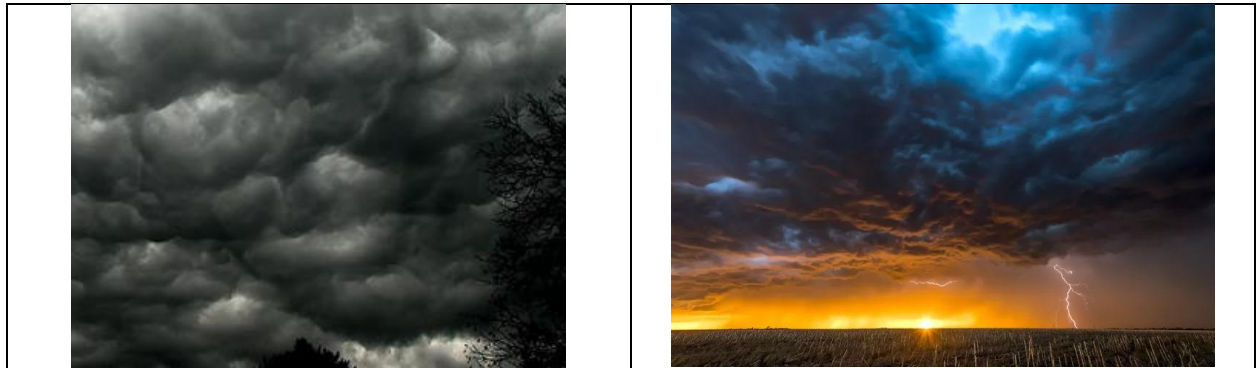


Early Family History



My father appears in the top left of the photograph, looking about sixteen. Sitting on my grandmother's lap is Uncle Vern, the youngest. Uncle Jack is with my grandfather, and Uncle Russell sits in between them. The girl in the top right is my aunt—though her name escapes me now. My grandparents were both chiropractic doctors, which in those days meant electric baths, massages, and back adjustments. Photo about (1921)



On my mother's side, tragedy struck early. In 1918, when she was just eight years old, her parents were killed in an automobile accident. Back then, orphaned children were often taken in by families to help with chores. My mother and her sister Doris were raised by the Hamiltons, who operated the dam on the Big Manistee River near Mesick, Michigan. Their brother Harold, however, wasn't wanted and was sent to Grand Rapids. He later rose to become CEO of major foundries and was quite successful, with five children of his own. I remember him once saying, "I send my boys to college to get a good job, I send my girls to college to meet the boys who are going to get a good job." A clever sentiment for that time.

Despite the difficult beginning, all three children grew up to have fulfilling lives. My mother found joy in planting vegetables and canning the harvest—a true countrywoman at heart.

Life in Battle Creek

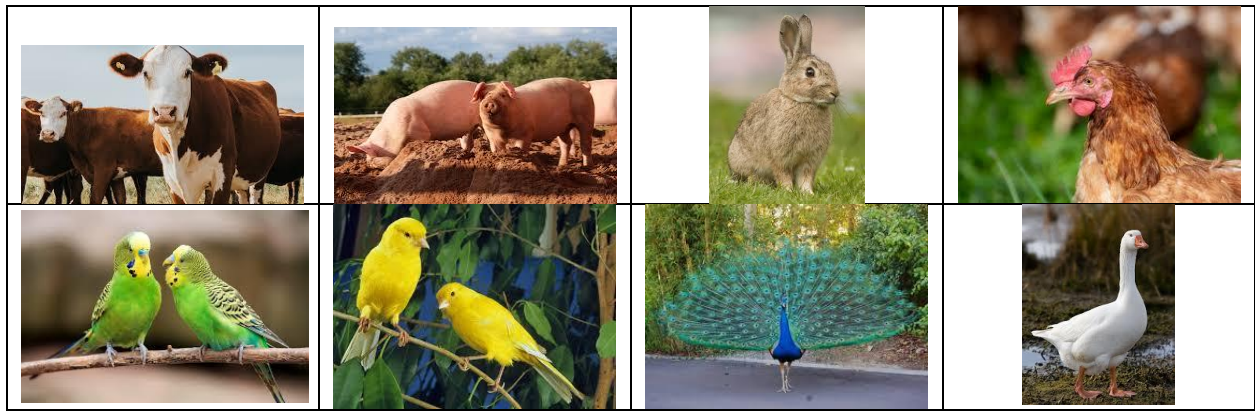


My parents were born just five years apart—Dad in Chicago in 1905, Mom in Mesick, Mi. 1910—and they married in **1929**. My father worked at Kellogg's cereals in Battle Creek, Michigan. For a laborer in those days, that was a dream job. He retired as a mill repairman, having put in 46 years of hard work. I remember him coming home sweaty and tired but still loving his job.

Formal education was brief—my father made it through the sixth grade; my mother through the ninth. Their families needed them to work, so school took a back seat. That's the way it was in the country anyway. It was still that way when I was growing up; the larger farms kept their kids home a lot. It was more important to learn how to farm than in school.

My parents clearly had a vision for how they wanted to live. They bonded together with the same dream. Raise a family on a small farm with orchards, vegetable gardens, and lots of animals. Imagine the warm conversations they must have had about those dreams.

They bought an old trapper cabin five miles from downtown Battle Creek and turned 15 acres of old riverbed into a thriving homestead in **1935**. How happy they must have been on their life's journey. They fenced off five acres as a pasture for the animals. They built a chicken coop, a pig pen, and a barn for the larger animals. Winters were Snowy and cold in those days. The orchard had apples, peaches, pears, apricots, sweet cherries and sour cherries. On the other side of the house they planted table grapes, an arbor about 150 feet long. We had maple trees for the syrup and poplar trees on the east hill side to keep the wind down, however we never had much wind being in a valley. All crops were planted in the riverbed where the soil was particularly fertile.



They raised cows, pigs, chickens, rabbits, and even peacocks. Inside the house, my mother bred canaries and parakeets, selling the young birds—she was the entrepreneur of the family.



My dad plowed the fields with a white work horse named Nellie while Mom handled planting, harvesting, and canning. Eventually, Mom convinced Dad to buy a walk-behind tractor, believing Nellie's winter appetite was too big. Dad soon wanted the horse back—he found the tractor too much work! You no longer could hear him yelling "Gee!" and "Haw!" While working in the fields. Back then, everyone knew those commands: "Gee" to turn right, "Haw" to turn left. It's wild to think that 80 years ago, he was plowing fields with a horse—and now, tractors run themselves by satellite. I lived, witnessed and experienced the whole change and spent my childhood inside their life dream, as it became my reality. I didn't know it at the time, but I was so lucky to be their son.

My sister and I about July of 1941



They planned for children, but it took longer than expected. The doctor told my dad he had slow swimmers. Married in 1929, they didn't have me until **1941**. In the meantime, My Uncle Jack was off to war in Europe and had a three-year-old daughter at home that he couldn't care for, so my parents adopted her. She had barely settled in when my mother became pregnant. So, now they could continue their plan, it was music lessons for the kids, clarinet for my sister and piano for me.



Family Expansion & A Handshake With History



My piano teacher Mrs. Tuck lived on a nearby farm and introduced me to her father, who proudly shared that as a five-year old, he had shaken hands with Abraham Lincoln. I shook his hand—meaning I was one handshake away from history. I doubt there are many people who could say that now. I still think it's pretty cool.

Recital Is Announced—Mrs. Melvin Tuck will present a group of piano students in recital at 8 p. m. today at her home. 440 Gorsline road. She will be assisted by the Rev. Clayton Mulvaney, who will accompany her in a duet. Students taking part will be Janet Firman, Martha Firman, Sandra Hoff, Deanne Behnke, Gordon Metzger, Mary Margaret Mizer, Harry Mizer, Nancy Bird, Dennis Greenman, Joan North, Tommy Smith, Marcia North, Judy Messenger, Jimmy Messenger and Patsy Platt.



Lady was the special pet that was there when I came home from the hospital and lived until I was about 9 years old. I chased her around the house and underneath the sewing machine and kept sticking my hand in until she would bite me. She tolerated me but she was always my mother's companion.

Wartime Memories & the 1941 Chevy



When I was born, my father treated the family to a new car and called it the Corky car, one of the last built before the factories switched to war production. During WWII, women were called to work, and my mother joined an airplane factory in Battle Creek, helping build the wings.

I remember riding in the front seat between my parents, listening to “Ghost Riders in the Sky.” I still play the “Roy Rogers and sons of the Pioneers” version today. Another song I remember is “The Little White Cloud That Sat Right Down and Cried. Funny how those little things stick.

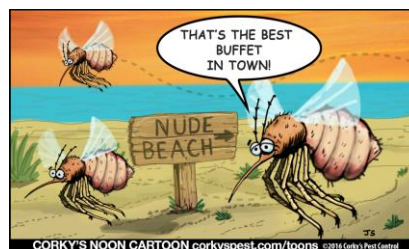
A Name with Character

Photo of my grandmother on her business card.



When I came home from the hospital, my birth certificate read *Harry A. Mizer Jr.*—a name my grandmother found appalling. Ironically, she had named my father Harry A. Mizer now Sr. Around that time, the Sunday comic strips featured a mischievous little boy named *Corky* in “Gasoline Alley. ” Inspired, my grandmother gave me the nickname” and it stuck. Even in business, I went by *Corky*. At 85 years old, it’s still with me. This caused me to read cartoon pages most of my life. I always liked reading funny papers. Now I have the second largest collection of insect cartoons in the world, all produced by *Corky's pest control*. You'll see them splattered throughout this book with the whole collection on corkymizer.com.

Sometimes they are a distraction. Sorry, I like them.



The Power of a Name

"Corky" stuck from that first moment and it's never left me. No one who knew me well ever called me Harry, Corky was who I was, to friends, family, and eventually, customers. I named my company *Corky's Pest Control* because once someone heard the name, they never forgot it. Sure, I got all the jokes: "Where's your cork?" or "Did you come out of a bottle?" But what my grandmother couldn't have known was that she gave me a gift—a name that built a brand. Corky's Pest Control became famous. I appeared in my own TV commercials and was on the air hundreds of thousands of times. People still recognize me, often by my voice more than my face. They say it's distinctive—though it sounds normal to me.



I was on the board of Trustees at the University of California Riverside for 7 years, a wonderful experience in my life. I also wrote eight books—mostly on how to train pest control technicians to pass state examinations, plus one on how to win at Blackjack called "When You're Hot, You're Hot." I still play occasionally, though I don't visit casinos often anymore. I gambled seriously for almost 50 years, taking about five trips a year. I played in Europe, the islands, and nearly every casino in Nevada. I never made it to the East Coast, but of all the places I played, only Barbados came out ahead. Caesars Palace even barred me, which I wrote about in my book—it's on my website,



CorkyMizer.com.

YouTube still shows hundreds of my clips, about Corky's pest control, though I imagine they'll fade in time. San Diego—America's eighth largest city—was home to 40% of my business. The new owners of Corky's are riding on my legacy, though that may fade if they slow their advertising. My website still hosts hundreds of TV and radio spots, interviews, and cartoons. My insect cartoon collection in its entirety is on Corkymizer.com.

Back to my story



My sister and I when was 4 years old in 1945. She was always rather disconnected from the world, but I loved her. One day she told me she was adopted. I didn't

understand what that meant, but I ran straight to Mom and caused a hullabaloo. That's probably why I remember it so clearly.

She was stunning and beautiful her whole life and took advantage of it. Everybody took advantage of her also because she was carefree about everything. When she was 15, she discovered sex and decided she wanted to have it all the time and with anybody available. She was beautiful in a 5-foot 5-inch frame with long flowing natural blonde hair. The boys stormed our house night and day just to get a look at her. She would sneak out and meet them, then come home as if just to say boy was that fun. My mother and dad would chase her, search the city for her, look in garages, pier through windows and do everything to corral her and bring her back home so she'd be safe. She would only crawl out the window and be gone again. All the boys wanted to marry her and as soon as she was eighteen, she said yes to a soldier named Hollis Chadwick. She never had more than two nickels of her own to rub together in her whole life. She had five sons two of them died in childbirth or shortly thereafter. I always loved her and so did everyone else; she was just who she was, except her or not; she never changed. I had to support her for the last many years of her life. She knew I had money and expected me to share it. If she had something somebody else expressed an interest in, she would give it to them. If I had given it to her, she'd give it to them anyway. She was just a free soul and actually worth knowing. I miss her giggles and her laugh. I would scold her and say see what you are doing. She would just say, oh I know it's really crazy huh, then giggle and say, "oh well".

♥ My Mother's Strength



My mother was warm, loving, and shy in public. I never once worried about being loved as a child—though I took that love for granted. I remember, as a young boy, wandering about half a mile through the fields to my friend Judy's house. I remember her hanging onto her mom's arm and telling her that she was going to marry me when we grew up. (I wonder what happened to that). That memory's clear—but so is the one of my mother's chasing me home with a peeled willow stick, swatting the backs of my legs to teach me not to wander off again. I still remember those welts. But I never once felt anger toward her; I always knew it came from love.

She stood about 5'3", and I remember the constant challenge she had finding bras—44 double E's, always needing to be special ordered. Her dresses hung loosely, giving her the appearance of being heavier than she was, until she wore a belt, and you saw she had a slim waist beneath it all.

Barefoot Summers & Foot Rubs

Mom stayed barefoot all summer. Her feet were always sore. We'd lie on opposite ends of the couch and rub each other's feet, playing "follow the leader on which spots to rub." She'd groan with pleasure when I hit the right spot—usually the swollen balls of her feet. I have the same issue now, and I wish she were here to do it again. I miss my parents deeply. I'm lucky that my fourth wife, Amy, rubs my feet every night for 15 minutes or more. It calms me and helps me sleep. From age 45 to 70, I had weekly full-body massages and reflexology. I believe that's one reason I'm so healthy today.



Dad's Strength & Work Ethic

My father never got the credit he deserved. He stood six feet tall with Charles Atlas type muscles. His co-workers said he could carry grain bags—one in each arm and one in his teeth. He started at Kellogg's unloading grain cars and eventually became a mill repairman, fixing cereal-making machines thanks to his mechanical skill.



My mother loved everything and everyone. She was the heart behind our farm, driving the effort to grow and can the vegetables. We sold or gave away what we couldn't eat. The basement shelves were lined with jars sealed tight with ring tops—peaches, strawberries, pickles, and more. The jars popped through the night as the vacuum lids sealed. We lived on her harvest through the winter and into spring.



I was startled when I saw this picture on the Internet because this is exactly like our kitchen, windows, tiles and all except for the toaster which didn't exist.

My mother would open these windows and yell at us kids outside to get in for dinner or do the dishes or whatever, but I sure spent a lot of time standing in front of that look alike sink.

Chores, Baths & Big Upgrades



Our washing machine setup was a labor of love. The churn-style machine lived in our basement, and before we used it, we scrubbed clothes on washboards in big tubs filled with hot water, heated over a fire, from a big tank—two hours to prep before we could wash. Afterward, we used the leftover hot tank water for baths, which happened about once a week. Summers meant outdoor clotheslines; winters, we strung lines in the basement. Until we got a hot water heater and indoor shower, sponge baths with pail-filled sinks were the norm. My mother nearly cried with joy when we finally had running hot water in the kitchen—an upgrade that transformed her daily life.

Memories That Stay With You

While you're still young, you should try to remember all of the youngest memories that you can and jot them down. I remembered young memories from when I was in my 20s that I don't remember now. One of my treasured memories is sitting on my uncle Russell's lap I think in (1945) while he taught me to tell time with his watch. He would say, "It's four o'clock—where's the 4?" Uncle Russell moved from Chicago to stay with us while receiving diabetes treatment in Battle Creek. He passed young, under 40 I believe, but I'll always remember his jokes and his unique laugh—especially while listening to Arthur Godfrey on the radio.



Echoes of the Airwaves

Arthur Godfrey was one of the biggest radio personalities in America during the 1940s and '50s. Known for his folksy charm and conversational style, he hosted *Arthur Godfrey Time* and *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*, reaching millions of listeners across the country. He was especially popular in the Midwest, and though I don't remember much about his shows, I do remember my Uncle Russell laughing along with him on the radio. That laugh still echoes in my memory.



Us kids used to lay on the floor in front of the big Zenith radio in the evening and listen to the Lone Ranger, Inner Sanctum and the squeaking door. What fun memories, of course that was before television, so this was our “before bed experience”. These half hour shows usually start at about 7:00, and we went to bed when they were over.

Uncle Jack & Wartime Memories

When I was four—in **1945**—Uncle Jack came home from World War II. He gave me his canteen belt and helmet; I thought he was the coolest guy around. I later learned he was my adopted sister’s biological father. I think seeing her stirred something in him, because he never came back. Maybe it was the emotional weight, or maybe just the hard times of postwar America. I only have flashes of those moments, but they’re etched in my heart.





A New York Adventure

Around age five, **1946** our family took a trip to New York. I remember standing atop the Statue of Liberty and peering over the edge of the Empire State Building. We saw *The Little Rascals* movie, and that's all I recall—but those mental snapshots are vivid. The Empire State Building shown here was completed on April 11th, 1931. It was a spectacle at the time and to visitors from all over the world.



The Empire State Building had less competition in 1945. | New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division // No Known Restrictions on Publication



School Days & Joy Schools



I walked a mile to school each way until fifth grade, except for kindergarten. Four years, first through fourth grades, were spent in this school, named Joy 1. Wow! I can't believe I found this photo on the Internet. I went to Google and punched Battle Creek Michigan

Penfield Joy One School. Presto, it appeared like magic. I remember the rope-pulled bell in the steeple on the top of the school that signaled the start of class. Rain, snow, sleet, or hail—I walked. I had over boots, overcoats, and everything I needed. People talk about how hard life was back then, but to me, it was fun. I never saw it as difficult—though I’m sure my parents did.

Farm Life & Simple Upgrades

Shortly after I was born, my father plumbed the house and hooked it up to the well, giving us running water and an indoor bathroom. The outhouse lingered until I was about ten, when my mother insisted it be removed. That’s when Dad put up a basketball hoop—and I shot baskets right where the outhouse used to be.

We had two milk cows, and when I got older, I helped strain the milk while my mother made butter. We drank it raw—no pasteurization. Our kitchen evolved from an ice box to a small refrigerator, which had an ice tray on top but no freezer. This meant no more than twice a week’s visit from the iceman. Eventually, we sold the cows and had milk delivered twice a week. My dad was thrilled.



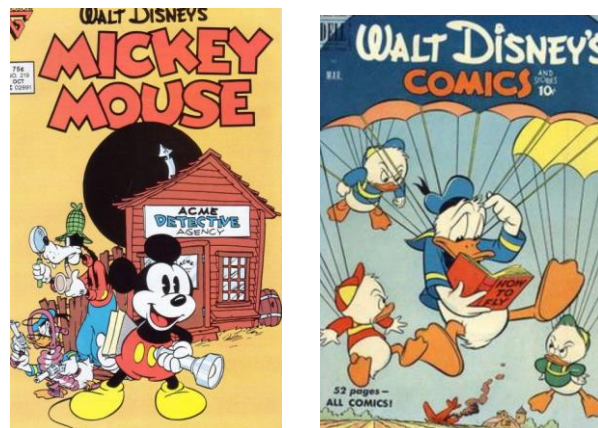
Grain Sack Fashion & Childhood Hustle

We received grains in 50-pound cotton bags to feed the animals. Farmer’s wives turned those bags into shirts and dresses for their kids, and we all wore them proudly to school. Some of the bags had patterns printed directly on them to make it easy for farm wives. Most of us farm kids looked alike in our floral shirts and Levi’s. We didn’t feel poor—we were just happy to have clothes. The kids from the projects teased us, but it didn’t bother

me. I was always finding ways to earn money, selling things, shoveling snow, and mowing lawns. I didn't care what the job was. I just did it.



Comic Books & Childhood Treasures



Back then, comic books were the ultimate pastimes. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Superman—I had stacks of originals. If only I'd saved them! They'd be worth a fortune today. I'd just love to have them back to read them again. This might be another reason I produced cartoons.

My 8-Year-Old Snapshot



I vividly remember the day this photo was taken in **1949**. I was eight years old, full of energy, and had just run into the house from the back pasture. My mother buttoned my collar and brushed my hair before snapping the picture. I was squirming around just having fun with the picture. That shirt was my favorite, and somehow, I've kept that photo in my little box of treasures all these years. I remember putting that shirt on that morning and admiring art. It's almost as though I knew that picture was going to be important in my life. Why are some memories so vivid? I liked who that kid was.

Coal, Boxcars & Kindness



Sometimes we'd walk the railroad tracks at night, picking up pieces of coal that had fallen from the freight trains. That coal helped heat our homes. My parents made it feel like an adventure, even though it was a sign of hard times. We lived close enough to watch boxcars switch back and forth and see people—called “bums” back then—climb out and

run from the guards. I met a few on my walks through the countryside. They were never mean—just trying to get somewhere. It was a poor time in the 1940s, during and after the war. Things got better in the '50s but then came the Korean War. Bummer!

By then, I had a newspaper route. I didn't read the papers much, except the funny papers, but the headlines were always about war and death. I remember wondering if this was just how life was going to be. I remember I wanted it to end. Honestly, for most of my life, we've been at war somewhere. I hope that changes someday—it's absolutely ridiculous. Do you think it's because we build all of these successful war machines? Do we promote wars so that we can sell them? I hope not that would not be the side that I want to be on. Now that I'm retired and play the stock market, I don't purchase stock from companies who produce war equipment or machines that kill people. I own guns, but I don't buy stock in their companies either.



This is a picture from my wall of the 12 GAGE shotgun my father gave me when I think 10 years old in **1951**. I remember it was pretty heavy for me at the time. Now, I wonder what they were thinking of giving a young kid like me a great big gun like that. Whatever, he did it.

Yes, I own guns, and I keep them in my house, many guns. Yes, I have been taught how to use them. I hunted a lot when I was young and learned how to track animals. I went to gun ranges and did a lot of target practice throughout my life. I shot my first elk while hunting in

Colorado. They determined the elk was 65 years old when I shot it. I imagined what a wonderful time this elk must have had in the 65 years wandering through these beautiful mountains. That was my last hunt. However, you must know how to protect yourself and your family. As you read on, you'll see that I took martial arts lessons for 22 years and became a rather high-ranking black belt. Not too bad for an old Pacifist who would never harm anyone except for self-protection or to protect family and friends. The older I get the more pacifist I become. How could I have *been in* the pest control business all those years and killed all those animals? Pest control is necessary to control the pestilence in the world which would be destroyed without it. Be careful of misuse.

I got a BB gun when I was seven. I'd shot at birds, never hitting them—until one day I did. I broke a sparrow's wing. My mother rushed over, knelt beside it, and gently stroked its head. She apologized to the bird, saying she hadn't taught me better manners. She told it that it would never fly again, never feed its babies, and that they would starve. She asked the bird to forgive me. That moment stuck with me.

Later, my father gave me a 12-gauge shotgun. I was about ten. I went into the woods, hoping to bring home squirrels for dinner. Hundreds of crows gathered overhead, cawing wildly. One crow began cawing louder than the rest, and the others fell silent. I raised my shotgun and fired. Feathers scattered; the crow fell dead to the ground. I stood over it, remembering the sparrow—and my mother's words. I felt deeply sorry. I swore I'd never shoot another bird, and I didn't. After that, I went into the woods just to watch. Squirrels gathered food; woodpeckers tapped for the bugs hiding under the bark. Frogs crawled; ants marched. The woods were alive. I mostly left the shotgun behind. The sounds in the "Silent Woods" were fascinating.

Later in life



I got interested in crows later in my life. Did you know that a flock of crows is actually called a murder of crows. Crows roost at night in numbers of maybe 1000 or more and then fly out in the morning where they have staked out a small area to be responsible for the roadkill, (animals hit by cars) and other dead animals, then head back in late afternoon to settle down in their nightly roosting place called” communal roosts”, one bird will generally speak, and the rest will remain silent so not to draw attention.



Crows are among the most intelligent birds. Ornithologists tell us these gatherings are not random but part of their social system and overnight safety strategy. The calling of one crow asserts social bonding. I saw about 100 crows gathered around North County Fair in San Diego County and decided that I would follow them and find out where their nesting place was. It took me a few days of following them, losing them and then finding them again until I found their nesting place over by Lake Hodges. I couldn't tell just how many

crows were there but there was well into the thousands. It was deep in the woods on a tractor-path, I drove my car in until I got on the edge of the communal. I sat there for about 30 minutes experiencing the phenomenon. My inquisitiveness was fulfilled, and I never went back again.

Nature's Classroom

One day, a Seemingly special warm breeze brushed my face like a kiss from Mother Nature. I felt it many times growing up—while riding horses, sitting under trees, watching the wind ripple through the grass. I know they were just summer breezes, but some felt special and on those special occasions made me feel connected to something bigger. To God. I didn't always feel that way, but I do now. My dog Trigger—named after Roy Rogers' horse—was always by my side. We raced down paths, slid down hills, and sat under trees together. That picture of me at eight years old? I liked that kid. That was a discovery part of my life. I found every animal, every bug, everything that was trying to do its job to survive in life was special. I was just the observer, not the interrupter.

Games & Grit

We played marbles— Three players put five marbles each inside the circle. a game where you'd pick an "Aggie" shooter and try to knock marbles out of a circle drawn in the sand. If your Aggie got knocked out, you lost everything left in the circle. I won one tournament and lost in the finals. There were crowds of kids participating.

Tourney at Bailey Park

Marbles Title to Be Decided Saturday

The "battle of mibs champions" for city crowns and four sweepstakes awards that take the successful contestants on a one-day sight-seeing, fun excursion to Detroit will be waged on a dozen specially prepared rings of Bailey park stadium starting at 9:30 o'clock Saturday morning.

A total of 101 school champions and runnersup—one school is sending a lone entry instead of the customary four—will compete first for the titles of boy and girl champions and then, in a grand finale, for the city-wide grand sweepstakes crown.

Open to Public

Open to the public without charge, Saturday morning's intensive competition will carry through successive rounds until the boy champion

will be sent to the winners immediately upon receipt.

Date for the one-day Detroit excursion, which will include a morning at the Detroit zoo, one of the nation's finest, luncheon at a well-known Detroit cafe, box seats at an American league baseball game in the afternoon and then dinner en route home, has not yet been fixed. However, it will be a June event, probably during the second week of the month, and will be made under the supervision of a civic recreation department official.

All of the prizes, as well as the Detroit excursion, are being provided by the Enquirer and News which is co-sponsor of the marbles

play, as it has been since its inception, with the city recreation department.

Bailey Park Chosen

The Bailey park stadium field was chosen as site for this year's finals because tournament officials believed it offered much better playing surfaces than were available on the high school field last year.

The playing rings will be laid out on the skinned portion of the baseball infield. The surface is to be raked, then rolled to provide a smooth surface, before the eight-foot rings are laid out.

School champions and runnersup decided within the last two days, additional to the list appearing in

last Wednesday's issue of the Enquirer and News, include:

Raymond — Vivian France, girl champion, and Ruth Ann Johnson, runnerup; Larry Weimer, boy champion, and Harold Shemberger, runnerup.

Pennfield — Carolyn Ledbetter, sixth grader, girl champion, and Marilyn Ledbetter, third grader, runnerup; Harry Mizer, sixth grader, boy champion, and Jim Ledbetter, fifth grader, runnerup. (It would appear that the Ledbetters are a family of marble players since the girl champion and the two runnersups are brother and sisters.)

Brownlee Park—Kay Baker, fifth grader, girl champion, and Mildred Keeler, sixth grader, runnerup; Raymond Keeler, sixth grader, boy champion, and Harold Burke fourth grader, runnerup.

Minges Brook — Dennis O'Keefe, sixth grader, boy champion, and Rudy Lingg, sixth grader, runnerup.

We played Annie-I-Over and Kick the Can, combining hide-and-seek with strategy. These were games for poor kids—free and full of fun. Bowling and golf were out of reach, but we didn’t feel poor. We just didn’t waste money on nonsense.

My parents bought a ping pong table and a carom board. We played for hours at a time. Mom made Kool-Aid—really just sugar water with flavor—and popcorn from scratch. We’d knock kernels off the cob, toss them in a skillet with butter, and cover it to keep them from flying everywhere. About 10% wouldn’t pop, but it was cheap and delicious.

When bored, we’d catch crickets and sell them to neighbors going fishing—one penny each. That was enough for gum or a Baby Ruth. Hershey’s and Baby Ruth were the staples until Snickers came along. Ten cents for Snickers felt like heaven. Coke was ten cents in small bottles. You’d get two cents for Coke bottles by turning them back in, no diet anything back then. Gum was five cents for a five-pack—one penny per stick. Wrigley made a fortune off that. I’d bring gum to school and give it to the girls. I always had money from my paper route and odd jobs.

Country Life & Community



Even the “rich kids” didn’t have money. Their parents didn’t give them any. We thought they were rich because they lived in project houses with small lawns and nice clothes. Our yard was dirt, and we parked cars on it. But our farmhouses were bigger, with basements and more space. Project houses looked fancy to us—tiny kitchens, tiny dining rooms.

Our trapper's cabin-turned-farmhouse was rickety, with old doors and squeaky floors and hooks for locks. Skeleton keys worked in the main front door, but no one locked it. With guns in every house and dogs guarding the yard, people never knocked and waited; they'd just yell out your name. If someone knocked, the dogs would go wild. That was country life—and it was good.

I interrupted this story about my childhood because “wandering with faith” happened to me from ages 4 through 12. It needs to be told as one passage, not interspersed with my life story the way it really happened. It would be too confusing. God is a special subject to me and because of all he did for me needs to be told uninterrupted. I hope and pray you can someday feel the peace of living with God.

Wandering with Faith: How I Came to Believe in God

There's a truth that lives quietly in the world—warmth in a glowing fire, comfort in nature's beauty, wisdom in time's rhythm—and I've come to believe it points to something greater. This is the story of how I came to believe in God.



The Fire Within

I often sit in front of my stone-log fireplace, wrapped in a blanket as radiant heat fills my home. Though it's modern now—piped heat beneath stone floors—but the fire evokes memories of countless fires I watched dance and burn over the years. Flames melting into glowing coals, smoke drifting upward... it always stirred something deep in me. I took this photo with my iPhone pointing toward the fireplace from my chair. My foot with a blanket draped over it shows.

Believing in God isn't just an idea. It's an awakening. You start seeing signs and small miracles, if you're willing to slow down and notice. The natural world becomes a teacher: sunsets, birds in flight, mountain roads, blooming flowers. Their quiet brilliance is always there, waiting for you to drink it in.



Tonight, as I sit here, I realize I don't need to explain scripture or convince you with verse. My purpose is to assure you there *is* a God. You must one day look into the flames or the sky—or notice some small, profound miracle—and decide what that means for your life. I didn't always believe the way I believe now. I was too busy drinking inward the fun of life and believing it would last forever. Understanding grows as your experiences stack into memories. I was always touched by beauty. I have so many wonderful memories and they keep coming. God gives those to you, if you haven't noticed.

Here is what I have come to believe.

I believe there's a small energy of light burning inside of you from the time you're born and goes out when you die. I believe the energy causing that light is what God uses to transport your soul into the next dimension. (Your afterlife)

Your learning begins while you're still in the womb from the feelings that are passing through your mother's body. Joy, Fear, anger, happiness, this is where your body develops an understanding of its first environment. Feelings are your first developed language.

When you are born, you're dumped into this chilly world with new LUNGS. It must have been very scary as we screamed out with feelings “where is my blanket”, my familiar protection.

The 24 hours a day of feeling “communications” have been disconnected. Now, faintly recognizable through the blankets and clothing, confused by the many different feelings from strange people who hold you.

Seeing and hearing are the next new experiences that you will figure out. The connected feelings that you had while inside your mother's womb are replaced by kisses, hugging, and the breast feeding connected to your mother. Feelings are still your common language, but perception now begins. The fact people or nurses are doing something hurriedly with you, not paying attention and what facial expressions with body language mean.

Next comes learning how to walk, talk, and experience our environment. How you are treated and guided through these first years of experiences will have a profound effect on your young life. You're confused by the lies people tell you in a language that disagrees with your perceptions. You need to hone those skills as your perceptions are usually correct.

No one remembers going through this when you're in your mother's womb and when you're born and go through those first few years of life. Without education, how will the mother know how to treat her young child while in the womb and for the few years afterwards. It should be common knowledge, but it is not. I'm sure I cried, frustrated because my

feelings were not being understood as did you. Hungry, hot, cold, wet, etc. I believe the less people lie to you when you're young the better your body perception language will be later. Ants communicate with odors, bees sometimes through dance; peacocks get the attention through the beauty of their spread-out tail. We got attention by crying.



I was lucky, I was born at the time in life when women stayed home and took care of their children. I had at least a year and a half with my mother before she was called to work in an airplane factory for the war. I was born February 8th, 1941, and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor 10 months later. Most of the men were called off to carry rifles and walk through foreign lands. Women replaced them on the production lines. Women should have at least 6 months with a newborn child to introduce them to the world. In these days women usually take less than a week off.

Mind body soul the essence of your life.

Your mind runs your body through a network of nerves muscles and blood. Your soul keeps track of everything you do in a memory log for you to review at any current or later date. (like when you die)

Your true language is energy and feelings. While you're in this lifetime environment, you learn whatever language is spoken in your area of the planet so you can communicate with other people. When you die, that will all be translated back into energy and feelings. The lies will be obvious, as they are now and always were if you were paying attention.

The spark of energy put into your mind and body when you were born continues to give you energy throughout your life and leaves your body in death. That last burst of energy will carry your soul along with your memories and feelings into your afterlife.

What continues is all the energy of your life, positive and negative mixed together. Your indifferences will be left behind in your dead mind and body. That's important to realize.

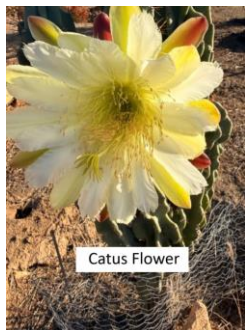
Energy cannot be extinguished; it is just mixed in the atmosphere of life. Even if you don't believe in God yet you must have learned what I just explained to you is true. This planet is not just the extension of God; God is the universe. What will you do for God and yourself while you're visiting this spectacular planet that is shooting through this timeless space? This is such a beautiful place. I hope you're intelligent enough and have the local political atmosphere to enjoy it.

Feed your mind with nourishing thoughts. Care for your body with respect—no poison, no neglect. Your soul is watching. Talk to yourself gently. Meditate. Think before you eat, before you act. You are the caretaker of your own existence.

You are alone in your inner thoughts, and only you are responsible.

No one else can live your life. No one else can look after you the way you must look after yourself. Please... live well. Be happy. Some of you may even carry my blood. I want you to thrive.

🌸 Awakening Through Beauty



God through nature put all of these wonderful things on this planet for us to see. So, look at them. Humble yourself in the beauty that's all around you.

Looking deep into a flower has an effect. I've tried to capture that beauty in photos, but none compares to seeing it live. The inner structure—stamens, petals, delicate geometry—is overwhelming in detail. Nature is generous when we take the time to look.

Every time you can, pick up a flower and look deeply into it. After you've examined hundreds, something awakens. One day you'll just understand.



The way clouds twist into unrepeatable shapes. Lying on my back in the grass, watching them change, I realized: no one else will ever see those exact formations. Nature creates moments just for you. That thought still humbles me.



One day a quiet moment taught me I was uniquely *me*, and that every person I meet would also be one-of-a-kind. That realization made me love people—deep and naturally. But life teaches us: not everyone is worthy of that love. Some people carry harmful energy, and we must learn to walk away. This takes practice, but the peace it brings is worth it.

You'll encounter people who drain your energy. Push their energy out of your life.

Distance yourself from those people, try to be around people who make you happy all the time, people who listen to you, and you listen back.

Why would anybody do anything to hurt this beautiful little bird. Any harm to this little bird is a death sentence. There's no hospital it can visit.



Think positively. Not naive—but intentionally. When you seek Energy from your inner light, you become receptive to it. Positivity doesn't guarantee smooth sailing, but it opens the door to grace, to small wonders, to clarity.



Why would anyone put a light that automatically lights a gravel country road and destroy the wonderful darkness while not benefiting man or animal

Perception

I hope you sit with these reflections. I hope they help you look at your own life through a more spiritual lens. The signs are there if you're watching. Everything that happens potentially has a meaning for you personally. Learn to talk and listen to yourself. When you meet someone, what kind of energy do they give you? What do they look like? How are they dressed? If you are interested enough to look, what is your impression.

It's easier to go through life not believing in God. You can imagine that nature is not a miracle. You can believe that all of the things that had to magically come together so that you can exist are natural. Why should you be a decent human being when there's no reward. In fact, you may think the payoff would be better if you didn't obey God's rules and make an easy life. Instead, beg, borrow and steal with no intention of payback. Sit back and meditate on that one. Anyone who tries that will certainly become a miserable human being. Really, sit back and meditate. What do you think?



I hope one day you can look at other people and be able to recognize how they see themselves so you can decide whether they are worth saying hello to. This bird looks as though it's had a pretty hard life.

The Meaning of Time

The Babylonians gave us a 24-hour day. The Egyptians the solar calendar. Julius Caesar changed the year's start to March. Humanity has shaped time—but beyond Earth, time doesn't follow our rules.

In space, the idea of a year, or a minute, is meaningless. Measure things in “instants.” Maybe, in God's view, an instant and eternity are the same thing. Science is working on that now. Do you suppose the past, the present and the future could all be combined into one instant. The one that we are presently experiencing. The past was the Big Bang, the present is our development, the future is eternity. The shortest lifespan of any living creature on earth belongs to the adult mayfly which sometimes is just a few hours. They have no mouth parts or digestive system; they don't eat, they just mate and die. Source is the world atlas. I wonder how long they “feel” they have lived. An instant or decades? If our universe has been here for billions of years, how long is that in God's eyes, maybe an instant?

A Divine Pattern

When God created heaven and earth, perhaps it began with a great fire—a celestial bang. In that instant, every molecule that would one day form life was set in motion.

I believe God doesn't control every moment of our lives, but he designed the framework that allows us to exist and evolve. Maybe, just maybe, some souls are touched more deeply by his hand at birth.

Each of us carries mind, body, and soul—distinct yet interconnected. They must work together. Feed your body and mind with kindness and nourishment, so your soul can flourish. When you sleep, your day uploads into memory. Live each day with purpose.



On Conscience and Forgiveness

You've felt it—that voice inside you. Not words, but feelings. When something is wrong, you *know*. That's your conscience. Learn and follow that conscience language.

We must judge ourselves first before asking God for forgiveness. If your soul aches with regret, you must learn to forgive yourself. That's where Jesus comes in. He intercedes. He made forgiveness possible.

About the other prophets? I don't know. That's on my list to ask God when I get there.



The Single Commandment

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. But to me, it distills down to just one: so, I don't have to remember each one separately. I was never good at memorizing.

Do not do anything that harms another being—emotionally, physically, mentally.

That covers it all. In the beginning, there was no sin, because no one had yet thought to violate that truth.

Lucifer did. He knew God could not look upon sin, and by introducing it, he created a space where people could wander—and suffer eternally.

God sent Jesus to give us a way back. You must forgive yourself for your trespasses before you die. If you cannot forgive yourself then you must go to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness. If you carry hate into your afterlife, it will dissolve the love and beauty you have spent your lifetime accumulating. If you don't want to believe in God for some reason, then at least think about how you can die in peace. Yes, we all have sins. The only one who didn't, died on a cross more than 2000 years ago. So, how are you going to do that. Just remember you can always accept Jesus. He will forgive you if you ask.



Cumulonimbus Mammatus Clouds



It's never too late to work on your own forgiveness or to ask Jesus to help. You have to be still alive to read this, and if you're still alive, it's not too late.

My first encounter with something divine happened when I was five. I think!

We had family visiting from Traverse City, filling my room and my sister's—so she and I were sleeping on the fold-down couch in the living room. I woke to see a tall man standing over me. His coat, dark and draped, wasn't worn normally; his arms weren't in the sleeves. A chain held it together at the neck, and instead of a belt, he wore a scarf around his pants.

Eighty years later, I can still see his face.

I screamed. Not out of fear—at least not as I recall—but out of shock. He didn't move, didn't flinch. I remember others in the room, though I never told my parents that part. When the lights came on and my parents ran in, my sister hadn't seen anything. Later, my father asked a nearby neighbor if he'd visited that night. He had not. My parents chalked it up to a dream. But I wasn't convinced—and still am not. That night changed me. It was the moment my memory truly began, as if my mind had been unlocked. Before it, there's haze, after, clarity. I believe it was a visit. Whether angel, spirit, or messenger—I believe.

Yes, I have had bad things happen in my life. On only three occasions I allowed them to rile up in my soul. I tried to walk away and put them aside. It took me time to unravel my bad feelings. Now I don't even remember what they looked like, and the incidents are cloudy.

It taught me to ignore people whom I feel are headed down a forbidden and dead-end path. This will happen to you a lot. Make a U-turn; no one will miss you.

I now believe this was the night God, his angels or his messengers knowing what was coming in my life, inflected peace and tranquility into my conscience, to take away the memory of pain in my grief and added the laughter in my blessings. If not for the broken heart delivered to me by Joyce, my first true love, I would have never experienced the beauty and the fantastic love this life has to offer. This explains why I was drawn to her at first sight; the whole thing was meant to happen to prepare me for future delusions.

I have had a life full of fame, fortune, beauty and wonder, thank you God.



The Power of Generosity

I've given much in my life—not because I expected a return, but because someone needed it more than I did. Even when I gave beyond reason, something always returned to me. Not necessarily from the same hands, but from somewhere. That generosity, I believe, created waves of prosperity that shaped the blessings I experienced later. My sister gave generously but I don't think she ever got a return. Why? Her heart seemed to be in the right place unless she regretted it. She didn't seem selfish on the outside but only God knows.

Sure, some people didn't appreciate what I gave them, but that never mattered. The circle of kindness never required their gratitude—it just moved forward on its own. Do something for someone in need and require nothing in return. If it makes you feel good, then you are on the right side of humanity. If your heart is in the right place then humanity will pay you back tenfold, maybe not in monetary value, but I'm sure one day you will find out there's a lot more in life than money. I've never had any feeling for money at all and yet have always had more than I needed. I have goodwill in my heart, but I don't need recognition from anyone but myself.

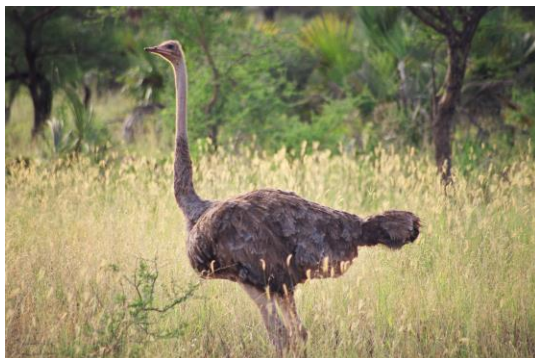
My mother attended The Pentecost church on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings, of course I was roped into going. In case you don't know, that means tied, gagged, and dragged along. I wasn't the only one that happened to because most mothers and sometimes both parents made sure their kids came along too. The Church of God was the

name of our sect of the Pentecost church. There was a group of five of us usually gathered in the back of the church where we whispered and giggled and carried on for about an hour and a half until the sermon ended. Yes, we were the target of scorn from most of the parents, but they were happy we were there. Sunday morning was Sunday school where they indoctrinated us with our beliefs. This of course was speaking in tongues, being born again, and healers who laid on the hands and took diseases out of the bodies of believers. We often traveled to weekend retreats where we saw first-hand some of these things being carried out.

They told us not to open our eyes in the middle of prayer because the demons might be walking up and down the aisles. Now you tell a kid that and what do you think they will do, just what we did. We looked for the demons walking up and down the aisles, of course we never saw one. Many of us kids either didn't believe or was very skeptical, but after a few weekend retreats and the things that we saw there would make us believe that some of these people were either professional actors or whatever happened to them was certainly in the realm of the spiritual world. It's really hard to fool a kid. Of course, it's hard to believe in God. But it's harder to not believe when you're present in the unexplainable over and over. It is especially true when you know these people outside the church.

When you see someone glow while The Spirit is in them, you will have questions about what you previously thought or didn't think. If you're in a hurry and you want to spend a week then go to Salt Lake City UT. I've seen more glowing people there than anyplace else the inner glow that makes them shine. They don't glow in the dark; they glow in the light.

. I am not a Mormon, and I know a lot of people who claim it not even to be a religion. But they sure have a high percentage of glowing people around there. Watch carefully if you're out and about you are certainly going to run into some. The glow is not on the outside, it's on the inside. When you see it, you'll know.



I witnessed speaking in tongues on many occasions and I want to tell you it is a language that once you hear it you will know it the next time you hear it. It's like when you hear someone speak Spanish you know they're speaking Spanish and French is the same way. I went to retreats 100 miles apart and heard many different people speaking in tongues and knew it was the same language immediately. I heard it on many occasions in my own church too. It is impossible to fake. Especially when I knew the people and knew they did not speak a second language and yet when they spoke that language, they spoke rapidly without hesitation, so it was obvious they were not dreaming it up as they spoke.



The incredible thing was one night when I saw one of us, his name was Johnny Coffing, become born again. He was regularly one of us. He wasn't sitting with the rest of us that night, many times our parents would demand that we sit with them, but when we heard a commotion, we all ran up to where he was to see what was happening. It happened right in the middle of a ministry, which they stopped, and a bunch of people kneeled around him and prayed with him. He had thrown himself on the floor gasping and rolling around as if he was having an epileptic seizure. We had all seen it before but not in one of us. We knew it wasn't a seizure, and we all knew what was happening to him. He was being born again. He was leaving his sins behind him. He was obviously in touch with something outside of his body and was asking them to relieve those sins from him. He cried and begged for mercy and forgiveness. Johnny never came back to sit with us again and when we saw him, he would always smile and gesture a wave, but he would stay up front with his parents. He knew we had come up to him that evening and watched him. He obviously wasn't embarrassed, but he just had nothing to say to us anymore. Of course not, what would he say to us? But it changed all of us. It was harder to make jokes in church after that. We quit hanging around together, No explanation? It was also about that time that my life got full of outside activities, and I didn't come to church very often anymore.

You will see things in your life that will make you want to believe, and things that will make you feel foolish to believe. You will have to sort those things out and decide for yourself. Most believers I notice have had happy families of some sort. That doesn't mean if you want to be happy you have to believe, not true. But I think you must live an honest life with Integrity to have a chance to be truly happy. I no longer belong to any organized religion, and I haven't since my young days. I've seen and experienced many things, and I believe in God. Maybe someday, I'll find a church that I want to go to again but in the meantime, I can pray alone by myself. I think that it's so important I write this book for future generations, to ask you to give God a chance. I haven't put many negative things in here that happened to me, and I haven't put all the negative things in here that I have done. God helped me walk away without scars on my heart. I didn't understand that until later after my first divorce.

These things happened to me intertwined with my young life over about a four year period. I don't remember how I escaped going to church. I imagine the busyness of life. My mother kept going for a period of time. When they moved to Yuma AZ later in life, they belonged to a local church there and my father was attending with her more often. Looking back, I think my mother had some demons she was doing battle with.



I found myself in churches relatively often throughout my life. My friend Kent McCulloch became an Episcopal priest; I have had many conversations with him and listened to several sermons. Barbara my 3rd wife was raised Catholic and on many of our trips we would end up visiting a Catholic church. We also visited a nunnery in France where cloistered nuns were practicing a vow of silence, offering their prayers and sacrifices to the needs of the world. I will never forget the silent energy of peace and tranquility experienced inside that church building. The good energy was so thick it almost lifted me off the floor. Have you ever seen anyone where their face seemed to glow?

We were exploring Europe with our friends Professor Sanford Shane and wife Marge with whom Barbara had graduated law school. We visited several synagogues with them as they are Jewish, and they kindly went with us to see the Catholic churches. We also visited Escorial, a monastery just outside of Madrid. One of the monks living there for life had made friends with Sanford while attending UCSD finishing his Catholic education.

He walked us through the entire place explaining what it was like growing up inside a monastery including his childish pranks. We ended up climbing out a window and sitting on the roof for a while. You never know what life has to offer until you live it. This was a lifelong memory. There were also large pieces of artwork by artists. Priceless!

We also visited a lot of Jewish synagogues and Muslim monasteries that were vacated and changed to Catholic churches in Spain. It was in 1492 when King Ferdinand and Isabella threatened to cut off the heads of anyone who didn't change to Catholicism or leave Spain by July of that year. That was before Columbus discovered America.

Of course we visited Notre Dame in Paris, a wonderful experience. I loved history so I had to experience seeing some of those places while listening to local history. You must explore the world yourself and see some of these wonderful places with the histories that are written in them. Do it yourself as part of the beauty you can take with you in your warm feelings of life. Do whatever you must to comfort yourself and be happy.



[Let's go back to my story](#)

Farm Life & Simple Abundance

We weren't wealthy—just a notch above poor—but we had a little farm, and that made all the difference. We raised about fifty chickens in our coop, and they kept multiplying. Little

chickees ran everywhere. We ate the chickens and their eggs, yet somehow always had more than we needed. We also kept about 6 rabbits in hutches near the coop. We didn't keep them through winter—they became part of our fall meals.

⑧ Bars, Cards & Community

I wondered what my parents' life was like before me.

They had a lot of friends. I think it's because they went to taverns before I was born. Their favorite was *Verona Tavern*. I believe they went together most of the time. Dad never missed his turn to buy a round—Kellogg's paid better than most jobs. After I was born, money went into fixing up the house. I remember the kerosene lanterns—we didn't have electric lights for a while. We weren't poor compared to others, but we lived simply.

I remember on occasion my sister and I would accompany my parents to their friend's houses. We would have dinner or a barbecue and sit around where finally my sister, and I would fall asleep in the chair or on a couch while my parents and their friends played cards after dinner. We were too young to stay home alone, and my parents wouldn't dream of a babysitter.



Back then, most bars had pool tables and card tables for games like pinochle, canasta, and hearts; gambling was prohibited. My parents spent time in those places before I was born, but after they quit going. They never took me along. While growing up, I kept meeting people who remembered them from those days. My mother was the kind of person who never said a bad word about anyone. She was both the farmer and the farmer's wife. We had a little less than three acres of garden and justice under one acre of it was different

kinds of potatoes. While Dad worked at Kellogg's, he plowed and dragged the fields. She marked the garden rows, hauled water, pulled weeds on her hands and knees, and did all the canning. She planned the meals, shopped for food, and kept the kitchen spotless—though she hated sweeping and vacuuming. That chore fell to my sister, and when she wasn't around, it was mine.

A Family Road Trip West



I found this photo on the Internet. It looks exactly like his Oldsmobile.

In **1947**, Dad bought a new Oldsmobile with a sun visor over the windshield. We hitched up a sleeping trailer and traveled west—through the Black Hills, Yellowstone, Washington, Oregon, and down the coast to Los Angeles. We watched salmon leap upstream, saw grizzlies and elk and crossed the desert on Route 66 back to Michigan. We also saw huge vultures, in trees right alongside the road. I'm sure a lot of people just shot them they would be easy prey for anyone with a rifle. Sad now they're mostly extinct. My parents slept in the trailer; my sister and I slept in the car. For little farmers from Michigan, they were adventurous souls.



My First Dog & a Boy's Best Friend



I could not find a photo of Trigger, my first dog but this looks exactly like him.

We always had dogs on the farm, but none were truly mine—until I was eight. I went with Dad to visit a co-worker who had a thoroughbred collie chained to a doghouse. His papered name was *Duke Mountbatten of Melissa*, but I renamed him *Trigger* after Roy Rogers' horse. We bonded instantly.

Six months earlier, I'd started a paper route delivering the *Battle Creek Enquirer and News*. I had to cheat and open the route in my sister's name. She wanted nothing to do with it, so it was mine. I saved \$25, the exact price the man wanted for the dog, and begged Dad to let me buy him.

Trigger and I roamed the fields together. I talked to him like he understood everything. Five years later, the TV show *Lassie* came out, and it felt like they'd copied our life—minus the drama. Trigger was two when I got him and lived to be sixteen. We drifted apart in my teens when horses and sports took over, but I'll never forget how he changed my life.

Sheba the Farm Guardian



I couldn't find a picture of Sheba either, but she was a brown speckled Springer spaniel all definitely look alike. This is a spitting image.

She weighed about 40 pounds. She was creamy white with small brown streaks and didn't ask for much—just a quiet place to sprawl out. Occasionally, she'd rest her head on my lap for a quick pet before wandering off again. Sheba earned her keep by killing rats and chasing rabbits. My parents kept 25-pound bags of dog food in the basement, and rolled down the bag as it emptied, so the dogs could eat whenever they wanted. Despite access, both dogs stayed lean—they ran around the farm keeping the rabbits out of the garden.

Strawberry Hustle

Up the hill was a strawberry field owned by a grocer named **Chicken Charlie**. He paid a nickel per quart to pick strawberries—or you could pay him a nickel and keep the berries. I tried picking for a couple of days but realized I wasn't making much. So, I came up with a plan: hire pickers for a nickel a quart, pay Charlie his nickel, and sell the berries for 25 cents a quart or five for a dollar.

I placed an ad in the paper. At 9:00 a.m., four women pulled up in a car and asked, “Where’s the man hiring?” I said, “That’s me.” They laughed—until I ran to get my mother. She explained the situation, and they agreed to work. They picked a lot of strawberries, but it was a one-day gig for them. I sold the berries door to door, which was the easy part. I recruited friends to pick, but they weren't motivated—they didn't have horses to feed like I

did. Strawberry season ended, and I never went back. My paper route was more profitable anyway. That was my kind of education—before I even turned 12.

My First Horse: Bill



This horse with the three white socks is perfectly brown color and head shape Looks exactly like Bill and it's a gelding.

I was tired of delivering papers by bike and wanted to graduate to a horse. My dad said he wouldn't buy me one unless I could feed it through the winter. I think memories of his horse Nelly came to mind. Hay was \$35 a ton, and I showed him I could afford \$40 a year with my paper route. I had \$80 in the bank, so off we went to the horse auction.

We bought a retired racehorse for \$56. He was about four years old and so skinny his backbone was stuck out. I named him **Bill**—no idea why. We fenced off an acre of orchard with lush grass and kept him close to the house. I'd open the gate to let him into the larger pasture when needed. At nine years old, I had to jump up and grab his backbone to climb on or lead him to a fence to mount. He was gentle and just wanted to eat. He gained weight quickly and filled out nicely.

I rode bareback at first, but he was slow. Trotting hurt my butt because of his skinny backbone. One day, I stripped a switch from a tree and laid it gently on his backside—he lit up like a racehorse again. I never had to hit him, just remind him. That switch must have triggered memories of jockeys. He could take off like a bullet, and I quickly realized I needed a saddle.



My First Pest Control Job

One day, while feeding Bill apples in the orchard, I noticed they were full of worms. I told Dad, and he said, “What are you going to do about it?” My mother took me to the Farm Bureau with some apples. They told me it was **codling moths** and explained how to spray in fall and early spring to prevent them. I followed their advice, and the next year, our apples were better.

Dad gave me the job of managing bugs on the farm—at age nine. We used **DDT**, which came in three-pound cardboard pump dusters. I’d dust everything, wearing a bathing suit then rinsing off under the sprinklers when I got caked in powder. The first time, I got a terrible sunburn. Lesson learned. But I kept at it. Japanese beetles were especially bad on the strawberries. That was the beginning of my pest control career. When I moved to California, I realized nobody knew much about bugs—and I did.

Linda the Welch Western



When I found this photo on the Internet I almost cried; I would have sworn it was her.

The next year, my sister wanted a horse—and of course, she wanted mine. So, I bought another: a **Welch Western** I named **Linda**. She was smaller than Bill, about 10½ hands high, while Bill was around 12.5. Linda came with a bridle and halter, but I still needed another saddle. I rode her bareback for a while—she was so round it was easy. But now I had two horses to feed, which meant more hay and grain for the winter.

Linda had an attitude—she knew she was beautiful. The brown color turned black in the wintertime. That little toss of her head said it all: *“I’m gorgeous. Don’t mess with me.”* She was fast off the line, perfect for barrel racing, and while she couldn’t match the raw speed of my retired racehorse, she had finesse. We ran the fields and thorny trails together, often bareback. I’d lean into her neck, and she’d lean into the turns like a pro.

She delivered newspapers with me every day. She knew the route so well she’d stop at mailboxes on her own. Sometimes we’d do the route at a flat run, and she’d skid to a stop, hind legs dragging, rarely missing the mark. If I missed opening the box getting a newspaper in and closing the box timely, she’d turn her head and give me a look that said, *“Hey dummy.”* But the moment I got the paper in, she’d launch forward; front legs curled and nearly airborne.

My mother made cloth saddle bags so I could fold the papers and hang them over the saddle horn. Linda learned which houses I tossed the paper on porches, and which I tucked into mailboxes, and which went into newspaper dispensers. Back then, nobody minded us using mailboxes for papers.

The route was about four miles long. Even with all the stops, we could finish in an hour—but it usually took less. There were always people to talk to, especially girls who wanted to pet my horse. After the last drop, we’d head home through fields and thorny trees. Linda would be soaked with sweat, heaving at the sides. I’d toss her saddle onto the fence, remove her bridle, and open the gate. She’d trot into the pasture, then slow to a walk, cooling herself off. No need for hot walking—she handled it herself.

She never ran from me. The next day, she’d walk right up, ready to go again.

Sometimes Dorma Barland, the neighbor’s daughter, would ride with me. She was three years older; we had fun talking on the route. Of course, I was smitten by her. She was beautiful, paid attention to me, told me how great I was, but one day, she met a guy with a car—and that was the end of our rides.

Buggy Days & Country Fame



After a few years, I bought a buggy and hooked Linda up. She didn't mind the strapping at all. She trotted proudly down the road, and people would come out just to say, *"What a beautiful horse!"* Not a word about the buggy, of course. She was a star.

Eventually, I got tired of the buggy. I preferred jumping on her back and taking off. Hitching up and trotting slowly wasn't my style. So yes, I knew how to waste money even back then.

Work, Chores & Making Money

My parents supported anything I wanted to do to earn money—so long as I finished my chores. I mowed lawns, shoveled snow, and later, cut wood with a chainsaw and sold it by the cord. I didn't spend much—just hay and grain for the horses—so my savings grew fast.

Most of my friends could have done the same. They had land, but they were lazy. I was up early and busy all day. No dull moments

Dad's Volkswagen Bug



My father bought a blue 1956 Volkswagen Bug—probably the first in Battle Creek. The police stopped him just to see the car. He drove it off-road like a Jeep and got it stuck a few times, but he was so strong he'd lift the front or back end and move it himself.

Sideline Support

When I started playing sports, Dad came to every practice and every game. He'd stand on the sidelines—even when no one else did—and yell at us to run faster. It embarrassed me at first, but I got used to it. He was always there: baseball, basketball, and football. He'd drive me and other kids home afterward, even if it made dinner late. Mom wasn't thrilled about that.

Walking Was the Way

People ask if everyone had horses back then. No. From 1941 to 1945, during WWII, things were tight. It wasn't until 1952 that things started changing. Few cars, fewer horses. Mostly, we walked. I did too—because if I rode my horse somewhere, I couldn't go inside or hang out. I never thought about that at the time. I just walked like everyone else.



I remember buckboards pulled by horses or tractors coming down the road. If you were walking, they'd let you hop on.

Pony Express & Rodeo Days

I was known as the **Pony Express** in Battle Creek—delivering newspapers on horseback. Most roads were dirt, and even the paved ones had wide paths for walking and riding. I was written up in the local paper a few times, complete with photos. Years later, while standing in line at a movie theater in Chula Vista, I struck up a conversation with someone from Battle Creek. When I mentioned Gorsline Road, she said, “Our paper boy delivered on horseback.” I smiled and said, “That was me.”

My dad saw how good I'd gotten at riding and signed me up for the rodeo. We borrowed a horse trailer, loaded up my horse, and entered the barrel races. I didn't win, but I had a blast. I even trained some neighbor's colts for the 4-H club show. I didn't win there either—but I learned a lot. Eventually, girls became more interesting than training horses.

Baseball & Kellogg's Pride



I grew up playing Little League as a catcher for the **Kellogg cereals baseball team**. They had a team for every age group, so I just moved up each year. One day, my dad rushed home and said, “Come on—we’re meeting the Kellogg News photographer. He wants a picture of you swinging a bat.” My mom had just bought me new Levi’s but hadn’t cuffed them yet. We rolled them up and headed out. The photo was staged—no ball to hit—but it ran as the Kellogg News cover, which went out to thousands of employees. My dad was thrilled. I thought it was silly at the time, but now I treasure that photo of us.

Farewell to Horses

When I put Linda up for sale, she was gone before I got home from school. My mom said the kids who bought her fell in love instantly. Of course they did. A few weeks later, Bill, my other horse, was struck by lightning while I was at a football game. He’d been standing under the shade tree where they always rested during light rains. My dad called the rendering company, and they hauled him away before I got home. He never knew what hit him.

That was the end of my horses—for a while. I owned horses off and on until my mid-40s. But **Linda was my favorite**. I’ve thought of her often over the years and the wonderful rides we shared.

First Cars & Hard Lessons

I had been driving tractors and cars since I was 10. Asparagus grew on the roadside everywhere in Michigan. When Mom and I went out to pick wild asparagus, she'd let me drive so she could hop out and cut it. New cars cost about \$800 back then, but they didn't last long. Roads were always salted in the wintertime to melt the ice and snow. It also rusted out all the cars in the quarter panels. My parents gave me my first car-- a 1952 Chevrolet in 1956 when I was fifteen years old.



Six months later, I traded it for my dream ride: a '51 Chevy sport coupe. Drive-in movies were huge back then, and that car saw its fair share of outdoor theaters.

We didn't drink, not me or the guys I ran with. We were athletes, fueled by coka cola, hot dogs, and McDonald's burgers. Battle Creek had one of the first five McDonald's ever built. Burgers were 15 cents each, or sometimes 9 for a dollar on weekends. Coke costs a dime. Gas was 27 cents a gallon with tax—17 without it. We were careful with money, but I always worked, so I had just enough. Bellevue was only 12 miles away, but we saved trips for weekends.



Later, I bought a **1928 Model T** to fix up. It was always breaking down, but I loved tinkering with it. Some kids roddeed theirs to go fast, but one tragic accident changed everything—six

kids in one car, four died, and two were never the same. Dorma's oldest sister was one of the victims. After that, parents laid down strict rules about driving with other kids.



I wrecked my 51 Chevy, bummer, bought this 55 Ford while I was still a senior, I traded it later for a 57 Pontiac which I dearly loved, then bought the 55 Buick that I customized and drove to California.



Just after graduation, my friend **Bob Rowley** was killed when a farmer turned in front of his MG. My friend **Laura Smith** and I sat together for hours, stunned and in disbelief. We visited each other many times in CA. and MI. throughout the years and kept in close contact; she was a very good friend. She passed away last year in her sleep—a peaceful

way to go. Many of the kids I grew up with are gone now. Cancer, heart attacks, old age. I'm trying to finish this book before I succumb. Except, I'm planning to live another twenty years.

Family Support & Lasting Gratitude

I could never say enough wonderful things about my parents. They supported me completely—even bought me a truck for my business when I was struggling after my trip to Japan. That saved me. My mother passed in 1974 from cancer; she was 63 years old. My father remarried and continued to mentally support me until he died in 1986 at 81.

He left me **\$10,000** and his **25-year Kellogg's watch**, which I plan to pass on to my grandson Kenny. I kept that money separate—it gave me a warm feeling just seeing it there. I didn't need it by then; I'd already become successful. But I had the chance to tell him how much it meant to me that he was always there cheering me on from the grandstands. He never lived to see how far I'd come in business, but I think he and Mom believed I was successful long before I really was.

A Message About Education

My Parents never understood the importance of education—neither had any formal schooling. So, they never talked to me about college, and I never considered it. That's the only mistake they made as parents. Don't make that mistake.

Education is everything. If you don't know that already, learn it now. Go as far as you can. It takes perseverance, but it's the only way to truly make something of yourself. I was lucky—I had energy and drive—but I got knocked around because I lacked education. Don't let that happen to you. It's a different world out there now than when I grew up. Your chance of making it big is practically impossible without an education these days.

Everything I've done, everything I'm leaving behind, is so my grandchildren and great-grandchildren can go to college. I haven't left a fortune—just **education money**. Because I've learned that **free money doesn't make people happy**. You have to earn it. I want you to have the chance to learn. If you choose not to, the money won't be there for you. Not until you're 36—and only then if there's anything left. You might think you're smart and maybe you are in fact, but without that piece of paper you won't be counted. I went to literally hundreds of seminars and became very educated on insects, but I don't have a

paper to prove that I'm sure I spent more hours with college professors and 7 hours that it took to get a bachelor's degree, but it didn't count.

High School Years

I was in 8th grade when Joyce Sivits walked into my class and was introduced. I could tell she was embarrassed, but I was immediately smitten—and I knew it. I'd never met a girl before who made me want to hold hands. During the next few weeks, I maneuvered my way close to her when I could, and before long, we were going steady. We stayed together until mid-senior year, when she broke my heart. You haven't truly lived until you've had your heart broken



Left to right: Sally Buller, Karen Mast, Leanne Tack, Cheryl Hand, And of course Joyce Sivits.



My girlfriend Joyce was a cheerleader. Her family practically adopted me. Her father taught me to hunt, fix cars and radios—we were inseparable. Years later, he even joined me at my cabin in Colorado to go elk hunting with friends. They took home two impressive trophies.

I was the only farm kid in our group of friends except Laura, the rest of the kids all lived in urban communities we called project homes, you can tell by looking, they didn't look like farmers.

🔑 A Busy Life

Writing about high school is difficult—not because I wasn't busy, but because it's all a bit of a blur. From age eight to sixteen, I had a newspaper route. By 15, in 9th grade, my schedule was hectic. My mother often helped me with the papers while I played sports. I'd rush home to complete the route before dinner, though I was late more often than I'd like to admit.

By **DICK PFANDER**
St. Philip bounced back from a 12-0 first period deficit to notch four touchdowns in the remaining quarters to grab an upset 26-12 win over favored Pennfield in the Cereal Center finale for both schools before 600 fans in Bailey Stadium last night.

The Tigers, who had lost five previous contests took advantage of every opportunity while handing Pennfield its second loss in six starts.

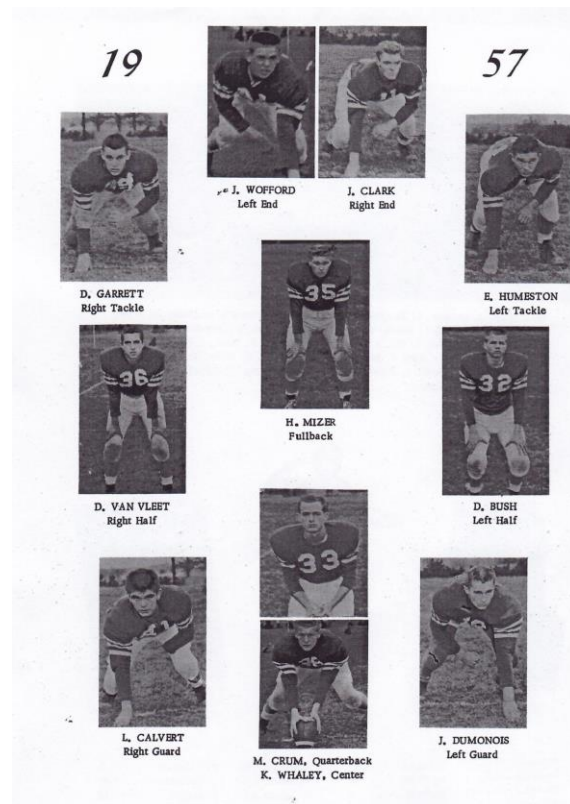
Rowley Scores First
Statistically the Tigers turned in their best performance of the season as they netted 270 yards including 129 on 4 completions of 9 passes. Pennfield had the edge in first downs, 12 to 10, but netted only 171 yards, 133 of which were on the ground. The Panthers completed one of 4 passes.

The Panthers started off with a bang, notching two first cantalies. Bob Rowley got the first

The Panthers started off with a bang, notching two first canto tallies. Bob Rowley got the first

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Thanks to my Little League Baseball experience, I started as a catcher for the varsity team in 9th grade. I was athletic enough to also play first-string guard on the basketball team.



In football I played fullback on offense and center linebacker on defense. I scored more than 40 touchdowns in my four years of high school football.

When I looked at all of my old write-ups in the Inquirer and news, I found myself in the newspaper more than 120 times during that four-year period. Remember, it was a small town. I've included a few write-ups to be able to brag a little bit. Well, after all, it is my book.

I wasn't an exceptional student—average at best, despite earning straight as in my early years. My parents hadn't attended high school, and their vision for me was simple: Graduate and get a job. They didn't know how to push me academically. I don't know how to control you either, only having this book to do it. But let me be clear—education matters. Whether you carry my blood or not, I will always say: pursue it relentlessly. Education is paramount. There are trade schools and colleges. You can also go to school full time on the Internet these days and who knows what they will develop by the time you're reading this book. I was not only lucky, I also lived in a completely different time than you live in currently. I don't see how it's possible for anyone to make it in business or any other way without having some sort of advanced education. Plan on it early, I have left money to help pay for it. If I have run out of money by the time you're reading this, then look for private and public scholarships. Be relentless in your pursuit of scholarships even

if you have my money they will help tremendously. Then my money will be there for other things.



That's me, number 31. I was fullback in varsity football. Penfield Agricultural was a small country school—only 95 in my graduating class—so the pool of players was limited. We were competing against similar-sized schools, which made the games deeply competitive.



Yes many times we played in the snow





Jim Ledbetter, sitting behind me, was always the true basketball star. It wasn't because he was so incredibly coordinated. It was because he was so smart. He understood sports better than anybody on our team and he was usually a high scorer.

Life Around School

I usually rode the bus to school, which took about 30 minutes with all the stops. After sports practice, my dad picked me up. He got out of work at 3:15 and often came directly to school, even though he passed near our home on the way. He'd watch practices and even give rides to other kids. His little Volkswagen, packed with players, was a sight—and he loved every minute of it.

After school, I still had my paper route, farm chores, and horses to care for. I stayed busy.

A Memorable Teacher



I took a typing class with Mrs. Angeline Barden, a petite powerhouse who taught with authority and compassion. She taught typing, shorthand, and geography. One unforgettable day, she yanked a big, defiant student straight off the bus by his ear and marched him back into school to face consequences. She didn't tolerate disrespect and earned our admiration. Her classes were quiet, disciplined, and effective—despite rarely assigning homework. She was one of Penfield's finest.

Legacy and Reflection



This is Darrell and I am working on the sports edition of the Penn staff. I remember he did all the work while I watched it. Darrell graduated a year ahead of me. He married Marsha Garms, one of the true Pennfield sweethearts. I didn't live in Battle Creek to be aware of all their accomplishments, but through Grapevine I understand they became pillars of the community. It would have been fun to witness.

Dreams, Realities, and the Value of Work

In our graduating class, I don't think a single kid went on to a university. We grew up in a different world—where advancement came from hard work and common sense. Nowadays, you can't even apply for an advanced job without a college diploma. That's why I believe education is everything. Trade schools are a great path also, and if you're my relative, my educational fund is ready to help you get there.

Building the House—and a Life

My dad decided to build a house across the street on a five-acre parcel. He refused to take a bank loan, so we ate goulash for two years while he built it himself—with me often roped into help. I laid most of the hardwood flooring, I set out a lot of the cement blocks around the house so that he could more easily lay them. It was a modest but beautiful two-bedroom house, with a garage in the basement and a ramped driveway.

When we finally rented it for \$25 a month, Dad felt proud—and rightly so. He celebrated by buying steaks for dinner and declared, “No more goulash.” We had steak nights for a while until my mom’s persistence returned us to more traditional meals: chicken, meatloaf, and plenty of hamburger-based dishes.

Sports and Student Leadership



Sports were everything in high school. I loved it all—and filled my life with games, teammates, and team spirit. My parents didn’t guide me toward academics. A son who graduated from high school was their life’s goal. I got by with average grades but enjoyed a great reputation with teachers and coaches. How much better would my reputation have been with good grades? You have to decide on your future right now! A little study would have been fun if someone had shown me. Yes, it would have changed my future.

Naiveté, Self-Worth, and the Real World

It never crossed my mind that I might be stupid—but looking back, I was certainly naïve. I saw the world through rose-colored glasses. I thought life would be easy after graduation. I always had enough money, thanks to steady work. I thought I could do anything.

Turns out, reality had other ideas.

Senior class play I



I'm the one in the white pants

Family Secrets and Emotional Crossroads

My parents were solid for most of my life. But around my senior year, things shifted. My dad moved into an apartment downtown. I joked with him about it, but he wasn't in the mood to talk. Two weeks later, he returned home.

That's when my mother dropped the bombshell. Years earlier, she slept with a friend named Sam Brown during a fight with my dad. She said she never knew whether I was Sam's child or my father's. The doctors had told my dad that he had slow swimmers. That's what the fight was about. My dad had black hair my mother had dark hair and Sam was a blonde like me.

But to me, it was simple—Dad was my father. He raised me. DNA tests didn't exist, and even if they had, I wouldn't have taken one. I knew who my father was, and that was enough.

So, this is why my mother was paying such patronage to the churches all of these years. The guilt she carried around must have been very heavy, never being able to tell anyone. I don't think I realized until later in my life how dramatic that must have been for her. I was never privy to the conversations between my mother and father about that, but I imagine she wanted to have a child so badly she was willing to do anything to get it. Did she do it just for herself or did she do it for my father too because he obviously thought that I was his blood for this whole time. My coming graduation and the end of their goal and dreams must have made her decide to come clean.



Identity, Fathers, and What We Carry

I knew Sam Brown. He'd left town before I was born and came back long enough for me to spend three summers working under him as a painter. I earned my journeyman's painter union card through that job. Every Friday, I'd pick up my paycheck at the local tavern—where painters, drinkers, and working men gathered. It didn't take long to realize that painting full-time wasn't for me. Many of the guys were alcoholics, and it was a world I didn't want to live in.

I never asked Sam Brown about my mother or what had happened. My dad never brought it up, either—until just before I left for California. One evening, he took me down to a tavern and asked if my mother had ever mentioned Sam Brown. I told him she had. I said I thought it was ridiculous and didn't give it another thought. He said, "Well then, I won't think about it either."

We talked about it only one more time, in **1984**, when Dad came to visit me. My mother had passed away a decade earlier, and we were both married to different people then. When Dad brought the subject up again, I told him, "You've been there for me every single game, every practice, every step. No father could have done more. You're my dad, "always was, always will be." He nodded and said, "Okay then," and that was it. We never discussed it again.

Still, I know he never forgave my mother. When he died, he was buried next to his second wife—not my mother. His place beside her in Yuma remains empty. My mother dying still hanging onto the guilt, my father dying thinking his life was a sham. I would not have been born had she not strayed. My life was wonderful. Why did she need to come clean. Guilt, or was she asking forgiveness and squaring it up with God? She never told anyone.

I believe the thought of going into her afterlife with a lie unforgiven, knowing she could not hide it there was her undoing. So, was she able to forgive herself before she died? If not, I feel bad for her soul. I'm afraid she could not forgive herself. She may be currently and forever wrestling with this unforgiven trespass and condemned with that thought eternally.

I am the product of that trespass but have no guilt from it. She protected me from it. I was the product of her and my true fathers plannings and building a life on that 15-acre parcel of land with that old trapper cabin on it. The fields, the gardens, and pastures where I roamed with the animals. She used an interloper to produce me for her and her chosen mate to complete their plan. That wonderful plan they executed perfectly for my happiness. I forgive her and I pray she can forgive herself. God, send her my prayers so she may know.

The Final Season—and an Emotional Shift

Senior year brought a new football coach. The previous one had been dismissed after neighbors overheard him using foul language during practice. This new coach made it clear—he was here to build championship teams for the future, and this season didn't matter. During our first meeting, he pulled me aside.

He said, "I read the newspaper articles about you." Then he added, "Ever hear of a dead man's hand? Aces and eights." He didn't have to say much more—I understood. I was in the past, not the future.

He needed a quarterback but planned to train someone else. I played fullback with a 6.5-yard average and 30 touchdowns across three years. But he stuck me at QB anyway. I only scored once in the first two games.

Eventually, he moved me back to fullback, and suddenly I was scoring again—three touchdowns in the next game. I didn't give him reason to dislike me, but something felt off. I was the top senior athlete, rivaled only by Roger Romaley, a standout sophomore who would become an All-American tackle. I played center linebacker on defense, and I loved every minute of it.



Roger Rolamey

The coach gave me full freedom at linebacker—to rush, watch, read, attack. In one game, I lifted the opposing center off the ground, threw him backward into the backfield, and tackled the fullback before he could move. That was football to me: instinct, strategy, power.

Hatred in the Locker Room

We went into halftime in next to the last game after I'd already scored one touchdown. In the gym, while guys were catching their breath, the coach grabbed me by the shoulder pads, slammed me against the bleachers, and threw me around like a rag doll.

His Tennis shoes gave him traction. My cleats on the polished gym floor, slid like roller skates. I wasn't hurt physically—I had pads, and adrenaline. But I saw something terrifying in his face: pure hate. He snarled as he said, "Mizer is the only one out there playing a good game." He was right, I was playing a good game, so I didn't understand why he was throwing me around until I looked into his face. Everyone knows hatred when they see it!

He didn't touch anyone else. Just me. It was more than critique—it felt like something deeper. Something personal. Something twisted. I don't recall ever seeing hate in someone's face before until then, I recognized it immediately and yes, I was scared.

When the team headed back out to the field, I sat there on the bench. I made a decision. Football was over.

I left the gym, went to the locker room, showered, changed, and drove home. My dad was at the game that night. He asked why I didn't play the second half. I just said I wasn't feeling good. The next week, I told him I'd quit the team. He wasn't happy—but he accepted it. I never told him why.

If I had, he would have confronted that coach without hesitation. I didn't want that.

The Bold Truth

The importance of this story is to understand that your attitude and your actions steer the course of your life. If negativity surrounds you, adjust your attitude. It's your mindset that guides your destiny. I let the bitterness from that coach change mine. That was ignorance, and it didn't serve me well.

For most of my life I have not handled confrontations well. I started seeing a psychiatrist in 1974 in San Diego and traced anguish and frustrations all the way back to that football game with the coach. But I still shun confrontations. I think that's part of the reason why in later life I became a martial artist.

Looking back, I realize it wasn't just football—it was that, plus the things unraveling at home. It overwhelmed me. But that's still an excuse. I never really had a mentor; I never confided in anyone when I was young. It's a really important time in your life to have someone to talk to. Parents would be the best, but I never gave it one thought to talk to my parents about my problems. I hope you think about it and talk to your parents first. Every single person in the world has problems, your parents may not have the answer but talking about it out loud with them may give you the answer yourself.

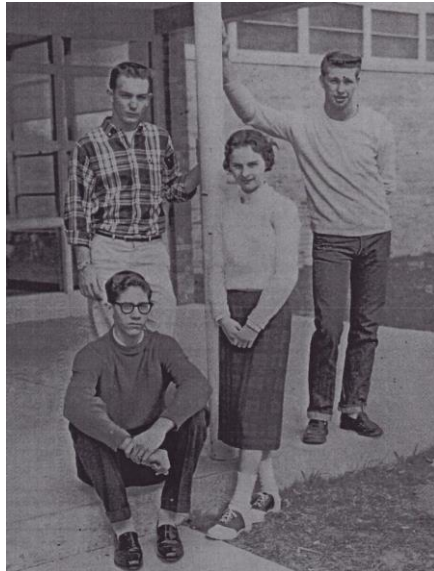
If I had been more grounded, maybe I could've embraced the QB role. Maybe things would have played out differently. However, I would not change a single thing that happened to me in my life because of the fear it may change the ending. I'm happy, I've had a special life. I probably could have avoided most of my own trials and tribulations if I had just talked to somebody about my problems. I was lucky that I didn't fall into that deep negative abyss.

The Downward Spiral

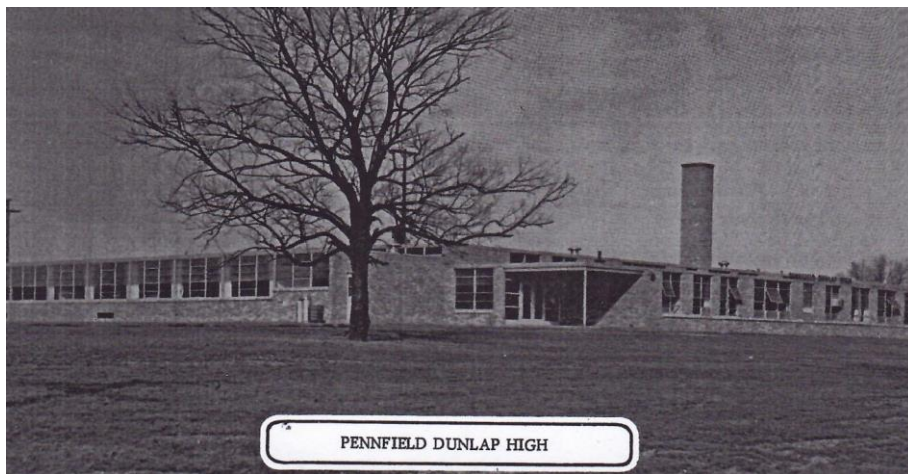
After that, everything shifted. I changed. I bought a leather jacket. I started hanging out in new places. Drifted from my teammates. Not one of them ever asked why I quit—they knew, or they didn't care.

I began skipping school. Joyce, my steady girl, eventually quit me too. I can't blame her. I wasn't pleasant to be around, and I was blaming everyone else for how I felt.

Baseball season came, and I passed on it. I figured I'd work, save money, and leave home as soon as I could. My grades nose-dived; they were not great anyway.



That's Bob Freed treasurer sitting, Bob Rowley above him Vice President, Connie Morgan Secretary, and that's me on the right president of the senior class. I was treasurer as a freshman, secretary as a sophomore, vice president as a junior, and president of the senior class. I never chased those roles—they just happened.



Graduation—and the Stillness That Followed

I had enough credits to graduate—except for freshman history, which I had skipped. Miss Robertson, a new teacher barely older than us, sat me down and said, “draw me a picture of the American flag. If you do, I’ll pass you with a D- and you can graduate.”

She handed me colored pencils and a sheet of paper. I stared at the flag in front of her room. It was one week before graduation.

I sat front and center in Miss Robertson's classroom, staring at the American flag mounted on the wall. She could've placed me anywhere, but she chose that seat on purpose. I was alone in the room. She knew what I'd been through and wanted to make sure I passed. I was aware that nearly every teacher knew—but not a single one said a word.

The End of the Farm—and Childhood

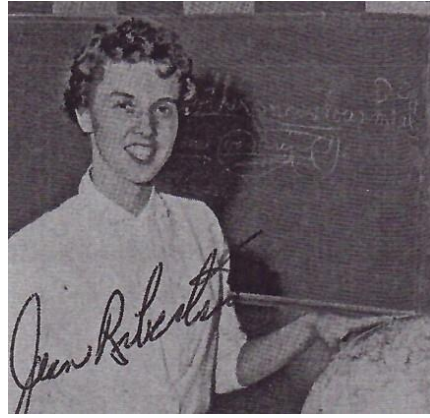
The day of graduation came. I was dressed in my cap and gown, standing in my front yard beside the lilac bush that had been planted when I was born. Now it towered ten feet high and wide, blooming in a spectacular farewell. The scent filled the entire yard—a sweet curtain call on my childhood.

As I walked around the bush, I was hit with a stunning realization: after today, I had no plans. No next step. No roadmap. No athletics to prep for. No school to return to. Joyce and her family were no longer part of my life. For the first time, everything felt... paused.

The farm was quiet. The horses were gone. Chickens—gone. No rabbits, no ducks. My mom didn't even plant a vegetable garden that year. The soil, once alive with purpose, now sat still.

I stood there trying to understand. They had built this farm from scratch—plowed fields, planted orchards, built barns and coops. Maybe they felt relief. Or maybe, like me, they felt the weight of change. I didn't ask. I wasn't wise enough yet. I understand now! Their lifelong dream had come to an end, they had not panned further. They didn't know what to do either.

A Gentle Goodbye from Two Young Teachers



A week after school ended, I ran into Miss Robertson and Miss Wigger at a diner. We talked and laughed. It was warm and casual. As we left, both women put their arms around me and said, “You’re going to do something great—we know it.” They meant it. They were proud of me. It almost lifted the fog I’d been living in. Almost! I was lucky to have such wonderful teachers. They’re probably gone now, but I wish I could tell them, “Thank you”.

! The Reason for This Book

I was lost. I had no road map, and I had put myself in that position. No one warned me that this moment would come. My parents, never having had a high school education, couldn’t foresee it either. The ambition burning inside me had no direction. I was filled with enormous, directionless anxiety—and I don’t want that for anyone, especially those who come after me. I didn’t talk to anyone about it; Now I know that was wrong. Maybe I would have had an easier time had I sought some psychological help. If you’re in this place, there’s plenty of places to go. Start with your parents if possible.

A Message Across Generations

Take a moment to think. Not everything goes right in life. What might you do differently? What *will* you do differently? My childhood—despite everything—was nearly perfect. I wouldn’t trade it for anything. Even now, I think about it with tears in my eyes. I was lucky. So very lucky!

My parents built a beautiful life. They executed their plan with skill and sacrifice. Their lack of education meant they couldn’t see the end coming—and that’s not their fault. They did what they planned. Now, I look back with 20/20 hindsight, but it’s *my* hindsight not theirs. They have given me my hindsight, and it’s a wonderful hindsight. I wish I could tell them

now. Think about your life, how it ripples outward to everyone around you, especially to those who you love.

This is my friend Randy Wells, He disappeared after graduation day, and I have never been able to find him again. Wherever you land, I hope the grass is green. (Private message)



We were supposed to hang together

