

"We aint got no gym. Where are we gonna practice basketball?"

Charles Tarrant, 1972



-The Concrete Cowboys-

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The Concrete Cowboys

Just about all of our equipment funds had been spent for all our new football gear. Football equipment is expensive. In 1972 it amounted to about \$150 per player. This did not include the extras like cleats, arm and hand pads, mouthpieces, and the like. Football season was now over for us, and we had to figure out something for Basketball season. The first thing we needed was a place to practice.

Behind the Ag Shop was a concrete pad where we could park the trailers we built for final fitting out and we could put other vehicals on it to work on, so we wouldn't have to lie on the ground. Mr. Brookins had this roughly 50 by 20 foot pad cleared off and had a 10 foot metel pole erected with a basketball goal with metel backboard on it. While we played football and practiced, some classes had their P.E. period on this pad. Basketball was back at Lone Oak again, after a fashion.

This was a passable court. A basketball behaves differently on concrete than on wood. It comes back with just a touch more force. Because the concrete was gritty it tossed up bits of dust and dirt. It made the ball collect grit and destroyed the traction of our tennis shoes. Grit embedded in the footwear made them hard and slick. At least we had a place to practice. Now we wondered about our uniforms.

We thought all of the boys uniforms went to Vallhalla when the gym died. The girls' uniforms were stored in the Home-Ec room and narrowly escaped destruction when the school was saved. Our girls had their uniforms, but we boys didn't. Mr. Brookins had a method that was time tested to deal with this.

Because atheletic equipment is unusually expensive Mr. Brookins knew he had to search for bargains. He would quite often search papers from all over the area for auctions, fire sales, and going out of business sales of sporting goods establishments. When he would find something he

and Coach Taylor would drive to the place and acquire new equipment for us. In this manner they got dozens of basketballs, footballs, new uniforms and equipment, all for a fraction of the purchase costs. In this way that's how I found out where the original blue helmets came from.

Seeing a block of basketball uniforms for sale at a dirt cheap price Mr. Brookins got them. Quite pleased with themselves, he and Mr. Taylor brought back what was to be our new uniforms consisting of red jerseys, white jerseys, and some shorts, and in addition a load of new but smokey smelling basketballs. Quite a haul! We had our uniforms.

Our first practice was in cold weather but sunny. We tried the old drills that we knew so well, but with no walls the ball often rolled into the mud around the pad. The support pole on the backboard made layups interesting. Once or twice somebody would slam into that pole. A guy could cheat, too, by wiggling the pole when somebody shot. This would move the basket and cause the ball to bounce off the rim. A lot of guys did this, good naturedly destroying our shooting.

Sometimes when tracking a ball we'd get blinded by the sun. This led to some bizarre things like missed passes, crazy rebounds, and a loud 'splat' as the ball hit square in a nearby mud hole. Desperate to keep the ball dry we'd dive after it and try to fling it back onto the concrete. This usually led to the spectacle of somebody sliding through the mud on all fours.

The court was on the south side of the campus, but the wind often blew through this area with considerable force. Everybody learned to use windage but when we took this thinking on into an indoor court we missed a lot more than we hit.

Falling down on this concrete pad was very painful. Paper and candy wrappers often blew onto the pad. To step on this was to invite a rapid meeting with the cement. For example, one time Gunner had the ball. I came out of my zone to attack and I stepped on a piece of paper. I went down with considerable force. Still in football mode I got up as quick as I hit. Gunner thought it was funny. I hobbled a bit from the impact, and Mr. Taylor had me sit down for a while until the stinging stopped.

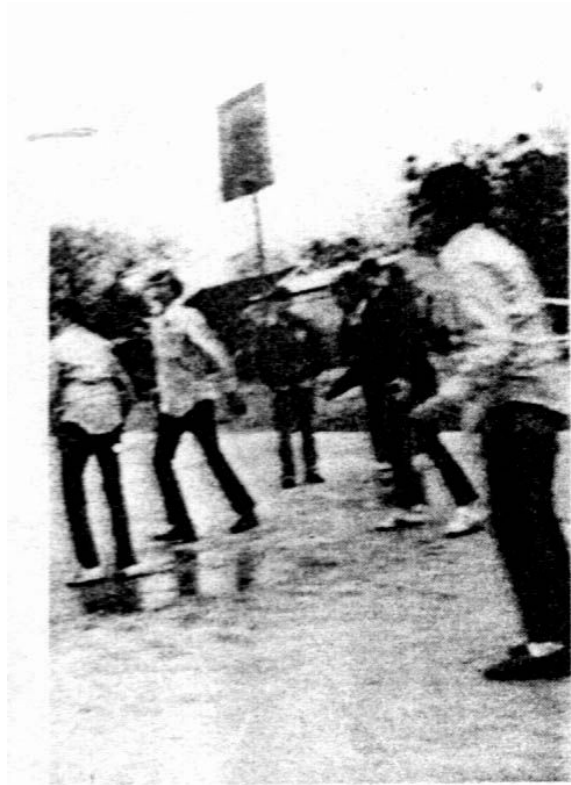
While sitting there rubbing my sore knee caps I contemplated our situation. I was not enjoying this. What little basketball skill I had learned was evaporating out here, and it was affecting my fellow team mates in a like fashion. We were picking up bad habits. I knew we had to shift from football thinking to basketball thinking but most of us were still in football mode. The concrete, being outdoors, diving into the mud, and the close quarters made this more like football than basketball. Most of us had to wear coats because it was so cold, and nobody was nuts enough to try to wear shorts on the concrete. Our skinned elbows were enough without raw knees to go with them.

To make the situation worse it rained and rained and rained and rained. The coaches knew they had to find a place indoors for us to practice. Other schools were contacted who had spare gyms, like Quinlan. Quinlan let us use their Junior High gym and let us use it for our "home" gym. We sometimes got to practice in Quinlan's High School gym from time to time.

The first night we went over there for the first indoor practice we had we were really hyper over it. I wore a knit cap, thinking it would be cold in there. After a few minutes I shed it. It was hot! This would take some getting used to.

Off to one side, Coach Taylor didn't like what he saw. Almost all of his best players had graduated last year. This bunch we made up of this year were not a team in any sense of the word. His best players were Danny Bowman and Robert Vice. The rest of us were also-rans or total wash-outs. This year he didn't have 5 starters and 10 wannabees. He had 2 starters and 13

wannabees. Resigned to his fate, he scratched his head and decided to make the best of what little he had. It was going to be a long season, and all of it road trips.



Big Red?

Halloween had been virtually ignored this year by us in my class. I did drive my sister's kids to Greenville so they could Trick or Treat, but it was no big deal for me. What had my attention was our first game of the year was coming up, and the long awaited Thanksgiving Holiday. Thanksgiving fell on the 23rd and we'd get Thursday, Friday, and the weekend off! Most of us were more than ready for it.

What we weren't so ready for was this first game of the season. Everybody was still looking forward to it, because it answered the questions of just how ready we really were. It was quite an enjoyable affair. We were fielding an even larger basketball team than last year. For the boys there were 15 of us, 2 more than last year, and Roy Crow was the only black guy on the squad. David Lemons was here for the first and last time, as he was a Senior. Randy Price and Herman Crist were aboard, finally. Mike Bell was out of the hospital, back in school, and ready to shoot some hoops. Gonga was here, with Neel, and Connie. Robert and Danny were here, the only real stand outs. We had two new guys named Johnny McCaghren and Dennis Grey. I wasn't too familiar with any of them, but I had played football with Dennis. Both of these guys were average players. I wondered where Bobby Underwood and Dan Webb was. The only old hands available from last year were Gunner, Larry Hukill, Danny Bowman, and myself. This looked about as promising as a plane crash.

Then came the day we congregated in one of the class rooms in the high school and the coaches passed out uniforms.

We got white jerseys.

"Cool!"

We got red jerseys.

"Go Red!"

And...

"What the Sam Hill is this?"

We got blue shorts!

I recoiled away from the ugly blue things like a vampire from daylight. Everybody looked at the things in distaste. Blue? We don't wear blue! What in the Ding Dong Thunder in Tarnation are we doing with BLUE shorts?

Mr. Taylor tried to smooth our ruffled feathers.

"They got red trim on them. Besides, you'll look patriotic."

I gave him a cynical look. Yeah, right.

As much as I disliked the ugly blue shorts Gunner hated them even more. The way he described them was that when a guy sat down it made it look like he was 'happy to see somebody'. They were a satiny dark blue, and real shiney. They had white trim, with red pinstripping.

The white jerseys were pure polyester and after a few moments on the floor they stank. The red jerseys were more conventional, and we felt more at home in the things. Unable to find a #12, I picked #51.

I didn't know it, but for me that was a bad omen. I personally thought #51 was cool. It was the same number as the Paramedic squad vehical on the T.V. show "Emergency". Paramedics were a new and experimental thing back in '72 and my group liked them. I would come to dislike this number, one heck of a whole lot.

Lone Oak fielded 2 teams each of boys and girls. There were about 21 girls on the team. There were Varsity and Junior Varsity, together totalling some 34 students. With coaches and managers it pushed the total to near 42. It was quite a group. This girl's J.V. team may have been a first. Coach Fannin was the girls' coach, Mr. Taylor was ours. We looked forward to our first game. This was to start the longest road stand in Lone Oak basketball history. All games were away games.

Yet, with these blue shorts, could we still call ourselves 'Big Red'?

The Start of the Longest Road Trip

The gymless Lone Oak Buffaloes, it's boys team equipped with horrid blue basketball shorts and minus 4 first class starters who graduated last year, went to it's first game at Celeste. It was a cold 21st of November night, 1972.

The big wooden Celeste gym reminded me of our old gym, and how much we all missed it. We sat in the frigid confines of this brightly lit barn-like structure and rooted for the two back to back girl's games going on below on the floor.

Celeste took the J.V. girls apart, trouncing them 29 to 13. We gave our ladies a round of applause as they came off the floor, for it had still been a good fight.

The Varsity girls was a more closely fought contest. Back and forth it went, and either side could have won it in the end. Celeste managed a victory over Lone Oak 32 to 35, by three lousy points. Not bad for a group of girls who had no gym to practice in! Marilyn Fry had 16 points in this game.

Then it was our turn on the floor, Varsity and J.V. combined. We wore those horrid blue shorts that had embarrassing bulges and creases and were the wrong cotton picking color. We did the traditional warm up. I missed the windbreakers, the flag, Woody, Rickey, and all the guys we had last year. After the warm up Mr. Taylor sent in his starters for the first boy's game of the year. Off we go!

Danny Bowman and David Lemons were hot, surprising Celeste. They had problems with us! A combination of Mr. Taylor's proven tactics and the want-to drive of Danny, David, Robert, and the others let the team stay on the floor with the Blue Devils.

Over on the bench Gunner made negative remarks about our blue pants, hollered at Celeste, and picked at the odd red bumps on his legs. Most of us had these bumps too, and I couldn't figure

them out. They looked like acne, but they didn't pop. I was confused and annoyed by this new personal problem, and I had no idea how to deal with it. This was caused by the stylish tight blue jeans we all wore. The pantlegs rubbed against the thighs causing the hair follicles to become irritated. This was made worse by the fact that we practiced in long pants to keep from freezing. Throughout the season we'd be seen on the bench absentmindedly picking at these bumps. It was just one more thing to make this season what it was.

Bumps or no, the Lone Oak team on the floor was doing a very fine job. Celeste could practice in their gym if it rained or if it was icy. They had proper facilities. Yet, here we were, hanging within 6 points of them!

In my naeiveness I wasn't impressed at the time. This was not the super team I can grown accustomed to last year by whom I judged all others. I expected more from a Lone Oak team because I was spoiled by last year's unparalleled one of a kind adventure. In the end we lost, 34 to 40.



In the final talley Danny had 17 points and David Lemons had 10. The other 7 points went to the rest of the starting squad, probably most of it going to Robert Vice.

With all that, and a decidedly mixed bag of results from this first set of games, we went home and from there to the delightful Thanksgiving Holidays.

On the Road Again

Thanksgiving, with it's 2 days off plus the weekend, was the ususal wonderful rich-food fest and get together my family normally indulged in. It was spread over 2 towns and 3 or 4 different houses. We'd go to Grannie's house in Sulphur Springs and had a good time there, then we'd travel to Greenville to visit my Aunt Dot and her large family. Sometimes our relations from San Antonio would come up and join us, but because of the distance they usually waited until the longer running Christmas holiday.

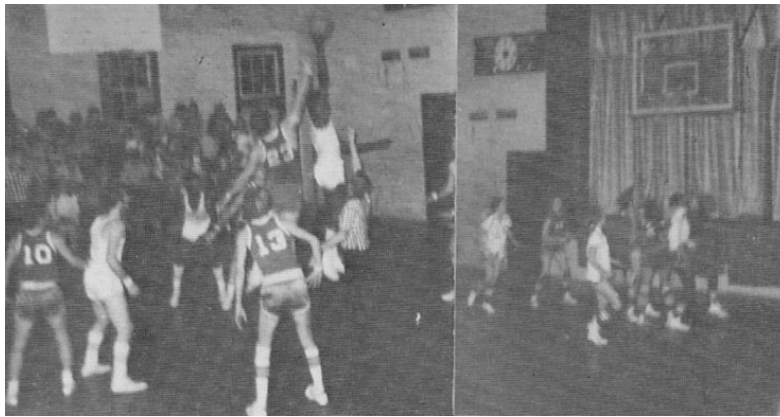
Always there was an abundance of food and we lived off leftovers for days afterwards. The chickens and dogs got what remained of that.

After Thanksgiving, somewhat overfed and a little out of shape, we again went to Celeste for our second game of the year. The place was starting to look real familiar.

The boy's J.V. squad would play first this time. For some unknown reason the girl's J.V. was not here. I was on the boy's J.V. with a lot of guys I had never played basketball with before and I did not like a lot of them. The feelings were mutual. There was a bit of animosity throughout the entire squad, and this played on each guys morale in a negative way.

The game was a relatively low scoring contest. Everybody had first game jitters, but Coach Taylor let me play. My teammates never gave me the ball. In the end we rose to victory over the Celeste J.V, 34 to 25. I thought nothing of my lack of ball handling and merely went to the locker room after the game with nothing on my mind but the satisfaction of a victory. Mr. Fannin's girls team was on the floor after us.

Up and down the floor they went in a close contest with the excellent Celeste girl's team. Our ladies fought them to a standstill then forged ahead to win it in the last quarter, 33 to 31! Marilyn Fry had 19 points, and Francis Johnson had 14.



Up in the bleachers I thought this was a pretty good sign. We had won two games this night. I watched the Varsity tromp onto the floor and begin the old ritual of warmup I now knew so well. I had a hard time accepting the fact that this team was so very different from the one I was on last year. Not only the uniforms had changed, but the entire personality of the squad.

If I couldn't tell the difference, Danny Bowman certainly could. The game went rapidly downhill from the start, for us. The ball handling was average, at best, team work was not anywhere near the par he had seen last year, and too many were taking bad shots. He stuck with it, and tried to make the best of it. What else could he do?

Coach Taylor took a good look at the performance of both his teams and realized that he had his work cut out for him. This team needed work and training in the worst way, but he had no gym to practice in to hone the rough edges off. The main reason we could stay with anyone now was that we were still in top physical condition from football season. Now that the holidays had taken some of that away, and our flaws really began to show.

The game didn't end fast enough for Varsity as they got kicked 56 to 30. Welcome back to Highschool Basketball. It was going to be a long season.

Motormen

Mr. Trimble's welding class had turned out so well that he decided to try to make some of us passable lawn mower mechanics. The entire shop was strewn with over a dozen brand new gold painted Briggs and Stratton lawn mower engines on the work tables that we arranged in reasonable order for the task at hand. We had classroom time on the mechanics of the 4 stroke engine, how to tear one down, and how to put the whole thing back together again. We even had every tool imaginable for the job. This was terrific!

The mechanically inclined among us dove into the small motors without hesitation. The less so, including me, went after the engines with the cautiousness of a brain surgeon. There were teams on each engine. Rabbit helped me. We even had a manual nearby to keep us from really messing up the project. Still and all, it was a lot of fun.

We drained the oil out of the crankcase, opened the block, removed the valves, magneto, piston, flywheel, slinger, dust cover, and just about anything we could take off the main block. Mr. Trimble was wise enough to not to let us diddle with the carburetors. If we tore those apart there was no way we'd get the clockwork-like device back together in anything like a functioning unit. Like I said, we concentrated on the basics.

This was loads of fun, especially for those of us who never worked on a motor before. There were soon bizarre happenings.

Some guys had parts left over. Others couldn't get their engine to shut off once they got it started. Some guys got shocked by the magneto when they tried to turn the motor off. One engine even shot sparks out of it from a faulty aligned magneto. The circus was truly in town. This was a riot!

All of us were tearing up a soft metal shaft key that was designed to split rather than tear up the flywheel or damage the crankshaft. After going through every one of the keys we had in the shop and then buying some at high prices, Mr. Trimble decided we could make our own shaft keys, by thunder!

The flywheel was hard to get on the shaft as it required a finesse we didn't possess at 17. Some guys tapped the stubborn part into place with a ball-peen hammer. Others forced it on in other ways as equally destructive.

I managed to get my flywheel on my motor and happily installed the rest of the parts as best as I could figure out. Rickey Graham, who has had his hands in the guts of more motors at 17 than most of us in the shop would in our entire lives, added his skill to the project. Randy Price and I worked on. Rick even showed me how to make the shaft keys and I made several. These were passed out to other teams.

Finally, on November 29 of 1972, I had rebuilt my first engine of any kind. I topped off the first sized gas tank and cranked the torque starter. I released the switch and the machine cranked to life! Suddenly notable among the blue smoke and the roar of the motor was a distinct knocking sound. I quickly shut the motor off to the hee-haws of my classmates.

"That one aint put together right," crowed Eddie Bell.

"Sounds like you threw a rod!" David Dillon joined in, laughing.

I was horrified. Had I tore up my engine? Oh my goodness! Before I could tear it back down to try and figure out what was wrong the class ended for the day.

Cold and Ice

Basketball season had brought my spirits up but not my health. This thing, flu, bad cold, or quinsy, had me by the throat and would not let go. I cleared my throat so often my teachers thought it was a common way for me of speaking. My persistent cough wouldn't get worse, but it wouldn't get better. The day after my engine in Ag went bonkers I came down with the flu again. It was so bad that I was out for two weeks with the stuff. A week into this I tried to go back to school, but I left at noon. Had I realized how serious this stuff was I would have gone to a doctor but I assumed that decision was my parents' to make. I stayed home and dealt with it. It wasn't any fun at home either.

Coughing and sniffing I tried to watch T.V. because Apollo 17 was lifting off. This was to be our last trip to the moon so I wanted very much to see this. Aunt Polly decided that if I was too sick to go to school I was too sick to watch T.V. In the shouting match that ensued I missed the liftoff.

Seemingly pleased that she had ruined my entire day she started her usual routine of making beds and watching soap operas. An era of space exploration was coming to an end and she wanted to watch the pretend lives of a group of actors. Go figure.

On Sunday, December 10, 1972, a most remarkable amount of snow began to actually build up in drifts. I looked at this with great curiosity and enjoyment for even the tiny snow drifts I saw out the windows were a rare and exciting thing in East Texas. On Monday, school was cancelled. This saved me from one more day of absence.

Texans on Ice is a show Yankees come down to see. Most of us had little or no experience driving on the ice and in 1972 they didn't sand the roads. When the sun peeks out the stuff melts in spots leaving a hard layer over a layer of water. The results are very slick and dangerous. This refreezes causing even more problems. Eventually it all breaks up into a slush.

Cars could be seen decorating ditches, poles, and guardrails here and there, going backwards down the road with their wheels not turning, and moving down the road at a controlled speed that a turtle can appreciate. Such was how snow and ice are dealt with in East Texas.

I got well enough to return to school, and with the enthusiasm of seeing my friends again, I went back on the 13th. Once back at school my buddies eagerly read everything I drew in our comics. I asked Rabbit about my engine in Ag. He told me I had split the key and the knocking was the flywheel hitting the block. He put in a new key, restarted the motor, and it ran fine.

Well! How about that! It was only a minor problem, and a common one at that. That made my week. I was never to get a chance to tear down another motor in school, though. I was to help Rickey Graham build his big orange Camaro. It was to be his neatest car.

Rick was a growing enigma with me. He was getting more withdrawn, even more so that last summer. Doc had built a shop right next to the Fina station and we worked on Rick's cars in there a lot. The station was also changed to a Conoco. We didn't call it 'the Fina' anymore as a result. Rick began to spend a lot of his time there alone. I occasionally would show up and pitch in to whatever was going on, like the building of the Camaro for instance. Usually we played Battleship or just talked. Because Rick wasn't playing basketball we spent less time together. To make it worse he had even broke up with Liz and that left him even more depressed and moody. We were still buddies, though. We could still talk, we just didn't as much as we used to.

Rick and I wore some simple chains on our necks from time to time. They were like dog-tag chains that the Army issues but we had nothing to hang on them. We just wore them and that was that. Rick had a long continuous chain he strung clear around the room. To him, that was an extravagance.

I was confused to discover that Rick didn't own much. He had no models, no games, not much in the way of the tabletop hobbies that I loved so much and couldn't do without. His room was just where he went to go to sleep and the rest of the world was where he played. He had a closet with a motley collection of shirts and pants. He had maybe two pairs of shoes and his Dingo boots. On his wall he had a couple of posters. I don't recall a radio or anything like that, but he probably had a portable radio he listened to at night with an earphone. Rick really liked the junk and gadgets I bought, though, including a pair of 10 dollar walkie talkies I once got. We played with them for hours. His family wasn't poor; they had land and farm machinery, far beyond anything my family had. They just chose to live simply. It was their way.

Lynn McGee once bought a model car and let it lay about the store in it's box for days before he half heartedly assembled the thing. It was a kind of 'skull on wheels'. He eventually gave it to me. I guess he found it boring. I would have had the thing painted and assembled in 3 days. I completed the job he started and it joined the rest of my collection. I would find bits and pieces of the glow in the dark model for years afterward, here in there, in various storage boxes.

Rick and his friends seemed to be more involved in drinking, smoking, messing with cars, and chasing loose women than anything else. As big a friend as Rick was he and I had very different pursuits. The funny thing was that I could partially comprehend his world of mechanics, welding, and Catting Around, and he could partially comprehend my perspective of spaceships, super computers, and fantasy. I think my way of thinking bored him. I accepted his behaviour as normal and everyday, and I thought I must be unusual and strange. I didn't fit in with his bunch of running buddies, so that re-enforced the thought. Any attempt to be like or even fit in with his friends ended badly. They didn't understand Geeks and I didn't understand them.

I accepted my fate reluctantly, and because I was stubborn I kept trying to be someone I wasn't when I was around him and his friends. If I had just tried to be myself I would have done much better. I really stood out when I was just myself, be it on the football field, the basketball court, or in school. All I had to do was just be myself. Rick knew who I was better than I did, but he also had his own way of looking at things and sometimes he considered my nerdy ways not too cool. His attempts to change me into something I wasn't only left me confused and him frustrated. In the end we both would accept the other for the what he was; a genuine friend and trustful ally. We could not ask for more.

"All Glory is fleeting"

A traditional warning a

Roman slave gave to his master

in a military victory parade in ancient Rome.

Tournament Fever

While I was out sick Lone Oak participated in the Quinlan Tournament. On December 1 Lone Oak boys met Campbell for the first game for both teams in the Tournament. Campbell beat us, 68 to 57.

Danny Bowman had 20 points. Our strategy became to get the ball to him or Robert. This lack of self confidence and ability left the entire team lopsided and weak overall. Danny was without a doubt the best basketball player on the entire team, and Robert was a remarkably close second. If we had only had a gym there is no telling how good we just might have been!

In the girl's bracket Lone Oak soundly beat Bland 40 to 25. Francis Johnson had a strong game and 19 points.

On December 2 Lone Oak met Bland in the boy's consolation bracket. Danny was hot, scoring 23 points, but Lone Oak went down to defeat and out of the tournament 43 to 39. One or two men cannot carry an entire team. If everyone scored about 10 points we would have soundly beat just about anybody. Gone were the days when we could pass it around and be dangerous from all 5 stations. The ability to do that wouldn't return for about 10 years, and in that time the most remarkable team in the history of Lone Oak basketball, the 1972 Regional Quarterfinalist, the team that had Lone Oak's first undefeated season in basketball and it's first real title, would be all but forgotten.

So it was that out of the tournament were both the girls and boys teams. Next up was Community, on 5 December. It was to be a mixed bag of results.



Mr. Fannin's B-team girls were beaten by Community 37 to 21. In a manner of revenge, the girl's Varsity was victorious, slamming Community 53 to 45. After that the boys played.

Community wanted to beat Lone Oak badly. They had a long standing dislike for us, dating at least back to the 1950s. In spite of Danny's 20 points and Robert's outstanding 14, Community beat us 77 to 61. Cox, of Community, had dumped in an amazing 32 points, and another member of his team had 22. This was a bad way to get ready for the Celeste Tournament, and that came almost immediately after.

On December 8 Savoy beat Lone Oak in the boy's bracket 64 to 51. Danny had 24 points and Robert had 12. Lone Oak boys just didn't have a team well rounded enough to be a proper contender in most games. Lack of practice and picking up some really bad habits doomed the team.

History does not record what our girls did back at the Quinlan Tournament. Here at the Celeste tournament Marilyn Fry and Danny Bowman were named to the All Tournament Team. Our girls had fought all the way down to the Consolation Finals and lost by only 2 points. Francis Johnson had 25 points and the final score for them was Lone Oak 36, North Hopkins 38.

By the end of this I was back at school.

Bong

Rabbit had a trick he could do. He'd be looking the other way, walk straight into a metal pole, and with a loud impact he'd make it look like he bumped his forehead off the pole. What he would actually do was cushion the impact with his hands and kick the pole for effect. It looked really neat and it was his number one stunt. When done on the covered walkway that ran behind the school the results were very convincing.

One weekend Rabbit and I were in Gibson's department store in Greenville. I wandered around the toy aisles and in the sporting goods area. The models were in the toy section and all kinds of really neat guns were in the sporting goods.

Rabbit decided to do his head bump trick. He approached a big yellow support pillar as if he didn't see it, did his 'bump' and when he kicked the post it gave a metallic 'ting'.

Randy grabbed his forehead in mock agony and we spun around and around into the next aisle. A guy had seen Randy 'hit his head', whistled and went "Mmmm!" That had put us into uncontrolled laughter. Randy had faked the guy totally out.

I could just see this guy when he got home.

"Marsha, I saw this here young feller bust his head plumb open in the store today."

"Do tell! How on earth did he do that?"

"He wasn't a looking where he was a going. Ran right into this big ole yellow pole. Knocked him flat!"

"My my! These kids today!"

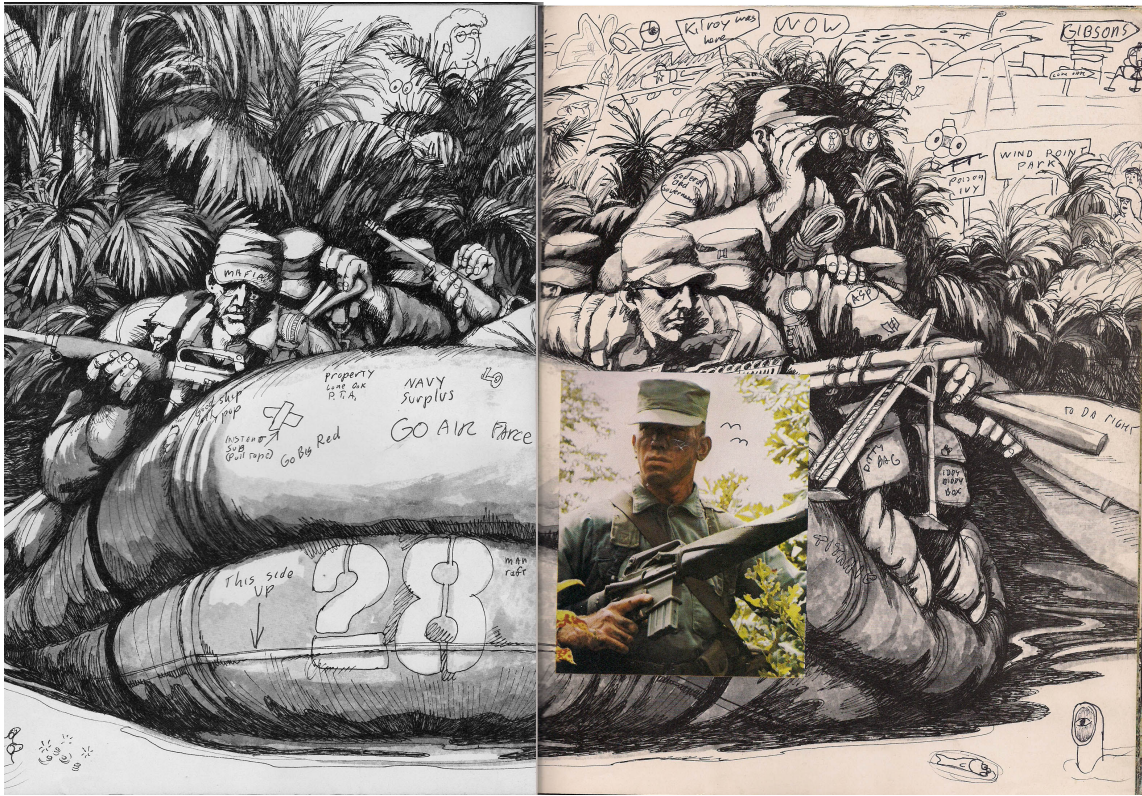
I went on many trips to Greenville with Randy. He was getting interested in a military career and so was I. I was definitely Gung-ho for the Army. I especially

liked tanks. By shopping the armed services we got to know all the recruiters in Greenville.

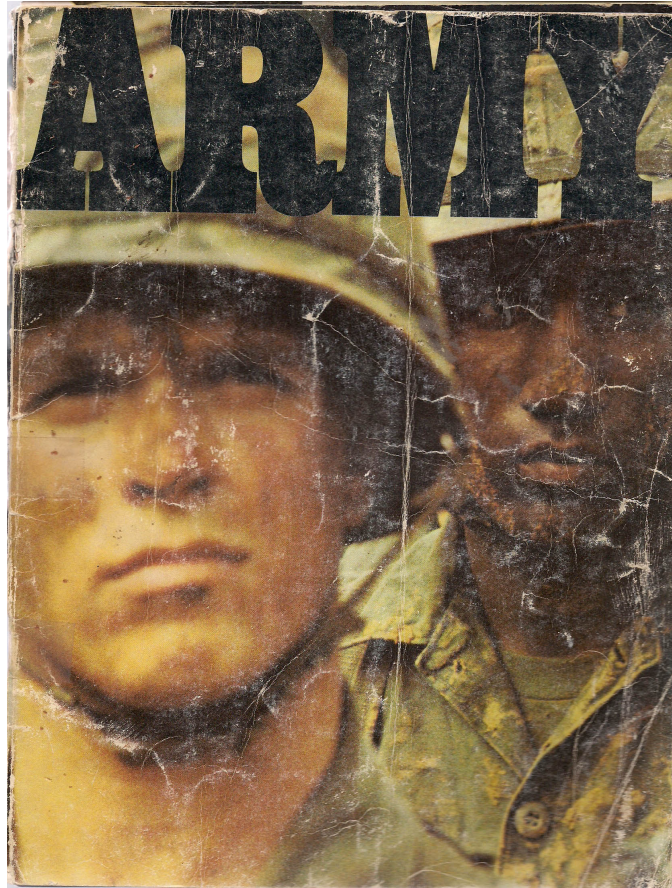
Once on an Army recruiting drive the 2nd Armored Division sent out a mobile weapons display to the schools. They had a wide variety of weapons from Sten guns to M-60 light machine guns. Its purpose was to let us compare our weapons to ones captured from the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army. I examined my first AK-47 assault rifle. The weapon had a smaller stock than the Russian and East European versions I would become more familiar with. It was designed for the smaller stature of the North Vietnamese. It had a triangular folding bayonet permanently attached. Later I would learn that meant that the weapon had been made in China. Triangular bayonets were outlawed by the Geneva Convention. The Chinese are the only people I know who make an A.K. on that pattern.

The soldiers in the truck passed out to us pamphlets, a magazine like recruiting book full of pictures and line drawings, and decals featuring the 2nd Armored shield and motto. I took to this

stuff like it was solid gold. I spend hours thumbing through the book. Herman and I doodled on the line drawings and some of the doodles were quite creative.



In his, Herman had doodled on a line drawing of group of Rangers in a rubber boat crossing some river. He drew a big patch on the boat with the label "Instant Submarine; Pull Tape". I thought that was so funny that I copied it into my book. Herman got a little angry, thinking I was ripping off his idea. I did it because I was intending to save this book, and as of this writing I still have it, drawings and all. Herman doesn't have his. If I hadn't put that gag in my book it would have been lost with his book and probably forgotten. I kept a lot of things other folks would have thrown away.



Speaking of doodling, the girls had their own thing. When some girl got a crush on a guy she'd cover her entire book cover with his name, endlessly, from corner to corner. Some girls wrote in an angle to the printing on the cover, others hap-hazardly. Some wrote their own full names, as if proclaiming their identity in pen and ink. All this name scrawling made the book cover look as if was covered in weird diagonal scrolly lines, giving it a blue, red, or black background color.

One favorite phrase often scribbled was something like "Bobby and Sally, together 4 ever." This could be found on walls, book covers, desk tops, just about anywhere. I would look at this with skepticism borne of the way I perceived the behaviour of most of the guys I knew. If I found this on a chalkboard I would add "or at least until next week".

On the desktop sometimes a lovestruck female would put his initials and hers inside a heart. She'd add an arrow through the '+' and maybe garland it with a drawing of flowers or what have you. This was often viciously defaced by some of us guys when the girl wasn't around.

For the most part girls didn't doodle on the blackboards or the desks, didn't write poetry on the restroom walls, or any of the baser forms of entertainment we did in class. They participated in the more elaborate forms of gossip, character assassination, and being mooneyed lovestruck.

If a guy was ga-ga in love over a girl some gang might give him a hard time. It was said that Larry Briggs had a thing for a girl known as Dixie. The picked on him quite a bit about it for a while, good naturedly. The light harrassment stopped when it just lost it's novelty. That was how it was.

We were a vicious bunch, always looking for a chink in someone's armor to berate someone, anyone, mercilessly. Once you showed a weakness, we were on you. We were quick to tear down each others accomplishments and to ridicule each other for their failings.

In short, we hated each other.

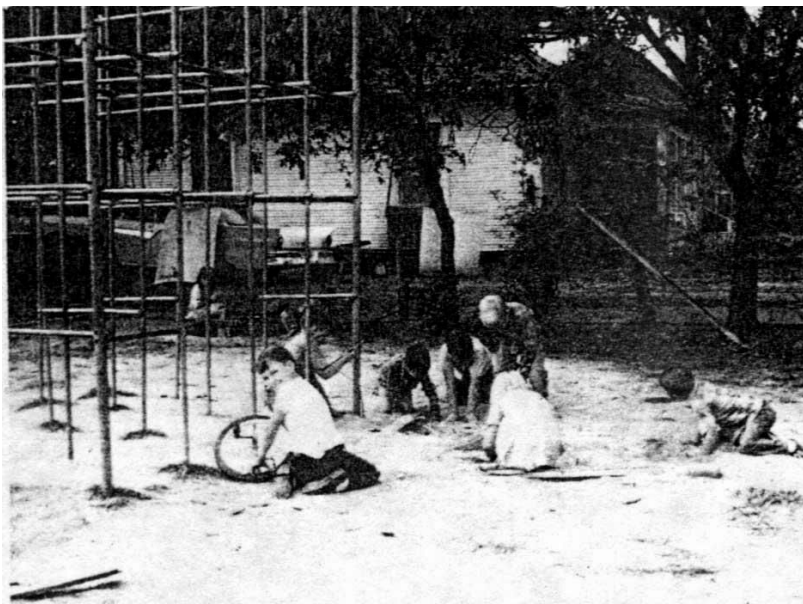
The First Word

In the Greenville paper was an announcement about our new gym. As I read this small news item I had mixed feelings about it. Yes, we were getting a new gym. Yippee. The darn thing wasn't due to even start being built until March. As an adolescent and being in the position of being on a gym-less basketball team I believed we needed the gym now, and they should build it now so we could practice and play in it now.

I read on. Projected costs of the structure was \$200,000 dollars. I figured that to be just about right. In my teenaged mind I actually thought they would rebuild the gym on the same spot where it stood and build it as an identical structure with the required improvements. It would have been nice to have toilets inside the gym and showers that didn't freeze a guy when he desperately needed a shower and give him the crawling crud on his feet.

I was to discover that the School Board had other ideas about where to put the new gym. They were eyeballing the territory north of the old field and on the playgrounds. In order to accomodate this structure our old seesaw stand would have to go, along with the slide, both sets of swings, the merry-go-round, and possibly the monkey bars. In short, they were going to sacrifice the entire old play ground for our new gym.

I had a special love for the swings and monkey bars that were now destined to be moved or become scrap. Back in the mid-sixties Larry Hukill and I played Space Rangers on the monkey bars. They were our spaceship. We went to unexplored planets and distant stars. Even Rickey Graham would join in a space fantasy or two. I had no idea that they were going to scrap my spaceship. Even if I did I couldn't have stopped them.



Above: Kids playing at the Monkey Bars. Below: Space Rangers



The swings were our jet fighters where I'd battle evil pilots and occasionally get shot down. I could bail out at the top to the arc of the upswing and 'parachute' 6 or more feet to the ground. Nobody ever got hurt doing this, and boys and girls both bailed out of swings high up. The swings were to be moved, not scrapped.

The playground was a weird place of fantasy, dreams, and unrestrained fun. By this time next year it would only be a memory.

Switching Gears

One of the most difficult psychological things to do is to switch from the mentality of football to the mentality of basketball. A large amount of highschool athletes at LOHS found this change so difficult that they simply gave up trying to play basketball. They ended up spending the season in what I considered the dark catacombs of study hall.

I had difficulty switching to basketball mode, made even more difficult by lack of real practice time and any coaches finding time to show me what I needed to know. All through High School I never quite made the switch, and that gave me the attitude that basketball had never been good to me, with the exception of that great 1972 team I had been incredibly lucky to be on. Guys wouldn't throw me the ball because I couldn't dribble and I had a lousy shot. Because of that I concentrated nearly 100% of my time on defense. I relentlessly attacked, attacked, attacked. I went after the ball, tried to block shots, and deflect passes. Using my arms and legs to maximum ability I could make throwing the ball in very difficult. I often baited a player with my wide stance to make him try to throw the ball through my legs. I'd quickly bring my legs together, kicking the ball out of bounds. I may have been a sorry offensive player, but on defense they had to respect me.

I watched Danny Bowman and learned. When I threw the ball in I took into account everything I had seen Danny do. He'd point at a guy's feet and say "3 feet", meaning he was supposed to give

him a 3 foot leeway on the in-bound. When the guy looked down Danny would rocket a pass to anyone who was open.

Danny used headfakes and misdirection to throw the ball in, too. He would focus on a phantom off to one side and would even use head and hand signals to make the guy in front of him think there was actually a guy off to his left, for instance. When the guy faded left to cover the phantom Danny would quickly inbound it. I learned to be quite good at this myself. On rare occasions when I play basketball today I use the fakes to great effect.

I watched and I learned. My dislike of Danny was turning into grudging admiration. I knew he was one terrific basketball player so I copied everything I could of his methods. I really began to think quite highly of the tall, blond, Gomer Pyle looking fellow, but I refused to admit it to myself.

Practices went on as best they could, both on the frozen concrete pad and in whatever gym we could get. Once we went to Bland Grade School and practiced on the most unusual court I have ever seen. It was a redone auditorium, and only about half the size of a real basketball court. We found this place bizarre. It had a stage at one end, and we kept losing the ball up in there. About all this accomplished was to let us practice in shorts for a change and on a wood floor. Something had to be done because it was getting far too cold to practice outside anymore.



One day we had a one on one practice session out on the pad. We saw some really tough contests. Danny took on Robert, and Dennis Grey took on Johnny Macharhen in two of the best battles. Everybody got to participate. My matchup was looked upon as the game of the day. I had to take on Gonga.

This was a very slow but difficult match. I had relied extensively on passing away as a safety valve. Now I had nobody to pass to. I had no fakes and fakes to pull on Gonga so all I could do was get between him and the ball and frantically think of something to do. I would slowly drive for the basket with him draped around me like some gigantic cloud. He was wearing this big, black knee length coat open like wings under his arms and that only made it more difficult. I had no idea what to do. I forced some shots, missed, and Gonga used his 6 foot plus size to get the rebound. If I jumped as high as I could I had a chance to block his flat-footed shots. In the end he beat me.

Such was our outdoor practices. We had no points of reference, no marks, no circles, and no lines to tell us what was what. The entire practice was catch as catch can.

If we had Philip, Dan Webb, Rickey Graham, Ricky McCallum, and especially a gym to practice in, I truly believed we could have been a first class district contender. Even in the shape we were in we were able to match the also-rans and sometimes beat them. As bad as it seemed at the time it wasn't really all that horrid, considering our circumstances.



The girls practiced in almost the same situation we did. It was as cold and as nasty for them as it was for us. They had occasional use of the Greenville Y.M.C.A. for practice. They played basically half court, so they could adjust to the situation better. They were playing a lot better than we were in the overall standings.

Other things began to catch up to all of us. We had no bleachers to run, and we didn't do any exercises. We were now losing our physical edge.

The Fine Young Men

They were the Jock Clique. Everybody in the entire school knew their names. Some children held them in the same slack-jawed awe that we held the heroes of our time in. They were Danny, Robert, Frankie, Eddie, Sachs, Johnny Hooten, and (to a certain degree) Gunner. The three who dominated the group appeared to be Danny, Robert, and Frank.

Those of us in the Nerd Clique beheld them as a monolith in their togetherness. We held them all 3 in high contempt for the abuse we recieved from them. As we saw it they were a group of inseperable buddies, darn near blood brothers. In fact this clique of individuals was wracked with individualism.

Frank, for unexplained reasons, had an attitude. I guess he was brought up to believe in defending his personal space and honor at all costs. It made him rough, tough, and hard to get along with. I always thought he was buddy-buddy with Danny and Robert like I was with Randy and Herman. It wasn't so. Often Frankie would push it to the edge and Robert would have to tell him to back off his case or pay what probably would have been a very high price. I percieved Frankie as arrogant and pushy. I also admired his incredibly wirey strength and remarkable endurance. Even Danny was awed by Frank's atheletic ability. If Frankie hadn't been a smoker, and if he ran track in high school I think he could have been State qualified miler. He was fast and long lasting.

Danny and Robert grew up together and were related to each other. They were buddies as far back as the sandpile and plastic army man days. Having grown up together they were like brothers. This friendship is what gave the Jock Clique an appearance of solidarity.

Herman liked them even less than I did, and he dubbed these honor-laden scholars and athletes "the Fine Young Men", with an air of contempt. Being on the receiving end of jokes, insults, abuse, and general bullying left all of us in my clique with a bad view of these gentlemen that they seemed not to perceive. If they did, they seemed to remain aloof of our view of them.

As I have said I secretly admired Danny and I tried to be like him. Subconsciously he was inspiring me now more than Rickey was. Robert himself had forced me to find the courage and drive to stick it out in the line as he pounded me and I learned his tricks. Both of these fellows were outstanding 17 year olds, but not to those of us at the bottom of the pecking order.

Because Rabbit and I played football with these men some of them cut us more slack than usual. They respected us more than Herman or Gary, for instance. Once, just for funsies, I arm wrestled Robert. Arm wrestling was a fad and occupied part of the time in a study hall. Robert stuck his massive fore-arm and huge hand up on the desk top and I put my skinny arm and delicate hand up against it. We joined grips, and started. Robert just held his hand up there and I pulled and pushed and tugged. Robert just grinned.

"Any time, Tornt. Have ye started yet? C'moan!"

I couldn't even budge that huge arm, but I didn't really expect to. Robert was being Robert, big and funny. Finally he just took my arm down in a smooth motion. Some of the guys in the class enjoyed the nuttiness of the whole thing and I did too. That was just about the most fun I ever had with Robert, and the first time he didn't really seem to treat me with real contempt.

Because Robert maintained the air of a big dumb lineman, which he wasn't, I didn't know that he was the leader of the Jocks. For instance, he'd have an idea and Danny would follow along. Both of these guys grew up fast, hanging out with older siblings, and learning the rougher adult ways a bit too soon. Danny had his nose broken a couple of times playing "touch" football with his family, and Robert had experiences just as tough. These two guys grew up fast and hard, and were expected to achieve. It must've been a hard burden to bear.

I'd sometimes kid Danny, telling him to take care of that "Golden Arm" of his. The real facts were that if he went down on the field or basketball court from injury we were sunk. In football we had Neel for backup quarterback, but as good as Neel was he wasn't Danny.

Our moments of rapport with the Jock Clique were rare and in my group's minds often outweighed by the abuse we took. The Fine Young Men were the upmost males in our class, and I personally tried repeatedly to prove to them that I could play football with the best of them. I did not know just how much of their respect I really had because I was somewhat blinded by my dislike for most of them.

I wanted to be tough like Frankie Payne, fast like Danny Bowman, and big and powerful like Robert Vice.

Pictures! We got Pictures!

It was another one of those cold, wet, and rainy days so typical of 1972. Today was picture day. Without much ado we put on our basketball uniforms for the one and only time at our home court. Varsity put on the blue shorts and white tops. Junior Varsity somehow rustled up some RED shorts to wear with the red tops.

The red shorts were found in a box of gear believed lost when the gym burned down. I don't know where they found them but I was delighted that they did. There weren't enough red shorts for everybody, so J.V. wound up with them. I felt some better about that. I had only given this box of goodies a once over, thinking Coach Brookins had found another bargain of uniforms like the ones he did before. The odd thing was that these uniforms were the same cotton and nylon style we had worn last year. In fact, they were the uniforms we wore last year! They had survived the fire by being kept forgotten in a closet in the school. We didn't know that.

Clad in our mixed uniforms we walked outside to the concrete pad for our photo op. The concrete was in it's usual state; wet and cold. The photographer tried to get a good picture of us standing, but that didn't work. He decided to get the J.V. team to kneel facing the camera in front of the Varsity. Having one leg up wouldn't do, so we put both knees down on that cold, wet, gritty pavement. We were cracking jokes and cutting up quite a bit, but you culdn't tell from the expression on most of our faces. It was cold, man! Some of us encouraged the photographer to hurry up, then we fled into the Ag classroom after he took the shot, wiping the grit off our knees.

Once we got inside we got our individual pictures by standing in front of a piece of wall panelling. I wore my socks in the traditional leg stripe pattern, and I was the only team member to do so. Larry Hukill had the right idea, but he didn't set up his tube socks on his baseball socks right. Gonga just wore baseball socks. Everybody else wore the red banded white tube socks so popular then. Notable was that Roy Crow wore deckshoes. I could empathize.

That was picture day that cold December morning, and the only pictures of us in our uniforms on the home court.



Mr. Peppermint

There were things I really enjoyed doing. I enjoyed drawing the most, and football came a close second. With my artwork as a refuge I was having a happy time, in spite of the fact that our season that was staggering along. In my closed world of cartoon adventures things made sense and I had control. Out here things seemed to be going to be out of control or simply didn't make any sense. Evening study halls were boring beyond belief. Normally we'd be in the gym or some such, but now we had no place to go. It was too cold and wet to go out and play basketball on the concrete or baseball out in the mud soaked fields. Coach Taylor tried to fill the void with an extra credit class on personal hygiene but the class didn't catch on too well.

Mrs. Baldwin, our typing teacher, also taught a speech class in the science building. This was a little chaotic and fun as all get out. I gave a demonstration of my drawing style and drew several quick drawings on the black board. Somebody in the highly amused class asked me to draw somebody, so I did a caricature of Martha as best as my untrained ability would let me. I think poor Martha was a bit insulted, for I did not do her true beauty anything near justice. She sat there being inscrutable and doing a slow burn.

Martha herself did a wonderful demonstration of flower arranging. She took several artificial flowers and a block of styrofoam. In seconds she had a very attractive arrangement. I was much impressed by this. Martha was always full of surprises, and I guess I liked her more than I would admit to myself at the time.

Herman played golf and Danny kidded him with a double entendre about his 'putter'. Herman brought his golf bag to school and made a verbal jab at Danny with the putting iron. To Herman's and my surprise Danny and most everybody else didn't get it.

The speech class also included a writing class. Mrs. Baldwin also taught this one, and one of the things we were to do was to describe ourselves. I took the angle of someone who knew and admired me and I told the reader that "Charles Tarrant is a wonderful fellow. He's saved my life many times. We go everywhere together." Ms. Baldwin thought it was so unique and amusing that she personally talked to me about this essay. Rather than write "I am Charles. I like to draw. I like to watch T.V. etc", I had put in a most unusual paper.

I was amused by my own stunt, but I wasn't sure if it had been good or bad. Usually when a teacher gives a person one on one instruction it means that person has done something wrong. My mental processes weren't sure how to deal with this.

We also wrote an essay about our "ideal girl" if we were a guy or our "ideal boy" if we were a girl. I just started writing, and the image took shape. She would be a lady of high moral fiber, a bit of an athlete, someone who took care of themselves, dressed nice but not showy, and was intelligent. Having an oversexed version of Raquel Welch would be loads of fun for a while, but who are you going to talk to later? I wanted a girl with brains, to talk about science and technology, sports, politics, and philosophy. That was the type of lady I figured I wanted to marry, and it was the type of girl I was looking for.

Without knowing it I had accurately described Julia or perhaps Martha. I think they made great impressions on me as to how a real lady should behave. When I saw Gabrielle Drake on U.F.O. that just re-enforced the ideal. Spider-man's girlfriend Gwen Stacy was also a high qualifier, but I didn't know much about Spider-man or Gwen Stacy at that time.

Back in the slow moving world of study hall we all found different ways to amuse ourselves. We had a lot of energy to burn off and some of this was spent picking on Martha (of course), or

Elaine. David Morgan especially loved to go after the increasingly beautiful Martha. He drove her crazy.

Mr Dial usually left us alone in there, to take care of paperwork and other school business, as he was the principal. Playing Woodyball, drawing, or playing dice basketball had replaced such antics as Civil-War Navy and Bomber. Mr. Dial knew I played dice basketball with Herman and Randy the Rabbit, so we could now pursue this past time openly and without fear of the powers that be descending on us. To our delight, we were trusted.

Sing alongs somehow crept into the study hall. One thing we did was a military-like song accompanied by two stomps of the feet at the end of each line. The first time we did this Mr. Dial came back into his room angry as a wet hen.

"I can hear you clear down the hall! Stop that foot stomping!"

So we did, for almost 2 whole days. When we took it back up Mr. Dial ignored us completely. Some of those foot stomping cadences were very complicated series of taps accomplished by rocking the feet in time to the song.

We were monitored by the two way P.A. system in the ceiling. I think Mr. Brookins and Mr. Dial were highly amused by the wacky goings on in study hall. One day Danny produced a comb and tissue paper and proceeded to play us a tune. He was humming up a storm, as we sat there in near total silence. I couldn't quite make out the song, but he was ripping right along when his symphony was interrupted by the voice of Mr. Dial over the P.A.

"Mr. Peppermint. Mr. Peppermint. Would you come to the office, please."

Danny flashed that big embarrassed grin he has, and slowly got out of his desk. Off to the office he went.

Silence fell over the room. Then David Dillon and Gunner put their ears against the wall to see if they could hear anything in the principal's office next door.

Danny Bowman the Sheepdog was an honor student, THE quarterback, and a star all around athlete. He didn't get in any real trouble over the tissue comb thing. I think Mr. Dial and Mr. Brookins were amusing themselves at Sheepdog's expense. For Danny to even get called to the office was a jaw-dropper for all of us.

The end result was that nobody brought anymore tissue combs, but the crazyness of study hall continued unabated.

Lightning Strikes Again

Things were a mess. Without a gym we usually met on the bus. After the very boring night I spent in 1968 after missing the bus I swore I'd not miss another one. Well, guess what I did on 19 December 1972?

I got out of school at the usual hour and pursued my normal routine. I then strolled back to school at a leisurely pace feeling like I was on time and ahead of schedule. As I entered the school gates

I noticed there was no bus parked for us to board. Confused, I sat on the front porch. I just hoped that somebody had forgot to bring the bus over.

Mrs. Chambliss came out of the school and saw me sitting there, holding my uniform bag.

"Charlie, what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for the bus, I guess. Everybody should be here by now."

"The bus is already gone. It was an early game."

Blown away, I just sat there.

"Want me to take you home, Charles?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

Off I went home. I tossed my un-used uniform on the couch and stalked by my confused parents. I watched T.V. and sulked. This was one lousy way to wait for the holidays.

I spent that game night sitting on my bed and drawing on my comics. I wondered if I could do something even more dumb. Mr. Taylor would say to me when I missed a photo-op or meeting that I had a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Man, was he ever right!

On the positive side, our boy's team won but the girl's team lost. To sort of make up for my debacle I had a good practice on the 20th. We had a holiday tournament game on the 23rd, and I waited for it along with my team mates in great anticipation.

"Hey man, nice shot!"

Overheard at a game

Not Going the Distance

Coach Taylor was unable to coach us at this particular game at the Community tournament. To take his place Coach Fannin would coach both the girl's teams and boy's teams. We all thought this would be interesting.

Coach Taylor didn't like to physically touch his players. Mr. Brookins also stayed an arm's length away. Mr. Fannin was different. He was more physical. He didn't touch the girls, but he would push us out on the floor, pat us on the back, do all that Rah-Rah stuff any physical coach would do. I had no problem with his hands-on style. He came from a time when Lone Oak played a vicious brand of football and he had a reputation for toughness and hard hitting that we were only a shadow of. Football in the late 50s and early 60s was a type of bruising, bone cracking, blood letting sport we could only guess at. Guys had their teeth knocked out, noses broken, bones snapped, and kept on playing. Mr. Fannin got a college scholarship out of that, and went to college. He got his degree at East Texas and became a coach. He really got emotionally involved in his games, and he knew his sports inside and out. He was 150% Buffalo, red and white all the way.

So we went to a tournament with him temporarily replacing Coach Taylor. It was 23 December, 1972.

Up in the bleachers of a gym I sat with Herman and Rabbit. The gym looked a lot like Caddo Mills', but it had a longer drop from the front row to the floor below. I wasn't sure where we was, nobody told me we were in Community, but I was with my friends and it didn't matter. Looking around, something drew our attention.

Sitting by himself in the center of the bleachers was a bear of a man. Stocky, slavic looking, with huge hands, he drew the attention of just about everybody in the gym. There were whispered thoughts passed around about his identity.

With a flash of revelation Rabbit pointed at him.

"That's Fritz Von Eric!"



I looked at the guy again. All the familiar features I had seen countless times on Saturday Night Wrestling on T.V. suddenly snapped into focus. It WAS Fritz Von Eric, one of the greatest professional wrestling heroes of the entire world! Wow, man!

Herman and I sat there in confusion. Do we approach him and say 'hi' and risk being ripped to shreds or do we stay here, where it's safe? In the end we stayed put. Rabbit was bolder and he went over to see the man. Mr. Von Eric was watching one of his sons play in the tournament below. He signed a piece of paper for Rabbit and Rabbit then beat a hasty retreat, grinning.

Wow, it really was the Master of the Iron Claw! A couple of other people bothered him, but most of us kept our distance out of respect, admiration, and naked fear. Soon we went to a below the bleachers locker room to dress and I never saw Mr. Von Eric in person again. When I occasionally did see him on T.V, though, I know that I had seen him, that he was real, and that he was a human being like the rest of us.

As we dressed I contemplated my jersey. I wasn't real pleased with number 51. Just as last year I had a talisman for good luck in my long gone Confederate Flag, this year I considered the #51

cursed. Too many things had gone wrong. I was not happy with it. I slid into the jersey and tucked it into my basketball shorts.



We went on the floor and the warm-up began. I missed all the stuff from last year, and Bobby Underwood was in love so he wouldn't be here. We went to the bench.

We got a quick pregame speech by Coach Fannin and out on the floor went the starters. We began our brackets in this tournament. As the game rolled on we quickly noticed that our opponents appeared to be getting very favorable calls by the refs. Some of the calls looked to us to be so one sided that it appeared flagrant. Mr. Fannin was getting very hot under the collar and he started yelling at the referees.

"Hey! What is this? Why don't you call it both ways? Can't you see that foul up there?"

They called a technical foul on Coach Fannin! His large eyes narrowed considerably. He folded his big arms and glared out on the court.

"So thats the way it's going to be, huh?"

This rapidly developed into a fiasco. Some Lone Oak girls were up in the bleachers and they booed mightily at each one-sided call. Once David Lemons was coming down the floor. Nobody was within 10 feet of him, and a reff called a foul.

Mr. Fannin was more than a little disgusted by this time. If the reffs weren't going to let us play basketball then we'd just fool around. He looked down the bench where I was, yelling at the idiotcy going on out on the floor.

"Bulchor, go in for David."

I looked at him in disbelief. Had he lost his mind? We needed David out there, in spite of the questionable calls. I figured he'd have me out there just for a little while, like I was at Bland last year, then he'd put in who ever he really wanted to play. I didn't question what I believed to be my good fortune. Out came David Lemons, in went Charles Tarrant.

Up and down the floor in a disorganized mob we went. We tried to play ball but these lousy reffs were calling a lot of things that just weren't there. For me, the most memorable moment of the night was at hand. I broke open during a fast break. I was almost under the basket and off to the left side of it. The ball was zipped to me. Opposition players decended on me like hawks. I thought fast. I stood flat footed and heaved the ball up toward the basket. It was trying to bounce it off the backboard into the net. I gave it a bit too much, released too early, and the ball flew over the top of the backboard and fell behind it!

Hey, man, nice shot!

The crowd hooted. I looked at my hands and walked in a small circle. I was angry, embarrassed, and unhappy. This entire situation stank. I had just embarrassed myself in front of all my team mates, a coach, and about 100 people I did not know. It was as embarrassing to me as losing my shorts. To this collected mob I would forever be the 'skinny kid who threw it over the backboard'.

Coach Fannin left me in. As we went up and down the floor some more I hollered at the bench to take me out. Coach Fannin shook his head and told me to stay in. I was doing o.k. in his opinion.

Sometime after this another bad call brought Coach Fannin to his feet. The reff called a second technical and threw Coach Fannin out of the game!

Calmly Coach Fannin got up and packed up his gear. He looked at all of us.

"Boys," he said, "lets get out of here."

Danny looked over the situation. We were behind. We were apperantly playing the reffs as well as the other team. It was a hopeless cause. Even if we could stay there was no chance. For the first time in my life we quit a game in progress. We packed up our gear and left without comment.

Big Red didn't quit, but we would certainly walk out when we knew it wasn't fair. Still, I hated to leave. We had no choice. Without an adult to run the team we could no longer play. The game was over. Gunner gave us his opinion in the locker room, as we got out of our uniforms.

"Forget these guys, man! If they don't wanna play fair and square I say we're right to walk out and to blazes with all of them."

After my over-the-board toss I had tried to redeem myself on defense. I had not done it. I was now famous for something else. It stuck in my craw.

Hey, man, good shot 51!

I had wadded up #51 and jammed it into my sack. I hated the thing. I focused all my frustrations of this bleak season on that one mass of red, white, and blue trimmed cloth. I would not wear it again, oh never, never, never! Once we got back to the school house I'd look for a new one. I had never been this angry at a sporting event in my life. Nobody said anything to me in the locker room or the bus back. My one lousy shot was overshadowed by the entire game and the treatment we recieved at the hands of the reffs. The ribbing for the over the backboard shot would come later, but right now we were all very angry. Christmas vacation was here and after this night of complete bull we were ready for it. We had quit the tournament so we wouldn't be back there again.

It was hard for me to believe that seeing Fritz Von Eric might be the high point of the entire season! This was truly "Purgatory!"

Shaking It Off

I was digging around in a box of our basketball gear we had. There were some of the old uniforms recently rediscovered among the booty. I now dispised #51 and I had it laying on a desk

nearby. Coach Fannin had let me in this room and he let me see if I could find a jersey I liked better than the one I had. He left me in there alone, telling me to lock up the room when I was finished. My resolve was, that tight as money might be, if I had to I'd buy my own jersey someplace. I wasn't wearing #51 anymore.

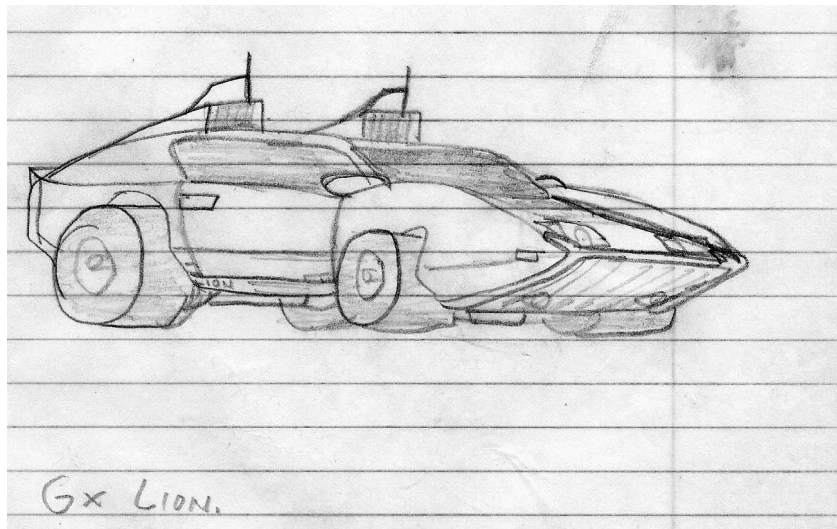
I was hot and angry. I was totally ticked off. I had retrieved my old #4 from home and now I wanted a number on my red jersey I could live with. Mr. Fannin knew this, and he was cutting me some slack on this account. I was just about to give up digging endlessly through the box, and I had been told to get a move on because Mr. Fannin wanted to go home. Suddenly I found it. I pulled it from the box with panting breath. There it was! My number 12! My number from last year! It was mine, by thunder! I would be #12 again, just like last year!

I sat on the floor, holding the red and white memory of a season unlike any other. I clutched it to my chest and remembered the glory of that year. Now I had it back. I felt like I had found an old friend. I hoped it would bring back the spirit of victory we had from last year. I could not say. I was just so happy to have #12 again. I thought at the time that it wasn't the same jersey. I believed it had been immolated last year. I was to find out later that this was the jersey I had worn, that the fire never got it. That made the memory of it even stronger.

I wadded up #51 and stuffed it in the box, deep in the bottom. I put the box back up, and left the room. I had #12 in my fist and I wasn't about to let anybody else wear it again for as long as I was in school.

Slowly but surely we were getting our team colors back. I felt better about my number and I had a little hope for what remained of basketball season. Only time would tell. We had roughly 6 losses and 1 win with the Varsity boys.

My Car



It looked like a cross between a Lamorgini Countach and a sporty hatchback. It had a monster engine in the back, rated at 587 cubic inches and supercharged to around 1200 gas gulping horsepower. It seated two in a built in roll cage with bucket seats and a chest harness. It had computer assisted driving controls and a simi-automatic computer enhanced gearbox and drive

train. It was glossy red (of course) and had chrome trim all over it. It existed only on notebook paper, and it was all mine. I called this ultimate imaginary car the Lion.

I knew practically nothing about real cars beyond a few basic operations and simple mechanics. This overpowered hot rod was my dream car, its design unlike any other. I drew this car from time to time and modified it regularly to each new discovery and whim.

The car was not air conditioned, and had manual crank windows. It had a 2 way radio long before the C.B. craze, and an 8 track player stereo/radio set up. The body was plastic, for lightness. It was built for straight line speed and raw power, sort of like a funny car. I figured it could do a quarter mile at about 250 miles and hour. Internal comforts were secondary, just like most of the hot rods around Lone Oak and Greenville.

After I sat in the Cobra helicopter at Greenville during the airshow I discovered the compact but powerful turbine engine. I transplanted this small 1500 horsepower rated monster into the Lion. This changed the shape of the rear deck and enabled me to add a spoiler. I also changed the color of the car to British Racing Green.

I became so fond of this concept car that I drew color pictures of it. My friends thought not too much of it, more content with realistic vehicles. Their dream cars were Camaros, Corvettes, or Mustangs. I was the only guy there with a turbine powered monster, but it was expected that 'Tornt' would have something like that.

Most guys who could draw even a little had a concept car they loved. Often they drew a stylish vehicle with sleek lines, lots of chrome, mag wheels, and huge slick tires.

This was the era of the so called 'Muscle Car', though back then we just called them hotrods. The average engine was over 300 cubic inches, and over 300 horsepower. These cars usually had great speed in a straight line, but cornered like an overloaded dump truck. Bucket seats and a 4 speed manual transmission or '4 on the floor' was the rage. The rear bumper had to be about belt buckle high to give the car that low in front 'racy' look. A stereo was a simple a.m. radio and 8 track player set into or suspended under the dashboard. Front and rear speakers were a must.

A common muscle car could do a top speed of over 120 mph and could cruise easily but dangerously at 90. With the primitive suspensions on these heavy road hogs every bump hit at this speed had a good chance of propelling the vehicle into the nearest ditch. It was surprising that very few of the kids at Lone Oak got killed in these high speed crashes. We'd often hear about somebody rolling their car or truck, and they'd be at school the next day without so much as a scratch and telling us all about the crack-up.

Bobby Underwood had a medium green Maverick he drove like he was possessed. I was once up at Jack Evan's store drinking chocolate milk under the roof of the service area when I heard what sounded like someone locking up all four brakes. I spun around and saw Woody's green car coming up Highway 69 sideways. He expertly threw the vehicle into gear, popped the clutch, and blew the car up into FM 1564 toward his home. He had just executed a perfect power-slide. I freaked out.

"That boy is crazy!"

One of the local sages agreed. I finished my milk, got astride my old bicycle, and peddled home. On the main support that went to the banana seat on my dark green bike frame was the number 426, representing the engine I wished I had on this, my 'car'. On that bike I was driving my Lion, with my lady by my side, and Creedence Clearwater playing in the stereo. Yee ha!

Christmas, 1972

Christmas was a lot like Thanksgiving, but a bit more festive. There was also the prospect of gifts showering us in abundance. It was hard not to be greedy.

This particular Christmas was celebrated in Sulphur Springs at my Aunt Corienne's house. Her husband's name was Pete, and he was the first bald fellow I ever saw. He was also a first class Volkswagen mechanic, and worked on the bug-like cars in his garage next to his house. He was a WWII veteran of the Pacific, an Engineer. I think he had been in New Guinea. For such a diminutive and quiet fellow to be an honest to goodness veteran was something I didn't fully understand until near the end of his life. I gave him all due respect once I knew the story.

Aunt Corienne was the youngest of my father's sisters and she was both sweet and beautiful. Soft spoken and shy, she was incredible. When I was in my pre-teen years I loved to stay at her place and hang around her boy named Sonny. He taught me chess, and let me ride his horse. I thought it was one of the coolest places on earth.

Adding to the festivities, my cousins from San Antonio arrived. In the joy filled melee that ensued from our getting together I gave cousin Ronnie part of my cherished Cape Canaveral set. He thought it was pretty neat. We had a great Christmas together, and that made everything feel good again. The tournament, the over the backboard toss, all seemed to fade into the background. I was happy again.

So it was that I went back to L.O.H.S. and my frustration of trying to figure out what a basketball was for. Still, I now had number 12 and I was ready for the next game. At least, I hoped I was.

Doofus and Goofus

Gunner and I had eaten heartily at the Bean Pot Cafe that his mother ran in front of Lone Oak. The weather was tolerable for a change, so we decided to walk the half mile or so to the school and wait for the gang to arrive. There were no friends of ours in the cafe, and we were bored, so we figured we could be bored just as easily on the bus as in the cafe. Off we went.

Upon arriving at the school we also discovered we were the only ones there. We deposited our uniform bags on the bus in choice seats and waited for anybody to show up. I sat in the bus driver's seat and looked over the maze of buttons and switches clustered to my front and left.

"Cool! I wonder what this does?"

Gunner came up and joined in the guessing game with me. I saw a red switch on the steering column. It didn't pull out, so it must push in.

Click!

The emergency flashers on top of the fenders to my front came on. I pulled on the switch to shut them off.

Snap!

It came off in my hands! Oops!

Gunner and I both tried to pull the switch back out of the recess where it had snapped cleanly off. Being unsuccessful we once more did what anyone in our situation would do, and we did it without a single thought or hesitation otherwise.

WE RAN!

We hesitated only long enough to get our gear and then we hauled it out of there.

Exiting out the bus door at high speed we fled willy-nilly to the church not far from the front of the school. We stayed on the shadowy front porch of the church, keeping a sharp lookout. There, in the growing dimness of the sunset, sat the bus, its emergency flashers going steadily.

Gunner and I figured that if we got caught it would be our hides. I knew Coach Taylor's temperment from the window incident and I didn't want to pay for a new light switch on the bus. As we watched, Coach Taylor drove up. He came directly to the front of the bus and honked loudly. We saw him get out and go into the bus.

"Now's our chance!" Gunner advised.

Gunner and I took off back up town. We hesitated a few moments, then turned around and started running up the street in front of the post office. Both of us were in pretty good shape, so this little run to the front of town didn't even have us winded.

After a few moments Gunner decided we should go back. Looking innocent as lambs we walked back to the school. Mr. Taylor hadn't moved his car and the flashers were still going. We entered the bus.

"What happened?" Gunner asked.

Mr. Taylor had a pair of needle nose pliers and was trying to pull the switch on the steering column.

"Aw, some no good so and so broke the switch on the flashers. I can't turn them off."

I tried not to blush with embarrassment.

"Lemme see," I said. If I fixed this I would have vindicated myself.

Mr. Taylor handed me the pliers and went to go call Stoney. Gunner and I tinkered unsuccessfully with the switch.

Frustrated, Mr. Taylor moved the bus, got another one, and put it in place for us to board. Stoney arrived and unhooked the battery on the flashing bus, stopping the lights.

"I'll fix it tomorrow," Stoney drawled, and went home.

In this manner we started our trip to Leonard for the tournament. My bad luck was still going strong, and this had seemed to have been a bad omen. Every time I'm with Gunner something bad seemed to happen. And this wasn't the last time either.

To the Leonard Tournament

Leonard was, at it's best, hostile territory in 27 Dec. 1972. Danny especially disliked them, and I had no love for them after the '42 to 6' and 'We want Buzzard' incident of last year. I had Randy Price and Herman Crist with me to keep me out of trouble. Heck, I didn't even miss Rick, and I had forgotten all about Philip and Woody being gone. This was the festive Holiday Season! Christmas was in the air and all my buddies chatted constantly about U.F.O. and my comics. Life was good for the time being and it didn't matter one whit what went down on the maple. We were together and having a good time.

We were doing something this year we saw a lot of teams do last year. We were concentrating on one guy to get all our points. Danny was the best shot we had and every effort was made to get the ball to him. He usually dominated the stats, and we usually lost. This doesn't take anything from Danny. It is just the other guys, including myself, didn't have the skill, ability, and confidence he did. It just wasn't there. That was one of the reasons a lot of us didn't care if we lost anymore. There were other reasons.

The girls at the basketball games were a special distraction. Clustered in the bleachers we'd often oggle the ladies on the floor and on the bench. The Heraldic color combinations of the uniforms added a great splash of color to the ladies moving about on the floor. At that time it was just a pleasant distraction and I noticed no single lady above all others unless she was on our team.

Gunner would make lecherous remarks from time to time and I could get Rabbit to give me evaluations of this or that girl. I considered Rabbit to be an expert, sort of like a Casanova. We knew the personalities of the girls on our team so not much was said about them.



Rabbit

With pleasantries like talking about girls, science fiction, and what we all got for Christmas, we just didn't really care about the game we were to play that night. When the games started things went predicably bad for us. In spite of some excellent efforts by most of us there we fell to West Lamar, 47 to 40. Danny had 14 of the 40 points we had.

Our girls also lost, losing 48 to 34. Ruby Williams had 32 of the points for Lone Oak, doing about 90% of the scoring!

On December 28 we back for more. Our girls played Whitewright and were defeated, 41 to 34.



When Danny saw who we were meeting in our next contest he was beside himself. It was Cooper! I am sure he could hardly wait. He and Robert got their blood up. This could be revenge for the stomping we got in football season!

From the tip-off on it was a fearsome battle. It was 46 to 34 at the half, our lead! After the halftime performance of hoop-shooting by the non-starters, the contest continued. Our bench was restless, for all of us wanted Cooper to go down to defeat.

Our morale soared as the third quarter ended. It was 56 to 47, our favor. We were really into a basketball game for the first time this month.

Cooper took a good look at the situation they were in. If they lost to these upstart Buffalo goons from south of the Sabine they'd not live it down. It was time for Cooper to get down to business.

On the bench we watched with alarm as Cooper began to cut into our 9 point lead. Mr. Taylor didn't want this one to slip away, it was our best opportunity for the entire year. He tried to urge the Buffaloes on, giving advice and words of caution. I do not think he was listened to entirely.

Danny, Robert, and David Lemons especially did not want to lose this one golden opportunity. Playing as well as they could, Lone Oak held on and just got by Cooper, 71 to 69! Cooper had almost beat us, but instead it was they who were eliminated from the contest. We waved bye bye to our foes as they left the floor in a bit of a huff.

Danny had 21 points but he was outscored in this contest by Robert, who had 22! We had won our second game of the season, making us about 2 and 7 over all.

December 29th we were right back at it, and with our confidence up over our last victory. There was a feeling of power among us, for we had tasted the fruits of victory over a disliked rival and wanted more. In our path was Como-Picton.

To our collected and great delight we ran right over Como-Picton. The score was 15 to 7 in the first quarter, with us outscoring them more than two to one! By the second half we had the poor fellows running confused circles, with a score of 32 to 12. During the usual halftime activities some of us dared to speculate about actually getting to play a little in this game.

So it was that Mr. Taylor cautiously substituted. He didn't want to lose this chance of staying in the tournament, but he didn't want to blow Como-Picton off the floor either. This was a most unusual

position for us to be in this year, and we loved it! The game ended with a respectable 65 to 45, with both team's honor in tact.

Danny got 27 points for us, and David Lemons got 10.

I thought David was just amazing. He was even shorter than I was, but he had a few pounds more than I. He was very fast, and he could actually play basketball far better than anyone his size on the entire basketball team, including Junior High.

He was to tell me that he regretted not playing basketball his other high school years. I admit we could have used his abilities in the past. He had, like many others, played one year too late. The Championship team was gone, and the trophies we got were in the case. For him, Herman, Randy Price, Gonga, and some others, the opportunity had gone. Here they could only hope to grab a little glory for themselves. I considered myself to be exceptionally lucky to have been on that 72 team.

We were dissappointed that we got beat in the consolation finals, and history does not even record the score. We were still happy to have gotten that far. Our team record was 3 and 8. I guess getting rid of #51 jersey brought us some luck after all!

Ambush on Ronald

Lover's lanes dot the landscape. Any secluded spot of resonable privacy is a good place to go neck. The only bad thing about this for the people involved is that when other folks know of somebody's spot. They might go look this person up when they get tired of gossiping in town. Ronald was on the recieving end of one of these visits.

Late at night, somewhere deep in the woods down one of the thousands of backroads near Lone Oak, Ronald and his date were kissing up a storm. The windows were fogged over on his Dodge, and both participants were lost in the moment. Little did they suspect what was about to happen.

In Lone Oak Randy Price and I were zipping around in his yellow van. There were a lot of guys and girls sitting around in front of Lone Oak and so we stopped to chat with them. All of a sudden, and for no reason at all, somebody got the idea to go to a known lover's lane. We all took off in a 5 car caravan. We had no idea what we'd do when we got there, but it was something to do.

In minutes we arrived at a clearing in the woods. To our surprise Ronald's car was found down there. Boisterous individuals desended like crows on Ronald's car, flood lit by the headlights.

Ronald was not real happy. His date was a little terrified. I don't think she knew anybody there. I certainly didn't know who she was. We bugged Ronald mercilessly. People sat on the hood of his car, others bounced the car on it's springs and made lewd remarks.

Amazingly, Ronald put up with this for over 10 minutes before he cranked his car. He revved his engine at the guys sitting on the hood and threw the vehical in gear. The fellows didn't move, so Ronald honked at them. One dove off, but the others remained on. Ronald started to drive off with his organic hood ornaments in place. Seeing that Ronald was for real they got off the hood and Ronald drove angrily off. Cat calls and lewd jokes followed his departure. Randy Price and I were laughing it up.

This left me with the impression that Ronald was some sort of a Cassanova. Nothing for the next full decade would do anything to change that impression. This was the only time I ever went on an expedition to bust up somebody's privacy on a lover's lane.

Decades later Ronald was still angry about this incident.

"One man's trash is another man's treasure."

traditional

The Old Bus Barn

East of the playground, next to the monkey bars, was a corrugated tin structure that once was the old bus barn. This shed was used for maintenance and repair of Lone Oak's busses before the Ag-Shop took over these tasks. The place now sat idle and it was decided to remove the building once and for all.

Several consecutive Ag classes attacked this unfortunate shed, removing the tin from the roof and sides in rapid succession. Scavengers were already begging for some of the junk, discovered deep in the confines of the old shop. The floor had been earth, and had several layers of caked on grease and oil in spots. In this mess we found old forgotten tools, various vehical parts, and items we could only identify as junk.

Mr. Trimble had a trailer backed up to the shed and we spent the class time loading sheet tin from the shed onto it. We wore the same big thick brown leather gloves we used to weld with. This made carrying the metal a bit more difficult, but it prevented cuts and scratches. Nobody complained about this activity. It was outside and a refreshing change from the monotony of class work.

Looking around in the mess that was this shop, we discovered there were several shop tools here similar to what we also had in the Ag Shop. There was a grinder, a drill press, and an electric arc-welder that had seen better days. Some of us suggested this was the 'old ag shop'. I suppose it might have been. The new Ag shop with its attached class room, science room, and the concrete basketball court had been added to the school just before my Freshman year. I had never had a class in this drafty old building we were now tearing down.

One day in my Freshman year we were in front of the brand new Ag shop watching a big scorpion-like back-hoe digging a deep pit in the ground just to one side of the front garage door entrance. All of us Ag-boys watched on with interest as the back-hoe removed a huge quantity of red clay from the hole. With shovels it would have taken us a week or more to get that much out of there. Mr. Trimble was supervising this excavation so we didn't have a class. Before we knew it we had to go to our next class. We could hear the back-hoe running for most of the day. When we returned to Ag class the next day there was a drying concrete slab over the hole. After that hardened a gas pump was installed. We had witnessed the gasoline pump that was to gas up our busses for many years to come.

Some of the local thieves got wise to this and actually stole gas out of the pump sometimes. Mr. Taylor got the idea of filling the tank with diesel fuel. This would make the thief's car smoke and he might be identified in this manner. In the end I think they just cut power to the pump and installed pad-locks each evening. The stupid audacity of the local thieves amazed me.

We tore down the old bus barn over a period of 3 days. Some of us found ways to avoid working. Pretending to pick up junk was one way. On a particularly cold day several of us gathered in a chilly knot and just stood there watching. A lot of guys wore their best clothes to school and refused to work in them. Mr. Trimble got some hilarious drop-seat white coveralls to combat this problem. Rabbit and I thought they were cool and wore them most of the time we welded and did shop work.

In the end we had pulled everything salvagable thing out of the old shop. All that was left was dirt, oil, grease, and oddities.

Rick talked Mr. Trimble out of a dual set of foot pedal controls tht originally went to a driver's education car. Pleased with his aquisition, Rick put them in his old Ford and took them home. I don't think he ever found a use for them though.

As for myself, I found nothing in the old shop I wanted or needed. In a few days virtually nothing remained of the old tin building that once stood there.

The playground was next.

1 Jan 1973

New Year's was celebrated in my home in a rather docile manner. There were no toasts, no parties, nothing in particular to mark the new year. On the day after, however, it being the first day of the New Year, we ate a hearty helping of black eyed peas. This was supposed to be for 'good luck'. Good luck was what I needed right now and a lot of it.

These legumes were cooked in a large aluminum pot for hours. Flavored with bacon or fatback, the smell filled the house with a pleasant aroma. Once the pot had boiled the peas into a resonable tenderness and the soup had turned a greyish-brown they were declared fitting to eat and served up in quantity for supper.

This wasn't the only entree'. The peas were a side dish for steak, mashed potatoes, and other goodies. This was washed down with sweetened iced tea. That was a typical New Years Day at my house.

What made this less than exciting was that this was the last day of the holiday vacation. Tomorrow was a school day and I was reluctant to go back to what my classmates and I loosely referred to as 'prison'. It had not been a good year for us, sports wise and social wise. Ever since Junior High we considered ourselves State Qualified material. We just knew a State Championship Trophy would be put in the trophy case with all of our names on it. After Cooper kicked our tails we got a wake up call of the most unpleasant kind.

So far, with my classmates figuring promenantly in the games, the best we had done on the gridiron was 1 District title and 2 Second places. This was admirable, of course, but to us it simply wasn't good enough.

The last day of Christmas vacation was boring, especially after the eating of the peas. I sat in the floor and stared blankly at the inane holiday T.V. specials for a while until I decided to go see what was going on down at the Station.

I rode my bike down there in spite of the cold weather. Rick was there. I could see his car. I got off my bike and entered the place.

Rick was sitting behind the counter to my left. He pointed a gun at me and fired. With the report a long blue flame came out of the revolver's barrel. I hit the deck and looked up. Rick cackled evilly.

"It's a blank starter pistol, Buzzard!"

Happy New Year to you, too!

After that most unusual greeting I settled in for a pleasant evening of chit-chat with Rick in front of the store's space heater. He told me he had gotten the .22 caliber blank pistol out of a glass box that sold very shoddy merchandise. The pistol costs 5 dollars. A tin of ammo was about a \$1.98.

I looked in the glass display box that was on top of the counter. There was some macho looking spiked watch bands in there, various types of way over-priced jewelery, watches, and a whole lot of stuff a person didn't really need, but might want.

I would have liked to have had one of those macho watch bands because it looked so tough, but I couldn't get the money for it. The thing was so big it wouldn't fit well on my skinny wrists anyway.

As I said, none of the stuff in the glass case was well made, and usually lasted about a week so from normal wear and tear. These glass cases could be found in just about every store and market all over the county. I don't know who set them up or maintained them but all you got for our money was this junk.

A novelty we all liked was the little refrigerator magnets that had different sayings on them. They came on a black paper covered metal strip of about 20 or so. One that Rick liked a lot said "Mafia Staff Car, Keepa U Hands Off." Cars had metal dash boards back then, and he could put it on his dash. The magnet was made from a magnetized strip of some kind of rubber, and sunlight caused them to deteriorate. They didn't last in a car more than a few months before they crumbled.

I was depressed again from a lot of unimportant things. As I said, our football team had what we considered a sub-par year. Our basketball teams left a lot to be desired. I had been sick a lot more than even what was usual for me, and that had a lot to do with my feeling down. Rick cheered me up. He kept my spirits up by gossiping, telling stories, or just reliving the past seasons. He never told me why he would not play basketball.

Rick closed up the store and I went home in the chill night. I waved goodbye to my best friend on earth and I peddled home. It was a New Year. Tomorrow it was back to school and on with the longest road trip in Lone Oak basketball history.

So it was that we put 1972 behind us. Last year had seen the finest boys basketball team in the history of our school. That was the highpoint. After the class of '72 graduated there was a noticeable drop in the overall capability of the Buffaloes. A good part of this was the fact that we were in a much tougher district. Another factor was that Danny had lost at least 3 of his favorite receivers. The biggest gash, of course, was our lack of a gym. We couldn't even have real pep-rallies that thundered as before. Without a gym practice in bad weather was impossible, in both football and basketball. The Fall of 1972 was marked with terrible weather. So here we were. It was now 1973. We had the whole rest of the year ahead of us.

Once we got back to school the hi-jinks picked up right where they left off.

Somebody had accidentally tore the corner off a one dollar bill. Herman found this and decided to have a little fun. He taped the corner to a piece of paper and stuck the thing in his shirt pocket. It looked like he had a dollar in there, just sticking out. He decided to see what would happen. We went to the Ag-shop.

David Dillon, being the 'fun loving' individual he is, spotted Herman's 'dollar' right away. He walked right up and snatched it out of Herman's pocket. He chuckled evilly, as if to say 'Now what are you going to do?' When all Herman did was chuckle back Dillon couldn't figure out what the deal was. Then he looked down at his hand and saw all he had was a bogus dollar.

Realizing he had been had, or 'Got the Bird,' as we called it, he laughed and asked Herman if he could try the trick himself. The fake dollar made the rounds, and we saw the trick pulled many times that day. Herman had the immense satisfaction of knowing that he originated that trick.

Larry Briggs became increasingly withdrawn. Without McCallum to keep him happy he had very little interests and virtually no running buddies. He didn't sulk about it, but he was a bit more combative than before. He was losing interest in this school and just about everybody in it. We would watch him try to weld in the Ag-shop, and never seemed to get an arc going. He kept to himself a lot.

One day Larry just stopped showing up. Like McCallum, Dan Webb, and Philip, he was there and then he wasn't. Unlike Philip being gone I noticed Larry's absence. Once he left we did not see him again. I found out later he got a job as a welder, of all things, and got quite good at it. His sister was still around, but not him. With Larry's leaving it was the end of an era in my clique. Herman and I certainly missed McCallum and Briggs.

Basketball season stumbled on. The girls stopped fielding a J.V. team but we still had our J.V. or 'B' team. History doesn't record much of what happened to us, but I can recall that it wasn't very pleasant. The last listing we got in the paper was the game we played against Wolfe City. It was a prime example of how our season went.

Wolfe City sicked their Wolves on us and left us dazed, confused, and defeated on a cold and icy night on the 9th of January. This was now district play and all the other teams wanted to rack up as many victories as possible. We were on the receiving end a lot. Wolfe City gave us a stomping 86 to 40 in the Varsity game, and Danny had 16 points. Before that our girls had won by beating Wolfe City 53 to 27. Francis Johnson had 30 points. We 'B' teamers were on the floor before that and we got collectively took to the cleaners, 69 to 20. Ouch! It had been a bad night and there would be nine more to follow.

There were some memorable moments out of this. Herman sat in the back of the bus, and a girl of outstanding repute, either Julia or Neicy, more likely Julia, had sat next to him. As time went by the girl drowsily put her head on Herman's shoulder, very much to Herman's delight. When the predictable ribbing of the situation took place the lady merely opened her eyes and said "He's harmless."

Harmless, indeed! If only she could read his mind.

"The trouble with being a good sport is

that you have to lose to prove it."

traditional

The Road Trip Ends

For us, this miserable season seemed to go on and on. As Buffaloes we were not accustomed to losing, but once we discovered how easy it was we just let it happen. There was no chance of us winning district this year so we just got out there and played basketball just well enough. Our sights were already on next year and football.

This January was as cold and icy as any I had ever seen. School was closed from time to time because of iced over roads and snowfall. It was a nasty school year, overall.

Out in the larger world President Johnson, who we called L.B.J, died at this home in Texas. I can remember back in the 3rd Grade just about everybody having "All the way with L.B.J." and "L.B.J. for the U.S.A." buttons everywhere. I was sorry to see him pass away. He had been President and a fellow Texan. My respect for him would diminish somewhat as I grew older and did research into his mismanagement of the Vietnam War, his incredibly destructive "Great Society", and his overall incompetence at his job as President. He did a few good things, but his record on Vietnam would gall me a quite a lot.

As for Vietnam, on January 25, 1973, the papers happily trumpeted that we had peace at last in the war over there. The American people had enough of Vietnam. We seemed to want to just get it over with. North Vietnam told us what we wanted to hear, and they had no intention of keeping their word. They simply wanted America and it's Allies out so they could conquer South Vietnam 'in peace'. We wanted out of there so bad we swallowed their untruths hook line and sinker. We'd spend the rest of the century paying for it all over the world.

Back in the smaller world of District 36-B the tournament started on the last of January. Lone Oak's district record was so lousy that we were not invited, not even our girl's squad. This was the first time in a long time our girls had not made the District Tournament. We turned in our ball uniforms and prepared for track. We bid a fond farewell to the cursed blue shorts and hoped we never saw the tacky blue things again.

In the Tournament the Celeste girls won, and prepared for Bi-District. In the boys brackets Bland and Campbell had a multi-game playoff lasting about 4 games played at Quinlan. Finally Bland won, leaving Campbell to go home and know they had fought the good fight.

The Celeste girls won Bi-District on 13 February and went on to the Regional Tournament.

Bland boys lost out in Bi-District on the 14th of February and ended their season.

The Celeste girls went to Regional on the 17th of February but lost. They had just had one remarkable season.

While reading about this in the paper I noticed on the back of the front page a side-bar about one of my favorite actors dieing. He was a small guy, balding, with glasses. I could empathize with him a lot. He was Wally Cox and I was saddened by his passing.

On a much lighter note, I also noticed that Neicy had been named in Who's Who of American High School Students. She was recognized for her leadership in academics, athletics, and community service. She was a prime example of most of the girls I knew at school at that time.

Neicy held many titles and honors, among them Head Cheerleader, Miss L.O.H.S, Outstanding Teenager of America Society Member, and Football Sweetheart. She was one outstanding lady, and I was privileged to have known her as a friend in school. We didn't talk much to each other but she wasn't stuck up either. I respected her a lot, and I thought she was just too cool. The respect we had for each other was pretty much mutual, and she was a first class act.

Track

Mr. Fannin loaded us all in the bus and drove us down the 1571 highway about a mile or so from school. He opened the door and we all stepped out on the road. The bus turned around and went back to the school.

"Y'all take off. We'll see you at the school," Mr. Fannin said.

I locked into my mile running stride and took off down the road toward the school house. I soon passed Danny, Rickey, Robert, and others and I was soon up near the front of the pack. Nobody was really pushing it so I was soon up there with only a couple of guys, stomping along. I had a higher cruising speed over long distances than my sprinter classmates did and I still ran from time to time at home so I was in my element here. We turned left and padded easily up the black top of McBride street and into the front gate of Lone Oak School.

Wide eyed and curious little kids watched us come crunching through the gravel of the parking lot, through the playground, and on into the old football field. We halted there, gasping for air. The team was so strung out in a line behind us that it took several minutes for the entire track team to complete the run. Mr. Fannin figured this was a good way to start off the track season.

To whip us into shape we had an Endurance Relay one day. We ran as fast as we could then handed off to someone else who went another quarter-mile lap. The sprinters were blown out early but the distance runners like myself were still going strong. Both Danny and Eddie were soon on the ground, gasping for air, and out of it.

I looked at these super-athletes with interest and curiosity. I was still doing fine and these fellows were spent. It boggled my mind. I didn't comment on this because these guys would take it as an insult. None would seek my advice either, even though I had been advised by a college mile runner over at E.T. After all, what did Buzzard know?

I proved how much I didn't know one day. We were doing laps and like an idiot I started running backwards. I soon flipped completely over a pylon we had there, landing hard but unhurt on my upper back. I quickly got up and kept running.

Track was a lot of fun. We had been pretty much locked up in the school house since December and we didn't have a real outlet for all that teenaged energy. This was the type of tonic we needed. All of us hopped into it with enthusiasm. We could run, shout, push ourselves as hard as we could, and it was glorious. Outdoors at last!

Mr. Fannin watched me practicing a mile and shook his head. He had such stars as Danny, Robert, Rick, Eddie, and others. Some of the Freshman had remarkable speed. I was nothing amazing, but he liked it that I had the nerve to try anyway. Mr. Fannin was just that way. He admired young men who gave it all they had, even if they were not remarkable athletes. A guy didn't have to be the best, but he had to do his very, very best and really try. He got accolades for his effort.

This kept me going, and I kept pushing. My being as bull headed as a stump helped.

Demolition

We watched with varying degrees of interest as heavy equipment moved in and began to remove our playground equipment. The Monkey Bars, my old spaceship, was uprooted and taken away. The giant slide where my friends and I spent many a fun recess was removed. The swings, the merry-go-round, the maypole, all went away. The contractors looked at the big brown 8 inch pipe that made up our see saw pivots. They wondered what to do with that. The giant steel pipe was anchored in concrete, like a huge 'm'.

After speculating for a while the decision was made to pull it out with a back-hoe. That didn't work. More ideas flew back and forth, finally they decided to dig it out. The contractors were very impressed with the fact that the pipe was anchored some 4 feet in the ground. This led to some head scratching. They couldn't just cut the pipe off at it's three locations. It had to come out.

After much digging with the back-hoe and pulling with a tow truck the very heavy concrete and steel construct was forever removed. It was loaded onto a trailer and without any ceremony hauled away to parts unknown.

Most of our playground gear was just moved. the slide, the merry-go-round, and the swings were placed behind the auditorium, on the west side. I don't recall what happened to the monkey bars. The play ground as we knew it was gone, never to return. Remarkably, none of us seemed to care. It was progress, I guess, and we were going to get a brand new state of the art gym in return.

This was the middle of February, and actual construction on the gym was supposed to start in march. While all this was going on school work went on, but with some interesting twists.

Pantomime and silent acting went on in a class we had. Herman, Gonga, and I collaborated on our version of Frankenstein. This took place in the auditorium on the stage.

I was Igor, Herman was the Mad Scientist, and Gonga was the Frankenstein Monster. We rehearsed and came up with ideas and even special effects.

The silent play opened with Gonga flat on his back on a table with his feet toward the audience. Herman was doing the 'doctor' routine. I was the assistant. Herman reached into a bowl and pretended to take out a brain, when in fact he held nothing in his hands. He did what I called the "life" bit, by holding it up and presenting it to the sky. He placed it back down and I poked at it. He pretended to slap me for my insolence and this was so well done that the audience gasped. Score one for our acting ability. Neato!

It was time to put Gonga's brain in. He took the organ and moved to Gonga's head. I shuffled off stage Igor-like and got to the light switch. I triggered the switches, creating a flashing effect as Gonga twitched and wiggled. I came back on stage to see what the master had done.

Now, Gonga was alive! Gonga got off the table, killed Herman and me, and that was it. The monster was loose!

We got some applause and that was cool. It was the best of the pantomime plays.

Southbound on the Northbound Side

Wham! Wham! Wham! In a steady and hypnotic rhythm my tennis-shoe clad feet slapped the brown pavement that made the southbound shoulder of highway 69. I was in excellent physical condition and I did this every weekend I could to try to improve my abilities and at least stay in shape. If the weather was bad or it was cold I did not run. Coach Taylor cautioned against running in cold weather. The chill air irritated my throat and could lead to another lengthy illness. I sought to avoid that, and in the end I would have been better off not doing this running so much.

Wham! Wham! Wham! I ran to the driveway of Vicki's house. The picturesque colonial style brick home was set about a quarter mile from the highway in a grove of trees. It gave Vicki and her family the privacy they desired. Arriving at the entrance to the drive I turned and headed back north, and home. I could see the flashing lights on the station to my front. I tried to pace myself by the rhythm of the lights but discovered that I could not maintain the pace.

Breathing heavily I finished my mile run and walked off the cool-down. I put my hands behind my head and gasped for air. It had been a typical run, and I had sprinted the last killer 100 yards. I soon got my wind back and went on into my house to find some sort of entertainment. U.F.O. would soon be on, but I had seen almost all the shows by now. If I couldn't find Rick or go over to Benji's I'd spend an extremely boring night at home, sometimes drawing in my comics, sometimes tinkering with a model of some kind.

Monday found most of us back at school, looking forward to summer. Some of the Seniors made plans for themselves once they got out of school. For stars like Jerry McGee tons of scholarship offers came in. Jerry made a very tough decision to not take any of them. It wasn't the easy route to go, but he believed it was what he wanted to do. A person has to make these decisions and stand by them. Jerry did, and in the end it worked out for him in a good way. Football didn't rule his life, though he was as fanatical a Buffalo as I was. He played it for the fun of it. Once he was through with high school he saw no further need of it. It was a brave decision, and I do not think I could not have made it.

We were being enrolled in our track events by our coaches. We sat up in the tiny bleachers next to the 8 man field. I had only one event, so I sat next to Eddie, half listening. I was messing around with an odd bump on my knee when something I had never seen before popped up out of it. It was the oddest green color, real icky looking. I tapped Eddie on the leg and pointed at the thing. It scared me a little and I was hoping he could identify just what the blazes I had done. He only turned as green as the eruption and turned back to listening to the coaches.

I picked the goo up on my finger and looked at it. I discovered it was the thorn that I had broken off in my knee almost two years before when I was building the bridge and working on the clubhouse! It was about the size of a pencil point, black in the stuff that covered it. I had carried it all this time, through football, basketball, and through track. It was a wonder I didn't get cellulitis or something, and maybe it was responsible for a lot of my being sick.

The hole in my knee it left healed up nicely and went away without even leaving a scar. I quickly forgot all about it, and signed up in the mile run. I think I was the only miler this year, and that suited me just fine. I was better prepared for it than last year.

The girls put together a track team this year, too. There was some speculation as to just what a girl could and could not do. Was it lady-like to toss a shot-put? Do girls run the 880, the 440, or the 220? Should they run 100 yards or 60? A lot more intelligent fellows than I figured out what

the girls should run and participate in. Thus, in the late Winter and early Spring of 1973 Lone Oak had a ladies' track team that set school records that held for quite a while.

The first participants in this little historic mission were all trailblazers. Marilyn Fry was very fast, and Julia Mahand participated in several events. I think they brought back some first place trophies. There were 16 motivated young ladies on this track team.

Mister Taylor used the fact that he now had times and speeds of several girls to motivate us. If our speed was less than the girls he chided us. My blazing speed of 13 seconds in the 100 yard dash was at least a full second slower than Julia's. Mr. Taylor kidded me about it. Try as I might I could not break that 13 second mark. I was content to stay with the mile run. Nobody else wanted the mile or gave me hard time about it. The unwritten law was that if a guy couldn't do it he didn't bug the guy who was doing it.

Randy Price and I were still pretty tight as buddies. Herman was just as close as ever. Gunner was starting to hang around the group a little and Gary Dooley would occasionally get in some action or other. James Kelly really loved to play Woody Ball with us.

On the out was Rickey Graham. Because he hadn't been active in basketball I didn't seem much of him during the season. This drove a sort of wedge into our relationship and he drifted away from my projects as he pursued other interests, like girls. He was more successful than I at that. For somebody to talk to during school hours he and Gongga got together. They'd talk cars, girls, the military, whatever. It is nice to have friends. Without friends a guy can get isolated and go slowly nuts. No one exist in a total friendless vacuume. Friends can save a person from himself. Right now, Rick wasn't doing too well.

While Rick was spending time with Gongga or alone things were going smoothly in my circle of close friends. Rabbit was really becoming a personality. Rabbit's antics were harmless but fun. He was never destructive but he could give Gunner fits with his wit. On other occasions his comedy was more physical. There was this biology dummy in the Science room. We would take it apart and mess with it's innards like a big 3-d jigsaw puzzel. Randy could take the front torso panel and put it on, like it was his own. It fit farely well, too. We'd make comments like "Bad sunburn, man!" or "Really went sliding down that road when you fell off Mr. Trimble's truck didn't you, man?" Rabbit was a lot of fun. He and I made plans to join the Army together.

In football Rabbit and I teamed up where the buddy system was necessary. I think we kept each other going. Sometimes I could play a trick or two that would drive Randy crazy, but he knew it was all in fun. He would play tricks on me too. We would spend all of 1973 as buddies of the best kind. Randy never let his ways with the ladies over rule his friendship with me. He always found time for both his girls and his friends. In 1973 nothing could seperate us. We both believed it would last forever.

Once I drew a picture of two guys welding on a pipe-fence with helmets on and white cover alls. On a big grey trailer was mounted a Lincoln Welder and on the welder I had "Rabbit-Vulture Welding Team".

Rabbit looked at this and asked me straight out if I planned to do this after I graduated next year. I told him it was a cool idea, but I had no plans to open a welding shop or anything like that. I had no assets for such an undertaking, but it was an interesting prospect.

For the next entire year Rabbit and I would look into many interesting prospects, the likes of which neither of us would have believed. Our horizons were enlarging almost daily. Part of it would contribute to the great downfall and disaster of one of us.

"The clock is running."

Common phrase used by

astronauts to tell ground control

that the mission clock has started

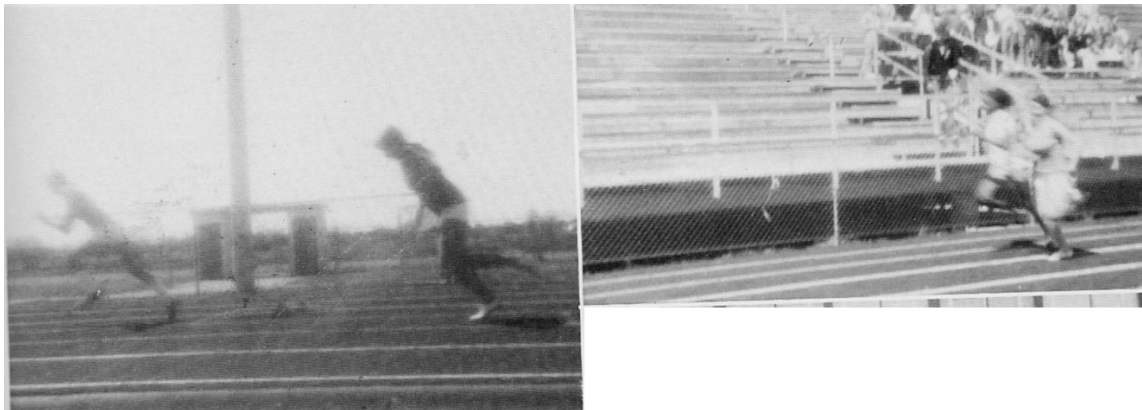
and the launch vehical is moving.

Track and Mud

It was cold and very nasty. It was a typical day for this school year. I had no idea where we were at this track meet, and I sat up in some bleachers, freezing. With chattering teeth I looked out on the field below. It was so cold that some of us had sought refuge in the busses, but that only made it feel worse when a person came back out. It had been raining a little and a lot of the runs to the jumps and vaults were muddy.

Rabbit wanted to be in the high jump this year, and I watched him attempt a jump. He crashed bodily into the bar, and fell sprawling over the big foam rubber mats. He had lost his footing and wiped out. Angry and spitting little bits of foam rubber from the mats he tried his second jump. He didn't clear the bar. He was very angry about the runway and complained enthusiastically to me about it. Randy Price was most dangerous when he was angry. His temper sometimes got the best of him, and I stayed there to calm the couragous but angry little guy down. I agreed with him, he had been rooked by a muddy launch. I had no idea how he might have done with good weather and a good runway.

This was one of a couple of meets we'd go to this chilly spring. The running track itself was wonderfully paved with a sort of black top. Most of us had been running on grass at Lone Oak so this had us at a disadvantage. Danny, John Hooten, and Eddie roared down the oval in head to head competition with arch rivals from other schools, but I have no record of how we did in this meet.



I ran my mile, finished dead last, and that heared the end of the meet. It was so cold and wet during the run that my glasses fogged over. I tossed them to Rabbit about halfway through the run and finished without them. I do not remember my time.

I was disgusted with my performance and I sat, ticked off, in the bus all the way home.

Sometime later in March we went to Cumby, I think it was, for another track meet. The weather was pleasant for a change, and it was actually up around 60 or 65 degrees. It felt balmy. I stood next to Coach Taylor and eyeballed the small blacktop trail that served Cumby as a track. We looked it over.

"Its a paved track, Charlie. You run on pavement so it should be okay for you," Mr. Taylor said.

I nodded. Coach Taylor and, recently Coach Fannin, always backed me in my atheletic ventures. Usually it was positive with a "give that 110%" attitude. I sometimes was gently kidded about the fact that both Julia and Marylin Fry could outrun me in the 100 yard dash, but I secretly told myself that they couldn't keep up with me for 4 circles of this oval monster. Mostly it motivated me to do the task at hand, like run 5,280 feet as fast as I could.

I was left alone to work on my strategy. I began to think on what worked and what didn't, mostly by trial and error. Certainly I had to kick for at least the last 100 yards. I had found out the hard way that I didn't have the speed to catch up once I dropped out of the pack. By running on the Windpointe Park road with the entire track team I discovered that if I could stay with the front runners I could finish high up. I decided that if I at least stayed with the pack and worked my way to the front I might just finish well enough to place. Finishing first with a bunch of guys who ran this thing in under 5 minutes was something that I knew was impossible. Placing, though, was possible. So I concentrated on placing.

As we prepared for the race, I looked around. I saw a guy from Boles Home doing a streaching exercise. Boles Home had a formidable track team, and I figured "what the heck", so I copied his exercise. It seemed to work, for it loosened up my back and legs. Live and learn.

We got on the track in assigned lines. On the word "go!" we took off. As we took our first step at least 2 men pressed the start button on the stop watches they held. The clock had started. As we stomped down the track I was amazed at the speed of the first lap. It was almost a sprint! I kept up with the pack and settled into the rhythm of long distance running.

Rather than pass other people I had other people passing me. I could not pass them back, though I tried. Canterng along at my best speed, I soon found myself far back. I finished that way.

Gasping and totally blown out, I staggered after the final lap and fought to catch my breath. My strategy didn't work this time, but I decided to keep trying it, with modifications. Our next meet was to be the District Meet at E.T. in Commerce.

District Meet, '73

Wow! I looked around. This was bizarre! There were 16 guys crammed into the lanes for the mile run! This was the final time to test my strategy this year. Bang! The starter gun sounded and off we went. Pushing hard to keep with the mob, I was worried that I'd blow myself out if I wasn't careful. This reflected the lack of track coaching I had, but just what could two men do? Mr. Taylor and Mr. Fannin had about 15 to 30 guys to deal with, and the girls team, and I was just one event. I didn't feel left out, and I was no more neglected than anyone else.



The entire group began to settle down, and the steady slap of feet on the cinder track allowed us to get into the running hypnosis of the long distance runner. By the second lap we began to spread way out. The guy in the lead was setting a killing sub five minute pace. I wasn't too concerned about that, other than the embarrassing possibility of him lapping me. My mind wandered as my feet ate up distance.



This entire day had been as boring as any other meet I had been to. I had a bad scare earlier, thinking I had missed my event, but I was found and put in the race in time. I had no idea how we were doing in this meet, and no records would remain to tell me in the future except for an entry in my journal. All I know is that in the mile run I was currently stomping along in 14th place, with two very worn out fellows staggering along behind. I guess they would eventually fall out from exhaustion. I don't remember them finishing.

As we ran the bell lap I began to push very hard. This was it, do or die! I got by two guys. On the last turn, nearly spent, I began to sprint. It hurt, and my lungs protested, but I pushed anyway. This was my insurance that I might get a place. Ahead of me a guy didn't start his kick, he was cruising along. I pushed as hard as I could. I got tunnel vision.

The guy crossed one tenth of a second before me. It was that close. I had finished 12 of 14 finishing runners! This was a major step up from last year, but I was dissappointed. I didn't see this for the victory it was. I did not win, therefore I lost.

Why I was down so much on myself I don't know. Possibly it was the intellectual environment I was in. I had low self esteem, certainly. No matter how hard I tried I felt like I would never win. Compared to most of my rivals in the jock clique, I was a klutz. Of course, just about anyone would be. Another possibility was my reacting to the way the other people were reacting. I wasn't alone in this thinking, as Rickey Graham had shown. A lot of us were just plain depressed. We spent a lot of time tearing each other down too, as I have said.

I had left 4 guys in the dust, and I had almost made it five. I was a miler. Nobody saw anything wrong with my performance. The coaches were proud of me. I had done well in a field of excellent runners. Being a mile runner is not easy, and I was the only one who did it year after year. I had done my personal best of this year, and I had a lot to be proud of.

But to my 17 year old mind, I had lost yet again.

This, That, and the Other

March was noted by an Indian uprising at Wounded Knee, North Dakota. As crazy protest and uprisings on college campuses had been the rule for the past 5 years or so I gave this only passing notice. As I grew older I payed a lot more attention to this. I would wonder where the Indians got the AK-47s. In 1973 it was nearly impossible to get an AK pattern rifle anywhere. The Indians had some. The F.B.I. also took notice and they had put the place under siege for the rest of March.

More civilized things were underway in Lone Oak. On our all brick and concrete First Christian Church in Lone Oak a cross was erected over the entrance an was dedicated in memory to Mrs. J.S. Moore by her family. People can remember her when they see it.

On 11 March 1973 Lone Oak sent 13 girls to an Area Future Homemakers of America meeting in Commerce. Niece went, along with Shirley and Elaine from our class. I don't know the reason of this big get together of the F.H.A. and I don't have any idea of what they did. What caught my eye was the published philosophy of the event; "You sometimes lose what you go after; you always lose what you don't go after."

This pearl of wisdom essentially described my thoughts about life in general, but I phrased it more like " It is better to have tried and failed, than never to have tried at all."

Weatherwise, tornades had caused notable damage in the Tawakoni area. I remember a lot of water being everywhere, with ditches flooded all over Hunt County. It was a flood, and I was even able ot paddle a small flat bottom boat all over my front yard. This had to be one of the wettest, nastiest years ever.

On the 18th of March work finally began on the new gym that we needed so badly. In the paper was a picture of a tracked front end loader removing the concrete forms for the foundation of our gym. Lone Oak got a story in the front page about the ground breaking. There was no ceremony for it, but Mr. Brookins got an interview. It was eye opening.

Mr. Brookins talked about our tenacity and toughness in dealing with crowded conditions. He also said about our basketball season that we "weren't exactly winners, but I was extremely pleased with them. They did everything they could under the conditions."

I should have paid more attention to the accolade this man gave us. It would have made a bad season better. Now, some time later, it does take the sting out of everything that happened, including my over the backboard shot. Oddly, nobody ever gave me a real hard time about that. A lot of people who were there remember the way David Lemons and Coach Fannin were treated more than what I did. It HAD been a bad year, for all of us. That said volumes for my attitude, as well as Rick's and the guys on the basketball team. We were a most unhappy bunch.

As for the new gym, finally under construction, Mr. Brookins said "It'll sure be an improvement over what we've had this year."

No lie.

Mr. Brookins took no credit for his able leadership during this bad year for us. He held us together, kept us going, and maintained his own good cheer. He said, "They realize what the situation is and they've made the best of it." It was never Mr. Brookins who did it, it was always us. He forever gave us the credit. His modesty was great. To have known him was an honor, and to have him as a coach was a privilege. It continually amazed me how highly he thought of all of us. We were forever winners in his eyes. He gave us the wins, and he took the losses.

An All-Athletic party was slated for April 14 for us from Lone Oak. This was to be in the Nation Guard Armory on Lee Street in Greenville. I think it was to be a pat on the back for us enduring such a lousy season of all sports this year. The Buffaloes Boosters sponsored it. Many of us wondered at this. Would we go, or not?

Spring was met with open arms and great enthusiasm by one and all. Freedom for the summer lurked ahead. There was hope that it would dry out and warm up. Feeding this hopeful attitude was what was looked upon as good news from Vietnam. We thought the war was over and our 'trustworthy' advisories from North Vietnam would keep their word to settle peacefully with South Vietnam. This would be called by historians the 'False Peace.' For us there was hope that if we were drafted we would not go to Vietnam, and there were rumors that the draft itself would be done away with.

The Greenville paper trumpeted that Lone Oak was going to build a city park! It was to include a childrens' play area, a multi-purpose court to be used for volley-ball, tennis, basketball, or shuffleboard. There was to be a recreation center, restrooms, picnic facilities, and parking around the area. This was to be where the town square is. They also planned to build a new fire station. The current one was built back in the 1920s and still had artifacts in it from that time. We all looked forward to this new construction as we all felt that it would make Lone Oak a first class town! A real city park? You bet!

On March 28th Lone Oak went to what we called a U.I.L. meet. The University Interscholastic League held literary events for the intelligencia of high schools to compete in various events like the jocks did in track meets. It didn't matter that half of the U.I.L. were jocks anyway.

I did not participate and I knew absolutely nothing about U.I.L. anyway. Mrs. Baldwin noticed me and my literary talents and she decided that next time she would try to get me in a U.I.L. meet someday.

The U.I.L. crew from Lone Oak was heavily spiced with my classmates. There was Shirley, Julia, Danny, Vicki, and Martha. The Junior class of '73 was well represented.

U.I.L. Spring Meet '73

The U.I.L. meets are much like a track meet. It takes all day and it is very slow. There are no spectators, and it is all indoors. Points are awarded for each event, totalled up, and the school with the most points wins.

In 1973 something like 109 contestants from all over District 17-A met at E.T. in Commerce for the events. It began, and like a huge snail crawled along, event by quiet event, all day long. Slowly the results were posted.

In Shorthand Competition, Cooper took first place and third place. Quinlan got second and fourth, and Honey Grove got fifth.

In Girl's Prose Reading, Dianne Sewell from Lone Oak took first place, for our first ribbon of the event. Cooper came in second, Wolfe City third, Detroit fourth, and Fannindel fifth.

In Boy's Prose Reading John McCaghren of Lone Oak took first. Fannindel came in second, and Cooper came in third.

Cooper began to pull in front in overall points.

In Girl's Persuasive Speaking, our Julia Mahand took first place. How all around can she get? This Lone Oak girl could do it all! Fannindel came in second.

Our debating team of Lana Slemmons and Tina Abbot came in first over Fannindel who made it into second. Lana and Tina were very good at this and usually dominated this event. I'd hate to be trapped in a corner with these two trying to have an argument on politics or philosophy. They'd destroy me, or any other person foolish enough to try them!

In Girl's Poetry Interpretation, Cooper came in first, Detroit second, Wolfe City third, and Donna Turney of Lone Oak came in fourth. Fannindel came in fifth.

In Boy's Poetry Interpretation, Cooper was again in first, Detroit second, Steve Schones of Lone Oak came in third, and Fannindel came in fourth.

I have no idea what Poetry Interpretation is.

In Girl's Informative Speaking, Cooper was first, Fannindel was second and Silvia Phillips of Lone Oak was third.

In Boy's Informative Speaking, Cooper was first, Detroit was second, Russel Cook of Lone Oak was third and Fannindel was fourth.

Russel was a moderately sized lineman and breaking the stereotype of the dumb lineman. He was the second string center, and had lots of promise. Placing third in a speaking event said volumes for his intellectual capability.

On the other side of the coin, I figured that if any guy was to do good in the Number Sense event, it would be Danny the Sheepdog. The my great disbelief he didn't even make the top five! A girl from Detroit came in first, Fannindel came in second, and the highest placing guy was from Wolfe

City who came in third. This was followed by Cooper in fourth, and Quinlan in fifth. Danny was nowhere to be seen! Talk about stiff competition!

In Science, Wolfe City came in first and second, Fannindel third, Wolf City again in fourth, and Cooper came in fifth.

By this time Cooper was way ahead on points.

There was a mathematical device that had been in use for about a very long time. This mathematical monster was called the sliderule. They actually had events to see just how good kids were with this obscure tool.

Fannindel mastered the device and came in first, second, and fourth! Quinlan was third, and Wolfe City fifth.

I once took a look at a slide rule, just out of curiosity. I fiddled with it for all of three minutes. I put it down and never picked one up again. I never figured it out, but I admired folks who could, and I still think mathematicians are among the greatest scientist.

Vicki Pipkin and Martha Sale were great typist. I figured they would get first and second place easily, but guess what happened?

In the typing event Cooper rattled into first place and third, and Fannindel captured second and fourth. Honey Grove rumbled in fifth.

Vicki and Martha were left way back in the typewriter dust, covered with perverbial correction fluid and eraser bits. Both of our girls were amazed at how fast the other girls were!

"I had just typed the first four letters," Vicki said when she came back, "and the others were already returning their carriages!"

When I heard Vicki tell Mrs. Baldwin this I was amazed. Vicki was the fastest typest I knew! Just how fast can people type?

In the Spelling event Cooper again came in first, Fannindel was second, Cooper third, Joan Shrum of Lone Oak came in 4th, and Wolfe City came in fifth.

In Ready Writing Lone Oak came in first, with Mickie Batte. Mickie was a small girl, and I knew her hardly at all. She certainly could write, though. Detroit came in second, Fannindel was third, Wolfe City was fourth, and Detroit was fifth.

In Feature Writing, Fannindel claimed first, Detroit second, and Cooper third.

Cooper came in first in Newswriting, Editorial Writing, and Headlines. They dominated the entire meet.

Cooper captured the 1973 District !7-A trophy for U.I.L. with 138 points. Ribbons were awarded for each event for the first five places, so Cooper took home a virtual fist-full of ribbons. Most of them were blue, for first place finishes.

Fannindel came in a distant second with 98.5 points. Lone Oak managed third with 75 points. This was a respectable finish, but somewhat of an eye opener for those of us who thought our

school was intellectually superiour. Detroit was 4th, with 66 points, Wolfe City 5th with 27 points, Quinlan 6th with 15, and Honey Grove 7th with an unknown total.

Mrs. Baldwin knew that 3rd place was okay. First place winners in speaking events, first, second, and third in typing and shorthand, and first and second place winners from all events would go to the April 12 Regional meet at Kilgore. Lone Oak had 5 people going to Regional.

For those of us left behind back at school, all was chaos. This was a day off, so we had clean-up day at the school. Everywhere people were spraying water on windows and rubbing them with the brown paper towels from the restrooms. People with brooms were everywhere. I think each room and the hall got swept out about 17 times.

While rubbing this window and polishing that piece of furniture Rabbit and I hit upon a daring plan. In the office was a car-type radio that was hooked up to the P.A. system. It was playing muzac at a barely audible level. We all hated it. Randy Price and I were going to put it on Rock and Roll, preferably K.L.I.F. 1190 top 40 hits if we could find it on the dial.

There were these vent windows up in the walls, near the original ceiling. They are about 3'X2' and hinged at the top. It allowed ventelation through the school. When the ceiling was lowered in 1972, these windows were obscured in the halls. In he class rooms and school offices these same windows were only about half-covered. In the class rooms we used them as paper-wad targets. There may be a sizeable amount of paper up there still.

Rabbit and I got a ladder, a spray bottle, and some paper towels. We started washing these windows, craftily working our way to the office. Randy held the ladder I was on and I sprayed and rubbed the glass. I had run out of honest window cleaner long ago, but everybody was refilling their bottles at the water fountain so I did the same. We used the same dirty paper towel over and over until it literally fell apart. With frequent trips to the hand-cranked towel dispenser in the restroom to get a 4 foot long strip of paper we kept going.

Rabbit and I boldly carried the ladder into the office. This was a place where neither of us had been to unless we were in deep trouble, so we felt like this was a no-man's land and heavily mined. We put the ladder up and Mr. Dial came in to see what we were up to, out of his office.

Rabbit and I both paled but Mr. Dial just grinned up at me.

"Do a good job on that there window, Charles, and dust off the radio while you're at it."

DUST OFF THE RADIO?!!

"Yes sir."

Rabbit kept a look-out while I gave the window a rub or two. Randy was more apprehensive than I had ever seen him. I reached down with my feet and gave the tuning dial a spin. Rabbit listened and heard the muzac quit.

Getting the willies, Rabbit looked up at me and rapidly from side to side. This was cool, yes, but he was afraid we'd both get expelled if we got caught. I thought this was amazing. Here was the fearless Randy Price, the Rabbit himself, unintimidated by women, guys twice his size, and anything football could swing at him, about to go crazy over a harmless prank like changing a radio station.

I was covering myself well. I had "accidently" hit the tuner with my foot. Now that I was done with the window I'd dust off the radio and "try to find the station" on the radio.

I climbed down, sprayed the top of the P.A. system/radio, wiped it off, and put the dial where I thought 1190 might be. Rabbit was bouncing on the balls of his feet. He wanted out of there! Ladder in hand, the dirty deed done, we exited. Once in the hall Rabbit and I bent double with laughter. We had pulled it off!

We went into the Math room to see what I had got on the radio, and sure enough K.L.I.F. was oozing through! Success!

Mr. Dial was not deaf. He knew exactly what had happened and when it happened. He knew it for what it was and just let it go. Rabbit and I felt like we had scored a touchdown! We were the first to change the music channels, but we wouldn't be the last.

The Times They are a Changing

In mid-March of 1973, Greenville removed it's parking meters from the down town area. This was in response to the fact that down town was losing business to the new discount stores on the south side of town along Wesley Street. There was a T.G.+Y. and a Gibsons, and they were open until 9:00. All the traditional down town businesses closed at 5:00. The down town busiensses didn't have any parking lots, except for Sears. All the discount stores had large parking lots right there around them.

This pretty much marked the time when down town Greenville began it's long, slow, spiral down. Traditional down town stores begin to really feel the pressure from the new concept of the Discount Center. Down town Greenville had less than 15 years before it collapsed.

Woody's Superettes were replacing the neighborhood stores. These were in turn being targetted by 7-11s. Drive in movies were clinging to existance by showing more and more raunchy and tasteless sex movies. That wasn't working. The movie house was being moved, too. The old Texan was going down, being replaced by the Rolling Hills Twin Cinema on south Wesley Street. After the Texan closed down it ended an era of some 70 years of movies being shown down town. Everything was moving south of down town.

Lone Oak was changing too, but nothing really spectacular. Abbot's Food Store would last a while longer but Smart's Grocery would close it's doors. The washateria was still on Katy street, but it's days were numbered. Rickey Graham and I used to hang out in the washateria, eating junk food and wasting time, waiting for ball games in '72.

The Civic Center was located right next to Jones's Cafe. Up above the Civic Center was the Masons Lodge. I had no idea what a Mason was, so I paid that no mind.

Most of the rest of the old shops in Lone Oak were closed. Almost an entire block was closed and empty. On that one block only the bank remained open. The town looked abandoned and ill-used.

Occasionally someone would open up a "Hangout" in Lone Oak. It follows the same path over and over. The enterpreneur leases one of the ancient buildings on one of the blocks. It is stocked with pool tables and pinball machines. The owner might put in a candy rack, coke machine, or even a grill for cooking real food. There would definately be a juke box.

Sure enough the bored teenagers of Lone Oak would come to the hangout to play pool, pinball, or just hang out. As pool has a bad reputation, the Hangout eventually garners the reputation as an unsavory place. Dometic indignation would be directed toward the Hangout. Soon business will slack off and die, and the Hangout will go under. No Hangout has lasted more than a year, and I think there have been at least 4 in the recent history of Lone Oak.

Some of the unsavory characters may be at the Hangout, but I have never heard of a fight breaking out of any illegal behaviour. When the Hangout closes the kids, with no place to go, would gather on the sidewalks at night and spend this idle time trying to find something to do. This can go to drinking, smoking, gambling, fighting, and other mischief. Lone Oak has had a number of local cops and a 'Night Watchman', but through most of the 70's and part of the 80's it had virtually no real law enforcement in the town at all. Without supervision and being bored the kids often reverted to a gang-mentality of territorialism and establishing a pecking order. Outsiders were greeted with cat-calls, abuse, and maybe a fight.

The first Hangout I went to had a juke box that didn't need money to play. The thing blared music constantly, playing record after record. One day the thing got so hot from constant use that it burned itself out. That Hangout closed a few days after that. That was the way hangouts went.

Lone Oak had a fire department manned by volunteers that was somewhat rag-tag, ill-equipped, and undertrained. There were about 6 or so real part-time volunteer fireman, and upwards of 20 to 30 enthusiastic volunteers with no training at all. The two Booster units were smokey, loud, and unreliable, and the worn out Pumper ran when it felt like it. When these units took off to a fire they had volunteers draped all over them like flies on a cow, and made almost as much smoke as the fire they were going to. It was the circus.

The fire department had a very loud air raid siren that was mounted up on a pole. It sounded like nothing I ever heard before. This thing was activated by a button on the firehouse. Once a fire alarm was turned in by telephone or somebody running up to the firehouse, the call would be sent out. A series of blasts on the siren let those who knew the code where the general location of the blaze.

For instance, a series of short blasts ment the fire was in town. Three long ones ment it was out to town. A number of blasts gave the direction. One might be north, 2 east, 3 west, or 4 south. This isn't the actual code, but it gives some idea of what the code was like.

In the early part of the school year, as we sat in class dazed by the heat, we'd often hear the alarm from the firehouse blasting out for some grass fire somewhere. It became a past-time to count the number of blasts on the sirens. A person could look all over the class and see fellow classmates with ears cocked, counting the siren blasts on their fingers. A lot of us had no earthly idea what in blue blazes the number of siren calls ment. It was just a welcome relief from the boredom permeating the average late summer classes.

Sometimes we could see the smoke. Somebody would holler out "There it is!" and we'd all look at the plume. We could guess what kind of fire it was by the color of the smoke. Grass fires are mostly a bluish-white smoke, and structures burn with an ugly boiling black smoke.

The siren even had an effect on the playground. Kids would stop dead in their tracks, stop swinging, skipping rope, or look up from a game of pit-marbles and start to count the siren calls. Once the siren stopped it was like a switch had been turned on. The kids would go right back to what they were doing with no idea what the number of blasts meant but knowing there was a fire someplace.

Fire drills at school were somewhat ridiculous. Hanging on the wall not far from the boys room was an old brake drum off a bus. Attached to this on a chain was a striker made from a large bolt. Before a drill teachers and faculty were told what the proper number of strikes to the wheel drum ment. We were told what was expected of us.

At the proper time we'd hear a flat 'clang' as the wheel drum bell was struck. We'd orderly exit the building and form up out front. The entire 300 member student body would be out front chattering and bored, and on the second strike of the wheel drum we were told to go back inside.

As corny as the wheel drum technique sounded it was a good idea. If a fire took out the power to the school bell, ringing the wheel drum would still work.

I have a feeling that if the school ever did catch fire there would be paniced kids bailing out windows and running screaming up smoke filled and flaming halls. Teachers would try to do the fire drill and get stomped by the stampede.

Our biggest piece of fire equipment in 1973 was a 1958 vintage fire engine pumper unit. This thing, mentioned above, was worn out when the town got it, and it seemed to spend most of it's time broke down trying to get to a fire or trying to get back from one.

This engine had the support 'Booster' units in the form of modified flatbed trucks mounting large round or oval water tanks on the back. A big lawnmower like engine powered the truck's pump. This pressurized a hose that had a gun-like nozzle. A guy could spray water about 50+ feet with it. The noise of the pump made it impossible to hear plainly when a fireman was trying to tell the hose-man something. Yelling firemen was the order of the day for each fire.

One night I was in Lone Oak with Rabbit. We were bored and just sat there talking to the cluster of locals that sat around, smoked, gossiped, and talked dirty. All of a sudden the fire alarm went off. In a gaggle we ran pell-mell for the station, excited by this new diversion. Several people were already there and cranking the 3 trucks up. We all piled aboard; on the flatbeds, on the running boards, anywhere we could get a grip.

The trucks studded out of the garage with a lot of noise and smoke, rocking across the uneven surface of the square. Water splashed out of the big green spherical tank I was holding onto, drenching Hollis Goode and me. The machine rumbled onto Hiway 69 and rumbled south at a frightening speed to a visible glow a few miles down the road.

Hollis paled.

"I hope that ain't my house!" he yelled to me over the roar of the engine. We all looked at the ominous glow and speculated. As we got closer we saw it wasn't Hollis' house, much to his relief. This brought the entertainment value back up. As our truck turned off Hiway 69 to Hiway 2737 we saw a nice looking wooden house that was quite involved. There were no vehicals in the driveway and the shaggy lawn said that there were no residents in this house. This empty house had mysteriously caught fire.

The truck slowed and we dived of like fleas off a large dog. Most of us just stood there and watched the volunteers battle the blaze. The house was lost, but there was a large butane tank near the inferno. This got everybody's immediate attention.

I saw Randy Price. He was helping a guy hold the firehose from the pumper and spray the house. As it became plain that the house was gone the firemen began spraying the butane tank with enthusiasm, to try to keep it cool. Hollis and I began to look for a likely spot to dive into just in

case the tank started to blow. As close as we were if the tank did blow the resulting fireball would cook us, if the blast and concussion didn't kill us outright. Being in a ditch would be no help.

We flinched when there was a roar and the tank cooked off. The pressure valve had finally let go, and made like a huge blowtorch, shooting flames 30 feet into the air. Everybody took an involuntary step back. This was scary. The trucks were even driven back away from the flames, and more water was directed on the hot surface of the tank. It hissed, the surface was so hot.

A butane tank is designed to pop a pressure valve rather than turn into a bomb. Fortunately for us everything worked as designed. Once it sank in that we weren't going to be immolated the thrill was gone. The house was soon smouldering debris and the tank was venting it's gas into flames in a less dramatic manner. People began to go back to Lone Oak. I got a ride, and went back to town to wait for Rabbit.

The running joke about our fire department was that "They hadn't lost a foundation yet." So far so good.

Spring is in the Air

I stood way over in left field, watching Robert Vice pitch to David Dillon. It was a pleasant spring day, and I was soaking up the warm rays of the new spring sun.

We were playing a strange game of baseball where the guy who got the batter out got to bat next. If a guy caught a fly ball he got to bat, if the pitcher struck the guy out he got to bat. They just traded places. I just stood there, happily bored in the warmth of spring, watching the game. I didn't anticipate anything being hit my way. There were about 12 of us, far too few for two teams, so we were just playing this way just to kill time.

Then Robert tossed the grapefruit sized softball at the plate. David Dillon took a flat swing at it. Pop! It came right back at Robert in a hot line drive, straight for his head. Robert had just enough time to close his eyes and that was all. It caught him straight on the nose and bounced off.

Robert grabbed his face and yelled "Oh! Oh!" then spun down on to the pitcher's mound.

Everybody just stood there for a second in horror, then there was the sound of ball gloves hitting the ground and the slap of tennis-shoe clad feet as we all headed for Robert to see if we could help him. Coach Taylor quickly showed up and we let him look at Robert. Robert lay on his back, still holding his face.

Robert's nose was broken, split open, and over on one side of his face. It looked gross in the extreme. He was bleeding like crazy.

Mr. Taylor looked him over and drawled out "Your nose is broke."

We eventually got Robert to his feet and Danny with Mr. Taylor helped him to the school for whatever else they could do for him. Our school nurse, Grace George, was there and she tended to him. Later on Robert's parents took him to what amounted to a "nose specialist" in Greenville and that guy sent Robert to Dallas, it was so bad.

Robert had his nose put back together in a most excruciating operation, taking a local anesthetic. He was conscious while the doctor worked on him, and he could hear the grinding of his own bones. He was understandably grateful when it was all over. Other than the associated minor concussion with his broken nose he would be okay.

Meanwhile, back at the diamond, I could not believe what I had just seen. Other than the time Bulldozer col-cocked Philip I had never seen a guy knocked flat like that before. Our game halted and we broke up into amazed smaller groups to discuss what had happened. The incident was not forgotten by any of us, and certainly not Robert.

Cold snaps were now fewer and fewer and I was appreciative, being a summertime kind of guy. I shambled onto the bus early spring morning and found a seat. There, brain numb, I just vegetated for most of the route.

Nobody messed with me on a bus route anymore. Usually I was ignored. I don't think for a minute it was out of respect, but if a little kid gave me a hard time I'd threaten to twist his head off of his pencil neck. In this manner I was left to my own devices. I couldn't read because of the jumping and rolling of the bus. I certainly couldn't draw, though there were times that I tried. All I could do was stare out of the foggy window of this yellow monster and daydream.

We turned off Highway 69 onto the black top that lead to a long winding journey near Hall Cemetery. The bus stopped and picked up Eddie Lively who's brain was in a similar state of functioning as mine. He came in, waddled up the aisle, and plopped down in a seat just in front of me. Mr. Taylor had the bus moving even before Eddie sat down. In seconds the bus was filled with a powerful sulphuric stench that was oddly familiar to one and all.

"Aww, man! We ran over a skunk!" someone cried.

I looked out, but I saw no roadkill animal carcass. I went back to my daydreaming but as I zipped along at 100 thousand feet I was having trouble keeping my dream plane flying. The air was most foul coming into my oxygen mask. I unbuckled it and I found the air in the coc-pit no better. What was going on? I popped back to reality.

On the bus people had let down the windows to get fresh air in the bus. Maybe the skunk got tossed up into the fender well and had stuck there. Man it was a strong stink!

When we got to school we rapidly exited the literally stinking bus. The air was pure outside and I sucked in great lungfulls before entering the hallowed halls of Lone Oak School.

Back on the bus Mr. Taylor gave the vehical the once over to see where the skunk was. He looked on the engine, in the wheel wells, everywhere. When he went back on the bus there was only the faintest smell of skunk. Following his nose it led right to a seat on the bus. It wasn't very strong, but it was coming from there. It was the seat Eddie Lively had been sitting in.

This was very odd and Mr. Taylor couldn't figure it out.

The stench was now in the school. The immediate response brought speculation that a skunk was in the crawlspace under the school. Alumni ran everywhere holding their noses. I looked around.

"Oh, no! Not again!" I moaned. What else could make this morning worse?

Rabbit stood next to me, his books in one hand. His other was holding his protesting nose.

"What gives?" he asked me.

"Our bus ran over a pole cat coming here. Now there's one under the school!"

Rabbit nodded.

"The crummy things must be everywhere."

We went to our first class. Stoney started on a hunt to find the skunk that must be under the school. The creature had to be gotten out or it would be impossible to hold classes. Using his nose, Stoney hoped to locate the stinking little creature.

A person did not have to be Sherlock Holmes to solve this mystery. As Eddie sat in his first class of the day his classmates began to cry out, gasp for air, and even his friends moved away from him. At first he thought everybody was putting him on.

Marylin said "Oh, man, you STINK! Get out the room, boy!"

Eddie left the room as windows were opened and boisterous classmates gasped for air. What was the deal with Eddie? How could he smell like that and not know it?

The fact was that Eddie didn't smell but his cloths did. A skunk had gotten into his clothes closet that night and blasted his cloths. The animal paid for that affront with it's life, snuffed out with a shotgun.

After disposing of the black and white furry corpse Eddie lay back down, his nose becoming accustomed to the musk. He actually could not smell it anymore, and neither could anyone else in the house.

Once dressed he was not aware of the aroma surrounding him. He dressed as he had thousands of times before and boarded the bus, almost causing us to want to bail out of the vehical.

Poor Eddie got a trip home and did as well as he could to find something that didn't reek. Eddie was known as a prankster and there was some speculation that he did this on purpose. He had sworn to Mr. Dial that he had not. It was not told to us what happened, to protect Eddie's pride. Most of us went blissfully on our way thinking a skunk had met his maker under our building. We soon forgot all about it as the odor dissappered. Spring was in the air.

Of Tall Grass and Broken Glass



I still have my ideas of who they might be, but I am not certain. Just as Lone Oak had virtuous people of good standing it has had its share of thieves and, occasionally, a murderer. This time it was thieves who struck.

One warm, spring day we arrived at school as per usual and went inside. After the usual greetings with school chums and the like, several of us went to the Ag shop for our first class of the day.

Idling lazily around the shop and outside of it to take advantage of the warm sun shining down on us, we awaited the arrival of Mr. Trimble, our venerable Ag teacher. Randy Price, Herman Crist, and I kidded around, keeping ourselves occupied and out of trouble. When we saw Mr. Trimble and his unexpected escort, everybody shut up and gawked. Mr. Trimble was heading our way with a couple of what I believed to be State Troopers. We collectively referred to them as Highway Patrol because that's where we were most familiar with them. They may have been County Sheriffs, but all I knew was that they were Cops and represented massive authority and power. Mr. Trimble introduced his two big companions and let them speak to us.

"Boys, somebody broke in the school last night and took a lot of stuff," one of the Cops said.

There was some audible gasps. This was the pits! First our gym goes down, we have a really bad year of athletics, and now some turkey robs our school! I was outraged! Who would dare to do such a thing? It was like they were wiping their feet on everyone here. Who ever did this had no class and no personal honor at all.

I listened with the others as the Patrolman spoke, and I took in his appearance. He had a gravelly voice, like a cliché drill sergeant. He stood over 6 feet high, and was built like a fire-hydrant. He wore sun-glasses, a hat, and a brown uniform festooned with cop gear; a badge, a Sam Browne belt, a BIG revolver, his name tag, hand-cuffs, ammo, and a belt ring for a baton. He looked tough, talked tough, and got the instant respect of most of us there.

"If any of you know who broke into the school, you can tell me or Mr. Trimble. If any of you here did it you'd do well to tell me because if you did it we'll find out and it'll go bad for you when we do. Any takers?"

There was a nervous silence. This guy was danger incarnate. To cross him was to risk serious bodily harm and a bleak outlook for the future. I looked my friends and classmates over. There were other classes here, too, like the Sophomores and such. I guess the classes were postponed for the morning while the investigation of our school was going on. Nobody in our group said word.

Some of my school chums talked tough, and pretended to be outlaws, but in fact none of the people I had in my class and most of the rest of the student body weren't stupid enough to commit a major act of lawbreaking such as Breaking and Entering. This school was a State funded facility and it could even get the Texas Rangers involved. This was terribly serious business, and frightening.

The cops took to interviewing us and I got an immediate case of weak knees. I did not want to meet this gorilla-like cop one on one. He scared me. I waited my turn like somebody awaiting execution. As my classmates and I had nothing else to do we began to mill around in front of and to one side of the Ag shop. Like most teenagers we found ways to amuse ourselves, mostly with horseplay.

Suddenly I saw Nat Wade and Bobby Underwood running at top speed to the front of the Ag shop. They were wide eyed and agitated. What was up? They looked as if they had seen a ghost, or worse.

Quickly the cop and Mr. Trimble followed Woody and Nat to the place where they had come from. Curious, we followed them in a loose gaggle.

"We saw them right here! There they are, all stacked up!" exclaimed Nat.

I took a look to see what he was pointing at. There, in the tall grass under a tree, was a sizeable stack of typewriters, adding machines, telephones, and other 1970s era office equipment.

Wow!

The patrolman took one look and put his fists on his hips.

"Well," he drawled, "If yall had come straight to me and told me what you found without such a fuss I'd be up in that there tree waiting for them to come back tonight. At least you all found the stolen goods."

Mr. Trimble shooed us back and away. I never was to find out who stole the equipment and stacked it up in a hidey spot to be picked up later. Who ever did it probably had another run in with the law. People like that don't learn. They eventually end up in prison, or worse.

Through the grapevine I found out that somebody broke out one of the windows to the Principals office and apperantly made several trips to stack the plunder in the high grass under the tree. I guessed it had to be one person because 2 people would have loaded the stuff up and took off. Stacking it under a tree in high grass would let the theif come back at a convenient time to haul the stuff away, most likely under the cover of darkness. Had the cops discovered the stash first they could have laid an ambush and got the theif right there.

We had got all our stuff back, but I'd sure like to know whot the slimeball was who violated our school. I doubt that it was our crack Commando Team that was supposed to have gotten Leonard's play book last year. They certainly would have gotten caught.

Later that day we were all called to the office, one by one, for interviews. When I went I was very frightened but Mr. Brookins made me feel more at ease with his friendly ways and a trusting smile. I told the cop what I knew, which was nothing, and Mr. Brookins thanked me for my co-operation.

Before I said a word the patrolman told me I didn't have to say a thing if I didn't want to. This was all voluntary. Then he asked me if I understood what was just said. I said yes, and he asked me about 3 questions and that was it.

Weak kneed but relieved, I left the office and looked to see who was next. That was it, and then things got back to normal even before the day was out.

I don't know if they ever caught the guy or guys who did it. For what they did to my school and put me and my friends through, hanging is too good for them.

Off Season

Weightlifting and field trips came to take up the time toward the end of school. For weightlifting we used the visitor's side to the field house. All of our football gear was stored in the home side, so the relatively empty visitor's side was handy for this activity.

A series of weightlifting exercises was put together by the coaches and Coach Taylor supervised our weightlifting. Robert, Rickey, Danny, and Frankie could lift a remarkable amount. Rabbit, John Hooten, several Freshmen, Gunner, and I worked together. John Hooten especially enjoyed lifting weights. He was fascinated by the substantial development of his chest and arm muscles.

We called this activity 'Off Season', and it's primary goal was to build us up for football next August. We used barbells only, some of which were survivors from the old gym. Many times we could be found in and around the locker rooms, pumping iron like fanatics. One thing we strived for was to discover our maximum lift. This was a military-press. Mr. Taylor kept track of this progress on a clipboard. It was to compare our lifting ability from when we started to when we reached maximum. We had never heard of weight belts, so we usually just wore shorts, tennis shoes, and occasionally a T-shirt.

I reached a plateau of about 155 pounds or so. I wanted to get to 160 pounds. All I know is that it was HEAVY. With my rail thin arms I could not pick up this 160 pound load off the floor easily. Gunner and Rabbit helped me get it to my chest, and I was on my own from there.

Gunner got a kick out of the way my barrel chest stuck out as I held the weight up to my neck. On a count of three I tried to push it up over my head and hold it there. I couldn't. I tried again and I failed, even with Gunner, Rabbit, and Coach Taylor cheering me on. As hard as I tried I could not get that weight to lock over my head. My top lift weight would remain at 155 pounds, and I'd never again attempt a military press of 160 in high school.

I weighed a grand total of about 120 pounds soaking wet, so I was military pressing over 35 pounds more than my own weight. I can remember thinking I was picking up the equivalent of one of our linemen or linebackers.

Mr. Taylor was pleased with my weightlifting ability. Some guys who weighed more than I couldn't press 160. Personally I didn't know this, and I was disappointed in my lifting. I consoled myself by skipping rope like a mad man, getting in my 100 hops and working off my frustration.

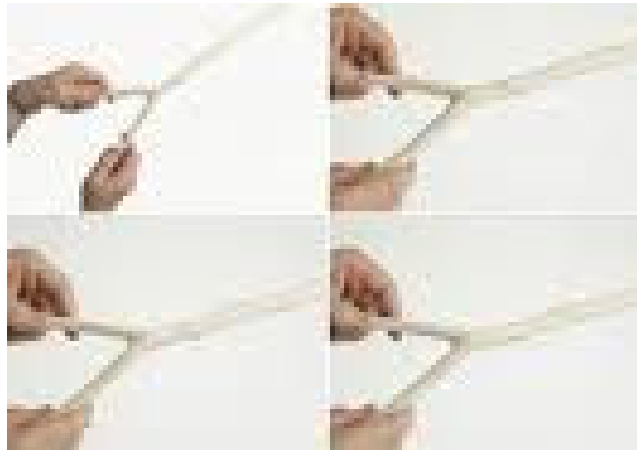
Back in the Ag shop we had little to do. As the year wound down Mr. Trimble didn't start many projects because he didn't have any boys to finish anything that took too long. One slow day, as we stood around, a group of people showed up with a most interesting invention. It was a lawn mower engine attached to a long pole-like device that looked like a metal detector. At the end of the pole was a rotating drum that contained fishing line. The guy holding the 40 pound machine told us the thing could cut grass and trim around buildings without damaging them. The fishing line would cut down the weeds but not mar the paint on a building. It wouldn't even hurt a human hand.

We thought he was crazy, but we wanted to see if the cutter would work. He and his assistant cranked the thing and, sure enough, it cut the grass and trimmed around the building. He even put his hand in the rotating line with no injury.

We were impressed. We had just seen a demonstration of one of the very first Weed Eaters. The machine would be refined, lightened, and become very popular in the next 10 years.

Then there was the time Mr. Trimble took us on a field trip to his private property. We had discussed in a class the pseudo-science of Divining or Water Witching. Mr. Trimble decided to give us a field demonstration. After a short trip north on Highway 69 to his pasture-land he cut down several Y shaped green tree limbs and trimmed them up. It a short while we were going all over the place with these Divining Rod "scientific instruments" looking for water.

The Y was gripped at the top, and the long part held skyward at waist level. As a person walked along some 'unseen force' would draw the long end down, much like the mysterious force on a Ouija Board. We kept this nonsense up for most of the period, finding likely spots to dig wells and even 'following' a water pipeline. It was great fun, and we were out in the boon-docks enjoying the fresh spring air.



Soon Mr. Trimble ordered us on his truck again for the trip back. We all inhaled one last lungfull of the fresh country air, and soon travelled back on Highway 69 to Lone Oak. I didn't go "divining" again, but there was a couple of times I did play with a divining rod.

Passing the Torch

On March 28, 1973, the first section of the wall of the new gym was erected. It was a solid slab of concrete, and had a metal angle at one end to secure it to the base. A big crane lifted it up, and held it in position while it was secured. Occasionally we'd see a fresh section of the wall come in on a flatbed truck to be erected into position.

Rabbit and I talked a lot about a military career. I wanted to be a tanker and go to the Second Armored Division down at Fort Hood. Rabbit was more practical. He wanted to be a Military Policeman. Together we went on a few adventures at school. One evening we got over into the gym construction area to look it over. We were to get our first real impression of the new gym. The workers were gone for the day and we looked over the massive structure laid out before us in all its grey concrete glory. It looked huge.

We cautiously stayed out of the gym floor area, avoiding the impulse to explore in there. We goofed around in the locker room areas. It looked like it had been bombed out, so we started playing 'building clearing' from room to room. Once we got tired of that we looked the gym area over and wondered at it, looking through what would eventually be the boy's locker-room door.

We were frankly afraid to go into the gym area itself because the concrete slabs were free-standing. The on site construction crane held one in place, but the others stood on their own. It spooked us, causing us to fear that one of the massive structures would fall on us.

After getting our first real good look at the new gym and satisfying our curiosity we left the site.

I think other members of my class visited the site, in ones and twos, looking over the construction of what was to be Lone Oak's first gym since 1935. I was a funny looking building to start with, looking like a kid's construction with blocks.

Jack Brookins himself put in a request for the construction boss to get a move on. He hoped to graduate the Seniors of 1973 in the new gym. The construction company did it's best to beat the end of school deadline.

Some 15 days later I missed out on the Athletic Banquet put on by the Buffalo Boosters that April 14 in the National Guard Armory. An event happened that I wished I had witnessed, but I and several others missed out on.

Our problem was that we had to get a ticket to go to this banquet and none would be sold at the door. This seemed like a lot of bother and a lot of us didn't want to go the trouble. Some of us in the student body didn't want to buy a ticket then have something come up and be unable to go. I'm not sure how many people went, and how many didn't, but it was an eventful night.

We had a local man who made it to the big time in Dallas news television. He was a newsman for one of the 3 network affiliated stations at the time, and looked upon as a celebrity. He was one of the speakers at the banquet.

Then came the real reason I wished I had been there. It was an event of monumental proportions in our small history.

Mr. Brookins was presented with a plaque from the Booster Club President. Mr. Brookins made a speech and said something that would have shocked and amazed me had I been there. He said that after 18 years as a coach he was retiring to spend his time as administrator. To hear he was giving it up would have been an unpleasant surprise. We would have given him a standing ovation out of gratitude. Next year Mr. Fannin would be the Head Coach. This was accepted by all.

Nobody I knew had any idea of the real reason why The Coach was retiring. They did they did not tell us in the student body. We would find out later.

For myself, I had missed the banquet, missed the Torch Passing, and blindly went on without any idea what had happened April 14, 1973. It was the end of an era.

Another event also took place on April 14, of 1973 that we came to talk about more than the banquet: Eddie and Karen got married. This marriage was to cause a ripple throughout the entire state.

The Board of Education, at least here at Lone Oak, says that someone can't play high school sports and be married. Eddie came to disagree with this because it was a career opportunity that he was unwilling to sacrifice.

After some thought on this, I have to agree. If a guy was going to school, maintaining the Grade Point Average, and supporting his family, why can't he play high school sports? Eddie's family took the schools to court.

I didn't really pay that much attention to it at the time, to be perfectly honest. Eddie, by nature, was a bit cold and stand-offish. He was hard to get to know as a friend. Also, classmates getting married was nothing new to me or anyone else. By now the novelty had worn off and the news was met with eye-rolls and the word "Again?"

"Bulldozer" had led the way. We all thought we were so much smarter than he was. "Bulldozer" was just the first. Now we all wondered who would be next.

Our class was getting smaller in other ways. Anita Green transferred to Campbell schools. Others had left for what ever reason. That put us down to about 25 in all. So much had happened, so much had changed, and it had happened so quick that I chose to remain aloof and apart from it. I got fewer nasty surprises that way.

As school rolled along, we elected new cheerleaders in May. Sheron Stewart got Head Cheerleader. Originally quiet and shy, she rose to one of the most visible positions in school. "Boo" Lana Slemmons was back, and Susan Smiley. Betty Westbrooke was elected, and Sylvia Philips was on the squad.

Sylvia was a very pretty and good natured girl. Lynn McGee was smitten lovesick like a ton of bricks by her. I, too, looked at her with hopeless interest, but I got too fresh and she gave me a symbolic whack on the face. I had it coming, and I kept it only friendly after that. Sylvia's family would move away to Houston during the summer. Lynn was devastated. I actually saw a guy I considered a lecher really tore up over a girl who had nothing much to do with him. It was freaky to me. Sylvia would not be seen by any of us after 1973.

On the other hand, Herman had hit the high point to his school career! He was appointed to Boy's State and attended a dinner by the American Legion post held in honor of the Boy's State representatives. Herman would go to Austin in June and participate in some kind of a Citizenship exercise. Herman was real pleased.

Our school had originally asked Danny and Robert to go, but both declined. Herman took it to heart that he was going to Austin and he the two foremost jocks were not. Herman considered it quite a personal feather in his cap.

I was asked to be an alternate, in case Herman couldn't go. Surprised, I had agreed and promptly forgot all about it. I got my name in the Greenville paper for it, but I didn't know it. How I got picked for Boy's State, even as an alternate, I have no idea. I remember that I was in study hall and a teacher, Ms Baldwin I think, just walked up to me and asked. I got a short explanation and I agreed. Then I put my nose back in my book and forgot all about it.

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes

As amazing as things had been throughout high school it was always the things "unlooked for" that sometimes brought the nicest surprises. One memorable night the entire athletic organization of several schools were invited to a big food and speech fest at East Texas State University. This somewhat large gathering was put together by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Having no idea what it was all about, I squeezed myself into my suit and went to the

school house. Then the school bussed us over to a large ball room on the E.T. campus, in a building I would come to know as the Student Union Building, or Sub.

This dining area was big enough to easily fit the floor of our old gym into, bleachers included. It was even bigger than our entire auditorium. Prior to this, the biggest eatery I had ever been into was the cafeteria\auditorium at Lamar School in Greenville. That only seemed so vast because I was just over 3 feet tall at the time. This place was definately bigger. It was ranked by tables set up stratigically to a raised dias; something like a small stage. On this stage the guest of honor sat at their tables. We came to this great hall and sat down.

A prayer was given and then we fed upon sumptious delacies most of us had never seen before outside of holidays or special banquets. As is my wont I stuffed myself, hoping to put some meat on my 100+ pound frame. Rabbit sat across the table from me. He was enjoying a projection of the 1971 Superbowl on the wall behind me. He was almost to the point of cheering the game on several times.

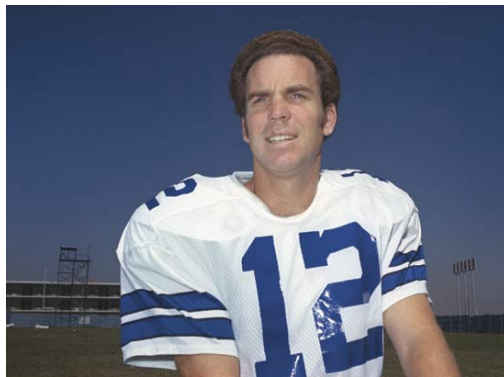
"It's a film, turkey!" I scolded him.

"Hey, I like it!" he retorted.

I turned and gave it a brief look, then I returned to my food. Randy and I seemed to be of the two main categories in this room; those who were enjoying the food and those who were engrossed in the film. I was still busily eating away when the master of ceremonies got our attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my priviledge to introduce our guest of honor, Mr. Roger Staubach!"

I almost spat my food out. there was Roger the Dodger, #12 of the Dallas Cowboys, a Living Legend and an atheletic hero! Every quarterback in the audience wanted to be just like him.

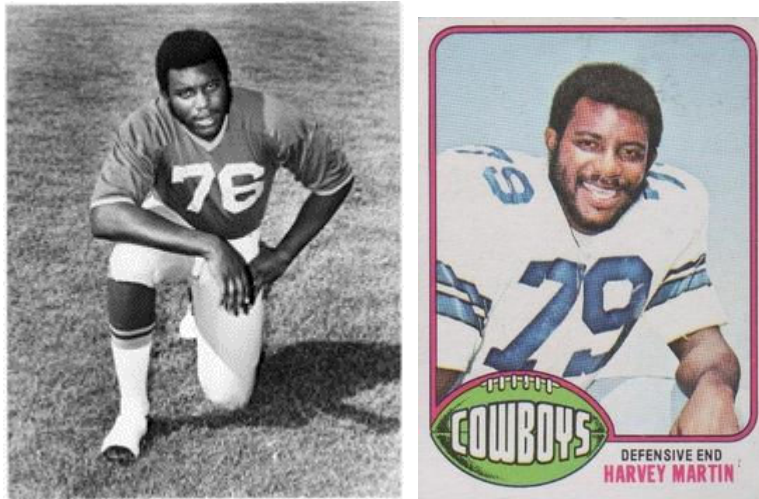


We applauded enthusiastically for this man. The Dallas Cowboys were OUR pro team! This was THE quarterback! We looked at this man with glazed over eyes! Mr. Staubach gave us a speech. It was amusing, informative, and wonderful. He related to us as how he had played for Navy and they came to the University of Texas to "teach Texas how to play football." He said with a bit of self sarcasim that Navy really showed U.T. because U.T. beat Navy 21 to 0! That got some laughs from us all. He then went on to talk about the Fellowship of Christian Atheletes and the great things they were doing and to explain to us what they were. Mr. Staubach had a wonderful voice and he sounded just like someone who would be a friend a buddy.

He was living a fantasy most of us had. All of us wanted to play Pro ball. Few, if any of us, would ever play in the pros. Only a handfull of us would play college ball. Because we were keenly

aware of this that was why we looked at Roger Staubach, graduate of the Naval Academy, Naval Officer, quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, and Superbowl Champion, with awe.

Mr. Staubach sat down and a couple of other people spoke. There was this gigantic black man who was introduced that few of us had ever heard of. He was a graduate of E.T. and he had been drafted by the Dallas Cowboys. What he said went in one ear and out the other. His name was Harvey Martin. Just who was he? In the years to come he would carve out a powerful reputation as a defensive right tackle. He would be #79, and he would be respected throughout the N.F.L. We all saw him just as he was beginning his N.F.L. career. This encounter would not be forgotten by a lot of us, and as we would see him on T.V. some of us would say that we met Harvey Martin at a formal dinner years ago.



I went back to my food after the speeches and the films resumed on the wall. I looked up to see Roger Staubach trying to leave. He was literally being mobbed by people trying to get his autograph. I thought that was disgusting. Mr. Brookins had told us to leave Mr. Staubach alone and to be on our best behaviour. To a man we did. Mr. Staubach graciously battled his way out of the hall, and to his great credit he never told anyone to get lost or to leave him alone. He was a class act all the way. I guess he figured that being the celebrity he was that this was just part of the price he had to pay for it. He exited and returned to Dallas.

Not long after this we were all loaded up and bussed home. I was driven home from school by my friends and that ended the night. It was the one and only time I ever saw Roger Staubach or Harvey Martin in person. It had been an unforgettable experience.

Harvey Martin left me with the impression that college linemen must be incredibly huge. It let me know that my chances of playing college football were even less. In spite of that it was a good experience to meet two men who were Dallas Cowboys.

Close Out

Mrs. Harris, who I contemptuously referred to as "Unholy Harris", was replaced in '73 by a very pretty woman named Ms. Ivy. I thought this black haired, glasses wearing, 23 year old lady to be a stunning beauty. Her problem was that she could not deal with a classroom full of rowdy teenagers.

Her efforts to reign us in led to resentment and I dubbed her "Poison Ivy". David Morgan had a field day with her. When he'd be in the process of cutting her down he'd look around the class to see our reaction.

She did a major faux-pas by reading a passage from a poem in our literature book. It was a sophisticated poem totally wasted on the intellectual level of the male portion of my class. She came to a passage that talked about the burial of a the person in the poem. It said something about being "laid to rest in the green hills of home..."

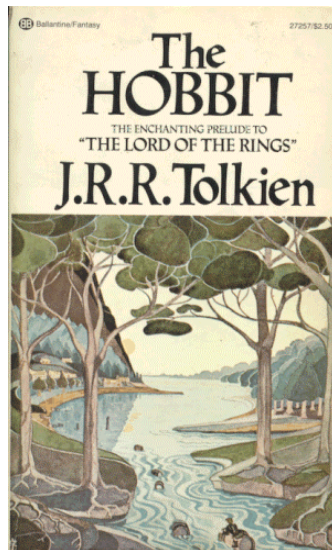
She read that out loud and decided to dissect the poem. She said "Lay me where?"

Gunner didn't skip a beat.

"In the green green grass!" he called.

The class roared with laughter and Ms. Ivy turned as crimson as one of our jerseys. The poor lady simply could not handle it, or us. She quickly tired of our innuendo and rowdiness. She would leave at the end of the year and we would not see her again. I hope she found a class with less boors in it, and went on to be a good teacher.

We did other things in other classes. One day I was reading a book about the U.S. Marines when Herman brought a great book to school called The Hobbit.

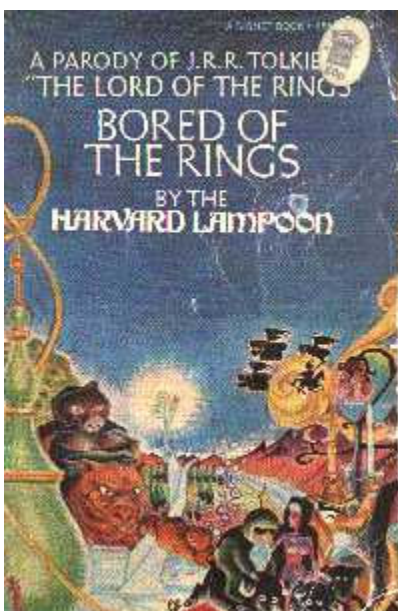


I took one look at the thing and saw references to Elves and Dwarves. I rolled my eyes and gave the book back to Herman.

"This is childish garbage!" I said.

Herman tried to convince me otherwise, but I stubbornly refused to believe him. I stuck my nose back in my Marine book and read on.

Herman wasn't finished with me. Knowing my coc-eyed sense of humor he gave me a book to read in History class that was a parody of the Hobbit, called Bored of the Rings. I took to reading this thing in Government class, hiding it behind my Civics book.



Mr. Chambliss was up there instructing us about Civics and Government. I read to a passage in Bored of the Rings that caught me by surprise. I almost lost control it was so funny. I stifled my guffaw, but the noise was a cross between a snicker and a sneeze. Mr. Chambliss cast a cautionary glare in my direction, raising an eyebrow for emphasis, but kept on with his lesson. I had to put the paperback away least I read the passage again and burst out with uncontrollable laughter. I would eventually read Bored of the Rings from cover to cover and I would usually keep a copy in my library.

Herman accomplished what he set out to do. I later went on to buy the entire Lord of the Rings set that was very popular in the 70s. I still have the ragged, dog eared, volumes someplace. I sometimes still read them, and they led me to get involved in fantasy gaming that would be so popular in the 80s. I never regretted what Herman did for me that day. Some 5 years later I would become leader of a gaming club in Greenville. My gaming friends and I would meet in Greenville for many decades after this, and we would be best man at each other's weddings, god-father to their children, and help one another in time of crisis. All this began when Herman handed me that one oddball paperback.

In classes some of us discovered ways to cheat. Anyone caught cheating faced serious penalties. Among them was expulsion, loss of credits for the entire semester, or merely getting a zero on that day's test.

One of the most risky factors in using a cheat sheet was that if a guy skipped one answer or repeated it the entire rest of the test was blown. Sweating like thieves and looking guilty as sin we tried to fool the teachers as we would sneak quick glimpses at our cheat sheets.

Gary had what he thought was a novel idea. He put a cheat sheet that was slightly larger than a postage stamp, in the long black locks of Sheron Stewart. She sat in front of him, and all he had to do was get a glimpse in her hair for an answer.

I am not sure what the relationship between Sheron Stewart and Gary was. She seemed remarkably tolerant of his presence. I watched this relationship from a distance and all I could do was speculate. They seemed to be quite close. When I asked Gary if he had a 'thing' for Sheron he denied it. He said they were like brother and sister. I didn't 100 % buy this explanation and I

still don't. I think he had a crush on the cheerleader, and refused to admit it. I am still not sure either way.

Anyway, they were sitting about 3 rows back from the front. I was chewing on my pencil and trying to figure out what the answer to a particular question was. It was an essay question and I wanted to figure out what answer the class teacher would want. If I phrased it wrong I could fail the question.

I looked over at Gary, clear across the room from me. He reached into the middle of Sheron Stewart's back where her hair fell, and took a glimpse at his cheat sheet.

The teacher caught on quick. Everytime Gary would play with Sheron's hair he'd mark an answer. After a while the teacher got up, went over to Gary's desk and discovered the cheat sheet. Gary, I think, let it fall out of Sheron Stewart's hair onto the floor, so it looked like he had it on his desk and was hiding it in her hair. By doing this he took away any of Sheron's complicity in the deed. He took the fall all himself.

The teacher merely zeroed Gary's test, and let it go at that.

The rest of the school year was taken up with nonsense and easy tasks. Report card apprehension set my palms to sweating as the Final Days approached. A sense of doom hung over me as I nervously waited.

For off-season practice those of us on the football team started playing touch football, supervised by the coaches. We shorted up in the locker room of the new gym. It was quite a novelty. We admired the new showers and rest room that we had. Nothing had been totally plumbed in yet, but I thought all these new facilities were just fantastic. Locker racks for us to hang our equipment in were already here. I took a locker next to the gym door and that would be my locker from now on. These lockers reminded us all of the racks in the old gym. They were nothing but open wooden shelves with a place to hang the gear, but we were the first to use them.



Locker room, looking south east. Door opens to hall leading to outside exit and coaches office.

Picture was taken looking in from gym floor.



Looking north west toward the door that leads out to the gym floor. That's my locker

Next to the door. Notice they were nothing but simple open wooden racks. Theft was virtually non-existent.

We made up four teams and the Coaches set us up in a sort of tournament. Mr. Fannin took great delight in this, watching us do battle and improve our skills in passing and running routes. It was great fun to do and it gave the coaches a chance to see who looked like a real receiver or a good safety. Our touch-football training was a very valuable tool, and we used it extensively. This is the very early birth of what would evolve into the 7 on 7 that would make off season more interesting for all the schools.

The 4 teams we had were called the Streakers, Strollers, Jets, and Stokers. I was on the Jets, and Gunner was my quarterback. David Morgan loved to quarterback and he wasn't all that bad at it. I made 4 posters on notebook paper, one for each team. We had them put up on the locker room walls. They were the first posters in the entire gym.

The "Streakers" poster was a guy in a ski-mask and nothing else, about to throw a pass. The word "Streakers" was strategically located on the poster. "Strollers" was a baby buggy with a tiny hand and arm about to throw a pass. "Jets" was a side view of an F-40 Stargazer from my comics over a big 1. I don't think I came up with a poster for the "Stokers" because I had no idea what it was. I think I eventually used a steam train engine.

On defense I was covering Terry Dooley on a pass route. I played on Danny's prejudices and gambled by covering Terry loose. Danny was too crafty for me. He read exactly what I was up to and burned one right to Terry. The little guy got 10 yards on me.

"Don't ever underestimate your foes, Charlie-O!" Coach Taylor called.

Yeah, and don't ever overestimate yourself.

Rabbit was going "Hawa-hawa-hawa!" at me as a way of friendly intimidation. I remarked that it sounded like birds. We didn't know it but he gave me one of my most popular and enduring cartoon characters, the 'Hawa-bird'. This bird would evolve and change over the next 20 years and become a major figure in my pantheon of cartoon characters that I created.



There were plans going on for informal training during post-season. This would be done by ex-players who had gone to college and had game time. Our football training was now almost year around, but to us it was just good fun. Mr. Fannin saw a lot of determination in his up and coming team. In private conversations with Coach Taylor he believed they had a team that could go to the State Championship next year. We had a lot of promise, Coach Taylor agreed, all they had to do was get us to do it.

As the warm month of May drew to a close I was now 18 years old and nervous as a cat. As I sat in my homeroom class for the last time this year I recieved my report card. With great trepidation I looked at it.

Once more there was joking and cat-calls about not going on to the next grade, about repeating as a Junior and maybe graduating in '75. Not me, my friend! I was to be a Senior in 1974! I had made it! I had reached the top rung of the ladder, I had made it to the top of the heap! I WAS A SENIOR!

The Last of the Class of 1973

Late May came with all the great freedoms longed for by all my fellow classmates. For Anita Green it ment she was getting married to a fellow she was madly in love with. As she was now in Campbell and not a real pal of mine I paid it no mind.

Now that I was free for the Summer I went into it with enthusiasm. Others would be free of High School for the rest of their lives, as the graduating class of 1973 began to rally at the new gym that peaceful May evening.

Jerry McGee drove his 396 into the school parking lot for the last time as a student of Lone Oak. Already other classmates of his had parked in their old spots one last time. They converged on the gym, where graduation was to be.

Jerry met people he had grown up with. David Lemons, Eddie Lively, and he exchanged greetings and nervously speculated on their futures. David was to embark on a singing career with his band, hopping along the circuit and playing the Country and Western clubs.

Others of his graduating class thought of college. Some thought of a military career. Some of the girls looked forward to marriage and the life of a traditional housewife. Others, both male and female, had no solid plans than to just have one last summer and then try to figure out what to do next.

All classes were unique, but this class was unique in a special way. Marilyn Fry was Lone Oak's first black cheerleader. She had done very well. The football players in this class were the last to play 8 man football in highschool. With their graduation there would be no more alumni who had played the old 8 man game in their high school years.

Of all upper classmen I knew this group best of all. They were closer to me. I had been on the playground in gradeschool with many of them. Larry Hukill and I explored the stars and battled evil space creatures side by side on the monkey bars.



William had tried to make me the butt of many of his jokes. David Lemons had inspired me to follow as close as I could in his footsteps. Jerry McGee showed me what real class for a guy was like.

This was one of the classiest and easy to get along with classes I would ever encounter. They really made an effort to get along with everybody. There was only 18 of them, and I knew I would miss most of them. I certainly respected most of them.



I will pay special accolades to Jerry because I not only respected his considerable strength but that he was the very first Buffalo to score in the return to 11 man football that we all began in 1970. He was big, fearsome looking, strong, and had a lot of class. He never gave me or any

other fellow a hard time unless they pushed it. He and a lot of guys in his graduating class qualify for the title of 'Gentleman'.

So it was that Jerry entered the uncompleted gym through one of the empty windows and went to a designated room to dress in cap and gown. He wore his Sunday suit, and everyone else in the class wore their best. Aside from the usual lightweight cutting up in the dressing room there was not much else to do. The Class of 1973 marched out on cue, clad in traditional cap and gown. Speeches were made by school board members, faculty, and class officers. A prayer was made for their future, then the diplomas were given out.

When Jerry, Larry, David Lemmons, and their classmates exited the gym in May of 1973 that night they were no longer students of L.O.H.S. They were a few of thousands of graduates. Jerry planned to attack life with the enthusiasm he had gone into Buffalo Football with. He would leave Lone Oak, but he would be back.

For them all it was onward, upward, and Go Big Red!

Changes

I sat in my favorite chair watching T.V. in the living room. In my left hand was a Dr. Pepper, in my right was my very favorite 1/48th scale model of an Apollo spaceship. I was very happy! I didn't care that the calendar said it was Spring, for me this was Summer! I had slept late and I was embracing the comfort of life at home. I had it pretty much to myself most of the time, just me and the T.V. All around me things were changing. My relationships with people, the places I went to, the things I did, even my own self were changing.

I still hung around with Rickey Graham, but not as much. We went hunting one day at his place and the day was highlighted by our discovery of one of those hand-pumps for water that was over a well. It looked like the kind seen in westerns. It worked, too, to our delighted surprise.

I had pretty much stopped playing football with Benjy and his friends. Other things were taking up my time. Rick had stopped riding his monster bicycle and gave it to me. In turn, I gave my bike to Benjy with the understanding that he would take good care of it. To my great anger I was wrong.

I found Benjy and his big pal J.M. Davis jumping my bike over a ditch. They had broken the seat and tore several spokes loose from the wheels. I angrily took it back and I never let Benjy have anything of mine again. He and I pretty much didn't see eye to eye anymore. Our friendship virtually ceased to exist.

Rick was very happy with his new orange 1971 Camaro that he built, but mechanical troubles kept the powerful car in the shop from time to time. To keep transportation available he purchased a 1958 Studebaker. This car was a faded canary yellow, raunchy, and ugly. It was also worn out. Rick got me to paint a Confederate Flag on the dashboard and the word "stud" on the rear quarterpanels. He actually gave me a few bucks for my effort. This was to become our back up car.

Once I was riding home with him through the boonies on a blacktop road and the hood latch failed and the hood came right up. The wind caught it and bent it back over the roof, blocking forward sight. I had never seen such a thing happen before, but I had been in much worse with Rick so I remained calm. Rick carefully stopped the car, got out, and pulled the hood down. We then continued on our way.

I noticed one day that I had little black whiskers, about a dozen or so, clinging to my upper lip. They were different from the light colored peach fuzz I had there before. I was delighted! I had a moustache! Curious about the prospects, I took one of my older pictures and drew a beard on it to see what I'd look like. Herman saw it and howled with laughter.

I once discussed the prospect of shaving with Rick, while he dragged a razor over his thick black stubble.

"The novelty wears off after a while, Charlie. It gets old fast, and its just a pain after that."

I didn't care. I made up my mind that I would grow a beard someday.

Rick and I didn't go to town as much now. Roller Skating was becoming passe'. Going to the steak house was not as much fun anymore, either. Rick had also found a girlfriend that I never saw and his dating her left me with a lot of open evenings with no place to go. Rabbit came in to fill this void.

Rabbit and I would get together from time to time and just mess around. We did nothing major because neither of us had any money, but we could usually find something to do, like the Ambush On Ronald or hanging around in Lone Oak. We actively persued our military career ideas with the recruiters together.

Randy wasn't getting the type of deal from the Army that he could get from the Marines. The more he saw from the Marines the more he liked.

I liked tanks, and the tanks the Marines had in 1973 were worn out heaps and interested me not at all. There was also something about the aloofness of most Marines, their air of superiourity, that I didn't like.

The Army had the gadgets, and their tanks were loaded with gadgets. I was hooked on the Army.

The recruiters were more than happy to see us, in spite of the fact that it would be a full year before we could go in. The conventional wisdom was the all volunteer Army was a mistake and that the draft would soon be re-enstated. Until that happened they all had quotas to fill.

Randy and I were given bumper stickers, decals, pamphlets, books, even frisbees. Rabbit got a Globe and Anchor pendant he wore on a chain. the recruiters showed us films in a T.V. like projector. I was fascinated by the M-60-A1 tank in use at the time. It was vastly superiour to any tank I had been familiar with before. I watched in awe as the tank blew up targets, rolled along roads at 30 miles an hour, and weighed in at 52 tons. The biggest gadget on the tank was the Xenon spotlight over the 105 mm gun.

I had only been remotely familiar with tanks, and these were essentially late World War Two versions. The leap in technology was staggering.

Randy wanted to see what type of career he could have after the Marines. He wanted to be a policeman, I guess, and the training he could get in the Marines seemed superiour to that in the Army. I didn't have a problem with it, for we had always tread slightly different paths.

Randy's fondness of the Marines and my love of the Army was the first of many little things that would begin to seperate us.

" If all your friends would go and jump off

a bridge would you do it too?"

Mother to a son, discussing a question

of peer pressure.

The Iron Bridge



Randy invited me to go swimming in Lake Tawakoni. As I had developed a little bit of swimming ability by this time, I happily went along. We piled into the yellow van and unloaded at a boat ramp near the legendary Highway 35 Bridge.

This bridge is called "the Iron Bridge", or "the Two Mile Bridge". This thing spans from East Tawakoni to West Tawakoni, from Rains County to Hunt County. It is about 15 feet from the guard rail to the silty, murkey, wine dark waters below.

As it was about mid-June, swimming was in vogue big time. I had on my basketball shorts. There were about 4 other guys with Rabbit and me, including his dare devil little brother, David. David looked like he was barely over 3 feet tall and he was totally fearless. He looked kind of like Bob Crane of Hogan's Heros fame.

We parked the van and entered the water near the boat ramp beside the bridge. This let us know just how cold the water might be and scared off any snakes and fish in the area. Randy the Rabbit got up on the bridge and hopped off. He hit the water feet first and splashed water almost as high as the guard rail! Some of the guys with us refused to go up on the bridge, but they kept an eye out for cops. As I went up to the bridge I saw a sign that said "No diving from bridge."

Oh yeah?

I stood on the area just outside the guard rail and looked down at the water. The waves had the dark blue-green silty mess in motion, and the sun reflected off it giving it a jello look. I stepped off the bridge.

The flight down was remarkably long and with a splash I entered the water feet first. I kept going down. The tempature of the water suddenly changed, going very cold. I kept going down, feeling the bubbles shed off my body. Still I kept going down. Where was the bottom?

Having had enough of this, I frog-kicked and paddled to the surface. It took a bit to get there. I broke surface at last, wiped my face so I could see, and swam for the ramp.

"Man! That water is cold!" I cried.

"Yeah, and it's deep too!" Rabbit added.

I got up on the slimey boat ramp, letting the warm water lap around me.

"How deep do you think it is out there?" I asked Randy.

Rabbit shrugged.

"It could be as much as 30 feet," he guessed.

We dived off the bridge several times, never seeing a cop once. I never did find the bottom. It was great fun for us, and I discovered that I could swim as good as anybody there. I could do the crawl, and I swam all over the place. I was overjoyed that I could actually swim!

Randy got his brother David to go piggy back and they leaped into the water together. Rabbit, getting braver, then decided he wanted to swim 8 piers to the ramp. We walked the distance on the bridge as he counted the piers. He looked at the 80 or so yards to the beach, and changed his mind about swimming there.

Most of us jumped off the bridge feet first by just stepping over the guard rail. Randy wanted to be different. He took a run and dived over the guardrail. He hit the water in a classic head first dive. I didn't see him hit the water but I did see him clear the rail. Those of us on the bridge ran over and peeked over the rail as the water splashed up where we were.

Would Rabbit come back up?

He did, and paddled toward the beach. After this we all retired under the bridge and chatted about girls, cars, the military, and football. Rabbit had lost his Marine Corps pendant and was upset about it. It is somewhere way down in the murkey depths of Lake Tawakoni, settling into the silt. For us, it was gone forever. Randy hated loosing that pendant.

As we sat on the concrete bank under the bridge somebody broke out a bar of soap and actually took a bath. After a while we all called it a day and went on for other pursuits. Until I went parachuting at 5000 feet this was to be the highest dive I had ever done.

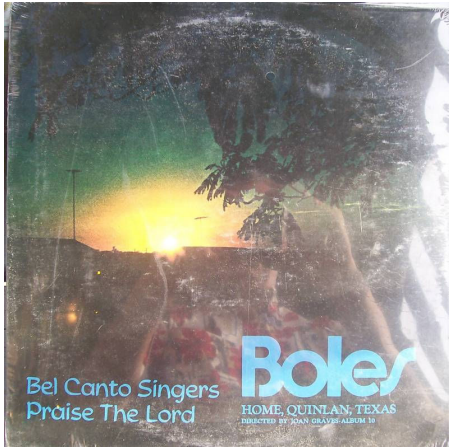
Randy's running buddies were as different from Rick's as night was from day. They were younger, not as argumentative, and more intellectual. Ray and Doug Higgins would go on to outstanding careers in military aviation. Randy's brother David was just as big a thrill seeker as Randy, and just as tough. Neicy's little brother Bobby Simmons was also among the group.

Bobby was intelligent, quiet, stoic, and very tolerant. As Randy and I were Seniors, we lorded it over him a little. He simply did as he was told and didn't complain. I grew to respect him, but I never let him know it.

Fingers In a Jar

June came, hot and humid. Between spending time with the recruiters and general messing around I would managed to haul some hay and occasionally work at my dad's station.

The heat of June wasn't lost on those out at Boles Home. They had a Choir called the Bel Canto Singers and rigged up a tour for them this summer. To keep the 12 girls and 5 guys comfortable as they travelled through New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Nevada, an air conditioned bus was purchased with donations. This bus was white, with the school name, and "Bel Canto Singers" stenciled on the sides.



I had never heard of an air-conditioned school bus and I do not know what I would have thought of it had I seen the artical back then. I had not, and I probably would not have cared who the Bel Canto group was. However, one individual in that group and I were to meet and it would have a dramatic effect on me, my personality, and my entire outlook on life.

Still, the thought of an airconditioned bus back in 1973 was mind boggling. I did see this bus later, several times in the mid to late 70s, and in 1994 it or it's successor would be retired to a pasture to one side of the school of Boles Home. The Bel Canto Singers would tour no more. But in June of 1973 it was a brand new bus, and the Bel Canto Singers embarked on what must have been the adventure of a lifetime. None of them I found would tell me anything of the trip, except that they did a lot of travelling and went to several states.

June was also the big month for Herman. He packed his stuff and took off for Austin with his fellow Boy's Staters.

Once in Austin Herman participated in the "organization of political parties, elections, campaigns, and enactment of laws within a mythical state." Herman found this somewhat boring, but he enjoyed seeing the Texas Capital city of Austin.

The Capitol Building in Austin is located on a very long road so it can be admired as it is approached. On a wagon or buggy riding toward it the view must have been fantastic. Even in a car it is quite eye-catching.

Herman took all this in with typical 17 year old's attitude.

"Hey, man, where are all the girls?"

Herman had to settle for the fact that he was at BOY'S State.

Going to the Department of Public Safety building Herman was given a tour, along with his fellow Boy's Staters. They beheld some of the most sophisticated crime fighting devices in the State of Texas. Of all this modern and high tech goodies the one that stuck in his mind the most was grissly and primitive.

In a jar inside one of the labs was a great collection of human fingers. These were dried and mummified. Each unidentified corpse found in the state has one finger removed before burial so it can hopefully someday be identified by a finger print. Herman grossed out. Perhaps by now, with DNA testing, this method is no longer in use, and with DNA testing they have been able to identify some of the lost souls the fingers used to belong to.

One thing Herman truly liked in his trip to Austin was going to the place where the University of Texas Longhorns practiced. It was an arena with artificial turf. He examined the texture of the fake grass and marvelled at the spongy feel. He and his fellow Boy's Staters even got to play a game of touch football on the field, putting Herman one up on most of us. He was the first one of my class to ever play football on artificial turf. To my knowledge nobody else in the entire student body had ever done so.

After his interesting stay in the State Capitol, Herman came back with a Boy's State T-shirt. I would come to think that he really loved the shirt, because he wore it almost all the time until it nearly fell apart. What the deal was is that it was his way of saying to Robert and Danny that he went to Boy's State and they didn't. It was an 'in your face' on his part. I don't think they caught on, but it was massaging Herman's ego so he didn't care. He really did not like the 'Fine Young Men'. I could empathize. I figured I had played football for much the same reasons, to show these Fine Young Men that I could do it too.

The trip to Austin was the high point of Herman's summer.

Up in space, Nasa had repaired it's damaged Skylab station. I thought that was just too cool and I watched what little of the space program the media felt was fit to put on the air. I was disappointed of the long gone days of liftoff to splashdown coverage.

In Greenville a publicity stunt was pulled off by the Army Recruiters. I knew the recruiters well enough to get some inside information and I hung around as they put together a group of volunteers they called the "Audie Murphy Platoon". This was a group of about 18 young men who would go through basic training and advanced individual training together. They were also supposed to serve in the same unit, and so on. I don't think this worked out, because after the ceremony on the south courthouse steps I heard absolutely nothing else about the Audie Murphy Platoon.

The old Greenville Hospital where I was born became the Senior Citizen's Center. This was better than tearing it down, but eventually it would be boarded up and abandoned.

Oil prices were rising again. Gasoline had been between 25 cents and 30 cents a gallon, and now it had rocketed up to 45 and 60 cents. In some places there was no gasoline to be had. This was precipitated by hostile Arab nations who disliked our support of Israel. This was part of a bigger plan on part of the Arabs that would come to a dangerous head in October in the Yom Kippur War. This would also spark the so-called 'energy crisis'.

Because of that there was talk of the big Cadillac style car going by way of the dinosaur.

Football was in the local news, too. Cooper was picked to win our District 17-A, even before the first workouts had begun. Robert was also mentioned, as he was getting even bigger and stronger. I hoped we would all get bigger and stronger, because we had not won a district title at Lone Oak in 2 years. We would see.

July

Hanging around the Army Recruiting Station I met men who were veterans of the Vietnam War. They had also been to Germany, Asia, and other places I had only read about.

One of the recruiters was Sgt. Smith. He had a baritone voice and was rail thin. He had two helpers in Sgt Kandler and one other guy that was from the First Cavalry Division. The guy from the 1st Cav. wore a black beret that all the guys in the Cav wore, along with his green uniform.

Sgt Smith was tolerant and cool, very business like. Sgt. Kandler genuinely liked me and we chatted a lot about the Army and his time in Vietnam. His New England accent was a hoot, as he called a house a 'hoose'. Sgt Kandler hated to wear his class 'A' coat. He could be seen all over town out of uniform by not wearing the coat. The guy from the 1st Cav had a temper. One day after tiring from my questioning of him he blew up at me. I stayed away from him after that, but I still got along fine with Sgt Kandler.

I helped Sgt Kandler sell these 75 cent buttons for the 4th of July Celebration coming up. In a photo of him in the Greenville paper he is selling a button to somebody. Directly behind him is my bicycle, just barely visible. When the reporter showed up to take this photo I got out of the way because I was dressed in only T-shirt, jeans, a beat up cap, and ragged sneakers. I also had no business in the photo.

This 4th of July there was to be a great celebration at the football field in Greenville, complete with fireworks. I could hardly wait. I had never seen big time fireworks in my life.

Of course, I bought one of those 75 cent buttons the Chamber of Commerce had the recruiters selling. Sgt. Kandler had me wear it all the time I was around the recruiting office area. I also wore my beat up fatigue cap and some green trousers I owned. I guess I looked something like I was already in the Army, and the recruiters didn't seem to mind.

I helped around the office some, too. I had nothing else to do there, so I pitched right in. I helped unload tables for the Audie Murphy Platoon set up, move chairs, and the like. For my efforts I was given a beat up old non-functioning Light Anti-tank Weapon tube. The L.A.W. is a one shot, bazooka-like weapon, and this old worn out thing was now little more than a toy. It was the first major acquisition to my collection of military hardware.

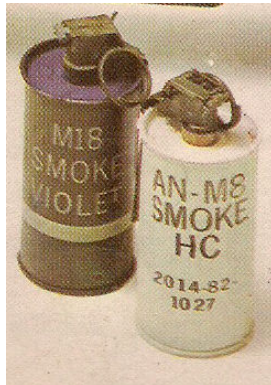
The long awaited Fourth of July came and I hopped on my gigantic bike and rode to town. Rick and I believed our bikes could not be beat by the smaller "Stingray" bikes popular then. I rode all

over Greenville, observing different events. I then went to the front of the Senior High School by the old hospital where the Auto-Cross was being held. I watched sports cars zig-zag all over the course and one big Thunderbird tear up the pylons as it lumbered through the course. After the cars finished a bunch of bicycle riders took to the course, myself among them. I easily put about 6 lengths on the Stingrays but when I pulled into a slot that the cars had to enter and back out of the other bikes violated the course and shot by. I believe I was the actual winner of the impromptu bike race, because I was the only one of that half dozen that did the entire course as it had been laid out.

Alone again, I wandered into the Greenville football field after chaining and securing my monster bike. I was way paranoid that somebody would steal my one and only method of transportation, and I carried a chain and lock on it. I went to the far end of Phillip's Field and looked over what was being put up there. I stumbled over the upright display and gained the wrath of the head assembler who told me to go away. I had tripped over several of the thin wires that were used to hold the display up.

Finally I got out of the place and I waited in a safe and quiet spot out of the way for Sgt. Smith to arrive. Spectators began to arrive, and populate the stands. Sgt. Smith soon drove up, to my relief, and he called me over.

"I got smoke grenades in the front seat of my car," he said. He showed me the non-lethal pyrotechnics he had under a coat in the car seat.



"Keep an eye on them," he ordered, " They are worth a lot of money."

You bet they are, roughly \$45 apiece, and if they get lost Sgt Smith has to pay for them!

So I was posted guard by his car. Sgt. Smith was in civilian dress and I thought he looked odd. He looked emaciated and gaunt, with all of the military trappings gone from him. Had I known better I would have also been curious where he got the M-18 Violet Smoke Grenades. Goodies like that require a lot of paperwork and official say so. I watched most of the preliminaries from my station by the car.

One of the first events of the fireworks was a parachute jump over the stadium. The airplane was so high that everybody had to look practically straight up to see the jumpers. They came out at 5000 feet after dropping a streamer that told them the wind conditions. Sgt Smith came and got his smoke grenades and tossed one of them out on about the 40 yard line. I watched with fascination from the foot of the grandstands as purple smoke boiled from the little can-shaped grenade.

The guy on the P.A. called them "smoke bombs" and in my military bigotry about such things I thought that was real dumb of him. The announcer went on chatting about the two guys who were drifting down under the multi-color parachutes. It seemed to take forever for the guys to get to the ground. When they did I ran out to help them with their parachutes. As I held the canopy this one guy daisy-chained up his lines and chute. Wrapping this up in a manageable bundle, he took it over to Sgt Smith's car. Both jumpers then tossed their rigs into the car's trunk. With a wave Sgt Smith drove away with the parachutist, and I was on my own again.

I went out on the field and collected the 2 hot and burned out smoke grenades. I put them in my cap until they cooled enough to be handled bare handed. Looking around I found the safety spoons and pins. I eventually added these to my collection of military equipment. I still have one of the rusted out hulks today someplace along with the 75 cent button.

The rest of the night was watching events such as egg tossing and races. The fireworks were okay. Some guy would light a fuse on a mortar buried in the ground next to the band practice area. With a 'thoop!' the rocket would streak skyward and explode with dazzling effect. The one I remember the most didn't get very high. The rocket popped out of the tube, then blew up on the ground, blasting and whistling as the gunner fled for cover.

While this was going on, a guy in the bleachers kept dropping firecrackers up in the bleachers, even while we sang the National Anthem. It was taken all in fun by the announcer. There was a live band too, playing a variety of songs. I knew the lead singer from my Dixon sand-lot football days, but I didn't go say hello.

Things eventually wound down. The standup displays I had tripped over earlier that day were okay, but not dazzling. Judging this fireworks display from the others I had seen later on it wasn't bad. It certainly had a lot to it, including the parachute drop, the egg races, and so on. I thought it all was really neat.

Things ended and I called my parents to come and get me. I wasn't about to risk my life riding my bike home at 8:00 at night. It was way too dangerous. I quietly waited out of the way until my father arrived and I put my big ole bike and smoke grenades in the back of the pick-up truck. We rode home. I was sunburned, tired, and feeling very lonely. As neat as all this experience was I didn't have anyone to share it with. I had been in a crowd of people and all alone.

I spent the next several days playing with the smoke grenades and getting over my sunburn. I also recieved an obscure note in the mail telling me I may have won a sewing machine if my ticket number matched the numbers on the card.

What ticket? I just walked into the stadium and sat down. I filed it away and didn't even try to go see if I had won a sewing machine.

Time diminishes us with old legends passing and give us new ones. In July 7th of 1973, Betty Grable passed away. The older members of the entertainment industry and thousands of WW II veterans were saddened by her passing. She was the pin-up girl of WW II, and her picture and likeness graced many a military vehical and installtion.

In Lone Oak a new metel building was erected to serve as out new firestation. The current building was almost 100 years old. The new building was to have room for both trucks and the pumper. The old building had caught fire, and what remained was torn down. We had made some progress, from brick to steel.

I, the Accused

It was a typical summer night in Lone Oak. The bugs were tolerable and bored kids sat on the hoods of cars and chatted freely about nothing at all. Randy and I were parked in front of Abbot's Food Store, in his blue Falcon. He was happy he had the little car, for it gave him a freedom he didn't have with the van. The Falcon was his, and he could go when he pleased in it. The Van was his dad's, and he had to ask permission to use it to go anywhere.

So here we were. Suddenly the fire alarm went off again. We catapulted into motion almost immediately. Running for the firestation everybody wanted to get a ride on one of the trucks. Rabbit had other ideas. He wanted to take his car, not wanting to be stranded like he was the last time, depending on the firetrucks to get him back. We waited, and the firetrucks took off for East Tawakoni, down the roller coaster road of 513. Rabbit fell in behind and off we went.

After a bit of travelling on the hilly, winding road, we saw a sizeable grass fire up ahead not far from Randy's house. He dumped me out by my request and somebody on a firetruck tossed me a damp burlap sack to beat out the fire with. I got to work with a will. Rabbit drove on to get on a truck and help the crew battle with the fire.

After a while the trucks had it out-flanked and sprayed water on it to kill the blaze. As the fire died I flagged down a truck to return my slightly smouldering sack and maybe get a ride to Lone Oak.

I hopped on the running board of the truck and gave one of the guys in the cab my sack.

"Is it out?" one of the guys drawled at me.

"Yeah, another Lone Oak fire out," I replied.

"You wanna go back to Lone Oak?" they generously offered.

"I got a ride here, but I'll go back with yall if I can tell him."

"Okay."

I looked around, wondering where Rabbit was out there in the smokey blackness.

"Sure have been a lot of fires lately," I said.

"Yep."

"You know," I said, "that old gym burning down was the best thing that could have happened."

This was the conventional wisdom being tossed around at the time. We did get all new football gear, and a brand new state of the art gym. The fact was we really missed the old barn, but this was one way of putting a positive spin on our loss. All of us had been discussing the positive aspects of the loss back in town before the fire. When I brought it up here I got an unexpected reaction.

The driver of the firetruck glared at me and growled "Get in the truck, boy!"

Confused by this, and suddenly alert after the adrenalin charge of fighting the fire, I looked at the driver and obeyed.

"Yes sir."

As we rode to Lone Oak I was interrogated. The passenger with me said nothing, just let the driver run his head.

"Did you set that gym fire, boy?"

I looked at him in disbelief, and realized I was dancing on the edge of getting in major trouble.

"No."

"Where was you when it burned?"

"In Greenville, with Rickey Graham."

"You can prove that?"

"Ask Rick."

I would hold the driver of this firetruck in contempt for the rest of my life for his accusations.

Once we got to the firestation in Lone Oak the truck was put up and I got out of it, steaming with rage. I found Randy and told him what happened. The absurdity of it all made him crow with laughter.

"Aw, that guy who gave you a hard time is harmless. He thinks he is more important than he is. Don't worry about it."

Rabbit knew my moods better than I did. He knew I would be wound up about this for days. He was right.

Days later when I told Herman what had happened to me he guffawed and asked me just why did I burn down the gym. He knew I didn't like being accused of anything I didn't do and I had very little sense humor about such things. Herman picked on me about that for years, getting a kick out of my reaction.

Dyn-O-Mite!



Rick's place was a miniature Disneyland. It had a large barn where a poultry raising enterprise had failed, a welding shop, tons of scrapmetal of every conceivable type, a large stock-pond we called the Party-Lake, 3 or 4 small barns of ancient age, a tiny cemetery containing about 4 graves, and ravines filled with cans and an old '35 pickup truck body.

The Party Lake had a pier on it, and people could dive off into the inky water. I never went to a party there, so I never knew what really went on there. Rick would sometimes embellish the truth, so I came to believe that some wild goings on had happened there. All that probably happened was 4 guys and a 6 pack.

We could shoot firearms all over the place. A smaller stock-pond not far from Party Lake was populated with snakes and turtles. We'd spend a few hours on slow days sniping at these reptiles with .22 rifles. Occasionally a buzzard or rabbit would wander into our sights. We shot only one rabbit and he wasn't fit to cook. We never hit a single buzzard though we shot hundreds of rounds at the big, black birds soaring overhead.

I don't know where Rick got it, but he came into possession of at least two sticks of dynamite. He even had the blasting caps. Keeping this stuff in very dangerous because static electricity can set off the caps. If the dynamite gets unstable it can go off with a considerable blast that can easily level a house. My guess is that someone with all the proper permits and training got it to blast stumps out of the ground and had this ordinance left over.

I wasn't around when Rick set these charges off. It was described to me in some detail later, and what I saw convinced me that I was getting the whole truth. Rick got a 12 volt battery out of one of the farm vehicles and he, Lynn, and another fellow went down into the pasture. They put a stick down in one ravine in the hulk of the '35 pickup, ran to another nearby ravine for cover, and proceeded to set up the wires they had strung. With sweaty palms they put the wires to the poles of the battery.

There was a loud BAM! that echoed through the trees and shook the very earth under them. Lynn looked up and saw hundreds of cans falling from the sky. He, Rick, and the other guy covered up as the debris rained on and around them.

After all the junk stopped falling from the heavens and they were sure that they were unhurt, they went over to see what was left of the truck. What they saw thrilled them. The rusty orange truck cab had been turned inside out, and ripped totally open. The doors were gone. The firewall had been blown out and away. The floorboard disappeared. Only the 'I' beam chassis remained relatively in tact.

"Wow!"

"Neat-o!"

Next they found a tree. Rick got a shovel and they put the dynamite stick under the trunk of the tree. It was an old tree, dead, and ideal for what they wanted. Once more they strung the wire and got set up.

Again there was an explosion of considerable force. Again the very earth shook under them. Lynn looked up to see the tree about 30 feet in the air, limbs and bark going everywhere. It had lifted straight up, like a wooden rocket. He and the others ducked before the debris got to where they were.

It was a week later when Rick told me about this and showed me where it happened. I gawked at what was left of the trunk and the hole where the tree used to be. I, too, thought it was really neat.

I loved Rick like my own brother. For all his bluster and bigness he was really a sensitive, quiet, insecure fellow with a large ego. He just wanted to be a hero and looked up to. To me he was my hero and I looked up to him, and I always will. All too often Ole Rick tried to be something he wasn't, just like I did. His greatest successes came when he just let himself be himself.