

"Bellerophon became proud of his good fortune later in life.

He tried to ride Pegasus up to the home of the gods.

Zeus sent a gadfly to sting Pegasus, and Bellerophon

fell to earth. He was blind and lame the rest of his life."

Greek Mythology, World Book Encyclopedia, 1959

# The Fall

**Basketball Season, 1973-74**

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Part Seven

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"I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano-

A stage, where every man must play a part,

And mine a sad one."

Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

End of the Dream

Most of the guys washed their uniforms, both game and practice, then dutifully turned them in. Some of us Seniors took our time about turning in our equipment because this was the last time. When we put our cleats away in the closet this year they would not be back out again for a large percentage of us.

I stood in my backyard feeding bread to the chickens and watching my beloved red jersey and the rest of my uniform dry on the line, flapping in the breeze. I wanted to keep my jerseys. I wanted to be able to reach into a box and pull one of these out someday and say to my son or daughter "See, I played football for Lone Oak and here's the jersey I wore. We didn't lose a game that year in district play."

Later on after the uniform had dried I stuffed everything in my duffle bag. I even threw in my hand and arm pads so someone could use them next year. That Sunday night I put the big green bag, that was basically the sum of over 6 years of dreaming and hard work, near the front door so I could get it tomorrow. I took one last look at my battle scarred helmet with those neat red Buffalo decals on the side. Ah, for just one more season! *Just one more!*

The next day I lugged the lumpy green bag onto the bus and tossed it under the dashboard of the beast. I found a seat and nobody spoke to me all the way to school.

Once at school I stored the bag on top of the lockers in the hall. At the appointed time I carried my bag into the gym to the coach's office.

Mr. Fannin and Coach Taylor inventoried my gear, and found none missing. Mr. Fannin joked that he wanted to be sure no jerseys were missing. I offered to buy mine, but they named a price way out of my reach. I bid a silent goodbye to my most favorite of all football jerseys.

About 5 years later I saw my red #62 one last time. The young man wearing it was on the practice field, sitting on his helmet. #62 had its lower part torn away, and its sleeves cut off. It was a sad end for a noble garment, to die as a lowly practice jersey.

I came back about 2 years after that when I got word that they were selling old jerseys. I was only able to salvage #85 for 5 dollars, but I patched it up as best as I could. I have this artifact to this very day and gave it to the school as a keepsake of those times.

I really miss my old #62, and I never saw my white jersey after I turned it in.

Now it was time for basketball.

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"Now is the winter of our discontent..."

Shakespeare, Richard III

## The Gaidiators



Well, here we are. We are the first basketball team to ever grace the innards of this brand new gym. There are a lot of us!

The best all-pro among us is Danny Bowman, the Sheepdog. He had 4 strong years of ball playing in high school, and 2 in junior high. Robert Vice is among us again. Herman is here, Randy Price, Bobby Underwood, Gonga, Mike Bell, Neel Dunlap, Terry Dooley, Connie Gray, Dennis Gray, Wayne Westbrook, Lane Garner, Kenneth Jones, Tim Wages, Mongoose, Paul Payne, Roy Crow, Gunner, and myself. There were roughly about 20 of us, easily enough for two teams.

Our girl's team fielded 24 ladies, enough for almost 6 complete teams of 6 each. Julia was the only Senior on the team, what with Shirley getting married and leaving. There were 8 Juniors, 7 Sophomores, and 7 Freshmen. Just like the boy's team there weren't that many spectacular athletes on it.

Coach Fannin commanded the ladies, Coach Taylor commanded the boys. Both were exceptional Coaches, but alas, they had very little to work with.

In boy's practice we did a lot of running. We ran the bleachers, we ran the lines on the floor, and we ran laps. This was rough on all of us. For the poor saps who didn't play football this almost killed them. For those of us left over from last year we thought that practicing indoors again was quite a novelty!

We boys were still thinking in football mode as usual, and it showed. We'd run over each other and set some picks like we were throwing downfield blocks. Herman was blown away by this, having not played football. We had a ton of aggression still boiling around in us and the non-footballers had a problem dealing with this.

Robert seemed to single Herman out for special attention. Once, while we were waiting for Coach Taylor to come out of the office and start this version of hand to hand combat he called 'practice' Robert decided to give Herman a hard time. He came up to Herman and towered over him.

"Hey, thar, Hur-mun," he drawled.

Herman knew better than to try to run. Robert wasn't speedy but he could always get one of us later. Avoiding him once would only lead to bigger problems later on.

"Where did you get that shirt?" Robert asked, taking a big fistfull of Herman's practice tee-shirt.

Robert blew his nose on Herman's shirt and giggled at him as he grossed out. A safe distance away from all this I just shook my head and stood next to Randy Price the Rabbit. I felt safer next to the Rabbit. If Robert came at us we could split off in two different directions, initially confusing him because all of a sudden he had two targets to chase instead of one.

I was pretty much at peace with Danny. Even Robert respected me fairly well. I had been practicing football over him for two years as his tackling dummy. For that reason I caught less abuse than Herman or any of the Freshmen on the team. Watching Robert pick on Herman didn't endear him to me any.

As for Herman he had a cold blooded hatred for Robert, Danny, and all those 'Fine Young Men' of the upper caste. Herman had a tendency to be easy-going and unaggressive. This didn't sit well with some of the Fine Young Men.

In this manner practice began and would roll on and on throughout the season. Each practice that would follow would be pretty much like the first.

Randy Price had returned to school the following Monday after getting hurt at the Mabank game that Friday. He wore some sort of harness for his broken collarbone that pulled his shoulders back. Randy gave Herman and me a hard time for noticing how weird his collarbones had looked before the game. Randy was one tough individual but he had a good sense of humor, too.

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## Practice

### Hand to Hand 101

Robert and Herman went up for a rebound.

Kawham!

Herman went sprawling onto the floor, dazed. Herman landed hard enough for Coach Taylor to halt the practice. Robert had given Herman his trademark forearm upside the head, knocking Herman out cold.

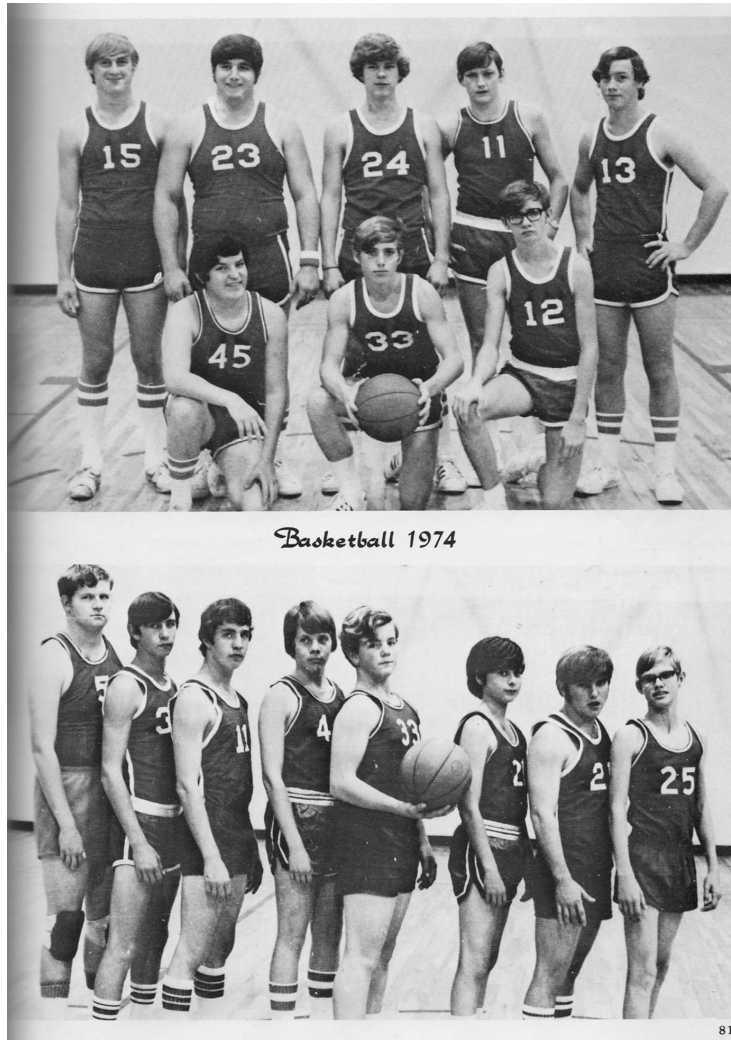
While Herman lay there, watching the gym spin around, the rest of us stood a respectable distance away and talked among ourselves. Still thinking football, having someone dazed and on their back didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary.

Sometimes we practiced half court, sometimes full court, as Coach Taylor saw fit. After the first full practice session Coach Taylor knew he had a sack of old potatoes for a basketball team. He might be able to get it to work for a few games if he was lucky, but this group of players lacked talent in the worst way.

There were some memorable moments in practice. Once somebody passed me the ball and I broke for the basket, wildly dribbling like a madman. Bobby Underwood broke loose and chased me. I screeched to a halt under the basket and put a head fake on Woody. Woody bit for the fake and went high up in the air. His forward momentum carried him onto my shoulder, straddling my

back. He painfully slid down my back, groaning in disbelief and embarrassment. He then lay on the floor in the fetal position until he could uncurl.

Mr. Taylor and everybody but Woody thought it was funny. Even Woody managed to grin in embarrassment. Mr. Taylor noticed my fake and my attack on the basket, and he figured he just might use me as a J.V. starter later in the season. He figured I finally had enough ability and promise and might actually be able to play basketball. We would see.



One of my major goals was to block Danny's shot. I could leap to within 4 inches of the rim and Danny could touch the rim. I think I once touched the ball as it left his hand but I also slammed into him with considerable force. He got mad enough about that to tell me off, but Danny never stayed mad very long.

I was dangerous to be around because I was aggressive and clumsy. I played like a wildman, leaping around and attacking the ball. I also took my lumps. Once Roy Crow went up for a rebound, got it, and caught me under the chin with a forearm, snapping my jaws together. I bit deeply into the edges of my tongue. The pain was so sharp it made my eyes water. I once col-cocked him in football practice that way, so this was Roy Crow's way of getting a payback. I swallowed the blood rather than give him the satisfaction of seeing me spit it out. We were even now.

It was rough out there. In fact, it was so rough that I did a drawing of a bunch of guys going at each other in the gym with chains, boards, knives, and what have you. I called it "Lone Oak Basketball Practice (Brawl on the Docks)". In the picture the players are too busy beating the daylights out of each other to even pay attention to the ball that lay nearby. I had Coach Taylor looking on approvingly.

We had one day of this rough and tumble style of practice with virtually no teamwork or sense of bonding as a team before we went to Boles Home on November 27, 1973, for our first game at 7 p.m. This was to be something I would never forget.

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"What light through yonder window breaks?

Tis the east! And Juliette is the sun!"

Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliette"

### Bad Moon Rising



It was chilly, but tolerable. It had to be between 50 and 65 degrees. It was a pleasant night for basketball. Boys and girls boarded the one bus, filling it to near capacity. We waited for everybody to show up. I had Herman with me and Randy Price nearby. All of us were in a warrior's style boisterous mood and filled with the spirit of adventure. This was to be our first basketball game of the year. Most of us wondered how we would fare against Boles Home. Boles had been playing at least a month. We had only one disorganized day of practice ourselves. Our curiosity was peaked. What would happen to us on the floor?

There was a commotion up near the door and Tim Wages got on the bus wearing his uniform. We burst out laughing at him over this mistake. How could anyone be so dense? He came over and sat near me and I asked him if he had lost his ever-loving mind. Actually, I felt sorry for him, and I loaned him my windbreaker so he would at least have something on. I had been where he is now, and if I had somebody to guide me I probably would have made less mistakes.

"He's ready to play, aint he?"

"Oh, yes! Too ready!"

Mr. Taylor took a look around to be sure he wasn't leaving anyone then he cranked up the bus. The yellow monster lumbered out of the parking lot. The girls hung their uniforms up by coathangers on the windows, giving a curtained look to the bus. It was soon quite dark in the beast. On to Highway 69 and off northward we went. I had several caps of various discription in my gym bag and just for kicks I passed them out for the other folks to fool around with. They had a good time with them.

The bus peeled off 69 to 1564 toward Weiland. I was very familiar with this road because it was the same one that led to Rickey Graham's house. I guessed he was at Greenville or at the Station. Perhaps, if he was home, he saw us drive by his house from its perch up on the hill that over looked the road. I don't know. It might have been too dark for him to see the bus anyway in the gathering darkness.



While on this road I looked to the west out of the right side window where I sat. I saw a new moon just over the horizon, looking dark and malignant. I could make out the orb and a bright crescent. This was the first time I had ever noticed the thing and I paid attention to it. It looked fascinatingly ugly up there. I told Herman and he glanced at it then he made a non-committal comment. The bus rolled on.

Was this some sort of sign? I had seen signs of all types before, such as the hearse parked in front of the Jones' Cafe when we lost out in the Regional Tournament. And of course, Randy's collar bones. Here and there I had seen little things that I took as warnings or portents of the future. Looking at this new moon I wondered what it was supposed to mean, and why I had noticed it just this night.

I shrugged it off as the bus turned onto 34 and rattled toward Boles Home. It was just a new moon and nothing more. I knew it only looked that way because it was lit up by Earthshine, the phases of the Earth being opposite of the Moon. Still, it bothered me, and I couldn't shake off a strange feeling of foreboding.

My attention was brought to the situation at hand as we rolled into the somewhat familiar landscape of Boles Home. The bus pulled into the school parking lot and stopped.

It was time for the Gladiators to dismount and go into the arena to play our first basketball game of our Senior year. I recovered my caps and stuffed them into the gym bag.





These bags we had were brand new red and white gym bags made especially for us and were notable by the fact that we were the first Lone Oak basketball team to have them. Most of us had them, too. The sides of the bag were red and on one side was a white line picture of a charging Buffalo. On the other side of my bag I drew a monstrous cartoon duck, and scribbled some non-sense on it like "First Amphibious". Our uniforms, shoes, socks, towels, and kneepads easily fit into the small bag. They had suitcase-like handles and were very easy to carry. They were light and made of Naugahyde and very sturdy. The bottom was made of pressed board, and it maintained its shape even when open. Other teams had similar bags in their school colors so it was common to see these types of bags all over the place. These bags were not school property, they were purchased and belonged to the students.

I entered the doors to the Boles gym. Doors I would later come to call "the Gates of Hell". When I passed through those doors my life changed and would never be the same again.



I showed my bag to the ticket taker and I entered the familiar confines of this converted airplane hangar. This gym appears smaller than it actually is. I think that is because the ceiling is lower and the bleachers were of the fold up variety. The bleachers look smaller than they actually are. The low cross beams discourage long passing, and many teams have found that out the hard way.



*Basketball 1974*



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### ***Lone Oak Girls Basketball 73-74***

Our girl's team went right into the locker room to dress. The Boles ladies were already on the floor, randomly shooting and dribbling around the west end of the floor. The rest of us from Lone Oak got up into the north bleachers and settled in. Tim sat on my right on the edge of the bleachers, Herman sat directly to my left, and next to him was Randy Price. We started chattering among ourselves like parrots, in typical bleacher creature fashion. Once we established our territory and marked it our with our gym bags we made quick trips to the concession stand. Buying a cola and maybe a candy bar we returned to our seats and looked over the enemy territory.

I was picking on Tim mercilessly. I would point him out to any and all passers-by and holler our "Hey! Look at this fool!"

What this did, hopefully, was point out the folly of his not thinking before putting on his uniform. Appearances to the contrary I wasn't enjoying picking on Tim. He simply had to endure this harrasment so he would learn, once and for all, to think before he acted. It was part of dues-paying, and he was lucky I wasn't Robert. I was mad enough at him as it was.

If he put up with what I did to him with this public humiliation and straightened up, then he was a Buffalo and on the team. If he couldn't take it and bailed off the team then he wasn't worthy of being on it. It was that simple.

The Lone Oak girls soon came out onto the floor and began their warm-up drills. Twenty four girls take up a lot of space on half a gym floor. I looked over the girls in red and white and saw mostly familiar faces. I didn't know any of the Freshman girls, but they appeared to be a rough and tumble lot. Some of them had been downright unfriendly.

Having been used to such treatment from the uninformed I just let it be. I saw nothing in the entire collection of 24 young ladies that told me I had much of a chance beyond casual friendship with any of them.

Perhaps that is the reason that I looked over the Boles girls with more than a passing interest. Their squad was about half the size of ours in numbers. There were about 12 or 13 in all. They had 2 cute cheerleaders that I could see, but nothing there held my interest. I looked the basketball players over and I had to admit there were quite some attractive young girls in the bunch. I discussed this with Randy Price, whom I considered to be an expert on the subject. His comments were non-committal, and he had no special interest in anyone he was looking at.

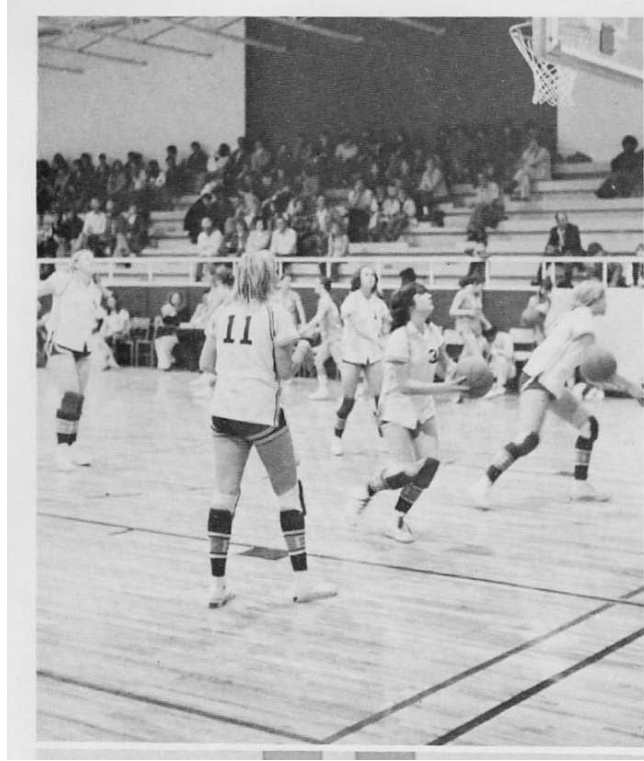
Raking my eyes over the girls on the floor I had no idea why on earth I was doing this. I had been to almost 100 basketball games of all types in my school career and at no time did I pay any attention beyond the moment to any particular girl. My eyes went from one green-clad lady to another and all of a sudden they locked on to this one smiling, dark haired beauty in particular.

The very first thing I noticed was her hair. It was unbelievably glossy dark black and worn in a shoulder-length page-boy style. I had a cartoon character I drew who looked like this, up to a point. This may have been what made me notice her more, but the character I drew had brown hair and was a very serious Astro-Navigator who didn't smile much. This girl had black hair and the most pleasant smile and dark eyes like I had never seen before. Wow. I got curious about a woman I had never seen or heard of before, for the first time in my life. I just sat there and gawked for a second.

She was not a tall girl, but well proportioned. The closest I recall of anyone from Lone Oak who looked like her was Niecy Simmons, our 1973 Homecoming Queen. All this, and some other factors I had no real control over, made me pay more attention to this young stranger than any other girl I had ever seen before in my life, even Martha or Sandy. I became intrigued with this interesting girl, and the more I watched her the more curious I got. Who was she? I had to find out!

I talked to Randy and Herman, casting about. I kept one eye on the girl. I noticed her number and memorized it. Lets just say it was "00". Something inside me clicked and I knew I had to find out her name.

Soon the game began. Boles Home had been playing for a while and most of our girls had been on the Drill Team. Lone Oak girls were out of shape for basketball and they had only recently came together as a group. They had not had enough time to train or work out before this game and it showed.



The Boles girls had superior ball handling capability and experience. They had made all the mistakes Lone Oak was making now, but that was a month ago. Since then Boles had overcome these handicaps with experience. The score at half-time was close, but it was Boles' advantage, 15 to 11.

For those of us in the bleachers it wasn't too bad. With a 4 point difference it could easily go either way.

After half-time the game resumed. Boles Home continued its dominance, scoring 8 more points to our 6, making it about 23 to 7. That was when things began to look bad for our girls.

The game rolled into the fourth quarter and after a while we had to go suit up for our game. As a unit we picked up our bags and went to the locker rooms. It was chaos in our locker room. Uniforms had only recently been issued and some of the guys actually hadn't even tried their suits on. Some guys even forgot their shoes, taking them out of the line-up for our first game. Shaking my head in disbelief I went to the door to see what the score was. I looked out just as the game ended. I saw #00 grab one of her teammates and dance around in celebration. It was obvious we had lost. When I looked up for the score on the clock but it had already been cleared.

I almost started to ask #00 what the score was and tell her 'good game' or something like that but Danny and the others burst out of the doorway to the start our warm-up. #00 disappeared with her team mates and I got in line on the floor.

It was one bizarre warm-up. Tim had no idea what to do and he messed up several drills, prompting the wrath of several exasperated team members. Tim was shooting when he was supposed to rebound, getting into the wrong lines, and so on. All he had to do was simply watch what was going on in front of him. Even if somebody didn't know the drill, just seeing what everybody else was doing would give a guy a clue. Tim was clueless.

Connie Grey remarked to me what a "goofy" individual he thought Tim was. I just laughed and looked at the poor lost fellow. He was acting like a total idiot, but he would prove himself or leave. There was no other way.

After warm-up we broke for the bench and sat down. There were far too many of us to sit on the bench so a number of us plopped on the floor. I was in my accustomed spot far from Coach Taylor and I had Herman sitting on my left. The floor was cold and uncomfortable, so I acquired a towel and sat on that. Bare skin also sticks to the varnish, making it feel like we were sitting in a dried puddle of cola.

Danny, Robert, and the rest of the starting team went forth to play our first boy's game of the year. I shouted "Go Red!" and watched in what was now my traditional place on the bench. Boles Home soon had its hands full with a powerful group of football players who had been working out for nearly 4 months. Lone Oak could generally run faster and had a higher endurance than most of the Boles boys. We were in top physical condition. It was still a close game, however. By the first quarter we led 12 to 10. It was Boles' better experience against our conditioning. Both teams were inspired for this contest. The Boles boys wanted to win because their girls had won, and we wanted to win because our girls lost. Our respective alumni rooted us on.

On it went on the floor, round and round. Boles had a guy named James Lewis who wore glasses and had a strap on them, like the rig I wore. The rubber end on the strap broke in the rough battle going on out there. Donnie Sinquefield, a guy who went to school there at Boles, once told me we were the hardest hitting team he ever played against. James couldn't keep his glasses on after the strap broke, so he spun them along the floor toward the sidelines. They landed between Herman and me. Herman quickly picked them up so they wouldn't get trampled on. Somebody from Boles came over, I think it was the manager, and Herman gave the glasses to them. Herman looked up in the bleachers for a second and then tapped me on my shoulder to get my attention. I was engrossed in the game at the time.

"Hey, Buzz, there she is!"

Until this time the Girl From Boles Home had not been on my mind. Herman brought her back to my attention. I looked over to my left up in the folding bleachers and I saw her, going up in the bleachers to sit with her friends. Wow! There she was! I gawked again. Holy Cow!

She looked very attractive in her street clothes. She was wearing snow-white jeans and a sky-blue blouse with a multi-color sailboat patch picture on the front. She was happy as she spoke to somebody in the bleachers, and she had a warm smile and sparkling eyes. Man, what a classy looking lady she looked like! She seemed to get along well with everyone she was talking to.

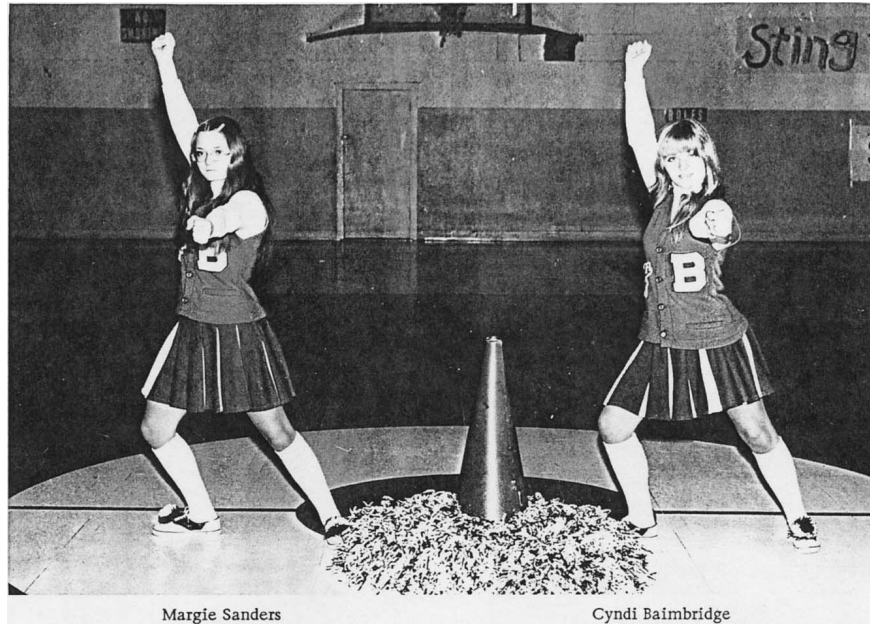
She had a cola cup and as I discreetly cast a glance in her direction, I noticed she didn't throw the cup away when she was done with it. She tore the bottom out of it and used it for a megaphone. I thought this was quite a novel idea. She was just too cool. Maybe she was a cheerleader! I had to get to know who she was!

Out on the floor the contest was nip and tuck. Long passes were not done in the Boles Home gym with those low rafters. Dennis Grey and Randy Price both found that out. Still, we pulled out a 4 point lead by half-time, purely by virtue of our being in better condition.

Halftime took me right down where the girl was. She was not 20 feet away up in the bleachers. I told myself not to look at her, and I took more difficult shots than usual, and from longer range. I missed a lot more than usual, too. I am not a good basketball player, and I didn't think for one minute I was impressing her in the least. Still, I was close to her as I could get without going up in the bleachers. It felt weird.

When the A-squad came out to shoot I rebounded as I had a hundred times before, still not daring to look in her direction.

Only Herman knew I had a thing for #00 and he initially put it down to pure lechery. I wasn't sure what it was, but I had never felt this way before. I never even had this kind of feeling for Martha or Sandy.



I had good-naturedly picked at the 2 Boles Cheerleaders, Margie Sanders and Cyndi Baimbridge. This was something unusual for me, but I put that down to still being aggressive after football. This started to bother me because I just wasn't myself. Only six days ago we were in pads and knocking heads. We were still knocking heads, but the pads were put away. Something wasn't right.

Halftime ended and Herman and I roosted on the floor again. I turned my attention back to the game.

Our strategy rapidly became simply "get the ball to Danny or Robert". Robert didn't look like a basketball player because he was built like a tank. The Boles guys didn't cover him as tight as they did Danny. He came as a big surprise to them with his shooting ability. We had a 6 point lead now by the start of the 4th quarter.

My battle lust was now up. Victory was in sight and this was the biggie. #00 faded from my mind as I rooted for Big Red to win. Herman and I began to watch the clock. Lone Oak was pulling ahead. Neither side was really burning up the nets but Lone Oak was putting it in the hoop more than Boles was. Soon our lead was 10 points. It began to hold. Herman and I counted down the clock to zero and it was our turn to celebrate. We had won our first game of the year 49 to 39!

I looked at Herman and made the baseless assumption that "We must be good, man! We've just started this season and these people play basketball all the time!"

Herman agreed and we headed toward the locker room. The gym was quickly emptying of the spectators. I didn't see #00 anywhere. I went over to the score-keeper's station. I saw a fellow

named Joe Burks who was keeping the stats. I took a chance and boldly asked him who #00 was on the girls' team.

He looked in his score book and cross indexed the number with the name.

He told me her name.

I repeated that to myself and imprinted it into my memory. It was a name I'd never forget for as long as I lived. I had just done something that would change my life forever. Nothing would be the same from now on.

As we boarded the bus the evil looking new moon had set. The warning it had sent had been seen but ignored.

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"The irrationality of a thing is not an argument of its existence, rather, a condition of it."

Friedrich Nietzsche

## Socks and Jocks

Our girls had lost that night at Boles 31 to 22. A Freshman girl was our high scorer in that game with 10 points. Robert Vice had 24 points in our game, followed by Danny Bowman with 18. Of our total of 49 points these 2 guys had 42 of them! That left only 7 points for the rest of the entire team. This was not a good sign.

I later found the scorebooks of that night and I looked them over with great care. I was surprised to discover that Sherry Oneil had what appeared to be a sister on the team. I will call her Mollie in this story. Other than that I learned nothing new. I put the books back down and went on to the day's practice.

My inquisitive mind was getting ahead of caution, and I was charging headlong into something and I had no idea how it would affect me. Something was driving me like nothing ever had before. I don't think I could have stopped it even if I tried.

We had a tournament at Quinlan in a few days. There was a lot of speculation and rumor. We told ourselves we had a good basketball team, that we could actually hear the Thunder, but it wasn't so. Everyone wanted to duplicate the amazing season of 1972. Looking at us Coach Taylor knew this wasn't the team to accomplish that feat. There was too much in-fighting, disrespect of each other, and a gross lack of real talent. Coach Taylor would rub the back of his neck and look at us with exasperation. This was going to be another long and difficult season, and not only because of basketball.

I had told Herman and Randy Price how I felt about this Boles girl. Rabbit looked at me and just shook his head.

"Charlie has a crush," he thought, "he'll get over it. After all, he only knows this girl by name and looks and she doesn't know him at all. It'll pass."

Meanwhile I was becoming infatuated with this lovely girl that I wanted to get to know. Herman told me we'd see her at the Quinlan Tournament. I looked forward to that with anticipation. I created a brand new character patterned after the Boles girl, and gave her equal status to my friends by putting her in my science fiction comics. I had it bad.

That Thursday, November 29, 1973, we went to Quinlan for the tournament. As most of us in the Senior Class had only 3 classes per day it was no big deal. The boys' and girls' games were about 6 hours apart, so Coach Taylor got the boys squad out of class and we went stag to the Quinlan Junior High all wood gym. I wished Rickey Graham was with us. His not playing basketball had driven a wedge between us. I missed him a lot.

We needed Rick more than ever this day because Robert Vice and Danny Bowman had lost their Grandfather and had to go to his funeral. It was a necessary thing, and because of our lack of depth we had no firepower at all. I didn't realize this at the time, but Randy Price did. He dreaded the coming contest. We were, collectively, in deep trouble.

If we had Rickey Graham, Philip Anderws, Dan Webb, along with Robert and Danny, we would be a very dangerous team indeed. This had been Rick's best chance to be a starter and he was just letting it go. If I had not been so distracted by my growing interest in that Boles girl I probably would have tried to talk Rick into playing. Unfortunately I was looking at new horizons this season, and I was not all together myself anymore. That was bad for all of us. I would be needed in the worst way and I would not be there for them.

I wasn't like Bulldozer, of course. He couldn't control himself, see. He had to get married in the 8th Grade, after all. I, being superiour, could control myself when it came to the girls. I had in the past, so I would in the future. That was what I thought. I didn't realize that I had been struck as hard as any teenager ever had. I was heading for a place I had never been before. I was on my personal Pegasus, ready to fly to Mount Olympus. The Gadfly was already on its way.

Randy Price was still in the process of healing up his collarbone. He didn't say if he was hurting or not. He didn't seem to be in any pain. His collarbone had been broken for less than a week, yet he seemed to be doing okay. I never saw him grimace in pain and only once he told me it hurt when I accidently brushed up against him. The harness he wore to hold his shoulders in position stuck out under his basketball jersey. He took some ribbing for it's resemblance to a upper torso garment that women wear. When he was out on the floor he leaped right into rebound battles under the basket without any hesitation. Rabbit was too-too tough!

On another front our girls got some really neat trademark basketball socks that they all wore. Thes had an interlocked L.O. enclosed in a square halfway up the calf. It looked really cool. None of the guys wore them because we looked upon this as something for the girls only. No Lone Oak boys wore baseball socks in the 1973-74 season. That tradition, started by the 1972 Championship team, had ended.

Shortly we arrived at Quinlan's Junior High gym and debussed. I went with Herman and Randy Price. We saw a team already playing a game on the floor. We all found a spot in the bleachers and nested like several large, ungainly birds. Then we waited.

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## A Stomping

The Boles Home boys were playing Royse City and getting a licking. I quickly located the girl of my interest up in the tiny bleachers of this gym where she was sitting with her friends. They had



already played their game of the day, and were watching the boys from their school. I don't know if the Boles girls had lost or won in this tournament yet.

In spite of the destruction of the boy's team on the floor Boles Home's morale was high. #00 had her trademark megaphone cup and all the girls did their stomping-clapping routine. This routine caught on throughout the district and where ever else the Boles girls went.

The boy's game was already in the fourth quarter. Boles soon lost 90 to 46 and both teams exited the floor.

The Boles girl and her teammates quickly left, and Randy and I moved into the empty bleachers for better seats. Another girl's team came on the floor and Rabbit and I sat there, bored. We both hoped that somehow Danny or Robert would show up. That was a pipe dream. To go to play basketball on the day of the funeral of a close relative is in very bad taste. They would not be here no matter how hard we wished.

The Forney Jack Rabbits came in and took spots in the bleachers not far from us. I saw the name on their gym bags and I was amused. Randy saw a lot of tall, big fellows. He was unamused.

"Stew the Rabbits!" I called out on impulse.

Rabbit nudged me and looked at me in horror.

"Shut up, man! These guys are huge!"

I looked them over. Yeah, they were tall and everything. So what?

"Try not to get them mad, man! They'll kill us!"

I nodded, agreeing with Rabbit's superior wisdom, and put most of my usual ribbing of the enemy team away. All too soon it was time to go into the locker room and suit up. I got into my uniform and waited impatiently by the doorway.

Coach Taylor and Rabbit both accurately assessed our chances. They were slim and none.

Our second warm-up of the year was a lot saner than the first one we had earlier in the week at Boles. Tim was beginning to figure out the routine and he was starting to think. That was a good sign.

We populated the entire bench and part of the floor. Forney went onto the court with a he-man "GO!" as they broke huddle. These guys towered over us like titans. They moved up and down the floor like giants. They proceeded to rip us to shreds.

I cheered and called all traditional bench-sitting stuff, but Forney could not be stopped. For every basket we put in, Forney got 3. When the buzzer sounded at the end of the first quarter it was an unbelievable 20 to 6, Forney's lead.

When Lone Oak came back out for the second quarter it was noticeably quiet on the bench. We didn't Thunder, we lumbered. It was awful. If our morale hadn't crashed, it was getting close. Guys leaned back, legs apart and arms folded. Gloom hung over the bench like a cloud. Out on the floor for Lone Oak it was a disorganized horror.



Forney easily scored another 22 more points this quarter, raising their total to 42. Hapless Lone Oak only scored one (Count 'em! One!) basket all through the quarter. It got so bad that most of the team didn't bother to pursue when Forney broke out for a fast break.

During halftime shooting Randy Price came over and spoke to me. He pointed at the lop-sided tally on the scoreboard.

"See that? That's why we do not make them mad."

I nodded. It was 42 to 8.

I looked around for any forelorn hope I could think of.

"Do you think Danny or Robert will show?"

"I doubt it," Rabbit replied. We were doomed.

It was soon time for the second half. Oh no. I don't know if Forney put in their second string, but chances are everybody on their team got to play. For us, Coach Taylor rubbed the back of his neck in exasperation and put in some of us to get game time. Forney had just about run ragged the 5 fellows he had out there.

We doubled our performance of the second quarter, scoring 4 points this time. Forney kept up their destruction of our team, scoring another 20. It was 62 to 12. I sarcastically noted that we had made it all the way to double figures. Now it was the 4th quarter.

As Forney put in more non-starters their scoring fell off a full 2 points. Ours did not increase. It was as if we didn't know how to dribble or pass and had only a vague idea of what the orange hoop up on the backboard was for. This was the most awful game I had ever seen a Buffalo team play.

I believe that Coach Taylor sent me in to get game time. I think he rotated everybody in and out. Gunner chunked a ball at me and yelled "Shoot it! Shoot it!"

I threw a brick, being outside my usual range. A lot of us threw airballs that day.

Forney scored 18 points in the 4th quarter compared to our 4. When the final buzzer sounded it was 80 to 16. We staggered off the floor in shock, and bagged our uniforms in relative silence. There wasn't much to talk about.

Without a doubt we knew who was carrying this team. We were crippled and clueless without Robert or Danny. Dennis Grey was our high scorer and he had only 6.

We had to come back to this mess tomorrow. I only hoped we had Danny and Robert here when we did.

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"None ever loved

but at first sight they loved."

George Chapman, "The Blind Beggar of Alexandria"

## I Can Still See Her Standing There

Thursday night I tinkered with a model car I was in the process of assembling. By accident I had mixed up a beautiful shade of silvery green and I was painting the body of this 1974 Corvette with it. It looked really cool. It took my mind off the stomping we had recieved.

Friday we had to go back to the Quinlan Tournament. In school all that Friday we hoped Danny or Robert would show. It would give us a fighting chance. The game was at 3:00 so we'd leave at 2:00 or so. Randy and I had bad feelings about this game. Coach Taylor had told Herman that we were up against Boles Home. Herman told me and added that 'She' would be there. That took my mind almost fully off of Danny and Robert. My spirit of adventure suddenly leaped to the fore. This was to be more than just a basketball game to me.

At the appointed hour all the boys' team jammed into a Yellow Monster and rolled for the Quinlan Junior High Gym. There was a game in progress so we just sat in the bleachers. The bus was taken back to Lone Oak to run it's evening route. When it returned it would have our girl's team on it. We all sat in the Quinlan bleachers with Coach Taylor, pretty well marooned here.

Herman and I sat together and chatted. I had no idea who the teams were on the floor but I found myself following the action. Herman suddenly elbowed me, getting my attention.

"Hey, Buzz! There she is!" he said to me.

Indeed, there she was! Oh, good golly, wow! It was like my eyes had a zoom lens on them. I took in every square inch of what I saw, in great wonder.

She glided in like an Egyptian Goddess. It was as if the entire gym grew dark except for an aura around her. She wore a light blue blouse with long sleeves and some type of frill near the neck. She had on blue jeans and white deck shoes. She carried a green and white gym bag and her uniform on a coat hanger.

Her hair was that stunning Raven-dark, glossy and beautiful. She had a broad friendly smile as she surveyed the arena she was about to enter. The deep brown of her eyes sparkled wonderfully as she watched the game in progress.

My heart stopped. Here was without any doubt the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my entire life. I felt an elbow in my ribs.

"Did you hear what I said?" Herman asked.

I came out of what ever came over me and looked at Herman

"Huh?" I drawled, in some sort of shock.

"I said she looked like Natalie Wood," Herman repeated.

I looked back at her and compared a mental image with what I saw.

"Yeah, kind of," I agreed softly.

I tried not to stare at her as she settled in the bleachers with her friends. If she looked straight at me I felt like I might die. Speculation ran wild in my mind as I glanced at her at every convenient chance. Was she a cheerleader? She seemed to know all the moves and such. She even toyed with the pom-poms she borrowed from Margie Sanders, one of the Boles Cheerleaders.

Just what type of lady was she? She seemed to get along fine with everyone on her team. Some of the girls had their uniforms on coat hangers and hung them on rails and any convenient rack. They had marked out their territory.

It was time for us to suit up. I dressed silently in the locker room with my mind more on the girl in the bleachers than the game on the floor. Herman looked me over with amusement. This was entertainment for him of the highest order. If he could help me meet the girl of my dreams then he was more than happy to do so. It was an adventure the likes of which he had only read about. It was Boy Meets Girl. If the formula was true then this was a very interesting part of my life he was observing.

In team colors we did our warm-up and I tried to put something extra in it. All I managed to do was mess up more than usual. I shook all that off and sat on the bench, a bundle of nervous energy.

I looked across the floor at where the girl sat and I actually wondered if my data on her was correct. Did I know her real name? I wanted to find out. I couldn't just sit there and do nothing. To have that feeling of helplessness like I did when Mike Bell was in that car wreck was something I couldn't stand. I had to do something, anything.

The ball was jumped and the game began. The Boles Home boys discovered much to their delight that they were playing a bunch of red and white turkeys. There was no Robert and no Danny, so we had no offense. Realizing their advantage they began to roll over us. As Boles took a lead over us the girl from Boles and her friends got into the game vocally. Cheering loudly and enjoying themselves they watched the boys team take a two to one advantage at the end of the first quarter, 12 to 5.

We gathered around Coach Taylor and listened to him. He put it on the line, not mincing words. If we lost this game we were out of the tournament. He told us to slow it down and try to control the ball. If we could control the ball we could prevent Boles Home from scoring. If we tried to run and gun the superiour ball handling ability of Boles Home would destroy us. We joined hands.

"Go Red!"

Out our 5 hapless heroes went for the second quarter. We tried to put up a good game, but Boles was just too good for the scratch force we had loosely rambling around on the maple. Neel, Gunner, Wayne Westbrook, and Dennis Grey did as well as they could. Mike Bell was leading the pack, but they were heavily out-gunned.

Realizing there was no hope, Herman and I found other ways to amuse ourselves. We tried an experiment. In order to find out if the lady's name really was we called out random names in addition to cheering our fellows on.

I called out her last name and she looked up, right at Herman who sat next to me. She grinned for some reason. She then looked at one of her buddies and said something. I thought she may be making fun of us, but she was probably confused as to who was calling her name.

At halftime it was 27 to 15. Lone Oak had managed to put in 10 points in the second quarter, doubling our effort in the first quarter. Boles still was almost 2 to our 1 in scoring.

I shot my halftime shots, rebounded, and went back to the bench without so much as a glance at the girl of my interest.

Third quarter started a mean defensive battle. Coach Taylor had told his 5 starters to slam the door and only take easy shots. It was a ball stalling offense. There was no shot clock in high school basketball, so the offense could control the ball at their end of the floor indefinitely so long as certain penetration rules are met. The ball went around and around the key, but eventually some restless teen-ager would force a pass and Boles would intercept for a fast break. Any shots taken would bounce off only to be rebounded by Boles Home and their better rebounding ability.

Lone Oak scored no points at all in the third quarter, but managed to hold Boles down to 6. It was 31 to 15. Coach Taylor knew it was hopeless, so now it was time to play for fun. He opened up the bench and put the hapless bench sitters on unsuspecting Boles Home.

"Go in!"

Herman was elbowing me again.

"Coach Taylor is talking to you, Buzz!"

I looked down the bench at Coach Taylor. He was resigned to his fate that this was our last game in this tournament.

"Go in for Mike Bell."

I was delighted! I was going to get to play in front of the girl from Boles!

My instincts of playing in basketball for the past 2 years took over and I notified the clock. At the appropriate time I was buzzed into the game. Both my legs felt rubbery, my mouth was dry, and I was sweating. I had been apprehensive on the floor before, but I had never felt like this out here. I got in position in the guard spot.

This was a mess. Nobody seemed to have the slightest idea of how to run the system that had served us so well in 1972, myself included. There was some ball-hogging, but Gunner got the ball from his spot at center. He fired a pass to me at left guard and yelled for me to shoot it. I let fly a brick that went just under the rim. Coach Taylor let me finish the game, and he freely substituted guys in. When Gunner went out I didn't get to touch the ball again. I made no points.

The buzzer sounded and I disgustedly looked at the scoreboard. It was us 21, Boles Home 48. We got eaten alive. Mike Bell was our high scorer with 8 points. The damage done to our basketball program by losing our gym was still evident. We were collectively a lousy team.

As we walked off the court the Boles Home and Lone Oak girls came on the floor. Before I went into the locker room I called out the to Boles girl "Go get 'em!" and her name.

She stopped dead in her tracks and looked around, confused. I waved and ducked into the doorway. I don't think she saw me. She definately heard me call out her name but she could see nobody she knew in the direction from where the call came from.

After getting back into our street clothes Herman and I sat up in the bleachers watching the warm-up. I had Herman there for moral support because I was scared to death to move any closer to the green clad females on the hardwood not 15 feet away. Herman and I sat like condors on a roost, both of us eyeing the Boles girl critically.

"Nice shot", we'd say, barely above normal speech, and "Oh, what a rebound!" It was doubtful anyone could hear us over 3 feet away. In spite of playing in the game I was still oddly wound up.

The Refs jumped the ball to start the game and Herman and I move down to the front row, virtually on the floor. Julia was on the defensive team, not 6 feet away. Across the line from her was the Boles's blond sister. Julia had her hair in 'dog-ear' pigtails to keep her long tresses under control. The girl's sister merely had her hair up in one big poney-tail. This was the typical style for most girls who played basketball and had long hair.

I actually chatted with Julia. She was a lot more friendlier since she got her Homecoming Queen title. Once she discovered just how much we really thought of her she was more at ease around us. I thought Julia Mahand was one wonderful person, and I still do.

Herman wanted to go to the concession stand. I made deliberate eye contact with the Boles girl's sister.

"Say hello to her for me," I told her.

She looked at me in wide eyed shock. Who was this guy and how did he know her sister? Herman and I left for the concession stand.

The girl's sister was distracted by what I had done. A little worried about who this stranger was that was asking about her sister she lost a level of ball control she usually had. Lone Oak girls are known to play a rough game of basketball, just like the boys, and she got into a mean floor battle for the ball. She went down hard, and didn't get up very fast. I felt bad about that.

Boles had held our girls to a one point lead at the end of the first quarter, but at the half it was 27 to 21, Lone Oak still leading.

At halftime I moved next to Coach Taylor, higher up in the bleachers, and chatted with him. Coach Taylor listened to my ramblings with fatherly patience and made comments on my ramblings. I think he noticed that I was more than a little distracted by the Boles girl. If the gym had fallen in at that time I would not have noticed or cared. I was in Love. For the very first time in my life, too.

Coach Taylor shook his head to himself. He knew more about the situation that I ever could. He had seen me during football season. I was a lot more aggressive, tempermental, and even more

moody than usual. He knew what it was. Charlie had a case of the Hormones, and real bad case, too.

My insides felt like they were turning over. I couldn't breathe. I felt light headed. I felt ill. I was sweaty and shaking. I felt wonderful. My mind raced between fear of what might happen and my strong desire to talk to that girl.

The Boles girl's sister had been hurt before the half, but she came back out. She was Boles's big gun and on offense she knew she was too valuable to linger on the bench. In spite of this Boles found themselves in major foul trouble. Their coach was forced to substitute. Lone Oak began to score 3 times for every one basket Boles scored. The third quarter ended with Coach Fannin's Lady Buffaloes leading 42 to 27.

As the game went into the fourth quarter much to my delight the girl of my interest checked into the game. She was about 10 feet away from me. I clammed up for a second. This was sensory overload! I managed to say something, good naturedly picking on her like we would Martha, then the entire group of guys up in the bleachers joined in. I had opened Pandora's Box.

She put up a battle on the floor. She was fouled and hit both free shots. She also ran over a couple of girls from Lone Oak. As I said, it was rough out there.

Then she broke free under the basket and hooked an oddball underhanded hook shot into the basket. As I watched the game progress she later did it again. This time she put too much on it. The ball hit the top of the backboard and bounced off the rim. She got the ball back and attacked a third time.

She hooked the ball up and over. It went much higher than she intended and went clear over the backboard. She shook her head violently and put her hands in front of her face.

My jaw dropped in shock. Man, did I know exactly how she felt! Coach Taylor howled and laughed, saying she shot just like I did. In the bleachers all of my teammates turned and looked at me, remembering the fiasco from last year. I didn't think it was funny, not then, not now, not here, and especially not her.

She came to her position at the mid-court line and a lot of guys picked on her. I reached over and popped Woody one on his head.

"Knock it off!" I said to him.

Bobby Underwood looked at me like I had lost my mind. What was with ole Buzz? He never acted this way before!

She heard the other guys razing her and looked up in the bleachers sidelong.

"Shut up," she said, to everyone in general, with a slight grin.

I called back for her not to pay any attention to "these hound dogs," and I told her to shake it off and that she'd be okay.

Angry and embarrassed I just sat there, looking at her, without anything to say to her.

Lone Oak girls triumphed, 53 to 37. When the buzzer sounded the Boles girl was the first girl off the floor. I never got a chance to talk to her.

Her sister was high scorer for Boles Home with 21 points. Our high pointer had 23.

I don't know who was more upset that night when we left the gym, her or me. But for a long time I'd remember her as I first saw her that day. I can still see her standing there, all light and wonder.

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## Quinlan Tournament Finals

I expressed my concerns over the Boles girl's emotional welfare to Herman on the bus ride back to Lone Oak. We had a seat on the very back of the bus and I wrapped myself in the darkness to match my mood. It had been a long day, full of adventure. I was wondering just how upset she was over the game. What I had to realize was that it was just a game, nothing more. Chunking a ball over the backboard was not the end of the world. I survived, so would she. I had a bad thought, thinking that maybe she'd have her boyfriend to talk the hurt away with. I sunk lower into my depths at that. I sure wished it was me. How wonderful to tell her that it would be okay, and I would be here for her. Ah, dreams.

I stayed up late that night watching bad T.V. and slept till noon. I then went back to Lone Oak, caught the bus, and went to Quinlan tournament for the final night of basketball. Awards were to be presented in the Quinlan High School Gym, so win or lose, we were invited to attend. With that in mind, I went.

Our girls had took down Quinlan "B" team girls 42 to 36 earlier in the day, and in the Consolation Finals they put up a battle. They had come a long way and wanted that consolation trophy pretty bad. In the finals they fell to Community, 40 to 32. They had fought a good fight.

In the boys side Commerce won the Tournament Championship over Community, 50 to 48. It was a great barn burner of a game. In the Consolation Finals, Bland beat Caddo Mills 72 to 46.

For the girls Tournament Finals, Quinlan beat Royse City 47 to 32.

That was how it went. We collected in knots around the crowded gym to see the award presentation after the final game. I saw the girl I wanted to meet in a collection of Boles students. I kept my distance and I said nothing.

Awards were given out and I saw Cox of Community for the first time as someone else than a football player. He was a good sized fellow, and a living legend. For 4 years and more we had battled this young man in football. He was one tremendous athlete and the tournament officials named him to the All Tournament Team. Only 10 boys and 12 girls got that honor.

Cox got his little trophy and was talking to some of his buddies when the Boles girl walked over and congratulated him. Cox said "thank you", and watched her leave. Cox's buddy looked at her, then him, and asked "Who's that?"

Cox just shrugged and said "I don't know," and promptly forgot all about her.

Across the gym from where I stood, my knees felt like rubber. Man, did I wish that could have been me she had talked to! I considered Cox a lucky fellow. I never saw Cox again, that I can recall. Cox would go to North Texas State University after he graduated.



With not much else to do after the trophies were passed out, we left the Quinlan Gym once and for all. I didn't get near the girl and I didn't try. This wasn't the time to do it.

I was not to see the inside of Quinlan's Junior High gym ever again. Just like our wonderful old gym this one met a fiery fate in 1976, becoming forever lost. All that remains are a couple of concrete slabs and not much else. Where we once played basketball and I fell in love cars now park.

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## Patches? We don't got no Stinking Patches!

On Tuesday, the 4th of December 1973, certain members of the Senior boys who had been on the football team we summoned to the gym before lunch. Curious about hearing my name called, I went into the facility and saw Coach Fannin, Taylor, and Brookins with a man I didn't know. At their feet was a large pasteboard box.

This unknown guy started taking our measurements of arms, chest, and neck. What was this all about?

Mr. Taylor reached into the box and took out a red jacket. It had no patches, emblems or anything at all on it. Mr. Taylor commented on the red leather sleeves. I was looking at a Letterman Jacket, one of the most coveted awards in all high school! I was being measured for one!

Coach Taylor put the tape measure around my chest and allowed it to "expand for growth."

"But Coach," I said, "I aint got enough game time to qualify for a jacket!"

Mr. Fannin smiled and put his eyes on me.

"You got enough practice time, Bulchor. We decided that was good enough."

Well, how about that! I was in shock. I expected to play football in highschool, but to actually attain the undreamed of award of this simple red jacket was incredible. Wow, man, this was just too much!

Mr. Taylor grinned at my enthusiasm. This was just about the best surprise I had ever gotten in all my years in school!

We returned to class, and filed this little incident away. Things being what they were I was not 100% sure that I would receive a jacket on the appointed day. Just because they took my measurements did not mean I had the cherished award. There was always some little clause or something that could rise up and deny me this gift. So it was that I more or less forgot all about it. After all, what could I do?

Notable here was the fact that of all the girls in the Senior class or 1974 only Julia Mahand was fitted for a letter jacket. She had won it by virtue of being in basketball and lettering there. Her being Homecoming Queen was just one more honor that would have gotten it for her.

The last month of 1973 was upon us. It was December. When Christmas led into New Years it meant we only had 5 months left on our time in school, 5 months until graduation. It was scary.

On December 5th I sat slack-jawed before the T.V. watching a movie about High School Football. Astonished, I sat there mesmerized by a movie that brought back a flood of memories and feelings. It was like a war veteran watching war movies about battles he had been in. The movie for T.V. was called Bloodsport and I have only seen it that one time.

It was an unpleasant movie about highschool football. One guy had died on the practice field. Others were being beaten all to pieces. The Coach was a monster. None of this really reflected football as I knew it or remembered it. Still, this team went to the State Championship, realizing our lost dream.

The next day at school we talked about it a little and made comparisons with our own Buffalo Football experiences. After one day of light discussion we forgot all about it. It wasn't us, nobody had ever died on our practice field, and our coaches were not hard driving win at any cost monsters. It had been fiction, and not an accurate portrayal of football as we knew it.

On the 6th we went to our second tournament of the year, this time at Celeste. Robert and Danny knew we had the stuffing stomped out of us at Quinlan and they both wanted to avenge this insult to Buffalo sporting honor. None of us had any fantasies of who was really carrying this team. We had learned the hard way. Our strategy was now purely to get it to Danny or Robert and get out of their way.

We had arrived at the school that morning, and as soon as classes settled down we left for Celeste. Our game was due to start at 9:30 a.m.

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## Celeste Tournament

I no longer had to badger Tim. He had fit in at last, and that was that. Now all he had to do was stick with and learn what I had learned the hard way. The Boles girl was far away at the Rains County tournament, but she was etched in my memory. Quiet, brooding, moments brought her back to the fore in my mind, but mostly I would get too involved with the situation of the moment to think of her.

We had our two big and only guns back, and from the tip-off at Celeste that cold morning in that big gym we knew it would be a different game than it was at Quinlan.

We didn't Thunder. That was left at Terrell, and gone. What we did do was match point for point with Bells. The end of the first quarter in this game we actually had the lead, 15 to 12! Morale soared on the bench, and I chattered fiercely for my team. We all craved a victory after the misery we had suffered in the Quinlan Tournament.

Bells managed to out-score us in the second quarter and drew to within 1 point, 27 to 26, still our lead! When Herman, Randy Price, and I went out to shoot during the half I noticed there were very few people in the stands. The ones that were there were staying, because we had a barn burner going and it was too good to leave.

We sat down and the second half began. Bells came out gunning and we came out running. It was one wild melee. At the end of the 3rd quarter Bells had taken the lead by one point! We didn't want to go down to defeat again, and no way would we settle for 2 and out. Danny was determined to redeem us after what happened in Quinlan. He got to work.

In the fourth quarter both teams put up an amazing battle. Even Coach Taylor was astonished by the effort. Lone Oak scored 21 powerful points in this last quarter, and Bells put up 18. That was just enough for Big Red to get by, 58 to 56! We had won!

It felt good to win again after so long a draught. Danny had an incredible 29 points! We packed our gear in good humor in the locker room and went back to Lone Oak and our classes.

That night we returned to Celeste and slammed Trenton. We continued on with the winning streak! No scores survive of this contest or any other data, but we had won again to continue in the Tournament!



We went to meet the host team Celeste on that Friday.

Herman and I were dribbling around on the floor at Celeste, having a good time. We were on a winning team and just might win this Tournament Championship. Herman was obviously enjoying himself.

I spotted a poster taped to the railing that had a derogatory statement about us. I wasn't going to let that stand. A ball bounced off the rim and headed right for the poster. Herman deftly intercepted it and dribbled to shoot. I got an idea.

"Next time one heads that way, let it go, okay?"

"What are you going to do, Buzz?"

"I'm gonna put it through that poster."

Herman just grinned at me and arced his shot through the net.

Sure enough a few moments later a ball ricocheted off the rim and headed for the poster.

"Let it go!" I called to Herman.

The ball bounced up about stomach high and I gave it a healthy slap. It smashed into the poster, tearing it loose from the tape holding it to the wooden railing. I recovered the ball and dribbled back out on the floor. Herman and I continued shooting and I looked over to see a teacher repairing the poster. She looked on the floor at me, knowing full well why I did it. There was

nothing she could do about it, though. I gave an embarrassed grin, and left the poster be for the rest of the game. I'd let Danny and Robert do my talking for me.

We were to play the Celeste, the home team. That was why the anti-Buffalo poster. The game soon started and Herman and I populated the bench. It was not a pretty game. Celeste came out battling for their hometown honor. They led 14 to 10 at the first quarter. Our hearts sank as Celeste rolled on, making it 24 to 18 at the half.

Expecting nothing but defeat, Herman and I went out at halftime and chunked at the basket. Celeste had a 6 point lead, and with our team that would be almost impossible to take back.

I had forgotten that Buffaloes never quit. Celeste came out and ran into a wall of Buffalo defense. Robert Vice, and to a lesser extent, Danny Bowman, went collectively wild on the floor. The team held Celeste to ONE point in the entire quarter while we scored 12! Lone Oak took back the lead, 30 to 25! This was happily shocking for us, and unbelievable! Were we, perhaps, better than we thought?

We were not only back in the game again, but we were in the lead. I say 'we' because I was on the team and I practiced with these guys. Therefore I had some responsibility for their conduct on the floor. I was a part of this 'we' just as much as any other member on the team, in spite of the fact that I had not one second of game time that night.

Our defense, what ever changes Coach Taylor had made to it, worked. We controlled the third quarter with great power. As we went into the fourth quarter it was do or die. If we lost this game we'd be out. Once more the battle was joined on the floor. It went around and around, Celeste battling for survival, Lone Oak straining to maintain it's lead. Celeste began to gain on us. My nerves were on edge as it came to a contest of trading baskets. First Celeste was ahead, then Lone Oak. For all of us on the bench there was a state of high excitement, just the opposite as it was in Quinlan.

When the final buzzer sounded Lone Oak had sank the last basket, winning it 43 to 42! I was emotionally spent! This had been one incredible game! We had beaten the home team at home. We were still in the tournament! Who would have thought of such a thing after the disaster of the last tournament?!

Robert Vice was the high scorer with 26 points. He had over half the points to himself. Between him and Danny I think they had over 2/3rds of the total points. They were our guns.

Coach Fannin and our Lady Buffs got a beating by Bells, 43 to 23. The girls had a game tomorrow at 9 a.m. against Detroit. The winner of that contest took on Campbell at 4:40. It was going to be an interesting day. As for me I had seen just about all of the bench of the Celeste gym that I could stand.

There was this team, I don't know who they were, after one game we had played, that forced the door between locker rooms. A big guy entered and threatened Robert Vice. (Talk about STUPID!) I picked up a stick I found in the locker room and watched. The guy was half in the door and talking trash. We had all stood up and if they wanted a rumble there was going to be blood all over the underside of these bleachers. The guy didn't leave the doorway, and I had seen this type of bravado before. Other teams didn't like getting beat by us, but to come in and threaten us like this because he had a problem with Robert was pushing it to the very edge of a fistfight. It would have been bloody but nothing happened. They idiot closed the door and I put my stick down and took my shoes off.

The Lone Oak girls' team got into the game with Detroit and were totally overmatched. Detroit took them out of the tournament, 45 to 30. Then it was our turn to play Detroit.



The Detroit boys came out like thunder and rained all over us. They scored 20 points and held us to 2 in the first quarter! This stunned us, but it didn't shake us totally. Lone Oak fought back in the second quarter but with an 18 point difference it wasn't too hopeful. By the halftime it was 32 to 15, Detroit's favor.

I shot my halftime shots and speculated over our chances. It didn't look good. There was still a 17 point difference. Without further delay it began again.

Gamely and bravely my team mates wrestled with the Eagles, scoring 13 to points to Detroit's 12. Still Detroit dominated, leading 44 to 26 as we went into the 4th quarter. Their lead stood at a hefty 18 points, exactly what they had gained on us in the first quarter.

I don't know if we gave up, ran out of gas, or just plain got outplayed but Detroit ran wild in the 4th quarter, getting 23 points. Lone Oak got 16 but that didn't even put a dent in the 25 point lead Detroit had. We got beat, and we got beat bad, 67 to 42.

We did get a trophy for our efforts. We came in second in the Celeste Tournament, a most respectable finish considering the incredible lack of talent slouching on the bench. Danny had 18 points in this game, and he was named to the all tournament team. We were all very dissappointed that we had not won, but in considering all of the factors involved we had done a most incredible job. We brought a trophy home, and regained our team pride. I owed that to Danny and Robert.

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## A Fistfull of Honors

Coach Taylor sorted us out. He had to pick who was on 'A' team and who was on 'B' team for our Varsity and Junior Varsity games. There were plenty of people on the bench for both squads, at least until attrition would take over.

At first I thought I was a bench warmer for the 'A' team. I was surprised when Coach Taylor made me a starting 'B' teamer. There were two things missing on 'B' squad; aggressiveness and height. I was about 5' 7" tall and a little taller than most of the 'B' team Gladiators. I also had enough aggression for everyone on the floor.

Herman hated to try to shoot over me. He said it was like running into a wall. He would demonstrate by holding the ball over his head and running into the gym wall. What I didn't catch on to was that I was actually fouling him by slamming into him with my body when I tried to block his shot. I was concentrating on hitting the ball so much that I was completely unaware I was nearly knocking him down. I would pay for this oversight in the future.

I was delighted to be a 'B' team starter. That meant lots and lots of game time. I had never played in a basketball game from start to finish in my life. This was, in effect, my rookie season! I now had a grasp of the rules of basketball but I still needed hard training in the fundamentals. Nobody could spend the time to show me how to shoot. Nobody showed me how to dribble properly. I would have been an excellent bench warmer for the 'A' team because in all my years in basketball it was what I had learned to do. I had virtually no game experience at all, but at least I was no longer lost out there.

Looking in the Greenville paper we saw that Danny and Robert were named to the District 17-A Football Squad. Danny was picked offensive player of the year. He had 114 points in this year alone, so that made sense. Seven other players filled the slots in the honor roll too, more than anybody else in the district. Robert was Defensive Player of the Year. This was his third straight year to be named All District. I am proud to have had a small hand and numerous bruises to help that happen.

Frankie Payne, Russel Cook, David Morgan, Rickey Graham, and Eddie Bell were all on the honors list. This contrasted with our first District Title, back in 1970. We had 5 guys on the list then. In District 17-A we had made a powerful accounting of ourselves. Next year, after we were gone, Lone Oak would drop down to Class B.

Our football team that I had known for 6 years went out with a blaze of glory. We did not go the State Championship, but we did do remarkably well. It had been an amazing half decade.

We had scored 298 points this year, and had given up 134. Including the playoffs we averaged 27 points per game while giving up only 12. We had an undefeated record in the season of 9-0-1. This was the first undefeated season since Lone Oak's return to 11 man ball. This was an excellent legacy to leave behind. We were very proud of what we had done. I am proud of each and every one of my team mates. What we had, warts and all, was unique and wonderful. We had filled the role of Buffaloes well. We were among the best of our school and it's great heritage.

For the other guys on the team, they awaited their turn in the honors circle. Only Bobby Underwood and Russel Cook made the list, and Woody only got an honorable mention. Woody was the best dog-gone field goal kicker I ever saw. He had 2 touchdowns, 21 point after kicks, and a field goal for a total of 36 points! The problem with my opinion was that it was very biased. If there were better kickers out there I never saw them. Woody was, to me, the best of the best. I still think he got shortchanged by the polls.

Under his calm demeanor Neel Dunlap seethed. He would show us up for our arrogance. He had to put up with our air of superiority for as long as he knew us. Now we would be leaving forever and he would gather honors for himself. He wasn't out to beat the other teams, he was out to beat us. He had to prove something, just as I had to. The real problem was that he had to prove it to himself. We thought more of him and his future team than he realized. He was, and still is, a Buffalo.

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"Love is Blind"

Geoffrey Chaucher, "Canterbury Tales"

## A Chicken With It's Head Cut Off

I had a bad case of the pre-game willies. I was about to start my first game ever in basketball and I was not mentally prepared for it. I was certainly wound up. This was 11/Dec/73, and this was the inaugural game of the new gym. I wasn't 100% for the game, and I was actually a little scared. Okay, I admit it. I was terrified.

I do not believe that I was held in very high regard by my fellow J.V. team mates. Connie Grey had a special problem with me and he tossed me off with great contempt. I just put it down to the fact that I could not play basketball. Rains had brought a J.V. team here to be the first visitors in this new gym.

Mr. Taylor watched on in varying degrees of enthusiasm as his young B-team clattered up and down the floor. It had started off with me startling the guy next to me at the tip off by asking him how his wife and kids were. The guy freaked out and stayed away from me for most of the game. Another would give me a hard time all night, good naturedly picking on me. It was a bizarre game.

As we battled on some generous soul passed me the ball on a fast break and I actually scored. I remember the bleachers cheering quite loudly for my accomplishment. I then went for a ball that was going out of bounds and tossed it back to a Rains J.V. guy. I was now trying too darn hard. I was then fouled and I missed both shots. I couldn't find any records of this game except in my own notes, so I have no way of knowing the final score. When it ended we just went to the locker room as the Boles Home Girls came onto the floor to start their warm up.

I had participated in the very first game in the new gym, and I had made 2 points.

Boles Home got the honor to be the first girls and Varsity boys team to visit this gym.

I made my way up into the bleachers and watched that Boles girl as she went through the warm up drills. Herman sat next to me, wondering about my state of mind. He had never seen me like this before, and it was a little frightening at best.

Looking out there at this very pretty young girl in the white jersey and green shorts I felt the overwhelming compulsion to talk to her. I just had to! How would I go about it?

My father had come to this game, a rare thing for him to do. I pointed her out to him. I told him how much I wanted to talk to her. He said she was very pretty and if I wanted to talk to her to just go ahead.

I bit my lower lip and thought about that. I'd give it a shot! I went to the concession stand and then I went up in the bleachers behind the visitor's bench. She was about 10 feet away, not far from the bench. The game hadn't started yet. I gave it a try.

I called out her name and said, "Are you gonna play tonight?"

She turned, saw me, and quickly turned back to the floor, in a huff. I walked away, deeply hurt. What was I, an ogre or something? I guessed she was mad because of what happened over at Quinlan. We had treated her and her team rather badly. I sat way up in a corner of the bleachers with Herman and Rabbit, and left her alone for the rest of the night. Only one thing was I certain of now; her name.

This was yet another warning. I had two warnings now. I should have heeded them. This lady wanted nothing to do with me.

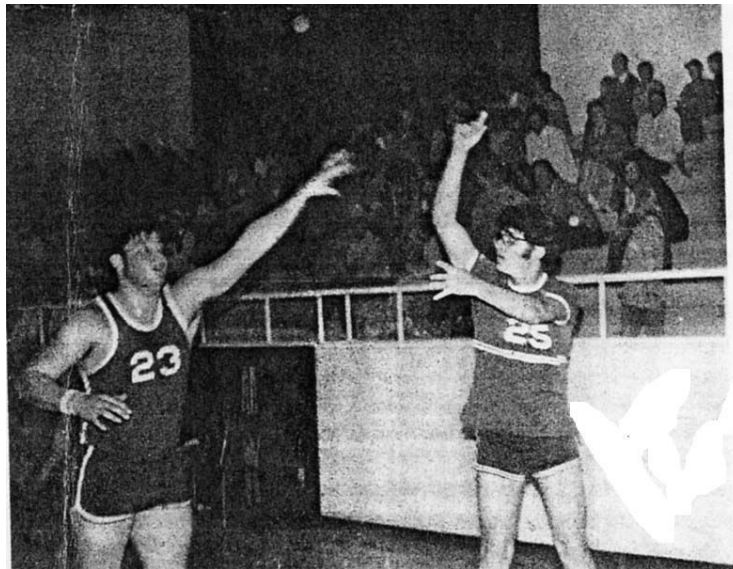
Things went badly for Boles in the game, and in the second half she got to play. She had a lot of problems with both Lone Oak and her own team. She had to throw the ball in once and much to her horror the other 2 girls just stood there, covered.

She hollered "Move!" and finally got the ball in. Lone Oak stole it and quickly made 2 points. I think Boles lost this first game with us.

Herman and Randy Price had to go suit up for the game, leaving me feeling very alone and awkward. I wanted nothing more than for her to come up and just say "Hi." That was never going to happen. Not in this world.

I watched a very chaotic and disjointed boys game from my exile up in the bleachers. Less than 50 feet away the Boles Home girl sat with her sister and their friends. If she once looked in my direction I never saw it. I left them all alone.

I looked at the floor. I saw a clot of people thunder down the floor. I heard the shrill tweet of the referee's whistle and then Robert Vice's big hand shot up out of the crowd. It was wild and disorganized out there. I wanted to be on the bench. I had nobody to talk to up here. I hadn't felt this alone at a basketball game in my entire life. I put my chin in my hands and watched the game.



Boles brought a photographer along and started taking pictures. I thought this was odd, but I didn't pay it much mind. Robert leaped up to block a shot by James Lewis of Boles Home. They caught this moment in a photo. To this day this is the only surviving record of the first game in our new gym, and it is in the 1974 edition of the Boles Home yearbook.



I have no idea who won the boys game. Randy Price, broken collarbone and all, dove headfirst out of bounds to save a ball. He hit the maple sort of hard, but he was okay. After the game was over I hung around to see Randy and Herman.

While I was looking for my two buddies this gave the Boles girl enough time to get on the bus and avoid any chance of meeting me. If I had pursued her there might be a fight, especially if she had a boyfriend. I considered her having a boyfriend quite likely. In spite of the fact that only one or two of the girls in my Senior class had local boyfriends I believed it quite impossible for a girl of such good looks to be unattached. It was best that I talk to Herman and Randy and let Boles Home leave with its bus load of kids.

I found my friends, chatted with them for a bit, then I rode home with my father. It was the first game in the new gym, my first game as a starter, and the first time I ever really tried to talk to a girl I had never met before. A lot had happened this night. All I could think of, though, was a girl who had no idea who I was, or even cared if I was alive. She had reacted real negatively to me, too. I don't know why. That was the first of many things that wouldn't make any sense in the following year.

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## Big Red Lockers



Seniors had a lot of free time and on the 13th of December it was decided to take advantage of all this. Some 200 red metal lockers had arrived. These had to be assembled and mounted to the walls.

Enthusiastic about having something to do, most of the male members of the class pitched right in. After getting all the tools needed from the Ag shop they proceeded to assemble the lockers.

I was in a group that simply didn't want anything to do with the new lockers. I was tired of doing things around school and not getting what I considered recognition. At least, that's how I felt at the time. This was most unlike me, and was just one more example of the fact that I was not acting

like old self. I was held in high regard by most of my peers and the school faculty. I somehow just didn't want to put out anymore on school projects that I felt did little for me. I had built trailers, bar-b-ques, parts of the football field, and countless other school projects and I was feeling short changed. This didn't make any sense. Why had I started acting like this?

I spent most of the time running simple errands and finding ways to goof off. Posey, David Dillon, Rabbit, and a host of others got right into building the lockers. They were acting like they always had.

First, the wooden lockers that lined both sides of the hallway were removed and unceremoniously thrown out of the back door. No matter what they had been there 25 years and in spite of rough treatment they served a generation of Lone Oak students. The new steel lockers were red, and they were mounted in two racks down the length of one side of the hall. This gave more students individual lockers and because they were on one side of the hall it widened the hallway about a foot.

As much as I had loved putting things together this time I oddly kept my distance and just watched. The big metal sawhorses we had used for welding on were brought in and the back panels of the lockers were man-handled into place on top of the sawhorses. Randy Price or somebody equally small would get under the sawhorses with a can of bolts and a screwdriver. Individual panels that separated the lockers were bolted into place and then the doors were put on. Mr. Trimble supervised to be sure all the numbered doors were put on in the proper chronological order.

Once a bank of lockers were completely assembled they were hauled off the sawhorses and worked into place on the wall. They were then secured to the wall with toggle bolts.

This went on all day and I was very bored with it all. Sometimes I helped carry out the old lockers and bring in parts of the new ones. Even that little bit of work soon got old and I essentially ended up doing nothing at all.

Herman and I sneaked off and hid in the auditorium with his sister and a girl named Sondra Hill that really liked Herman. He would eventually marry the girl, but that was in the future. Herman and I would sit in the auditorium seats and I would goof around on stage, messing with the props and exploring the place. Herman, the girls, and I kept this up until Mr. Brookins found us in there and ran us out of there.

After a few days of this carnival atmosphere the new lockers were in and most of the old ones were gone. I think I kept my books in one of the few remaining old wooden lockers near the rest rooms. Mine was close to the corner where the janitor's closet is. Because everyone wanted the trendy new red lockers Randy Price and I now had a big wooden locker apiece. It let me keep a lot of my stuff in the locker, like notes, drawings, and tons of my doodles. I was quite happy with my own private and very large individual locker.

These few surviving wooden lockers would last until the summer, when school was over.

Lone Oak was also starting a Kindergarten. What with the classrooms in our new gym and an abundance of class room space now available it was only a question of time before that happened.

Things seemed to be looking up all over.

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"A horse! A horse!

My kingdom for a horse!"

Shakespeare, Richard III

## The Last Game of 1973

Christmas was upon us and everyone was filled with holiday spirit. It would be time off and a chance to just lay around, blow off steam, and enjoy being free for a while.

Around us the world turned. Pamela Lindsey, who had left us for a while then returned from where ever it was she went to, was engaged to be married. In Greenville Sgt. Sheppard replaced Sgt. Smith. Randy Price and I got to know Sgt. Sheppard and he did the preliminary paper-work on us for our upcoming enlistment.

Basketball rolled on. I started on B-team and had a good night. I figured I had seen that girl from Boles for the last time, and I wrote her off. At least I tried to.

Practice was still just as rough as before. I ran over Danny and I had scored 4 points out of the 4 shots I put up. Mongoose tried driving on me and I did a maneuver I had learned from Danny and I drew a charging foul. Gothcha!

The way we practiced was hard and rough and didn't develop any form of a sense of being on a team. It was basically "in your face" basketball and revenge based. Not much teamwork came out of it, and not much was done in the way of ball handling or learning the basics. We were not a team, we were a collection of individuals who were trying to beat each other more than we were trying to win games. The 1972 team would have brushed us off the floor and forgot all about us.

Six weeks tests had come. Fear that my grades were slipping grabbed me, but when I passed my Book-keeping I felt much better about that.

On December 20 of 1973 we were to play our last game of 1973. When we got to our new gym it was a typical night to begin with. There was no J.V. game so I got to suit up with the Varsity. I was looking forward to a fun time of being on the bench with my friends and enjoying a night of basketball. It didn't turn out that way.

We got in the locker room and suited up. I was sliding into my white jersey when Randy Price suddenly realized he didn't have his jersey! Randy had been elevated to the position of starter and was far too valuable to miss this game. I didn't hesitate. I shed my jersey and gave it to him. He put it on and I got back in my street clothes.

The team went out to warm up and I trudged up into the bleachers. There wasn't enough room for me on the bench so I sat all alone up there and just watched the game.

It was a typical Lone Oak game. It was nip and tuck, it was rough, and there was a lot of fouling. Gunner launched a long shot and it went right over the backboard. I wasn't alone in that category now. Boles girl and I had company in that club. It wasn't funny anymore either.



In the swirling chaos that was on the floor I noticed that we seemed to be holding our own. I wanted to be on the bench so bad, but I could not. I had made a choice and I had to live with it. Years ago I made a statement to Coach Taylor that I would not give up my knee-pads in football to anyone. He countered by saying to me "Even if it helps us win?"

Would I sit out a game where I could give up something that would enable us to pull out a win? Yes, I certainly would. Randy wore my white jersey.

This was the last game, as I said, of this year. When we would go home for the holidays we would not play basketball. We had not been invited to any holiday tournaments this year. This was it. I watched on in gratification as Victory spread her wings for the last time in 1973 for Lone Oak and blessed us with a one point victory. I had made the sacrifice and my reward had been a win by my team. I was happy, and Randy would turn in my jersey after he had washed it at home.

I thought it was a good sign. We had won our last game of 1973.

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"While there is life,

there is hope."

Cicero

## The Soft Sweet Touch of Death

On the 20th of December temperatures fell like a rock. It had gotten very cold after being unusually warm for several months. It rained and turned all the dirt roads to muck.

On the 21st our test were finished and happily we all spilled out of school for the last time in 1973. There were the usual happy good-byes and the calls of "see you next year!" Everyone scattered to their own homes and families for the two weeks vacation.

I broke out my big ugly bike and looked at a goo-covered roadway near my home as a challenge. It was a mountain, of a sorts, and I intended to climb it. I rode off into the muddy road and I quickly bogged the heavy bicycle down. Pushing hard, I never dismounted the bike, but pushed it from the saddle all the way down the road, a distance of about a mile. I peddled when I could, but the mud was so deep that it was almost impossible. As I got near the end of the road the ground became firmer and I was soon able to peddle the bike again. It slung mud off it's tires and my speed rapidly picked up. It had been a workout for over an hour but when I defeated the mud I felt better about it. It was something physical I could do to work out my frustrations, and I had a lot of frustration to work out. I rode home, triumphant.

On the 22nd of December I played football with some friends, and managed to turn my ankle. It didn't hurt all that much, so I continued on. It was the long awaited Christmas Holidays and I wasn't about to let a sore leg mess that up. I needed something like this, all the rough and tumble, to keep me going.

On Christmas Eve I went to Sulphur Springs to my Uncle Charles' house for Christmas dinner with the family. Dad then presented me with the only bike he ever bought me, a white 10 speed bike. I was so blown away by this that I rode the bike all that night, catching a bad cold in the chill night air.

On the 26th I let my sister Sandra and Ben Hart take a turn on the bike. I was real proud of my very first 10 speed. I thought it was one great bicycle. My father was pleased that I was so happy with this new bike.

I had overdone it in the past few days, though. I was now hoarse and coughing. In less than 2 days after Christmas I was flat on my back in bed with a raging fever and aching joints. I was so sick that I couldn't even think properly.

This sickness didn't just last a day or so. It got progressively worse. My mother didn't take me to the doctor for whatever reason. I once staggered out of bed and called a doctor and I discussed my symptoms over the phone. He refused to speculate over the phone about what I might have, and told me to come on to let him look at me. I just stumbled back to bed in my delirium and lay in it.

I lay there ill and delirious for several days. I started to lose what little weight I had. My breathing was even coming rough. I could only breath shallow and short. My lungs had a lot of trash in them and I felt strange. I wasn't eating at all.

One night, while the house was asleep, I suddenly awoke. I had a tremendous feeling of peace. Something told me I had to get my affairs in order and be sure everything was okay. I painfully reached for my clipboard and started writing. I was writing my will. I sensed I was dieing. This thing had me and I felt a velvet like touch of peacefullness slowly coming over me. This wasn't just a bad cold, this was death. I could feel it, I knew it, and I decided to make sure everything was okay when I left this life. Blinking through the fevered haze I felt remarkably lucid. I started dividing up what little I had. I left all my collected drawings to Herman. I felt he would take care of them. I willed my bikes and all my other things to Rickey Graham and Randy Price. I willed my money that Dad had saved for me for college would go to the girl from Boles. It would get her started on a good education, I felt.

I didn't have a lot, but I wanted to be sure that it went to the right people. I completed this Will, carefully folded it, and put it in the shelves at the head of my folding bed. I then rolled onto my side and more or less passed out from the exertion. I felt that I was ready to die.

I awoke the next day feeling even worse, but I was alive. I was still alive! I thought of my coaches and what Rick and Randy had told me. I couldn't quit.

"Are you going to just give up, Charlie-O, or are you going to be a Buffalo and keep going?"

It wasn't time to quit. I could not quit. I had to fight back and beat this horror that had me in this so very pleasant killing grip. I could not give up, no way!

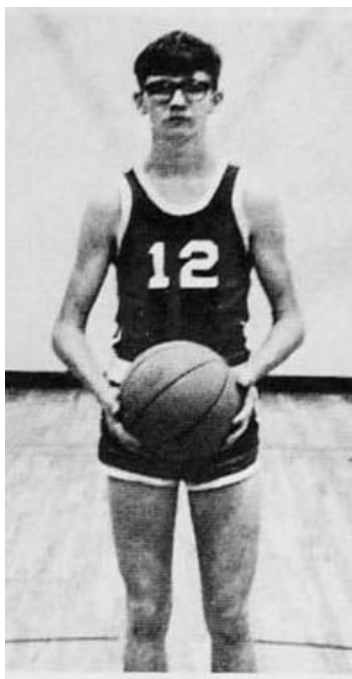
I began by breathing deep and exhaling quickly. This forced the stuff in my lungs up and got me to coughing, but it also got the stuff out of me. I sat at the kitchen table, barely able to hold my head up, and forced myself to eat. I lay in bed at night, with the tempature of my room hovering around 50 degrees and a cold sweat drenching my body. I was wrapped in blankets that were soon soaked through. I refused to give up. I had no medicine, no antibiotics, just my will-power to get me through this grip of death.

I thought of that girl from Boles and how much I still wanted to meet her. I wanted to know very much what type of girl she was, to just talk to her. I could not let go and leave that undone. It was a calling and I had to do it. I thought of my dear friends and how much I wanted to see them again. I fought hard to get well. I wanted to go back to school. School had already started back up when my fever finally broke on the 6th of January. I had been very ill for over two solid weeks, and sicker than I had ever been in my life.

I was finally able to dress myself properly and get out of bed. I was still coughing and sore in my joints, but I was able to move.

On Monday, the 7th of January, 1974, I returned to school, going there for the first time that year. Randy took one look at my emanciated frame and exclaimed "Where have you been, man! You look terrible!"

I just told him that I had been "sick as a dog". I looked at my friend and smiled. I could not describe how happy I was to see his face again.



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"I ask of my lady

That I be allowed to serve her.

That I may hold her in my heart.

That to her I may dedicate each Victory

And call upon her in defeat.

And if at last

I give my life

I give it in her name."

"Man of Lamancha" 1965

## The Fall

I was in my room tinkering with my silver-green Corvette model. In spite of trying to concentrate on this car that I was customizing I was not really into it. My mind was on other things, more important things. I wanted things to happen. My hobbies and my drawing weren't enough anymore. I had been lonely for most of my adolescent life with the exception of my running buddies. I now looked upon this girl at Boles Home as my one best chance to improve on my situation in life. There was nobody in Lone Oak and in all my adventuring and wandering around in Greenville I had never met a single solitary girl who would give me the time of day. Some I had met were shrewish or of "questionable moral fibre."

No, this girl from across Lake Tawakoni was the best chance I had.

I put the car down on the deepfreeze top worktable and put my head in my hands. I had to talk to Randy Price and Herman. This step I was about to take was a big one. I could not do it all alone. I was terrified that I would mess it up. I was just a dirt poor farm boy, but my future looked promising. I would sign up in the Army in a couple of months and I'd have what I hoped was a career for the next 20 years. I'd get money, travel, and a place to live. It all looked good. All that was missing was someone to believe in and believe in me in return. So this was a big move I was taking and I had to take it. Was there any one else? No. What else could I do? I had no answer to that.

I put the car and it's parts back in a box and I tried to sleep. Perhaps tomorrow I'd have a better idea of what to do. What makes a man fall in love with a woman he has never met? Is it a look or a touch? Maybe it was the way she talked or carried herself. I don't know. I do know that I liked everything I had seen of her, from her happy outgoing demeanor to her pretty smile and sparkling dark eyes. I know I had seen what I believed to be the most beautiful girl I had ever seen in the entire world. All I wanted right now was to talk to her or go see her. This was the troubling part.

My first effort to talk to her ended with a complete snub, but I put that down to the treatment she had received at our hands at the Quinlan Tournament. I had no car and virtually no money. I had no idea what her telephone number might be and to just call a girl I had never met, right out of the

blue, was a no-no. All that left was to write her a letter. My handwriting was a barely readable scrawl. That left typing a letter to her. As impersonal as that might be, at least she could read what I wrote. Typing one at school was to risk discovery and ridicule. Fortunately I had a typewriter that my parents had bought me for my last birthday.

That was the only course I had left, then. I rolled out of my folding bed, unpacked my typewriter, and the sounds of my rattling keys could be heard well into the night. Soon my trash basket was filled with rejected letters and I gave up and went back to bed, tired out.

At school the next day I was discussing my situation with Herman and Randy. I looked upon Randy the Rabbit as a sort of ladies man so he might know what I should say. Herman had several sisters. He probably knew how a girl would react to my advances.

Right off Randy doubted that she'd write back. It was a thing that just wasn't done. Herman looked at me and offered "What have you got to lose?"

Good point. She was about 15 miles away and if she didn't answer I had lost nothing. Therefore it certainly was worth a try.

That left another problem. What the heck was her address? I had to find out. I cast around at likely sources. I asked my parents, my friends, everybody I could think of that was trustworthy. Rickey Graham came across with the address, and my mother puzzled out the area code.

So now everything was ready. I had the address, the equipment to write the letter with, and the postal service would get it there. All I had to do was come up with the proper letter. I felt like a scientist who had a rocket, launching pad, and crew, but had no idea what type of payload he wanted on the system. I thought for a moment while sitting before my home typewriter, and then I just started typing.

I rattled out a letter describing me as clearly as I could. I apologized for the razing she got at the Quinlan Tournament. I told her no lies, and I didn't want to. I wanted to stand or fall on my own merits. This is one girl I also wanted real bad to meet and get to know, no matter what.

I typed out a couple of rejects and finally hit on what I felt was the proper wording. I carefully folded the letter and stuffed it in a white envelope. I put a stamp on it and put it where I could get it and mail it the next morning.

The next morning I dressed for school, and ran across the highway with the letter in my hand. I put it in the mailbox and raised the flag.

So it was that I then fell from Pegasus and dropped a long long way into a deep dark pit with no visible bottom. It would be a long long time before I climbed out into the light of day again. A long time.

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## A Pretty Pink Letter

Quite a few people had left the team because of grades and lack of game time when we all came back in January. It had shrunk the teams alarmingly. The teams, already weak from a lack of experience and depth, suffered even more.



Coach Taylor was forced to do some shuffling of the roster. He pulled some off of J.V. and put them on the ailing varsity. I was left on J.V. as a starter and that suited me just fine for the time being.

Dennis was in love with some girl in his class and he started playing really sloppy basketball. I sat on the bench for one varsity game next to Coach Taylor and watched the greatest boys' basketball coach in Lone Oak history shake his head in exasperation.

"He's so gone over that sweetheart of his he can't get his mind on the game, Charlie-O."

Dennis took a real lousy shot, from where he should have passed off.

"See there? He just doesn't know what he's doing."

I didn't say anything. I just sat there and watched. Girls could really mess up a guys' mind, I concluded, but I was too tough for that. I am not Bulldozer. No girl was ever going to mess me up. I had my act together! Poor Dennis, to be so weak.

Friday, January 18, 1974 I got off the bus. It was a bright, clear day and not very cold. My prospects as a J.V. player and our chances of actually accomplishing something improved a little with each practice. The future looked promising in spite of our motley crew.

I trotted into my home and tossed my M-1945 Army backpack that I carried my books in, onto the couch where it usually stayed most of the weekend. I would do my homework on late Sunday or jam it all down in the first study hall Monday morning.

My mother was in the living room, and she pointed at the top of the T.V.

"Theres a letter for you," she said.

I saw a pretty pink envelope propped up by the nic-nacs my mother kept on top of the television. I picked the envelope up and read with rising excitement the name on the envelope.

She had written back! The Boles Home girl had written back!

With great feelings of joy I ran into my room at the back of the house to read this little message in private. Never before had a girl ever written to me, even so much as a thank you note.

I hopped on my bed and propped up on the wall. I looked at her scrolly handwriting. It was wonderfully elaborate with interlocking letters in each word. I opened the letter up and extracted the two pages of notebook paper in there. Both pages had been written on, back and front. She had sent me a 4 page letter!

Like WOW, man!

I began to read. Judging from her use of words she was an intelligent lady. Everything in those 4 pages was wonderful. I found out that she was just 16 and she apologized for that as if that was important. Herman speculated that she might be as old as 18, but because she was younger I would have about 2 years to court her. Good. Had she been 18 she'd graduate and leave Boles, and I probably would never have seen her again.

She told me that she played basketball in Junior High and she was one of the high scorers. She said that she was in the Bel-Canto singers, with her sister. She said her hobbies were sewing and singing, and that she made a lot of her own clothes. Cool. What a tremendous lady!

She told me of a long trip they took on the Chior bus to the West Coast.

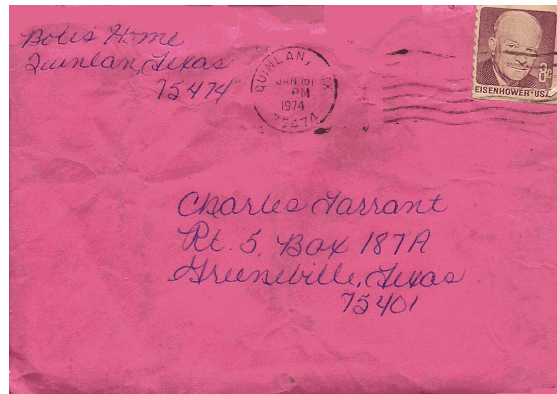
Then she said she didn't know who I was but that it was okay for me to write to her. She also jokingly commented on how rough and 'mean' we are as a basketball team. She didn't know the half of it!

Judging from the content of this simple letter she had some self doubts, like most teens, but she was going to send me a picture of her if they turned out satisfactory. Cool.

I put the pages down in a daze. This was one great lady. She not only lived up to my expectations, she surpassed them. This was just too much to ask for.

One thing disturbed me. She did not know who I was. That bothered me a lot. I had my crummy school pictures to send her and that was all. I hadn't got my football photos yet. I simply had to send her a picture and let her know who I was. If I got a letter back telling me she thought I was someone else or something, I would understand, walk away, and put it down to what might have been. I would just have struck out. Again.

But first I had to tell Herman and Randy that she had wrote back! This was like winning the State Championship! **She had wrote back!**



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## Scholarships

Everyone who ever put on cleats and a helmet at Lone Oak has had in the back of their minds to go play college ball. Even the tiniest of fellows have that dream. I had that dream. I once suggested to Coach McNutt many years ago that I'd like to try college ball. He told me that the chances of being on any college team was highly unlikely. Only great big guys or spectacular atheletes go on to play in the colleges, Rudy Rutiger not withstanding. (Check out the movie "Rudy" to see what I mean). I was neither great big or a spectacular athelete.

College ball is also very diffrent from highscool ball. In high school, at least here in Lone Oak, it is supposed to build character and spirit. In College it is more 'for keeps'. Winning is all and everything. Guys go head-hunting, hurt each other on purpose, try their level best to undo the

other guy, and that is only in practice. I do not think I would have liked that environment. The coach wasn't a mentor in there, he was a task master who had to win or go find another job. Players were also expendable.

Of all us in the Senior class only two got scholarship offers; Danny and Robert. Howard Payne signed them up on January 19, 1974.



Eddie could not get a scholarship, him being married and all, so he would do a walk-on at E.T. and try to get on the team there. He had tried so very hard and suffered so much for it that for him not to get an offer to some college seemed like an injustice.

Frankie Payne believed he should have a scholarship, too, and a fistfull of honors to go with it. He got neither. He was so mad I don't think he spoke to Coach Fannin again. I never saw him at anymore Buffalo games either. That was a dog-gone shame.

Rickey Graham didn't get anything either. Somewhat lost by this, he didn't know what to do. He thought about a military career. It seemed like a good choice, but he wasn't even sure he wanted to finish school. With no further football career beckoning he just didn't see the reason. Soon after this he stopped coming to school altogether.

Gunner did not get any offers, nor Ronald, Oakes, Johnny Hooten, Gongga, Randy Price, or me. I wasn't surprised anybody called me, and Herman figured it was just another part of the 'Fine Young Men' network.

I figured I would be seeing Danny playing in the pros someplace, and I could watch him on T.V. I would hold my son or daughter in my lap, and tell them, my wife, and anyone else who would listen that I knew Danny Bowman when I was in highschool. I used to be one of his centers. Now he is out there playing pro ball. It would be great. I am sure my wife would roll her eyes after hearing the story for the 100th time.

I hoped Robert would do good, too. He had taught me what it meant to be a lineman. It was a lesson I never forgot, and I hoped to pass it on to others. The future looked interesting.

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## Reply

Randy Price freaked out. He could not believe she had written to me. It was all totally unbelievable, if not too good to be true. No more to him than to me. We were on the bus, on the way to that nights basketball game. We were in district play, playing 2 games a week. Boys' Varsity, Boy's J.V, and Girls' Varsity played each of these nights. It had not been going well for any of us.

Wolfe City, Honey Grove, Quinlan, Cooper, and Detroit were in our district. Randy didn't like to go to Detroit because it was so far to ride in the Yellow Monster. I could beat this by dozing in the seat. Randy had a lot more adrenalin in his system than I, so he couldn't sleep enroute to the games.

Some schools were actually calling off some games over long distances because of our so-called gasoline shortage. Gas had doubled in price, from 30 cents to over 67 cents a gallon. That was blowing the budgets at small schools. The Yellow Monster drinks a lot of gas, in some instances the older busses got gas milage in single digits! A huge, untuned, over-revving V-8 engine consumes a lot of fuel.

Herman told me he was happy to be on A-team, but he'd rather be a J.V. starter. He spent a lot of time on the bench. This was just the opposite of my feelings that I'd rather be on 'A' team, sitting on the bench. I was perfectly happy to sit on the bench, because that was what I did best in basketball.

That night we battled one of our opponents and lost and lost and lost. This led to grumbling among the troops. Fewer and fewer people showed up for practice and games. It was getting real bad. Tim Wages had left.

Herman was happy I had made contact at last with the Boles girl. He anticipated that many good things could grow out of this. In his eyes I was on my way to wife, career, and all that went with adult-hood.

Randy believed I was the most talented guy he ever saw. I could draw, write, play sports resonably well, and I was funny. Randy loved me like a brother. Now I had what seemed to all of us to be a girlfriend. He was absolutely happy for me.

I got home and that Saturday I pecked out a letter to Boles on my little typewriter. I folded the letter up and put it in the envelope that had her address on it. I picked up my photo and hesitated.

Should I do this? Everything in my being was telling me not to. In my head my subconscious was screaming at me not to send her that picture! Yet, something else was tugging me the other way. I could lead her along, write her a bunch of lies, and let her think I was some muscled up jock. I could tell her I was some handsome, All District Center, an 'A' Team starter, and in basketball I was usually in the top 3 scorers. I could lie, lie, lie, and lie some more and I would hate myself for it. It would be dishonest and I would gain nothing in long run. If she built a mental picture of some Super Joe Athlete and I showed up on her doorstep she would be exceptionally angry. If anything had been built there it would be lost once and for all.

No, I could not lie to her. She had the right to know. If it was not meant to be then it must end. I put the picture in the envelope and sealed it. I made my decision.

The letter was mailed the following Monday, on the 21st of January. I spent all day in school feeling great anxiety over what I had done. I sat in typing class and rattled out another letter trying

to let her understand why the picture looked like it did, as well as some other things I hoped would clarify the situation. I was sweating in my palms with worry as I put this letter in an envelope and mailed it on Tuesday. I had no idea what effect either letter would have. I just felt as though I was on the verge of losing something I had come to treasure deeply.

At the basketball game that night I was overly distracted and we lost. I bounced off people and missed passes. I fouled out. I sat on the bench almost sick with worry. I had a lot in common with Dennis now.

I also had a bad feeling that I had blown away my one best chance in my young life to do something that I felt really counted.

Oh my....



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"I have no other but a woman's reason:

I think him so because I think him so."

Shakespeare, "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

## The Girl From Boles Home

She arrived at her cottage after school. It was made of pretty red brick with white trim, and had a colonial look to it. She shared this facility with her siblings at Boles Home. All told there was a sizable amount of kids in the house with them, and two house-parents. Most had private rooms joined by a long corridor down the rear of the cottage.

Her house parent presented her with the mail she had recieved. She was delighted to see that "the guy from Lone Oak" had wrote back.

She went into her room, deposited her books on a desk and took the letter with her onto her bed to read it. Leaning against the wall with her legs drawn up under her she opened the letter. She extracted the typewritten pages there-in and noticed the photo as it fell out. She picked it up and curiously looked at the face on the front.

Was this geeky looking fella the guy from Lone Oak? She certainly didn't imagine him looking like the bespeckled dude in the photo. She read the letter. As she did her hopes sank. Yes, it was really him. The same guy in the bleachers at Quinlan, the same guy at Lone Oak. She finished the letter and put it down. Well, this was just one more dream she had that came crashing down in flames. She considered throwing the picture and letters she had gotten away. She decided to hang onto them for a while. Maybe they'd mean something someday. Right now it was just one more disappointment. She got off her bed and went to do her kitchen chores. It was time to make supper. She didn't want to discuss the letter with anyone.

The very next day she recieved another letter. Curious, she retreated to her room once again. What did this guy have to say now? Why did he write again? Soon it became apperant. She read that I was justifiably worried about sending her my picture.

"Well," she thought, "This is the last he'll hear from me."

She put the letter away, and told herself that if she just let it be, by simply ignoring the situation, it would go away.

Just as I had my ideal girl that I had written about as a class project, so had this young girl had her ideal man. She wanted a big, strong fellow, like Robert or Gunner. This would give her a sense of protection and strength to shield her from any more unhappy things that would come her way. More than anything she wanted security and a family. She also wanted that non-existant thing called "Unconditional Love." At this time she felt as if she had neither, outside of her siblings in the home with her.

She went on to do her chores and forget all about that guy from Lone Oak. It was 25/Jan/1974.

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"The rest is silence"

Shakespeare, "Hamlet"

## A lot of Stompings

For every game we lost fewer and fewer players showed up. Guys quit in ones and twos. Many begin to hold Coach Taylor, who had coached Lone Oak's first Championship Regional Quarterfinalist team in history, in contempt. Even I had my problems with him. But I had seen him at his very best in 1972 with the Centurions. I was a Centurion, as was Gunner and Danny. We were the only Centurions left when Woody took a hike.

Coach Taylor was desperate. Only his most dedicated and loyal players would remain. Bitterly I played on J.V. and suited up for a couple of Varsity games. No victories graced us. It was certainly an unpleasant experience. It would become almost nightmarish.

But I wasn't going to quit.

Coach Taylor couldn't do much with the appalling lack of talent he had on his 2 teams. He couldn't make silver out of dirt. He tried to find an offense that worked. Nothing seemed to come together. Other teams tried some totally bizarre things on J.V. against us when we played. One thing they did was the "picket fence". Three guys formed a line, shoulder to shoulder, in front of a shooter. These 3 guys were almost in a pass-blocking stance, to keep people from blocking the shot. The guy who shot had a clear, unblockable line to shoot at the basket from 15 feet away.

I was at forward. I saw the guards confused by this odd formation and unable to adjust. I came out of my forward position and slid through the blockers to get to the shooter. They pulled this on us twice until I was able to break it up. They then started breaking off into my vacated zone so I had to quickly fall back to cover it.

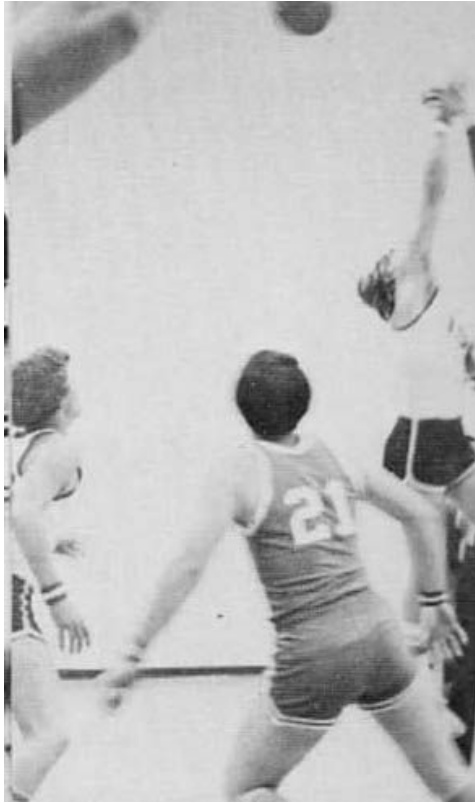
They beat us, but they didn't pull that trick on us again. Coach Taylor congratulated me for my alertness. It was one of the few accolades I would get for playing basketball.

We had no drills for throwing the ball in, and we never worked on one. I found out that many schools have quite elaborate in-bounds drills. Guys would form a tight line or knot and explode in all directions. This left us confused and a little angry. It did not intimidate me, but it did a lot of the rookie players we had left.

In addition to starting to collect a sizeable share of fouls I also had my bad nights. The Coach from Wolfe City saw that I could be screened out in my right defensive corner zone. His strategy became to merely put a player between me and the shooter. That froze me to my spot, almost under the backboard, and I should have broken through to the outside man. It was an easy jumpshot for 2 for this guy. Coach Taylor got wise to this and put in Paul Payne in my place. He gave me a proper chewing out for not going outside and showed me repeatedly how Paul beat the screen.

I was hot, angry, and distracted by 'other things'. I just let it go in one ear and out the other. We were going to lose anyway, so I didn't really care. How far I had fallen! I had the Boles gril on my tiny mind and I figured it was too late for us to accomplish anything in basketball this season anyway.

I knew what to do, it's just that I had forgotten how. I ran into a lot a people. I had a lot of pent up frustration to burn off. The girl had not answered me and that ate at me constantly. I did not have my head in the games anymore, and only Coach Taylor's generosity for what he considered my sacrifices for the team kept me in the starting line-up.



Just about everybody was looking forward to playing us. The Lone Oak Buffalo Gladiators were not a team, it was just a collection of guys playing at basketball. Everybody got to unload their bench on us. Big Red was not carrying the Thunder anymore. The Thunder was carrying us, and to our foes.

Cooper, especially took great delight in our disjointed, disorganized form of playing. The guy that Danny and Robert had made their personal project that rainy night in football season ran his mouth at us all night long. Robert stopped once, looked up in the bleachers right at the guy, and just grinned. Robert knew he had given the guy a night to remember that football season. The loud-mouthed dude didn't even play basketball, so Robert held him in even more contempt.

"Go on and just run your head," Robert thought, "We all know who won that little contest last season."

Cooper beat us in basketball twice this season.

Wolfe City had put together a fine basketball team. They were leading district and picked to win it. Some of the young men on this team were the same ones we had met in our last regular season game. When they blew us off the floor they got revenge on us and great satisfaction.

Coach Taylor tried to control the game. He developed a slow moving ball control stall-based offense he called the 'Snowbird' that he hoped would cause an opponent to foul or grow complacent enough for us to work a high percentage shot in on them.

It started off well. The Varsity held their own with Wolfe City, carefully passing and methodically working inside for a good shot. That lasted until discipline broke down late in the third quarter.



Both Danny and Robert were somewhat bored with the stall-based offense and decided to run and gun. That was a lot more fun, in their view. When we came back out they tried to play in the fashion of the team of 1972. It was a disaster. In seconds Wolfe City pulled way ahead on fast breaks and rebounds. Coach Taylor could not believe what he saw. He called time. The crew came over to the bench for the most bizarre chewing out I ever saw a team from Lone Oak get.

"Why wont you listen to me? Slow it down out there and work it inside, like I told you."

When the team went back out on the floor they simply continued their run and gun style, and subsequently got eaten alive. Coach Taylor threw a towel on the floor next to the bench, and sat there, disgusted. He gave up on the guys on the floor.

Wolfe City soundly stomped us, scoring most of their points in the 4th quarter. Run and gun may be more fun than the "Snowbird" stall-based offense, but it lost games when the talent just wasn't there. We did not have the collected discipline to do it.

Coach Taylor decided to try it again at Detroit. He attempted to stall the ball until his team figured out that they wanted to play basketball and not take stupid shots, or try to run and gun.

Detroit also whipped us, and Coach Taylor made up his mind not to try anymore. Simple but slow offenses were not what his players had the will to run. A slow scoring game with Lone Oak having a chance of winning were not on the Gladiator's list of capabilities. We could knock the crap out of each other in practice and leap about like idiots, play gotcha! and fool around, but we didn't have what it took to win games. Taylor's Terrors had become Taylor's Turkeys.

It came to a peak one horrible night at Honey Grove.

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## The Horror

Honey Grove had this guy that must've been 7 feet tall. If he wasn't, then he certainly looked it. It was as if he could get down the entire floor in 3 strides. Nobody could out-rebound him and nobody could block his shot. He left our varsity dazed and trampled in his formidable wake.

Earlier this night I had participated in a mauling we had recieved by the Honey Grove J.V. I then sat up in the bleachers with Randy and Herman while the Lone Oak girls got destroyed by the Honey Grove girls. We discussed everthing but basketball. Basketball wasn't entertaining anymore. It was sheer misery. Randy had chunked a basketball over the backboard once in a desperation shot a few games back, but by now it had lost it's novelty. Nobody laughed about it anymore.

In my comics my low feelings invaded there with a vengence. I had killed off my main character and destroyed several others. The stories were becoming dark and negative. This worried Randy and Herman and left them a little confused. Of course we all discussed Boles Girl. She had not written back and I didn't know what I should do. Randy still told me to keep writing to her, for she was bound to write back sooner or later. For that and other reasons I started typing letters to her and mailing them, regardless of how they sounded or the mistakes they contained. Eating at me constantly was the question; why didn't she write back, if only to tell me to get lost?

I guess I was hurting pretty bad.

Time came for Herman and the Rabbit to go dress for the game. I sat up in the bleachers, alone and feeling totally lost. Nothing was working anymore, and too many things didn't make sense. I watched the boy's game.



Herman sat on the bench. He was the only guy on the bench besides Coach Taylor. Attrition had gutted us. Our man-power was cut down by almost half. Only 6 Varsity players had showed up. It had gotten that bad.

The Horror began with the tip-off. The ball was quickly taken by Honey Grove and put up for 2. It went down-hill from that point on.

Mr. Taylor had given up on trying to teach us the Snowbird offense. Not knowing what else to do that was what Lone Oak tried for a while. But we had no height and no speed so Honey Grove easily could fast break on us. Long passes became the standard.

By the end of the first quarter Honey Grove had us 26 to 12. I sat up in the bleachers shaking my head. This was maddening. I got up and wandered around. I had nobody to talk to and no place else to go.

Coach Taylor looked hard at Gunner. Gunner seemed to be playing without much in the way of enthusiasm. The more Coach Taylor watched the more he didn't like Gunner's actions. It took a while, but he finally had enough. He took Gunner out and sent Herman in.

Gunner plopped on the bench and just looked at Coach Taylor. Meanwhile Herman got the ball at the top of the key and swished it. I cheered for my buddy, and I knew how much it meant to him to do good in a game like this. Herman even had nightmares about throwing the ball away. That is how uptight he was about his playing.

Back on the bench, Coach Taylor attempted to dress Gunner down for his lousy playing but Gunner wouldn't listen. He was fed up with a lousy season and Coach Taylor in particular, and he took off for the locker room. He just quit the team, then and there.

That only added to the feelings I personally had that Gunner had let us down at Mabank. Quitting was a rotten thing to do.

I went down at halftime to chat with Herman and Randy. I stood there to one side of the court and talked to them. It was 52 to 24 and Rabbit had no illusions as to our chances.

"They are gonna kill us."

"It looks like they already have!" I said, "Nice shot, Herman."

Herman smiled cynically, "Yeah, I don't get many of them, though."

I looked around, then back at the bench.

"What happened to Gunner?"

"I don't know. He went somewhere."

I suppose I could have suited up for this game, but I figured that because I had game time with the J.V. squad I couldn't. I have a feeling Mr. Taylor would not have minded. He never asked me, so I didn't. Had I been my usual self, I probably would have suited up. Still, I intended to sit on the bench next half. I still had enough of my old self left to do that. Sitting up in the bleachers alone was a total bummer.

The 5 guys left repaired to the bench and I went there with them. It was a sad situation. Gone was Mongoose, Roy Crow, Woody, and a host of others. Now Gunner hung up the tennis shoes, and for the last time. In my mind, as well as Randy's, was the feeling that those who quit simply could not hack the mission. It was all well and good to be on the team when we were pulling down victories, but when the going got tough they all bailed out.

Danny, Robert, Herman, Randy and I simply would not quit. It was bad for all of us, but we could not quit. This was our last season. This team wasn't even a shadow of the great team of 1972. That was the greatest team in the history of boy's basketball of this school. They set the standard for all of us to meet. We fell way short. But we were still Buffaloes. We still wore the red and white. We stuck with it no matter how bad it got for all of us. None of us would ever hang up our jerseys and just walk away. That would go against everything Coach Brookins, Coach Taylor, and Coach Fannin had taught us. Never give up.

Honey Grove came back at us with as much force and power as they had in the first half. It rocked us back on our heels. Honey Grove had no trouble with us at all. They went over, around, and through the Varsity like it was paper. They scored at will.

Herman got hot in the second quarter. He would get the ball at the top of the key and sink it. He did this twice. Then missed, just once, and he never got the ball again that night. That was a prime example of what was wrong with this team. There were 5 individuals out there, not 5 team mates. It was so sad, how far we had declined in only 2 years.

It was 78 to 36 going into the 4th quarter. As it began the bleacher creatures began a restless stirring that I had heard somewhere before, but did not recognize. Something special was in the

making, but no one on our side saw it yet. Soon it was 80 to 38. I sat there and chatted with Coach Taylor and called an occasional encouragement to my floundering teammates.

Like most of us, Herman usually didn't pay attention to the crowd. This time he noticed that they kept getting louder and louder. Everytime Honey Grove scored the cheers rang out even louder. What was going on?

Herman took the inbound pass from Rabbit and dribbled down the floor. He looked up at the clock and suddenly realized why the crowd was so enthusiastically cheering. It was 96 to 42! Honey Grove was on their way to scoring 100 points on us!

I looked to my right to see what Herman was staring at and like a bolt out of the blue I suddenly realized what was going on. This can't be happening! It just can't be! I felt rage, my frustrations, and hurt surge up all at once to the surface.

"Stall! " I bellowed, "Stall the ball!"

Herman passed to Randy and Randy looked at me in curiosity then to Coach Taylor.

"Keep playing," was all Coach Taylor said.

I kept screaming for my teammates to hang onto the ball and run out the clock. It was unheeded. Honey Grove easily got a rebound and in a fast break made it 98 to 42. The crowd noise was as loud as it had been at Caddo Mills so long ago.

Honey Grove had in some non-starters, but as they had a Junior Varsity game that night they didn't have much in the way that would let the pressure up on us. All of their players were exceptional and superior to what we had that night.

We scored some more, going all the way to 48 in all. I kept on screaming for a stall until Honey Grove broke the century mark. It was 100 to 48. I sank back in despair on the bench and shut up.

"It's okay, Charlie-O," Coach Taylor said to me, as way of consolation, "It's not the end of the world. Don't let it get you down."

Don't let it get me down? This was just one more thing. What else could go wrong? I just sat there with my arms folded and said nothing. This was as bad as I had ever seen it. This felt like doom.

Honey Grove polished us off, 104 to 48, scoring the most points I had ever seen at a high school game.

After the final buzzer I went to the bus and waited dejectedly for Herman and Randy. This had been horrible. I wondered what else waited for us just ahead. If I had my head together I would have seen that this was one lousy year for everybody here, and not just me. I let it get to me, though, and I should not have. I should have been tougher. I honestly don't know why I wasn't.

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"It is best to love wisely, no doubt;

but to love foolishly is better

than not being able to love at all."

William makepeace Thackeray, "Pendennis"

## Going Campbell Way

Boles girl had sent me a basketball schedual with her first letter. I had shown this to Randy and Herman. The last five games on the schedual were checked, an open invitation to to come to any of them I could make. Randy compared her schedual to ours and he saw she was playing at Campbell on January 28th 1974, and we had an off day. Randy told me this was my one best chance to meet her this year.

* District Games			
BOLES HOME HIGH SCHOOL Basketball Schedule 1973 - 1974			
Oct. 16	Miller Grove	Away	7:00
Oct. 19	Alba	Home	7:00
Oct. 23	Ector	Away	7:00
Oct. 26	Trenton	Home	7:00
Oct. 30	Ector	Home	7:00
Nov. 6	Alba	Away	7:00
Nov. 9	Miller Grove	Home	7:00
Nov. 13	Trenton	Away	7:00
Nov. 27	Lone Oak	Home	7:00
Nov. 29-Dec. 1	Quinton Tourney	Away	
Dec. 6-8	Rains County Tourney (Boys)	Away	
Dec. 11	Lone Oak	Away	7:00
Dec. 13-15	S & S Consolidated Tourney	Away	
Dec. 18	*Caddo Mills	Away	7:00
Jan. 4	*Dland	Home	7:00
Jan. 8	*Celeste	Away	7:00
Jan. 11	*Campbell	Home	7:00
✓Jan. 18	*Caddo Mills	Home	7:00
✓Jan. 22	*Dland	Away	7:00
✓Jan. 25	*Celeste	Home	7:00
✓Jan. 28	*Campbell	Away	7:00
✓Jan. 31-Feb. 2	*District Tourney		

"You can say hello and ask her why she didn't write back to you," Randy advised.

With his backing I planned all week for a chance to talk to her. Randy even arranged with Gary Dooley to have him drive us over there in his Mustang.

Gary knew Campbell and he had contacts there. It wasn't totally hostile territory. Gary even had girlfriends in Campbell.

I was grateful to Randy for bouying me up. I was nervous and a little bit terrified of what might happen. Randy was sort of like a cheerleader for me.

"Shower, shave, and off we go!" was his motto for preparing for this meeting. I felt confidence in his cheerfulness, but I was dreading the upcoming adventure.

I put on a dark green sweater and my white pep-rally pants. I was to wear the colors of another team to go see another team. It felt weird. I felt that sacrifices had to be made.

Randy, Gary, and I piled into Gary's brown Mustang right after practice and took off for Campbell, via Praire Vally Road. Gary drove his agile little car like a maniac. Highway 513 north is called Prairie Valley Road, or Campbell Road. It had a lot of twists and turns with hills and drops that would make a Formula One Grande Prix racer happy. One curve we even call "Dead Man's Curve" because it is said someone actually got killed there, according to legend.

Gary roared down this track at 90 mph, down shifting into the turns and blipping up the R.P.M.s as he shot out of the 'S' turns. Between holding on for dear life and wondering if Gary was totally insane there wasn't much time for conversation.

We arrived at I-30, crossed the overpass burning rubber, and tore into Campbell. Gary slowed his over-powered machine to a sane speed as we travelled the winding streets toward the school. Once over the railroad tracks he parked the Mustang under a streetlight in front of the familiar sunken gym. I could hear basketballs being dribbled and youthful voices raised in a school cheer. We were there.

We got out of the car and my legs felt kind of rubbery. It was not because of the wild ride we had just experienced either. Randy slapped me on the back in a comradery fashion.

"Come on, Chuck, let's go."

I wobbled into the gym and paid to see a high school basketball game for the first time in my life. Gary dissappered, seeking out familiar faces in the Campbell crowd. Randy and I went to the visitor's bleachers and sat on the front row at the extream end. We watched the girl's game in the Pit. I spotted the Boles girl quickly, wearing her uniform.

Imagine all this. Randy had arranged for Gary to take us to this game sorely for me to meet girl. There was really no other reason. He had gone out of his way just to do this for me! The mind boggles to have such a friend who would go to so much trouble.

So Randy and I sat there. I was very uptight and more than a little confused. I simply had to talk to the girl. A couple of guys from Boles got to wondering about us, and one named Donnie Singuefield talked to us. Donnie knew Gunner. These Boles guys were a little curious as to why some guys they had never seen before were here and appearantly rooting for the girls' team. Predators had been out at Boles before, and some of the guys were protective.

Randy did most of the talking, and Donnie had satisfied himself that we weren't here to make trouble. I just sat there, lovesick and anxious. I saw my girl shoot and I cheered for her.

"Where will she come out of the locker room at?" I asked Rabbit.

He looked around then pointed to a door at the far end of the bleachers.

"She'll come out right there. When the game ends go wait for her there."

I looked at the grey painted portal and I felt a surge of raw fear. That door was 600 miles away in hostile territory and through a minefield. I was to walk point all the way there then set up an ambush. I was to deal with what ever I found there alone, without support. When I would take that walk I would be all alone.

Randy saw a pair of hands and a set of eyes peering over the edge of the pit at us, just for a second. He swore it looked like the Boles girl. She had seen us, he thought, but did she know who we were?

Did it matter? It would all come to a head in a few minutes.

My vital signs raced as the clock ticked to zero. The Boles girls got wiped out, 63 to 33. My girl's sister had been the high scorer with 15. She was usually the point maker for Boles.



With the boys teams gone to play, the bleachers were relatively empty. I reluctantly left my seat with words of encouragement from Rabbit. I took a very long walk to that door. Scared to near panic, I stood there alone. A couple of girls came out immediately, startling me. They were carrying gym bags and had their uniforms on coat hangers. They didn't give me a second glance. A few more came out, then she herself with some one else, maybe her sister, by her side.

For a brief instant we both froze. Our eyes locked. She startled in recognition. Her friend stopped for a second, looked at me, then her, and continued on her way. She tore her eyes away and looked at the floor. She seemed to draw inside herself, as if she was afraid I might strike her or something. She looked so pretty, even then.

I wanted to just take her hands and tell her that it was okay. I wanted to tell her I loved her and wanted to date her. I wanted to tell her I was looking for someone to marry. I wanted to tell her a thousand different things. I wanted this lovely creature in front of me, barely as tall as my shoulders and her frightened face wreathed in her beautiful black hair, to be my girl.

I frantically searched for something to say. I couldn't find the words. I then blurted out all I could think of for the moment.

"Hey, uh, why didn't you write back to me?"

A chill of fear shot up her spine. She fled by me, calling back "I forgot!"

She retreated up into the bleachers, right into the middle of her teammates safely surrounded by them. She looked at me with big, frightened, dark eyes.

I stood there stunned. She forgot? How could she forget? People forget their homework. People forget their game jersey. They don't forget to write to someone who sends them regular reminders. I felt like I had been slapped. It would have been better if she had slapped me, kicked my shin, or even kneed me in the groin. It would have hurt a lot less.

I moved away from the door and glared at her as I passed. I sat down next to Randy, and I was very angry.

"What happened? What did she say?" Rabbit asked.

"She said she forgot," I said, looking straight ahead.

"She what?"

"Then she ran."

"What?!"

I explained to Randy what happened in angry and frustrated tones. Randy didn't know what to say. This hadn't been in the game plan and it certainly didn't go the way it was supposed to. According to the way he foresaw this she and I were supposed to be up in the bleachers right now happily chatting to each other and she would be introducing me to some of her friends. I, in turn, would introduce her to Randy. Then we were supposed to all live happily ever after.

Fat chance. I was deeply hurt and I wanted to go home, right now!

"Let's go, Randy. I wanna leave. I don't think I can stand it in here another minute."

Randy looked up and around. The girl looked at us briefly then ducked her head. She was keeping an eye on me and she had no idea what I might do. What I might do is leave. I didn't want to hurt her or yell at her. I felt as if I had blown it. There was no further reason for me to remain in this accursed gym. I wasn't watching the game on the floor.

"Let's go see if we can get Gary to take us back to Lone Oak," Rabbit said.

We walked up the bleachers and the Boles girl tracked us fearfully. What type of monster did she think I was? Did she think I'd leap up there and grab her? Did she think I'd scream at her or even strike her? That sort of thing wasn't done where I come from. She didn't want to talk to me, so I'd leave. I couldn't stand to see her so afraid of me like this.

We located Gary Dooley and left. Randy couldn't believe it had gone as bad as it had. He could not figure out why she acted like she did. In Randy's thinking there was nothing about me she couldn't like. I was his buddy, after all, and he thought quite highly of me. To him it seemed only natural that she would, too.

I didn't know whom won the boys game and I didn't care. I wanted out of that gym once and for all. We got to the car. Somebody from Campbell had recognized it as Gary's and had poured popcorn all over it. Gary didn't bother to rake it off, he just opened the door and we piled inside. Ill and angry, I paid little attention to the ride back to Lone Oak.

When I got back home I angrily unpacked my typewriter and poured my black rage into a letter to her. I got insulting and mean. I was also incredibly stupid. I didn't even bother to proof read it. I just stuck it in an envelope and mailed it off.

I got no reply. I didn't expect one. 1974 had been a lousy year so far. It was to get worse.





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## Taking the Pressure Off

Herman was shocked at how bad things had gone at Campbell. It didn't make any sense to him. She wrote to me. She sent me a schedual and invited me to come to her games. All this said openly that she wanted to meet me. When she did eventually meet me she runs away like I'm Jack the Ripper or the Elephant Man.

The cold reality was that here was a guy she had never seen before. He suddenly confronts her and looks angry. She was scared of me, and did what any 15 year old would do in a situation like that. She sought safety. Calling back to me was the only thing she could think to do. She had been badly frightened.

Herman was so taken by the adventure in Campbell that he composed a poem called "My Love is in the Pit". This was to forever name where I felt I was at this time.

Making the entire month of January a complete write-off, we had lost our last games of this month. Nothing had gone right.

February rolled upon as gently and warm as a mother's kiss. The tempature was up around 74 degrees. We welcomed it. Perhaps things would look better.

I still clung to my optomistic view that I could eventually win that girl from Boles Home over. My friends told me I should keep trying, so I kept trying. I even sent her a birthday card, the first one I ever sent to any girl anywhere. Then, of course, there was basketball.

Coach Taylor realized his innovations and good ideas were a waste of time with this rabble he had for a team. We had simply lost the will and the discipline to win. One day we put on our practice gear and went out to practice. We had Wolfe City to battle with on this Friday and we had no illusions. We expected Wolfe City to clobber us. Wolfe City expected to clobber us, so we were all in full agreement. Wolfe City was first in the district, and we were way down in the cellar.

The Coach looked us over as we started practice in our own hap-hazard "I gotcha" fashion. We were a rag tag looking bunch. Coach Taylor called us over and put it on the line.



"Boys," he said, holding his clipboard in one hand, "we aint gonna win no championship no matter what we do, so I decided to we can just play for fun from now on. For the rest of the season we'll just go out there and just have a good time."

Coach Taylor set up a very simple offense and a simpler defense. This was to be our battle formation for the rest of the season, what little remained of it.

For most of us it was as if a big weight had been removed from our shoulders. The practice ran a lot easier and was more easy going. We were no longer under the pressure to win. We could more or less play as we liked. That is exactly what we did. It was fun again. The pressure was off.

As a result our morale rose a little bit as we readied for Wolfe City. There were now only two games left and then we could go into track and field season. The bus ride over to Wolfe City was subdued, but not gloomy. We were gonna get the stuffing kicked out of us, but we had accepted that. When a coach lets up and tells a crew that he can accept a loss and wont be disappointed in us that took a lot of the strain off we had all been under. We had a winning tradition. We simply hated to lose. If we lost we let our coach down for all the time, work, and faith he put in us. Now the coach said what we were doing was okay. Now we could relax.

In the J.V. game I fouled a lot but I did not foul out. Coach Taylor rotated everyone in and out all through the game and it was fun out there. We paid absolutely no attention to the score. I guess we lost, but so what? We had played a good game anyway.



I relaxed up in the stands with Herman and Randy while the girls took a pounding on the floor. Boles girl entered the discussion we were having and Randy knew I still had a flame burning in my heart for her, in spite of the disaster at Campbell.

Rabbit knew me better than I did, and he figured as much. He knew I would not quit until it got so bad I had to. That was one of the things he genuinely liked about me. I can only say that in this case I am afraid his faith was misguided. It would have been better, perhaps, to quit and just forget about this uncaring, distant, unreachable girl.

Randy and Herman went out to play and I sat on the bench so I would not be alone. Wolfe City didn't score a hundred points on us but they did give us the beating we expected. Herman noticed right away that the team acted different and played different. It was a more relaxed team out there. The passing was more generous, and all over the floor. It didn't hurt so much to lose anymore.

The bus ride back was almost plesurable.

My Mother went into the hospital after this for exploritory surgery. That caused me additonal anxiety and worry. Everything was now in a mess. I sent more junk mail to the girl at Boles. I didn't know what else to do. I just hoped somehow this would stop.

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## End of the Road

Randy Price sat there in history class looking intently into his book but not reading it. He was digesting my problem. He knew this was a bad situation. He streached and looked up at the ceiling for a moment. The girl of my interest lived clear across the lake. I couldn't go see her and I didn't have any money to get her flowers or gifts or any of a hundred things he knew I'd love to give her. I didn't even have a car to go see her with, much less take her out on dates.

Randy looked back at his book for a moment, then over at me. I was drawing again, lost in my own space adventure.

It was a hopeless situation. Why was I still sending her mail? The answer came to Randy even as he thought about it. There was nothing else I could do. The mail was my only link to her. That was sad.



On the 4th of February Herman, Randy, Danny, Robert, and I participated in our last ever high school basketball practice. For me 5 years of wearing the red and white basketball uniform would end tomorrow. There would be no final championship, no accolades, no ribbons, nothing except that one trophy we won in second place at the Celeste Tournament. I guessed that would have to do, but it seemed like a sorry way to end our Senior year in basketball. We didn't pay as much attention to that one trophy that we should. That little honor represented the apex of our glory in our Senior year of basketball. Little did we think of the fact that there were a lot of teams out there without even that much to show for their efforts. At least we gave our school and our Coach something to take back with them.

Even in our Senior year, with a team loaded with ball hogs and individuals, we managed to get second place at the Celeste Tournament! Think of that! This was Herman's first team trophy, I suppose, and Randy's first in basketball! We hadn't done so bad, really.

The stress was really working on me. I felt absolutely rotten in the last practice. My mother was in the hospital, the Boles girl still didn't write to me, my school work wasn't up to par, and there was this general fear of what the future held. All of this was hammering on me every hour I was awake. The final shots were taken on the court and then the balls were put away. It had ended. The last basketball practice of 1974 had come and gone. It had been all too quick.

That Tuesday, February 5th, 1974, we loaded on the bus for our final game. I didn't know where we were going or who we were playing. All I knew was that the road ended here.

All of us anticipated the outcome. We were gonna lose tonight, no question. There hadn't been a basketball pep-rally since 1972 and we hadn't made the play-off tournament since then. I was on the second only J.V. team we had in class A ball, at least. I had been on the first J.V. team in the new gym.

As we were the first teams to play in that new facility everyone who followed us were our descendants, so to speak. I hoped that they would do much better than the 'Gladiators', who became Taylor's Turkeys. They would.

They went on in the 1980s to establish a basketball dynasty that lasted for almost 10 years. During those ten years the boys who played in the new gym were to have undefeated season after undefeated season. They would tie our 1972 record, but not surpass it. They would claim an

Area Championship, though. Lone Oak was to have respect as a basketball school for a change. In one game they would score 114 points, shattering all previous records. These young men followed in our footsteps and did us proud.

In our last game, the ball was jumped by Too Tall Paul. We went round and round, up and down the floor. There were bad passes, airballs, fouls, bricks, travelling, and missed foul shots. Nobody on our team really cared. We were just having a good time.

A magic moment came when somebody passed me the ball when I got open. I chunked the orange sphere up at the rim and it bounced drunkenly from one side to the other.

"Go in, blast it! Go in!" I swore to myself.

The ball hesitated on my side of the rim, teetering to either fall off or go into the basket. It seemed to be making up its mind. Then it fell into the basket and through the net. I had scored!

For the third time in my life and the second time this season I had made a basket!

I heard cheers, probably from Randy and Herman and some other supporters. I leaped around like a tall skinny frog and headed back on defense.

The rest of the J.V. game was of little consequence. We got smeared but I had ended my last game on a high note.

The rest of the night went as usual. The girls played and lost. The boys played and lost. We then boarded the bus and went home.

Randy congratulated me for my effort on that floor and I gave him and Herman accolades for what little was accomplished that night.

The season was over. Nevermore would any of us put on the tennis shoes as the Buffalo basketball team. It had ended.