Lone Oak. She looked like she could fit right in with our ladies.



Janet Lynn was to have such a profound effect on Herman that he would later name one of his daughters after this lady. I would name one of my cartoon characters after her. She was really a wholesome looking girl, the type anyone could bring home to their parents, take to church, or just go on a date for the evening. The more Herman and I learned about her the more we liked her. A little later in life when we found out she had gotten married we were disappointed that someone had beaten us to the altar, but we were happy for her. Marrying her was just one of our juvenile fantasies, like being astronauts.

We never worked up the nerve to write her fan mail. We were afraid she'd think we were goofy or something. She was two years older than we were, too. Besides, what does a guy from Lone Oak say to an Olympic Figure Skater from Rockford, Illinois? Miss Janet Lynn, in our language at the time, was 'One okay Babe.'

In addition to basketball practice, distractions of pretty blond ice skaters, school work, and assorted other mundane things, we started off season weight lifting. Putting muscle on my bean pole frame was a personal wish of mine so I took to lifting weights. We only had free weights, and a universal weight lifting gym was unknown in Lone Oak. With free weights an uneven lift caused the weights to fall off one end and the other end to crash into the wooden locker room floor. I often wondered why we never knocked a huge hole in that floor. Much to my chagrin I didn't bulk up at all, though I began to weigh more. I simply couldn't figure it out, though I had shot from 5' 2" to 5' 4". I kept at the weights, hoping I would look like Hercules.

Dream on.

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"Experience keeps a dear school,

But fools will learn in no other."

Benjamin Franklin

## Flying with the Flyers

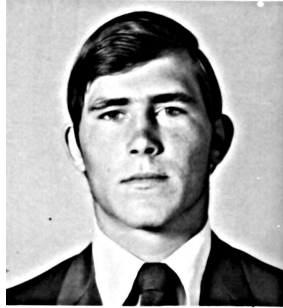


If I was to tell anyone that I knew exactly what was going on during that season I'd be telling an untruth. From February 14<sup>th</sup> to the Bi-District game I was confused and lost in all the extraordinary goings on. My notes of this time begin to drop off from the usual daily entries. This might be showing a dangerous trend of a loss of interest in basketball, or perhaps a drifting into a state of disbelief about the entire thing. Some of the B-Teamers had already left. I think Bobby Underwood was getting ready to give it up, but I wasn't sure. Things were getting a little chaotic. Some might call this the 'Championship Blues'. It is a strange thing to win a major victory and feel a little disappointed. Perhaps wanting is not the same as having.

Basketball was taking away weekends and weeknights that could be spent working at part time jobs or even spending time with a girlfriend. As I didn't have either one I was still pretty much as enthusiastic about basketball as before. I think I realized I had zero chances of playing from here on out, and that bugged me, but quitting was not an option where I came from.

Spider and Woody were there when we took our team picture some time in January. This is the one that appears in the yearbook. I am embarrassed by how grungy my shoes look. They are grey looking even in the photograph.

Looking back at that, and all the things I know now that I didn't know then, I think maybe the powers that be should have gotten Randy Payne and at least let him stand there with us. He had been a part of the team, after all. Yet, life in the real world is not fair, and things happen that are unforeseen. Randy was not in the photo, and never would be. I did not like him, as I have said, but I will not forget him because he played a big part in winning our first game and our great victory at the Celeste Tournament. When anyone looks at the All Tournament trophy of 71-72, think of this fellow who's major fault was an attitude problem but had great athletic ability. Perhaps, if I could shake his hand today I would do so. Honors belong to the one who wins them, and nobody can take them away.



RANDY PAYNE  
Football-1,2,3,4; All District  
Football-4; Basketball-1,2,3,4;  
All District Basketball-3; Bison  
Staff-4; Commercial Club-3,4;  
FFA-1,2,3,4

A lot of the players on the team believed that if we had Randy with us we would have beaten all of our competitors. He was that good of a player.

Pictures, honors, and all that stuff aside, we played a 'home and home' series of two games against a basketball powerhouse called La Poynor. They had a remarkable player named James Street who could really tear up the maple, set fire to the nets, and jump up into the lights. He was a little fellow, but he had great ability. His team was called the Flyers, and they were rated first in the state in our class. They were an amazing team to look upon with blue or dark purple striped shorts.

I was finally coming down with a bad cold or the flu on February 18 when we played them at Lone Oak. I was trying not to fall out. I wanted to be with the team for no other reason than I was just one of them. So it was that during warm-up I behaved myself and took it easy. I slouched on the bench, out of it. I managed to get the flag out, but I could not work up much enthusiasm.

Lone Oak had a tiger by the tail, and La Poynor had ran into just about the best team they had yet seen. It was a whirlwind battle. Neither team could ever let up. If any team backed off or lost concentration just a little bit defeat would be the result.

There were many reasons for putting out a little extra in an event. Some things will inspire players to dive whole hog into the thing. Tonight our inspiration was an eccentric acting black man who I later found out was a relation of O.T's. This guy was INTO the game, big time! He sat in the bleachers and yelled constantly "Get your hands up!" This guy wanted us to WIN, probably more than we did!

By the end of the first quarter everybody in our gym knew where this remarkably vocal fellow was. He had our team inspired in a strange way by this spectral. The guys on the floor did keep their hands up, and they played defense as well as ever. Everybody on the floor was grinning, too, because it was funny.

We had a very slim lead at the half, 28 to 27. I didn't do much at the half. I was feeling really crummy. Still, I took a few shots, and I rebounded some for the starters. After that I went over to the bench and plopped down, feeling ill.

As soon as the tip off started the second half the guy up in the bleachers started again.

"Git che hans zup!" he roared, really getting down, "C'mon, git che hans zup!"

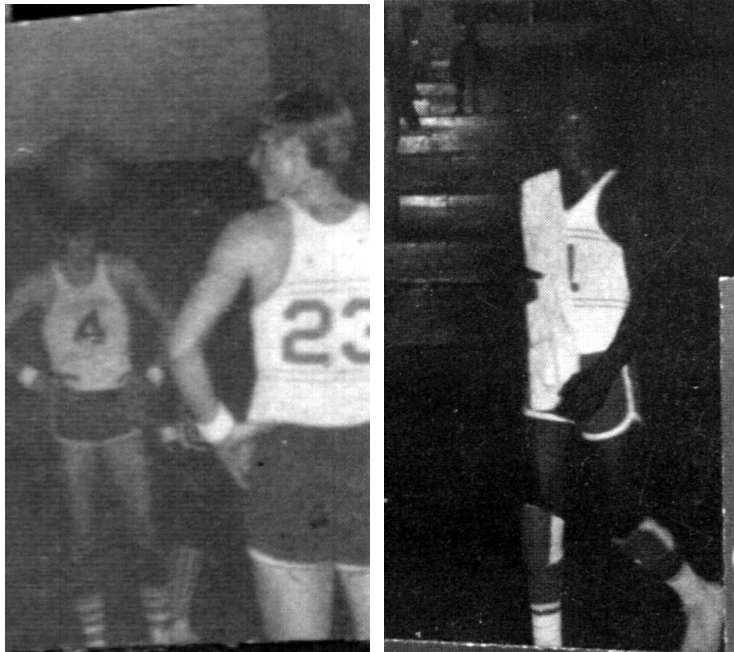
With their hands up the Buffalo defense looked much taller than it actually was. The arm-span of Butcher and Steve was quite impressive. I guess La Poynor was a little intimidated by this forest of arms, and the fact that they were playing on our home court gave us an advantage. In the end we prevailed, 57 to 54, giving the Lone Oak hometown crowd a good evening of basketball.

Steve had 17 points for the night. Danny had 14, and Willie had 12. O.T. had about 7. James Street had 22 points for his team. It was a really strange game, I guess. We played better than we ever played before, inspired by this fellow hollering for the guys on the floor to 'get their hands up'. I never saw the guys smile so much while they were in a game.

The next day I was really sick with this illness. It was a Saturday, and I thought about scrapping all ideas of going to La Poynor for the second game of the two game series. I weighed the fact that I would not get to play by what I might miss, and the fact that I was on the team and a part of it. I made my decision, worked up my nerve, and went to the game. I felt like I had to be there.

Because I was sick I don't remember much about the ride to place I would only go to once in my life. I probably slept all the way there. Feeling very bad and with a fevered haze on my mind, I suddenly found myself on the bench and the game in progress. Clad in my windbreaker, I leaned back on the bench. I was even too miserable to call out to my team. I heard the same guy we had at Lone Oak call out for the team to get their hands up, and I saw him up in the bleachers of what I remembered as looking like a stucco covered gym. The place was all white, I think, made of concrete that looked like stucco. At least, that is the way I recall it. I have never been there since, so I have nothing else to go on except what I recall in my delirium.

The Flyers wanted revenge. We had beaten them at Lone Oak and they had their blood up for this contest. On the down side for us I think we may have gotten overconfident. Mr. Taylor gritted his teeth as the Big Red Machine did exactly what he told them not to do, and tried to run and gun with a team that specializes in the run and gun. La Poynor was motivated, and fast. They pulled ahead.



***Buffaloes in white. We didn't like our white jerseys at all.***

Coach Taylor tried to slow the game down, to let Lone Oak get the initiative and play our own game, rather than the Flyer's game. La Poynor was hitting 75% of all their shots from the floor. We were somewhat less successful.

Halftime came and went, and I still could only grasp part of what was going on. I guess it was for the best. La Poynor was holding onto its lead of nearly 20 points. They eventually mopped the floor with us.

Coach Taylor said it all when he said to a newspaper reporter that "We had a bad night."

Sometimes the gang just wouldn't listen to the Coach, and this was one of those nights. To me it meant the Mojo had failed for the first time in 17 games. To the other guys it meant it was our first Varsity loss for that many games. It was one heck of a winning streak, one to be proud of. Still, I hope this loss had taught the guys a lesson. Some of us thought we knew better than Coach Taylor, and we had paid for it tonight.

Wrapped up in my windbreaker and coat, I shivered all the way back to Lone Oak. When we got there I shuffled off to the phone switch station and called home. As the cold wind swirled around me and aggravated my condition I waited for my parents to come and get me.

My one thought was how much I disliked losing.

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## Out of It

I was so ill that I spent Monday at home. I rarely was given medicine for my frequent bouts with "the flu". Usually I just laid in it until I got so bad my Mother would take me to the doctor or I'd get better. Mom would sometimes give me aspirin and the like. I would chew them and swallow them because I did not have the ability at the time to swallow pills whole. I'd sometimes get chicken soup and orange juice. Sometimes Mom would try to make her own chicken soup, but the stuff was horrible. She simply could not make chicken soup.

I would wrap myself in one of the homemade crazy quilts we had in abundance and sit by the space heater. I sat in the rocker that was my favorite chair. This was what I did for therapy. The T.V. was near at hand, and I had my comics to draw and to read over. In my fever fuzzed out brain I sometimes came up with really bizarre plots in my comics. They seemed to make perfect sense to me at the time, by reading them again a few years later would make me cringe.

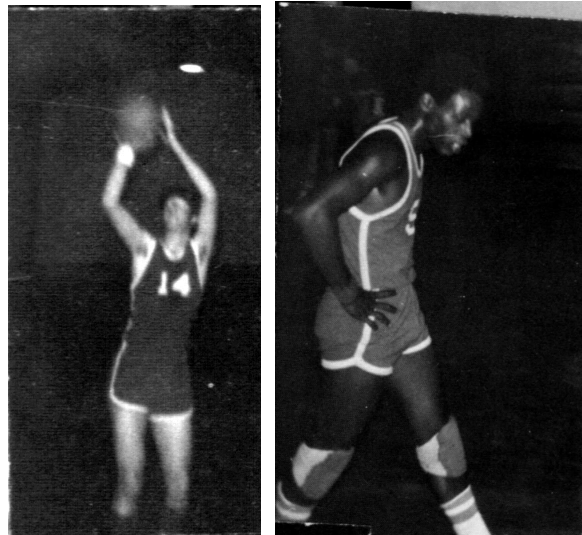
I had a cold or the flu, but fortunately none of my team mates did. The exhibition games continued, and this time Howe came to our big ole cold gym. Howe was the same school that had beaten the Buffaloes in 1970-71, in the Bi-District Championship in football. They came now to find out if Big Red Basketball was all it was cracked up to be.

They did find out right quick that the Big Red team was worthy of their notice. Lone Oak took a 42 to 36 lead at the half. A lot of people from the Bi-District clash in football from back in '71 had come here to watch, and it was fun for them to see the old rivals get a licking by the basketball team. The partisan crowd was really getting their digs in.

I was at home, with the flag. If the Mojo was working that night I had nothing to do with it. I really knew the Mojo was really nothing, but it gave me and some of the others the psychological satisfaction of feeling like we were really doing something for the team. It was something those of

us on the bench had control over when we had absolutely no control over what was really going on. That was what the Mojo really did, and that was the only magic in it.

Howe put up a tough battle. The guys on the floor had to score and score and score to keep from getting run into the floor by Howe. To this end, O.T. caught fire, ripping in 26 points. Steve got 21, Willie had 15, and even tired ole Butcher got 12. Only 5 points went to the rest of the team, probably Danny. Why Danny Bowman didn't score more I cannot say. Howe kept up, never letting us get more than 10 points ahead. Victory was a close fought high scoring 79 to 70. A lot of Lone Oak football players got a little mental revenge, even if the game was meaningless.



I was unaware that we were even having a game. I was so ill I didn't even care. I would be out an entire week, laid up with this abominable "flu". Because I was ill I had a drop in my self esteem. I was developing a negative attitude. I was missing school and exhibition games and I was depressed. In my fevered dreams I had a wild adventure where I was racing James Garner on a dirt track in Lemans class racing cars. When I finally got out of bed that weekend and rejoined the human race I really didn't care much about anything.

I was given gifts I really didn't ask for. Ronald Posey gave me a Confederate Flag patch that I kept in my box. Mike Cheek gave me a B-B gun after I showed him I could hit bulls-eyes with it. It had a broken stock, but a little tape and wire fixed that. This cheered me some, as did a little game of football we played near the Sample's house. I was in a much better state of mind by the end of the weekend.

When I returned to school that Monday I was told of the game of last week. I took my Biology test, and participated in English Class pantomime. I did okay in these little projects, but my mind and the mind of the entire school was on the coming Bi-District game.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Coach Taylor had an interview in the top of the sports page of the Greenville paper. This was a fascinating read. In it he described in terms vague enough not to give anything away about how his team evolved from a group of footballers to a first class basketball squad. The paper even hinted we might even go to state!

I did a double take at that. Whoa! State? That would be a dream beyond anything that had ever been done on the maple by Big Red at anytime, at anyplace! Were we really that good? I read on.

Coach Taylor described the guys on the team. He talked about Danny's neat-o corner shots. Near the end of the piece he talked about the 'B' team and ended it by mentioning the Freshmen, Bobby Underwood and Charles Tarrant.

Wait a minute! I'm a Sophomore, not some lowly Freshman! I took this simple mistake personally and got angry at the coach for making such an honest mistake. Heck, I looked like I was 10 years old and according to some sources I behaved like a 3 year old. I was not a Freshman but I certainly looked like one. He had not seen me in sports for a full year, so what was he to think?

I should have been proud. For the first time in my life I had my name in the paper for athletics. I had arrived! I had made the big time! I was a Buffalo and my name was in the paper for it! Yet here I was, ticked off because he made an easily understandable mistake. Randy Price listened to me belly-ache about it and finally told me that I should be happy my name was even in the paper at all. He said that Coach Taylor didn't have to even mention me, so I should be grateful for even that. I sat and sulked and got over it. I put it down to my post-flu recovery attitude. More important things were coming that would get us even more press time if it went as we hoped.

Bi-District was coming and Lone Oak was getting ready for the first such contest to happen to their basketball team in a very long time. Quinlan's gym was to be the place. Tuesday, February 29, 1972 was to be the date.

That Tuesday Rickey Graham, David Morgan, and I were plotting evil acts. School was looked upon as a lousy waste of time because we had all our test done for this semester. We wanted to go home early, and if the faculty wouldn't let us then by 3<sup>rd</sup> period we'd take off on our own.

When 3<sup>rd</sup> period came we ran like thieves to Gunner's jalopy. In a cloud of gravel and dust we tore out of the parking lot. Mr. Dial saw us leave and ran out there trying to stop us. We didn't see him. We thought we had got away clean.

Okay, we had left Lone Oak far behind, so now what? Gunner suggested we go to his place so we could hide out there and do fun and exciting things like watch T.V. and sit around doing nothing. Whoop de do. This was gonna be one fun expedition I had gotten myself in on.

Gunner got out and tied up his man-eating dogs, then we went into the house. Boredom quickly set in. I didn't even bring my clipboard so I could draw. Gunner had 2 motorcycle helmets and I picked one up to look it over. It was metallic red, and looked real cool.

"I'll sell that to you for 5 bucks," Gunner offered, half in jest.

I looked up.

"You got a deal," I replied.

Rickey said nothing. New helmets could be bought for 7 or 8 dollars at Gibsons back then. When they were on sale they went as low as 5 dollars. He figured I'd eventually learn what a dumb deal I had made. I arranged to pay Gunner in increments later on. I had to have a helmet if I was going to ride motorcycles. Now I figured I had one.

I thought maybe we were going to do something fun, maybe even go to Greenville, but we spent the rest of the day at Gunner's house. We went back for the game that night. It was time for the Bi-District game, the most important sports event any of us had ever been to in basketball.

We were also in big trouble, all three of us.

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## The Bi-District Game

We arrived at the Quinlan gym and went into the now familiar confines of its locker room. Once more Coach Brookins was with us, to give Coach Taylor and us moral support. Butcher got up on top of the lockers after he dressed, sitting up there like some tired gigantic owl. I think this was his way of calming his nerves, bizarre as it looked for a 6'6" guy to be sitting cross-legged on top of some lockers. If he really was nervous I couldn't tell. He looked calm and cool and just as tired as ever. He was neither. He was as wound up as he could get.

Outside in the bleachers a capacity crowd was packing in. This was the biggest event in the area. Those of us in the lesser ranks of the team couldn't grasp what the fuss was about. We figured it was just another game. We were supposed to win. Those who had more maturity on the team realized what was at stake and it nearly blew their minds. Butcher's perching on the lockers was an example. Willie and O.T. fidgeted. Steve remained quiet. Coach Taylor came in and squat in the middle of the floor to outline the game plan one last time on his clipboard. All of the starters surrounded him and listened intently except for Butcher who observed from on high.

Other than the exchange between the coach and the team it was real quiet in the locker room. The importance of the coach talking to the troops was significant to us all. We looked upon the seriousness of the situation. We simply had to win and winning was what we did.

Coach Taylor stood up and put his hand out, palm down. Butcher came down off the lockers and the entire team formed a huddle around Coach Taylor. We joined hands in the middle and got ready to exit the locker room.

"GO RED!"

The battle cry echoed loudly off the walls of the small locker room. Big Red was ready. Steve grabbed a basketball for the warm-up, and out we went, stepping into history.

Cheers filled our ears as we circled our half of the floor. We formed two lines and the warm-up ritual began. I looked around the gym and I saw standing room only. Was Sandy out there? I would never know. As fast as her delightful image came to my mind I put it back away. We had a game to play. Just down the floor from us was Community. For Steve and other Senior classmen Community was a hated rival as much as Quinlan was for me. It was a little something extra for them to beat Community tonight.

Warm up over, we formed around Coach Taylor again and put our hands together once more.

"Go Red!" we said, and out on the floor went our team. I plopped on the bench and deployed the flag. It was time.

Community was in white and we were bedecked in our red. As the tip off started the game we on the bench began our routine of calls and yells. The first Bi-District game for Lone Oak in 26 years was underway.

I believed in a lot of things when I was in highschool. I believed in the infallability of right over wrong, in honor, truth, loyalty to friends and school, and I believed the Big Red Machine could not fail. It was a somewhat smug attitude, but I just knew Community could not and would not beat us that chilly night in Quinlan's gym. I could hear the Thunder, I could see the Lightning, and I could feel the Wind. This was Big Red!



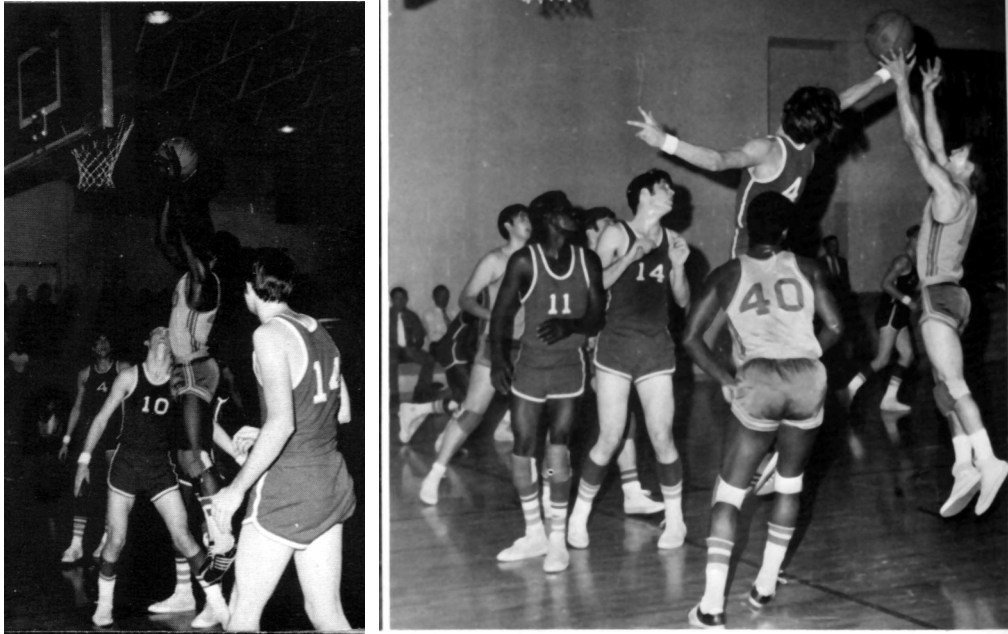
Community had power and ability also. This was one of the tightest fought games I had seen since Bland battled us all through district. We were trading basket for basket, and Coach Taylor knew we could be in serious trouble if something broke down on the team or if the troops got too cocky. As he put it, "Community would clean our clock!"



I simply could not believe the score at the end of the first quarter as Community had the lead on us by one basket, 15 to 13. I got worried, and my smug attitude took a bit of a beating. La Poynor had shown that we could be beaten now, and with Community leading us it very well could happen again.

I sat there helpless as the lead did not change. By halftime they still had the lead, 29 to 27. This was scary. Had we come this far only to fall? I shook my head, believing we could come back, and I went out to do the halftime thing. We had to win, and I would not give up.

The crowd was quite loud in Quinlan's packed gym. It wasn't just local people here, or people who were from Lone Oak or Community. Some folks were here from Greenville, Commerce, and other places. This was something to be in the middle of. I had faith we'd somehow pull this victory out tonight. I heaved a shot at the basket, and told myself we were only 2 points behind. As I rebounded for my team mates I felt my resolve return. Community was not going to beat us tonight. I couldn't give up.



My belief in this was shaken as the third quarter ground along painfully. Rick complained that the guys on the floor had better get their heads in the game or when we returned to Lone Oak it will be track season for us. The flag didn't seem to have a Mojo anymore. Nothing seemed to be going right. Battle as they might, Big Red couldn't break past that 2 point lead Community had.



Fourth quarter came and it looked as if this was going to be our final game of the 1972 season. Then as the final 2 minutes ticked down something remarkable happened. Big Red rallied and pulled ahead by 3 points, 56 to 53! Our spirits rose and the bench came to life. This was more like it!

Community began to get desperate, shooting low percentage shots on the outside and making reckless passes that were intercepted. Something had broken their cohesion a little bit, and Lone Oak jumped on it.

At the one minute mark Coach Taylor called time out and gathered his crew around. I listened with great interest.

"Control the ball, boys. Pass it around and burn up that clock. Make 'em foul you. We aint but 56 seconds away from winning this thing. Hang onto that ball. Stall. Lets go."

We joined hands.

"GO RED!"

Back and forth the ball went, from Willie, to O.T, to Butcher, to Danny, to Steve. For 27 seconds it went round and round like this. Somebody shot it and scored. The Braves finally got it and called time. It was 58 to 53, our lead.

The Community coach knew he was mere seconds from losing this contest. If Lone Oak got back in their stall they'd strangle the Braves out of the game. He told his men to intentionally foul to break the stall. It was an act of desperation, but these were desperate time. He was gambling that our lousy free throw shooting would work in his favor. Everybody had been shooting bricks all night at the free throw line, so it was worth the gamble.

Getting down the floor, Community shot and missed. Butcher grabbed the rebound. He was fouled immediately.



Looking something like a weeping willow tree, Butcher slouched up to the free throw line. Sweating freely and looking for the world like he would keel over from exhaustion at any second, he stood in the free throw circle.

"One and one," the Ref said.

Lewis Smith took the ball, wiped his face with his left hand, bounced the ball, and shot.

Swish, right through hoop.

Looking as if he'd fall over, the Butcher took his second shot.

Swish again, making it 60 to 53.

Now on the hairy edge of panic, Community desperately moved down the floor. They shot and scored, making it 60 to 55, but there was only 10 seconds left.

O.T. threw the ball into Willie. They beat the full court press, then almost casually controlled the sphere until the clock said five, four, three, two, one, and it was over!

We had done it! We had done it! The entire gym went wild and the B-teamers leaped off the bench. For the first time anyone could ever think of Lone Oak had won a Bi-District Championship! It had not been easy and it had been a long time coming!

We shook Community's hand, in the spirit of sportsmanship. They had played one spectacular game. I had expected us to win, but this all felt so unreal. My team mates had not let those of us on the B-team down, had not let the entire town of Lone Oak down.

Nike, the Greek goddess of Victory, had spread her wings wide for us. The Buffaloes were now Bi District Champions of 35-B/36-B, for the first time in history.

We had won! We had won! Go Red, Go!

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## The Chamber of Horrors



After last night's victory and the actions of the coaches, I think Gunner, Rick, and I figured we had gotten off scot free for our little escapade prior to the game. We could not be more wrong. The situation was that it was a low priority to chew us out for being stupid at the time, because it was the Bi-District game. It might have taken the teams mind off the game and cost us the championship. Coach Brookins let it be. He knew we'd be at school the next day. It could wait.

So it was that I came to school as usual with my mind more or less switched off and stumbled into my first class of the day. I was in this delapidated state of mental awareness not because of last night's glorious victory, but because it was and is my normal state for several hours in the morning. After 10 years of academia I had gotten used to this morning numbness, as had just about everyone who came to school and suffered the same as I did. I would look at the girls in my class though, and they seemed just as alert and awake now as they would at noon. How did they do it?

I cracked open my first book of the day, propped my head on my hands, and prepared to accept the droning lesson to come. The routine was interrupted by the overhead speaker calling Rickey, Gunner, and me to the Office.

Oh-oh!

Gunner, Rick, and I rose grinning from our seats. We knew what was coming. I hadn't had an honest paddling in years so I figured this was it. I could already imagine the 'twack' of the board on my rear. Sheepishly we strolled toward the Chamber of Horrors, that Dark Evil Dungeon that lurks in all schools; the Principal's Office! We whispered among ourselves, and the boards of the empty hall creaked under our feet. It was only a few yards to the office door but it seemed like a mile. We entered the office, and nervously awaited our fate.

Coach Brookins separated us, cleverly interviewing us one at a time. He checked for any discrepancies in our stories to see if we were lying to him. Knowing the type of man he was I could not lie to him. It would have gained me nothing and only made the situation much worse. I had too much respect for the man to ever lie to him. The other guys felt the same way.

I was called in and he sat there with Mr. Dial off to his right. Mr. Dial was very unhappy, but Mr. Brookins had that inscrutable and all business look on his face that was impossible to read.

I glanced at the palm leaf paddle in the corner and I figured that was soon to be whacking on my rear end. I was wrong about that, but in the end when Mr. Brookins was done with me, I wished he had. It would have been easier for me to take.

Coach Brookins folded his arms and leaned forward on his desk. He made direct eye contact, indicating he was dead serious. He spoke gently and softly.

"I'm disappointed in you, Charles," he began, "I sort of expected a stunt like that from Gunner and Rickey, but not from you."

I turned crimson and looked at the floorboards. This was horrible. I had disappointed him! This was the COACH, the man who was the number one Buffalo!

"There are a lot of people who think quite highly of you. I know I do. You let us all down. Do you know that?"

I nodded, wanting to die. There was no place to hide, no place to escape. This man, who was our Coach and the one person on earth we could not let down, I had let down. It was a stupid thing I had done, and I was stupid for doing it.

He exacted a vow from me not to do something like that again and there was a penalty tacked on. I humbly accepted his all, without protest. When I had been let out of his office I felt like I had been thrown off the roof of the gym. He had not touched me at all, but I certainly wish he had.

This 'talking to' was the most devastating thing I had ever endured. I staggered back to my home room and slumped into my seat.

Randy Price the Rabbit looked at me with great curiosity, then at Rick and Gunner as they came in. Gunner had a big grin on his face. He was always grinning.

"What happened?" Rabbit asked me, "Yall get licks?"

"I wish we had," I replied, "It would have hurt a lot less."

"We just got a little talking to," Gunner said, making light of the horrors we had just endured.

Rabbit looked at us, incredulous. He shrugged it off and school continued normally for the rest of day. I never, ever, thought of skipping school again.

In the wide world of sports the Regional game was coming. My over-confidence in the team had not been deminished one whit. Practice continued. We had the game of our lives coming up that Friday, March 3, 1972. Coach Taylor believed that if we got by our first opponent we would make it. The highest hurdle was the first one, he would tell us. If we could maintain our poise and stay cool we could break into the rest of the Regional Tournament, and drive on possibly all the way to State.

What made the first bracket so difficult is the newness of being there. The big gym, the unknown schools, the whole experience of it all could blow our minds if we let it. That was our biggest opponent, as Coach Taylor saw it.

Snapped to reality by Mr. Brookins, I was pretty much over my post-illness depression. I seemed to be back on track. I was back running with the team and I was as clumsily enthusiastic as ever. I tried to steal the ball repeatedly from Willie, O.T, or Danny. I would try to block their shots but they easily cleared me by over a foot. I was back in the groove and it felt good. Coach Taylor was pleased to see that his number one cheerleader was back.

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## Omens and Portents

(The Hearse Curse)



I had a pleasant surprise, along with the rest of the team. The school was going to give us a pep-rally! In the big ole gym we were placed as guest of honor. For the first time in my life I sat with

my team in a real pep-rally. Being honored in such a way by the school and faculty was a great gift to us. As far as I know this was the first time a pep-rally was ever given for a basketball team. It was just fantastic, to all of us. We really appreciated this, more than words alone could tell.

It was typical of all the football pep-rallies. The Cheerleaders were there, the school song was sung, and Coach Taylor and Mr. Brookins gave speeches honoring us that were appreciated by everyone there. I believe Steve or someone gave a speech, too, expressing our gratitude and our hopes of victory in the forth-coming contest.

The cheerleaders gave a familiar group of cheers. I had chanted them at least a hundred times. This time it was as a real member of the team.

"Go, Fight, Win!"

The cheers echoed off the rafters of this cavernous building, ringing high and free into the air outside. Some probably could hear us in town. Others already knew what was going on and why. All of them would see us at the Regional game. All of them and many, many more.

This was a wonderous, wonderful voyage I was on and too good to really be true. Had I the maturity to understand what was going on I would have been blown away by it all. We were reaching what was at that time new and untouched heights. We were going to the Regional Tournament. No matter what the future held no other Lone Oak basketball team had ever gone this far before. The girls team of last year had done this well. To think we could do what they had accomplished was on the Senior's minds. To surpass that record was an unspoken goal.

After school I went to the Beanpot Cafe with Gunner to await the time to return to school and the trip to Kilgore. I ordered my usual burger and Dr. Pepper. I then settled down to wait for it to be cooked. Restless, I then went up to Rick's favorite pinball machine and fed it a dime.

While I was absorbed in more or less playing this complicated device 2 black men I had never seen before came in and got a table. They were waited on and chatted with each other. I paid them no mind other than the fact that they were 2 unknown faces. I finished my game as the last silver ball streaked through the bumpers. I didn't have anymore dimes to throw away so I sat down to wait for my food. After it was served up I dived in with gusto.

While I tore through my hamburger like a starving wolf I looked up and saw what our visitors were driving. It was a shiney black hearse!

I swallowed a chunk of burger and tried to put my bulging eyes back in their sockets.

This was a BAD omen!

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"This was their finest hour..."

Winston Churchill

## Never Before

It was Friday, March 3, 1972. Under much more fanfare than usual our bus load of basketball players and several choice supporters rolled off for the first Regional Boy's Basketball

Tournament we had ever seen. Behind us was a long string of cars, following us from Lone Oak. Our perspective on this was brand new. For some of the girls in the convoy following the bus it was a repeat of last year. They had been this way and knew what to expect. On the other hand, we had no idea. None of the boys team had gone to that game.

The Kilgore gym may have looked familiar to girls who were here last year but to me and my team mates it looked unbelievably huge. With a quick look around we went straight to the locker room to suit up. As I put on my 12 and windbreaker Butcher once more took a lofty perch. So far, so good.

I had told nobody about the hearse. Such nonsense wouldn't register with Gunner anyway. Spider wasn't here. Woody was someplace about, I think, but I don't remember him being there. I felt sort of alone. That may seem strange with Rick, Gunner, Philip, Larry Hukill, James 'Big Al' Kelly, and Coach Taylor to be on the bench with me. But it wasn't so. Woody and I shared the hand slapping and the Mojo. I psyched myself up, and out onto that strange floor in that huge gym we went.

As we did the warm-up I looked to my left. The bleachers were packed with people. I couldn't see the top row, they just went on forever. Just how many people were in this place? Hundreds? Thousands? Good grief, what's a poor old country boy to do?

Without much ceremony or anything to mark it as a special occasion the game started. I shunted aside the unbelievability of it all and got into game mode.

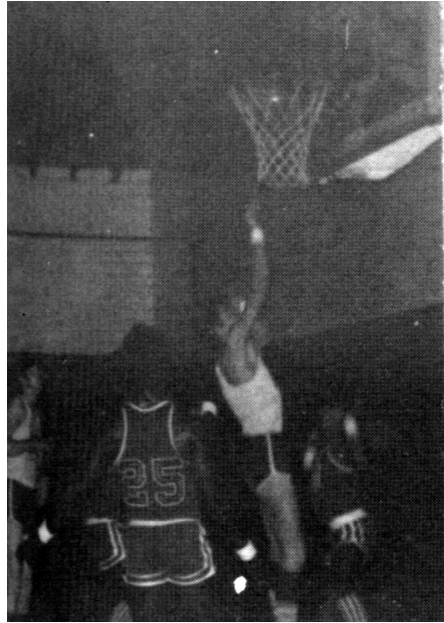
Central Heights was our foe. It was a basketball school. They had a 36 and 4 record. Our record was told as 22 and 3. I guess that included our tournament losses and the loss to La Poynor. Central Heights had a lot more floor time than we did.

Central had two very big and heavy black guys who were twins. These guys were bigger than Rickey Graham, Gongga, or Robert Vice. They were huge. Usually I didn't expect much basketball out of guys built like this, but they were hitting long shots from all over the floor. I looked at them with awe. They destroyed any stereotypes about big and slow men.



Willie was having problems. He was shooting from far away just about every time he got the ball. He may have been trying to counter the 2 big twins. Danny was upset by this. Willie was shooting way too early, forcing Lone Oak out of its normal ball-control game and into running with Central. Willie was being intimidated by Central's full court press, forcing him to not play his normal game.





After the first quarter Central led us by 6, 30 to 24. This high scoring game was wild and out of control. If every quarter was like this one Central would have 120 points and we would have 96. That was the pace we were setting. Coach Taylor chewed his thumbnail and tried to get his team to slow down. The entire squad was having trouble with this full court press Central had hit us with. Our normal game just was not working.

Somebody handed me a set of brown earphones and mic with a long cord going out of sight. Confused, I put the things on. What kind of deal is this?

"Hello?"

"Hello, Charles, this is Mr. Brookins."

"Hi Coach! Ya wanna talk to Coach Taylor?"

"No. You just listen and tell him what I tell you to."

"Yes sir."

Mr Brookins was seeing if he could find a weak spot in the Central Heights offense or defense. He had a clipboard and diagramed movements. He also kept an eye on our team and relayed any faults to Coach Taylor. What statistics he had he sent down, too.

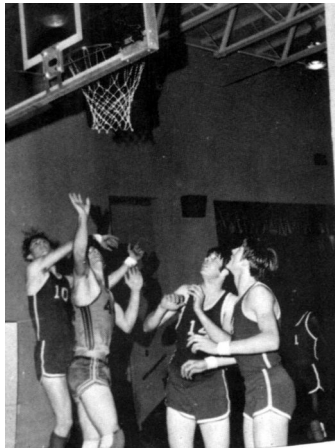
I asked Mr. Brookins where he was and he said he was up in the press box at the top of the bleachers. I turned and looked. He said he waved. I did not see him at all. I only saw thousands of faceless people going on forever. The crowd had a deeper roar to it than any I had ever seen. Somebody had an air horn and I could hear it from time to time. This entire episode was mind boggling. Way too much new stuff.

I was supercharged for this game, and after the novelty of the earphones wore off I discovered it was sort of like a bridle. I couldn't cheer for my team on the floor because if I did it would blow Mr. Brookins ear drums out. Why I got the earphones I had no earthly idea. Rick, Philip , or even

Gunner would have been a better choice in my opinion. Big Al would have done it well. All this honor did for me was to muzzle me. I had to ditch them somehow.

Gunner didn't want them. Rickey just looked at me and shook his head. I had to get these things off. Finally after a lot of persuasion I got James Kelly to take the things. He was right next to Coach Taylor so he should have had the things to begin with, I thought. I believe the fact was, because I was sort of looked upon as the kid who was so into the space program, that I would be a good candidate for the technological part of this event. Thanks, but no thanks. This was a battle, and I was in battle mode. In the end the earphones lay on the bench to be checked in time and again, to see if Coach Brookins had discovered anything. He hadn't and he wouldn't. Central was just too good of a team.

Halftime was approaching and Central put heavy pressure on our inbounds men, O.T. They intercepted several of his passes, scoring. This wasn't O.T.'s fault. Danny or Steve should have flooded the inbounds area, making it difficult for Central to cover all the targets. Central kept up their 6 point lead.



Coach Taylor was torn between trying to set his team down and let them take stock of the situation or let them see if they could work it out on their own. He pursued the latter course. The strategy had worked in the past. If he messed with the team now it could throw the entire game off. He just hoped they could adjust.

By the half it was 47 to 41, with Central Heights leading. Coach Taylor sent me to the Score Keeper's station to see who had how many fouls. It was a very long walk in front of all those people, almost blowing my 16 year old mind. I asked for fouls and got a deluge of names and confusing stats. My eyes glazed over and I staggered back to Coach Taylor. He sent me back to get specific fouls on Willie. I held up 3 fingers, indicating 3 fouls, and almost made an obscene gesture with them when I did. I caught it in time, I think.

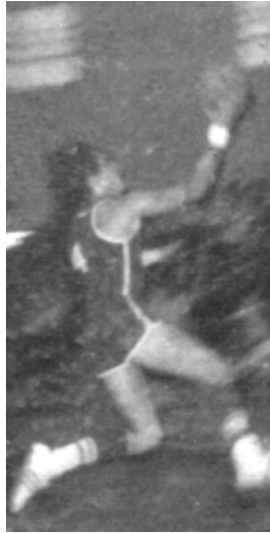
If we lost Willie we would be in bad shape. Willie having 3 fouls was in the yellow zone, if he got one more he would be in the red zone and critical. He had to play a more careful game.

The half time shooting was scary. I was in the largest gym I had ever been in for my entire life. There was a capacity crowd. There would be other crowds in the future, much bigger than this one, but none would be as unreal or as intimidating as this massive mob rooting for us and Central. This was the Twilight Zone.

We were still only behind by 6 points so we could still overcome that deficit and win this game. I felt like we would if we could somehow stop those 2 big guys from their outside shooting. If we did

that, though, they could go inside and knock Butcher, Steve, and Danny out of the way with their sheer size then grab rebounds easily. I called these guys the 'Fat Albert' twins and I developed a huge dislike for them. They were breaking our backs.

I had the flag here and deployed, but it seemed to have lost it's magic. During the third it truly seemed so. Nothing seemed to work for us. Central pushed 13 powerful points ahead with remarkably accurate shooting, full court presses, and by intercepting passes from all over the floor. Even I could see that they had us figured out. The dark clouds of doom gathered over our bench. This was the end.



My heart sank as we began to falter, then collapse. Victory had spread he fickle wings and flown from us. By the start of the final period Central had us 69 to 56. All that was left was to fight on for honor. We couldn't catch them. Even so, all through the fourth quarter I watched on, never giving up. I hoped for some sort of miracle. None came.

At the final buzzer I felt the very unfamiliar sting of defeat. We had been soundly whopped, 95 to 78. It was a full 17 point stomping. While Central celebrated we just walked slowly off the floor.

The books showed we had played a great offensive game. Steve had a strong 25 points. Willie had 24. Danny had 14 and Butcher had 12. O.T. had 3. Our defense had been the problem. We had tried to run and gun, which was something we didn't do well, especially with a full court press on us.

In the locker room, stuffed with sour grapes, everybody blamed everybody else. Steve blamed Coach Taylor. Danny blamed Willie for taking long shots. Coach Taylor blamed himself and some of it went to O.T. for the inbound passes. O.T. was just disappointed, and he knew what we all knew. We were not mentally prepared for this game. He thought like we all thought, that we were a better team than Central. Butcher, as usual, kept quiet. I blamed my Talisman. It had failed me. In the back of our minds had danced the impossible vision of a State Championship Trophy. Now it was gone, vanished like some wonderful dream we had all suddenly awoken out of. Now it was all over.

As we dressed to and prepared to leave, I somehow lost the treasured flag. Somewhere in the Kilgore gym it went back to the obscurity from where it came, either by the bench, the locker room, or the trek there and out. It was gone forever, just like our dreams of the State Championship.

The 1971-72 season, a season unlike any other done by the boys at L.O.H.S, had suddenly ended. We felt very dissappointed, of course, much like the girl's had the year before. Yet, like them, we had no reason to be down on ourselves. We had achieved the heights and gone further, faster, and with more victories than any other Lone Oak team before us.

Taylor's Terrors, the Centurions, had left a legacy for all who came after us to shoot for. It would be a while before anyone equalled this record, and none from Lone Oak would surpass it for a very long time. We were the best boys team of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and I had been very lucky to be a part of it.



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## After The Season

As fast as it happened it was promptly filed away and pretty much forgotten. This is part of the indoctrination. We had to forget our last game and look forward to the next. Yet I had seen it and I was a part of it. I had suddenly gained the respect of my peers and classmates. I wasn't a great athlete like Danny but I had been there and I had been part of it. I had played in a handful of games and I had one point. This was 100% more than any of those who sat in study hall playing hangman.

The Saturday after the game I made my first movie. It was a real experimental low budget thing put together by Mike Cheek of Dixon. It wasn't much to speak of overall, but it was the first one of a couple more I would make later on in life. This little movie was done on 8mm film, scratchy homemade sound, and had Benjy, myself, Hiram, the Samples kids, and a host of others in it. It was all B.B. guns and primitive slapstick. The last time I talked to Mike he said he still had the movie somewhere. Twenty four years later I would be making independent Vietnam war movies for Blackfox Productions. Who would have guessed?

Track and field was forced upon us now. Central Heights had laid us low and did it fair and square. We held no grudges as we took out the starting blocks and shot puts. The little cage the track equipment was kept in was in the lower Varsity showers area. I had messed around a little last year with track but I didn't go to any meets. I didn't have a physical last year, and my parents probably couldn't fork up the 15 dollars for me to get one. This year was different, and I was going to find something I could do in track.

In the meantime we went on a field trip to Paris, Texas, and the Campbell Soup Company located there. This was the first time most of us had ever seen the inside of a huge factory before, so it was an interesting morning. The whole place was amazing. They had a factory within a factory where they made their own cans and T.V. dinner trays. They had a huge cooker oven where the soup was cooked right in the can. I thought it would be interesting to work in a factory like that. This gave me and some of my classmates the wrong impression about most factory work. I

mistakenly thought factory work was good, clean, and paid well. The Campbell Soup Company was immaculate, and the employees were scrubbed and clean, in white coveralls.



These were the days when a person was expected to work only 40 hours a week, Monday through Friday, usually from about 7:30 am to about 3 or 4:30 pm. Overtime was rare and only in real production emergencies. Most factories had only one shift, and closed up when the day crew went home. A lot of people had weekends off and week nights free, except for maybe truck drivers and service people. There was talk of increased leisure time, and even a 4 day work week.

"People in the future will have more free time on their hands than ever before," said Left Wing News broadcaster Walter Chronkite on a C.B.S. T.V. show called "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century", speculating about the future. It is amazing just how wrong folks who predict the future can be.

We had one last honor in basketball. Steve was recognized as All Region player by the powers that be. He had been most impressive, in spite of the fact that his team had been blown out of the water. Steve also headed the All District Team of 36-B. On the second team O.T. and Willie got slots. I guess Butcher looked too tired to qualify and Danny was too young.

I looked at this and told myself "Be patient, Danny, and take care of that golden arm of yours."

On the girl's team Ruby Williams and Marilyn Fry were on the first squad. Francis Johnson and Cindy Hukill were on the second team. In all Lone Oak had 7 students on the All District Squads or higher.

The 1972 Lady Buffaloes finished a very respectable second in District against Celeste who was to become a powerhouse in girls basketball. They played well, and finished well.



Back at Regional, Central Heights cruised along, knocking off foe after foe. Then they ran into the La Poynor Flyers. La Poynor took them down, 70 to 66. That gave those of us who followed it a feeling of satisfaction. Central had beaten us and La Poynor had beaten them. Earlier in the exhibition games we had beaten La Poynor. La Poynor went on to win the 1972 Class B State Championship.

Beating the Flyers that one time in the "Getchehansup" game was something we'd never forget. We had beaten a team that went on to win the State Championship. We were that good. No one could ever take that from us. We had once battled the best in the state and we had won.

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"You Don't Ever Quit, Boy, Not When It's For Real!"

Texx Cobb, Uncommon Valor

**"You Don't Ever Quit, Boy, Not When It's For Real!"**

I had been taught to never give up. No matter how much it hurt, not matter how bad I felt, I couldn't ever give up. Hurting was what I was doing just now. There was a large cow pasture west of the baseball fields that were behind the school, over a chain link fence. In this area was where the mile runners trained without interference from kiddos on the playground, and without tying up the running areas for the sprinters. I had on my dingy basketball shoes and stumbled along the uneven ground trying to make a circumfrence of the pasture. Word had it that one lap of the place was a mile. I didn't know if that was for sure, but I had run further than I ever had before at one time, and I thought I was going to die.

Thump! Thump! Stumble! Thump! Thump!

Gasp! Wheeze! Gasp! Wheeze! Gasp! Wheeze!

Running with me was Randy Price the Rabbit. I guess he felt bad about missing the most amazing basketball season ever. Now he was following my lead again for no other valid reason other than he liked me. He kept pace with me, gasping and wheezing right alongside. It felt good to have someone to talk to between gasps for air.

Rabbit had missed the entire basketball season. For 4 months he had done no drills or exercises. I had been in training all this time, yet Rabbit was keeping up with me somewhat easily. If I had been out of training like he had I'd now be regurgitating my school lunch on the practice field. How he was keeping up with me, I didn't know. I just kept putting one foot in front of the other, and gasping for oxygen.

Coach Taylor, now coaching track, kept an eye on us. As we staggered to a halt and bent over, totally spent and out of air, he told us to put our hands behind our heads and straighten up so we could breathe easier. He also told us to walk around or our legs would "blow up".

It was tempting to just grab a limb on a nearby tree and hang by our arms, but he was the coach. He must know something, so we stumbled around, hands behind our heads. This cow-pasture running was so rough the first time I wondered if I'd ever breathe normally again.

We had turned in our basketball suits. I kept my shorts for track, and they remained at home. I had a pair of canary yellow knee length shorts I wore for track practice. These were kept in the new wire baskets we had up in the locker room. I had a really nifty pair of very light track shoes somebody had left over from last year. These things had quarter inch removable spikes in the sole. Everybody else had similar footwear. They were the finest for running track and I loved them.

We measured and marked off the area around the old football field and baseball fields with stakes. This gave us a servicable running area, and we were all timed in different events. I tried out for several, only because I was curious as to how I stood up against the others. Who knows, I might even find some event besides the mile run that I was actually good at.

The usual gang of little grade school kids harrassed some of us while we ran. Most of us just blew it off, but I didn't like the cute little tykes and I wanted to bash their sweet little heads in. Some of them knew how to cuss, but in very odd ways. Some of them used words they thought were dirty that left a guy grinning from ear to ear and he flashed by the angry child. The kids looked upon the advent of track and field as an invasion of their favorite recess areas. That is, until the admiration of the track stars began.

Someone had anchored the blocks at the 220 mark. I got in them and got set. I looked over at Coach Taylor. He dropped his arm and I blasted out of the blocks like a wounded elephant. Pounding the turf with my big feet and pumping my skinny legs I tore as fast as I could toward the first baseball diamond. I zipped across home plate just as one of the little kids called me a very odd name and demanded I vacate his ball playing area. I wanted to smack him with a swift kick but I was being timed. An injured child might upset Coach Taylor, and I had seen all of the inside of Coach Brookin's office I wanted to see. Besides, if I clobbered the little loud mouth that might be the end of our track practice at this time of day. I kept running.

I rounded the last turn then sprinted as fast as I could for Coach Taylor who was holding the stopwatch and marking the finish line. When I ran by Coach Taylor clicked the stopwatch. I stumbled a half a dozen steps or so to burn out my momentum then I stood gasping, my hands behind my head.

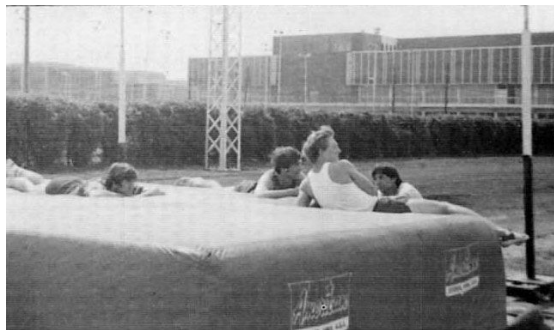
"30.5," said Coach Taylor, generously. If I could keep up this speed I could run a four minute mile! Yeah, and they could bury me with school honors after I kick off from cardiac arrest from the exertion! This 220 had spent me. There was no way I could do eight of those nonstop for a full mile.

Gasp! Wheeze! Oh!

Training for track was actually fun, and it was pretty much self paced. There was nobody there to yell at us to go faster, hit harder, and jump higher. It was more or less left up to the individual. Everybody messed around in all the events in training, just to see what they liked best. I liked the mile, and Rabbit liked the high jump, but he still ran with me. He had his reasons, I guess, but he never told them to me.

We had a pole vault pole that was practically solid aluminum. It was painted orange, and had black markings every so often up and down it's length. Nobody knew what the markings were there for, and the age of the pole was unknown. As it was an aluminum tube I can speculate that it was from the late 40s or early 50s. It tipped the scales at something like 20 pounds. This thing had no flexibility at all. I wanted to see if I could pole-vault, so I picked this monster up and dragged it out to the pit to try it. Nobody else seemed interested in pole-vaulting.

A pole vault catch slot was installed at the base of the sawdust pit, on the west side. A stack of foam rubber mats and inner tubes in mesh bags were on top of the muck, awaiting the decent of a pole vaulter or high jumper. This was much more inviting than splashing down into the goo of the sawdust pit. Some of the guys who were running track were lounging on and around this comfortable pile of cushions.



***Track meet at ETSU***

I took a text-book stance and aimed the pole like a knight's lance. I loped down the dirt runway. The guys on and near the mats scattered when they saw me coming. I hit the slot snugly and tried to get launch myself off the ground. I pulled up, got 3 feet off the ground, and came crashing down on my tail, right back to gritty mother earth.

Clang-clang! "Oooooof!"

The guys near the mats just gawked at me.

"Buzzard," Eddie said, "You're crazy!"

I got up, dusted myself off, and picked up the pole and my dignaty then limped away. So much for my pole-vault ambitions. Did we have a javalen? We didn't? Too bad.



Coach Taylor was thankful we didn't have a javalen. If I got one of those here there was no telling where it would land. For me it was back to the pasture and another mile. Coach Taylor steered me gently in the direction of being a miler. He took my skinny build and enthusiasm then decided to build up my endurance. He told me stories of Jim Ryun and the amazing 4 minute mile barrier.

Coach Taylor would listen to my questions with resonable patience. He had me drinking milkshakes with raw egg in them and running all over the place. As it took me over 5 minutes to finish a mile run it kept me out of his hair for a while.

We had school open-house on March 5<sup>th</sup>, and we spent most of the day sprucing the old place up. We washed windows and polished the floors, making our beloved school look as good as possible for the visitors.

As a fitting way to put a final note on the basketball season, the Harlem Globetrotters came to Commerce. They put on a show in the E.T.S.U. Fieldhouse gym. Some of the fellows went to see them. I didn't, but at least Herman Crist did. It was lots of fun for everybody.

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## Unpleasant Things

Gambling and social drinking were some of the big past-times in Lone Oak. Being as how a person didn't have any place to go at night or anything to do, out came the dice and cards. Cruising around in somebody's car and drinking booze on the blacktop roads was done without much fear of being caught by the authorities. I had Rickey to take me to Greenville from my house in Dixon so I never got into gambling or drinking. I much preferred roller skating and cruising Wesley Street in Greenville.

These gambling habits were picked up early and they were often addictive. Some guys just couldn't put it down. I had what we now call six sided dice in my box, but the teachers all knew after a while that I was not a gambler. I was allowed to keep the little spotted cubes without any problems. Other folks on campus were different. Dice shooting on campus was actually going on. Most of the girls in the Freshman class knew how to shoot dice. Everybody, including me, knew how to throw quarters, trying to get them as close as we could to a wall or similar barrier. I didn't have much money at any time, so I never threw away my coins like this. I still had a gym window to pay for, too. Odd Man Out was popular because it could be played quickly and the game disbanded rapidly when anyone undersirable, like a teacher, approached.

We had a casino of a sorts under the gym. In addition to smoking it was a convenient place to shoot dice. Coach Taylor once caught several guys under there. They were so engrossed in the gambling they didn't know Coach Taylor was there until he had them.

Coach Taylor genuinely disliked to punish the boys in he found under there. Some were on the basketball team, and other than the vice of gambling they were quite decent fellows. I don't know what happened to them, but it wasn't too severe.

Playing cards, like Poker and Blackjack, may have went on, but it is more elaborate than just shooting dice. A pack of cards is easy to detect. Teachers always keep an eye open for a rectangular package in a pocket, be it cigarettes or cards. Dice and cigarettes were usually stored in the socks, concealed neatly by the bell bottoms or flair leg jeans. Boots, usually cowboy boots, were excellent storage areas. Cards, cheat sheets, dice, knives, and a variety of other forbidden goodies can be stored in the high top of a boot.

The style was to wear a tight shirt, usually a t-shirt. This is often tucked into blue jeans. A wide belt is worn with this. Boots are worn and the pant legs are pulled down over the boot tops. This gives the first impression of being unarmed. In fact the belt is a weapon and can be rapidly deployed and wrapped once around the fist. The buckle is used as a flail. Even a small buckle can cause a good sized wound. In the boots can be stored a variety of weapons, usually a knife, like a 6 inch blade. If anyone carried a gun I did not know of it at this time, though one local thug did show me he had a "Saturday Night Special" on him once. Guns were looked upon as far too lethal. With a knife a guy can cut somebody a little. All that can be done with a gun is try to kill. Even getting caught with a gun can get a person in more trouble that they could ever get out of. The gun the guy had was junk by my standards, but still dangerous.

I never carried weapons except for my belt. To give that appearance that I might, just might, have something on my person would give the would be adversary second thoughts. These were most unpleasant things to have to do, but it kept things polite in Greenville at night. If some of the other people thought they had an advantage or thought someone was weak or unarmed they would first try intimidation then an attack. Because of my friends and our manner of dress I was never attacked in Greenville. The same rules didn't apply in Lone Oak. Years later I once stupidly went there alone when I was out of school and I was attacked. I was held down and threatened with a broken bottle. I went there alone and I had paid for it.

These and other lessons increased my cynical outlook toward my classmates who were outside my clique. I didn't gamble, chew tobacco, smoke, or drink. Those who did looked upon me and my kind as weird and uncool. It widened the gap between the cliques and led to feelings of superiority on both sides. There were probably feelings of jealousy also.

I was known throughout the school and I was liked by the entire faculty, for the most part. Some people, both male and female, looked upon me with great hostility for no other reason than I was somehow popular. Just who did I think I was? They couldn't figure out how a kid who looked like I did, had no money, and dressed in shabby clothes had gotten to be a celebrity like Steve, O.T, or Larry Little.

It was simple. I paid my dues, and I never gave up.

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## Shirley



Shirley Funk holds a special place in my memories. She was the most down to earth girl in the entire class, and a bit of an outcast. I could empathize with the outcast part. She came from a

very large family with some 10 of them crammed into a small 3 bedroom house. She was the oldest child there. They were dirt poor, like my family.

Shirley was Country and Western. She even owned and rode a horse. She wasn't hard to look at by any means and dressed nicely for her financial situation. She was also very easy to get along with. She didn't have her head in the clouds, or her nose in the air. I liked her.

She could read lips.

Once in the Science room we were having a study hall. I had a disagreement with a guy across the room and proceeded to cuss him out silently.

"Stop that!" Shirley said, "That's not nice!"

Surprised, I looked back at her. She had an embarrassed and angry look on her face. I wondered how she knew what I was saying.

Shirley wanted to be accepted and liked. Heck, I liked her just the way she was. She was the closest thing to a close female friend I had in the entire school. Julia liked me but kept me at an arms length, Vicki Pipkin liked me just as a friend, but Shirley was a girl I felt I could talk to about what was on my mind.

Two of her brothers were friends of mine. I'd invite them down to my place and we'd play board games or hunt in the woods. Maybe that was why Shirley felt at ease with me. I guess she was like most of the other girls in that she considered me 'harmless'.

She was not part of the inscrutable women. She dated guys in the class because she was just somewhat lonely and needed someone to let her feel wanted. I once escorted her all the way to Rick's house on my bicycle while she rode her horse. It was a long and enjoyable encounter and the closest thing to a date I ever had with her.

She could be picked on a little, but if she got mad she could easily knock somebody's teeth out. Perhaps it was that air of danger that made me see how far I could push it before getting her enraged.

"The African Queen" with Humphry Bogart was a popular movie with Herman and me. The book was in the library so I checked it out. In the book is a make-out scene between Mr. Alnut and the Missionary lady. I read this passage and showed it to Herman. We had our usual laughs and I decided to get a female reaction to the passage. I stuck it under Shirley's nose and I said "Read this."

Herman and I watched with interest. She read on for a few moments then suddenly said "Oh!" and flinched. Herman and I broke into evil laughter. She continued to read the book, soaking up every word of the classic. I managed to get it back. I was reading it for a library project. After I turned it in Shirley checked it out and read it from cover to cover. I was slightly amused that she had broadened her literary horizons because I let her read a make-out scene in a classical adventure book. She was full of surprises.

Shirley had the courage and self-confidence to try out for cheerleader. This was a major step, like going out for quarterback or halfback. Being a cheerleader is an all or nothing affair. Either she goes out and makes it or she fails. There was no second place.

We could see little girl cheerleader wanna-bees everywhere. They'd do a series of moves that looks something like a martial arts Kata, but they are doing a cheer while they move. In the end they jump as high as they can, arms and legs going all over the place. It is quite amusing.

Shirley had been a cheerleader in Junior High, and she figured to give it a shot in High School. She had the grades, and the right attitude. Bespeckled and from the wrong side of the tracks, she signed up for tryouts. That took more courage than I had. She had no friends that I know of to back her up. I had Rickey to push me in the right direction. She was on her own.

Try outs were in the auditorium on the stage. Everybody was to observe and cast ballots for who they thought should be cheerleaders. I got my ballot and went into the auditorium to watch.

Several girls at one time were doing their level best on the stage. They'd do a cheer then let another group of five take their place. It was somewhat crowded up there. Into this maelstrom stepped Shirley.

I watched with a partisan eye as she and 4 other ladies did their routine. She was on the right hand side of the stage, and we were facing it. The cheer was well done, reflecting on the training all 5 had recieved. Then came the hop and jump at the end.

She went into her hop and struck the side of the stage on the jump, stopping in mid-jump. She had balked. I didn't have a problem with it, in fact I thought it showed her human side. Humanity, a down to earth attitude, and approachability is what I liked in cheerleaders, so I thought she deserved the vote. I gave it to her without a guilty conscience or feeling of pity.

About an hour later we sat in class doing our lessons. The results were announced over the P.A. Five girls were named and Shirley wasn't one of them. I took a peek at where she sat. She didn't seem to be upset, and she quietly returned to her lessons. I guess she figured after she had struck the stage it blew her chances.

I was dissappointed. I really wanted her to get cheerleader. She had been a cheerleader before, and if she was good enough for it then she was good enough to be a cheerleader here. Thats what I thought. I was might have been more dissappointed than she was.

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Not So Shiny Armor



I don't want to give the impression that I was some kind of Knight in Shining Armor in my conduct to the ladies. Most of them I respected and held in high regard. Others I ragged on mercilessly. Some unnecessarily.

For instance, one girl who had a class with us did a terrible job of dying her hair blond. It turned almost white except for a dark strip right up the center. She resembled a football helmet with a center stripe. I called her 'skunk-head' and suffered her wrath. I didn't let up and I nearly drove her to distraction.

I got slapped by other girls for crude remarks and insults.

Making fun of the food in the cafeteria got me and a couple of other guys a lengthy lecture for boorishness. Still, I would rather be a boor than a lech.

If some girl verbally pushed me too hard I'd push back with a blast of profanity, mostly about her moral habits and lineage. This usually prompted her to retaliate in kind and escalated the argument a notch. Mostly I would avoid such a conflict by retreating or staying away from such a situation.

Before our science teacher was relieved of his duties we kept science class a sort of a nut house. We'd get him off the lesson plan by getting him to bable on about anything. One thing we did was run laps around the room. I mean really run laps, just like in gym class. This sounds crazy, but we did it. I was becoming a mile runner, so I got the task of taking laps of about 100 or so and being timed for it. I have no idea what for.

While I was sacrificing my knees for funsies there was this one girl who just had to stick her legs out in the aisle where I was running. I asked her to move them or I might trip over them. She didn't, so I stepped square on her ankles on the next lap as I went by. She retracted her legs but tried to kick me as I went by.

Eventually the circus-like atmosphere of Science Study Hall stopped along with the running when the teacher got canned.

Once there were these two girls who would perch like harpies on the ice-cream box located in the breezeway, and sell the icecream. One was blond, the other brunette. These are the same that Rabbit had burned when one of them called me 'funny face'. Neither of these two girls had

wholesome reputations. I left them strictly alone, having no interest in them. They weren't my kind of girls.

When I'd pass by the icecream box on the way to one class or another the brunette would give me a hard time by calling me 'sexless'. I retaliated by calling her a lesbian. Her blond running buddy thought this was hilarious and nearly fell off the icecream box. I never did get used to them, or any other girl like them.

Once Rickey took a girl out on a date. Shirley's brother Charles and I met up with them somehow, and Rickey's date decided she wanted to kiss Charles and me. I hadn't kissed a girl of the same age as mine before in 1972 and I wasn't about to start by kissing someone else's date. She planted one on Charles but when she came for me I angrily turned my head to one side. She balked.

"Whats wrong?"

"I aint gonna kiss you."

"Why?"

"I just aint."

I walked angrily away, heading home. I had no business being there and she had no business kissing me and Charles. I refused to speak to her again after that. She really ticked me off. But as I have said, most of the girls I did know had what I called class and didn't participate in such foolish activities. Those that did I held in low status. I wanted something more than just a sweaty summer night in a car, and she was Rickey's date, after all.

There was another girl we called Bozo because she did a horrible job on her make-up once. After the novelty wore off I left her alone, but if she made me mad I'd bring it up again.

Rabbit fur coats were popular and attractive. For most of these girls it was the closest thing to a mink coat they would ever wear. Being clods we dubbed them skunk-fur and bugged the girls about them. We bugged them so much that the girls actually stopped wearing them. I was a big part of the crowd that caused that.

It wasn't just us either. One girl, Shannon Cook, went against her classmates wishes not to tell Mr. Ross he had bubblegum stuck to the back of his pants. She told him, and then got threatening notes by someone. These notes were violent in nature and had such a frightening effect on her that she moved away from Lone Oak. Shannon was and is a tremendous lady with a big heart, and someone had actually ran her off.

This reflects badly on all of us, but decades later we'd make contact and she told me she still loved Lone Oak.

I tell all this so it will not seem as though I am trying to build myself up as some sort of White Knight on these pages. I was just as base and crude as any other school kid. I am no saint.

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The Beat Goes On

Run, run, run, run, run! All day long I ran. I ran inside the baseball field, in the cow pasture, to the store and back, all over the place. One day I ran two and a quarter miles and I felt great. Another day I ran only one mile and felt like I might die. Once I out ran Rabbit, but he said he had on bad shoes. Some people just can't be beat.

Coach Taylor timed me in these runs. My times were in the 6 minute range, putting me in decent contention for district. I was no speed demon, but I was not slow, either.

The closest time I came to getting killed at school was in track. We were getting the hurdles out of the track cage near the varsity showers. The pole vault poles were too long to put in the cage so we just leaned them up against the wall. A couple of guys were up in the varsity locker room landing talking to me as I carried a handfull of hurdles out of the locker room.

"Look out!" one of them yelled.

Sensing something was coming my way I just drew up tight.

KERWHAM!

The big aluminum pole had missed me by inches and fell with a loud bang on the floor to my left. The guys on the landing to the locker room stared at me in disbelief. I stood there looking down at the orange pole, confused and relieved that it hadn't hit me. If it had it would have cracked my skull open like a watermelon. No more Charlie. I propped the pole back up and took the hurdles out. That was close!

Running track allows a guy to find out what his limitations are. I put a maximum effort into a 100 yard run. We had set up on the remains of the old field behind the school. Admiring little kids were all over the place, and clustered around Coach Taylor to see the times of the sprinters. On a signal I blew out of the blocks and raced up field. I held my breath and pushed as hard as I knew how. I flashed across the finish line and blew out my breath.

"Thirteen seconds, flat!" Coach Taylor called out.

Thirteen seconds? Man, I'll never be a state class sprinter. I was at least a full two seconds behind our best runners, 3 behind the best in the state.



***Rickey Smiley and me in track practice.***

Once or twice we got the treat of going to practice at the East Texas State University stadium. Coach Royal drove us over there in his tiny little compact car. Five of us squeezed into the little tin box. Coach Royal flashed down the serpentine Campbell road, through Prairie Valley. He went into the turns like a racing driver, cocking his head this way and that. We all thought this odd and amusing, but we said nothing.

Once we were at E.T. I looked at the big oval cinder track E.T. had. It ran around their football field, and was reddish brown. I thought it looked real cool.

"That's a quarter mile, huh?" I asked.

"Yep, all the way around," said Coach Taylor, "A mile is four of them."

Wow.

Curious, I went out and did a mile on the track. I staggered in on the last lap and looked up at Coach Taylor.

"That pasture we run in," I gasped, "ain't no mile."

Coach Taylor just grinned at me. What had happened was that I had just experienced the difference of running on an unfamiliar surface. I was not used to running on a smooth, flat, firm, surface and because of that it blew me out.

On another visit I sat in the bleachers watching an E.T. track meet. I paid particular attention to the mile runner. He was blistering up the track but it looked to me like he was barely running.

"They're going faster than you think," Coach Taylor advised me.

Later I met the miler and I talked to him. He gave me advice and showed me techniques. Coach Taylor observed this and saw I was really taking my track and field seriously. I wanted to improve and grow. Coach Taylor had told me I would get a trophy just for myself (and my school) if I placed high enough.

I wanted this personal glory. I wanted it bad.

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**FIRE!**





Track slowed down some on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. Not many guys showed up and I was afraid it would end because of lack of interest. I was also trying to rake up the twelve dollars to pay the fee for my Driver's Education. I eventually managed to get it from my parents. I was relieved when about 30 people soon showed up for track, and Mr. Brookins helped coach the team. Things began to look up.

Elaine Weatherly's family had built a new brick house. They wanted to tear down the old green and white Colonial they had lived in for so long that was now in front of the new one. Curious, I just showed up and pitched in. I injured both my wrist using a drive shaft as a battering ram to knock parts of the roof off. I also managed to step on a nail. Elaine wasn't much in evidence, but I really didn't care. She didn't either. She and I had gone our separate ways and we would never be close again. Beyond being classmates, we no longer had anything at all in common. I pitched in with enthusiasm, demolishing the house she once lived in.

We saved a few rooms that were to be moved and used for storage near the garage. I was then pleasantly surprised by Elaine's father, R.G. He gave me several model car building magazines and a Marx Toys Cape Canaveral rocket set that belonged to Elaine's grown and married brother. Delighted with this booty I took it home. I still have some of it today. I always admired this spring powered plastic and tin toy rocket set. It had buildings, fences, launching pads, plastic men, and just loads of goodies. It was at least 10 years old when I got it, and that was in 1972. I had a ton of fun with it, and parts of it showed up in model rocket displays, table-top wargames, and other fun things for years to come.

Many decades later I'd buy a similar set for \$110. It was identical except for the ground crew. The company that made it had gotten the old molds and litho prints that survived and marketed it to collectors. They even called themselves Marx Toy Company. It was a far cry from the originals in many ways, but still good enough.



On Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, I had my usual running day in track. As I was leaving the almost empty Varsity Locker Room to go run, Johnny Hooten looked up from tying his shoes and spoke to me.

"You know, Charlie, you got what it takes. You're out here and running track, playing football, basketball, and theres a lot of other people sitting on their butts in study hall. You got more guts than they have, and I admire your for it."

I was stunned by this sudden praise that came like a bolt out of the blue. I couldn't think of much to say.

"I'm just doing what I want to do. I wanna show that I can do it too, I guess," was my reply.

Hooten just grinned at me and continued putting on his track shoes. I left the gym, feeling very strange. It was a crazy road I was on. I didn't know anybody really gave a heck that I was here. Johnny Hooten had surprised me, totally.

I did all my practice running and everything, then I went back to the Varsity Locker Room. I took off my yellow shorts and wadded them up. I stuffed them in my basket in the rack. I put my track shoes that I liked so much on top of them. I closed the basket and left the Varsity Locker Room. This was a sanctuary I had tried hard to get to. I cast a glance around the now familiar confines, with the assorted white, red and blue helmets on top of the lockers. The rope hung limply from the rafters. Gear and odds and ends were scattered about the dusty musty confines. I looked forward to suiting up for football in here next year. I loved this place. This was hallowed ground!

I went down the landing, looking to my front at the track equipment in the wire cage and the pole vault pole that almost killed me. Next to it was an experimental cane pole that had broken in the middle. I hoped we would someday have enough money to buy a real pole and I could learn how to pole vault. I turned right and cast a glance at the showers. There was no hope they would ever fix the nasty things, unless they spent a lot of bucks to rebuild them. I exited the shower area. I walked on the out of bounds area across the south part of the gym floor, over to the dog-pile area in front of the Junior High Lockers where I played dog-pile last year. I went up into the east bleachers that were painted dark red. I walked the length of the bleachers, passed the score keeper's station, and into the entrance area by the north-east doors. I exited the gym and pulled on my coat without a second glance behind me. The old barn had been here forever and it would be here forever. We had two years of football, basketball, and track to go. I hoped we got a State Championship in both football and basketball. It would look nice to have a special banner or something hung on one of the walls. I smiled to myself. I could just picture it. Happily I entered the school to get my stuff to ride the bus home. This was the last time I would ever see the inside of that wonderful gym.

Rickey Graham and I had spent a typical Friday night in town. We skated and hung around with Rick's rough buddies, had dinner at the Steak House, and then called it an evening about 3:00 a.m. En-route home we noticed a strange red glow on the horizon where Lone Oak was when we came over one of the hills south of Greenville on Highway 69. We remarked that it looked like all of Lone Oak was ablaze. We did not pay much more attention to the strange red glow that night.

I was sound asleep when my Mother roused me out of my slumber. Dazed, I realized it was Saturday. What was she getting me up for?

"Rick is on the phone. He wants to talk to you."

I pulled on my pants and t-shirt then staggered to the living room where the telephone was.

"Whats up?"

"Charlie, the gym burned down! You wanna go see?"

There was a stunned silence from me.

"Charlie?"

"Yeah," I mumbled, in shock, then "Yeah! Lets go see it. What... How did it happen?"

" All I know is that it just burned down. Meet me at the store!"

This was terrible! This was awful! After I hung up the phone I pulled on my shoes. A million thoughts ran through my muddled head. Maybe enough of it had survived to repair. Maybe enough of it remained so they can build it up again. Oh, Lord, what are we going to do without our gym? It was April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1972, a clear cool Saturday.

In Rick's Ford we tore for Lone Oak at 85 miles an hour. The 8 track was playing Mississippi Queen, Rick's favorite song. I nervously fired off questions to Rick as he nonchalantly drove the speeding 2 ton vehical with one hand.

"Did any of it survive?"

"It's gone."

"What about the locker room?"

"It's gone."

"What about the bleachers? Anything?"

"It's all gone."

I looked out the windshield as we approached Lone Oak. I could see some smoke coming from the area where the school was located. Oh no! It didn't get the school too? No! No! No! No!

"Did it get the school too?" I fearfully asked Rick, wondering where he got all this information from! Somebody there must have told him what happened and now he was telling me! Rick always seemed to know what was going on. I had no idea how he did it, yet years later I figured a lot of it was just bluster and guess work. At the time I just thought Rick was super competent about everything in life.

"Some of it."

How much, I wondered. I didn't want to have to go back to Greenville School without any chance of ever playing in sports again. A deep sadness began to creep over me. This can't be happening!

We tore into the parking lot and the first thing I noticed was the doors on the school were all open. The school itself looked like it was not damaged, but the familiar big black roof of the gym was gone. I had the door open to Rick's car and I bailed out of it before it slid to a stop. I sprinted for the front steps that led to the hallway of the school.

Say it aint so!

I exited the breezeway south door to a picture of supreme devastation. The magnificent old 288000 square foot gym had not just burned down, it had disintegrated! Nothing remained but 4 stark yellow brick chimneys poking obscenely into the blue sky. Several charred concrete piers marked where the foundation used to be. It was all totally, completely, irreversably gone. I almost fell to my knees. I had seen nothing like it before in my life.

No, it can't be!

Struck dumb by the sight, I approached the pile of smouldering ash and inhaled the horrid smell of burned aged wood. The sidewalks led to nowhere.

It just can't be!

I glanced over to my right. The girl's locker room had disappeared. Not far from it a small charred pile of aluminum marked where the special education building had literally melted and vaporized.

Oh no. No.

I looked at the back of the auditorium. Some windowpanes had broken, and the trim on the roof had charred, but the ancient old place was relatively undamaged.

Good. That, at least, was good.

I walked to the west side of what was once our gym. I saw the simi-melted remains of the popcorn machine. It was burned lopsided and bent grotesquely in the ashes. It had been stored under the bleachers so both the bleacher top and roof had fell on it. I continued on. Near where the west entrance used to be I beheld a 3 foot tall pile of simi-fused metal. It was all that remained of our roller skates. The Buffalo Skating Rink was now closed forever and ever. I looked where a tree used to be outside the west exit door. The tree was a charred dead ruin. It had been a sapling when the gym was built, now it too was gone. It looked as if it was in great pain.

It was all so sad.

The plumbing for the showers jutted macabre-like out of the ashes. The pipes were bent in ugly shapes, either from the heat or the pressure of debris falling on them. Oddly, no water came out of them. I guessed somebody had turned off the water to the gym after the fire.

Where the track and field cage had been nothing remained but twisted wire. Buried deep in the ash were our shot-puts, but we wouldn't find them for days. It was the only part of our track equipment that survived.

I went to the south end of the gym, behind what used to be our beloved Varsity Locker Room. It was all gone now, and the heat of the smouldering ruins kept me at a distance. I could see through the waves of heat where just yesterday I had put my shoes and shorts. There was a lot of ash in the twisted and blackened basket racks. I wished that my shoes had survived, but there was really no hope.

The hamper I used to land in from my rope swings was now only twisted blackened wire. It looked like something heavy had landed on the hamper and the baskets, probably the roof with shingles. Whatever it was it was gone with the fire. All the helmets were gone. The coveted white ones, the despised red ones, and the odd blue ones had all vaporized. Gone, too, were jerseys, pants, pads, all sorts of equipment that had seen hundreds of games. The only jerseys that survived were the odd ones that individuals managed to get home with.

The big ole black tacklebox had exploded and burned hotly. The lid was thrown open, probably from the aerosol cans we kept in there. The non-functioning ice-box we used as a storage cabinet was now a blackened shell. This entire mess was shrouded in simi-melted chicken wire.

Near the middle what used to be the locker room lay our old hand lever activated air pump. It was burned brown by the heat. It had inflated countless volleyballs, footballs, and basketballs. All of these were gone now, too. What games had they been in? How many hundreds of students had played with them?

I moved out of the heat and around to where the Junior High Locker Room used to be. The window that I had broken and paid for was never repaired. Now it didn't need to be.

The wreckage on this side mirrored the other. Pipes stuck up in twisted agony from the smoking ruins. Our pigeon-hole lockers were forever gone. Nobody else would use them and fear the pad-thief.

I was taken aback when I looked where our dog-pile mats had been cremated. In a heap but recognizable lay our poor scoreboard. It was destroyed, only a smoking black and brown memory remained. It looked like it hit pretty hard.

In the very middle of the gym was the ashes of over 4700 square feet of prime maple wood. Our floor had just been replaced, and had shiny new varnish on it. All for nothing.

At opposite ends of the smoking ruins lay 2 huge bent and twisted boxes I didn't at first recognize. They were the big heater-fans that vainly tried to keep this huge wooden cavern warm. They had hit hard too, and apparently the roof had fallen on them. I shook my head in disbelief and continued counting the losses.

There was virtually nothing left of the home bleachers on the east side. Fused piles of melted glass marked where the cafeteria had stored some huge mason jars. Glass melts at about 2000 degrees. This had been one hot fire! There had been a beautiful walnut desk under the bleachers, and now it was gone.

Venturing out onto the wreckage was out of the question. It was still hot, and there were over a million nails out there of all shapes and sizes. The huge chimneys might fall. Mr. Dial saw me and called me away from the scene I had surveyed.

I looked over at him. Mr. Dial looked ragged. He was dirty, his hair was a mess, and he looked worn out. He had been here since 3 a.m. when the fire was first detected. He tried in vain with our tiny fire department to fight the inferno. They had managed to save the south wing of the school, where the High School was located. It was closest to the fire. Mr. Dial had been here for about 6 or 7 hours with only 4 hours or so of sleep. His nerves were frazzled and he was emotionally spent. Something as dear to him as it was to us had been lost. He had seen the gym built, and he had seen it go. He had played basketball games in there, and coached the boys there. Not anymore.

He was to tell me some 25 years later that the fire had been remarkably hot. The gym had burned very quickly. By the time the L.O. Volunteer Fire Department got there all they could do was save the school building. The gym was long gone, in that huge ball of fire Rick and I seen Friday night.

I took a last look at the remains. The area looked somehow smaller. The entire structure was about 120 feet long by 80 feet wide. Without its towering roof and windows, without its huge wooden walls jutting up 30 feet into the air, it now looked very reduced in ground area.

Built in 1935 it was now all gone. Our last game in there had been a victory, when we defeated Howe. We had no way of knowing that it was a send-off for this wonderful 37 year old playground. We had beat a team in there that would become the State Champions. Many of us had played our first basketball game in that gym. I had a ton of memories and a 'y' shaped scar on my right wrist to remember it all by. Many years later, to my delight, they had found the score books of the 1972 season in the school's storage archives. I had thought they went up with the gym.

Goodbye and fairwell. I and many others would miss the drafty old box. We loved it so much more than we knew.

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## Who Did It and Why

Rumors ran rampant that the gym had been torched. Speculation ran from the school did it for insurance money to a reputed local arsonist had did it for kicks. I doubt very much that Lone Oak School would risk everything for its gym insurance money. Somebody later told me that they couldn't get the gym insured anyway because of its age and the 40 or so coats of paint on its walls.

As for our local Arsonist he came up with a very elaborate tale. He broke in, he said, from the back of the gym into the Junior High locker room. Carrying cans of fuel he spread this liberally

over bleachers, floor, and Varsity Locker Room. He then took a six inch stick of dynamite and put it in one of the windows. Behind this he placed a license plate for a reflector. Exiting the pitch black gym with his two empty cans of fuel (none were found in the rubble) he then got a flashlight and spot-lighted the license plate. Taking a pistol he fired at the reflection, hitting the dynamite and setting it off. The resultant explosion started the fire.

This was all unrefined bull. First, why break in through the back? As my time here had shown, people got into the gym all the time through the front doors. The doors were in such a delapidated condition it was easy to just ease in and push. Another item is that anyone diddy-bopping around in the gym with a flashlight might be seen. For another he had to carry two full cans of fuel to the gym. There are houses all around the east and north side of the school. Anybody driving up there would be heard, and probably seen. If he hauled these cans from a distance he must've been one motivated individual. Shooting at night, with a pistol, at a reflection by a flashlight from a distance safe enough away not to get hit by shrapnel from the explosion is a feat worthy of the Lone Ranger. Why even bother to go inside to set the thing on fire? Anything that old could be fired up from outside and he said he could get under the gym, in that space under the Varsity Locker Room. He could have flamed it from under there with just a match and his 2 cans of gas. You couldn't get into the Jr.Hi locker room from under the gym, unless you smashd your way through a wall. Last of all, and this is the most glaring error of his entire story; dynamite can be shot at all day and it won't go off! It needs a blasting cap, a spark, or some type of igniter. Any explosive that unstable as to be set off by a bullet strike is likely to go off just from handling. Dynamite can also be burned like wood. As long as it isn't jarred while burning it won't go off.

His entire story is full of holes. I think the reason this firebug wanted people to think he torched the gym was that it gave him a kind of noteriety. It made him a big shot to claim that he burned the gym.

Any gunshots would be heard. Even a .22 pistol makes a very loud report. A stick of dynamite going off would certainly be heard. One stick would sound like a bomb and it could blow a hole in the gym big enough to drive a car through. Debries would fly a good distance. As near as I know no intact unburned boards were found on the school roof at a distance from the ashes. No school windows were broken except those cracked by the fire in the auditorium. A blast like that would have shattered a lot more windows.

In short, he is lying. Here is my theory.

Back in about 1968 we were in the gym and a light in the ceiling was out. The gym used huge incandescent lights about the size of a volley ball. Coach Taylor got a replacement light and a big extension ladder. Gunner and Rickey Graham put the ladder up to the rafters. It was just too short to reach the nearest rafter by about a foot.

"How much you weigh, Charlie-O?" Coach Taylor said, sizing me up.

"About 65 or 70."

"If I have Gunner and Rick hold this ladder will you go up there and change the light?"

Oh boy! An adventure!

"Sure," I said.

I was handed the big light and I put it under my left arm. Looking up I began my ascent. I got about 10 feet and I started to sweat like an ice-tea glass in the middle of summer. I wanted this little adventure, but I was also super terrified of heights. I kept going up.

Just like on T.V. I didn't look down. I got up there and halted. I was about 20 feet up, on a ladder supported by 2 of my classmates. If somebody lost their grip I'd ride the ladder to the floor for a hard landing on the maple below. Happy thoughts like these filled my tiny head as I unscrewed the huge bulb from the socket. Suddenly I had one more problem. I had both hands full. How was I gonna put the new bulb in? With difficulty and some fear I let go of the ladder and grabbed the good bulb, switching it out with the old bulb. I managed to put the new bulb in the socket. I started turning it to get it to screw in place. The new light went in securly and I gave it one last twist. As I did so bits of brittle insulation fell off the wires that ran to the light.

I took a look at the insulation, not touching it. It was wrapped in the ancient cloth type, in wide use in 1935. Years of laying on the rafters up here had rotted the insulation substantially. It was brittle and hard. I dropped the bad light down to Coach Taylor then I started down the ladder. I was happy to set foot on terra-firma again. That had been a little scary, yet I guess I was the only member of my class to ever ascend to the rafters over the gym floor.

I base my theory of how the gym caught fire on the above observation, which is first hand knowledge of the condition of the insulation. The gym had just recieved a new set of shingles and a new floor put in. It had at least 37 coats of paint over aged and cured wood. There was literally tons of old rags, clothes, rat's nests, bird's nests, junk, and other combustables all in it's cavernous insides. There was more forgotten stuff stored in there than remembered. Something ignited. Either the electricity did it or something just combusted on it's own. This probably happened about between midnight and 2 a.m. Once the fire caught it found fuel in the old paint covering the walls and the fresh varnish on the maple floor. Once it got really going it was unstoppable and the gym was doomed.

Judging from the damage caused by heavy objects falling on the basket rack and the heater fans and by the way the walls seemed to have imploded rather than falling outward, the fire started low. Maybe under the bleachers, but it was somewhere away from the locker rooms. It was probably a short in the old lighting system in use in the storage area under the west bleachers. Once the foundation was weakened the walls and roof fell in, crushing the scoreboard, heater fans, baskets, and anything else under tons of shingles and timbers. All of this was of wood and rapidly consumed. That was it. Its what we found the next day. The sight still staggers me to this day. How those 4 chimneys remained standing is a mystery. The gym must've burned straight down. There were no ashes outside the ususal outline of it's foundation.

We were lucky, too. The wind was blowing from the east, and thats what saved the school. Had it been blowing from the west, as is common here, Lone Oak School might have ceased to exist. Without a viable school building they probably would have had classes in church until a new school could be built. The worst that could have happened was that Quinlan, Greenville, Miller Grove, Campbell, and Rains would get the students and Lone Oak would have lost its school forever. I do not think the town would have survived the loss.

Fortunately that didn't happen. The school building still stood, and that was a gift we really didn't appreciate at the time.

Rick and I went home at a more subdued pace, and we waited for Monday to get a better look at this mess after it had cooled.

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## That Which Survives

Monday came and a lot of kids got their first look at the devastation. Many took one look, shrugged, and promptly forgot all about it. The Greenville paper eventually sent a reporter and a photographer. A few photos were snapped. Mr. Brookins was interviewed, and the reporters went on their way.

During our now useless P.E. period we gravitated toward the old spot. Several of us went around to where the back of the gym was, near where our locker room used to be. We stayed out of the wreckage. I looked at the piles of ashes again. Then the braver or more foolhardy among us boldly ventured into the mess and gave things a closer look. As for myself I just had to look in my basket and prove to myself that my shoes were truly gone. I eased into the ruins of the locker room by stepping on pieces of rusty, blackened sheet metal that used to be I don't know what. It was sooty, and a little slick.

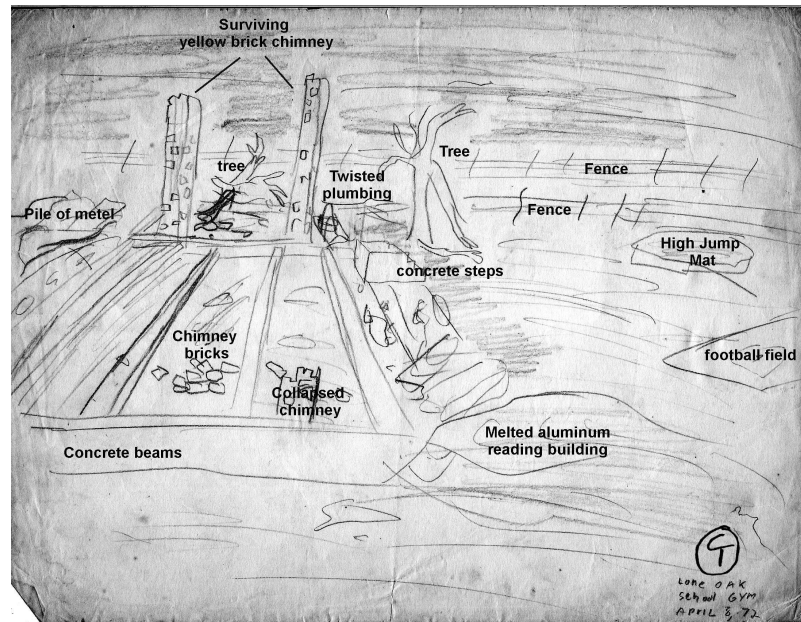
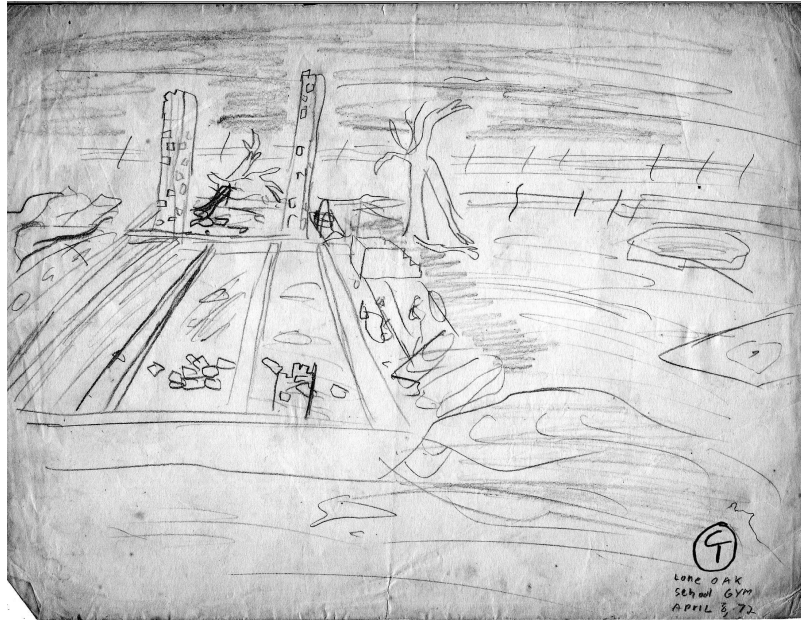
I found basket 12 still in its rack. I managed to pull it open. Nothing at all remained in its bent and blackened confines. I was not surprised by this, but I was a little disappointed. I would miss those shoes and those neat-o yellow shorts.

A faculty member saw me and several others in the wreckage and hollered at us to get out of there. We did, and found other things to do. Rick and I wandered over to the old 8<sup>th</sup> Grade room. It was heavily damaged. All that remained in tact was the science room portion that nobody had ever used. Mr. Ross' old desk and everything the 8<sup>th</sup> Graders had in there was burned away. Most of the roof of this building was destroyed. I thought maybe the school would rebuild it and save it, but in the end they tore it down and demolished it.

This was as far as the fire got. Fire trucks from Point, Emory, Quinlan, Miller Grove, and Lone Oak had valiantly fought the inferno and they had saved our school building. We owed these firefighters a debt of gratitude. Without them I'd now be looking at nothing but blackened bricks and a bleak academic future and no more football with all of us in Greenville or someplace.

Fortunately the somewhat carefree attitude of youth allows setbacks like these to be put aside. I'd really miss the gym, especially later in life. Right now it was gone and in the situation of the moment it was something sort of new and neat, but still horrible.

Later in the day we were instructed en-mass to stay out of the wreckage. It was a dangerous place. One of these chimneys could fall any second. There were literally millions of nails and lots of glass in there that could give us nasty injuries. The fire was also still under investigation. We must not mess around in the ashes. So warned, we never ventured back onto the cremated remains of the old arena. During a break I got my clipboard and sat on the breezeway steps and drew this picture of the devastation. In the picture next to it I identify what is in the drawing, so people can see what it is supposed to be.



The Greenville paper took a photo of the surviving bits of the Eighth Grade room to publish. Mr. Brookins had the most telling photo in his office. It was of a huge fire, in black and white. No outsider could tell, but those of us who were there knew exactly what it was a picture of. Mr. Brookins kept it on the wall of his office where every time he'd look up he'd see the death of our great gym. He couldn't forget it, and he didn't want to. I didn't either. A lot of us will remember it forever. The fun, the traditions, the secret places, the games and the comradship; that's what survives.



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## Eats and Wax

We had another field trip! This was great! Where were we going? Why, to a wax museum! That sounded very interesting to all of us! Off we went, bundled into a bus. I had Rick, Herman, the Rabbit, and Gary Dooley along in one boisterous mob. This promised to be fun!

The wax museum we went to was a marvelous place located somewhere in Arlington. We arrived there and unloaded from the yellow monster. We were delighted to be here, because it was time off from the hum-drum existence of school. We bought tickets from the counter. At the front near the counter was a wax representation of a State Trooper. This life-sized model even had narrow eyes that shifted back and forth, and a menacing grin on its face. Gay Fansler freaked out, looking at the figure. She backed up.

"Ewww! Don't do that!" she called at the wax figure, then retreated away from it into the museum. Rabbit, Herman, and I laughed at her then we went into the place ourselves.

We were allowed to go where we wanted and to see what we wanted. The place had a Wild West and Texas theme to it. There was a representation of Boot Hill. We walked around the display and read the reproduced tombstones. There was a collection of guns and memorabilia from Tombstone, Arizona itself.

Rabbit found a Bonnie and Clyde exhibit and called us over. It had a model A car, and Bonnie was holding a shotgun on Clyde. A placard informed us as to what all this meant. It was taken from an incident that was believed to have happened when these two outlaws met.

The most bizarre thing in the place was an exhibit of men hanged in a western barn. It had a light that blinked off and on at about 30 second intervals. Rather than make the exhibit spooky it made it annoying and hard to read the placards. What I noticed was the stuffed chickens placed about in there like they were scratching about in a barn. It was a nice touch, but I didn't think any of the hanged figures looked realistic. Of course, I had never seen a hanging, either.

One of the last things we saw was a display of movie stars and entertainers who had some association with Texas. They looked nice, but if it wasn't for the placards I couldn't have identified them. Capturing a perfect likeness is nearly impossible without an actual cast of the person. Even then to get the likeness to look just like the character does on T.V. is very hard to catch. The sculptors did an excellent job, none the less.

I think this museum burned down sometime in the 80s. Too bad, it was quite a nifty place to visit.

It was soon over and we went to a nearby Pancho's 'all you can eat' Mexican restaurant. We thought the food was excellent fare. Rabbit, Herman, and I noisily stuffed ourselves on this feast. Rabbit had a thing for beans and rice and I followed his lead. Herman watched Rabbit and me wolfing down vast portions of food and he was taken aback. Never had he seen the two of us gorge ourselves so. He had eaten all he could while Rabbit and I hadn't even slowed down.

Stuffed to the point where we couldn't bend over we finally gave up and stopped. Herman was amused at this and watched Rabbit use a wooden tooth-pick.

"You guys gonna explode?" Herman asked, laughing.

"Not yet," Rabbit replied with a wry grin, "But probably on the bus ride back."

We laughed, paid our bill of 2 dollars each then boarded the bus. It had been a 'full' and rewarding day of adventure and what we considered excellent food.

Life was good.

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## The Mile Run



On 12 April, 1972, we loaded up on the bus for our trip to E.T. for the district track meet. I had no experience in competitive long distance running yet this year so I was to do my very first rookie run at the district track meet. I was way uptight and apprehensive. I had a weird dream the night before that everybody I was running against had ran off the track to watch me run. This left me feeling a little uneasy. I was downright scared and a little hyper.

As we crammed into the bus Jack Brookins came out on to the front porch of the school. I hollered out in my screechy and distintive voice "Here comes Jay Bee!"

Coach Brookins just folded his arms and grinned, ignoring my remark. He knew exactly who said it, and where I was, but he did absolutly nothing about it. He knew that the peer pressure was about to fall on my head.

Sure enough, Larry Little justifiably got mad at me.

"Shut him up!" he raged at Danny Bowman, who I happened to be sitting next to, "We could hear him holler clear outside!"

Danny looked at Larry, then me, shrugged, and that was the end of the incident. I felt very embarrassed. I had showed disrespect to the most respected man in the entire area. The fact that Larry himself didn't pop me one was a surprise.

After I got my foot out of my mouth I looked at the group of well wishers seeing us off. One was David Neagle, who was my buddy of the upperclassmen. I waved at him and he nodded back.

As the bus cranked I changed my expression to one of false hopelessness and a him a weak wristed wave like one going to their execution. He half nodded again but this time he grinned at my joke. I smiled and settled back for the trip to E.T. I felt like this had made up for my foolishness earlier.

This bus was packed. There were over 16 high school boys, 4 coaches, the Junior High track team, several girls who played tennis or volleyball, and the team managers. I was next to a window seat, with Danny on my left to keep the lesser beings from bothering us. I considered myself very lucky.

Once at E.T. we unloaded and got ready for track. There were schools from all over the county represented here. I knew my way around a little, so it was easy to find a spot in the nearly empty bleachers. One thing I found out right away was that track was exceedingly boring, and they took all day. I had no idea what was going on at any given time, but I kept in touch with Coach Taylor. I found out that my event was the very last one. That meant I had a very long day with which to do absolutely nothing but lay in the bleachers or wander around the E.T. football field.

I saw guys pole vault with flexible poles. The things would bend until it looked like they'd break but the fellow would be swung up to the horizontal bar. Nobody seemed to be real good at this. Some guys would take the cross bar out with their feet, others would miss the slot and go tromping through the mats. Celeste won the Pole Vault. Lone Oak didn't do so hot because Troy Haynes had to borrow a pole and he had no way to practice.

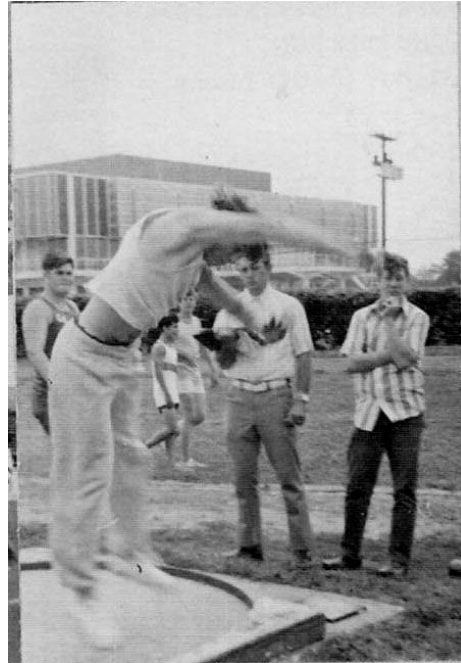
I then watched some guys toss a shot-put. I marvelled at the distance the big ole cannon ball would travel. The same sense of envious awe held true for the discus throwers. Robert Vice won the shot put, heaving it 39 feet, 8 inches. Eddie Bell came in second. Robert won the discuss toss, at 95 feet 2 inches. Danny Bowman was second.



I saw guys leaping as far as they could in the broad-jump. Others tried to defy gravity in the high-jump. Steve Henderson won the high jump, topping 5' 11". Caddo came in second. Lone Oak was gathering up a lot of points. First and second place at this meet went on to the regional meet.



Everywhere at each event were coaches and judges with stop-watches and clipboards.



Neither Rabbit or Herman were at this meet, so I had a very boring day all by myself. With nobody to mess around with and nothing to draw on, the events became more a distraction than anything else. Also I couldn't figure out why I didn't see Rick here. After basketball season he seemed to really be depressed. I think his self-esteem had taken a beating. It didn't make sense. He was the guy who got me this far! Everything I had become to this point I owed mostly to him.

We finally broke for lunch. In a bunch we crossed highway 50 to get to some restaurants and pizza joints on the other side of the 4 lane monster. Not knowing any better I ate like I did before a football game, wolfing down a burger and a shake. Stuffed when I didn't need to be, I returned to the misery and boredom of the track. I found some Lone Oak guys who were just as bored as I was. We discovered we could drop a cola cup off the stadium bleachers and it would hit with a massive splash of its contents, blowing the bottom out of the cup. We took amusement in this fashion from time to time. We also discovered that paper airplanes flew forever when launched off the top of the bleachers. I made one and tossed it into the updraft. It took off in the direction of Bonham and I never saw it again. I thought that was neat and several other guys launched aircraft, watching them soar away out of sight.

Skin was turning red everywhere. In spite of a brisk wind it was very sunny. A lot of people wore windbreakers or coats but for the track runners there was nothing to do but lay in the sun to keep warm. This blistered their skin, and I was no exception. Being blond and light skinned to a certain degree, I roasted.

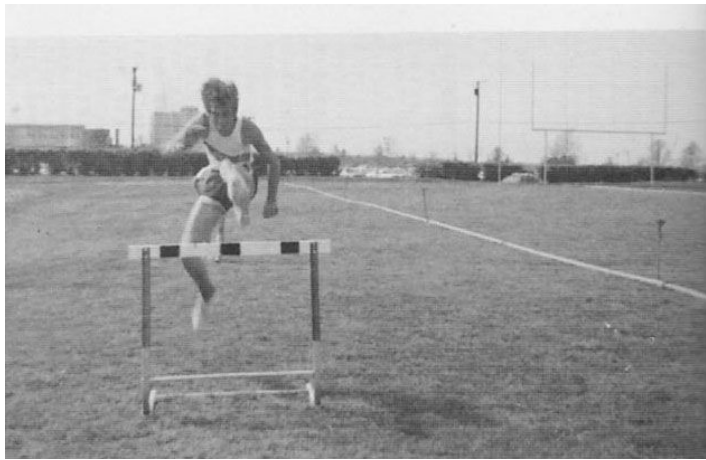
Big Red was doing well. We had won first place in 8 events. Eddie, Larry Little, O.T. Williams, and Steve Henderson ran the quartermile relay in 48.1 seconds for our first place. Caddo came in second. There was some cheering from the sparse crowd.

In the mile relay John Hooten, Danny, O.T., and Eddie outran Campbell in 4:04:8 minutes to get first place.

O.T. tore up the track, followed by Dan Webb the Spider, to win the very painful 880 yard dash in 2:19:2. Lone Oak came in one and two.



Eddie Lively, big and fast, was in the 120 yard high hurdles. Jumping over the barriers he was out-hopped by Celeste. They won it in 17.5 seconds, and Eddie came in second.



I watched Steve Henderson fire out of the blocks like a big eagle, wearing a red, white, and blue shirt. It was red with blue and white rings on the sleeves. I thought it looked something like a sailor shirt, and something out of fashion at a track meet. He tore down the track in the 100 yard dash and won it in 10.6 seconds. Caddo Mills came in second.

Eddie, Steve's more traditionally dressed brother, won the 440 yard dash in 56.8 seconds beating Caddo Mills.

Caddo seemed to be dogging us, coming in second right on our heels.

Celeste won the 330 yard medium hurdles in 46.4 seconds, with Danny close behind. 330 yard hurdles is a rough event. I seen guys crash and burn trying to hop over the barriers.

Steve, having an excellent day, came in first in the very rough 220 yard dash, in 25.3 seconds. Caddo Mills again came in second.

I was not a sprinter, and I considered the 220 and 440 yard dashes to be killers. In these events the sprinter ran as fast as he could for distances of up to a half a mile. I remember seeing Eddie Bell, wild eyed and teeth bared, running hard through the turns.

One thing that made the track meet so painfully long was that there was a junior division track meet going on simultaneously. Caddo won the Junior Division, but Woody came in second with the 60 yard medium hurdles.

Now my event finally came up. I found out much to my displeasure that Rickey Smiley was starting in the lane in front of me. He hadn't even practiced for the mile! What was the deal? Coach Taylor explained to me that Smiley was a stronger runner than I was. Angry at this unexpected turn of events, I went to my starting spot behind this fellow who I despised.

The starter gun sounded and the entire field took off like a sprint. I thought that odd, and I believed that everyone might blow themselves out. I got into my distance running stride, jogging along. Up in front Boles Home and Celeste broke into a battle for the lead.

The field stretched out a long way, almost the entire length of the track. Coach Taylor called out times as I padded by. On the last lap I cut into a faster pace that I called 'passing gear'. I soon passed this guy who was panting like a broken steam engine. I strode for the finish line, gasping hard for air. Near spent, I crossed the finish line and almost collapsed on the track. I got control of myself and staggered around with my hands behind my head. I finally got my wind back. I discovered that I had finished next to last.

I was very disappointed. The event was won by Boles Home with a time of 5:16:9. Celeste came in second. I had no idea how Smiley did, and I personally did not care. I was down on myself, but hey! I finished NEXT to last!

Lone Oak had won the meet! A lot of our runners were going to the Regional meet. All was not lost on me and what I considered a failure. I had placed next to last in 6:25:4. I sat on the bus back and nursed my wounded ego. Having Smiley start in front of me really ticked me off. I was sunburned too.

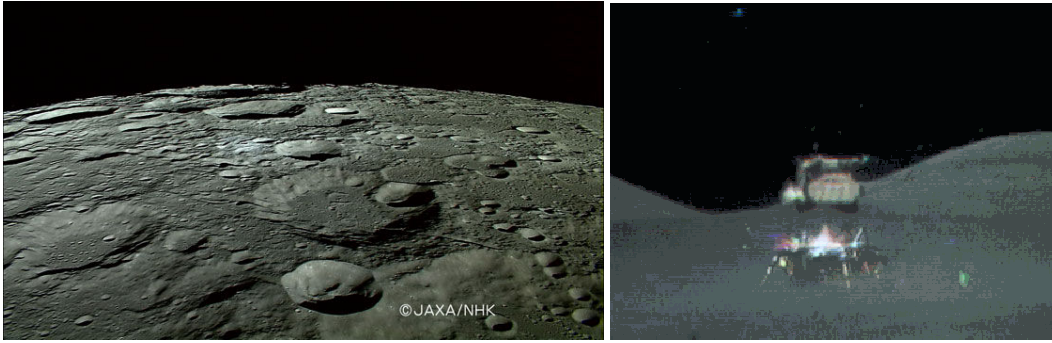
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## The End of the 1971-72 Year

After the track meet most of us who had participated suffered from the aforementioned mega-sunburns. The discomfort was quite profound to our teenaged bodies. All of us who had deep red skin wore loose fitting clothing and loose collars. One and all resented being touched.

In school some things slowed down, while others remained agonizingly the same. A high point was when the entire English class went to the Texan theater in Greenville and saw a passable version of Mc Beth. We were a rowdy bunch, just like on a Saturday Matinee. My billfold fell out under seats, and I didn't miss it until I was told it had been found in the movie house. Tight bluejeans and a restless stirring made me lose the thing over and over. The McBeth movie, though not understood by a lot of us, made an impression on me. I discovered I liked Shakespeare.

On some of the closing school days we'd have classes as per normal, other days we'd just mess around. One memorable day while the track team was off to Regionals we watched the moonwalk of Apollo 16 in the Auditorium, on a T.V. set up just for that reason. It had me spellbound but some others could care less. It was just time out of class. I guess I could have gone to the Regional meet, but I preferred the moon mission. Lone Oak didn't do well at the meet, so I guess I didn't miss seeing much.



Toward the end of the school year we let out early. It started to rain, but I wanted to get a ride home. I wandered up town toward the Cafe. Rickey Graham came tooling along in front of Guy Wayne's Exxon and offered me a lift. When I got into the old 65 Ford Galaxy I discovered a great deal of the floorboard was missing. Far out! This should be an interesting ride! I didn't know the half of it.

Rickey had a great big 4 speed transmission he was fitting in this monster so he had to modify the floor 'slightly'. In the process he decided to remove the rusted out sections of the floorboard as well. I had an excellent view of the damp pavement as it whizzed by just under my feet. I had my feet up on the lower part of the firewall, which was pretty much intact.



***What Rick's car looked like. He had a red one and a white one. We were in the white one.***

Roaring and blowing smoke from the worn out V-8 under the hood, we headed toward home. Rick put the radio on KLIF 1190 and we rocked to the top 40 as we sped along in the drizzle. Between Lone Oak and the Sabine River Bridge is a roadside park. Rick was zipping along at his traditional 80 or 85 and we had just about got to this landmark when the front left tire blew out.

The heavy car immediately spun 90 degrees to the left to our direction of travel, and into the ditch. Grass and bits of dirt blew up into the car from the open floor-board. I had a clear and unobstructed view to my right of the on coming obstacles heading straight for me at 80 miles an hour. The first road reflector hit square in the middle of my door, then passed under the car. The impact blew the unused ashtray straight up about 1 foot out of the arm rest, and it came right back down into it's compartment.

I looked at that with mute amazement and the vague sense that we might be killed. I also wondered when Rickey was going to quit kidding around and get control of this vehical. I didn't see it when the second reflector hit the rear quarter panel just in front of the rear bumper. This threw the car into a spin to the right, catapulting us across the highway. As the world spun passed us at breakneck speed I got a brief but wide eyed glimpse of the 18 wheeler and another car that

by some act of God just missed us. We started down the other side of the road, with reflectors smashing into Rick's door this time.

After a couple of more mighty thumps on the car's body we slid to a stop. Neither of us could move for a couple of seconds. The inappropriate blaring of rock and roll out of the radio caused Rick to turn it off with much irritation. We had almost gotten killed and the stupid radio was playing some inane song. That broke the spell and brought us out of the shock of nearly getting killed.

The engine was the only thing that had died in the mishap and Rick cranked it right back up. We had a flat tire so Rickey moved the car back on the shoulder to change it. It didn't matter one whit to us that we were now facing north on the southbound lane.

I got out of the car while Rick got the jack and spare out of the trunk. I had an adrenaline rush and I leaned against the car to regain my composure. Randy King drove up in his delapidated pickup and asked Rick what happened and if he needed any help. Rick merely brushed him off by saying it was under control.

"All we had was a blow out," Rick said, as if nothing else had happened. We both filed the incident away and talked about it with great enthusiasm for the rest of our lives.

I celebrated my birthday on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May with out much fanfare or a party. I discovered on the evening news that J. Edgar Hoover had died on my birthday. The former head of the F.B.I. was a bit of a legend, and his loss would be felt in the F.B.I. as it would lose some of it's edge, culminating in the disasters at Waco and Ruby Ridge in the 1990s.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> of May the Navy's Blue Angles arrived at the Majors Field Airport in Greenville. They flew F-4 Phantoms then, and they made an amazing variety of sounds as they buzzed every house they could find. I talked my parents into letting me go see them, but the show that day was post-poned due to the weather. Still, I walked around, talked to all kinds of pilots, I got one of the Blue Angel pilots to autograph my program, and I sat in the pilot's seat of a Huey Cobra AH-1 helicopter. As the overcast day wore on some of the Airforce guys and the helicopter pilots put on a little show for us with their machines. I noticed the Airforce guys were fascinated by how the Cobra helicopters could work as a team to strafe a section of ground almost continiously. The Airforce pilots were especially friendly to everybody. I thought they were okay guys.

The Blue Angles flew on the following Monday, 8 May, 1972. I had caught a cold and couldn't go. I sat on the trunk of the family car in the driveway and watched my first real airshow between sneezes and coughs. Even without narration and all the pazzazz the ground crew puts on for such events it was still very awe inspiring to watch. How they could get the heavy F-4 to do what they did; roll, spin, loop, fly just a few feet apart, was a display of flying I have had trouble seeing outdone at any time since. I went back to school the next day.

With track season over and no gym to play in, all that left was baseball. I play baseball about as good as I do basketball, so I spent most of my 4<sup>th</sup> period sitting on the ground with my friends or wandering around the campus. More often than not I got into one of the many variations of baseball we played.

I was messing around with the guys in a softball type game at the north east field and somebody popped a grounder down the first base line. Somebody picked it up and whistled it back toward home plate. Gonga wasn't paying attention and it hit him square in the forehead. Bonk!

I didn't know what to do. I just hoo-hawed and walked off. Gonga lost both his contact lenses and had a sore top knot. It wasn't really funny but it had been a really stupid thing to be at home plate and not pay attention to what was going on out in the field. People and life in general can be cruel sometimes. I didn't know if Gonga found his contacts or not. I guess he did. He also learned a hard lesson.

That we held the Greenville paper in a little contempt was well known. They sometimes didn't cover our games and often the writeups seemed hostile to us. One day late in May they pulled a real boner. The Greenville paper printed about a sporting event that the Buffaloes had gone to. Having been ill with a cold briefly, I wondered what sporting event I had missed. I read the article and soon I was laughing.

They had called Leonard the Buffaloes! Man, I imagined the telephones were ringing off the wall at the paper, and irate letters filled the mailboxes. Leonard called themselves the Tigers. Those of us at Lone Oak didn't like having our mascot being given to Leonard and I am all but sure that Leonard didn't like it either.

I read on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May that Dan Blocker, who played Hoss on the T.V. show Bonanza, had died. I was saddened by the departure of this fellow who projected a jolly, gentle way. It was like losing a friend that we all invited into our homes once a week.

U.I.L. came up, and I knew nothing about it, nor did I care. U.I.L. was sort of like a track meet for brains. Kids did math challenges, writing, science, all sorts of book stuff, including one act plays and debate. I didn't think it was for me, and none of the teachers had explained it to me. I didn't know what I had missed.

Julia Mahand came in second at Regional with Persuasive Speaking. This all-around girl was certainly one fantastic individual. Robin Black placed 4<sup>th</sup> in his event, and Donna Payne placed third in hers. Lone Oak had shown well at Regional, though I don't think any of them went on to the State meet. Still, Lone Oak had shown it's high standards for such a tiny school.

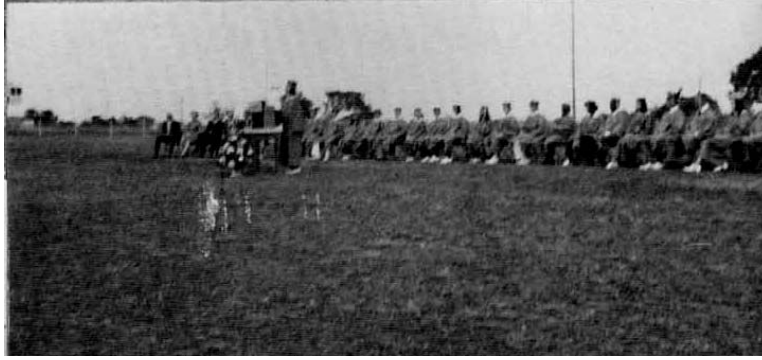
In school there was a little shop work done just for funsies, and we took some last minute tests. My fear of failure was very high as I waited for my report card. In due course I worked up the courage to open the envelope and see what the yellow card said. I read it with trembling hands. I had passed! I had achieved one more step up the ladder! I was a Junior!

So ended the 71-72 school year. We had covered ourselves with honor and glory, catching a Regional Quarterfinals title in Basketball and coming in second in district in Football. We won the District track meet. We had sent 3 people to Regional in U.I.L.

I had helped elect the Homecoming Queen. I had been invited to the banquet as a member of the football team. I was on the championship basketball team, and I had ran track. My grades were high enough to get me excused from some 6 week tests. I had ceased being a skinny nerd and went on to being a minor celebrity in the school. Everyone now knew my name. I had done well.

On the other hand we had lost our original Homecoming Queen. Our gym had burned down and came close to taking the school with it. One of the best men on the team had to quit the team because he was married. That was the down side.

A respectable graduating class was leaving, with Troy Haynes, Sheila Samples; the 1972 Homecoming Queen, Lewis Smith the Butcher, O.T. Williams, Randy King, Nandale Bowman, Norman Brookins, Steve Henderson, Larry Little, Rickey's sister Kathy, Robin Black, Jim Woodruff, Willie Davis, and Cindy Hukill. I would miss most of them, and I don't think I would see any of them for years and years.



**1972 Graduation at the football field. Looking East.**

Yet, now, I was officially a Junior. Summer had begun and the glorious three months of fun in the sun was upon us.

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## Thugs

My father referred to Rick and his running buddies as Thugs. Now, see, the Thugs are a Hindu sect in India who strangled, murdered, and butchered their unsuspecting victims as sacrifices to their blood-thirsty god Khalie. Rickey had grabbed me by the neck a few times, but he never tried to strangle me. To the best of my knowledge he didn't carry a garrotte, and when I was with him we never strangled anybody or butchered them either. As a matter of fact I never even saw him get into a fight with anybody. I also had it on good authority that he was a Baptist. Yes, I'm being sarcastic here, but Dad just didn't like Rick.

So why did Pappy repeatedly tell me I was hanging out with Thugs? Perhaps our style of dress, the method of mute intimidation we used to keep things peaceful, bothered him. Certainly my staying out late at night bothered him. Part of the way of life of hanging out in Greenville was to grow long sideburns as big as Elvis had, and look tough and unafraid. This cocky, hairy look grated on my Father's nerves. Pappy looked at Rick's influence on me as dangerous to his pure, sweet, only son. The fact that my brother was in prison also caused him to worry about me. He probably wondered if I was on the same track as my brother.

Actually it was much a do about nothing. What we did was harmless and it kept me from becoming a homebody. Pappy took teenage rebellion and arrogance as evil influences from Rick and his Thugs. Little did he know.

One night at the skating rink we 'Thugs' were deciding where to go after a night of skating. One of our 'sect' came up and excitedly told us that some idiot had threatened a girl he knew with bodily harm.

Well! Who is this moron who threatens women? Show him to us and we shall ask him why he does this while we slowly break his bones. Seven or eight of our group gathered near the car. Lookouts were assigned. The lady in question exited the rink and got into her car. She drove away. Our sharp-eyed lookouts never saw her.

Word got to us that she had gone so we quickly jammed all 8 of us into Rick's car. We tore out of the parking lot. Packed in like sardines, we could hardly get the door closed. Sitting in each

others lap was un-manly so we suffered the pelvic agony of too many people jammed hip to hip in a vehical designed to carry half the number currently in there.

I don't know where we went, but we drove a long distance. This was murder on us, but it was for a good cause, we believed. Somebody thought they knew where this young lady lived, so we were travelling blind in that direction. We were knights errant, looking for a fight.

I was jammed in next to an odd fellow who had been a Golden Gloves boxer. I think he was either high on something or he had taken one too many right hooks to the head because he would roll down the window and holler somewhat obscene suggestions to people we'd pass on the streets. I immediately mentally labled this guy as full blown nuts and kept one eye on him for the duration of our quest. I liked this guy when I met him before. He was real easy to get along with, usually. I couldn't explain why his sudden change in personality.

Back then I thought boxing was a true martial art, like Karate or Tai-Kwon Do, but he changed my mind on that. He said he once got into a dissagreement with a guy he tried to box this fellow. The guy proceeded to beat the tar out of the Boxer. Boxing didn't teach anything about holds and throws, or striking points. I decided I'd never want to learn boxing.

We went by what we were sure was the girl's house, and somebody thought he saw her car in the driveway. Satisfied that she had made it safely home we decided by unanimous dicision that it was time to go back to Greenville.

The Boxer and and a couple of guys suggested we go get some beer. Rick wisely decided we had too many people in the car to risk an alcohol run.

The cops might stop us anyway, wondering what an overloaded car full of teenaged boys was doing in the area. Having booze in the car would get us all into trouble.

This little adventure was over. We went back to Greenville from where ever it was we went to. The 'Thugs' went their ways and Rick took me home. What a way to start the summer!

This summer Rick bought a real motorcycle. This man-mangler had about a 350 cc engine. I think it was a Honda. I wished I had a Honda 175 road bike. The low slung look to the bike I thought was cool. Danny had rode one to school one day, looking for the world like Gomer Pyle on a bike. I really liked the way that 175 had looked. Rick's bike was big, greasy, and dark colored. It looked sort of sinister. It was cheap transportation, and had a more macho mystique to it. In spite of what some people would consider a small engine on some of these bikes I can tell you that they could criuse at over 60 mph and do it effortlessly for a long time. These bikes were full size, and even the 175 was looked upon as a hoss back then. They could get a lot of power out of a small engine.

Rick first got me to ride with him during lunch at school. I hopped on and tied on my red motorcycle helmet that I had bought from Gunner. The helmet had a dark blue face shield. I was happy I bought it. Feeling adventurous, off we went for my first real motorcycle ride.

As we sped up the 513 highway I could hear the snaps rattle in my helmet and the wind actually try to pull the helmet off my head. This was wild, and I got a rush from it.

That weekend Rick and I went to Greenville for some 'Catting Around'. I was almost blind at night with my blue tinted face shield, but it was a real neat experience. We got on I-30 and I looked at the cars and trucks as they passed just out of an arm's reach of this open machine. We were doing about 65 to 70 miles an hour. This was a thrill! While I was looking over Rick's huge

shoulder a quite large bug smacked into the upper left quadrant of my face shield. It made a loud pop as it hit, followed by a second pop as the plastic rebounded from the impact.

"Neat-o!" I thought.

I tried to yell what happened over the noise of the bike to Rick. All I got back was an "I can't hear you."

We went to the I-30 steak house and sat in a circular booth in the corner so Rick could have his back to the wall. None of our running buddies were there. It was just us in the back dining room.

I took a look at my helmet. Bug parts were liberally distributed from just about where my left eye would have been up and over the left side of the helmet. If I didn't have a face shield I think it would have taken me off the motorcycle. Man, what a bad trip that would have been! I'd have been road-kill in seconds.

We ate our meal in comparative silence then we went home.

Rick's little 50cc scooter became a sort of training vehicle for me. He decided to let me learn how to ride by letting me fool around on the little motor bike. I had a tendency to over-rev the thing and stall it. I couldn't get the feel of the clutch. The crazy bike even had a brake pedal on the floorboard.

Once David Morgan took me for a ride on this little bike. He promised with all sincerity that he wouldn't break 30 miles an hour. He tore down the blacktop road next to the store at well over 60. He slowed to cross a bridge and I angrily hopped off. I had enough of his foolishness that day. He tried to talk me into getting back on. I told him to go stuff himself and I started walking back to the Fina Station. Gunner shrugged and took off. In a short while Rick showed up on his big bike and took me back. Gunner wasn't scoring points with either of us.

Gunner once showed up on a black Italian motorcycle. It was called a Bologna, and I thought that was hilarious. Getting parts for the thing must have been beyond difficult because I only saw it that one time then never again.

Gunner kept up his shenanigans to the point where one day Rick wrestled him to the ground and told him to cut out the bull. Gunner eventually found other places to hang out, and things soon returned to what ever passed for normal at the Fina.

The Fina was good to us. It was a hangout, Rick had a virtual unlimited supply of fuel for his vehicles, and we could eat a sandwich or two there once in a while. I liked pressed ham with mustard and sweet pickles when I could get them. This was usually washed down with an R.C. cola or a Dr. Pepper. This blond actress named Pamela Austin advertised R.C. on television as 'the one with the wild, wild, taste.' I figured if she liked it I could too, so I drank a lot of R.C. Rick and I drank colas, rode his motorcycle, and talked all the time. I was getting out of shape, but I didn't know it. Two days would start on August 14, two months away.

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## Summer of '72

Jerry McGee had installed big coil springs on his SS-396, to augment his air shocks. Rick and I had gone to Chuck Hagerman's to get the springs for Jerry. Chuck cut them out of a 1952 Chevy that lay on its back in Chuck's cow pasture. As he cut the A frame mounts loose with a cutting



torch the big coil spring would leap several feet into the air. We'd run for cover then pick it up after it landed. I was given one and held onto it while Chuck cut the other loose. Rick and I then got into Rick's car and returned to the Fina station. The springs were given to Jerry and after a little work they were installed.

The car leaned perceptively. Jerry put in rubber spacers in an effort to even it out. That didn't do any good, so he had Rick's father Doc heat up the springs with an welding torch until the car was reasonably level. The car rode like a wagon, though, and had a lot of over-steer in the turns. Jerry would tinker with it constantly for as long as he had it.

Doc Graham was a wiz of a welder, and we often took advantage of his skills to modify or repair cars, bicycle frames, and motorcycles. He was a generous and good humored fellow, soft spoken, and intensely likeable. His good nature was reflected in Rick's generosity.

Back home my Mother got a beat up old white tom turkey. My mother was like a cross between Lucy Ricardo and Grannie Clampett. She was crazy and country. She loved to be around livestock or poultry and constantly kept a colony of chickens. Sometimes she'd try more exotic fowl like turkies or ducks. The owls, skunks, possums and other vermin appreciated this variation to their diets. Varmits raided us on the average of about once a week, and when my father was lucky enough to catch one he'd dispatch it quickly with the .410 shot gun.

Mom had gone to Canton for Trades Day and pruchased this huge, old, tough, New Holland Gobbler. This old gentleman was totally burned out and had no feathers at all on his very flat underside. His upper beak had been trimmed too close and he had no wattles. Several of his toes were bent in odd directions and he had bad feet.

He could strut. He'd puff his ragged feathers and turn his head red and blue. He'd make a sort of hiss and walk stiffly about, showing off his torn plumage. For some unexplained reason he hated Mom and my sister's kids.

I had no fear of the big ugly bird. I would hand feed him bread and he would eat chicken feed out of my hand. He was scared witless of the burlap bags, because thats where the previous owners kept him each time they tried to sell him. He was easy to catch because he couldn't fly or run very fast. I'd stuff a burlap toe-sack up my T-shirt and chase him down. I'd sit on him and pull the bag out of my shirt. In an amazing show of strength he'd throw me off and take off running. When he ran he stuck his legs straight out sideways and sort of rowed along. I thought he was the funniest thing since cartoons. Mom, of course, had other ideas.

Mom called him "Gobby". He would follow her around the yard, making ominous chattering turkey sounds. When Mom would stop for what ever reason he would attack her. He would hit her with his big feet and slap her with his ragged wings. She would retaliate by whonging him upside the head with a metel feed bucket. I would be inside watching T.V. and I'd hear them fighting. Gobby would make a chattering sound. Mom would holler "Get away Gobby!" and I could hear the metallic clang of the bucket as she banged it off his hard but empty skull. All mom had to do was carry a toe-sack around with her in open view and Gobby would never have come within a hundred feet of her. For some reason she never did.

We could make this old bird gobble by honking the car horn. We discovered this by pulling up in our drive way and the old bird was in front of the garage. Pappy honked for him to get out of the way and the turkey did a gobble. We laughed at that and told Mom. Mom wanted to hear him gobble so I went out and beeped the horn a couple of times. While my mother was enjoying the spectical of this worn out old turkey gobbling my irate brother came stomping out of the house wanting to know what the blue blazes I was doing. I told him and he just shook his head and went back to what ever it was he was doing, like sleeping.

Gobby loved to fight, but especially he liked to fight human females. I once hung up an old white plastic hobby horse on the clothes line so he could battle it to his hearts content. I liked him, and had a lot of fun with him, but it couldn't last.

Gobby met his fate later that Fall. Mom sold this tough, skinny, stupid, ugly old bird to a guy for his Thanksgiving turkey. I didn't know who to feel sorry for the most; Gobby or the guy who bought him. Gobby had crossed the line by attacking one of my neices. That was Gobby, the biggest pet bird I ever had as a teenager. Bon Appetite!

Rick and I went to movies all summer. One night we got in his Ford and went to the Trail Drive In to see Dirty Harry. The second big feature was the Wild Bunch. Rick sat spellbound by Dirty Harry but went looking for his buddies that he had seen earlier when the Wild Bunch came on. The Wild Bunch was one bad movie, full of foul language, topless bimbos, and slow motion death. I thought it stank and I just sat there alone in Rick's car, bored. Later when I read a critic's review of this piece of garbage I wonder if we had seen the same movie. Soon after the end credits rolled painfully by Rick returned and we went home at last.

This was an example of the many forgettable movies the early 70s that critics said were just wonderful that were in fact totally rotten. Most of these had half naked girls, terrible plots, bad endings, and slow motion death scenes. This was not high art but some people actually liked some of the junk movies.

Gary Dooley loved Stanley. It was a terrible waste of celluloid that had this nut and his pet snake. He'd throw this snake at people he didn't like. One of Gary's favorite sayings was "Bite 'em, Stanley."

It wasn't until Star Wars would they be making movies I could consider enjoyable and classy again. That was not until around 77 or 78, quite some time in the future. It would be a long wait.

On Thursday, June 1, 1972, the Drill Team girls reported for Summer practice. Vicki Pipkin was now Head Majorette, or Drill Team Captain as it was sometimes called. She was followed by Elaine who was First Lieutenant, and Martha who was Second Lieutenant. This would give my class a lock on these positions for the next 2 years. None of the Senior girls were in the ranking, but what the hey. A lot of them were Cheerleaders to make up for it.

The girls were drilled by a Kilgore Rangerette. Julia was so taken by this lady that she decided that in her turn, she'd like to be Rangerette someday.

Back at my house my Father looked on disapprovingly at my growing interest in motorcycles. There had been 2 very nasty and fatal motorcycle wrecks in the Greenville area. The accidents had left the motorcycles bent almost out of shape and the lifeless bodies of the riders broken.

"I can't stop you, but I can bury you," was the message my Father gave me. Still, I continued my motorcycle riding, getting better and better at it. When a fellow is a teenager he thinks he is invisible, immortal, and bullet proof. Sometimes you find out the hard way that you aren't.

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## Bugs and Booze

Rick and I shared many adventures in 1972. Rick's Father owned several horses. These animals were often saddled up and ridden by Rick and I. I learned to keep the horse out from under the trees after being brushed off a few times. I experienced the incredible sensation of being in the

saddle when the animal sneezed. I liked riding horses, but I often treated the animal like it was a car. I'd just get on and make it go, without any consideration of it's own welfare. The beast got revenge by giving me a tremendous amount of saddle sores. My feet often didn't reach to the stirrups that 6' 4" Rickey had set up for himself, so I would get a bruised rear end from bouncing all over the saddle in a gallop or trot.

We didn't swim at Tawakoni nearly as much as we did at Club Lake. This was a private lake located in Weiland. One of our friends had a membership, so we were granted access. There was a 50 foot pier out there with a diving board. I spent all my time near the pier where it was safe. Rick and Robert Morgan would swim around, jump off the diving board, and play tag with each other under water. Rick could follow a guy under water by actually listening to the swimmer's joints pop. I hadn't learned to swim underwater, much less on top of it. But I was getting able to swim short distances, and I was getting better at it.

Our buddy at Club Lake got kicked out of his bungalow there so Rick and I went to get his stuff. We threw clothes and personal belongings in the back of the pickup and also 2 cases of Pearl beer. We had to ditch the beer, because we weren't about to risk going to the Fina with 2 cases of beer in the truck in broad daylight. Rick threw some clothes over the booze and we left Club Lake.

We liesurly travelled down Farm Market road 1564 toward Highway 69. Rick then stopped on the bridge over Cedar Creek.

"Lets get rid of that beer, Buzzard," he said, exiting the truck.

We climbed in the back and started tossing cans. The cans weren't 6-packed up so we had to toss them off one at a time. Several empties made the trip too. Both of us kept a nervous eye out for the cops, or anyone else for that matter. I could hear the cans splashing into the water below.

"One of these days I'm gonna come back up here and recover all this," Rick said. He found a near empty can that still had some beer in it.

"It's probably flat, but I'm gonna take a drink."

He turned it up then spit it out. He poured the mixture out. It contained several drowned moths that had committed suicide in there. Rick gave the can a mighty toss. He wiped his mouth and we continued throwing the cans over the side. Rick soon got back into the cab. I got in beside him and with a screech of tires we took off for the Fina station.

Lesson for the day: Don't drink from previously opened beer cans. Yuck!