

CARAVAN

By Gary Forney



This is my story as told by me. I am sure that it is not the whole story, that I will omit some memories as painful or trivial. I will most likely dwell on issues unimportant to others. I will relate things from my own viewpoint. Being the central figure on my own stage this “theater production” will not be as others might see it! It is simply my story as I relate it. My own view from behind my eyes.

Gary Forney

There are several “births” for all of us. There is your physical birth and there are “births of awareness”.

My physical birth is officially recorded as February 12th 1953 at 12:01 am. My mother of record is Marietta Iola Forney, formerly Marietta Iola Cue. My father is listed as Lawrence Clyde Forney. There is a footprint on the document allegedly belonging to me at birth.

At the time of my birth I already had three older siblings. Eventually I would also have three younger siblings. To the best of my knowledge my parents' children in birth order are: Darlene Dorothy, Larry Leroy, Deanna Ruth, Gary Richard, Carma Marietta, Donald Raymond, Jerry Lee. I would be exact center child of these seven with three older, three younger, three brothers, three sisters.

My first name of Gary is a tribute to my father who named most of the male children after himself. Lawrence Forney went by “Larry” until his later years. Larry Leroy would be a sort of Larry Junior. Gary would be a variation on Larry, as would Jerry. Donald is the only exception being named after a friend of Lawrence.

The physical birth of Don aligns with my earliest “awareness birth”. My oldest memory is of waking up and going with my sister, Carma, into my parent's bedroom where we found our mother missing. We found our father shaving who explained that our mother was at the hospital where she had had our new brother Don. March 23, 1957.

The city of my births was Oelwein, Iowa, a small railroad center in the midwest. The Chicago Great Western Railroad along with the Rock Island both ran through. Oelwein was an ethnic mix of people who had come to work for the railroad. My family lived on the Southwest side. There was a railroad track four blocks to the north of the dead end of fourth avenue that separated our neighborhood from the largely Italian and Hispanic area across it. Our neighborhood was a mix of Germans and Swedes. There was only one Mexican family up the avenue, and we were the only French family

Our house at 820 Fourth Avenue S.W. was a brick garage originally built as a repair shop. No hot water. Cold water that froze every winter. Nine of us living together. There was a two-hole outhouse about one hundred feet south of the garage. The devil lived there at night and in the winter. The property was large. We owned the entire block, which was mostly weeds. There was a cow pasture just to the south. The portion of fourth avenue we lived on was dirt road. There was a woods not far to the west where I saw a wolf emerge as a child. To the east lived two German Catholic spinster women who hated our family.

My grandparents Cue lived across the tracks. They were the nearest relative. Grandmother Cue died when I was young, maybe when I was four or five. The only memory I have of her is of her yelling at me for not knowing how to tie my own shoes. I went home crying. My grandpa sent over one of those wooden shoes with laces toys for me to practice on. I did learn to sort of tie my shoes with one sloppy bow. I never did forgive my grandmother. I loved Grandpa though.

There were children my age around the neighborhood I played with, but not often or for long. I tended to be a dirty poor kid who attracted bullies. I was also a quiet shy child with a speech problem. Pronouncing “Forney” was difficult and always lead to teasing. I was also told not to bother my older siblings and not to play with the younger ones, leading to a feeling of not belonging that would last most of my life.

During my early years my father worked assorted jobs, but mostly as a coal and fuel oil driver. One of very few good memories of my father is going with him on his route once. Money and possessions were rare. Food was macaroni and no meat. I slept on a davenport in the living room next to the stove. My older brother also slept there. He had lung problems and would cough all night. The stove also showed flame through the two vent holes which I thought looked like demon eyes staring at me. I learned to sleep with my head covered.

I remember the fifties as a dark time

SCHOOL DAZE

I attended public schools in Oelwein, Iowa.

In 1958 or 1959 I was entered in Kindergarten at Harlan School on the northwest side. At first I liked my female teacher and my classmates. The school had toys I couldn't afford, and plenty of children my age to play with.

My teacher soon became annoyed with me. I was desperate for attention and wanted to tell her everything I knew. My way of getting someone's attention at the time was to tug at them going "You wanna know somethin'?" or "Ya know somethin'?" My kindergarten teacher finally snapped back that "Yes" she knew something, and didn't have time for me. I quit trying to get her to like me and gave up on talking to her..

We also had other problems. I had a tiny plastic toy pig with three legs. It was one of the animals from a toy farm set. One of my very few possessions. When you'd place it on its side you could make it spin with a quick snap of your fingers. Since I had given up speaking to the teacher, I had also quit listening. When she had our class in a circle for story-time or whatever I would just spin my little pig on the floor while she talked to the other kids. One day she took away my little pig! She didn't have time for me and took away my only toy! From then on I hated her!

The whole situation finally came to a boil over sour milk. Our lunch was mostly a small cardboard box of milk. I always had trouble opening the carton. When I finally did get it open I discovered the milk inside was sour. I didn't drink it. The teacher notices me not drinking my milk and tells me to. Since I no longer speak to her, I ignore her. Now she starts yelling at me to drink my milk. I still ignore her. Then she grabs me out of my chair. I throw a tantrum for which she locks me in the classroom closet. She lets me out after some time. I still won't drink my milk. She offers it to a girl in my class. Since the girl actually speaks, she tells the teacher the milk is sour! More yelling as to why I hadn't told my teacher the milk was sour.

That's all I remember of Kindergarten. I would hear the story of the teacher screaming "Gary, Drink your milk!" all the rest of my elementary school days. I actually heard it from a former classmate when we were in our thirties.

School was not off to a good start! To this day I don't feel the need to talk to people that I don't think are listening. I also have no desire to explain things to much of anyone. When the milk is sour, it's sour. If you say something about it, no one wants to hear it. If you don't say anything you are to blame for the milk being sour.

All I ever needed to know I learned in Kindergarten.

Southside School in Oelwein, Iowa

Elementary school was mostly spent at Southside Elementary. It was on first avenue, about three blocks east of home. Best way to get there was through a cow pasture that was behind the schoolyard. Eat a quick breakfast of lumpy oatmeal. Put on your clothes and hope they were warm if not clean. In the winter clothes out on the clothes line would freeze stiff. Many a morning before school my pants would glisten of ice and stand up by themselves behind the stove while thawing.

Best part of going to school at Southside was the music! I think it was while going there that I fell in love with music. While at Southside we sang great old folk songs to the autoharp. At the Baptist Church my family belonged to we sang southern gospel blues, what were called "Negro Spirituals" back then. At home, my Dad would play old 78 rpm records of country blues! I still love all those kinds of music.

Christmas programs were very moving also. We'd learn caroles and practice them as a group for the annual shows. It was the only time of year that the bleachers and stage at the south end of the school would get used. We actually would get to sing to a piano! The only bad memory is of some other kids yelling out that I wasn't singing. I was, but I wasn't opening my mouth while I sang

My best school days were at Southside! There were "Frolics" in the fall. A "Frolic" is an Amish term for what would be called a school fair. I loved those. I can still remember how it felt just being out at night in the fall air walking to the Frolic. I'd save my dimes I got for allowance for the "Fishing Pond" game. Sometimes I'd go watch the "Cake Walk", but I never took part in it..

The playground was fenced in and had three strands of barb wire at the top. It always made me wonder if it was to keep people out or us in. There was a really great merry-go-round though! It was one of the old ones made of two by twelve boards. It was almost as large as a carousel and had upright poles to hang on to where horses would be. As a skinny child I would cling to the poles as the older kids would push it so fast that my legs would fly out from under me until I was like a flag! It was fun and I never flew off as the teachers would warn.

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I did fall off the slide. I stood up at the top of the tallest slide, just to show off and look around. I thought from there I could just slide down standing up. I got about midway and then fell. I bruised my inner thigh up pretty good when I did. I had to show the female principal and female teacher my bruise by pulling down my pants. I was more hurt by embarrassment than the fall.

It was also at Southside that I learned another few lessons, one good and one bad.

One year the announcement was made for any students interested in being part of the Christmas Pageant to report to some room. I really wanted to, but was too shy. The boy I would walk home with asked me to wait for him while he went to audition. He got the part I had wanted. He got the bass part of "We, Three Kings". I was jealous and felt abused in some strange way. Then I realized the only difference between us, and why he got the part and I didn't, was that he *tried*. A good lesson to learn and one that I still remember.

The bad lesson was much like the Kindergarten lesson. One of my few friends was a neighbor girl. One day she asked me to watch her bike while she went off to play and be with friends and then to put it away when the bell rang. She threw her bike down in the grass and ran off.. When the bell rang I picked up her bike to put it away. The principal grabbed me! Why did I park my bike on the grass when I wasn't supposed to? I started to say "But it's not my bike" but I never got past the "But.." when she started shaking me by the shoulders screaming "There's no "Buts" about it.". I kept trying to say something but by then all that would come out was "But..but..but..". She almost shook my head loose! It's called child abuse now, but back then it was standard punishment. The principal was well known for her shaking of kids. I was sent into a detention room with some other kids and told to write a reason for each letter of the alphabet why I shouldn't park my bike on the grass. All the other kids quickly did and left. I was last one still there trying to figure out what to write, when the girl who owned the bike came to confess that it was her bike. That was nice of her, but too late for me. I had already been punished for what I hadn't done. I was then yelled at for NOT saying anything. It just added to the Kindergarten lesson!

The same girl asked me to play "Doctor" with her while we were at Southside.

One final memory: When I was in fourth grade there, my parents bought a house! Dad had gotten a postal job! We actually could afford meat! After some second guessing he had also gone out and bought a house that needed moved. It had been being used as housing for Catholic Fathers. It needed moved so they could build a new building. We moved it unto our property. It went past Southside when they did. I got to watch with pride when it went past and got to tell people it was our new house!! A great memory!

Things were changing for our family.

During the time I was at Southside my Dad had developed a cyst on his lower back. He could no longer drive truck and had to leave his old job. He found a job as janitor for the post office. It was a federal government job! It paid good money! We could afford things. It was the first time I remember owning things. I had toys. I actually got a bike, but never rode it to school. So many things happened suddenly around the time I was in fourth grade that it's hard to recall them all. My oldest brother enlisted in the Air Force and was rejected as 4-F due to his lungs. He and my older sisters were leaving the nest.. I started to be the oldest child still at home. We got hot and cold water and an indoor toilet! The spinster ladies next door were upset to see my family get ahead in the world and blocked their front door after we got the new house because the two doors faced each other! I tasted ice-cream for the first time. We had turkey for Thanksgiving!

The poor days were behind us, yet I miss them. There was a magic then that money can never buy or equal. I can't listen to a folk song, or hear the blues to this day without thinking back to those days at Southside School.

CENTRAL SCHOOL IN OELWEIN IOWA
[also known as “Centrala”]

I don't really remember much of going to Central. I went there for fifth grade. My teacher was a male who's name I have forgotten. We had to get a new teacher toward the end of the year. At the time the nearby Amish community was told they would have to get state-certified teachers for their schools or send their children to public school. It was part of the state's new educational program. It turned out that my teacher wasn't state-certified. The school replaced him with one who was.

The Central building was destroyed in a tornado in 1968. Next door to Central was another similar building, also destroyed. The two buildings were at one time the Oelwein High School buildings. Central had been the Junior High and the other building was the Senior High. Two years later, for grades seven through nine, I would attend school in Central's sister-building which had become a junior high school. The buildings were stately and historic and it's a shame that neither remains.

My classroom was upstairs to the right ,first floor, after you entered an impressive arched doorway.

Harlan Elementary School - Oelwein, Iowa

Harlan Elementary 1965 was one of the darkest times of my life.

Something happened. I am not sure what. My life up to then had been tolerable and had even had some good times. We had the new house and things should have been improving. Then I entered the outer rings of Hell itself.

If I could remember my sixth grade teacher's name, I would name him here. He was a sick perverted bastard and I wouldn't hesitate revealing his identity. Do you suppose I have blocked it? Oh, well.

Our teacher seemed to divide his classroom into roles. It was like being in "The Prime of Miss Jean Brody". For some reason he picked another male student and I out for special abuse. For no reason that I can remember he would make Terry Campbell and I stay in the classroom from the time we arrived in the morning until we left in the late afternoon. That means no lunch in the cafeteria or any recesses for us two. I do remember him telling both of us that part of the reason was to prepare us for when we were in prison. Neither of us had committed any crimes by sixth grade. It was just his sick prediction that we would in his vision of the future. One of the omens that he saw in me for this future was long sleeves! I was a super skinny kid and wore long sleeves to cover up my arms. The teacher related how only heroin addicts wore long sleeves all year round. I was forced to show him my arms. A sixth grade heroin addict?

The same teacher took one entire class period once to describe how hot and classy he thought one of the girl's Mom was!

We were also forced to dissect a live snake that year. It's heart was still beating while we cut it apart. For another science experiment the class learned about electro-plating by bronzing his car key! He also related how he liked little boys to wear shorts. It was sad and sickening, but there was nothing to be done about it back then. . Now he would be looking at serious criminal charges.

The classroom itself was also depressing. We had a basement classroom. There were no windows to the outside. It was dark and sinister with a twisted schoolmaster!

I felt like a prisoner, the fate he had predicted for me. I can still remember his telling Terry and I to get used to the four walls of that room as it would be similar in prison.

Once the teacher had sorted his students I became the scapegoat. It's normal for kids to pick on one another anyway and he had set me up as target. It just got worse and worse. I got quieter and the abuse increased. I quit riding the school bus and started walking to school, a two or three mile walk each way. My parents never even questioned why I was walking so far. I dreaded Halloween. It had been one of my favorite times of year while at Southside School. Now I was the subject of skeleton jokes. My name was written on the paper skeleton door decoration. The teacher never commented on it. I had a new white shirt ruined when I was crossing the street after school to walk home. The bus was passing and the students were yelling taunts at me and one spit really huge on my shirt. I was yelled at at home. My dad wanted me to fight. When I admitted I was afraid of the bullies, my dad said I was a wimp and a coward. What a sad lonely time it was.

The abuse lasted through out the school year. Some good did come of it though. In an effort to avoid the other kids I joined the Safety Patrol. Here's the reasoning. By joining the patrol I was given permission to stand on the corner directing younger kids across the streets and didn't have to be in the classroom until after the bell had rang. I would also leave the classroom early to go on duty. I was able to avoid my fellow classmates during that time. That year the Oelwein Safety patrol won gold badges for something. I don't remember what, but I had my badge for years after that. It might even still be around somewhere in my parent's house.

In an effort to escape the abuse I also made one of the greatest discoveries of all time by anyone! I found the public library! Forget tales of mind expanding drugs! Books are better than anything! I found the Holy Land. When I was reading I left this world. To this day when I read I am lost to the outer world. "Thinking is the best way to travel." The public library doesn't charge for their service even! Salvation for free! I read everything that I could. "Rusty's Spaceship" was my favorite then. I devoured Doctor Seuss. I loved to read. Still do! There is no better escape.

A little sidenote: My teacher decided to stick me in remedial reading. No visible reason at all. Within a week of the remedial classes the special education teacher sent me back into regular class. The pervert didn't understand why I was back.

If the sun ever shone during that year, it shone in a book. If there was salvation, it lay in a book.

Thus I spent that dark time in the pages of a book, and slowly Hell passed

Junior High - First Day

THINGS LOST!

Time to prepare for junior high. After having my sister Deanna yell at my mother to make me stop speaking in a cracking voice, she briefly realized I was entering junior high. She tried to teach me how to carry my books against my chest. I told her that that was the girl's way. She acted surprised to find out I was a boy. At least she knew I was alive.

That settled, I was equipped with the standard first day of school supplies of notebooks and paper, pencils, pens, and the like. I was also briefly given an item I wish I hadn't!

I was given a house key. I guess it was supposed to be some kind of badge of honor and trust. A token of entering not only junior high but manhood. **I lost it!**

It was the first day during lunch. Sack lunch students ate in the auditorium. I reported there in the usual confusion of finding rooms in a new school. I sat and ate my meager lunch. It was usually a peanut butter sandwich with no butter, along with an apple. I laid my new notebook down beside me. The key was in my pencil case inside it. I looked at the stage and dreamed of the future while I ate. When I finished dreaming and eating I got up to leave. I had made it from my seat to the aisle when I realized I had left my new notebook behind. I went back to get it. It was gone. I looked all over. I went to the office and reported it missing. I checked for it again in the auditorium. I checked with the office again for days. No notebook or key was ever found.

I needed new supplies and had to tell my parents. They were furious. I was accused of losing the notebook on purpose! New supplies would cost money! I hadn't looked for it. I couldn't be trusted! The missing key was suddenly part of an evil plan. I must have given it to someone to hold, waiting for word from me to use it to get in my parents' house!

I was never trusted again. When I was dating Bonnie ten years later my mother would stay up with the door unlocked and finally lock it after I'd get home. I heard about that key all the rest of my life. My dad was still cursing my "giving" that key to someone when I was in my forties! I believe he went to his grave believing I had.

There was more than just that key lost that first day of junior high.

I never ate lunch at school again, and for most of my life avoided that meal completely.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - IT'S A MOD MOD WORLD!

GARY FORNEY Classroom 7A

There I am. I look so dapper! It was roughly 1966 and I was in seventh grade! High School, sort of. Junior High. We had a dress code. Sport coat and tie for boys. My guess is that there was something similar for girls. We were all to be clean cut and upstanding! It was the last time. The times they were a changin'.

It was starting to be a Mod Mod World. I went to see my first movie with a friend rather than family. I can't remember who it was with, but we went to see "Doctor No" the first James Bond movie! Cool. Spies were soon a fad. Everyone needed a secret code number. Mine was A-779. Odd, I remember that and not my locker number. I had beetle boots. Pocket protectors. Clip-on tie. Suit-coat. Bic had just come out with the first ball point pens. Calculators were the new gadget. I became writing. I wrote a short story about spies. One of my teachers loved it and it was turned into a play and performed in the classroom. I began to learn to play the Magnus Chord Organ. Mom got a job at the Goodwill. More money. I got a skateboard from Woolworths! It was one of the first skateboards with a narrow wooden board platform and metal wheels. I took a woodburner and burnt a "Bat Signal" on it. The campy series had just started and I loved it. My best friend was a cuban named Otto. He lived in the Hotel Mealey. We'd skateboard downtown on the sidewalks. We'd put together model cars together. Sometimes we'd irritate the bellboy of the hotel by skateboarding in the hall. The bellboy was a high schooler who also ran the elevator. What a cool job! My boys gym class got to bowl. We went down to the local alley where they still had pin setters. I had been noticeing girls but now did even more! Crushes came and went. I remember seventh grade as a great time to be alive!

Holy I.Q. Test, Batman. I'm a genius!

In seventh grade they started I.Q. testing along with state testing of your basic educational skills or something. It's a talent show of sorts to see which school has the brightest most promising students. To what purpose I don't know. Perhaps to polish them and guide them into some bright unknown future. A future that wouldn't be offered to me.

The tests came back and I was given more tests, and more tests. All with the same result of **"boy genius"**. Any school would be proud. Any parent would be proud. Mine weren't!

According to the testing results, not only was I a genius but so was my sister Deanna. It was early on in seventh grade and I had the grade equivalence of a twelve grader ready to graduate! Fat lot of good it did me. I got in trouble for it!

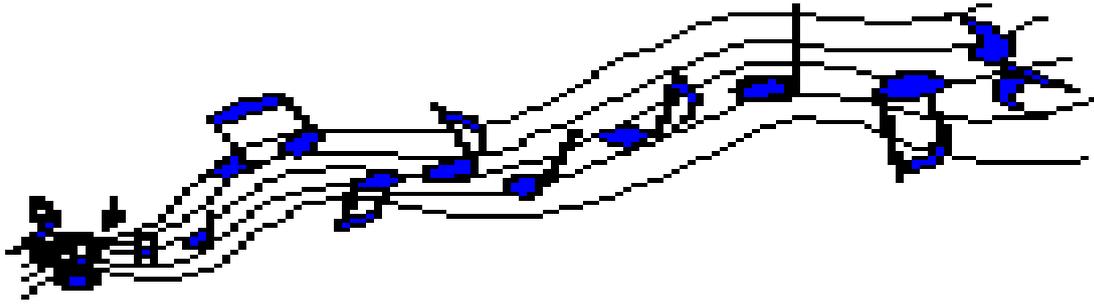
I have to back track to explain. My dad was a sailor in World War Two. He raised his children as best he could by using military methods. Every child was to be the same. No one was to stand out. If a child had the affrontery to stand out they were immediately slapped back in place. For one child to stand out would only make the others feel bad. I was actually told that. I was given a "dressing down" by both parents, and told it was a mistake! My parents were very upset by the school. They claimed years later that my sister had quit learning due to being told she was a genius. It never dawned on them that maybe she quit learning due to lack of encouragement. I continued to learn, but started to keep my school studies a secret from my parents. I started throwing away report cards with great grades. To bring such reports home would bring punishment for "trying to be better than the other kids"! Intelligence and creativity were not encouraged in my home.

I think part of the problem was in the number of us children. Seven kids can be a problem. To make it easier the family was divided into two groups. There were the "older" children or Darlene, Larry, Deanna. There were the "younger" kids or Carma, Don, Jerry. You may have noticed that two groups of three children adds up to only six children. It doesn't take a genius to figure out how I felt. There was also the name problem. Someone was always trying to call me "Larry" as I grew up. I hated being in his shadow. There would also be the confusion with "Jerry" in later years. Whenever Jerry would do something, mostly when it was bad, I would get the blame. I don't think my sister Deanna knows to this day which of us is which. Anything I might accidentally do right was accredited to Don for some bizarre reason. The Don bit was probably due to the military sameness. Bring the lower ones up and drag the upper ones down to present a uniform whole. All the same "C" students and people. It sucked then. It still sucks now!

I began to hate conformity!]

Junior High was just the beginning. There was more to come. The Mod Mod World was in the beginnings of a youth revolution. It was starting to spin around me. Events were just beginning to feel like the drawing back of a bow string.

I was starting to become a rebellious teenager! Holy Boy Wonder, Batman!



Pop goes the music!

Junior high saw the musical background of my life shifting. The Beatles had come to the states and were followed by the English invasion.

The Beatles at that time still wanted to hold your hand, and were happy just to dance with you. We sang Herman's Hermits' songs about Mrs. Brown's daughter. My voice dropped as I went through puberty. I had a good ear and would transpose the melody an octave as I sang. The songs were all moderately safe for school children. We sang "Norwegian Wood" in our innocence. We sang "Michelle", in our nieveity. The new music didn't grab me as much as the old blues, but it was fun to sing as the old folk songs had been.

Mr. Wiley, the music teacher recruited a few students and "arranged" a band in the same manner I hear the Monkees were formed or more likely the Shaggs. His classes may have even sang some Monkee's songs. He named the new group "The Yellow Pages!". It was an attempt at a hipness that eluded him. I remember one of the members of his group, Jim Hines. Jim was alright and probably hipper than Mr. Wiley. "The Yellow Pages" performed for the school in the auditorium. The junior high was a stately place and actually had a nice auditorium left over from the big band days. It had thick lush curtains, and even had a balcony. The group performed "House of The Rising Sun" sounding very much like the Animals. It was the first time I can remember hearing live music. I was impressed, but at the same time felt like they were just like me and that I could maybe do that. Only I would be original.

As near as I can recall "The Yellow Pages" stayed together for a few years, at least into high school. They changed the name to "The Pages", dropping the stupid "Yellow" bit. Maybe Mr. Wiley was thinking of the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine", but the group was better off without that one word. They actually recorded a 45 years later.

I had no real musical aspirations yet. However, I did meet Ron Reed in junior high. Ron would eventually become the drummer for my first band. That would be later. For now music was just something in the background and only came forward to be sung in music class. I was still incubating.

And masturbating. Girls and music were the same though. Both were something to think about, but the reality wasn't dreamt of yet. Songs like "Michelle" were just songs. I didn't understand most of the lyrical content. I understood the blues better. Love songs paled against the angst of the blues.

Now, as I look back I can find something buried under the bubble gum. The music was beginning to hum in my ears.

I was learning and the music could be patient ... for now.

In eighth grade I fell in with the bad news brothers, Charles and Dennis Maynes. They were from Missouri. Their father was an illiterate itinerate. The boys weren't much better. When Charles and Dennis committed some minor vandalism I was linked as being in on it with them even though I was uninvolved. The whole thing was blown out of proportion as a "gang" crime. Since I was the only intelligent one of the three, I was accused of being the leader when in reality I had no involvement. It went to juvenile court before it faded away. Charles was old enough to drive and might have had a permit. I am not sure. Anyway, the judge told all three of us that he didn't want us to drive! What it had to do with the case I have no idea to this day. I took the whole mess very hard. Since I was being made out as ring-leader most of the legal threats were made toward me. I, of course, was not allowed a defense, nor to deny being involved. When the dust finally cleared, all three of us were given minor probation and let go. We didn't even have to pay any fines. All a bunch of establishment waste. But I did take the no driving comment to heart and didn't drive until I was twenty.

I also went into a gothic stage due to the stuff leveled at me. I wore a black sweatshirt for the rest of the year. I also withdrew once more as I had in sixth grade.

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By ninth grade I was back. The black sweatshirt was gone, replaced by Hawaiian shirts. I felt better again and was back to writing poetry and reading anything that interested me. Times were good.

There is not much to relate about the rest of junior high except a fist fight I was dumb enough or arrogant enough to get in.

Three other students were setting themselves up at "tough guys" around the school. Pete Greco, Tim Ledesma and someone else. Pete and Tim and whoever it was also had a "protection" racket going on. They would collect money from other students for NOT beating them up. I refused to pay. One day I also refused to step out of their way.

The three of them came down the sidewalk acting real tough. Everyone got out of their way but me. Tim shoves me out of the way. I shove him back off the sidewalk. Then he takes a swing at me and I deck him. He jumps up and we start fist-fighting. I am holding my own when his two buddies jump in. All hell breaks loose! I can't remember every detail, but we all were beating and bashing each other. We rolled around and somehow wound up on the other side of the building. I was on top of Tim beating his head against the sidewalk while his buddies were kicking my ribs. A teacher broke it up.

I wound up with three cracked ribs, but was never bothered by them again. Tim and I worked together the same place over a decade later. We got along fine. Tim's niece is now my daughter-in-law.

I also began to play acoustic guitar. I had bought it from my sister, Deanna, for five bucks. She had bought it from Woolworths to become "a famous folk singer". There was no one in my family to teach me, so I was on my own. Who knew what would happen?

I was ready for high school.

Junior High - Last Day

THINGS LOST!

The official story: Baseball size hail (2.75") fell in Fayette county in the afternoon of May 15th 1968 followed by an F5 tornado that moved north-northeast from southwest of Oelwein, to Maynard and east of Randalia in Fayette County, Iowa. Homes were leveled and swept away in both Oelwein and Maynard. The warning sirens sounded for only 15 seconds before power failed in Oelwein. Nearly 1000 homes were damaged or destroyed along the path, and 34 people had to be hospitalized. Almost 1000 families were affected. The damage from this tornado totaled \$21 million.

My story: School had let out early that day, which may have saved lives. No one had any idea though. It was a nice sunny spring day, and a perfect time to be free of school.

My youngest brother Jerry had broken his arm near the elbow a few days before. He had been riding double on a bike. It's told that he might have lost his arm from the elbow down if a soldier on leave hadn't done what he wasn't supposed to and set it. It was only due to his actions that my brother did not lose his arm. It did leave him with a twitch in it for the rest of his life. He was sent to Allen Hospital in Waterloo, Iowa. Mom was there with him.

School had let out and we were going to leave for Waterloo to see him when Dad got home from his job at the post office. I remember just hanging around in the front yard waiting to leave.

It had briefly hailed, but I don't remember it being the size later reported. Maybe that was somewhere else in the county.

I was picking up hail stones when something caught my attention. I think it was the sudden stillness. I looked to the south and saw a funnel cloud! I had never seen one before except for in "The Wizard of Oz". I just watched it out of disbelief. As I did, it came in my direction. I watched as it tore up a board corn drying crib. It made a crashing sound and then the boards just floated in circles in the air like leaves in a small whirlwind.

Now I thought I should say something! I ran in the house and yelled "There's a tornado outside!". My oldest sister, Darlene, thought I was lying for some reason. It couldn't be! It was a nice day out. I just wanted attention. I think she just wanted to prove me wrong, but she went out to look. There it was! By now it was almost up to the property.

My youngest sister, Carma, was just starting to come out to see what was going on when Darlene shoved her back in the house. Carma was mad the rest of her life that she didn't get to see it.

We all ran down to the basement to wait for it to pass. While in the basement the tornado went past. We couldn't see anything. It sounded like a diesel freight train going over us. There was a popping in our ears. Suddenly it all stopped. It was quiet again. The whole incident maybe took five minutes!

After waiting awhile to really see if it was safe, and not the eye of the storm, we left the basement. What we saw was mostly a ton of tree limbs down. It was then that we heard the sirens briefly. We thought it was an "All Clear!" signal as the tornado was already gone. We also saw downed power lines and a car overturned. A few small buildings had also been knocked down. We checked, but had no real damage. The mortar of the garage showed a visible splitting, but nothing serious. The wind had also blown open the refrigerator. We had been lucky.

When we had first looked, we had looked to the south. The rear door was nearest the basement and that's where we had exited. After the shock began to wear off we moved to the north yard. The damage looked much the same. Lots of downed tree limbs and some power lines.

While looking north I saw Dad coming down fourth avenue walking toward the house. I told the rest that Dad was all right and coming home. We all ran out to see him and let him know we were all right. When Dad saw us he ran the rest of the way. He fell to his knees and hugged one of my brothers or sisters and began to cry in relief.

Dad told us that he had been driving home when the tornado hit downtown. He had a small French car, a Simca. Bricks had begun flying off the buildings near him and he stopped and crouched on the floorboards of the car while it was being pummeled. There was no way to drive the car home, so he walked home along the railroad tracks until fourth avenue. He actually admitted that he was glad to see us alive. Dad was not given to emotions but cried that day.

We left for Waterloo after about an hour or so later in our other car. We got out of town with no problem. Mom and Jerry said they heard about it on the television news. The whole thing seemed surreal.

Trying to come back into Oelwein later that evening was difficult. The National Guard had been called out and were guarding all roads. One trooper let us pass. Another refused. I guess the one thought we might be looters or gawkers at the least. We were finally able to get home somehow.

Central School was destroyed. So was the Junior High. My locker had been in the area the tornado had struck the building tearing a huge hole. There was no more school that year.

MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RANCH

There were other lives going on at the same time as mine. Even though this is my story, I think some details of a few other lives should be told here.

While I was in High School my older brother and sisters were finding mates and settling into their own lives.

My next oldest sister Deanna was the first married. She married Douglas Parker of Oewein, Iowa. Doug was a medic in the navy on-board a ship in Vietnam while they were first married. Doug is alright. We have never been close, but he is a solid individual. They have a daughter, Lynn, who was born in a northern suburb of Chicago.

The next married is my oldest brother Larry. He married Sandra Lincoln of Strawberry Point, Iowa. Sandy comes from a line of farmers. Her father was gored to death by a bull. Her relatives owned farms around Backbone State Park near Strawberry Point.

While Larry and Sandy were dating they introduced my oldest sister Darlene to Ken Follmer, a farm-hand on Sandy's parent's farm. Ken and Darlene began dating.

On a few weekends the couples would go to the Coliseum Ballroom in Oelwein. Since I was a teenager by then they would sometimes take me along. The Coliseum at that time still retained some of feel of the big band days. The stage and seating, and dance floor, were the same. The music was local Country and Western groups by then though. I remember Bobby Hankins and his band playing. Mel Campbell and His Country Boys also played. I knew both band leaders' kids. The Coliseum closed a few years later. The old era was ending and a new one beginning.

Larry and Sandy were married, then Darlene and Ken.

Kenneth Follmer was a preacher's son. He had gone to college and at one time had a teaching degree and taught band. That was before the Korean War. Ken had been a soldier. He told me he went out marching one day and that's all he could remember. Ken had been taken prisoner of war and tortured or brainwashed. His next memory was of waking up in the Independence, Iowa Mental Health Institute. He didn't like to talk about the war. We never did. We talked MUSIC!

Ken encouraged me with my music and tried to teach me what he could remember. I bought some books on music composition. Besides what I learned from the books, Ken helped me to learn basic piano chords. He also tried to teach me the coronet. I only got so I could play a half ass scale on it. I was more interested in music theory and composition.

Ken was a great guy and I still miss him. I openly cried when he died, but not when my own father died. Ken was a musical mentor and friend.

When Ken and Darlene married, Ken's father at first refused to allow me in the wedding party due to long hair. Ken and his dad had little in common. His father preached narrow minded bigotry in my mind, but was just one of many I would later meet with a prejudice against long hair. By the way, he did give in and let me be Best Man, but forbid me to sign the wedding register.

I was also Deanna's Best Man. Years later she claimed I was "a tiny baby" when she got married and wouldn't remember it. Once again she had me confused with Jerry.

I was an usher at Larry and Sandy's wedding. They went on to have four children. Larry and I were never close, but somehow we were always drawn to roughly the same places. Larry lives three miles from me now. We seldom speak or visit each other.

Ken and Darlene had no children. Darlene makes up for it with mothering nieces and nephews. Ken would have made a great dad.

While Darlene was married to Ken she seemed to get over some of her "hysterical behavior" and also quit her nervous sneezing, at least for awhile.

THE HAUNTING!

The story of the ghost begins when I was in fourth grade and ends around this time. Since some things were ending while others were beginning, it seems a good time to tell it.

We had first moved the big house onto the property in the fall of my fourth grade year. However we couldn't move right in. It would set there on the moving jacks and rig until the following spring. We had moved the house before digging a basement. It would have to set that way until spring until the foundation was laid and the basement dug.

While it was setting there, we had the first visit. It was a fall evening. Dad had looked out the garage window at the new house when he noticed a shadowy figure in an upstairs window! The window was on the southern end of the upstairs hall. Dad had spotted someone standing there. He told us to watch the back door of the house to make sure no one came out while he went in the front door to confront "the intruder". We did. No one came out.

When my dad exited the house later he said he hadn't found anyone. The house had been locked. He figured they must have gotten in and out some other way than the doors, but didn't have a clue. He thought maybe someone still had an old key to the house from when it was at its previous location. [It may have had something to do with his reaction when I lost a key a few years later in seventh grade.]

That was the first visit. The second didn't come until I was in Junior High School. I was given the former master bedroom upstairs. It had a cool glass paneled door with glass doorknob. The windows faced east and I placed my bed against them for years. The sun would warm me in the mornings. However, in High School I decided to move my bed. I thought it might be better against the west wall. The west wall had a mysterious "cold spot". There were stories that someone had died in the room while it was at its other location.

I didn't even remember the story until afterwards.

I was lying on my bed reading a school book in the afternoon. I was fully awake and not too involved in the school book. I think it was mathematics. I looked up from my book and there was a man standing above me looking down at me. His feet would have gone through the bed. I just stared at him. He just looked back with a questioning look on his face. He slowly just faded.

I tore out of my room. I ran downstairs and told my dad I had just seen a ghost! He didn't believe me and ridiculed me! I must have been asleep and dreaming! That was that in his mind. I went back upstairs and moved my bed.

That was the second visit. The third was basically the same only it wasn't me that saw the figure. It was one of my younger brothers. They met with similar reaction from my dad, who then accused me of trying to scare my brothers. They wouldn't have seen anything if I hadn't spread my story of pirates chasing me down the hall. *What?* He had changed my sighting.

The final visit happened while I was in High School. I had changed rooms to the one across the hall to the west of the master bedroom. It was smaller, but by then my younger brothers were growing and needed more room. They now shared the old master bedroom.

I was in my new room not really doing anything when an orb entered the room. It resembled a soap bubble about the size of a dodge ball. It was a faintly glowing light blue. It came floating through the east wall, seemed to hover for a second, then slowly sank a little in the air. It then passed at an upward angle through a portion of my bed, picking up speed before it passed out the other wall to the west.

I knew better than to tell my dad

I am convinced to this day that what I saw was a spirit orb.

The presence of who or whatever had left. Nothing else was ever reported of it.

How Do You Do What You Do To Me?

Before I begin the tenth grade, I'd like to mention a change in the theme music that had been running through my life.

Over the summer between ninth grade and tenth, my family would drive into Waterloo, Iowa on weekends to shop. I forget the name of the department store and it's gone now. What I found was the new mecca. I discovered I could afford to start my own record collection. Sort of.

At first what I was buying was limited to the bargain bin. I would buy packages of old 45's. The store had them in plastic collections of five to ten. These were mostly golden oldies with a few "unsellable moldies". I would sort through them and find a few songs that I liked. I think I still have some of them to this day. There was a teenage opera single that I enjoyed. It was a rather melodramatic song about "Grocer Jack" dying of a heart attack. I don't remember what the others were all about. Just some records to start my own collection of songs to play in the background of my life. All kids do similar at some time.

The first albums I bought were also in the bargain records. I was drawn in to an album by it's cover. In a somewhat Andy Warhol tribute one had some guy looking like he was dancing in various colors while holding a guitar. The album was by Freddie and The Dreamers. Later I would like the vocals and the songs inside, but the original purchase was due to the cover.

I bought two Freddie and The Dreamers albums! I liked Freddie. I still do! He had a great voice and the songs were folksy and whimsical.

Next couple of albums I bought were a little newer. I bought a Mamas and the Pappas album. Again, due to the cover. The first one featured them looking out the windows of a worn out bus. I thought it looked cool. I was also drawn to it by how pretty I thought Michelle Phillips was! I thought she was sexy, like Laura Partridge! Cass Elliot's voice blew me away in my puberty also. I thought her voice belonged to Michelle..

I was mostly into Folk music. The Smothers Brothers and Allen Sherman may have been on some of the 45s I bought.

In 1968 I bought a couple of books on "The Poetry of Rock"! The lyrics to a few Doors songs were there! I couldn't believe it. Poetry in musical form! The pictures of the group looked like me, kind of sullen and lonely, and the lyrics were the poetry of my life. I went out and bought my very first brand new album: "Waiting For The Sun".

The Doors became the sound-track of my life, through my high school years and maybe even to the present! I went right out and bought the two albums I had missed in sixty-seven. I wouldn't buy many albums growing up, but I bought EVERY album by The Doors! I wore them out playing them!

Other groups I would like later were Led Zepplin, The Moody Blues, The Blues Magoos, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix. All groups known for their "drug music". I just knew they all grabbed me by the ears! I still loved Folk music, but Electric Blues would rule the rest of my life

Meeting The Surreal Life!

Tenth Grade at Oelwein Senior High. As I had done since sixth grade, I would walk to school each day. Sometime in Junior High I had discovered that I was walking around with my head down looking at my feet. That wasn't good. So I started walking with my head up and looking directly at the horizon. I discovered that there is a world out there to explore!

And what did I see ? Oh, my God! There are adults going to my new school. The older guys look like they could actually shave, or grow a beard if allowed to. Actually, I did see a few goatees on some left-over Beatniks. It was a little intimidating for awhile until I noticed the other part of going to school with older students: WOMEN!! Oh my!

The mini-skirt was popular! My female classmates were all wearing them if they could. A few of the ones who just didn't have the legs for it would wear "granny dresses". There were legs everywhere though! It was hard to concentrate on your schooling. Or rather, I remember being hard during a lot of my schooling.

Typing class!

I felt the need to learn to type. I wanted to be a writer and thought it would be something useful. My instructor was Greta Lyman, pronounced "Lee-Men" not "Lemon". She was the last of the old German school-marms. I had had them at Southside, so knew what to expect. Everything was strict and rigid. Greta would walk around behind your chairs with a wooden ruler. You were to sit upright and your eyes were to be on your paper, not your hands. If you didn't sit proper or looked at your hands, Greta would whack the back of your chair with the ruler. There was also a very real fear that she might whack a student. I learned to touch type around 80 - 90 words per minute. I was only mildly distracted by the teacher's aide. She liked to hang around near my chair in her mini skirt striking poses against the radiator. Sex was one thing, but being struck by Greta's ruler was another.

Shop class was called Industrial Arts

Why do they call it "Industrial Art"? There is little "Art" to it. I made the world's ugliest lamp. I wouldn't have blamed my parents if they didn't allow me to drag it home. They did though. I wish I still had the ugly thing. It would be something to show people. It might say something about Pop Culture and Kitsch. I was also hit in the arm by the teacher. He was a big quiet burly guy. I was talking to someone using a machine. He was right to!

I dropped Shop after that year. Not because of anything. I wanted to study English and concentrate on becoming a writer. I also dropped Art. Another part of the reason for dropping those two subjects is that I thought of them as "easy" subjects. Easy courses attracted the leftover "Hoods" and "Thugs". They hadn't completely faded away yet. They haunted a few of the easy classes before dropping out or taking jobs or whatever. I wanted to avoid them. The only "easy" class I took was Music Appreciation.

I was becoming quite the writer already. The school printed up one of those student writings books. Close to a third of the writings were mine. It was called "Paw Prints". I wish I still had a copy! I used to write short stories and poetry. I still have the poetry, but all copies of my short stories are gone.

I took all the English courses I was allowed to throughout high school. Eventually I would be able to be in the advanced courses only available to students with a 3.0 and higher G.P.A.. I also took the more advanced math courses. You never know what might come in handy. The ironic part is my dropping of the Art classes. I didn't really think I would ever have a use for them.

For the most part I was a nice clean cut young man who studied and learnt. My grades were good. I maintained a **B** average easily and made Honor Roll all through High School.

I dressed rather average. I **was** average. Just another student. A deep thinker, maybe a little introverted, but what I thought was average. I had a tendency to try to blend in, at least at first. That would rapidly change!

The Vice Principal of Oelwein Senior High was, at that time, the surreal Jack Frost! Really! His name was John R. Frost, but his door said "Jack Frost". Everyone called him Jack. He was Jack Frost!

He was also a joke! One of those guys who likes to run around being tough. I think he also coached sports. His little office was stuck back in a corner of the main offices. He was friends with the athletes and the hoods! Those particular neandrathols would line the glass wall in front of the main offices intimidating everyone that passed. Jack Frost was their mentor. A grown bully in charge of little more than the sports equipment.

Jack Frost and I were bound to clash! It had to be. He was everything I despise to this day. I suppose to him that I was just some punk that needed pushed around.

I remember I was leaving the study hall and just walking up the hall. Jack Frost was coming the other way. He almost had passed me. He stopped a trio of hoods ahead of me and briefly spoke to them. Then I caught his eye. He turned to me and told me flat out to **"Get a haircut before you come back to school!!"**. He hadn't said it due to the length of my hair. He had said it to demonstrate his authority! My hair could only be considered long by military standards! The hoods snickered at his barking orders at me and he smiled back at them. It wasn't about hair length. It was about power!

I had had an appointment to have my hair cut that evening. Now I cancelled it! It was time to take a stand. I started letting my hair grow right there on the spot.

Until that year I had had to wear my hair the way others had made me. Until High School I was forced to have Butch hair cuts. My ears would freeze in the winter! It wasn't until that year that I was even allowed to have a crew cut. I was taught in grade school how to tell when you needed a haircut. You would take your fingers and place them in the longest area of your hair so the hair would stick up between your fingers. If you could see hair above your fingers you needed a haircut! Military standards. My Dad was a navy man.

When I was ordered to get a hair cut my hair probably would have still passed the finger test. By the end of the year my hair was over my ears. Within two years my hair was shoulder length. A year later other students would be growing their hair out due to the fashion of the times. I grew mine long out of rebellion! Those who grew theirs for fashion have long since cut it. I continue to keep mine for all the reasons I had when I first grew it.

The rest of tenth grade was all right. I began to write even more due to the encouragement of being a "published author". I did fine in my studies and maintained my grades even with growing hair. I made new friends and renewed my friendship with some.

That Christmas, or maybe the next, I got an electric guitar! Coolest present I ever got! It was a sort of Fender Strat clone from Sears. A single pick-up solid body beauty with a whammy bar. It was red even! My parents didn't know much about guitars so they forgot I would need an amp. Next time we went to Waterloo, Iowa we looked around for one. We finally found a used amp for fifteen dollars. A young guy had been using it for a practise amp. It was a Gibson Kalamazoo Model Two! I think it had a twelve inch speaker. I found out later that the Kalamazoo was largely used for keyboards. That amp was super cool in my book ! I didn't know anything about wattage at the time. I found out later that the Model Two was five watts. Plenty of power to rock when you're a young kid.

I had the equipment. Now I needed to know how to play it. I don't remember what happened to my acoustic after that. I think it may have finally warped beyond playing. It probably went out with the trash. None of my brothers or sisters play or they might have been able to have it. I had my electric set up now!

I was ready to rock! Sort of. I had to learn how first

A RAINBOW IN THE DARK

11th grade Oelwein Senior High School

What a confusing time those years were. It was the sixties. The best of times and the worst of times.

On the upside I was suddenly free to choose what I wanted to wear, what length to have my hair! I started dressing in full "Flower Power". Outfits I remember were my tie-dyed sailor suit, my lizard jacket, my pink tiger print pullover shirt, my love beads. The lizard jacket was a real favorite. It had six buckles in the front, no collar, long sleeves, and fringe. I felt like I was Jim Morrison when I wore it.

On the downside, people started thinking I was gay! In their minds bright clothes and long hair just had to mean some twisted behavior. It was pretty common for long hairs to be called "faggot" back then. If you had long hair you were probably a "dirty", "commie", "druggie", "fag". That was it. Bigotry is a shortcut past thinking. If you can quickly make a judgment you don't need much for a brain. It really didn't mean a thing to me either way. If they wanted to judge me in their ignorance, then let them! I had other things on my mind than fitting some mold of male and female.

On the upside I was well known by now as a writer! Anything to do with creative writing I was considered *THE PERSON*. Whenever any thing was printed in the school it probably had something of mine to it. I remember the football coach coming to me, even though we were natural political enemies, to ask me to do some art work for a flyer.

I even did poetry readings at churches. That all came to an end though. I was with a youth group at the Methodist Church one evening. I wasn't a member as they were too conservative for my tastes. I had been invited down for the evening to read some poetry. The church had also invited some "Jesus Freaks" from somewhere, possibly Waterloo, Iowa. They were to speak also. I had recited my stuff and was just hanging around off to the side. The "Acid Casualties", as we also called "Jesus Freaks" started getting out of hand. There was some young girl there from somewhere. She was taken in by these whatever. I just stood back observing. While I was, some short haired straight kid thought he'd be cool if he lit up a cigar. I didn't smoke back then. So there's cigar smoke in the air. The male Jesus Freaks are using any excuse to do a group huddle with the young girl. She is quite good looking in her innocence. They are praying and whatever in their circle when the girl mentions her grandmother has just passed over. NOW the shit hits! The Jesus Freaks tell her they know God personally. They can contact the girl's grandmother in Heaven! I just watch as they decide to have a seance. It's madness. I am like someone watching a car wreck. I want to look away but can't! Suddenly the girl starts crying. Her father enters the smoke filled church basement. He finds his daughter crying. He smells the air. He looks around. There I am off in the corner, a really tall skinny guy with long hair! AH HA!

Next day I find out I am banned from the Methodist church for smoking pot in the basement. It was nonsense. I was getting used to not having to do anything to get blamed for it by now. So much for the poetry readings.

I wasn't the only one with long hair. There weren't many of us though. I mostly remember it being Rob and George Shirk, and myself. Later there were maybe five of us total. Rob and George were walking down the hall one day past the offices. There were the usual jocks and hoods lined up by the glass doors. One day this great bunch leaped out at the Shirks with scissors and started hacking at their hair. I just heard about it. I wasn't there. Rob and George just resisted with non-violence. I would have knocked some heads loose.

In those days when I'd walk home, passing strangers in cars would scream "Get a haircut!" and swerve toward you. Having long hair made you a target. Things just got worse.

By spring of my junior year things were getting to me. There was the usual cabin fever issues, the long hair issues, the clothing issues. I needed to get away, but there was no sanctuary. It was all about to come to a melt down.

I wasn't doing drugs, although I was being accused of it constantly. I was not gay. I was not dirty. I was not a communist. In reality I was still a rather nerdy honor student with long hair who was getting very tired of it all.

In the spring there are various programs and meets for the non-sports students. One such was "Speech Contest". It's very similar to "Debate Team" in some ways, or a music recital. Students practice a three minute reading and delivery their "Speech" before a teacher/judge. I have attended my daughter's violin recitals which are very similar.

I was scheduled to take part. So was George Shirk. George had been a fellow poet at one time, but wasn't writing much anymore. He and Rob seemed to be studying drugs now. Actually the only reason I was doing the contest is that it had to do with my creative interests. I figured I would read my bit and that would be that. No big thing.

The students would practise after school in the English room. One day the instructor, Elmer Freyeremuth, came in and informed me that I couldn't take part in the contest. As it was explained the school did not want to be represented by long haired students. I was told that the principal was banning George and I from speaking.

Fine with me! I didn't really care about the contest. BUT, I did care about being told what I can do and can't do!

George and Rob decided it should be protested. That was the thing in those days. Since I had also been banned they wanted me to take part. The speech contest was that weekend. It shouldn't have been a big deal. Just a peaceful little sit-in.

The contest was in West Union, Iowa. Since I didn't drive I hitch hiked there in my tie-dye sailor suit! Just as dangerous back then as now. When I arrived I found Rob and George. We took a position in a hallway to peacefully sit. The plan was to do nothing to disturb the contest. IF someone saw us we would calmly and politely tell them why we were sitting where we were. That was the actual event. It shouldn't have caused trouble. IT DID!

West Union, Iowa, was even more anti-long hair than Oelwein. I heard later that the basketball team was practicing in the gymnasium. They heard about us "Hippies" and were making plans to forcibly remove us, and possibly cut our hair. We were blissfully unaware of it though.

A few of the other students we had talked to actually did understand. One of them made us some cardboard protest signs. We thanked them but slid the signs behind us. We weren't there to picket, just to peacefully explain.

A newspaper reporter arrives to talk to us. What? It turns out that Rob or George had called the papers in some strange effort to make our plea. It was the match to our powder keg! The newsman just briefly talked to us. Not a good enough story. Three kids just sitting to the side in a hall wasn't good news! He needed his "angle". So he takes the three of us and the signs we never made, down to the actual place where the contest had been. It was over by then. He has us hold the signs and takes our picture. We leave. I find a ride home.

Next day, our picture is in every paper! The Cedar Rapids Gazette, The Des Moines Register ALL have it. The Des Moines Paper printed the "Protest" picture with the signs on its front page. It made the United Press Wire! The reporter had also done a much more interesting interview with the West Union football team as to what they thought about our hair! The whole thing was written up like a riot! I heard later that parents had been calling the contest to see if their children were hurt in the protest.

Another example of getting in trouble just standing there, or sitting in this case. It was the final straw! It would be another week or so, but that was all I could stand.

Trouble was sure to follow

Tune in, Turn on, Drop out!

Things had been piling higher and higher. I had been denied admittance to an after school event when a teacher refused my student I.D. card. She claimed I wasn't a student. She was the same teacher that in seventh grade had helped me put on my first play. The whole thing was a farce. It was right out of "Waiting for Godard". When I couldn't get in, my friends came out to ask me why not. I explained it to them. Mrs. James then called me over. She said she knew who I was, but she said she was ashamed to admit it. It was my long hair! I was the same person under it. It was her that had changed. I should have been the one to be ashamed..of her! I had thought of her as a creative open minded teacher when she had taught me Art and Science in Junior High. Now she had revealed herself as a narrow minded bigot. All over hair length. Simon and Garfunkel's "Keep The Customer Satisfied" seemed to play in the background.

"Everywhere I go, I get slandered. I get libeled. I hear words I never heard in the Bible."

For some reason during that time it seems that long hair was forbidden in the Bible. I have never read anything about it there. But of course, I had long hair and was therefore a stupid dirty hippie! God hated long hairs, or at least according to some. I was also being turned against religion.

The whole long hair versus the establishment thing seems funny now. At the time it was dead serious. Literally. It could be worth your life to have long hair. It wasn't safe to walk down the street at times. Or to sit quietly in Study Hall.

Earlier in the year I was in study hall. I was at a table by myself studying. Apparently I was causing trouble doing it. Three red neck neandrathols walked over and took position at a nearby table. They didn't have Study Hall. They had just been passing by and saw a target for their hate. They started the usual remarks about long hair, drugs, dirt, faggot, etc. Their verbal abuse was loud and boastful. They, of course, were better than me since they had short hair. My honor grades were inferior to their failing grades, and they were better people than me, all due to hair length. I sit there quietly and tried to ignore their abuse.

Not to be. Bullies have to prove themselves. One of the creeps boasts to his buddies "Watch this!" and comes over to my table. Their kind also always needs an audience to prove their manhood to. I guess that it would be in doubt otherwise. His most intelligent remark? "You're a faggot, aren't you?". I continue to ignore him. His buddies are snickering. He is confused. How can he prove his manhood if I just ignore him? His kind thrives on confrontations with his "inferiors". Ever known a bully to pick on someone larger than them? I knew his kind. It bothered him. If he couldn't prove his manhood by provoking a confrontation he didn't know what to do. He got frustrated and angry. After a silence he did the only thing his kind knows how to do. He slugged me in the face!

I just gave him a look like he wasn't there and left.

I did go up to the office and reported the incident. Jack Frost said he'd check into it. Obviously he wasn't about to believe the word of an honor student with long hair over someone with a reputation for bullying but with short hair!

IF he ever talked to the trio I doubt. Jack Frost decided that my long hair must have been to blame. He sentenced me to sit in his office during all my Study Hall periods for the rest of the year.

The morale of the story didn't need explained to me. I had been there. Done that.

It's the week after the "riot" in West Union. Repercussions are rampant. Now the school completely denies banning any of us from Speech Contest. They claim that we are all three "undesirables" causing trouble. The principal of the school, Herbert Hass, denies everything. Jack Frost denies everything. Art Sensor, his real name, denies everything. Art was superintendent of schools.

The "riot" had drawn too much attention to the school. They needed to calm it down. That meant someone to blame. The Shirks had money. Their family owned Shirk Oil Company in town. They were above blaming. My Dad was janitor at the post office. Oh oh.

Art Sensor made one of his rare visits to Oelwein Community High School. He had a separate office elsewhere and usually made people come to him. In order to fix the recent hornet nest he had left his throne to find the source of the trouble. That would be me!

I was doing my detention for having long hair in Jack Frost's office when Art Sensor storms in yelling about keeping the hippies under control. Art was an old school Italian with a bad temper. He sees me sitting in the offices! Ah Ha. Obviously I am the guilty party for everything. Makes sense. Why defend myself? I know I've already been tried and convicted. Like in Kindergarten I ignore people who don't want to listen. He rants his rant and then leaves.

I wish I could say that I did on the spot what I would do the next day!

Before I tell you what I did, many people have wondered why I just didn't cut my hair. They would have. Why not me?

There I was. An honor student. A member of the Student Council. A member of Annual Staff. Writer for the school paper. None of it mattered as long as I was a long hair. Why not cut it?

I would never do that!

I had been repressed all my life. I was an ignored middle child. I was raised by military boot camp methods. Long hair was my statement of rebellion. When I found who I was, long hair was a part of it. Long hair was not a fashion with me. It was who I was. I could no more cut my hair than deny being born. My long hair meant I was who I was, and not a product of repression! A slave no more! May as well tell the Black Panthers they would have had less trouble if they would just go back to Uncle Tom's Cabin. My hair was here to stay

Here's what I did. I dropped out! Yeah, I just quietly took my books to the office and put them on the front desk. My only words were "I quit!". I walked out the door.

Later on I found out that someone, best guess is Jack Frost, wrote DROP OUT! in block letters across my school transcripts. Rumors also flew. Years later I would still hear how I was a drop out. I was even denied a job for it once. .

No one spoke to me about my decision. I guess when my parents contacted the school, they were told that the school had no idea why I would drop out. They did add that they were surprised by my actions, because "usually the smart ones don't drop out".

I have debated about just leaving things here for awhile in my story. Just letting all readers think I am a drop out. Wouldn't that be something? The long haired rebel drop out? The Marshall McLuhan post literate tribal man! Yeah!

The drop out story sounds cool but is not really true. I graduated with honors from East High School in Waterloo, Iowa! I would also go to The University of Northern Iowa later.

The full story comes later.

So Long Harry Cue!

Sometime in High School my Grandpa Harry Cue died. He was my mother's Dad. Picture "Jiggs" from the old comic strip "Maggie and Jiggs", and then picture him with wavy hair. That would be my Grandpa.

Grandpa was a good natured soul. I never heard an unkind word for anyone from him. When I was young, and my Grandma Cue was still alive, when I got on her mean side, Grandpa Cue would watch over me.

Sometimes Grandpa would have me sit out on his back step and straighten nails. I would be given a hammer and a coffee can full of bent nails. The nails are straightened by rolling them across the concrete steps and tapping them with a hammer to unbend the shaft. It was probably "busy-work" to keep me out of the way of Grandma's temper. I didn't look at it that way though. Grandpa was doing something my own Dad wouldn't bother with. Grandpa trusted me with a hammer. Dad would take tools out of my hand. Grandpa gave me a job to do. Dad wouldn't trust me to do anything. Grandpa and I would watch The Lone Ranger together. Grandpa would fall asleep in his chair, but when I'd wake him he always knew the plot of the show and what was happening.

Grandpa had his bad habits too. I loved him anyway. Grandpa would fall asleep in his chair with a cigar in his hand. After he had burnt one too many holes in the arms of chairs, My uncle Obbie forbid Grandpa to smoke. Grandpa still kept his cigars though. So Obbie hid his matches. Grandpa wouldn't have wanted to caused a fire, but still had to have his cigars. He started chewing them.

Grandpa also liked to disappear. He had a tendency to sit in his chair until you weren't paying attention, or something, and then he'd be gone. On a few rare occasions he'd walk to town and have too much to drink. He'd piss his pants and then try to stagger home. Dad would see him and get him home. Dad also related, when I was grown, that Grandpa would sneak off to a few lady friend's houses. I don't know. Maybe. All I know is I loved Grandpa.

After I became a teenager I didn't have time for old people. That's how it is with all teens. I was involved in my own life and it wasn't that I didn't still love him, but I rarely saw him during those years.

The final two times I saw Grandpa were brief. I went over to his house some holiday during high school. Grandpa hadn't seen me in a long time and I had long hair by then. He asked my parents who the young lady was! I didn't take it well. Grandpa sent word that he didn't mean anything and he was sorry. He sent word that he knew young people sometimes wear different hair and things. I never spoke to Grandpa again. I am forever sorry for that. Of all the people in my life I should have forgiven and that I loved was Grandpa.

I saw him for the last time the afternoon he died. He had gotten up and put on his best suit, went to the barber and had his hair cut. He stopped over to say bye to Mom. He said he was going to check into the county home. He felt he was a burden living in his own home. I didn't speak to him.

Grandpa checked into the county home that afternoon and died a few hours later.
I will always miss him!

Grandpa is buried in a country graveyard between Urbana and Vinton, Iowa with his wife and children. It's an old time cemetery and almost everyone there is a relative.

I go see him when I can.

Martin Reichter **World's Greatest Guitar Player!**

You have to have heard of Martin Reichter! The self-proclaimed World's Greatest Guitar Player? His band, Saint James Crucifixion? Biggest thing to ever happen in Vinton, Iowa?

Oh well. I am sure his ego is still intact. Hard to keep someone as full of hot air as Martin down.

After I dropped out it didn't take long to figure out that I didn't have anything to do. I'd been reading Lewis Mumford. *The Myth of the Machine: technics and human development* (1967). I was also reading the entire *World Book of Knowledge* for the year 1923. Musically I was studying the cadence and patterns of old gospel spirituals. After awhile too much reading can get to you. You need to come out of the fog of "unreality" for some air.

I don't remember why, but I decided to visit my cousin Martin. He was near my age, or maybe the same age. I hadn't seen him since we were ten or so. We weren't really close. I really have no explanation why I would want to go see him. I did though.

I grabbed an old empty suitcase as a prop and just took off. I walked to Highway 150 and hitch-hiked my way south to Vinton, Iowa. I don't remember saying anything to my parents about going. Now it strikes me as odd that they didn't seem to miss me. I was able to just take off for days on end without much being said. It was just the same when I would be in my room alone for days reading.

I was a middle child...

Martin Reichter! Adopted child. He had something rare at the time, but would slowly be more common place as time wore on. Martin's adoptive mother, my second cousin Melvina, was also a single mother. She had been married once briefly to a Native American. A few weeks into the marriage he came into the kitchen with his suitcase in his hand. Melvina, asked him where he was going. He said he was just going to hitch to the truck stop and get some cigarettes. It was the last Melvina saw of him. Everyone called Melvina "Mini-Ha-Ha" after that. It was a joke Indian name! When I arrived with my empty suitcase Melvina asked me what it was for. I seriously thought of saying it was for a trip to buy cigarettes, but kept my mouth shut.

I hadn't seen Martin in a long time. I had worried a little that he might be some hick town square. At first, I thought I was wrong to jump to conclusions. He had long hair now. He sort of resembled a cross between John Denver and the scruffy goat-god Pann! He might be cool. I was wrong. If I thought people misjudged me due to my hair, I had just done the same to him. I had assumed him better than he was. We both had long hair. That was the exterior. Under mine I was a nerdy intelligent youthful explorer out to find myself. Under Martin's hair was a small town red neck whose fifteen minutes of fame soon came and went.

For now though, I was searching for something. I didn't know what it was. All I knew was that for some reason I had been drawn here. It would be some time before I discovered why. It was the music.

I had been tempered in the fire. Now it was time to hone the blade with the hammer.

Martin was a spoiled child. He had had guitar lessons! He had even played in what Melvina termed a "hillbilly band". I forget its name if I was ever told. He showed me his empty electric guitar case. He had pawned his guitar in Cedar Rapids. He showed me an old fiddle that was beyond playing.

He also told me that he was the world's greatest guitar player. He maintained he was better than Hendrix! He was on his way to fame, according to him anyway.

I had been wanting to learn to rock. I was about to learn how NOT to.

Sometimes the unexplained follows me around. I am not sure just why or what it is. Things tend to happen that are best explained as supernatural.

Just before the tornado hit in 1968 Dad had placed a cement block on the roof of the garage to hold down some loose shingles. It kept drawing my attention. I told Dad that a wind was going to come up and blow that block off the roof. He just laughed and said that it would take one heck of a wind. A day later the block was blown off the roof by the F5 winds.

I have seen ghosts and spirit orbs. I was having some strange sensations now! Why had I been drawn here? There must be a reason.

The reason I can come up with now? I was drawn there to learn.

Martin never really asked me what I was doing there. That seems strange now. We hadn't seen each other more than twice in our lives and here I was? The strangeness would continue the entire visit. How long the visit was I can't recall.

We hitched into Marion, Iowa and looked up Martin's alleged girlfriend. We spent a few days there as I recall. I didn't like her or her mom. I also didn't like the neighbor girl they kept trying to force on me. She was one of those people who aren't real but know everything. For that matter everyone there seemed that way.

Martin. Why didn't anyone call him "Marty"? Now I find it strange. I didn't really think about then. Martin wasn't real. He had depth and width but no substance. He was hollow. He seemed to sense it and brag a lot in some attempt to fill that void.

His girlfriend. How old could she have been? My guess is fifteen. She acted like she knew why the world revolved. I am also sure that it probably spun around her.

The girlfriend's mother. A middle aged single mom. Chances are that she was never married. Yet, she was a self-proclaimed therapist to young people. She thought I was too quiet and therefore had something wrong with me. She wanted me to "trust" her and tell her my "problems". I kept my mouth shut. I was afraid to say what I really thought. Who was this woman to judge me? She had two teenage boys staying in her house with her teen daughter. She wasn't even providing adult guidance to her own daughter, yet she wanted to play amateur therapist? Forget it.

The neighbor girl? Just a typical teenage wanna-be. I don't think it mattered what she wanted to be. She just wanted to be, and to jabber on about it. A future socialite! Not my type. I got very tired of Martin and company trying to "hook us up". I wasn't interested then, and wouldn't be now. She acted like the kind who would want me to cut my hair and "settle down".

The only lessons I learned were that I would never fit in there. I would never feel at home in suburbia. Nor was I meant to be a socialite.

I was glad when we left.

The next lesson in "How not to rock".

After we left suburbia we returned to Vinton. While we were hitching, a couple drives up beside us. The older woman on the passenger's side looks frightened out of her wits. The male driver is red faced with rage. He's wildly gesturing for her to roll down the car window. She does, about an inch, after she's made sure the door is locked. The guy yells "Get a haircut!" at us. She very quickly rolls the window back up. The car roars off! Martin and I are speechless and then start to laugh! Totally absurd.

Back in Vinton we attempt to fit in. The best way to fit in with red necks? We go down to the local bar and play pool. What kind of bar serves two long haired hippie males? They did. I suspect Martin was a regular. Neither of us was of age.

While drinking and playing pool some "friend" of Martin's starts talking to us. The guy just got out of Juvenile Hall, or jail, or somewhere. He and Martin spend some time talking about that. I just ignore them both. I do remember the conversation taking a strange twist. The guy starts talking about anal sex between male inmates. Martin just goes on talking to him. Stranger and stranger.

I am not sure how it happened, but we ran into another of Martin's "friends". This one is older and drives a car. It never dawned on me until now that Martin was old enough to drive but didn't have a car. My mind was elsewhere.

The older friend was also with Martin in a band. They bragged a lot about the band, and how big it was going to be! Martin also related how he didn't have his guitar anymore. It hadn't dawned on me through all Martin's bragging that I hadn't heard him play. Where was my mind at?

Well, the guy told Martin not to worry that he'd get him another guitar. At the time I assumed that meant buy one. Now I wonder.

We wound up at a beer party that evening populated with the typical crowd that goes to those things. What was I doing there? The whole summer is blurred. What I can remember is surreal. I was there to learn to rock though, no matter where my mind was.

Martin bragged on and on about the band. He had named it "Saint James Crucifixion" or maybe "Saint James Resurrection", after he had had "a dream"! The name didn't seem that odd due to Credence Clearwater Revival. At least in his mind. I had a bad feeling about the name though. A feeling later justified.

The lessons I learned? The times hadn't really changed at all. People were still the same. It didn't really matter that the couple that screamed at us about our appearance were nicely dressed. It didn't matter the halfway house guy had long hair the same as I did. We weren't the same. It didn't matter that young people at the beer party had it either. We weren't the same. The exteriors were hiding the interiors.

I also learned that I was judgemental in my own way. I was just as bigoted as anyone.

I had sought to clear the "non-reality" of books from my mind by seeking out the "real" world. I discovered a duality! Both are surreal and neither was more real than the other.

I was finally learning.

My mind was slowly clearing.

There was more to learn though.

My turf!

After the time spent in Martin's turf we headed up to mine. I am not sure how long I had been gone. My parent's didn't say anything that I remember to show that anything had changed or that they had even noticed me gone. Dad seemed more interested in Martin than me.

I showed Martin my guitars and things. He didn't ask if I could play any. I had assumed he could play based on his word. He was assuming I couldn't for reasons unknown. What he thought I had the guitars and things for baffles me to this day. I didn't volunteer to play for him either. The world only needs one world's greatest guitar player anyway.

I did finally hear Martin play. It was good, but didn't impress me really. Most of the licks were standard and predictable. It was obvious he had taken lessons. His playing for all its technic lacked soul though.

We hung around my house for awhile. I told him I wrote poetry and showed him some song lyrics. He took one of my songs, said he could use it, and that was that. No mention of giving me credit or anything. I felt ripped off, but kept quiet.

We also visited some of my musician friends. Martin would brag to all of them about how good he was. Yet, I don't recall him playing for them.

Life is surreal.

What was I doing hanging with this red neck wannabe rocker? Well, I was learning. I had other friends who had bands, but we didn't hang out together. Martin, for all his faults, let me observe and hang out. Maybe I represented a fan to him. I don't know. All I know is I was learning something from all this.

After awhile, Martin had his grandparents pick him up and take him home. It did strike me as ironic. The rock star had to be escorted home?

Years before, Martin and I had stayed overnight with his grandparents. They had thought I was too skinny. They had prodded me with way too personal of questions wondering if my parents ever fed me, etc. Then to add insult to injury they had gathered all the old preserves from the basement and made me eat all of it along with anything else they could find. I was about ten years old and couldn't refuse. I got an upset stomach from being force fed and derided for being thin. They called my parents and told them to pick me up that I was "homesick".

Martin left with them. It was too far for him to hitch the same distance I had. I guess rock stars were frail in those days.

Before he left, Martin had told me his band would be playing in Independence, Iowa in a few weeks.

I kept an eye out for news of his concert. A few weeks later I did find a tiny ad in the Independence paper.

"Sock Hop. Gala Ballroom. Independence, Iowa. Saint James Crucifixion."

That was all. Sock Hop? It was already the late sixties and the fifties were a memory. The Gala was cool, but to still call it a ballroom was also dated. Who had written this? Someone's mother? The entire thing was also just a classified ad, like for a garage sale.

I did hitch hike to Independence to see the show!

Saint James Crucifixion!

I can still remember it. I am probably one of the few. I would almost be willing to bet that members of the band would like to forget it.

I arrived early for the “Sock Hop”. The band was still setting up. I got in by mumbling something about “lead guitar”. They let me in thinking I was with the band. I can't remember if I had money or not, probably not.

The band was in an argument with the management of the Gala. It turns out that the band had gotten the booking under some kind of false representation or something. Management is refusing to pay for the band and they haven't even played yet. Strange vibes are all over the place.

Saint James Crucifixion looked to be made up of people off the street. I failed to see any connection between any of them. There didn't look to be any connection between any of them and music for that matter. I thought a few looked like they had never played before. They were haphazardly setting up with no why or wherefore.

There was no audience! Besides me, I saw Martin's girlfriend and maybe two other teen girls there. The other girls seemed to be with one of the members of the band.

After waiting an eternity after a crowd should have arrived, a few of us drove downtown Independence to try to recruit an audience. No way. We heard from the one carload of young people we encountered the reason why no one was there. Turns out that there usually was a weekly concert there, but when no band was advertised that night that everyone thought there was no concert. The little “Sock Hop” classified ad among garage sale ads had gone unnoticed. Worse, people who had actually seen it, saw the name Saint James Crucifixion and thought it was a church event! They were not about to be lured in, no matter what we said.

We went back to the Gala and relayed the news. The band didn't seem concerned. They decided if they were to just start playing it would probably draw people in. To hear what? Their glorious brilliance? I don't think so. I think secretly that most of the band was relieved not to have anyone there for what was most likely a clumsy debut.

So, Saint James Crucifixion kicks in! One problem, they didn't have a set. Not a single song. I guess they hadn't thought that far ahead. None of them knew a single song that the rest did. Had this band rehearsed?

They just looked at each other! Then Martin decided they should just play anyway. He kicks in on guitar with some lick or another. The band tries to join in as best they can, but it's noise and not music. It wasn't even a good jam.

Martin's girlfriend asks Martin if she can dance with me to all this. Dance? Two problems. The noise from the stage isn't even music, let alone dance-able, and I can't dance!

I am first to admit it. I can not, for the life of me, dance! I am awkward, no sense of rhythm, two left feet. I have learned better than argue with her kind though. I do go out on the floor. It's pathetic but doesn't last long. IF there had been a crowd everyone would have died of embarrassment by witnessing my dancing.

The “jam” went on for a few minutes. When it petered out I think a few of the “musicians” were actually relieved. I had heard that most members of Saint James had been recruited by a newspaper ad. Now I wondered if they had had to audition.

Jim Mazziotti had arrived sometimes during the “show”. Jim's Dad was Sam Mazziotti. Sam and his wife, Mary, owned Samar Music. It was named using the first three letters of Sam and Mary. Jim was a drummer. The whole Mazziotti family was cool.

Jim was there because Saint James had rented their public address system or something from Samar Music. Jim was there to pick it up after the show. I knew Jim from school.

I went over and started talking to Jim, eyeing him up as a ride home. I was also curious as to what he thought of my cousin's band. I didn't ask though, and I could see Jim wasn't impressed. Jim had his own band, After Flash! They were good. Saint James was lacking.

For who knows what reason Saint James Crucifixion still won't leave the stage. They fire up another jam. Maybe they thought since Jim had arrived that their sound was finally drawing an audience.

A few members of Jim's band had come with him to pick up Samar's equipment. None of them were impressed either. The members of After Flash just walked on stage with Saint James and took over. They tapped members of Saint James on the shoulder and took the equipment out of their hands and started playing. The Saint James crew didn't even object. Martin was the only one who refused to relinquish. He just went on playing center stage! Things didn't seem to pierce the armor of his ego at all.

After the new "After Flash backs Martin Reichter" jam wound down, it must have finally dawned on people that Saint James had indeed been Crucified. It hadn't even been a religious experience!

I rode home with Jim Mazzioti and never saw my cousin again. Martin Reichter's fifteen minutes of fame had passed. If he ever had another band, I don't know. I never heard of one at least.

My Dad kept track of him and spoke to him years later. He related that Martin's ego was intact.

I went back to being my usual quiet self. I had a lot to think about. I hadn't found what I was looking for in the non-reality of books. I hadn't found what I was looking for in the real world.

Lewis Mumford and other writers gave me glimpses of a world I yearned to be a part of, but knew was unreal. I had hoped Martin would be a guide into the mystic world of music. I had also hoped to "escape" by fleeing my troubles. Nothing was making sense.

I thought about it all and the answer finally came!

Exactly one year to the day that I had dropped out, I returned to school. Maybe there was still hope there. I wasn't sure, but knew "reality" sucked. The only way to find a true path seemed to be knowledge.

I was thirsty!

I just walked in the school and re-enrolled. The kids I had gone to school with were now a year ahead of me. It didn't really matter to me though. I just made new friends.

I was also a legend. There aren't many like me.

The last half of my junior year passed uneventfully for the most part. I was back on honor roll with a three-point-five grade average. I was back writing again. My music and English classes were high points again. In Music Appreciation I coaxed the teacher into teaching me how to notate Gregorian chant when I learned he could. He told me that he and I were among less than a dozen people who could. It felt nice, but I had just learned it out of curiosity. It was like the Latin I had learned to read. I didn't see a real use for it. Just something nice to know.

Things were back to normal for now. Sort of.

I went back to throwing away my report cards. Things were still the same at home too.

Summertime Music

My musical interests continued. By now I could play guitar pretty good. I had also come up with an old upright piano, and was learning a little on it. I was writing more song lyrics.

My books on music theory were helping. Ken helped out too.

I was also experimenting with the mandolin and banjo.

During this time I wrote a few songs with piano arrangements. I completed two, and had real simple arrangements on two more. Decades later I would have Art Kaufman of Magic Key produce a few. The song that eventually became "Setting Sun" was written at this time. All Art's version had that wasn't in my original was a rhythm track. I also wrote what would become one of my lesser known songs "The One That I Love". It didn't have words back then. I would add words when I had Magic Key finally produce it. "Caravan" wasn't written yet. I wouldn't write it until later.

Those were the songs I wrote the complete arrangements for. I guess I stunned a few people with them. They were written more from music theory than actual skill on an instrument. I knew how the notes would sound, even if I couldn't play them.

My guitar skills were fair. I would say, on a scale of one to ten, that I played a seven. Most of my playing is self-taught. Since there was no one to teach me, I approached the guitar from a melody point of view. I used it to "sing" or to harmonize. I learned a folk approach to guitar, and have never been able to master "rock".

My keyboard playing is a vague Flash-Gordon Church style. When I play, it's almost always in D-minor and I use a lot of Landini Cadences. In D-minor a Landini Cadence would be the drop from F to D. An "Amen" sound is produced by the drop. It's very dramatic, but not "rock".

I also sent some lyrics to Five Star Music Masters. They would send me offers to record my song for a fee. I never had the money to have one produced. I would just keep the contracts and dream. Now I wish I had done at least one. Back then it would have been on a vinyl 45 rpm. I couldn't afford it. Who knows what might have been if I had?

The time wasn't right yet.

The time was ready for something else though!

I was about to have my first band!

I had been storing up knowledge and skill. It was all sub-conscious though. I didn't plan any of the music. I wanted to be a writer! Music was just a medium for my message. My English classes and creative writing were on a conscious level. The plan was to assimilate knowledge and experience and become a writer. I was thinking of being an English teacher. At least until I wrote my first novel.

Music was a hobby. It was also a typical teenage fantasy. I don't deny that. I wanted to be a rock star, just like any teenager, but didn't really ever believe it could happen. In the fantasy I would be a singer and songwriter.

Impractical. I had my Senior year ahead. No time for dreams, even though I had no idea what to do for the rest of my life.

SENIOR YEAR: OELWEIN

I started my senior year in Oelwein Iowa Community High School. Things weren't too bad. A lot of the anti-long hair sentiment had died down. There were exceptions though

I had given up wearing my rainbow outfits. Now I wore more traditional outfits with a sort of cowboy feel. I started wearing boots about this time. I started to prefer garrison belts. Other than that it was pretty much standard jeans and shirt.

I was enrolled in advanced classes. Among them were Advanced Media, Independent Study, Salesmanship. For Advanced Media I mostly did some advertising layouts. I was also on Annual Staff and did some award winning layouts there. For Independent Study I did a thesis on the poetry of the American Indian. It took up a lot of research but I got a good grade in it. I was maintaining a three point five grade average.

Salesmanship is where the problem was! Victor Collins was a bible thumper. He would use class time to discuss religion. It was forbidden, but he didn't seem to care. His flirting with female students was also forbidden, but it didn't seem to stop him. There were many rumors about him around the school, including one that female students could get a better grade from him by showing cleavage.

I got the top grade on every quiz, every test. He graded on a curve, which means I got an "A" for each one. I also took elaborate notes. I took part in every class discussion. I was very serious about the class. I felt I needed it to prepare for the real world.

I was about to get a lesson on the real world.

There was a final presentation at the end of the semester. It was to count for one third of your final grade. I wasn't worried. I had an "A" for the other two thirds after all.

Victor Collins chooses one of the failing students in class to be teamed with me. The other kid is lucky to be a senior and hates long hairs! During the presentation he takes the opportunity to publicly make comments about my hair. Victor gives me an "F" and writes on my report how God hates long hairs!

The other kid got a "B". He is surprised to get a high grade. His usual grade average was one point five. He asked what I got. When I told him an "F", he was surprised. He may not like long hair, but he did say that I had deserved an "A".

I was a little upset, but still not too worried. After all, the "F" was only one third of my grade. I had an "A" for the other two thirds. When averaged together that should have meant a "B" or at worst a "C".

Victor Collins gave me a "D". How could it be? It was just enough to pass, so he wouldn't have to have me in his class again. Yet, it was low enough to register as a bad mark on my transcripts.

I was registered the following semester for another class with Victor Collins. It was Distributive Education. Victor was the only instructor who taught it. I needed it to graduate. My registration mysteriously disappeared! It was too late to register for any other classes. Victor Collins had done God's will. I would have to take summer school to make up the missing credit. God's wrath on long hairs!

I did hear a decade later that Victor Collins was involved in a cult. He was also still teaching. I don't know if he was still bringing religion into his classes though.

Some things never change!

There was also another crusader! The school janitor. I don't remember him being around until that year. He was a stereotype of ignorance, yet a know-it-all. The kind you meet in bars. They variously work as janitors and security guards.

This particular creature thought it part of his job to hang around the girl's gym rooms and dressing areas. When the year books came out he could be seen in the background of almost all the girl's athletic team photos. He would also hit up on visiting mothers. The female students would avoid him like the plague.

We had one run in! It was after school hours. Robert Kellog and I were working on a project together. Robert was a clean cut honor student with a bright future ahead of him. He may have been class valedictorian. I don't remember what the project was. We had gotten permission from the Science teacher to be in his room to work. We were barely in the room five minutes when this janitor comes by and very nastily orders us out of the room. We explain we have permission. He is angered by my being there, and mutters some comments, but leaves.

Five minutes later, Robert goes to his locker to get a few books needed for our project. I step out of the room to get a drink. When I turn around the janitor has locked the classroom door! My books and supplies are still in the room. I tell him I want my books out of the room, and we had permission to be in the room. He starts shouting "fuckin' hippie" at me! He also wants to fist-fight! I am about to oblige him when Robert intervenes. The janitor yells more obscenities and refuses to allow us back in the room.

I am storming mad. I just left the school. Robert said he'd get my books back in the morning. He did.

The janitor had reported me as a troublemaker! He left out all his own behavior. I was in trouble with Jack Frost again. Robert vouched for me, and it was dropped. If the janitor was ever reprimanded for threatening a student is unknown. He did leave me alone after that though.

I heard from a friend after that. The student's mother was visiting the school. She told her son that the same janitor was hitting on her and had shown her his putty knife. He related keeping it extra sharp for when he might be called on to keep students in line. I guess he thought threatening to cut high school students up was manly.

The rest of the year was going well. All my other teachers were cool. There were a growing number of us with long hair. It was even fashionable. My grades helped things too. Even if I had long hair I was accepted by most.

At one of the rare sports events I went to, I noticed one of my old junior high teachers was letting his hair grow.

I also heard, years later, that one of my teachers, from this time, became a pot smoker.

Victor Collins and the Janitor were the minority now. Yet, they were a reminder that ignorance always survives. Their kind never really goes away.

My fellow students were alright! Most were aware and hip. It was a good time for youth. I think Woodstock happened my senior year. It truly was a magic time.

Music and good times. I was a senior.

THE BUTTERFLY SCREAMS

The story begins in the surreal location of the men's room Oelwein Community High School back in 1971.

I have a mild phobic reaction to public bathrooms. It may stem from the old outhouse days or from watching too many slasher films. I like to get in and get out as fast as possible. I must have lingered somehow that particular day.

An underclassman started talking to me. His name was Jim Damon. I was only vaguely aware of him before. I knew he was a cousin of someone from my neighborhood. That was about it. He seemed all right, so I hung around long enough to reply to a few things.

Somehow the subject of my poetry came up. That wasn't that strange, as I was known as a writer. What came up next though caught me by surprise. Jim asked me if I played guitar. I thought about it before replying. Yes, I did. He suggested we start a band. I was dumbfounded. I had been experimenting with the idea of setting my songs to music. I had written a few songs. What Jim suggested though was that we actually perform the songs! I was intrigued and agreed to give it a try. I was also hesitant though. It was something totally new to my secluded reality.

I think it was Jim's conviction that won me over. I was almost there. I asked him who else would be in this band. Jim said he knew a drummer. We could be a trio. The drummer's name was Ron Reed. Now, I was completely there! I had known Ron since Junior High. I knew that if Ron could even remotely play that the band would work. I sometimes have feelings about people. I knew that Ron and I could work together.

Jim told Ron about the band. He must have also told a few other people. When I went to my locker after the next period, my locker partner said he had heard I was starting a band. Brad Birdnow was another underclassman. We had been assigned to the same locker earlier that year. I said that it was mostly Jim starting the band, but that it was true. Brad played trombone and saxophone. He wanted in the band.

So, the four of us decided to form this band. I was elected quasi-leader. I reluctantly took on the reigns. I had no idea of what to do. It was my first band. It was also theirs. At least I was a little older and did know a tiny bit about music.

We all four got together at my parent's house to rehearse. There was the usual talk of what to call this fledgling group. There always is. Why does a band that may never play anywhere need a name? Well, since it was my band, sort of, it fell on me for a name. I think Ron or Jim said we should have an insect name. The Beatles were big. So was Iron Butterfly. They had recently had a hit with "In A-Gadda-Da-Vida". I liked the Doors! I suggested "The Scream of the Butterfly". It was a line from the Doors song "When The Music's Over". The full line is "before I sink into the deep sleep, I want to hear the scream of the butterfly". Morrison had taken the scream of the butterfly from the name of an oriental porn film. I lifted it from him. The others agreed on it as a cool name. We also told people we were named after Iron Butterfly. We were all happy. We were just starting the group and already had a cool name.

The name sounded like an electric butterfly burning in flames! We hadn't played a note together yet, but it was a good start.

Ron and I instantly bonded. We had been friends before, but now had a major bond in music. We started hanging together after school and whenever we could.

Jim and I became friends too. We didn't hang together too much, but some. Jim and I would talk and sometimes he'd get his mother's station wagon for us to ride around.

We were becoming a band of brothers.

Brad was odd man out. Ron and I were fellow rebels. Jim was also a rebel, just a tamer one. Brad, though, was uptight. He tried his best to be cool, but never really was. Ron and I were true rockers. Jim wanted to rock, so he was all right! Brad never understood it. Brad wanted us to play campy pop tunes.

Ron was a great drummer. He had taught himself to play by listening to records. Ron was into The Who! The first time I ever heard "Tommy" was at Ron's house. Ron also turned me on to Jethro Tull. Ron Reed was a fellow misfit. He didn't have my intellect, but he had the spirit.

I was an adequate guitar player. I patterned what little rock I could play after Robbie Kreiger of The Doors. I did know a few power chord progressions ala AC/DC. An A major along with an E major fired through a solid body electric guitar into a fuzz box backed with 25 watts of power. That was me!

The drums and my guitar provided the foundation for the group. If you wonder what we sounded like, picture a clumsy Doors sound with some fuzz box AC/DC.

Jim played rhythm guitar. He had a small Sears amp. It wasn't very loud and could barely be heard when he'd play. That wasn't a bad thing though. Jim was happy just being in the band. He didn't need to showboat. His playing was fair. He had a tendency to try to steer us toward country songs at times. At least they were cool older songs like "Ghost Riders".

Brad played the trombone. I was never convinced we needed horns. Bands were using them though. Blood, Sweat, and Tears used horns. The Doors had even used horns on The Soft Parade. I just went along with it. The trombone did provide a bottom of sorts. We used the trombone as a strange substitute for a bass player.

Brad had the nasty habit of trying to push us into pop tunes. He wanted us to play Three Dog Night tunes, or worse, odd pop songs such as the Pink Panther theme. He also had a worse habit. He liked to try to boss things. The last thing the group needed was a power struggle.

We weren't bad. We rehearsed what we should and worked up some pretty good tunes. We would try to play simpler things that sounded good. The foundation was still Ron and I with Brad and Jim providing some fill. At our worst we were young and inexperienced. At our best we were punk rock pioneers.

We worked up an impressive arrangement of one of my songs. It was called "What Have You Done?". The song was written around three chords on guitar accompanied by kick ass drumming. We used Brad's trombone/bass for a little bottom and Jim's quiet rhythm guitar to make the song a little more solid. The songs had words. We just didn't have a singer. Yet.

"What Have You Done?" was our best effort. It may have been our only true rock song.

We also worked up a sexy treatment of the Pink Panther theme. We were trying to be fair to everyone. Brad did play it pretty well on saxophone. At first it seems like an odd choice. We vamped it up a little. What we did was put the familiar drum pattern used for stripper's behind it. It gave the pop theme a new edge. Suddenly a rather bland song sounded sexy. I added a few bass notes on guitar behind the sax melody to bridge some of the gaps in style. A hell of an idea! Great sounding tune. Our second best.

We were still working on more songs, but had those two down pat! If only we had had more time and practice, I think we could have matured into an interesting band. To this day I think The Scream of The Butterfly had promise.

Other songs we were working on included "Joy to The World" by Three Dog Night, "Ghost Riders in the Sky", "Two Thousand Man" by The Rolling Stones". I was trying to write more songs too.

Then it happened. Our first and only gig!

Brad Birdnow was a Future Farmer of America! They have classes in lots of rural schools. They may even have them in New York City. It wouldn't surprise me.

We are all excited about how well the group is working out so far. We have a couple of songs. Two, actually. Brad is maybe a little over excited. He talks his F.F.A. teacher into letting us perform for their annual banquet at the high school.

First of all, we weren't ready. Jim Damon was the first to protest! He was right. We shouldn't have played. Second, it was the wrong audience at the wrong time.

The gig was for a sit down dinner for farmers! Our music was primitive rock. We may not have been danceable, but we weren't dining muzak either. It was surreal. Thirty years later I would face the same type of debut with The Iowa Mountain Tour. Maybe it's fate playing a joke on me. This was the first time.

We debated between us. Jim was right in refusing the gig. Ron didn't care either way. Brad was too excited by things to be rational. It came to me. I should have been a better leader! I wasn't much older than the rest of the band though. One of my weaknesses and strengths is curiosity combined with daring. "How do you know what could happen unless you try?" is one of my oft-repeated sayings. I agreed to the gig. I figured what the heck. Sometimes my mind is "elsewhere".

When I gave the go ahead, Jim agreed to do the gig. He got his mother's station wagon for the evening. We loaded Ron's drums, my guitar and amp, for the adventure. We get to the school a little early. We decide to go down to the music rooms for something. Mr. Malloy is still in one of the rooms. Dan Malloy was super cool. He asked us about our band and seemed genuinely interested. He even let us have a public address system. Why, I don't remember. We didn't have a singer. We set it up anyway and I started thinking about what to use it for.

While we are setting up our equipment another student asks about us. Dave Barker was his name. Dave is all right. We had both been in the school play together. He and I had the only speaking parts in a musical. That may have also put a few ideas in my head while setting up the microphones. I knew most of the Barkers. I had been friends with Kermit, Judy, Dave. I had known Monte, but wasn't friends. After high school they all became cops.

Somehow Dave suggests borrowing a spot light from somewhere. He actually is able to! Now we are ready to cook!

Slight problem. We have a public address system and no singer. We have a spotlight and no star. I make a decision. Just before we were to go on I would push Jim into the spotlight behind a microphone with a lyric sheet! I knew better than to let him know in advance! I didn't dare give him enough time to back out. I also knew he would be scared royally! So I just waited.

Finally the unsuspecting farm families arrive for the dinner. I can only imagine what they thought.

The lights are dimmed. A spotlight hits Jim! I had told him just before the light dimmed that he was to sing that evening! He objected like I knew he would, but it was too late. We didn't really need his soft rhythm guitar for the first song anyway. We did need a singer.

I give Jim a ton of credit. He may have been scared, but he was a trooper. He turned out to be more of a rocker than I had given him credit. He managed to sing/talk his way through the song somehow. Actually, it wasn't too bad. We all cooked behind him! We were rocking for the first time. It was good. There was actually applause.

Now for our second song. We did our treatment of the Pink Panther! Ron Reed and I noticed some of the farmers giving us odd looks. We were tickled by the reaction. Ron and I were fellow rockers! Brad was pleased with his turn in the spotlight. Things were well.

Then came the problem. We had played our entire set in two songs. Maybe five minutes had elapsed. We had nothing left. However, it wasn't going to stop us!

We fired into a song we had been working on but hadn't completely worked up. That was "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida". Ron could drum the hell out of it. The rest of us were barely capable of keeping up. I remember Jim and I just letting our part of the song peter out when Ron took off. The song worked, but barely. Given enough time it had potential. Our version that night was ragged and unfinished.

Now was the time to quit!

Nope. We went on!

We stumbled through worse and worse sounding arrangements of "Ghost Riders", "Two Thousand Man", "Citadel". I can't even remember all of it. It was terrible.

Finally we left the stage. There was scattered applause, but not much.

We were very reluctantly paid five dollars each. The instructor felt cheated by us.

The Scream Of The Butterfly had made its debut.

In fairness, we had potential. If we had stopped after two songs. If we had faced a different audience. If a few other things hadn't happened that were about to. If. If. If.

We did get a free dinner! Since it was a banquet we got to go in the kitchen of the cafeteria and eat. While we were there we did an interview with Lee Benorden. I vaguely knew Lee. He was a reporter for the Oelwein Daily Register, the local paper. Lee was sort of hip. He just asked a few questions about the band. He mostly seemed interested in me. He wanted me to write some stuff about the band and what I was up to. I wrote down our names and on the spur of the moment wrote what I thought was a cool quote.

"Ultimately, all the beauty is destroyed. The good succumbs to the evil. The only gentle sound is of The Scream of The Butterfly"

What was I thinking? I don't know. I just wanted a cool quote. Jim Damon didn't want to do an interview with Lee. Jim and Lee were not on the same wave length. They were both cool and quasi hip, but Jim had a rock-a-billy streak at times. Jim didn't like Lee's articles for the paper. If Brad and Ron felt left out when Lee didn't express interest in them they didn't let on. I don't think any of us thought much about what was to happen. We were just relieved the concert was over. None of us really gave a newspaper reporter much thought.

The next day I got an excited phone call from Brad Birdnow. We were on the front page of the Oelwein Daily Register! I went uptown Oelwein and bought a couple of copies!

The front page article was titled "Scream Makes Debut"! The story was actually pretty cool. It said some really nice things about me. It used my quote about good and evil and butterflies! It spelled all our names right! The only semi-bad part was it had mentioned our stage fright and awkwardness. Next day we were the talk of the school. We had done good.

Jim Damon reported to me that he had gotten a bunch of calls! A few venues around Oelwein and surrounding towns had seen the article. The Wild Wood, a local night club, wanted us to play there! A few other places wanted us. We had five more gigs lined up just like that!

I admit that I got in on some of the excitement too. Ron Reed and I made a trip down to Mel Campbell's garage studio to talk to him about recording a single on 45. Mel had recorded Jim Mazzioti's band After-Flash. He had also recorded Jim Hine's band The Pages. Both were local rock bands. Mel's studio was in his garage. He would record the groups to reel-to-reel and then send the tapes to be pressed into limited edition vinyl pressings. SaMar Music would try to sell the records locally. Since Jim Mazzioti's parents ran SaMar, it was natural that After-Flash had recorded there. I don't think Mel was that excited by Ron and I. I have a feeling we were too punk rock for his taste. Mel had a country band.

We did get a deal of sorts. Mel agreed to give us a shot for a fee. That's how it works, then and now. It costs money to record. An unknown group probably won't sell records and needs money to get their music out. It's fair. Ron and I told the rest of the group and we were debating it at next rehearsal.

Things were looking up for The Butterfly.

Until I did variety show!

Mr. Malloy asked me to be in the annual talent show. Since it came up so fast after the newspaper article, I thought he wanted the band. I agreed to be in it. Dan told me he didn't want the band. He wanted me to solo for the show! I was stunned. I didn't think of myself as having a talent for variety show. I didn't sing. My guitar playing was extremely limited. He told me he believed in me! He suggested I present my poetry! I was game.

I spent the next few weeks working on my act. I decided to do Jim Morrison's "Celebration of The Lizard". I had done it the previous fall for the first Earth Day in Oelwein. It had been an outdoor performance on a chilly day. I had done fair, but thought I could do better now. When I wasn't allowed to have The Butterfly for backing I set about creating my own "music". Ron and I went into the band room with a reel-to-reel recorder we borrowed, and recorded "noise" from every instrument we could. We were eventually ran out of the room for making too much noise, but got some great tape. Next I talked Robert Kellog into vouching for me again so I could get in the Science room. There, I recorded the sound of sine/square wave/signal generators! I would produce a droning sound out of both that crossed in frequency. A ear popping signal emerged. One generator was rising in tone while the other was dropping. When it got unbearable I cut to a white sound. I got the white sound by turning a radio up all the way while it was set to static for a signal. The recorded sound was sort of an evil hissing. I was also able to record some gong sounds until we were told we were freaking students in the next room out! There was also a backward piano track. I played contrasting notes on the black keys. A sinister melody of the right hand playing a descending melody while the left played an ascending. I had a great collection of "electrono-music" to work with.

I edited my sounds to produce a three minute "song". It used the signal generators, the white sound, the strange piano, and a reversed gong track. Very sinister! It all had to be sliced on reel-to-reel stereo tape! Now it could all be done on a computer!

For my stage presentation I decided against the spotlights they were using. I thought they were just randomly lighting things in multi colors. The lights were being manned by future theater students. I didn't care for their version of psychedelic lighting. I told them very flatly that I wanted my show lit entirely in red! I had a feud going with some of the theater students anyway. They may have felt like I was invading their turf. I was adamant though. Red lights only! I also refused to let them touch my precious tape. I had heard they wanted to ruin it. A few of them were known to be jealous of my talent. I wasn't going to risk it. I also refused to use their microphones. I was being stubborn, but had my reasons.

I am not sure if what would finally happen was conscious or subconscious.

We did one rehearsal. I was subdued.

Either knowingly or unknowingly, I had a little secret up my sleeve.

I knew theater too!

Last Days of The Butterfly

The Butterfly had taken its last flight. We just didn't know it yet.

We had what was to be our final rehearsal the week between the variety show rehearsal and actual performance. Mark Birdnow, Brad's older brother, shows up briefly. He and I were the same age. That was about all. We had nothing in common. Mark would go on to be a used car salesman in later life.

Mark just briefly hovered in the background for a minute. He seemed to be scowling around at the "hippies" in his brother's band. It was a bad omen. It didn't get much better after he left. A nasty vibration lingered.

Brad was in one of his power modes. He seemed to think he was leader now. I was involved in other projects such as variety show. I still had an interest in the band though. Brad was pushing for the band to take a cute pop direction again. He couldn't seem to figure out that he wasn't in Bread or Three Dog Night. I wasn't saying much. I should have. Jim Damon didn't care for Brad and the two were constantly arguing. It was really bad this rehearsal. I didn't know what to do. Ron and I just wanted to rock. We weren't concerned with what either Jim or Brad wanted. I kept quiet just hoping it would all fix itself. It didn't.

The next day or so later, Brad told us he wanted Jim Damon out of the band! It was actually a demand that Jim be out. I was tired of the two constantly arguing. I should have stood up to Brad. I didn't. Ron didn't have an opinion. I was stuck in the middle. I took the wrong side in hind sight. I just went along with Brad. Jim Damon was out. I think it was the day before variety show.

How did Brad Birdnow think a trio of drums, guitar, and trombone, would work? As I look back I think he had just made his move. He had taken over the band. He had gotten rid of the person who objected strongest. My next guess is that Ron and I were to become his backup in the "Brad Birdnow Band".

That is all just guessing.

Ron Reed and I talked about it later. We still thought the band could survive. We were the backbone anyway. Brad and Jim were just extras. We weren't really concerned. I had variety show Friday evening. Ron and I would figure the band out over the weekend.

The Scream of the Butterfly.

Gary Forney - Guitar
Jim Damon - Guitar
Brad Birdnow - Horns
Ron Reed - Drums

The Final Scream?

Brad Birdnow! - Leader

Gary Forney & Ron Reed - Background

I didn't think so!

I wasn't going to let it happen. I had variety show yet to do!

Didn't it dawn on Brad why I was in the show and they hadn't wanted the band?

The message was about to be delivered.

The Night of the Lizard King

Oelwein Community High School Variety Show 1971.

I was the last act, just before the finale. I was primed and ready for show time!

I brought my own microphone. I didn't trust the theater students. I brought my own amp for the same reason. Also, I could really crank up! I intended to. If I used the stage equipment it might have been possible to cut me off. I had side-stepped any sabotage or censorship! It was time to show them who I was!

For rehearsal I gave an effective yet safe performance. I had worn my more conservative garb. For actual performance I arrived as The Lizard King!

My long hair was carefully combed out in my best Alexander The Great style. I adopted a young lion persona. I was wearing my love beads, tiny strands of alternating red and white beads with a small bell. I had on my snake skin pattern fringed vest. It fastened with six buckles in front. I had my cowboy shoes on! The rock star had arrived. No one was wise to what was to happen. I had planned it well.

The entire show had been a spectacular. The other acts set a high standard. The light show had been elaborate. The songs were modern and well performed. It was a good show. Now for the final act just before the finale.

My tape fires up! LOUDLY! I had refused to let anyone touch it to adapt it over for the house public address system. The stereo reel-to-reel is being miked. The powers-that-be have no control over my volume! I have pulled a fast one! Too late for them to correct it.

I take the stage in my full hippie regalia flooded completely in red. A few people gasp! They have realized that it could be blood red. Too late!

No one had thought to pay attention to the lyrics at rehearsal. I had given a subdued version for students and it had gone unnoticed by adult ears. There were conservative adults in attendance now! My words wouldn't just slip by this time!

For my performance I had worked up an altered version of The Doors theater piece "The Celebration of the Lizard". It was edited for effect by me. I had completely removed several stanzas and replaced them with other material. The opening was now the "petition the Lord" segment from "The Soft Parade".

The "Eltron-Sound/Music" is thundering. I am sing/shouting the opening!

"When I was back there in seminary school there was a person there who put forth the proposition that you can petition the Lord with prayer. You cannot petition the Lord with prayer!" - Jim Morrison-

That little bit of screamed sacrilege was just the start! The stanzas that followed were taken from "Go Insane".

"Once I had a little game. I liked to crawl back in my brain. I think you know this little game. I mean the game called "Go Insane!"." - Jim Morrison -

Most of the youth of the time had heard "Celebration". The adults hadn't! No one had heard it the way I was doing it either! The performance was dark and sinister. It was also menacing and a challenge to the boundaries of society.

I heard gasping during the performance. I just went right on! I was too into character to stop anyway. I was the shaman in full dementia. It was trance time!

“and daughters smug, wound in sheets, with semen eyes in their nipples” -Morrison-

Loud gasping!

Words inflame emotion. I am well aware of it. I am using that power.

The music ended on cue.

I delivered the closing stanzas!

“Tomorrow we enter the town of my birth. I want to be ready.” -Jim Morrison-

The audience is stunned for a second. Then the theater erupts in thunderous applause! It also erupts in scattered boeing. The loudest reaction anyone had received, also the most mixed. I faced the audience in the arrogance of youthful victory. I held both arms aloft with a peace-sign in each. Then I just turned and walked off the stage.

I had just delivered the performance of my young life time!

It was also the eulogy for The Scream of the Butterfly. The final primal scream.

The variety show had been on Friday night. Monday afternoon Brad Birdnow is sheepish. He has to quit the band. His father was in the audience! I had totally freaked the old bigot out. I had also brought out his rage. How could the high school have let it happen? Why was this hippie allowed to perform while on drugs? Brad related that he was no longer allowed to come to my house. Brad's father described it as “an opium den”. Strange! Brad's father had never been to my house. He had found a shortcut past thinking. It turns out that Mark Birdnow may have told him that particular lie.

Brad Birdnow was no longer a member of the band.

Jim Damon offered to return, but we declined. We weren't sure about the band anymore. It had been fun and we had loved rocking. We were tired of power struggles from Brad and Jim though. Maybe Ron and I could go on alone.

Ron and I did try. We rehearsed for a week or so. The two of us had a chemistry. It wasn't a band. We needed something else.

We talked to several people about joining us. No one was working out. The two of us continued to rehearse, but we were losing hope. We called the new duet “Phoenix” after the fire-bird. Secretly I think we both knew it would never fly.

It was fun hanging out together though. I was an honor student and the school had open campus. I was allowed to leave school grounds when I didn't have classes. I think Ron may have just skipped classes. The two of us would get together in Ron's basement. Sometimes we'd drink his dad's beer and talk. Most times we would listen to records and dream.

We had become a former band. Just two teenage guys with dreams of rock and roll.

The Burning of the Phoenix!

Ron and I continued to look for someone to join Phoenix! Our thought was to add a keyboard. We were both Doors fans!

All we could find were female piano players. None of them were willing. There were no female rockers in Oelwein, Iowa in 1971. Women were just starting to rock. Janis Joplin and Grace Slick were pioneers.

We only knew of one male keyboard player. Tom Miller. Tom was in another band. That band was better than we were. There was no way Tom was going to join us.

I don't remember how, but a younger guy was pointed out to us. He went to the Catholic School. His name may have been Jim Brown. He lived in my neighborhood. Ron and I made a small trek to talk to him in a final attempt to turn the Phoenix into something.

Jim Brown, or whatever his name was, was a few years younger than either of us. He did say he played guitar though. Ron and I had doubts right away. We asked him to audition. He didn't have a guitar! Why is it that very few people who claim to play guitar actually own one? He didn't seem too bad though. He kind of gave Ron and I the impression that he might at least be worth a shot.

Besides, Jim had a cute sister about our age! I can't remember her name. Later on she married a creep named Mike Bathke who cheated on her. For now she was a teen hottie. Jim's mother was cool. Although sort of a flake. While we were there she seemed to want to hang around us in an almost too friendly manner. The house had a wood stove and she was warming her back against it. She commented on what she was doing. I think she wanted us to look at her rear.

"Here's to you, Mrs. Robinson!" - Paul Simon -

Ron and I left some sheet music with Jim Brown, along with a record. We told him to practise the rhythm part. We told him that I was the lead player and he would just play the chords, not to worry about the melody. We would be back in a week to see how he was doing. We had our doubts. We were desperate though. Maybe it could work.

We returned a week or so later as we said we would. We asked him if he had practiced the song. He replied that he hadn't. He told us it was the type of music he wanted to play though. I looked around. I didn't see a guitar in sight. I kept quiet and picked up my record and sheet music.

Ron and I were heading out the door. Jim Brown tells us that he is willing to join our band. Ron and I give each other a look. We tell him we will think about it. He thinks he is in! That's not what we said.

Then Jim Brown looks at me and utters the words that would end everything.

"Are you going to play background for me?"

This punk hadn't listened to anything. He didn't look to own a guitar. He hadn't rehearsed a note. He expected me to play background? Ron and I just looked at each other in disbelief. No way! We hadn't needed Brad Birdnow! We didn't need Jim Brown!

We talked about it on the way back to Ron's house.

Jim Brown wouldn't be joining! There was no more Phoenix! Ron and I finally knew it was over! The Scream of the Butterfly had passed. The Phoenix had flamed out. It was over.

ASHES!

Time sometimes clouds memories. We don't remember. We can't remember. We have creative memory at times and remember what we wish had happened. Worse yet, we remember what didn't happen!

For what it's worth:

It was the weekend, I think. It may have been a Friday evening. For some reason only my mother and I are home. At least I don't remember anyone else. Where they were I don't know. Just Mom and I.

I was playing piano. I can't remember why or anything much about it. I just remember I was playing piano. I have a tendency to attack the keys when I play. It's far from a delicate approach, and could honestly be called "pounding away".

The old upright piano wasn't anything great. It was only cool to me. My brother-in-law Doug had seen an ad that someone was giving away an old piano for free. We went wherever and hauled it home. It was probably an old school or church piano at one time. Just a standard old dark wood upright. The ivory was falling off some of the keys. Some of the ivory was missing. It wasn't in great tune. It wasn't completely out of tune either. I remember it as about three quarters in tune. Just something to "bang away" on!

Maybe it was the piano. Maybe it was my playing. Maybe it was me. It irritated my mother. I don't recall anything up to the point where she screamed at me to stop!

I either can't or don't remember the reason. I could have been playing too loud. I still do at times. It could have been the piano. It wasn't the greatest sounding. It could have been my playing, or "pounding away". Was I running an attitude? I don't remember anything before she screamed "Stop playing that piano!".

Here is what I do clearly remember:

I slammed the keyboard cover down over the keys! But not before I smashed the keys in a terribly cataphonic mad credenza!

Mom flies into hysterics at the noise! She runs into the kitchen and grabs a butcher knife! Yeah! A butcher knife! She comes running back into the living room! I am still sitting at the piano. I jump up when she comes at me with the knife!

It's a scene from a slasher film! I am facing Norman Bates' mother, not mine! She has the butcher knife over head and is slashing down at me. She is literally going to stab me to death for playing piano! The only reason she didn't is that I jumped out of the way.

I ran across the room trying to get upstairs to my room! The slasher film is still real. There is a maniac with a butcher knife trying to kill me! She slashes at my back!

I turn! I can't escape! I will have to defend myself.

It's been thirty five years. I have forgiven Mom. I hope she has forgiven me.

I slugged my mother with the back of my fist!

I caught her across the side of her head. The knife went flying! The horror film had been black and white. Now, it became full color and went into slow motion!

She was propelled backward at an angle into the wall. The house had white stucco interior walls. She slips down the wall unconscious! It's all still reeling out in slow motion. There is a smear of blood on the wall following her as she slides to the floor.

When reality returns I am standing there over my unconscious mother!

Oh my God! I have killed my mother!

I run in panic upstairs and hide in my room! Mad thoughts rush through my mind!

I am not sure how long it was. I heard my dad come in the front door. He found my mom and asked her what happened. She said she didn't know. All she knew is I had hit her. I was relieved that she wasn't really dead, but thought I was about to be! I heard Dad take her out the door. He may have yelled up the stairs that he was taking her to the hospital. I don't remember. I was too afraid of what my own fate would be.

When Dad brought Mom home she had had several stitches sewn in her scalp. She was all right although weak and shaken. Dad just came up to my room and told me to get my stuff together. I couldn't live at home anymore.

All these years I have wondered why Dad reacted so calmly. He was more the violent type and I had assumed he would murder me.

Dad is gone now. Mom and I have never really talked about the incident, but I think we have forgiven each other. As I write this it dawns on me that Mom must have remembered attacking me. She had probably told everything while at the hospital. Dad had just done what he thought needed done!

Mom may have been going through menopause. If she was, it was probably a rough time for her. She didn't need a rebellious teenage son.

I was sent to live with my oldest brother, Larry, in Waterloo, Iowa. I still remember looking at the lights on the horizon wondering about my future.

Friday I had left school in Oelwein, Iowa. Monday morning I was enrolled in East High School, Waterloo, Iowa. I had disappeared from Oelwein Community High School. I heard later that everyone just thought I had dropped out again. The drop out rumor haunts me at times to this day.

Waterloo, Iowa was my new home. Oelwein, Iowa is an average sized small town with a population of around six thousand. Waterloo, Iowa has a population of around sixty eight thousand. I had gone from a small town boy to the big city.

Who knew what the future would be?

One weekend had changed my life.

I had played the piano in a slasher movie!

Music had changed my life. Was it for the better?

I was in the silence between notes.

REBIRTH

East High gave me culture shock when I first arrived.

A young man named Rodney Maycomber showed me around my first day. Rodney had a black eye! Apparently he had gotten it from a black student for using the wrong word in a description of a type of people. East High was predominately black. I think two thirds of the students were African American.

Ambulances were also called to the school my first day. Someone had overdosed sniffing oven cleaner in the gymnasium.

The halls of East were flowing with seven hundred some students in the senior class alone!

It was intimidating the first few days.

It didn't take me long to adjust. I felt incredibly free! At East the students were hip. I was just one of hundreds of long haired males. I felt at ease. I had found home for now. I was no longer the post office janitor's son. I was no longer anything I didn't want to be!

My grades were now on a straight "A" level. The teachers judged you for your merit and not whose child you were, or the length of your hair. They had far too many students for that. I found myself at the top of each of my classes.

Two classes were my favorites. I had an Advanced English course and an Advanced Media course. English and media were cool to be in. We got to do something that I wouldn't have gotten to do in Oelwein. We got to make short films!

East High had super 8 cameras that could be checked out by advanced students. You would just fill out a short form and that was that. For the remainder of high school I was seldom without a movie camera. I made a half dozen short films!

I loved to go downtown to film. This is before the days of Wal-Marts and shopping malls. There were people all over the downtown area. When I first arrived in Waterloo there were still shoe-shine-boys polishing shoes on the corner of Fourth and LaFayette! People were walking all over! I would check out a camera and con one of my teachers into letting me have a film. Since I was an honor student all I had to do was tell them I wanted to do some filming.

I was new to Waterloo. The city fascinated me. I saw a connection between everything.

One film really caught everyone's attention.

The film classes were always littered with bits of film leftover from the editing of student films. The scraps were made of poorly lit scenes, over exposed film, and such. There were leftover trailer strips of white plastic.

I made a movie without using a camera from them.

I gathered several feet of film scraps and spliced them together until I had a three minute reel of odds and ends. No images. It was all either blank, black, white, clear.

After I had my base reel I took straight pins and scratched marks on the film. Some places I poked tiny holes to let light through. I used magic markers to create smears of red and blue color. Super 8 has tiny frames and is a narrow film. It was a painstaking process.

When the finished film was threaded into a projector and shown, it produced dancing lines, dots, and color. It was like a pulsating Rorschach test.

Two teachers were so impressed that it was shown to all their respective classes. I had another student help me show it. It was like a film festival. We would play a 45 rpm record for a soundtrack and let the patterns dance! We used different records each class, but any music fit.

I was also writing poetry as usual. I had lost over five hundred poems I had written. Those early poems just faded into the ether, lost somewhere in the move to Waterloo. I was now writing new and fresh poetry of the images and scenes of my surroundings.

I also wrote a nice bit of fiction as a joke. It would back fire a few months later.

The first week of some class or another we were all to write a short auto-biography.

I am a smart ass at times. I didn't feel any need to tell the truth. I created a dramatic tragedy filled total fabrication. I don't remember it all. I know I said something about my family being dead. Basically it was a tale of a sad pathetic orphan and his heroic struggle with fate and tragedy! No one knew me at this new school. I also thought it was hilarious.

Months later a girl, named Shirley, from school told me one of my teachers had told her how tragic my life was. Shirley was moved.

More about Shirley later.

My short time at East was an awakening. I was what I wanted to be. I wasn't expected to fit a mold. I went through it all with a certain awe and wonder.

I was still somewhat nerdy. I now wore lots of white shirts and black ties!

I made a lot of friends. Because I was an intelligent student I was friends with the other smart students. Because I was a creative artistic student I made friends with others of the type. Because I was a cool hip long hair I also made friends with those type.

I may have made too many friends during this period. I was too open for the most part. I accepted far too many people on a face value. I was **naïve** and innocent. Under my long hair and intelligence I was still a small town honky cat. My eyes were still being dazzled by the bright lights. I was only vaguely aware of the shadows.

I made friends with Bob Zaputil, the younger brother of Bill Zaputil from one of my film classes. Bob and Bill were sons of Iowa's Polka King. Within a year Bob would attach himself to me as a leech. For now we were "smoking in the boy's room". I had taken up that habit.

I made friends with Shirley.

I made friends with Peggy and Sharon. Peggy was a cute little blonde. Sharon was her Janis Joplin-like friend. I had a few fantasies about both. I also met Mike Meyer. He would become Peggy's husband after high school.

I made friends with Horst DuPong, the German foreign exchange student. Horst had an arrogance about him. We may have been drawn together by that mutual trait.

My senior year at East was short! I was only there for the second half of the school year.

Graduation was held in May. I didn't attend. I still had a summer school class to make up the credit that Victor Collins in Oelwein had cheated me. I also didn't attend because I felt like I wasn't really a part of the class. I had just transferred there for a semester. I really didn't feel like taking part in what I thought of as their celebration.

I also didn't think my parents or family would attend. Maybe they would have. I don't know. I didn't want to risk "trying to be better than the other kids and make them feel bad."

My decision not to attend graduation helped fuel the rumors that I didn't graduate.

When I walked out the doors of East High School in May 1972, I graduated twenty-fourth in a class of seven hundred.

No one spoke to me about college.

June 1972 - June 1973

Sex & Drugs, Love & Smoke

I have written brief biographies before. I always end them before this time period, or skip over it. This is the first time I have related the story of one of the most life altering years of my life.

Part one: The Arrow

After graduation I still had a few weeks of summer school. I had no idea of what to do after that. I was an arrow suddenly let loose, only I had no direction. I had no aim.

My brother, Larry, and his wife, Sandy, started pushing me to get a job. I think they may have also wanted me to cut my hair. They insisted I go down to the employment office every morning to seek employment. It was a total waste of time! No one cared about my grades or how smart I was, or what I had read. They only knew I had long hair. After a few weeks I gave up the search.

Larry and Sandy were getting on my nerves. I don't like being told what to do by anyone. Somehow I found a sleeping room further up LaFayette Street near the YWCA. My dad sent me the ten bucks a week for the room. He also sent along an additional ten dollars to pay for everything else. I don't think he wanted me home anymore than I wanted to go back.

Once I had the sleeping room I was totally on my own. I was still raw and naive. I was also lonely.

I only had one class in summer school. I took psychology. It was an easy course and at first I was acing all the tests. At first.

I had too much time on my own. I started to seek people to talk to. I also didn't care to hang around the sleeping room. There was someone in one of the rooms through the wall that had some sort of problem. They would play "They're Coming To Take Me Away!" by Napoleon the Thirteenth as loudly as possible over and over. I would leave my room when it would happen. It was during the day and it was a nice summer out. I would just go to the park. I also heard that the landlord was a pervert and peeping tom from some woman that lived there. I don't know. I do know he was creepy. I avoided the place except to sleep. I spent more and more time at Lincoln park downtown Waterloo.

I was just a step away from being homeless. The more time I spent at the park the more I met the strange people on society's fringe. I met Dale Wyant one day when he came walking down the street with a rifle. He was looking for someone he wanted to kill. He was right downtown with a gun! I met Glenn Trusdale the same day. Glenn knew Dale and stopped him from the gun bit. Glenn and I calmed Dale down. The three of us were soon friends, of sorts.

Dale was on the edge of behavior. Glenn was a peace lover. I was the youthful explorer. Dale gave our trio an explosive excitement. Glenn contributed a calmer subdued strangeness. I am not sure of my role. I guess I was an intelligent but alienated buddy, willing to try things just to see what happened. I was the arrow. I was taking off on my flight to?

Dale, Glenn, and I, started doing LSD together. I had never done drugs before. I settled into it in a hurry though. Soon I was taking LSD almost daily. I was also smoking pot and sharing quarts of beer and wine with the other derelicts. I had went from honor student to just another long haired drifter on the street.

Things got crazier and crazier. I couldn't remember what day it was. I couldn't remember people. Strangers would talk to me about our adventure the night before! I would stagger back to the sleeping room at odd hours. I would head across the river sometime in the early afternoon hungover and trying to still pass my summer school class.

Events are cloudy about that time. I lost the sleeping room after being too trusting with a couple of reprobates. We stopped in my sleeping room to pick up something. The two of them picked up the only money I had when I wasn't looking. I lied to the landlord and got by for another week. When I got some money from home again I owed every cent of it for rent. I thought I had been robbed by only one of the two. I stupidly invited the other back over. My money left again. I was officially homeless.

Before I lost the room there was the night two girls showed up at the door at two or three in the morning to have a threesome. One of them was in my summer school class. I didn't know she was in my class. Actually, I didn't know who she was! Life was out of control.

I took the last of my tests in the Psychology summer class. The first few weeks I had gotten straight "A" grades. The second half I couldn't concentrate to read. I got solid "F" grades. When the grades averaged out, it was enough to pass with a low "C".

I finally went down and picked up my diploma. It was on a shelf in the janitor's closet. Somehow it was appropriate! My previous life as a scholar was a memory by then.

The homeless situation didn't last long. I was walking down the street when this guy started talking to me. I didn't know him. He asked how I was doing. I was fine. He mentioned I had left my glasses at his house the night before. I hadn't even realized I wasn't wearing them. My body had also gone to a party somewhere without me.

The guy was Ray Clark. He was slightly older. He had a job on night shift at the John Deere Tractor plant. As we talked I told him I was homeless now. As it turned out, Ray was getting a divorce and was moving into a new apartment that day. I could sleep on the couch. It was common back then. It was the communal hippie thing to do. We went back to my sleeping room and picked up my things. They fit in a paper grocery sack.

Around this time I took up with Shirley. I had briefly known her from East high school. We starting being around each other. I wouldn't say "dating", but we were friendly. Shirley had been moved by the creative autobiography I had written while we were still in school.

I was sexually attracted to Shirley, and to her older sister Jan! Somehow Jan met Ray. I think through me. For awhile that summer Jan was our roommate. Ray and Jan slept together in the bedroom. I remained out on the couch. Jan suggested we all sleep in the bedroom, but I passed.

I had heard some odd sexual stories about Shirley and Jan. I wasn't too sure I wanted involved. Shirley had a thing for black guys. I knew she had several boyfriends besides me. I knew one of them. He related how he and Shirley were lovers while she was with me. Another friend related a few stories about the sisters. It turns out that Shirley had been raped by her step-father when she was fifteen. She had been taking a bath when he came in. Her step-father had her perform oral sex on him also!

I met this step-father. Ray and I were with Shirley and Jan at their mother's house. We were sitting at the kitchen table when the creep comes in the door. He looks like a drunk! He takes one look at Ray and I. Two long hairs in his ex-wife's house! He just glares at us and runs for the phone! He files a complaint that his ex is unfit as she allows hippies in her home! He is an upright citizen? Madness.

I also heard a story about Jan. I was told that she and Shirley's other boyfriend, the one I knew, had checked into a motel. They were joined by some other male I never knew. Jan would have sex with one while the other went for beer or whatever. When that one came back Jan would switch. I didn't hear if it ever became the three of them.

I didn't really care. I wasn't doing anything with either of them. I was more interested in my LSD and pot. Life was spinning more and more rapidly.

Ray and Jan eventually broke up when Jan took off with Ray's old grey Chevy. She just disappeared one day with Ray's car. She never left a word. After a few weeks I called Shirley at her Mom's house. I told her that Ray was wondering where Jan was. Shirley said she hadn't seen her for weeks. I knew she was lying. So, I told her that Ray was thinking of reporting his car stolen. Within the hour Shirley, Jan, and some guy, are at the apartment picking up Jan's things. Nothing was said beyond where they left the car. When Ray found it it had a half dozen unpaid parking tickets on it. Jan had left his car at the airport for days. Shirley and I also parted ways.

My adventures with the gang at the park were ending also. Dale and Glenn had gotten in a fist fight over nothing. It was just a case of drug enflamed tempers. There was a lot of strangeness going on that long hot summer. Drugs and booze fueled everything. I watched two stoners playing chicken with knives. They would throw a knife at each other's feet. The object was to make the other guy get scared and pull his foot back. A guy didn't. He took a knife right through his boot. I don't think he felt any pain. He just pulled the knife out and removed his boot. His sock was blood soaked. He went right on partying.

I left the stoners behind.

I turned to an equally nasty habit!

I started drinking!

Fourth Street in those days was buzzing every weekend. Cars would still cruise up and down the strip. At one end was Lincoln Park. At the other end was a parking lot near the Cedar River. The druggies claimed Lincoln Park. The high school kids had their own turf up the road. A block beyond that was the river where the drinkers held court. All I did was shift further up Fourth Street. From druggie to boozier was only a few blocks move.

The blacks had Sullivan Brother's Park. It was further up Fourth Street across Highway 20. It was late in the civil rights era, but tensions were still high. I was almost beaten during one of the last race riots in Waterloo. I was walking through a bad area. A carload of blacks drove by and yelled something at me. Some friends were right behind them. I was told to get in the car quick. I told them I had seen another white guy walking just behind me. We circled the block to pick him up too late. He was staggering up from a beating. We got the hell out of the area fast.

I did have a black girlfriend briefly during this time. We would dare society by walking hand in hand right downtown. I never slept with her. That was it. Holding hands. Still very daring!

It was getting to be fall. I was drinking heavily. Very heavily. I had quit drugs though. Well, I had quit LSD. I would still smoke pot. Black-outs were becoming regular from the booze.

I was working by fall. Rodney Maycomber from East was still a friend. He dropped by the apartment I was still sharing with Ray. He told me he had just gotten a job. John Deere was hiring everyone who walked in! I should get right over there! I did.

I was hired for graveyard shift in the Mill Room. I worked from 11 at night until 7 in the morning grinding flash off castings. It was like lifting weights for eight hours. I put on some muscle! I went from 145 pounds to 165. I was paid \$4.95 an hour. Good pay for those days.

I spent most of it drinking at first. Beer was twenty five cents. Hard stuff was a dollar. I was a regular at several bars. I had new friends. Bar-buddies! Free drinks.

I would stagger home and not remember doing it. Just weave on down the road between the meters. Then I met Theresa!

Love & Smoke - Fall 1972

As near as I can recall I met Theresa in September of 1972. She was fifteen. She wouldn't turn sixteen until January. Any memories I have are fogged after three decades. I remember her as very pretty though. A Linda Carter, Wonder Woman, looker! Theresa was also tall for a woman, maybe around six foot. Long black hair.

I had just started John Deere Tractor Works. The plant was across the river and about a mile or so walk. I would walk along the street north of the river. The route would take me past a parking lot where people would hang out. On this particular fall evening Debbie was there with Theresa. Debbie was a short little hottie I knew. She had dated an old friend once or twice. Now she was dating someone else. She called me over. We talked briefly. She introduced Theresa, and I forgot all about Debbie. Theresa and I were drawn to each other right away. We talked for as long as I could before taking off for work.

Debbie must have told her where I lived.

I was still living on the coach in Ray's apartment when Theresa came down to see me. We petted pretty heavy and ended up naked, kissing and rolling around on the coach. The coach was near a window. I remember all this because of an old woman who came up the stairs past the window. We wondered if she had seen us.

Theresa and I soon became an item.

Ray moved to Oelwein to be with some woman he had met from my old home town. Without him paying the rent I had to move somewhere. I didn't have time to apartment hunt, so I moved back to my brother's house. Larry charged me rent. I had my own entrance and was treated like a renter. I didn't have anything to do with the family.

I think it was during this time that I went to a lot of concerts too. I went to see Tiny Tim. After the concert I walked right by him. He looked right at me. I should have talked to him. I am sorry I didn't.

I also went to a few R.E.O. Speedwagon concerts, and Foghat shows! Joints would be passed from table to table at the Mac Elroy Auditorium. Someone would just light up and pass it on. How we got by with it can only be explained as the times.

I went to a few of the concerts with Mike Meyer and his wife Peggy. I had known both from East High. The three of us, along with whoever else, would go to the concerts and then to Perkin's afterward. Peggy and Mike started having problems though. I don't know what it was. I do know that she may have cast an eye my way. At one concert she asked me to hold her hands and gaze lovingly in her eyes. She did it to upset Mike. I don't know if she seriously wanted to have an affair with me. It never came up. It was the last concert I went to with them.

Theresa's parents did not like me! I did cut my hair to try to please them. It didn't help anything. I regretted cutting it and started growing it back. Theresa decided she liked my long hair better also. It was the last time I would cut my hair for a woman.

Actually, there was no pleasing Theresa's parents.

They tolerated me for awhile though.

Theresa and I continued to date through the fall.

I had cut down on my heavy drinking. The only drug I was doing was pot. A few friends were musicians. It was common to drop over to see them and share a joint. Smoking pot was just a hip social thing to do.

Sometime in November Theresa's parents forbid us to see each other for a time. I forget the exact details. I imagine it was probably just that we were getting too serious. Theresa and I had talked marriage. She was way too young. They did allow us to talk on the phone. I would also come up to see her at the Cedar Falls High School at times. I started sending Theresa a dozen roses almost daily.

I wasn't doing the best physically. I had gotten metal in my eye at work. Grinding metal creates sparks of metal. One of the sparks had gotten in my eye and rusted in the eye fluids. It had to be scraped off with a scalpel. You hold your eye real still and learn to pray and trust. While the scratch heals you need pain killers.

I also got the mumps! I had only had them on one side as a kid. Now I was almost twenty and got them on the other side!

I also started getting my wisdom teeth!

Top all of the above off with Mono! I had gotten it from a girl before Theresa. I had also given it to Theresa. Just a typical teenage kissing disease, but it just added to everything else.

I was dead tired constantly. I spent a lot of my time sleeping or trying to. I must have been sleeping nearly sixteen hours a day. I had to start getting louder alarm clocks. I put a clock radio across the room. When I had it next to my bed I would just reach over and shut it off and fall back asleep. I had to set it on static, as loud as possible, across the room. That way I would have to get clear up. It didn't always work. I did sleep through it a time or two.

I wasn't doing much. Just going to work, coming home, sleeping. When I was awake I would sometimes just walk around. I still didn't have a car.

I had a phone! It was to talk to Theresa. I seldom got any other calls.

That Halloween I made a freaky phone call. I had heard an urban legend. The legend goes that if you dial 7734 on midnight of All Hallows Eve, you will reach hell. The numbers 7734 spell out hell when turned upside down. No other numbers. Just 7734.

I called the number at midnight October 31st. It rang against all odds! I just dialed 7734. The other end is ringing! Holy Shit! I decide to hang up fast when I hear someone or something pick up.

"They" called back! My phone started ringing.

I just got the hell out of my apartment! I grabbed my coat and left!

A few blocks down the street, the chill calms me down. It had to be a joke. I must have reached a wrong number somehow. My phone had rang by some coincidence.

I went back to my apartment. Everything was the same. No demons!

I decided to test it again. I dialed "7734". This time I got no answer. It wouldn't even ring. Nothing. Finally I got the signal that my call couldn't be completed as dialed.

When I looked at the time I knew the reason. Midnight had passed.

Theresa's parents let us see one another again around Christmas. We continued dating where we had left off. I bought her a new ring to replace the engagement and wedding ring I had bought her. Her parents had forbidden her from wearing the more serious tokens. They did allow her to wear the new ring.

We had a nice Christmas together.

Theresa turned sixteen in January. We had sex for the first time then.

In January 1973 I self-published my first book of poetry. It was more accurately printed more than published. I had a mail order printing company print it up like a small pamphlet. It was titled "Catharsis/Apocalypse 1953". No one understood the title. It was meant to signify my breakthrough from the past. It was a duality. A kind of tribute to T.S. Eliot and The Wasteland. Seven years later I would change the title to just "Catharsis". The movie "Apocalypse Now" had come out after my little volume. People thought I had stolen my title from it. It was a limited edition. I gave out copies to everyone I knew. It even went on sale at a store downtown after I talked them into it. They displayed a couple of copies in the window! It never sold a one. Someone told me they had seen it, but thought it was a book on Catholic Catechism. I guess I hadn't learned from Saint James Crucifixion after all.

I heard from a friend in New York in 2005 that he still had a copy of "Catharsis".

Since summer of 1972 I was known more as "Poet" than as Gary. My thin little first volume of poetry meant that I had finally earned the name.

I had lost my John Deere Tractor Works job. I was simply let go at the end of ninety days. Nothing personal. They just didn't like long haired males.

I survived for awhile on money I had saved during the time I had worked in the mill room. Then the money started getting low. I did the usual employment office routine for awhile. I'd show up at their office bright and early every morning for weeks. After awhile they'd interview me and send me out to apply somewhere pointless. I had a genius level intelligence and couldn't find a job doing even menial labor.

I wound up working for Manpower! Temporary labor. My fellow workers were an assortment of gentlemen from halfway houses, former convicts, alcoholics, mentally challenged, and other derelicts of society. I was just another misfit among misfits.

While I was with Manpower, I mostly did temporary labor at Edible Soy Products in Hudson, Iowa. E.S.P. roasted soy beans. It wasn't too bad a job. I stayed on until March.

Theresa and I were holding on. That's about all. We had sex some more, but were drifting apart. I was growing tired of her. After the physical attraction wore off I started seeing her differently. Her opinions on music were irritating. She was also becoming more critical of me. It would all be over soon.

While working for Manpower I didn't hang much with any of my fellow workers. I remember one of them quite well though. His name was Jerry. He was a flaming alcoholic and bully. No one liked working anywhere near him.

He would miss work often. Best guess is he would be too drunk somewhere to show up. When he would show up he was a backstabber, a bully, a braggard, or all three. He would snap at the young guy giving us all rides to work about the music the kid would play in the car. Jerry hated rock and roll. He hated long hair. Like many alcoholics he probably hated himself. What a nightmare to work around! I only saw him between drunks. I would have hated to see him actually intoxicated.

One particular day he was being more than irritating. He had missed previous work drinking. The plant had put him to shoveling the leftover soybean husks. I was running a machine sewing bags shut. He wanted my job and sabotaged my machine. He told the foreman that I was a hippie who shouldn't be running the machine! I was livid. He didn't get my job though. The foreman was a Native American and was hip to what Jerry the drunk was trying to do.

After work that day, Jerry borrowed money from everyone in the carpool. He wanted dropped off at a bar! We gave him the money. We hoped he would get too drunk to show the next day. We were so tickled to be rid of him that we went out drinking! OH OH

After we dropped Jerry off at the bar, the young driver and I decided to celebrate. We went somewhere and I bought some wine and beer. We got pretty drunk ourselves. We went to the driver's house first and then later to my apartment and drank some more. Then we decided to walk uptown and see what was happening.

Along our walk we were suddenly stopped by two Waterloo policemen. We were both arrested. I was drunk. I admitted it. The other kid was drunk too, but had a record for sniffing solvent. The cops booked us into the drunk tank overnight.

I was charged with public intoxication. The other kid was charged with glue-sniffing due to his previous record. I had no idea of the charges until the next morning. We go before the judge and the charges are read at that time. According to the report, we were both sniffing glue! The judge sorts it out though. I was drunk only! The kid with me was sent to the county home, even though he was just drunk also. It was all due to his past record.

It didn't help his case that while we were being booked that he got out of hand calling the police names! It was common back then to call the police "pigs". One cop didn't like his lip or my long hair. Three of the officers beat the other kid pretty good. He vomited blood that night in the cell. I had kept quiet and somehow escaped a beating. It may have been that two beaten hippies might be believed more than one would if a complaint was filed.

When they let me out in the morning I was just relieved to leave the whole ordeal behind. It didn't happen that way. It turns out that the Waterloo Courier was notified of our arrests. They printed our names on the lower section of the front page. They listed us both as "glue sniffers"! They hadn't waited for the Judge or the hearing where I was charged with public intoxication! That wasn't front page news. False charges were printed against me. There would be more fallout coming.

Theresa's parents read the paper! They started to encourage Theresa to find a new boyfriend! My sister-in-law Sandy had seen it. She had called my parents before I had even got out of jail. It didn't matter what I said. I was once again being convicted.

By mid February things had died down a little. I continued working with Manpower. I knew things had to change though.

My parents stopped down sometime after my birthday. They told me to come with them for the weekend. I didn't have time to call Theresa. They were in a hurry.

It was for a reason. It was a Friday and they wanted to get me back to Oelwein before City Hall closed. They took me down to take a Driving Permit test! It was time for me to drive! I passed the test easily.

I stayed at my parent's for the next week. They had a 1966 Olds Cutlass. It was a white two door. When you pressed the accelerator on the Hemi you could watch the gas gauge drop with the same force you were pushed back in the seat. I used it to practise.

By the following Friday I had my first driver's license. I had only had the permit a week.

I also bought my first car the same day for \$150. It was a 1962 Corvair Monza coupe! It was a three-speed manual. I had never driven a manual but got it back to Waterloo somehow. I went out and bought vinyl racing stripes for it. The stripes were about four inches wide with a black spiderweb pattern. I also bought a T-handle for the shift lever.

I called Theresa! She hadn't heard from me in a week. She thought I had left her.

I drove out and showed her my car. She thought it was cute.

I quit my job at Manpower. I was able to find a new job easier with a car.

I went to work at Texson Campers! They made truck campers and toppers. I became head assembly foreman for \$2.10 an hour. I was now official and somewhat respectable!

I had my car. I had my girl. I had a job. How long would it last?

LEECHES !!!

Theresa started cheating on me. I am older now and realize she probably had good reason. I loved her at the time though and took it very hard.

I did the stupidest thing I have ever done in my life! I went into a grocery store downtown Cedar Falls. I bought ant-killer with arsenic. I mixed it with a Dr. Pepper and drank enough to kill five people. Suicide. The last door.

When I started vomiting I started to re-think the whole dumb business. Theresa wasn't worth it. No one is! I decided I wanted to live, if it wasn't too late.

I walked to a friend's apartment. My brother and his family were right downstairs, but I didn't want family involved. My friend checked me into the hospital. My parents were notified. My stomach was pumped. My parents were told that the doctor didn't expect me to live through the night! I was also given some injections of an antidote of some kind. It made my skin smell of sulfur. No one spoke to me. I had done the unthinkable for polite society. I had sought the darkness. How appropriate that my room smelled of brimstone.

I was eventually released. I refused to talk to a psychiatrist. They made an appointment for me against my will. I never kept it. I was charged fifteen dollars for it. I refused to pay it.

I left the hospital as arrogant as ever.

I am not sure how long Theresa and I lasted after the suicide attempt. I know it wasn't long. I briefly dated Shelda after that. Shelda was a classmate of Theresa's in Cedar Falls. When I realized it wasn't fair to Shelda or Theresa, I quit dating Shelda.

I continued to work at Texson Campers. The two dollars ten cents seems low by today's standards, but was about average at the time. I think minimum wage was a buck and a half.

Around this time I happened to be driving up Lafayette street when I spotted Bob Zaputil. I had known his older brother, Bill, from film class. Bob had long hair and I mistakenly thought it meant he was cool. He wasn't. He was a leech.

I had the need for someone, anyone, at the time. I just needed to forget Theresa. I started letting Zaputil hang around on my tab. Then Bob started bringing along his buddy, Richard Oxley. I knew I was paying for friends. I just didn't want to be alone.

The three of us would take my car and go driving around. We would sometimes go out drinking. Sometimes we would just listen to my records. Whatever we would do was always on my tab. I don't remember a single incident where Bob or Rich paid for anything.

We even formed a "smoke-band". I have belonged to many of these bands. They never amount to much more than "Hey, we should form a band.". A band conceived in the smoke of dreams, or sometimes marijuana. Most never get a name. This one did. We decided to call ourselves "Deep-Rock" after the gas stations by that name. If it had ever become an actual band we probably would have faced copyright-infringement charges. There was no worry of our every actually becoming a band though.

It was about this time that I started to think I could be a singer though.

Bob, Rich, and I spent my money for months. We'd ride around in my Corvair and do nothing. Things were still a little crazy. I was forgetting Theresa as best I could though.

I was still messing up. Bob and Rich weren't helping anything. I think Bob liked to encourage me to mess up. He was too afraid to let go or be himself. He needed others to do it for him. When I would do something wild or crazy he could live through me.

Even Zaputil's fantasy life was on my tab!

I would escape my leeches at times by driving into Oelwein to see my family there.

My old Corvair had an oil leak that I mostly ignored. I would get almost into Oelwein when the idiot light would come on. I knew better than continue to drive a car with the red dash light on. So, I would pull over and walk to the nearest gas station. This was a fairly common ordeal and I usually ran out of oil the same place. It was along the road the dump was on. I was still used to walking. I'd just pass the dump. I'd buy four quarts of oil and return to my car. I'd dump it all in and continue down to see my Dad.

Dad and I never really got along. Dad had been a "Sea-Bee" in World War Two. "Sea-Bee" being Construction Battalion or "C.B.". The sailors hold drive a caterpillar with one hand and have a machine gun in the other. Dad knew cars and mechanical things. I didn't. Whenever I would try to learn he would grab the wrench out of my hand. He would also tell me I was worthless because I didn't know anything mechanical. Any of the things I can remember my Dad ever saying to me involved the words "Useless", "Worthless", or "Trouble-Maker". My Dad told me he knew there was something wrong with me from the day I was born! My having a car did not bridge the gap between us.

"When was the last time you checked the oil in that piece of junk?" Dad would say.

"I just changed it." would be my reply. Which was half-true. I left out the part about running out of oil. To admit it would have only made me more useless.

Things were uneasy at home. I kept coming down to visit though. I wanted my Dad to accept me, maybe even respect me. I knew he could never love me. It wasn't in him. He could also never be proud of me. I was just coming around to be abused, I guess.

There was no real escape. Anywhere. Sundays with my parents were pointless. Friday and Saturday nights with my leeches were pointless. I was in a doldrum. I started going to a park in the country to just be alone and read.

I got in a fight with my Dad over my Corvair. He thought it needed a lube job. I thought it was fine. Dad very loudly informed me that if I didn't get a "fuckin' lube job" for my "piece of junk" that it was going to "fall apart going down the road and KILL someone!". Which was probably my worthless trouble-making plan. I equally loudly told him that I couldn't afford a lube job. I didn't know anything about cars. I thought a lube job would be around a hundred dollars. My Dad screams at me: "You better damn well be able to afford it. If you weren't so fuckin' useless you'd take care of your car. You are totally worthless. You shouldn't even have a car if you can't afford one!" I had been in this argument or ones identical to it all my life. I got in my car and left.

I didn't go home the next weekend.

I didn't go out with my leeches either. I took my car, my sandals, a bible, and went to the park to read. It was a beautiful day! I remember it was very nice in the park. When people started appearing I just picked up my things and went back to my car to drive home.

I got down to near Farnsworth Electronics corner. I stopped for the stop sign. I looked both ways and decided to proceed.

A Jeep comes tearing down on me from my left. There is a short haired male driver and his girlfriend. They are going so fast when they hit me that my car is spun in a complete circle. My face hits the side window bar with jarring force. My left cheek is bleeding when I get out of my car. The Jeep was going too fast to stop. It had hit a telephone pole and kept right on going into a second one before it could stop. The driver and his girlfriend were alright, although shaken.

I was stunned and shaken also.

While I am still trying to figure out what just happened the cops and a crowd arrive. The cops take one look at the short-haired "respectable" driver of the other car. They take one look at me. The first thing that they say to me is "Why didn't you stop for the stop sign?". To which I reply "What?". I was still dazed from having my face smashed against my left car window bar. The cops take my "What?", as meaning "What stop sign?". They write me up a ticket for running a stop sign. They also call an ambulance for the girl in the other car. She was drinking a strawberry pop when they slammed into my car. She had spilled a few drops on her blouse. Fully trained cops mistook strawberry pop droplets for blood? I was bleeding down my face but they didn't ask about it.

They also towed my car away without informing me as to where. The Waterloo Police Department was successfully sued a month later for doing the exact same thing to another driver. They got away with it in my case. I had to ask several people where they were going with my car. Someone finally said they thought it might be going to a particular place. I was able to call around and finally find my car. I had it towed again to my brother's house. The towing company was two blocks from Larry's. I still ended up paying two towing bills. If the cops had told me where my car was being towed I could have had just one bill.

It was still the early seventies. I was young. I had long hair. I lost my license for a month on the false stop sign charge.

The only bright spot was I don't think my insurance company paid for the other driver's Jeep. It did come out that he was reckless and speeding. Our respective hair lengths weren't visible in the paperwork.

I lost my job. Without a car I couldn't get to work. I borrowed an old 1963 Ford Galaxy 500 for awhile, but I didn't last long. Finally I just quit. There were other things going on and the new hassle of not being able to get to work just added to them. It was within days of the accident anyway.

My Dad came into Waterloo. We pried the bent metal off the front left tire enough for it to be driveable. I drove it and followed my Dad in his car. My brother Larry followed me. We got it into Oelwein and I parked it. When I did the steering wheel came off in my hands. It turns out that I was lucky to get it home before it did. My first little Corvaire was a total loss. At least the body was! The engine was still all right. I started looking for another body for it. Without a job I couldn't afford another car. We didn't look for another one at any rate.

I found a four door body! It was a 1960 automatic transmission. It had no engine or transmission now though. It had been being used as a chicken coop. I may have given ten dollars for the remains. We set about exchanging parts between my wrecked coupe and the four door body.

I was living at home again. It was the first time since I had left two years before. I had no intention of staying long! I was hoping to return to Waterloo as fast as I could, or anywhere I could get. I just knew I wanted to get away, soon!

My chance was coming!

“I've gone to look for America” - Paul Simon

I had turned twenty years old in February of 1973. It was now about June.

My younger sister, Carma, had just married what was to be her first husband. His name was John Wesley Davis from Detroit, Michigan. He worked as a portrait photographer.

I didn't care for John much. He was around my age was all we really had in common. John was “prestige” driven. I am not sure where he got it from. His dad was a gas station attendant. His brother or someone managed a pizza place. Maybe it was a glittering path he saw. A way out of Detroit. I don't know. I never did understand . But John did have something to offer me.

I asked him to get me an application to be a photographer!

A week or so later I got a phone call from a Steve Clevanger, owner of “Steve's Prestige Portraits”. It sounded impressive at the time. I should have been suspicious when I was hired sight unseen. I had almost no photography experience. I had made movies, and had taken hobby photos. I had developed my own black and white film and made prints. They didn't ask about any of it. I was blinded by the chance to get away. I didn't ask questions either.

It was a Friday evening when I got the call. I was to be in Jacksonville, Illinois by Monday morning. I had barely gotten the assembled Corvair ready. I hoped it would make the trip.

Something very important happened that evening. Something I wouldn't know the importance of until much later that year. It would affect me the rest of my life!

I needed gas to travel the 280 mile trip. I didn't have money for the gas. I hadn't worked in a few weeks. Every dime I had remaining had gone into patching two cars into one.

Someone may have suggested it, or maybe I just went to the person I most trusted at the time. I went to my brother-in-law Ken Follmer. Ken was almost a second father to me. A musical mentor and friend. Ken worked at a church janitor at the time. He and Darlene didn't have ready cash either. Ken got in his small coin collection for me. I think he may have given me the entire collection. It came to about four dollars in half-dollars and silver dollars. I promised to repay it!

I was on my way. In those days a tank full of gas cost around five dollars. The four bucks in silver that Ken had gave me nearly filled the tank. We also found a gallon or two in a gas-can. I tossed a windup travel alarm clock in the Corvair. I had about a six hour trip ahead of me.

Once again I was leaving Oelwein during the night.

When I got to Jacksonville I was to report to a Carl Snook! That was his real name. I was told we would be photographing at the Belscot store there.

I found the store and Carl spotted me. It was then that I found out what “Steve's Prestige Portraits” was. It was baby portrait photography. One of those outfits that takes pictures of your baby for a cheap come-on price and then tries to sell you a “package” of prints. The “photographers” travel from department store to department store with a camera, a tripod, a background screen, two umbrella lights, and a card table covered by a white rug. I failed to see the “prestige”. It didn't bother me that much though. I was game.

I was soon wearing a tan corduroy suit coat and pants. I also learned to tie a tie like an expert. I trimmed my hair up to a moderate level. I was a “photographer”!

For the next six months or so, I would travel the midwest. I would be in a different city, sometimes a different state, every week during that time.

I'd gone to look for America!

I became a really good portrait photographer. I got so I liked the babies. The home studio would get calls, from parents of my young subjects, praising my work. I was fitting the suit. At least for now.

I became familiar with the routine and the stops on it.

These are some of the stops I recall. Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Peoria, Illinois. Rantoul, Illinois. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Tulsa, Oklahoma. Wichita, Kansas. Cadillac, Michigan. Alpena, Michigan. Petoskey, Michigan. Saginaw, Michigan.

It was raining while I was in Ft. Wayne. I liked it there. It reminded me of the song "Little Green Apples". I felt at home in Peoria and even got to know a girl who ran the lunch counter there. She was a short southern cutie! I liked Milwaukee. Actually, I liked any of the stops in Wisconsin. Dairy country is very nice with its rolling hills. When I was in Milwaukee I'd go off by Lake Michigan and just sit and relax.

I didn't care for Petoskey, Michigan. I don't know why. I guess I just didn't find the people very friendly or something. On the other hand, I loved Alpena, Michigan. Lighthouse must have written the song "Brandy" after being in Alpena. I loved to go down to the docks and watch the sailing ships on Lake Huron. I'd smoke pot back in the motel room and dream of sailing.

I loved Tulsa. The Cosa Bonita Restaurant was my favorite dining place. The wind really does "come whistling down the plane" in Tulsa. I wasn't as fond of Wichita. Somehow Kansas always felt like a trip back in time about twenty years.

The months drifted by. I was content for the most part. It would depend on where I had to photograph and which of the other photographers might be nearby. The other photographers were like the cities. Some I liked. Some I didn't.

Jerry Yahtez was a great photographer. He had gone to Ray Vogue School of Photography in Chicago. I would analyze his photos to see what I could learn. Jerry and his mother had been in a car accident at one time. They had been rear-ended by a drunk driver. It had left Jerry a slight cripple in one arm and he would sometimes have epileptic seizures. He was cool though. He was also too talented for "Prestige Photos". He left to take pictures of weapons for the Rock Island Arsenal in Rock Island, Illinois.

John Davis was a fair photographer. His portraits were all right technically, but lacked any warmth. He would take two pictures per setting. He thought that was all he needed to bother with. Most parents got irritated, as they wanted three at least. John was treating their babies as subjects for assembly line photography. He wore a dark blue suit and gave off a cold vibe. John was into "prestige". He lives in Detroit now. I hear he has a nasty drug problem. Where is the prestige in that? There's more about John later.

Carl Snook. The name fit him. He was also hung up on "prestige". He fancied himself a ladies man. In reality he used women. He was into a superficial facade. When he wasn't photographing he'd play golf. John Davis and Carl Snook would go duck hunting. Carl would do anything to maintain his "image". He was a phony. He was a fake. A snook!

I didn't mind any of the other photographers that bad really. I didn't have to be around them. I would see them every few weeks. Some of them were irritating, but I could live with them.

I couldn't live with one. Tim McFate, or as I liked to call him Tim McFate! He was a sleazy David Bowie wanna-be. Times were changing. His kind were taking over. The seventies would see many more like him. He was a superficial user with no integrity. I hated him more and more.

Tim would bring run-away underage girls back to the motel to have sex with them. It didn't matter to him that I had paid for the room. It didn't matter to him that if something were to happen, that since I had paid for it, I would be implicated. He also didn't seem to mind who was in the room while he had sex.

Tim McFate is the reason I left photography. I dreaded being around him. He would skip out of motel bills. The other photographers and I would find out we weren't welcome anymore in those motels McFate had been to. He was underage. He would drink in the hotel bar by using my bar bill. He would bring hookers back to the rooms. I would throw fits. McFate was tempting fate! My fate was involved too! What a nightmare things were becoming.

His portraits weren't even good. Hell, his portraits were garbage! I looked at his prints back in the studio. He didn't even seem to know which way to point the camera. His prints were blurred. Over half of his pictures didn't show the background screen and instead showed the store behind the baby.

After the studio would sell the "packages" of our portraits, the leftovers that didn't sell, were filed away in boxes. The photographers would go through the boxes to find pictures for a portfolio. The best pictures would sell and not be in the boxes, but some of the leftovers weren't bad. On occasion a picture would be leftover just due to the parents not having enough money or something for the package. The boxes of leftovers were filed away with the photographer's name on them.

My "leftover" box was almost empty. McFate's was full. My portraits sold. I took good portraits. McFate's portraits were a waste of developing.

The salesmen who followed behind the photographers selling the packages were bitching about McFate also. None of the parents wanted McFate's stuff. The salesmen would also run into angry hotel and motel clerks all due to McFate.

Steve Clevanger was owner of "Prestige". He was just an older version of McFate, a sleazy con man. I heard rumors of him fleeing the studio by the back door when the tax man came in the front. I thought about complaining to Clevanger about McFate. It wouldn't have done any good.

It was the week before Thanksgiving. I made up my mind. I wouldn't say anything to anyone. I would just quietly check my equipment into the studio and go home. I had decided to quit. No money was worth what was happening.

The studio closed within a month or so after I quit. Steve Clevanger turned it into a massage parlor. Somehow it seems fitting.

I got home the night before Thanksgiving 1973. It was late, but there was something I had to do. I still owed my brother-in-law Ken the four dollars I had borrowed from him.

I could have paid him back anytime over the past six months. Ken had let me have the money in half-dollars and silver dollars. I knew it was from his collection. I wanted to pay him back the same way I had borrowed it. I had collected up half-dollars and silver dollars from when I was on the road. I finally had the four dollars.

It was late, around ten in the evening. I went down to Ken and my sister's house anyway. They were just thinking of going to bed when I knocked. I paid Ken my debt.

I am glad that I was able to. I had paid him back in the way he had given me.

Darlene later told me that they stayed up awhile going through the coins. They decided which ones to keep and which to spend. I went home to bed at my parent's house.

Thanksgiving Day of 1973. Ken Follmer died of a massive heart attack that morning. The ambulance taking him to the hospital got into an accident with a fire truck! Ken was already dead before he was even loaded into the ambulance. It was later revealed that he had a growth on his heart that closed off over half his heart when it shifted. There was nothing anyone could have done. Ken was janitor of the Methodist Church. He was cleaning the pews when he fell to his knees and died.

Thanksgiving has never been the same. My musical mentor was gone.

Everything Plastic

I wouldn't discover it until years later, but there had been another death. My Grandmother Forney had passed away while I was a photographer. No one notified me at the time. My younger sister, Carma, and her husband, John, had gone to the funeral. Somehow I was not told. It may have been on purpose or maybe not. Things are like that in my family. There are many things that I am "not told" for various reasons.

I never knew my Grandmother Forney anyway. She had lived in California my entire life. If she ever knew I existed is unknown. It would have been interesting to have at least seen what she looked like.

Grandfather Forney died before I was born. I never knew him or Grandma Forney. My Dad seemed to have hated his dad. I can't think of anything that Dad ever said about his dad that wasn't full of hatred.

The only grandparent I ever knew was my Grandpa Cue. I talked about him earlier in this writing. Carma and John did something else during the time I was photographing. I don't know how they came to have it, but they lost a piece of artwork that had belonged to Grandpa Cue. Mom had drawn a large pencil sketch of a few models while taking a mail-order art class. The drawings always hung in a frame over Grandpa Cue's chair. Somehow the framed artwork came into John and Carma Davis' hands. They lost it along with some other belonging when they didn't pay rent and the landlord locked them out of the apartment they were in.

I was among the last people to see Ken Follmer alive. I had also paid him my debt. After Ken's funeral I went into a period of grief and depression.

I came out of it within a few months. By May 1st of 1974 I had a new job and a future in plastics. I went to work for Gulf States Plastics in Oelwein, Iowa. First I worked as a Utility-Man, or fork-lift operator. I worked my way out to the warehouse next. Ultimately I would become a machine operator.

Gulf States was a cool place to work. The crew was almost all young people. Long hair had finally caught on in Oelwein. Most of the male crew had it. Most of the people I worked with were all right.

When I got my first check I went down to a clothing store in Oelwein called "The Hip Pit" and bought some new shirts and jeans. I tossed away my old corduroy suit. Now I started wearing fancy cowboy shirts. My favorite was white with nice embroidered patterns on the shoulder complimented with small rhinestones.

I don't remember what I had been driving, but once I got some money I went out and bought a 1963 Corvair Coupe. Actually, I bought two Corvairs. One was a hard-top coupe and the other a convertible. I mostly drove the convertible.

I also went back to my more creative pursuits. I bought a couple of super-8 cameras and a projector. I started making short films again. Most of my films at that time were stop-action animation. I used lots of model cars and had them running all over my parents' living room floor.

I had quit smoking pot in 1973. I was still smoking cigarettes, but not much. I would have an occasional Olympia Beer, but that was it.

One of the things I loved to do during the time was go to the A&W for root-beer. A big frosty mug of root-beer or lemonade was my favorite drink. Sometimes I'd buy a gallon and bring it home to share with everyone around. We'd all just sit outside in the summer and drink it. Fun times.

I was also building up my credit. I had a few plans for the next year.
I had a life insurance policy now. I owned two cars. I bought the first color television my family ever owned. I was still writing poetry. I was making films.
I was “respectable”. I didn't even mind. 1974 was a pleasant year.

The next year would change everything! Something was softly calling my name.

1975 - Gary and Bonnie

Up to this time I had always felt incredibly lonely. My poetry was full of references to loneliness. By January of 1975 I had given up on finding someone. Theresa was a memory. There were women where I worked. I even went out with one once. I had mostly accepted being alone though. How was I to know what was about to happen?

In January I did what I had been building up my credit for! I did what I had been planning for almost a year! I bought a brand new right-off-the-showroom-floor Buick! Wow! It was a red Buick Skyhawk! It had white interior with a V-6 engine! It was as close to a Corvette as I was able to come. That Skyhawk could almost fly! I gave way to the temptation too. I would wind it up to one hundred ten! I'd get caught at times too. I kept the speeding tickets down low enough to keep my license though. I wouldn't want to not be able to drive that beauty.

I was working with Gary Wright. He wasn't the Gary Wright of "Dream Weaver" fame, but he may as well have been due to what was about to happen.

Gary and I worked out in the warehouse together. We were the only ones on evening shift and had the warehouse to ourselves. We were a good team and could load all the shipments with time to spare. We would goof around and were good buddies.

Gary had a girlfriend. She and Gary were both from Independence, Iowa. She was a nice looking slim blonde named Becky. I met Becky one night at Gulf States when she came to see the other Gary. I talked to her and thought she was attractive, but that was it. She wasn't really my type. She was just someone to be friends with.

Becky knew a girl in Independence she thought might be interested in me. The other girl was Bonnie Hayzlett. Becky started talking to Bonnie about me. Becky and Gary Wright started telling me about Bonnie. The two of them were wanting to arrange a date between Bonnie and I.

It was just casual conversation. Bonnie had said she was willing to meet me. I had said I was willing to meet Bonnie. Nothing was coming of it though. It seemed to just be talk.

Sometime in late February I was given a photograph of Bonnie. She looked too young for me. The picture I received was her school picture for the previous year. I thought I could at least meet her.

I had someone take a polaroid picture of me. I wore my denim jacket with racing patches. I stood in front of the new Buick and tried to look cool. I gave the picture to Gary to give to Becky to give to Bonnie. It was March and still nothing was happening.

Gary Wright was actually a little too nice of guy. We had time to kill when we had light shipments. Gary would go into the main plant on his way to lunch. He would go to Hardee's and would stop to see if anyone else wanted something. It started out all right. Gary was just taking down orders from Dwayne Kuens and Dwayne's girlfriend, Darla. I didn't like Kuens or his girlfriend. But, Gary did and would bring them back an order from Hardee's. That's what started the problem. Once Gary was bringing back food for those two, everyone wanted Gary to bring them something. Gary in his kind manner obliged. It would take him over a half hour at Hardee's just getting all the orders. Since we were only allowed a half hour lunch Gary wouldn't check out when he left. Darla complained to her boyfriend, Dwayne, that her food was cold when Gary got back with it. Dwayne was supposed to be Gary's friend, but either him, or Darla, turned Gary in for taking too long for lunch. The foreman showed up one night unannounced. Gary wasn't in the plant, and wasn't checked out. Gary Wright was fired. He had been stabbed in the back for being a nice guy! He had also been betrayed by his friend, Dwayne.

With Gary no longer working at Gulf States I gave up any thoughts of meeting Bonnie.

It's was a nice pleasant spring evening April 11th 1975. It was around seven thirty or so. I had gone home to eat and was just returning to work. I had barely parked my Buick when Gary Wright drives up in his 1968 red Chevy. I am surprised to see him. It had been a week since he had been fired.

Gary is with his girlfriend, Becky. They have two other girls in the back of the car. One is Bonnie Hayzlett, the girl they have been wanting me to meet. I don't remember who the other girl was. I am introduced to Bonnie. She leans forward just far enough for me to see her for a brief second and says "Hi.". That's it. I would like to say there were sparks or omens, but it was just a simple exchange of greetings.

I had to get back in and punch the time-clock. I still had a little time to talk with Becky and Gary after I had. The two came in the break-room for a minute. They gave me Bonnie's phone number and told me to call her!

I was going into Waterloo, Iowa the next day for a few things. I altered my usual route so that the trip took me through Independence. I went to a phone in a laundry and gave Bonnie a call.

I asked her if she'd like to go out that evening. Bonnie said "Yes", so I asked her where. She wasn't sure. I suggested several places. She wasn't sure of any of them. I started thinking she didn't want to go out with me. Finally I asked her if maybe we could just go somewhere in town for a pepsi or something. She agreed. I found out later that she wasn't sure what her parents would let her do, or if she could even go out with me.

I showed up at her house later that afternoon. I parked my new car and walked up to the door and knocked. Bonnie tells me that no other guy ever had. Her dad answered the door. The best way to describe Bonnie's dad is as Floyd, the barber, from the old Andy Griffith Show. He looked like him and talked like him. It was surreal.

Bonnie's mom was asleep on a bed in the living room. I wouldn't met her yet.

I seem to remember Bonnie's dad wanting to see my driver's license. I didn't mind. I was legal and using my real name. I guess another guy hadn't been.

Bonnie and I finally leave together.

I was twenty-two. Bonnie was eighteen. My birthday was February twelve. Bonnie's was February twenty-second. We were both born on president's birthdays.

We drove around Independence awhile talking. I had also wired up an eight-track player for music while we did. I think the plastic may have still been on my seat covers. I don't know if Bonnie was impressed with my car. I am not even sure she was impressed with me. She hardly spoke if not spoken to.

Bonnie had long straight brown hair parted down the middle. She was pretty, but pale. She was also wearing clothes that struck me as hand-me-downs.

After we had exhausted places to drive past in Independence, we drove into Oelwein. Later on, I found out she didn't know if she was allowed to leave town. She didn't say anything that night though.

We went out for pizza in Oelwein at the Pizza Hut. Bonnie hardly spoke. I like to talk. I was starting to think she didn't like me. She was so quiet I thought for a second that she was treating me coldly. She wasn't really. I started to realize that she was just painfully shy.

When we left the Pizza Hut, it was starting to get dark. I thought I'd just take Bonnie home. I hadn't really planned to ask her out again. It had been a nice enough date, but I am used to conversation to tell if someone likes me or not. Bonnie had hardly said a word all evening.

We drove around a little more. I took her past my parent's house to show her where I lived. Then I decided to drive her home.

The Oelwein City Park is south of town. As I started to drive Bonnie back to Independence we stopped so I could use the park restroom. When we left the park we used the back entrance. When a person leaves the park, by that exit, they can turn right or left. To the right takes you to Waterloo. To the left takes you to Independence.

On impulse I asked Bonnie if she'd like to go to Waterloo with me. She said she would.

Once we were in Waterloo I started to be more myself. I wasn't really uptight or anything with Bonnie. It was just the usual unease of being around someone new. Now we were in an environment where I felt at ease.

While we were driving around Waterloo, I got in a car race with a pimp. Just one of those friendly little dashes. One or the other of you starts it by pulling up next to the other car and revving your engine. Then you just race a block or so. Nothing serious. In ways it's a tribute to the other guy and his car. It's a guy thing, or at least a "hot-rod" thing.

While we are having our short little race we crossed the First Street bridge at a high rate of speed. There is a brief bump that sends you air-borne a few inches off the ground. When I hit it I remembered Bonnie. She hadn't been saying a word. I hadn't meant to ignore her. I was just having a little fun.

I looked over at Bonnie. She had a big excited smile on her face. She looked very pretty too. She was actually enjoying herself with me! I decided she might be fun after all. I asked her out again.

I wasn't that sure though, so I asked her on a double-date with Gary and Becky.

I kissed Bonnie on our double-date. I can still remember it. Every detail.

Bonnie and I started dating regular. After about a month we started going "steady".

There is no moment that can be framed in time that can be pointed at as to when I fell in love with Bonnie. I just knew that Bonnie was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. I still think that to this day. I wanted to be with her all the time.

We dated constantly all summer. We just grew closer and closer.

It seems strange to relate this. I never noticed that Bonnie was short. I am about six and a half feet. Bonnie is five foot. I guess love is blind. When I looked at Bonnie I just saw someone I loved. When I looked in her eyes I didn't notice anything else.

We hated to say goodnight. We were required to check in with Bonnie's mom at the end of dates. Her mom worked as a night clerk at the Hotel Pinicon in Independence. We would dutifully stop there about one or two in the morning. After we'd tell Bonnie's mom we were going home we would go out riding around together for a few more hours. It was sometimes almost four in the morning when I'd get home.

When I would get home my mother would get up and lock the door behind me. I was never trusted with a house key after the one I had lost the first of seventh grade. I didn't care. I was blind to everything during the time I dated Bonnie.

If there is a "moment", it would be one day late that summer. I had gotten up and went outside. My dad was there in his lawn chair. I briefly talked to him. Without thinking about it at all, I found myself looking south. Independence is south of Oelwein. I hadn't even realized I was doing it until Dad said "It must be about time to go see Bonnie." He was right. I got in my car and drove to Independence. Along the way it came to me. I was in love!

Bonnie and I admitted our love for each other. We never spoke about it, but we both assumed we'd get married the next spring when Bonnie graduated high school.

When school resumed, Bonnie and I had been dating for five months.

Bonnie and I had been having sex together since June or so. In September she started to suspect she might be pregnant. When she told me I was overjoyed! We finally voiced the unspoken plans for marriage.

I took Bonnie to the doctor's. I sat in the waiting room while she went in for the appointment. When she came back out I kept giving her a "Are you?" look. Bonnie smiled at me and nodded her head. I loved Bonnie and now we were going to have a baby together. I was on cloud nine! I had never been happier.

I told my parents and Bonnie told hers. My parents didn't seem to care as long as we were going to marry. Bonnie's parents were upset!

I was blindly in love with Bonnie. That's all I knew. I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life. I had ignored all the signs about her family. I did have a few clues.

Whenever I had seen Bonnie's family it was a bad omen. The first time I ever met her brothers they were glaring out the window at some other long haired male and calling him names.

Bonnie's sister, Joan, would breeze by us with a very cold snotty greeting of "Hi, Kids!". The accent was on the "Kids" part.

Her brother, Chuck, has a heavy drinker. He may have been a raging alcoholic. There were concerns within the family about his drinking. Bonnie relates a time he was drunk and came into her bedroom. He threw the covers off her naked body and wanted to have sex with her. Bonnie thinks her dad may have been in the doorway wanting to watch.

Chuck was married while Bonnie and I were dating. One day he showed up while I was at Bonnie's parent's house. His forearms and hands were all bandaged up. His "official" story was an accident at work. The story I heard from Bonnie was more accurate. He had gotten into a drunken fight with his wife. I guess he may have gotten physically abusive. In the story I heard, his wife grabbed up their baby and ran out and locked her self and child in a van. Chuck was still violent and drunken. He broke out the van windows with his fists. That was how he had really gotten the cuts. They got a divorce while Bonnie and I dated. Neither Bonnie nor I can remember if she was his second or third wife.

Bonnie's parent's were divided as to what to do about her pregnancy. Bonnie's dad wanted the wedding called off. Bonnie's mom may have wanted it called off too. They may have been torn though. If they would forbid the marriage it might be worse than letting it happen. Bonnie might leave them in anger. The child might not have a name. Those thoughts must have concerned them.

Bonnie and I wanted married as soon as possible. We set the earliest date we could.

Bonnie's dad tried to encourage her to date other guys. He even thought that Bonnie may have been dating me due to my family name. He wanted her to date my cousin.

Bonnie's mom thought she could get me to call it off. That way, she thought, it would be my fault and Bonnie would blame me and not her parents. It was a futile plan, but one she tried to carry out.

Bonnie and I were blind to all of it. We just wanted to get married.

Bonnie's mom started to try to push and irritate me into calling off the wedding. She started making demands of the wedding plans

We had to have the wedding in Independence. Even though that meant my family going out of their way. She demanded Bonnie to tell my brothers and I to get hair cuts. Bonnie ignored her. She refused to let us have any music. She was afraid I might want rock music. She forced Bonnie to wear her sister Joan's wedding dress. It didn't fit Bonnie and Bonnie hated it. Bonnie's mom also had to authorize my guest list. She didn't want any "hippies" or "long hairs" at the wedding.

Bonnie's family didn't pay a dime for anything! They had just wanted to boss it in an attempt to get me to call it off. My family paid for everything. I paid for the church. My parents paid for tuxedos for my brothers and I. I paid for invitations. My sister, Darlene, paid for all the flowers. My family paid for the reception. Everything was on our tab for a wedding that Bonnie's mother had bossed and didn't want to happen.

Saturday November 8th 1975

Bonnie Hayzlett became Bonnie Forney.

I wore a white western-cut tuxedo trimmed with black. My brothers, Don and Jerry, were my best-men. Bonnie wore her sister's wedding dress pinned around her. Her sisters, Joan and [Princess] Carol, were her bridesmaids. Bonnie's brothers, Tom and Dick, were ushers. Her brother, Chuck, didn't show until after the ceremony.

We weren't supposed to have music. I had managed somehow to get Bonnie's mom to allow one song. It wasn't the song either of us had wanted. We ended up using "The Morning After" from The Poseidon Adventure. The film had been about a ship wreck. Somehow it was appropriate.

Bonnie's brother, Chuck, showed up about the time the wedding was over. He was so drunk he couldn't stand up straight. He had to clutch the back of a pew to keep from falling over. Once again, there was an "official" story. He had the flu. Bonnie moved away from him whenever he'd come close!

We had a cheap reception in the church basement. The high point was a lovely three tiered cake. White with blue trim. My parents had paid for it. Bonnie's parents took two tiers of the cake home with them. There was a special metal support still in the cake that the caterer needed back. It took me two weeks to get it back.

We had an appointment for wedding photos at Winter Photography in Oelwein after the reception. We were all there waiting for over an hour. Bonnie's sister, Joan, wasn't there yet. The photographer is very upset and has another appointment. My sister, Darlene, is paying for the pictures. She is very upset. When Joan finally arrives she snaps at us to get the pictures over with. She had to go bowling. She acted like we were holding her up!

Bonnie and I finally head off for our honeymoon. It had been a beautiful day all day. A very rare day for early November. We hadn't planned a honeymoon very well. It hadn't dawned on me to make hotel or motel reservations. We thought we'd go to Iowa City. We got as far as Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It had started to sleet and blow snow. We pulled into the first motel we saw. It was full. We had gotten married on the first day of hunting season! We were young. We didn't know. We hadn't made any reservations either.

We did find another motel down the road. We checked into it for the night.

Our married life had just begun.

Bonnie and I moved into our first home at 528 8th Street South West, Oelwein, Iowa. The house was owned by my oldest sister, Darlene. She had lived there with Ken Follmer, her late husband. Some of their belongings were still in the house. Bonnie and I moved it all into a downstairs bedroom. We set up our bedroom upstairs. Bonnie was starting to show.

The first few weeks of our marriage Bonnie was going to school for her senior year in Oelwein. She quit going without telling me. I was still working at Gulf States Plastics. I was a second shift machine operator.

Bonnie's parents came down one night while I was at work. They searched the house without telling Bonnie why. They may have taken a few things. I do know they found some old Ban-Trol tablets in a drawer. Ban-Trol is a nicotine pill to help with quitting smoking. They had belonged to Ken. The pills were wrapped and had a big "B" on them. The box was also in the drawer. Bonnie's parents gave her the third degree about the pills. When they left they took the Ban-Trol with them, along with whatever else they thought was "evidence". Evidence of what was never said.

Before they left, one of them pulled a stunt that cost me plenty. It may have been her dad, or it could have been both.

When I came home from work that evening the furnace was running full blast. It wasn't even that cold of evening yet. I asked Bonnie what it was doing running. She didn't know. When I looked at the thermostat I found the temperature set all the way up! Someone had cranked it to ninety five degrees! It had been running for hours. I turned it back down and discovered something else. They had also opened a window right next to the thermostat! Strangest of all, they had closed the curtain on the open window.

I ended up paying a two hundred dollar heating bill. It was a mild November. I could have heated the house all winter on the money Bonnie's parents had cost me that one evening.

I was still trying to get along with them. I dismissed what they had done as just caring for their daughter. I thought I could show them they were wrong about me.

Bonnie and I were very happy together. We were typical young newlyweds trying to figure things out. One day Bonnie went grocery shopping. She didn't know where the grocery store was and bought fast food items at Gibson's Department Store. It was really cute. I showed her where Super Value was. Super Value was a little more expensive than Fareway. We eventually did all our shopping at Fareway, but for the first year I thought it better to shop Super Value. It was less crowded for my shy new bride.

Bonnie also put my new Buick in the ditch that winter. We had been down visiting my parents a few blocks from our house. Bonnie took the car for some reason. She was having a little fun fish-tailing it in the snow when she lost control and put it in the ditch. She wasn't hurt and I just had it towed out.

I don't really remember much about our first Christmas together. I think we found an old artificial tree in the basement and set it up. We also went to both sets of parents homes.

We liked Bonnie's grandparents and went to see them often too. Her grandfather was legally blind, although he could see blurs. Her grandmother was very nice. One day her grandfather asked me if Bonnie was a good cook. I lied for her. Bonnie didn't know how to cook. She even burnt popcorn, which we ate a lot of back then. I found a recipe book for Bonnie. She still has it! I taught her how to pop popcorn over the stove.

We were adjusting to each other. Everything seemed to be going well.

Our child was due soon.

April 18th 1976 - Enter Joshua David Forney

We had gone down Saturday April 17th to my parent's house for the Easter weekend. Bonnie's water broke there. It was still early. She wasn't due for another month.

I wish it had just been the two of us having our baby together.

Dad takes over. He decides that I am too wimpy to be able to drive my own car to the hospital. He has my brother-in-law Doug Parker drive us! I object, but get nowhere. I am useless and worthless and better let someone else take care of things! Dad also calls Bonnie's mother. We have to take her with us. I object again. Dad says I am just trying to cause trouble. So off we all go to the hospital.

When we arrive at the hospital in Iowa City, Bonnie's mom tries to take over everything. When she is not admitted to the delivery area she tries lying to get in. She tells them she is a head nurse for the hospital in Independence. They still won't admit her. I am relieved.

Bonnie's mom was never a nurse, let alone a "head nurse". She had been a nurse's aide once briefly. She told a patient's family things she shouldn't have and was fired.

Finally, it's just Bonnie and I and about a dozen doctors! The Iowa City hospital is near the university. Every doctor is followed around by a half dozen interns. It was still better than Bonnie's mom.

Bonnie was in labor for a long time. I hadn't gotten much sleep either.

I am allowed in the room with Bonnie. There is a woman in the room across the hall screaming she is going to die! One minute I am standing there watching a doctor insert an IV needle in the back of Bonnie's hand while listening to the screams.

Next, I am waking up from a nice warm nap. As I slowly come around I notice that the ceiling is white. I thought that was odd and look around to see where I am. I am in the hallway! I sheepishly get up and go back in Bonnie's room. I had fainted out the door, or maybe was drug out there after I fainted. Bonnie is relieved to see me standing again.

Joshua David Forney was born early Sunday morning Easter of 1976.

I was told I could be in the delivery room. I had passed due to fear of fainting again.

I got to see Josh in the nursery area. Bonnie hadn't seen him yet. He was in a incubator at first due to his slightly premature birth. I stood by the viewing window and just stared at him. He was my first born son! I remember just standing there talking to him silently. I told him I was his dad and that I'd be taking care of him always. That I loved him.

Bonnie got to see Josh later that afternoon. We walked together to the nursery. Bonnie had a rolling IV stand hooked to one hand. I held the other hand. Bonnie fed Josh from a bottle. Since Bonnie could only use one hand I held Josh's head up while she did.

We were now a family of three!

I had left Gulf States Plastics the week before Josh was born. They had stuck me in the back between two people I hated. One was Duane Kuens, the guy who had betrayed Gary Wright. I took it as long as I could and then quit.

Two weeks after Josh was born I went to work for Triangle Plastics in Winthrop, Iowa. Gary Wright was working there now. He and Becky had gotten married. I had taken the wedding photos. They would get divorced later that year.

I started on third shift as a saw operator. Within six months I was a foreman and quality inspector. Gulf States had made styrofoam food trays. Triangle made plastic window shutters. The line I was foreman over made motorcycle fairings.

1976 passed while Bonnie and I were raising our first son.

~ 1977 ~ Here There Be Dragons!

Sometime early 1977 John Davis left my sister Carma behind. I guess he didn't see any "prestige" in being a father to his son, Jeremiah. He didn't seem to see any "prestige" in hanging around to see his second son, Travis, born. Carma was pregnant when he ran off with some bimbo from the massage parlor that "Prestige Portraits" had become! When he ran off he stole a couple of cameras, a tear gas gun, a tear gas cannister, and a few other items of mine. I failed to see the honor or prestige in being a thief.

I never saw John Davis again. I would just hear tales of his addled legacy!

At the start of 1977 I was working at Triangle Plastics as a foreman. I still had my 1975 Buick Skyhawk and two Corvairs. I was supporting my wife and son in moderate comfort. I had life insurance on myself, along with Bonnie and Josh. Things were well. Josh was learning to walk. I was planning for our futures.

Bonnie and I got in our first major fight though. Her parents had come down while I wasn't home again. They gave her twenty dollars and a lecture about our not having any money! I had money! I was paying the bills! We even had savings and checking accounts. I had a good credit rating. Bonnie's parents didn't even know what a credit rating was! I was furious. I loved my young wife though. I just gave her all my money and put her in charge of our finances. It remains as the only serious fight Bonnie and I have ever really had.

I thought that had put an end to it. Wrong.

A month or so later, possibly April, the owner of Triangle Plastics, the surreally named James Coffin, comes in second shift to see me! It was the second time I had ever seen him. Why was the plant owner there to speak to me?

I was told Bonnie's parents either called him or were in to see him. They wanted my paychecks transferred to Bonnie's name. It turns out we were getting a divorce! It was a total shock not only to me, but to Bonnie. We thought it was some sort of mistake and dismissed the whole thing.

I did decide Bonnie was spending way too much time at her parent's house while I was working though. So I left my job at Triangle Plastics for something closer to home.

I took a job as an assistant manager at the local Mobil Gas station. It was lower pay than I had been getting. It was only a few blocks from home though. I would be saving the gas money I had been spending driving to Winthrop, Iowa and back, so I thought it would work. At least until I found a better job. I also wanted to be closer to home and my wife and son.

It worked for awhile. Sort of.. Until Bonnie went down to see her parent's one afternoon.

Bonnie and I had been talking for the past six months about when to have another child. We had decided that Bonnie would try to get pregnant that summer. Bonnie's mom decided that we shouldn't have any more children. She took Bonnie to the hospital to get her more birth-control pills! I ended up with a medical bill I couldn't really pay, for something we didn't want! I was upset. We threw away the pills. Bonnie got pregnant again.

Bonnie's parents decided she should be living at home with her mother! When Bonnie wouldn't leave me, her parents insisted harder. They were planning a trip to California and wanted Bonnie to go with them. They told her to leave me behind. They told her lots of young brides spend six months to a year living with their mothers. We found out later that they had talked to a lawyer who had given them advice as to how long it would take to get a divorce based on desertion and non-support.

We talked to a marriage councillor about our problem with Bonnie's parents. He told us to ask them not to come to our house while I wasn't home.

Bonnie's parents raised the roof. How dare I tell them that? They weren't going to stand for it! They were going to send "some people around" to "talk" to me!

I lost my job at Mobil a few days later. Bonnie's dad had "straightened" things out! He came in to "talk" to me! I was working alone. The main manager was doing a review though. That means he was around silently observing my job performance. I was written up for having my father-in-law create a disturbance in the work place. I had a day off coming the next day. It was denied to me due to the report. I took it off anyway to be with my family. I was fired. Mobil was the first and only job I have ever been fired from!

It was mid summer now. Bonnie's family got worse! Her brother, Chuck, had a new girlfriend/future wife. Robyn was about sixteen. Bonnie's family was welcoming her into the family as Bonnie's replacement. It was designed to make Bonnie jealous, so maybe she'd come home! It just upset Bonnie. Robyn was also rumored to be pregnant and already living with Chuck. Bonnie's parents were blind to Chuck and his drinking. They encouraged Bonnie's younger sister, Princess Carol, to accept her "new sister" by spending most of the summer with Chuck and Robyn. Bonnie was even more upset. Her family was betraying her!

I voiced my opinion of the whole mess! It made everything worse than the nightmare it already was. I didn't care! I loved Bonnie. I didn't like what they were doing to her. They were blind to how they were hurting her. After awhile they were so blind with hate toward me they didn't care if they were hurting Bonnie! They just wanted me destroyed. At any cost!

Chuck started coming to our house all hours of the day and night to bang on the door wanting to fist fight. We had the cops remove him more than once!

We were being terrorized at home. When I wouldn't be home, her dad would try to force the door open when Bonnie would lock him out and hide from him in fear! He'd climb up on my cars and peer in the windows with a flashlight. We took out a Restraining Order with the Sheriff. Bonnie's dad just ignored it.

One afternoon he came down and stole a one-man crosscut saw. Bonnie begged him not to! My dad accused me of giving it to Bonnie's dad. Ten years later, it was like the house key I had lost. I was worthless and useless. That was Dad's opinion. His idea of "staying out of it" was to tell Bonnie's parents when and how to find us to harass us.

It all came to a head that fall with Dad's help.

I had gotten unemployment for awhile after Mobil. By late fall I had found a job at "Little Jenny's Gas Station" as a clerk. Bonnie had started coming with me to work to avoid her family and their trouble. Also to keep warm! It was October and we couldn't afford heat for the house. We didn't know what we were going to do that winter. Bonnie would watch Josh while I worked. It was warm at least, and away from where her parents knew.

Dad told them exactly when and where to find us! I don't know if they had called him or he called them, but Dad stayed "out of it" by sending them to my work.

Bonnie's dad drove a brown Pinto with a luggage-rack. We knew it the second we saw it. We could spot that car a mile back. It always meant trouble!

Bonnie had brought Josh with her to be with me at work. It was pleasant until we saw her Dad's car go by! He shouldn't have known where we were! We saw him look right over at the station! He drove up behind another building up the block and parked. We knew there'd be trouble.

Trouble wasn't far behind. Trouble was Bonnie's brother Tom's red car. There were four people in it. They slowed as they drove by the station. We thought they were going to pull in. There were customers at the pumps. They didn't pull in. They went across the street to use a Phone-From-Car. Only they didn't phone from the car. Tom and Chuck got out of the car! Tom called someone while standing watching over our way. We suspected they called Bonnie's mom. Chuck also spoke on the phone to whoever it was. They pulled the car out again and we thought they were going to come across the street then. There were still customers at the pumps though. Bonnie's brothers drove back in the lot across the road.

The lot across the road belonged to Pamida, a department store. Bonnie's brothers had used the phone at the far end of the lot, which was nearest us. Now they pulled away from the area and parked closer to Pamida and further from us. We watched them go in the store. We were relieved. We thought everything was a coincidence, or we prayed it was!

I had customers and couldn't watch more. When I could I looked for them. For a second I didn't see them. Then I did. They were pulling up to the pumps to get gas. Oh Oh.

Tom pumps the gas while he looks around. Then Chuck gets out of the car. Tom continues to pretend to still be pumping gas. There is only one other customer. Chuck briefly says something to Tom and then comes in. He tells me he wants cigarettes. There is still a customer in the store. While I hand Chuck the cigarettes and take his money the only customer exits. Chuck quickly uses one hand to grab me. He has the pack of cigarettes in the other but makes a fist with it to threaten me. I grab Chuck right back and clamp a hand over his fist. Chuck is scared! I crush his fist down over his pack of cigarettes. Chuck throws the ruined cigarettes at me when I let him loose. He wants to fist fight!

When I come around the counter to oblige Chuck backs off afraid. Out the window, I notice Tom glancing around nervously. Another customer had pulled in. Tom comes in.

Chuck is trying to trip me. A cheap cowardly street trick. You get the other guy down by tripping him and then you kick away at him. I wasn't falling for it. I stepped back and swung at him. Chuck managed to jump back and then he kicks me! The kick leaves a dirt mark on my pant leg but that's all. He didn't really get my leg, just the pants.

Tom is inside the store panicking now. I have grabbed Chuck and am threatening to toss him out the plate-glass window. Tom is begging me not to. I let Chuck go and he runs out the door. Bonnie tells Tom to get out that she is going to call the cops!

When Tom begs Bonnie not to call the cops she tells him about seeing her dad, that they are all in it together. She demands to know who else is in the car. There were two other people. Tom says "Don't you know who that is? That's your brother Joe!"

Bonnie doesn't have a brother Joe.

Bonnie screams at Tom again to get out. She is going to call the cops.

Tom leaves in a panic.

Who in the hell was "Joe"? We have thought it might have been Chuck's girlfriend's brother. Or maybe it was just a "street brother" brought as back up. Bringing a back up to a fight is considered cowardly by Waterloo street standards. It's a sign that you are afraid of losing and need someone else to help fight your battles. Chuck had proven himself a wimp. Maybe things would have been different if I had been a woman or he had had more to drink.

Bonnie did call the cops. Since the startion was outside the city limits by a few feet though we had to call the Sheriff. The Sheriff is in West Union. He recommends we call the Highway Parol, who tell us to come to their office on the other edge of town.

After going through channels we are finally able to file a complaint for assault. Chuck is lucky that that is all. Other charges could have been filed. The Highway Patrol told us to file attempted robbery charges! We said no. Assault charges were enough.

They arrested Chuck at Tom's house in Hazelton, Iowa. Hazelton is in another county, His crime had been committed in Fayette County. The Highway Patrol transferred him to the County jail in West Union, Iowa. Chuck also ran into contempt charges when he sassed a Judge and promised to repeat his offense as soon as he got out of jail. The Judge asked him to repeat his statement. Chuck wouldn't. The Judge kept Chuck in jail over night to cool off. He was also fined heavily. Chuck already had a long record. He had just added to it.

When I confronted Dad about his part, he just snapped at me and said “GOD DAMN IT, GARY! THEY'RE BONNIE'S PARENTS! THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW!” He told me about how useless and worthless I was again.

If Chuck learned his lesson is unknown.

Bonnie's parents didn't. They complained to the station manager. They claimed the entire incident was due to my holding Bonnie prisoner in the gas station. I knew the manager well, and he knew me. He had to report the incident to higher ups though.

Bonnie wasn't allowed to come with me to work anymore. I gave two weeks notice. If my wife wasn't welcome then I wasn't! That's what I told them. They asked me to stay another week. I did. Bonnie and Josh stayed with me!

At the end of the three weeks it was November. It was getting cold.

Bonnie and I had no heat in the house. We couldn't have lights on due to Bonnie's family. A neighbor found Bonnie's dad creeping around the neighborhood with a flashlight. He was “just checking” on his daughter's safety! The madness hadn't stopped or even let up.

Bonnie and I walled off the smallest upstairs room in the house with blankets. We had an electric heater we were trying to keep the room semi-warm with. We had nothing to eat either. We had no idea of what to do.

Josh was getting hungry. Bonnie was pregnant. We had no hope or future.

Bonnie's family continued pounding away.

Josh started to get sick! The cold and hunger were too much.

I went to my dad and humbled myself. He allowed us to live upstairs in a room. We weren't allowed any food though. At least it was warm.

Dad called Bonnie's family and wanted them to take us in.

Bonnie got in a fight with her mother over the phone.

My Buick Skyhawk was re-possessed.

We were afraid to make a sound in our upstairs room.

At least Josh was warm. Even if hungry.

!977 was just the beginning! The nightmare would continue for a decade!

February 25th 1978 - Logan Adam Forney

We were living upstairs at my parent's house in February of 1978. We had moved in when we had no where else to go. Neither Bonnie nor I can remember how we ate. My parents did not share any food with us. Josh was going on two years old and could say a few things. We tried our best to be happy. My twenty-fifth birthday had passed. Bonnie's twenty-first would be next.

We managed to get the state to pay for the delivery of the upcoming baby. Our doctor had told us to go to them. The woman representing the State of Iowa was pissed to see us. It didn't make her look good somehow to have poor people under her care.

The State of Iowa arranged for Bonnie to be driven to Iowa City by taxi about a week before the baby was due. Josh and I would be on our own until Bonnie returned.

It was very lonely for Josh and I. No matter what, we had always been together.

I started Josh on potty-training while Bonnie was gone. I put an old coffee can next to the stool in the upstairs bathroom. Whenever I thought Josh acted like he had to pee I would rush him to the can. When the can would be pee'd in it would make a sound. Josh was tickled. I would praise him. Within a week he would tell me when he wanted to use the can. It was a big start on toilet training.

There was also one very sad day! A day I still get emotional when I remember it.

Josh was acting unusually quiet. Finally he looked at me and said "Mommy all gone!". I fell to my knees to be with him while we cried together!

I never want any of my children to ever have to say those words ever again! Not about their mom or dad. Even when we die I refuse to be "all gone". I want there to be memories and a legacy!

Josh and I did all right, but we missed Bonnie. We needed to be a family.

I got a call the afternoon of February 25th 1978. Bonnie had gone into labor. I wanted to get there faster than I did. I was delayed while making sure Josh would be taken care of. He wasn't the main delay though. The biggest delay was finding a car for me to take. Actually I am surprised my dad let me drive myself.

When I got to the hospital in Iowa City I was told what room Bonnie was in. When I went to the room Bonnie wasn't there. She was in delivery. By the time I found Bonnie she already had a child in her arms, Logan Adam Forney.

I wish I had been able to be there for Logan's actual birth. The past can't be changed though.

Josh had been a blonde baby with almost no visible hair. Logan had a bit of short dark hair. He had brown eyes like the Hayzlett side, but dark skin like his dad. I was on top of the world again. I had two sons! What more could anyone ask for?

I had chosen Logan's name. I had just finished reading the novel "Logan's Run". All the kids were named by me actually. Josh is named for the song "Joshua Fit The Battle of Jericho", my favorite song from my Baptist roots. The boy's middle names were from the bible.

I remained around the hospital until Bonnie and Logan could come home with me. I didn't care for the hospital and just wanted my family all together. It was a great moment when the three of us left together.

When we got back to my parent's in Oelwein, I tried to figure out what could be done for my wife and two sons and myself.

I had hit bottom and didn't know how to get back up.

Useless & Worthless

Sometime in March we got our income tax refund. It wasn't much. I think it was a few hundred though. In our hardship it seemed more than it was.

My mother didn't seem to like Bonnie. I know why now, but didn't then. We didn't dare make a noise. Mom would scream up the stairs at times at us. It was usually directed at Bonnie. We needed to get out of there. But where?

Someone found an ad for a camper for sale. It was within our little price range. My brothers and I drove down and brought it home. It was too small for two people. It would have to do though. Bonnie and I moved in with our boys!

It was military green. A bad omen. It had a small sink with a gravity feed tank. The main feature was a small propane oven and range. We weren't allowed electricity. I wired up a 12 volt bulb to a car battery. It gave us some light. Every few days the car battery would get low. I would have to sneak a charger out to it when my parents weren't looking. It was still cold, but we could heat the tiny area with the propane gas stove. It was vented, but I still worried about an open flame. We would run the flame until it was warm, then shut it off and hope the heat didn't leak out. If it got too cold during the night one of us would stay up while we ran the flame again. The camper wasn't large enough for a toilet. We had a small plastic bucket in the tiny closet that we would use. Sleeping was a problem. There was a table that folded into a small bed. Bonnie and I would snuggle together on it. I built a small ledge area overhead for Josh to sleep. Logan slept in a cardboard box near us.

Somehow we managed to fit in the ten foot square area for the next few months.

There was still the food problem. Bonnie and I learned to forage some wild plants such as dandelion greens. I started selling scrap metal to the local junk yard. Most of what I could find to sell were aluminum cans and such. Today it would be called "recycling cans". On a good week I could come up with around five to seven dollars. Bonnie and I would buy some flour and make sourdough bread in the camper oven. We were just short of starving twenty feet from my parents kitchen.

I decided to move the camper!

One night Bonnie and I had just finished having sex when someone knocked on the tiny camper window. The window was right by my head. There was no mistaking the knocking for anything else. Someone was just outside and had listened to us making love and then knocked to let us know they had.

My first thought back then was it was Bonnie's dad back to his creeping around. I later learnt who it really was.

When I went out of the camper to see who had knocked, no one was there.

I told my dad about it the next morning. He told me I must have heard a dog walking on some tin. The tin was nowhere near the window! I know the difference between a dog walking on some tin way off somewhere and someone loudly knocking on a window right by my ear. I thought it odd that my dad was covering for Bonnie's dad. It didn't make sense.

Bonnie had a secret she wouldn't tell me until after Dad was dead a few years. It had been my dad who had lurked outside the camper. He had started pressuring Bonnie to get her to sleep with him. She was afraid to tell me.

I had no idea of any of it.

I did decide to move the camper anyway. I thought we would be better off further from the house. The area I wanted was covered with a huge pile of old lumber. I got permission to burn it. I couldn't burn the whole pile at once. I had to keep the fire at a minimum. I burnt and burnt for two days. It was drizzling a cold spring rain. First I caught pneumonia then tonsillitis. I was laid up in the camper for weeks.

Corn Blossom

When I recovered I managed to find a job somehow. I don't remember all the details. There may have been some sort of welfare program that sent me to apply.

Corn Blossom was a meat processing plant. They made Cudahy Hams! The plant was in Independence, Iowa and was only a few blocks from Bonnie's parent's house. We hoped they wouldn't find out. They didn't for almost two years.

It was still a struggle the first few months. Bonnie and I were still living in our camper all summer of 1978. We were still almost starving the first month. My dad was giving me a ride to work and picking me up. Until I actually got a check nothing would change. I smuggled a lump of pork out wrapped in a rag in my back pocket. Bonnie and I washed it off and cooked it. It was the first meat we had had in close to a year.

When I finally got my first check we went out and bought almost two hundred dollars in groceries. The Fareway store clerk gave us a funny look. We had only been able to spend two dollars at a time before.

My brother, Jerry, had purchased an old 1955 International Harvester short bed pickup for forty-five dollars. He just wanted the bed-box off it for his truck. I paid him the forty-five he had given for it. I started driving it to work without a box.

Actually, I thought it was a cool old truck. I started restoring it. I painted it a bright red. I put a visor back on it. I bought another original short-bed for it. I found original equipment running-boards.

The IH was 6 volt positive ground. I couldn't put a radio in it.

Dad acted strange again. He made me take my family and camper to Cutshaw Park. I hated camping. I wondered why he was sending us there. Cutshaw was in the middle of nowhere. I tried it for one night and brought my camper back to my parent's yard. Dad acted very upset to see me back! I couldn't understand why. We had gone camping, which is all I thought we were supposed to do. I didn't know we were supposed to live as squatters in some park.

After Dad was dead a few years I learned the rest of the story. Dad had been pressuring Bonnie to have sex with him. When she refused, he threatened to evict all of us from his property. That was why he sent us to Cutshaw to live! That's also why he was so very upset when I came back. He couldn't say anything for fear Bonnie would say something.

Bonnie would never be in the same room alone with my dad for the rest of his life.

I didn't know.

When it started to get cold in the fall of 1978, Dad built us a small shed on the south edge of his property. That way we were away from him. It wasn't too bad. A lot better than the camper. It was a twenty by twenty single room building. It had a wall furnace. We got the kids some bunk beds. We moved the camper close behind it. In many ways it was our first family home.

We spent the winter of 1978 in the "shop" as it came to be called. I continued work at Corn Blossom.

We ate well and were warm.

We were together.

~ 1979 ~ ENDINGS ~

In the start of 1979 my family of four was living in "The Shop", a twenty by twenty single room building. I was still driving my 1955 International Harvester pickup.

Sometime around February or March we got our income tax refund and bought a Pinto wagon. It was military green! It should have been lemon yellow. We had it about a week when we were trying to make it to Waterloo to do some shopping. We ended up stranded for hours in cold weather. People just kept driving by us. No one stopped to see if we needed help.

Finally we got a ride into Waterloo. It was almost evening and we had left late morning. The Pinto had thrown a front main bearing. We fixed it that time, but the car was a constant problem.

We were doing well. Meat processing pays well. We were eating ham. We had nice clothes. I had made a split rail fence for our driveway. The kids had plenty of toys.

I was even able to get back to my creative pursuits. I bought a 35mm SLR camera! It was a Pentax as well as I can remember. I took up photography again. By mid summer I had all the equipment needed for a small studio. I bought magnetic signs for the Pinto. I called it "Andromeda Photography". No one understood the name. I did two assignments. One of them was of a fellow workers display case. I am not sure what I was paid. Not much. Another assignment was also a fellow worker. He had me take pictures of his mobil home in Littleton, Iowa! I used an entire roll of film, and made prints. I was paid one buck for the whole job. I quit trying to take pictures for a living. It made a nice hobby though. I just kept taking pictures, but for my own enjoyment.

And for my sanity! Work was giving me an ulcer. I was swallowing Tums like candy. I had constant headaches. My skin crawled. My forearms itched all the time. I knew it was from doing something I secretly hated. I also knew I was supposed to "work for a living". The only time I felt human was behind the camera.

Sometime about mid summer my dad acted up again. I guess he was in touch with Bonnie's family. He found out that Bonnie's dad was restoring a Ford Model T. Dad said he wanted to go see it. I suspected something else.

My headache got worse! My stomach churned. I scratched my arms. I told my dad I didn't want to. He could go down by himself. Dad insisted that I go. I refused again to no gain. Dad also insisted that Bonnie go! Bonnie refused, the same as I had. She didn't want anything to do with her family. Dad won his way anyway.

It turned out that Bonnie's family was having some sort of get-together! The whole thing was about more than just looking at an old car! Now I knew why Dad had made us come.

I stayed way off by the garage! Bonnie refused to talk to her parents or anyone. She took the boys and went for a walk. Dad and my brothers talked to Bonnie's dad.

Of all the people there, Bonnie's brother, Chuck, decides to talk to me. I was very leary. I figured he might want to fight again. He didn't. He was on the outs also. His wife, Robyn, was also there. Apparently they had also been conned into an appearance. Robyn had had her baby. She had also had enough of Chuck. She was wanting a divorce. She didn't have anything to do with anyone either. It was the last I saw her.

The whole "reunion" was a disaster! No one wanted to talk to anyone. My dad may have been the only one who had a good time. I sure didn't. Chuck and I sat in his car and got drunk together.

When we finally got home that evening I was too drunk to make it to our little house. I fell down and passed out in the yard. Dad told Bonnie to leave me there. Bonnie brought me out some blankets. I finally woke up and came in when the ground got cold.

Sometime after the “Hayzlett Family Reunion” disaster Bonnie and I moved again. I am not sure of the details. Bonnie can't remember either. We moved back to 528 Eighth Street Southwest. We had lived there when we were first married. I was at work and Bonnie moved everything by herself. That's all either of us can remember. We may have blocked something.

My ulcer was getting worse. My doctor asked if I was under stress. I was 26.

Time passed. Both boys were toddlers. We had given up driving the Ford Pinto, although we still had it. I had the International restored pretty much. We both drove it. I was taking pictures still.

I also went back to my music to a degree. I fixed up an old acoustic guitar with some electric pickups converting it into a makeshift hollow body electric. I also wired a few eight track recorders together in a kind of multi-track. I could record a single track at a time. I wrote a few new songs. They were mostly a minimal blues. “Waterloo Blues”. “Star Child Lament”. “[I don't want to live in] L'America”. All silently voiced my need to escape.

I still have “Waterloo Blues”. It's gotten muddier over the years. It's been transferred from eight-track to cassette to CD and lost a lot of sound. It's still interesting though.

Bonnie was picking me up one evening in late summer. It's been several months since the “family” thing. She had the Pinto that night and was parked outside the plant. She saw her dad drive right by her! He looked right at the car. How did he know where Bonnie would be, at what time, and what she was driving? Her dad started to turn his car around when Bonnie quickly started our Pinto and dodged into the fenced parking lot.

When I finished work I came out and Bonnie told me about her dad. We didn't see him anywhere and just went home. I didn't think anymore about it.

The next day when I reported to work I was called into the main office. The plant manager and several foremen were all there. They told me they had been looking for me the night before. I told them that everyone on my shift had gone home at the regular time, same as I had. They wouldn't say why they were looking for me. I was written up for not asking permission to go home at the end of my shift. It was ridiculous. Workers with less seniority than I had were allowed to leave. I was the only one in the entire plant who had to ask special permission to go home at the end of my shift.

I couldn't figure it out!

After that I was required to wait for permission to go home. Sometimes I would be there for hours waiting for the foreman to come up from the offices to tell me I could leave.

I was getting four hours of overtime while I waited to be told.

I was taken off my bid job. They just put me on a machine where I had to stand for eight hours in one spot! My ulcer was terrible. My headaches were terrible. The itching on my arms was terrible.

I was having a breakdown! I quit! Within days of quitting my ulcer disappeared. My skin quit itching! My headaches were gone.

Over the years Bonnie and I have pieced together what happened. My dad must have called Bonnie's. He must have given her dad the time and place to find Bonnie. When Bonnie refused to speak to him, and he disappeared, he must have gone in the offices of Corn Blossom and told them something to make them look for me. Whatever it was may have had something to do with Corn Blossom holding me “prisoner”.

I was out another job due to Bonnie's parents and my own! It was the last time. I never worked again after that!

I started to see a psychiatrist about the “stress” that had caused my breakdown. I was finally diagnosed with “chronic depression”. I was considered permanently disabled. We went on Welfare while I continued therapy.

Bonnie went to work at the Goodwill. We weren't too bad off. We still had food and money.

We also continued to have trouble with Bonnie's parents! My dad was helping them harass us. We stopped talking to my parents as much as possible. It was hard though as my mom worked at the Goodwill with Bonnie.

Just before Christmas of 1979 Bonnie's dad came around. He caught me getting ready to leave in my pickup. He told me that he had talked to Bonnie and Bonnie wanted to come to her parent's house for Christmas. Bonnie and I had talked about going, so I wasn't too surprised. Bonnie's dad took it further. He told me that Bonnie didn't want me there! He said Bonnie was afraid of me! That she wanted to go alone! That she wanted her mother to pick her up! He said he had already spoken to Bonnie! He just needed to know from me when Bonnie's mom could pick her up.

It was a total lie! All of it. I knew it!

He pushed it even further. I told him I would think about it. That I would talk to Bonnie first. That upset him! He needed an answer now! When I wouldn't give him a time he starts in rambling! He is making no sense. He is talking like Floyd, the barber, from the old Andy Griffith show!

I asked him who all would be at their house for Christmas in an attempt to calm him down. He mentioned Bonnie's sister [Princess] Carol. I point out to him that they don't speak or get along. At which point Bonnie's dad made me furious! He replied that [Princess] Carol was a “very special lady and” they didn't “want her around Bonnie.”!

I love Bonnie! I wasn't going to hear any of it. I very loudly and firmly tell him to get the hell out of my truck! He starts to say something else. I inform him even more loudly and forcefully to get out! He is scared. He fumbles with the door handle. He is pulling it the wrong way. On the old International pickups the handle needs pushed forward to open.

I realize he just wants out now. That's probably best. I lower my voice and as politely as possible tell him how to open the door. He gets out and starts to say something else. I start my pickup and leave him standing there.

It was the last time I ever spoke to Bonnie's dad.

While I was leaving I watched in my rear view mirror. Bonnie's dad got his car and headed right for the Goodwill. He hadn't spoken to Bonnie. I knew that. When Bonnie got home she told me her dad had come in. He reported the incident where I yelled at him. He admitted I had frightened him. But, he also did an about-face. He told Bonnie we had had a nice talk and straightened everything out. He told her I wanted her to go to her parent's house for Christmas alone. He asked when Bonnie's mom could pick her up. Bonnie told him that she didn't want her mother picking her up.

I don't remember Bonnie's mother coming around.

We had a nice Christmas at our own house.

I don't think we even went to my parent's house.

1979 ended. A lot of things!

1980 Higher Learning

In 1980 I was finally offered an opportunity I should have had eight years before.

Our little family of four was living at 528 8th St. S.W.. I was going to therapy for my breakdown. Bonnie was working at the Goodwill. We were also getting some Welfare. I did a little snow shoveling in January. We were all right.

I was doing some cartooning as a hobby, along with some serious art. I created a character called "Bat-Rat" and wrote some comics around the concept.

I was still photographing. In February I did some nude photos of a Japanese girl. We began a sexual friendship. She came around several times. The friendship lasted for years.

During this time my sister, Carma, started dating Roger Stempke. I have nothing against Roger in any way. He and I are different kinds of people, but it's never been a problem. Roger is a lot bigger and better man than John Davis! They were married the following year. They are still married.

When we got our income tax refund Bonnie and I bought an old Mercury. It had full power interior is all I can remember about it.

My case was referred to Vocational Rehabilitation. As part of their program I was sent to testing in Waterloo, Iowa. The program was testing about twenty of us. We were sent to a class together. After the several months of testing were done most of my fellow classmates were sent to Hawkeye Technical School for re-training.

My testing yielded something even I had almost forgotten. I still had a genius level I.Q.. I also had low manual dexterity skills. The government decided it would be a waste of time to send me to technical school to learn to repair air-conditioning units! I was to be sent to college! They encouraged me to be a doctor. I remembered my fainting spell when Josh was born. I was tempted, but said no. They also encouraged me to study architecture. I have extremely high spatial thinking skills. I remembered reading Lewis Mumford, but I passed on architecture too.

I finally decided on Art, at least for the first year.

I applied to the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. I had to send a copy of my high school transcripts. I had half forgotten my years of honor roll grades. Bonnie was amazed at seeing my transcript. I was easily admitted to U.N.I..

Bonnie and I, along with the two boys moved to married student housing for the university in August. We had gotten a large disability check in June. We used it to rent a U-Haul trailer and packed all we owned. We quietly left one afternoon. We hadn't been speaking to my parents in several months. No one knew where we had gone.

The University of Northern Iowa was our new home for almost two years.

I made a friend of another Art student. Mike Hitchcock was an admirer of Christo Javacheff. We also shared an interest in photography. I liked and admired Mike. I think he looked up to me. We talked everyday. He had met Bonnie and the boys. Bonnie liked him too.

Just before Thanksgiving break Mike and I were planning a photography project together. We didn't have time to plan much. Mike had to paint over some snakes he had painted above his dorm bed. He told me his mother was coming to pick him up, that we would plan the project more when he got back.

Mike never came back from winter break. I heard he had gotten in an argument with his mother. Mike was found hanging in his closet. I had lost another friend on Thanksgiving.

1981 Slip Sliding Away

1981 reminds me of 1977. I was on top at the start of each and at the bottom by the end of each.

Spring break at the University of Northern Iowa I had pretty much completed my Freshman year of college. I planned to take summer courses to get a head start on my future. I felt comfortable and content. I was finally going to college. Cedar Falls was an intelligent community. Josh would start Kindergarten in the fall. Logan was almost three. I would carry Josh in my right arm and Logan in my left. Bonnie was even feeling at home. I bought her a cockatiel for a pet. At first Bonnie and the boys were a little afraid of the bird. After awhile the bird was hardly ever in her cage.

Things were well. There were also the not so great things. We had babysit for Steve Knuckles and his wife. The deal was supposed to have been in exchange for their watching our boys on occasion. We watched their son, Adam, almost every weekend. They never watched the boys. We had wanted them to so we could go out for our fifth anniversary. Bonnie and I were stuck at home when they failed to live up to the bargain.

Bonnie and I have never had anniversary plans work in over thirty years.

The main bad thing that happened was the election of Ronald Reagan. He was the new president. I had registered to vote in Black Hawk County, Iowa, but was not allowed to vote when I showed up at the polls. They told me I wasn't of age to vote. I was 27. My vote wouldn't have made much difference anyway. I had intended to vote for Walter Mondale.

When Reagan took office he put his "trickle down" theory into effect. Social programs fell right and left. I lost my Social Security Disability in the shuffle. I was sent in for a review. The person doing the review had to cut cases! He closed my case without listening to anything I said. I had told him I wasn't on medication during the interview. The last thing he said to me as I left was "Stay on your medication and you'll be fine.". I knew I had lost our only income!

Bonnie went to work for Sid McKenna Photography trimming pictures. I got a small part time job as a lab assistant in the Art Department. I took out a student loan to pay for school. I pawned and then lost all of my photography equipment.

When college resumed in the fall of 1981 I already knew we weren't going to make it. I started not being able to function. My depression returned. I had had friends around the university for the past year. Now I didn't. I couldn't get along with people. I was getting worse and worse. Bonnie and I transferred student housing areas to be as isolated from everyone as possible. I stop going to most of my classes.

I foolishly traded my ten thousand copy comic book collection for musical equipment. It was a futile move. Deep down I knew I couldn't start a new band. The equipment was just a grasping at straws. It was like a "teddy bear" from a childhood lived in another lifetime.

We had gotten back in touch with my family after being gone for a year. They immediately gave our phone number and address to Bonnie's parents! Bonnie would hang up on her mother when she'd call. Luckily Cedar Falls was too far to come to create trouble in person.

By winter everything was slip sliding away! My time had passed. There were signs of a new culture everywhere. R.O.T.C. returned to campus. I was being harassed by campus security for having long hair. My music was out of place and dated.

I became more and more depressed. I knew what our future was, and there was none.

I wrote poems in the margins of my school notebooks. The poems were invocations. I was secretly praying there was an answer that I could create either through art or music!

My dreams had slipped away once more.

1982 Nightmare Deja' Vu

January 1982 Bonnie and I moved all our belongings into a U-Haul. The Mercury had been in an accident. We junked it and bought a Ford LTD. We used it to haul everything we owned to Oelwein during a blizzard. I felt I was leaving the University of Northern Iowa in defeat and despair. How appropriate to be headed for my parent's home again.

We made it through the snow storm. We started unpacking our belongings onto a snowbank. I went in to face my dad. He snaps that we better not have everything we own out there! I told him we did. We had nowhere else to go.

I had to return the U-Haul trailer to Cedar Falls. I wasn't home for what happened. Apparently Bonnie's brothers came to my parent's house. Bonnie didn't want to talk to them but my parent's forced her to. Her brother's had the usual comments about my being no good, worthless, etc. They told Bonnie she should be living with her mother. We had been married for over five years. Bonnie just sat there and never said a thing.

Either my dad or mom must have called Bonnie's family.

We were allowed an upstairs room. We were not allowed food as usual. I had forseen the situation. Bonnie and I had stored up some canned goods before the move. We would have to survive on what we had. It wouldn't be enough. I started trapping and hunting wild rabbits for food. Somehow I kept us fed that year.

Josh graduated Kindergarten that spring. There was a little cap and gown ceremony at the city park.

Mom seemed to have an intense hatred of Bonnie. I didn't know why, until I knew about my dad's desires toward Bonnie. Mom must have known. It made for a miserable existence. We had no where else to go. We could barely speak or make a sound. If we would, my mom would scream up the stairs at Bonnie.

Logan started Head Start in the fall. His teacher was concerned that he barely spoke and would whisper when he would. I knew why. I couldn't say anything though. I assume the school blamed me. I started going to bed in a deep depression for days on end.

I raised some tame rabbits for awhile that year. The rabbit pen I had built was a place to get away and fell like I was doing something. I got attached to the rabbits and could no longer eat them.

Dad was the same towards me as ever. He reminded me constantly about the key I had "given" to someone when I was in seventh grade! Someone still had the key. They were just waiting for word from me on when to use it! I was useless, and worthless.

One time that summer a friend of Roger Strempeke was at my parent's house. He was a complete jerk! The creep started hitting on Bonnie in front of everyone. Bonnie went in the house despite the heat. She wouldn't come out until the guy left. Dad, on the other hand, seemed to encourage the guy. He was telling the creep what a wimp I was, etc. If I started to say anything Dad told me to shut up and go away.

Our Ford LTD had broken down. I had been wanting to get it towed back to my parent's house for days. Dad decides now would be the time to do that. He asked the other guy to go with him. I object! I can help tow my own car home. Dad snaps that I am not strong enough to push the brakes or stir the car without power equipment. Dad and the other guy tow my car home. I go to bed depressed for three days.

We spent 1982 at my parent's house. I felt trapped in a nightmare.

DOWN ON THE FARM

Summer 1983 - Summer 1986

The years spent “down on the farm” were the hardest years of my life! I don't like to remember them and may have blocked some memories. It was the bottom of a long downward spiral. It would take almost another decade to recover from those years. They are presented here as best I can remember. The exact year or month that related events occur are cloudy or unknown.

My Dad had decided sometime in 1983 to get my family out of his home. I am not sure where or how he heard about the farm we were sent to live on. It may have been through nameless relatives. The farm was on the outskirts of Oelwein, about three miles east of town. The people who had lived in it previously had torn the property up considerably. It had been being used as a scrap metal yard. There was still metal and scrap scattered everywhere. The driveway was a rough circle. There was no actual yard. Weeds were everywhere.

The house was fair, although needing repainted. There were no storm windows on the old two story home. A few of the actual windows were broken.

Dad thought it was good enough for his worthless middle child and family.

I went to work cleaning the old farm up as best I could. I picked up all the trash. There was an old foundation from a barn that had burnt down years before. I threw the trash there. As soon as I could I hired an independent garbage service. I replaced a few windows on the house. I closed off the circular driveway and made a more standard “L” drive.

The worst problem was heat! The previous occupants had torn up the copper tubing that used to run to a liquid petroleum tank used to supply fuel to an inside heater. They had also stolen or scrapped the heater. The tank was long gone. Everything used to heat the house was gone. I checked into replacing the tank, the heater, the tubing. It was beyond my means.

We were forced to use wood heat. The first winter I was able to afford wood. I bought an old wood stove at a farm auction. It had a crack that worried me, but would have to do.

The first summer we lived on the farm we had no car. We would have to walk the three miles into town and back. My younger brother Jerry bought an old 1952 Chevy for the tires off it. I bought the old green Chevy off him for fifty dollars and put some old tires on it. The Chevy was a cool antique. It had a column three-speed with a six engine. I loved it. I went out to a nearby junk yard and bought a visor for it. Most of the car was all right. An old lady had owned it first. She was blind in her right eye or something. The old Chevy was all creased and dented on the right side where she had side-swiped it dozens of times. It ran though and so we had a car!

We bought furniture at consignment auctions. We also had some furniture given to us. We unpacked our belongings that had been in boxes since 1981 when we had left the University of Northern Iowa. The boxes had sit in my parent's house for almost two years.

I am not sure where we got beds.

Bonnie went to work at the A&W again. She had worked there before when we were first married. She walked to work. Three miles to work and three back.

No one would come visit for months at a time. We had been dumped there and left to fend for ourselves. Out of sight. Out of mind.

TALES FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE BOTTLE

The stories that follow are remembered in no particular order. I am starting with the better and working toward the worst! The years on the farm were a study in madness and isolation! I found myself completely cut off from everything that ever mattered to me. No matter what I did to put the pieces together didn't work. I was in a cess pool with no escape!

Life on the farm was miserable from the start. It was a three mile walk to town and three miles back. No one came to see us. My family had just dumped us there like trash.

We had the usual struggle to even eat. We tried to get welfare and were rejected for the first few months. We foraged and did what we could. I still had some rabbits left, but couldn't bring myself to eat them. I think the only reason Bonnie and the boys did was it was something to eat. We had a few chickens. I couldn't even eat them. I was a lousy farmer. The only thing I could eat were the eggs. I tried growing a small garden. The land was too corrupted with old scrap metal. I took some timbers and made planters. I filled them with dirt from the nearby woods. Nothing really grew.

It would be months between visits from anyone. On a few of the rare occasions when we would walk into town I still felt alienated. I barely spoke to anyone the three years we lived on the farm. Sometimes I would walk into town to see my family. Dad would treat me the same old way. I would usually slowly walk back to the farm even more depressed.

I tried and tried everything I could. It was all grasping at straws. We were stuck on that farm with no hope.

We finally got a little welfare towards winter of the first year. We were able to buy fire wood for most of the first winter. The old woodburner was cracked but held on.

It was the only winter we could afford wood. The last two winters on the farm I was forced into burning anything I could find. That meant a lot of green wood. Green wood creates creosote. We had several chimney fires. The old woodburner gave out after the first winter. I had more and more trouble finding replacements. By the final winter I was using old barrels fitted with legs and a door. It was always cold in the house.

We only had cold water. I don't remember the exact details. It was hard to stay clean. I got pin-worms several times while living on the farm. It also comes from eating meat that hasn't been properly cooked. I can't remember what we used to cook food with.

The house was poorly sealed. In the summer there was dust everywhere.

Our entertainment came from old televisions I would buy at auctions for few bucks. I would cobble them together enough to run for awhile. When one would blow out I would cobble another one together. Auctions provided a small bit of entertainment, until my depression got worse. After awhile I quit going to them. I didn't really have the money for them anyway.

For the first year I tried to keep my spirits up. It got harder and harder.

The following are tales from the bottom of the bottle. The note from the bottle had gone unread and tossed away. No rescue was coming. The farm was T.S. Eliot's Wasteland, Dante's Inferno, my own personal ground zero.

A GARDEN OF VERSE

I went back to my creative pursuits. I gathered together my scraps of writing. I had material written here and there over the years. Most of it was from while I was attending the University of Northern Iowa. There were a few poems from when I lived in Waterloo, Iowa in the early seventies. I sorted through the material and did some minor editing. I self published the slim volume as "Night of Stone".

Night of Stone was my second edition of poetry. I had self-published "Catharsis" in 1972.

It felt good to be back to my poetry. In the next three years I would self publish several more slim volumes. The volumes were comprised of sixteen poems each. Each volume was a concept or idea. The sixteen poems were all relevant to one theme. Some of the volumes could be read as a single sixteen page poem.

The volumes were:

CATHARSIS - 1973

The Trilogy of Night 1973 - 86
KNIGHTFALL
NIGHT OF STONE
ECHOES OF THE NIGHT

SISTERS - 1986
HERE THERE BE DRAGONS - 1986
DEJA VU - 1986
THE QUEST - 1986
ODE TO A TOAD - 1986

The Aphorisms 1973 - 1994
THE LORDS OF PERCEPTION
THE FORMGIVERS

Other volumes were to follow in later years.

Word got out about my poetry as it had in the past. I made the Oelwein Daily Register again. There was a small article on me with a photo of me and one of my volumes. Several of my skinny little poetry volumes were available at the Oelwein Public Library. They were listed in the card catalog. I would check on them from time to time. People would actually check them out to read.

My poetry remained in several libraries in the area for nearly a decade before being banned by the Laporte City Police Department in 1994.

I took up calligraphy and did ornate editions of my verse.

There was something very wrong though. I use poetry to express bottled-up feelings. I had plenty during the time on the farm. The more things pressed on me the more I wrote.

The isolation was taking its toll. I was cut off from everyone and everything. The poetry from those years expressed my inward feelings. A bit of lonely beauty from a dismal time. My poetry was a rose growing from bloody thorns

The Three-Minute Band

The Three-Minute Band happened sometime early on during the farm years.

My dad, my brothers, and I, had been going to consignment auctions. The sales are frequented by an odd assortment of people just like any gathering.

Somehow my dad knew Joe Hicks. Joe Hicks was a minor character around Oelwein back then. Auctions are like social gatherings. Some people are there as much to talk as to buy or sell. Joe Hicks was just one of an assortment of people Dad talked to.

Joe Hicks had two sons and a daughter. The only one of the kids I can still put a name to is Jeff Hicks. I became moderately acquainted with Jeff. We were never friends.

Somehow the subject of music came up with someone. I am not sure of where or with who. What came up was that I played guitar. Joe or Jeff Hicks found out. They both came down one day looking for me. They wanted to know if I'd be interested in a band.

I asked a few questions, but not many. I am usually game for anything to do with music.

The main thing that fascinated me about the proposed band was when they said they knew a drummer! The drummer was Ron Reed, my old drummer from *Scream of the Butterfly*.

They also said they knew a guy who could play organ. They said he even had one.

I started thinking of the old days with Ron right away. Maybe this new band could actually work!

We talked about equipment. I didn't have a guitar at the time. I did have a set of drums though. The drums were left over from the equipment I had collected up just before leaving college. I was told if I provided the drums that Joe Hicks would provide me with a guitar and amp. I said fine.

A week or so later, Jeff Hicks picks me and up to take me to his house where the band is forming. I don't have any way to haul the drums. Jeff hauls them.

The proposed members of the band are there. Ron Reed is there! It's great to see him. We connect again like old times. My hopes are high.

There's another guy there with a foreign vibe. I can't remember his name. I had gone to school with his girlfriend who was there. Her name was Patricia Syler. I had also gone to school with Mary Syler.

The guy with the accent actually has an organ there! It's a pretty cool Hammond, not exactly a rock instrument, more of a church thing. My hopes are still up though.

My hopes last about three minutes! The foreign guy keeps wanting to call me "Gar", which I absolutely hate! Every time I tell him I hate being called anything other than my real name, he thinks it's cute or something. He keeps calling me that. I point out that his girlfriend goes by Pat, but wouldn't like it shortened any further to "Pa". I hate being called "Gar". It grates on me like someone growling at me. I am definitely having second thoughts.

I decide to give him a chance though. Maybe we can straighten out the name bit. IF he can play. He can't. At least he can't play rock. He plays amateur church music. The only song he knows is "The Old Rugged Cross"!

My hopes are sinking by the second.

Ron and I play one of the old "Scream" songs I wrote. "What've You Done?" sounds better than ever. Ron and I have matured as musicians. My hopes rise slightly.

The church organ guy asks what the chords are. My hopes rise slightly. Maybe he can learn. He can't. He doesn't know where the chords are. He learned to play from the book that came with the organ. My hopes go down.

I want this band to work. I really do! I want Ron Reed as the drummer. I want to make music again. I am torn about the organ. I am silent though.

Joe Hicks takes over!

For most of the first get-together of the new band it had been five of us in the Hick's basement. There was Jeff Hicks. What his part would be I didn't know. There was the foreign-vibe church organist and his girlfriend. There was Ron Reed and myself.

Joe Hicks had been off somewhere. I don't know where. He arrives about the middle of things and sits briefly listening. Jeff brags to his dad about how well everything is going. I am silent. Jeff has Ron and I play a song for Joe. Ron and I oblige with another playing of an old "Scream" song.

Joe asks why Foreign guy isn't playing with us. He doesn't seem to understand when we explain it to him. Joe makes us play "The Old Rugged Cross" with the organ. Ron Reed refuses. I should have. I just play a basic guitar bit behind the organ. Something in the Key of C. My hopes are fading again.

Joe takes me upstairs to talk to me. He needs to take his pills. He is on nerve medication. He doesn't say why, but everyone knew it was due to his wife having an affair. Joe starts telling me I need to take control of the band. He tells me a long story about a bull. He also tells me that we should play "Rugged Cross" and not the other stuff. He tells me we need to know more actual "songs" for when people come up with requests!

Joe's wife is with another man, and he is telling me to be a "bull"! ?!

Finally I am allowed to go back downstairs to the basement and the "band".

My hopes are completely gone! I am not going to join this band.

I try to talk Jeff into giving me a ride home. He had given me a ride and hauled the drums there, now he refuses. He also asks me when I am going to haul the drums home. I have no way to.

Pat Syler turns to me and asks what we are going to call the band.

I snap "How about "The Three-Minute Band? That's about how long we were together." She doesn't get it. She thinks it's a great name!

I walk home in the chilly evening air. I never get the drum set back. A year or so later Hicks' are moving somewhere and take the drums to my parent's house. My brothers sell them to a pawn shop. I don't get any of the money.

The Three-Minute Band is still-born.

I ran into the church organist a few months later. He still kept trying to call me "Gar" and wondered why I just turned and walked off.

The Three-Minute Band was just another attempt to create something. The isolation of the farm was getting to me. My depression was getting to me. The longer I was stuck in a situation I hated the worse I got. On the farm I was forced to deal with people I considered my intellectual inferiors. I was isolated. I was misunderstood. I hadn't drank in years. I went back to drinking.

Events during our stay on the farm are foggy in my memory.

I was an unhappy round peg being forced into a square hole!

Terry Conrad & His Stoned Ponies!

The more terrible the isolation got on the farm, the more I sought to escape through music or poetry. I would grasp at any straw in my quest to start even a tiny spark of salvation through creativity. I would even lower myself to redneck band status. That would be Terry Conrad & His Stone Ponies!

The Ponies had placed an ad in the free shopping news. They advertised they were a country band looking for musicians. I read the tiny ad and thought about it before calling Terry Conrad. When I called him I asked him if he had ever heard of Linda Ronstadt. The actual Stone Ponies would be her band. Terry had heard of Linda and said his band was a tribute. I guess he thought she wouldn't mind his trademark infringement.

I talked to Terry awhile. He lived off in Dundee, Iowa. All I had was my old 1952 Chevy and the starter was out. It would start if one person pushed it and the driver popped the clutch. I wasn't sure if I wanted to bother. Terry told me his band was a big thing. He seemed all right over the phone. I said I wasn't really much on country music, but could sing some Elvis. He told me not to worry about it. He said to buy a bass guitar and I could play that in the band. I was in just like that over the phone. He told me the band would meet in about a month. I didn't have a phone and left my dad's number.

Bonnie and I couldn't really afford the money for a bass guitar. We scrapped it together somehow though. We found an old bass for less than a hundred dollars. I had an old amplifier of sorts that would work temporarily. We thought it might be all right. Maybe my depression would lift if I could get back to music.

I practiced a little with the bass. I also brushed up on my vocals. Back then I could do a pretty good Elvis. My singing was somewhere between Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley. That's when I was still young. It's changed now.

After a few weeks, Dad got a call from Terry Conrad. Dad had asked Terry why the hell he would want me in his band. Dad told Terry I couldn't do anything worthwhile. Terry said not to worry, to just bring my "old fiddle" or anything. I am not sure if Terry forgot he told me to buy a bass, or if it was my dad who got the instruments mixed.

I was starting to have silent concerns with Terry Conrad and his Stone Ponies. I had already invested more money than we could afford in a bass I couldn't really play. What was this fiddle business? Everything had been over the phone. I worried about that too. I may sound country when I speak or sing, but to actually see me is another matter.

The big day arrives to meet the band.

Bonnie and I pack the bass, an amp, some sheet music for songs I had written, into the old Chevy. We get some of Bonnie's friends to watch the boys while we are gone. I coast the Chevy down a small incline in our driveway and pop the clutch to start it. We're on our way.

When we arrived in Dundee we were supposed to show up at Terry Conrad's. That's all we were told. We stop at some house and ask directions. Terry Conrad's turns out to be a body shop! Bad vibes!

We pull up in our old Chevy. I am not so sure about anything. I tell Bonnie to wait in the car. I tell her to wait and see how things go before shutting off the Chevy engine. I don't bother with the bass and just leave it in the car while I walk up to check things out.

There are about four or five red neck looking guys loitering in the body shop. They give me a dirty look. I asked if any of them are Conrad. One of them is. I tell him I am Gary Forney.

The “group” is mostly drinking beer. Conrad asks me what I planned to play. I reminded him he had said bass. Someone points out they already have a bass player. I hear Bonnie shut off the Chevy. I am worried by her decision. We might have to make a quick getaway. On the other hand, I am determined to make music, even with the “Stoned Ponies”.

Somehow I manage to talk them into letting me sing a number with them. It's the only song I remember them performing while I was there. I do remember a lot of beer drinking. I do “Heartbreak Hotel” with them. Actually it was pretty good. One of the members of Terry's group wants to do it again. Terry says no.

I slowly get the impression that Terry doesn't want me around. I had been recruited over the phone. My personal appearance just wasn't “good ol' boy” though.

I am getting bad vibes from Conrad. He is ignoring me, and probably regretting having a “hippie” around.

I go out to the car for a minute. Bonnie asks me how it's going. She had heard me sing. She had thought things were fine. I told her it wasn't and that I thought we should just get the heck out of there.

The Chevy won't start!

I go back to the body shop and ask for a push. Conrad acts pissed. A few of the band guys say fine though. They'll help. Bonnie is behind the wheel. They give her a push. I am wanting a decision out of Conrad. He doesn't say a word. One of the guys from the band asks me if Bonnie knows how to pop the clutch. She doesn't. I go running after the car while I hear laughter from Conrad and the Stone Ponies! I manage to catch up to the Chevy open the door and crowd in while it's moving. I pop the clutch. We return home.

Bonnie had thought everything was fine. She said I had sounded good. I knew what had happened. I wouldn't be a part of The Stone Ponies.

I remembered telling Conrad that I wrote songs.

I remember his reply: “So what? We all do!”.

I just sat out in the yard-swing depressed even further and drinking until it was too dark to see anymore.

A few weeks later I got a package from Conrad. I had left a demo-tape while at the body shop. My tape was in the package along with a note that said “The answer is NO!”.

I don't know what ever happened to the bass guitar.

I had never heard of Terry Conrad and His Stone Ponies before my brief membership. I have never heard of them since.

“Long hair does not compute!”

Bonnie and I had bought one of the first computer games when we were first married. We had purchased a Coleco “Pong” game for \$35 new back in 1975. It was just another toy like our lava lamp, black light, strobe light, mood rings, and eight-track.

While we lived on the farm the Atari 2600 video game system had come along. We were like any family and bought one of the new systems. It was as much for me as it was for the boys. I became fascinated with the games, not only playing them, but dwelling into the mystery of how they worked.

Shortly after the Atari rage, home computers started their first primitive invasion. The first curiosity was with computer games. Atari games were relatively expensive. With a home computer you could buy magazines with free games to be typed into it.

I somehow managed to buy a Commodore Vic-20, possibly with our income tax refund from Bonnie's work at the A&W.

I related to that Vic-20. Computers in those days ran on “Basic”, a simple enough computer language to learn. I was soon among the first of the “computer geeks”. I programmed a few impressive games.

I sent a few of my ideas to some computer magazines. Soon I found my name in print here and there. I was in Compute, Run, Commodore, and others. I had tiny bits printed almost monthly in Run.

I actually got a phone call at my parent's house from an editor at Run Magazine! They were pleased with my writings. I even got a few small checks for my writing. I think the largest was for fifteen bucks, but it was an honor anyway.

One of the other magazines considered one of my games for a long time. It was a western text adventure for the Vic-20. It was negotiated for several months, but eventually wasn't used. The Vic-20 was becoming obsolete.

I also had an arcade style game I had programmed called “Intercept”. I had found ways around the limited memory of the little Vic-20 and had spectacular graphics for my game. It was a 3-D shooter. By the time I had developed it though the Vic-20 was history. The magazines that had been spawned by the early computer phase were also history.

I couldn't afford to keep up with the technology. I had the skills, but nowhere to use them.

I also found myself an outsider in the field. I had spotted a flyer advertising a computer group in Oelwein. I had thought about calling them when one of the members called me. They had actually seen my name in some of the magazines and were excited that I lived in Oelwein. I was invited to their next meeting!

When I arrive at the meeting I am given odd looks. I don't look like a “computer nerd”. I have long hair. Ever since Cheech & Chong, a lot of people equate long hair with stupidity! It's an overlooked bigotry. It was in full evidence at this meeting. The guy who had been so excited about inviting me there acts embarrassed by my being there now. I feel bad vibes all over the place. I recognize one of these “experts” as the cable guy who forgot to ground a cable when he installed my parent's cable television. His incompetence fried a television when a surge hit it. He was at the meeting telling how the best program he had ever seen was one that spelled “Happy Birthday” as it played the song. I quietly left.

Intelligence and long-hair didn't compute!

Computers and magazines were just another straw.

All the Boys are down on the farm

The years on the farm saw the boys in early childhood. Josh went from seven to ten. Logan went from five to eight.

I remember when Logan started Kindergarten while we were living on the farm. A bus came to pick up both the boys. Bonnie wasn't home when they would leave for some reason. The first few days Logan wanted me to hold his hand and walk him right up to the bus. Over the next few days he only wanted walked partly to the bus. The hand holding was first thing dropped. After while he didn't want me walking him to the bus at all.

I guess they rode with Jerry Hayzlett on the bus. Jerry was named after Bonnie's brother, Gerald, who had died of leukemia when Bonnie was young. Due to all the problems we had had with Bonnie's family the boys didn't know any of their relatives on their mom's side. Young Jerry told the boys that his grandpa had a picture of Josh and Logan.

The boys never complained about conditions on the farm. Maybe it was because they were so young. We had video games and toys for them. They were able to have pets. We had a dog, Flash, on the farm. The boys also had bunnies. We raised a few pigs. The boys got to ride a pig when the pig was large enough. Just boyish fun. They had bicycles and lots of places to ride. In the winter there were a few places to sled. We only had one toboggan. When they couldn't share, I told the one being left out to just use a cardboard box. It was fun and worked great. Soon the other one wanted a box.

The boys also liked to play in the small woods at times. I caught them with a small campfire once. They had very carefully built a stone circle and were burning a few leaves in it. I just made sure it was safe and let them keep the fire.

I would let the boys "drive" my old Chevy at times. Driving amounted to coasting it down a small incline. I taught them how to shove it in neutral and steer. They could coast quite a way down the drive. I think they hoped it would reach the road, but it couldn't as the incline reversed to go up and out on the road. It was fun for them though.

The boys each had an upstairs bedroom. When it was too cold in the winter we would all sleep on the floor around the stove. Sometimes we had to be careful of sparks and couldn't be as close to the heat as we'd like. It wasn't as bad as it sounds and we survived.

Josh got in a fight with a kid on the bus who had been bullying him or Logan. The other kids said Josh "clobbered" the kid. As far as I know the kid left Josh alone after that.

We had a pet turkey, Geronimo. At first the boys were a little shy of the tom, but soon got used to him. Geronimo loved to circle Bonnie while fluffing his feathers. It's a male dominance thing. Bonnie got used to Geronimo's show after awhile. The boys loved to make him cackle by banging some metal pipes together. Geronimo would voice his dislike of the sound and the boys would laugh. Geronimo died of old age. No one could ever bring themselves to eat him.

We took the boys to see "Star Wars" and "E.T.". Logan cried because E.T. went home! I don't know if he did when E.T. "died", but Logan was upset that E.T. just left. Josh wanted to talk to me about Star Wars. He told me he knew we didn't have things like light sabres, or warp drive, but wondered what we really had. I had to tell him that we didn't have much really. The space shuttle pales against the Millenium Falcon! Josh is still a Star Wars fan!

I bought a bicycle motor-assist engine at an auction. I installed the engine on a three-wheel bicycle. It was a sort of moped. I would run it and the boys would ride in the rear basket. Bonnie would ride regular bike beside us. We had some fun family times.

Despite the hardship of the farm we endured as a family.

There's no escape.

I don't know how made contact with who. All I know is my dad started talking to Bonnie's mom on the phone. Trouble followed.

One day, when I was done visiting my parents, my dad pulled me aside out in the garage. He told me he had been talking to Doris, Bonnie's mom, and Doris had told him that I was cashing checks with my wife's name on them! It was a total lie! Dad told me Doris had sent Bonnie some checks and that I had cashed them. Doris had sent ten dollars cash in a Christmas card to Bonnie. That was the only money ever sent. Bonnie had gotten it. I hadn't opened the card. I had nothing to do with any of it. Dad refused to believe me. He told me all he knew was he wouldn't be cashing checks with his wife's name on them.

Years later, when Dad was reminding me about the house key I lost, I reminded him of his pulling me aside and accusing me! Dad denied the entire conversation and told me I had "heroin on the brain"! I have never used heroin in my life! The whole thing was just how Dad treated me.

Dad also gave Doris our full address and directions on how to get there. He said he had just said he didn't know where we lived, just "somewhere" outside of town. Mom corrected him. She was pissed that Dad was spending so much time talking to another woman. She said Dad had given Doris exact details on everything.

Dad also gave Doris information about where Bonnie worked and how to find her alone!

Bonnie's brother showed up first. Bonnie ignored him. The next day her Dad came in demanding to talk to her. Bonnie ran in the back room of her work and hid from him. I heard from one of her fellow workers that Bonnie turned white and acted terrified. She refused to speak to him. I also heard he wanted some food but refused to pay for it. Bonnie was afraid to go to work after that.

Bonnie's dad asked my dad why Bonnie acted afraid every time he saw her! He thought it was a sign of Bonnie being afraid of me! He thought I was abusing Bonnie. I don't know what Dad said.

Bonnie's brother Tom started driving by the farm constantly.

We started getting letters from Bonnie's mom. We would return all of them out of fear.

We just wanted left alone. It was too much to ask.

Bonnie's grandpa died while we were living on the farm. We weren't notified in time or something. Anyway we didn't go to the funeral. Her grandmother died four months later. After a lot of debate we decided to go. Bonnie was raised more by her grandparents than her actual parents. Bonnie loved her grandma. I think we got my parents to watch the boys. Bonnie and I went and sat as far back as possible on the friend's side. We didn't want to sit with the Hayzlett family. We didn't even want seen by them.

Gerald Hayzlett's widow spotted us! She came right over and sat by us asking way too many questions. She was too personal. It bothered Bonnie. Finally she got the message and left about the time the service started. At the end of the service when family comes down the aisle Bonnie's mom was very loudly saying "Bonnie and Gary are here!" over and over. Bonnie refused to even look at her mother.

We regretted going.

We happened to be in a store shopping one day. Bonnie's brother, Dick, was there with Doris. Bonnie hadn't seen her mom. Doris reached out to touch Bonnie's arm. Bonnie yanked it away, and left the store.

I was blamed.

The Lost Doorway

The band “Doorway” was still-born. It never got off the ground.

In a last ditch effort to try for anything musical I had placed an ad in the Shopping News myself.

I have always wondered how bands conceived by small ads fare? To me it sounds like personal ads, only with music in place of relationships. I wonder how a “musicians wanted” ad would work in a swingers' magazine?

I was desperate. I was willing to try anything.

We didn't have a phone on the farm. I didn't want people calling my parents. The little ad listed that I was seeking musicians to form a band. It gave my name and the rural route number of the farm.

I got three responses!

One was from a female singer. I don't know what she was thinking. I didn't need a singer! I still don't need a singer to this day. She hadn't even sang before. She just “wanted to”. I have heard similar before. Nope. Thanks for nothing.

The next was a female piano player. I thought maybe! She could actually play! She played Van Halen's “Jump” pretty well. She was also too painfully shy. I think someone had put her up to answering. Maybe her parents trying to force her into something. I told her that I might be able to use her for the band. I didn't hear from her again. I didn't care when I didn't.

The third response was even worse! It was a former classmate and neighbor, Nathan Kappmeyer. He said he had seen my ad and could play bass. I knew better. Nathan was just telling bar-room stories. I think he also had an eye on Bonnie! She couldn't stand him. I was desperate though and gave him the benefit of the doubt briefly. When no one else answered the ad, I had Nathan over. He acted like a trapped rat whenever I'd mention music. Finally I placed a bass in his hands and asked him to play something. He got a look of panic on his face. I had caught him in his story!

Actually, I wish he could have played. I wasn't very fond of him, but I could have used someone. Hell, I could have even used him!

That was it. I wasn't too surprised.

I gave up looking.

Two young girls came around to see Bonnie. I guess they worked with her as car-hops. They wanted to party with us, so we had a small one at our house in the country. We hooked up a microphone to an amp and sang together to some records. At a stretch we were a “musical group”. It felt good when the girls looked at me sexually while we sang together. For a brief moment I felt like a rock star.

That was it though.

The Doorway never opened.

Just another straw I grasped at in failure.

Send in the clowns!

Bonnie's Dad visiting her workplace drew unwanted attention from her employers. Knute and Florence Sondrol were well meaning people. We just didn't need their efforts to "help". They found out we were living in poverty in an unheated farm house. Naturally, they gossiped it to everyone due to their "concern". Things always get exaggerated in the process.

Florence was friends with Marie Burger. Marie Burger lived across the street from my parents. She also had a burning hatred of my family. The Sondrols probably thought Marie would help.

Marie Burger reported the exaggerated stories of our living conditions to the city! It wasn't that she was concerned. She just wanted to create trouble for my family. She reported us at living in the "shop" building. We hadn't lived there in over five years! Burger reported seeing Bonnie living in it! The city made my dad tear it down. Dad was pissed at me again.

In a further effort to "help", Knute, and his son Dave, decided to verify that we actually lived on the farm. They went over the the golf course across the street where they pretended to hit some balls on the driving range. Basically they just stared over at the house. There was nothing going on.

Florence Sondrol continued her "concern" over our poverty. She told all the other car-hops! One came out to our car when I was picking Bonnie up from work. She had a box of clothing to donate to us! It was insulting to an extreme. We left it on the ground and drove away.

Next, Florence tried to find "friends" for Bonnie. Most of the car-hops were girls in their early teens. Bonnie didn't want to be friends with them.

Enter: "The Sisters".

Mary Pat was around Bonnie's age. She was cook the hours Bonnie worked. Mary Pat's husband was a city worker named "Skippy". Mary Pat immediately started giving Bonnie "advice". She blamed me for our poverty and started suggesting other guys that would be "better" for Bonnie. Mary Pat was quick to give Bonnie lectures to memorize. Mart Pat's answer for our hard times was for Bonnie to leave me.

Mary Pat's sister, Becky, was married to one brother, but living with another brother. I would see Becky and her guy friend together sometimes. They would have their car parked by a patch of woods where they were carrying water buckets into the trees. They would wave to us after awhile. They were growing marijuana in the woods right behind the Highway Patrol Offices! Mary Pat and Becky were both surprised when the plants were discovered.

It didn't stop Mary Pat's meddling though.

Mary Pat and Becky had another sister. They both bragged about their sister and brother-in-law being swingers. Apparently the sister and her husband had lived in California for awhile. Somehow that made it acceptable.

I attracted my own clown.

I had briefly met John Necker at an auction. We had nothing in common in any way. Yet, he seemed drawn to me. He would come around every Wednesday night for years. He chewed tobacco, which I found disgusting. He had tried to join the National Guard. He wasn't intelligent enough. Everything I said went over his head.

Bonnie quit her job at the A&W. We hoped it would stop the clowns. It did, but the damage was already done.

ALL TOGETHER ASSHOLES

When Bonnie left the A&W, we were left with even less income. We had some “Unemployed Parent” welfare was all. It was still the Reagan years and there was a push on to drop us from even that! The program was under pressure to send me back to work despite lack of improvement in my depression.

We were desperate to find an income. I tried to get my Social Security Disability back.

I called Vocational Rehabilitation! The guy I finally got through to told me they needed to close my case. He asked me what I had been doing. I told him that Bonnie had been working to support us. “Mr. Mom” had just come out. The guy had seen it. The new catch-phrase of the day was “role-reversal”. He wrote it down. It still wasn't good enough to close the case. He asked me about my hobbies. I told him I didn't have any. He asked if I had anything I could sell, like any collections. I told him all I had was a few old black-powder guns that I didn't want to sell. He told me he had to close the case! He put me down as having returned to work in “sporting good sales” due to the black-powder guns. He told me goodbye. Hung up the phone. Case closed!

I went to the Social Security Office. They told me my case had been closed and was too old to re-open. I would have to start the process all over again. They gave me a few forms and told me to have them filled out by a psychiatrist.

I went to the only psychiatrist in Oelwein. He didn't want to talk to me. My case was supposed to have been closed. It wouldn't look good for his office to say I was still disabled.

I was reluctantly given a standard form to fill out. Among the questions for depression was one about being suicidal. I answered that I had attempted suicide in 1973. I didn't put down that I would never try that again. I thought maybe if I let them think I was suicidal it might help my case. It was a big mistake.

My case was being passed from one agency to another like a hot potato. It was a nasty ordeal. I was still disabled, but my case had been closed. Each agency would pass the case off to whatever other agency was down the ladder. My case made them look bad while it was in their files. By passing it off to another agency, the agency that passed it could mark it “case closed”.

The problem being that I was still around.

Each agency would find some reason to pass my case on. The Social Security office passed it to the State of Iowa. The State of Iowa passed it to Fayette County. Fayette County tried to pass it to the City of Oelwein. The City of Oelwein passed it back to the county saying we lived outside the city limits.

When the case returned to Fayette County it had been handed back and forth a dozen times. The information had also been altered so it could be passed off to each new department.

When my case finally came to rest in Fayette County, my chronic depression was listed as “schizophrenic manic depression”. The Vocational Rehabilitation Office's “sporting goods sales” report listed me as having hand-guns! It failed to mention the weapons were antiques. The report also listed Bonnie and I as having “marital problems” which was totally untrue. Bonnie wasn't responsible for my depression. The report stated that we had minor children. That was true. What was made of the various reports was a complete fabrication!

My case was passed to Children's Services! It was reported that I was a potential schizophrenic suicidal menace who might kill himself after murdering his wife and children!

The “potential” and “might” part ended up crossed off the file!

Fayette County sent a woman out to “investigate”. She interviewed the boys at school. Were the boys warm enough? Well, not really. Did the boys know if I owned any guns? Of course they did. Had the boys seen or heard me fire a gun? Of course they had! I hunted rabbits in the woods in the winter. I had also been forced to put down a goat to put it out of its suffering. The boys had heard me fire plenty of shots.

I was reported as threatening to murder Bonnie and my boys and then kill myself., and that the boys had heard the shots. There was no evidence of any of it.

The Child Abuse woman talked to the Fayette County Attorney. The Attorney and I had gone to school together. We had been Explorer Boy Scouts together. He didn't believe her flimsy evidence.

The buck had to be passed again!

Fayette County sent Alternative Treatment Associates to our house. The A.T.A. were allegedly alternative family councils. They made everything worse and worse. I started calling them the All Together Assholes.

The first thing they did was to try to replace me as father to the boys. They assigned them Big Brothers. The Big Brother program dropped the case.

Next A.T.A. found out that Bonnie had been an incest victim. They gave her a book about incest and tried to get Bonnie to contact her brothers. The reasoning was to “establish a new relationship”. Bonnie refused, and I was blamed. My depression worsened.

A.T.A. reported our house as being “cold” to the Child Abuse woman who said it was state law that any house with children must be 68 degrees at all times!

I had been given a form for a doctor to fill out by the Social Security. I was told if I could get a doctor to sign it that I could get my disability back. A.T.A. showed up at my appointment. They talked to the doctor about the case, even though they were not legally allowed to. They said they “just happened to be there on another matter”. The doctor turned me away on A.T.A.'s recommendation! When Social Security checked into the case, both A.T.A. and the doctor denied everything.

We were dropped from the Unemployed Parent program. A.T.A. claimed I wasn't cooperating with them because I hadn't kept an appointment with a therapist eight years previous. I hadn't even known about the appointment. I was living in Cedar Falls at the time and the appointment was in Oelwein. The appointment wasn't with A.T.A. either. It was just more idiocy from bureaucrats.

How were we supposed to keep our house warm now. It was already November 1985.

Bonnie and I were stranded on the farm with no income for our tenth anniversary.

A.T.A. told us they had thought that by eliminating our income that they could force me back to work. They were under pressure to close the case! They suggested I go to work as a janitor. I started getting migraine headaches. My stomach churned. My skin crawled.

A.T.A. said my symptoms might be being caused by my relationship with my father! Duh.!Who gave them the first clue? They also kept trying to use Rogerian psychotherapy on me. When I mentioned it to them, they asked me about it. They knew that Carl Rogers was a contemporary of Freud's, but that was all. They were ignorant of his methods.

Carl Rogers theory was that the patient wanted to heal himself. The therapist should only ask questions, such as “How do you feel about that?”!

The problem with Rogers is if the patient doesn't want to talk. I certainly had nothing to say to A.T.A..

Menage a Trois le Sanctuaire de l'Âme

I have been dancing around this subject. I have been hesitant to make my private pleasures public. I wouldn't talk about the subject now if it weren't important during this phase of my life.

By mid November of 1985 the All Together Assholes were seriously getting to me! Everything they did just heightened my chronic depression. There was something wrong with everything I did.

I had helped Josh with a school project. He needed to make something from a plastic milk container for a recycling project. We made a windmill of sorts. Josh won a prize and got his picture in the Oelwein Daily Register. He was very proud of himself.

A.T.A. found fault in the effort. I don't remember how they said it was wrong, but they did. They sounded like Dad. "Don't let those kids know you are proud of them!"

Bonnie gave A.T.A. a few copies of my poetry. Bonnie's handing the poetry to them was wrong. Somehow it meant I was doing something wrong to Bonnie.

There are things I do for Bonnie and things she does for me. It's equal and loving. Somehow A.T.A. found fault with anything I did.

I was getting very tired of everything. We had been cold through the previous winters. Due to A.T.A. the coming winter looked to be the roughest yet. The other winters we had at least had some sort of income.

Everything was worse after A.T.A. than it had been before!

I didn't even feel human.

I had been there before. My own father called me "useless" and "worthless". Now it felt like everyone was against me.

I was near another breakdown and I knew it.

I found my own salvation!

My Japanese "friend with benefits" still lived in Oelwein. I had almost forgotten her. It had been over five years. Everything was the same though. We went to bed together again. I felt better than I had in years. I started feeling at least semi-attractive. Maybe I was still worthwhile. I felt wanted again.

A week after the session with my Japanese friend, I picked up Pam in a bar.

I don't usually drink in bars. I just happened to be there that afternoon killing some time. Pam also just happened to be there. She was an attractive mature woman wearing jeans and a sweater. I thought she had some nice legs in her jeans. I also thought her sweater looked full. I wanted her.

Pam came over and sat next to me. We were almost the only two in the bar that afternoon. We started talking. Pam had a Mae West way of talking which attracted me.

We became friendly after a few drinks. Pam told me she was married. Her husband was in jail or prison or somewhere. She said she had been going to court. She didn't really say what for.

After a few drinks I asked Pam if she'd like to go with me to another bar or somewhere. She agreed. It was still afternoon and we couldn't find another bar. We bought a six-pack and just drove around and talked.

When I thought it was time, I drove us to the farm. I wanted Pam and I thought she wanted me. I was willing to find out anyway.

Before we went in the house, Pam stopped to pet my dog, Flash.

I patted Pam's rear and we went in.

Pam and I sat at the kitchen table for awhile talking. I showed her one of my poetry books. I loved her smile. I knew what I wanted. Finally I told her I could take her back to town or we could go upstairs to bed together.

Pam gave me her hand and I led her upstairs.

Pam performed oral sex on me. While she did she told me that her husband had forbid her to perform it on another man. She seemed thrilled to be doing it for me.

We settled into regular sex for the next few hours. Pam kept getting wilder and wilder.

The session turned into a Menage a Trois that lasted for hours.

When the women got up to get dressed, my fluid was streaming down both their legs.

When I finally took Pam home it was eleven at night. We had been in bed together since around three that afternoon. Pam wanted to find somewhere else to continue to have sex between just her and I. She couldn't think of anywhere though, so I drove her to her house. She told me what a great lover I was and she hoped she would run into me again.

I told her I'd like that too.

She gave me a deep penetrating kiss and slowly walked to her house.

Every light was on!

I looked for Pam again the next day, but never saw her again.

I felt human again! Pam, Bonnie, and my Japanese friend had given me a much needed gift. I was desirable! I felt warm, cozy, and loved. It's hard to describe. It's a case of "you had to be there". I hadn't felt attractive in years. I did now. I found a confidence in myself that had been missing for years.

I had faith in myself again.

We told A.T.A. we were through with them! All they had done was to make everything a nightmare! My renewed confidence told me we were better off without them. I was right!

Once the All Together Assholes were gone everything improved.

We managed to get our welfare back. This time it was with Bonnie as the Unemployed Parent. It was an income anyway!

I had learned plenty about how to heat the house over the three years we were there. I rigged up a two barrel heating system that kept us fairly warm without chimney fires.

There was no one to tell me how to do things! My parents didn't visit all winter. There was no one to criticize me. No one to tell me everything thing I did was wrong!

That winter the isolation worked for us, rather than against us.

It was the first step along the road to recovery.

There would be other stumbling blocks. My depression wasn't cured.

However, things would never be as bad or as low as the years on the farm. Pam had been an angel of salvation.

For Pamela
Copyright 1994 by Gary Forney

**II. The summer's leaving
found us unaware.**

**The setting sun bejeweled
a sapphire sky,
w/ pulsing gleam. .**

**& The insane leaves
cried fire & flame. .**

**While a rabbit whispered
the warm grass
in echoes of departure.**

Summer's Angel was my guest.

**& when. w/ a final
kiss she rose. .**

**My spent essence flowed,
from her once yielding
& welcoming womb. .**

**In milky streams
of liquid**

farewell.

1986 CARAVAN

We had survived the winter. Spring was approaching. We were actually a tiny bit of money ahead. To celebrate our good fortune I bought a tiny Casio keyboard.

The Casio was about three octaves and had some built in rhythms.

I built a nice keyboard stand for it. I also patched it into an amplifier.

I had given up ideas of a group or anything. I just wanted the Casio to fool with. I was toying with the idea of setting some of my poetry to music.

While doodling on the keyboard I found a nice Bosa Nova beat I liked. I slowed it down some to less than one hundred beats per minute. It sounded faintly like a movie theme for a camel caravan.

I thought the accompaniment sounded best in A-minor. I started to write a simple melody in that key. I did a half step from an A note to a B-flat and back. It sounded like the keyboard was saying "Care-a-van".

I wrote a fuller line around the word, then did variations on the melody.

At times I would write a line of music and then the words to go with it. At other times I wrote the words first and then melody. It was done like laying bricks on a rhythm foundation. I was using words and melody as mortar and block.

Once I had a complete melody written to the rhythm I laid in a simple repeating bass line. All the years I had spent studying composition had come in handy.

I played the song for Bonnie and sang it for her. Other than that I had no idea of what to do with it. My musical aspirations were buried under years of frustrations.

I notated out a piano arrangement and stored the song away.

It wouldn't be heard again until I had Magic Key record it almost ten years later.

Caravan by Gary Forney ~ copyright 1986

What are we doing here,

Where are we going to...

Caravan?

Tell me, if you can

What is the Big Plan?

Ev'rywhere we go...

Ev'ryone we know...

Seems to be insane!

Why do we keep blindly searching?

What will we find when we get there?

What will happen there?

Seems we live and die...

Is that all there is?

Caravan.

Like in a bad dream

Ev'ryone it seems

rides the Caravan...

Rides the Caravan.

Beginning the long road to recovery ~ Fayette, Iowa 1986

After we had shed the All Together Assholes, we needed an income. We were able to get Welfare under the Unemployed Parent Program again. This time Bonnie was considered the primary parent. She was referred to another Welfare program called Promise Jobs.

The only "promise" made by Promise Jobs is one year of Welfare until you either find a job or they kick you off the program.

Bonnie was referred for testing and training.

Bonnie has a General Educational Development Diploma. I had insisted she get it while I was going to the University of Northern Iowa. Bonnie took night courses. She "graduated" from East High School in Waterloo, Iowa in 1980. East was my old high school.

Promise jobs suggested that college might not be for Bonnie. A trade school or technical school was recommended. Clerical Study was recommended. Bonnie could be a secretary.

Arrangements were made for Bonnie to attend school in Calmar, Iowa. The school was Northeast Iowa Technical Institute. N.I.T.I.

We used Bonnie's going to school as an excuse to finally leave the farm.

There was a college in a small community named Fayette, Iowa. Our plan was to live in Fayette while I returned to my Art studies at Upper Iowa University there. Bonnie could drive the twenty-five miles to the Calmar campus.

It sounded like a good plan.

It didn't work out though. At least it got us off the farm.

The first problem was my old 1952 green Chevy. It needed work.

I went out to a junk yard near Stanley, Iowa. I found a 1951 Chevy body with a fleetback design. I forget what it cost me. It was just a body with no engine. The gauges had been broken out. The gas tank was missing. It was an ugly grey. The driver's window wouldn't open.

I borrowed a heavy log chain from my dad. Bonnie and I drove out to the junk yard. I hooked the chain between the Chevy's. Bonnie would drive the 1952 and do the pulling. I would ride in the 1951 and steer it.

Bonnie didn't know how to tow a car. She did jack-rabbit starts which gave a violent lurch on the chain. She also drove too fast. The Chevy I was in had no brakes and when she would stop I would crash into her. I couldn't wave for her to stop as the window on my car wouldn't go down. Finally I just opened the door and jumped out. She saw me do it and stopped. I yelled at her about what she was doing. She was doing her best and I am sorry now I yelled. She drove a little better the rest of the way home. We got the two Chevy's home somehow. When I looked at the front of the 1951 the front bumper bar had been badly bent during the towing. It was home though.

I spent the next four days working on the two cars. I worked from sun up until sun down transferring all the good working parts of the 1952 into the 1951 body. I ran into a problem with the motor mounts. I had to custom build the front mount. There were no rear mounts! I hooked up the engine to the closed driveshaft and chained it as best I could to prevent twisting.

The first time I test drove the 1951 the linkage to the manual transmission jammed. I had to use a tire iron as a crowbar to unjam it. The transmission would jump out of gear while in third after that.

I shoved the old green 1952 body into the weeds by the woods. I drove the 1951 to my parent's house and slapped some gloss black paint on it. The paint ran due to my hurry to get the Chevy ready for our move to Fayette.

Fayette, Iowa 1986 ~The best laid plans of mice and men

We found a house to rent in Fayette, Iowa. It was a small house and had proper heating.

We also found Bonnie an old American Motors Corporation Hornet. She could drive it to the Calmar campus.

We loaded everything we could in the two cars and moved off the farm. Unfortunately we had to leave our bed frames behind. We couldn't afford a U-Haul and no one would help with the move.

The landlord in Fayette was a crook. His name was Wagner and he was the Magnavok Television repairman in Fayette. He was also a self-proclaimed Reverend. I heard complaints around town about his repair work. Other than calling himself Reverend, I don't recall him saying anything about religion.

We were over-charged to move into the house. We had to pay three months rent, plus deposit, along with re-roofing the house. At least I was able to get my brothers to help with the roofing.

The living room had a dozen old televisions stored in it. None of them worked. We were told not to move them. I moved them anyway. I put them in a front porch room with a leaky roof. I wasn't going to "just live around them", as I had been told to do.

Bonnie and I took the downstairs bedroom. The boys were given rooms upstairs. The upstairs was smaller than the farm but was heated. The stairs were very steep and you needed to watch your step on them.

We had been forced to abandon our beds when we moved off the farm. Bonnie and I found an old door and placed it up on some supports. We covered it with a pad and just slept on that. We rigged together something similar for the boys.

We found a dog house for, our dog, Flash. I could tell she wasn't as happy in Fayette as she had been on the farm. She had puppies while we lived in Fayette, Iowa. We couldn't keep any of them. We put an ad in the Shopping News and gave them away.

Somehow, John Necker found us in Fayette. My dad probably told him where to find us. He started back in on his Wednesday night visits again.

Our plans started falling apart. We had moved to Fayette around August. We were both supposed to start school in September.

My return to college was the first plan to fall through. Upper Iowa University had accepted my enrollment. The first week of classes there was an orientation meeting for all new students. I went down for it. There was some woman who kept asking about my enrollment fee of one hundred dollars. I told her Bonnie was going to pay it that afternoon. The woman was back every few hours asking the same question about the money. Finally I told her that Bonnie had just paid it. The woman accepted my word. She told me that the financial aid office needed to talk to me.

I couldn't go to Upper Iowa University. I had outstanding student loans from the University of Northern Iowa. I couldn't attend college anywhere until the loan was paid. I couldn't even pay my own way if I could have afforded to. Any money the college would receive would have to go toward my loan.

No wonder the woman had been so concerned with my enrollment fee. It was non-refundable! I hurried home. Bonnie had been on her way to pay the fee when I stopped her.

I started to regret moving to Fayette, Iowa.

There was no future for me there. It was barely better than the farm.

Our life in Fayette, Iowa

Fayette, Iowa has a population of roughly 1,300 people. In the entire time I lived there I spoke to less than a half dozen. There was no one there I could relate to.

Our house was in a valley. We were only able to pick-up two television channels. To add to the isolation in Fayette, there was no entertainment.

At first I tried to make the best of things. It wasn't too bad in the beginning.

Fayette had, and still has, an annual "Watermelon Days". Someone brings in a dozen or so truck-loads of watermelon. Everyone in the city has all the free watermelon they can eat. We went to it. It was among very few pleasant days spent in Fayette.

We also got a small part time job delivering the Home Towner Shopping Newspaper. All four of us would deliver the free newspaper to every home in Fayette. We did it as a family and that made it fun. We gave the money from the route to the boys as a type of allowance.

I ran for public office! A totally strange move for me. I don't think of myself as political. I guess I thought it was a way to be around people. Bonnie and I both knew isolation is bad for me.

I got a nomination form and actually ran around talking to enough people to get my name on the ballot. I was running for a Farm Conservation Officer position. I have said it before. Sometimes my mind is "elsewhere". It seemed like a good idea at the time though and I believed in it.

I got around 500 votes. It wasn't enough to win a seat. It was an interesting experience though. I may still have the newspaper article around somewhere.

As usual, I tried my creative pursuits. Bonnie's technical school had a small newspaper. I submitted a cartoon for publication. It was accepted. I was given a regular section of the four page newspaper. Within two issues I was given a full page.

I had brought back the "Bat-Rat" character I had created almost ten years before. I just wrote new stories for a slightly older audience. My cartoon skills improved to a professional level.

Unfortunately, the newspaper was a monthly edition. It wouldn't be enough to keep me busy. I also started to resent the paper. It was all for free. I felt they were using my talent. I was still completely isolated. For some reason no one at Bonnie's school bothered talking to me. I would just submit my material and that was that.

The AMC Hornet was acting up by winter. Bonnie had to begin to car pool. A few of the other students would pick Bonnie up and drop her off. Bonnie repeatedly begged them to just stop in for a few minutes to talk. They refused.

Dad gave Bonnie's mother our address. We got the last letter we ever received from her mom. Her mom related having a breast removed due to cancer. She said none of the children came around anymore. She said the ones that would wouldn't if any of the others were there. Apparently Bonnie's brother, Chuck, had said the family was "so far apart it was sad".

Bonnie's mom still couldn't bring herself to accept Bonnie and I being married though. The letter also contained things that upset Bonnie. Half of the letter was a sad lament. The other half was as vile and condemning as ever. We didn't answer it.

By winter the isolation had reached a critical peak. I had nothing to do. No one to talk to.

I started playing solitaire with the curtains all drawn. I would just sit on the floor in the darkened living room all day. I quit my cartoon work. I barely got out of bed. I threw a tequila bottle through a wall in a depressed frustrated rage. Bonnie and I started arguing. We almost never fight. It was due to the isolation. I felt guilty for fighting with Bonnie. That darkened my depression. Things had become a downward spiral again.

Bonnie and I both knew things were wrong and had to change.

Waterloo, Iowa 1987

When events reached critical mass in Fayette, Bonnie and I talked about what to do.

Neither of us were really doing that well in Fayette. Bonnie was flunking out of school. It was due in part by having to deal with my depression, and due in part to Bonnie's scholastic skills. She didn't really want to be a secretary. She felt that her enrollment in technical school was forced on her. Bonnie just isn't a poster child for higher education.

All we had done in the eight months we lived in Fayette, was to move from the fire into the frying pan. It wasn't a great improvement.

Something within me gave me the answer of Waterloo, Iowa. I had graduated in Waterloo. I had been on my own in Waterloo. I had come of age there. I had survived and grown. I had made it there before. Maybe I could again.

Bonnie was reluctant at first. Her only experience with Waterloo had been to visit. We had lived in Cedar Falls while I had gone to college. Cedar Falls is a part of the Waterloo metro area, but not the same. She was afraid of the big city. Perhaps rightfully. She must have worried about me. What would happen if my depression deepened, and in a large area? Bonnie was scared but willing to try though. She wanted to see me happy.

Dad was dead set against the idea. In his eyes I had gotten in trouble in Waterloo and probably would again. He also accused Bonnie and I of moving "once a month". We had lived on the farm for three years. It was my sister, Carma, who was moving constantly at the time.

Bonnie and I bought a Waterloo Sunday newspaper and looked for rental property. We circled a few ads we thought we could afford. We still had my old Chevy. It wasn't much good for long trips. The manual transmission constantly jumped out of third and had to be held firmly in place. Somehow it made it to Waterloo.

We looked at two places. The first was small and in an unstable neighborhood. We passed. Next we looked at an apartment in a quad-plex on the west side. We decided to take it.

We had to get rid of our dog, Flash. She was a German shepherd and basically a farm dog. We couldn't have her in the apartment. It was a terribly sad day when we left her behind.

We managed to talk my parents into lending us a small trailer. Bonnie and I had been married for over ten years. My parents asked why we needed a trailer. In their minds everything we owned should have fit in the back seat of a car. They acted surprised when we said it wouldn't. They finally reluctantly lent us the trailer for one day only.

Bonnie and I were in a hurry to leave Fayette. In our haste we left behind my antique farm toy collection.

We crammed everything into the car and trailer for the one trip we would be able to make.

I am not sure what day of the week we left. I didn't look back.

We had no beds. We had left those on the farm. We did the same as we had in Fayette, and rigged up a bed out of an old door we found in the apartment basement.

When we moved we had used the AMC Hornet, and left my Chevy at my parents. The AMC had to be junked within the first month in Waterloo. We had no car after that.

We were in Waterloo, Iowa! It was March of 1987.

1987 ~ The Locust Street Circus

“All moveables of wonder, from all parts,
Are here--Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,
The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig,
The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,
The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft
Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet-shows,
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,
All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts
Of man, his dulness, madness, and their feats
All jumbled up together, to compose
A Parliament of Monsters. Tents and Booths
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast mill,
Are vomiting, receiving on all sides,
Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms.”

Wordsworth's description of Bartholomew Fair (from *The Prelude*, Book 7. 1805, lines 706 - 721)

We lived at 406 Locust Street in Waterloo, Iowa from March 1987 until March 1988. The address is on the west side a few blocks off the “Church Street” blocks of Fourth Street West.

Church Street was so named due to the large amount of church building grouped together for about four blocks. Bonnie and I were both Baptists and attended the Faith Baptist Temple the first few months we were living on Locust.

We were baptized together in the church there.

The more we attended Faith Baptist Temple, the less we came to think of it. At first I had thought it odd that such a large church building only had about twenty to thirty members. When I had lived in Waterloo in the early seventies I had gone to a church on Falls Avenue. The Falls Avenue Church was always jam-packed. The Faith Baptist Temple church seemed vacant in comparison. Faith Temple was also “fundamentalist” rather than “spiritual”.

The Reverend wore snake-skin cowboy boots! I should have taken that as a clue.

I didn't. Bonnie and I attended for a few months. We finally left the church as we discovered more and more ideologies that clashed. The Faith Temple believed in separation of the sexes. In their fundamentalist interpretation of the bible they had taken a single line of text to support their belief. They had taken Jesus' saying about looking at a woman with lust, examined it by the period and comma, and determined “the sin” was the woman's fault.

We didn't bother asking if incest or rape were the woman's fault. We just stopped going.

A few weeks later the Reverend came to our apartment. He wondered why we hadn't been in church for awhile. I refused to speak to him. Josh and a neighbor girl were friends. They were playing on a water slide in the yard together. They were wearing swimsuits. The Reverend didn't approve.

We quit the Faith Baptist Temple!

We drove by the Faith Baptist Temple building in 2006 - It was empty and for sale.

The Naming of The Freaks!

It's easiest to present our time on Locust by describing the people there, rather than a chronological telling of events.

The tiny one block neighborhood we lived in was a small ghetto.

There was a small mom-and-pop grocery store on the corner. It was run by Fred Shopsy. Fred must have had one of the last of the flat top haircuts. His store was robbed every weekend during the summer. Fred was cool and we got along fine.

Jerry Stevens: For the first month, it had been just our family living in the quad-plex. Jerry Stevens moved in the first floor apartment next to ours. He was a mental out-patient. He had spent most of his life in the mental health hospital in Independence, Iowa. For some strange reason he was allowed to live on his own with only semi-supervision. He was required by law to report for medication shots once a week. Jerry thought everyone in the neighborhood was also an out-patient. His mental condition was unstable the entire time he lived next to us and got worse.

Gary and Crystal: This "couple" moved in shortly after Jerry Stevens. At first they put on a respectable front. They moved in the upstairs apartment above Stevens. For the first week they had two children living with them. I don't know what happened to the boy and girl. I heard a commotion one day. Crystal borrowed a towel off Bonnie. Crystal claimed one of the kids had fallen down the stairs and bloodied their skull. It was the last I saw of the kids. Gary and Crystal's respectable front soon left also.

Christy: Christy was young, bone thin, with dark hair. For a pretty girl she always seemed to have a storm cloud over her head that followed her around. She moved into the apartment above us. Her ex-husband helped her move in. She had a baby boy with her. It wasn't her husband's child. We never saw the ex-husband after that. He impressed me as too normal to be joining the Locust Street Circus.

Denny and Jill Cooley: This couple lived in a house about mid block. Denny was rather quiet and had a split-lip covered by a moustache. He had long hair of sorts, but we had nothing in common. Jill was a short dumpy gossip and busy-body. She told tales about how Denny had been at Woodstock, where he had really long hair, and was even in the movie! She said he had taken a lot of drugs at Woodstock and still had "flashbacks". Denny was ten years younger than I was. I had been seventeen when Woodstock was held. You can do the math. I seriously doubted a seven year old kid from Iowa would be alone at Woodstock. I didn't say anything though.

The Cooley's had two girls. I don't remember the older girl's name. The younger girl was a pretty eleven year old blonde. Josh was her age and they played together. Jenny was the only Cooley I liked.

Gary and Kay: Gary and Kay moved into an apartment up the block, next to Cooley's. Gary was a short, out of it, druggy and booze hound. Kay was his sexy girlfriend. She was also a druggy. Every guy in the neighborhood wanted to sleep with Kay. She had several personalities. She could go from attractive and likeable to total moody bitch at the drop of a hat. It mostly depended on what drug she was on. I can't recall Gary being anything other than drowsy drunk most of the time.

Darrell Kauten and Karen Whoever: Darrell and Karen lived downstairs from Gary and Kay. They had one of the better apartments of any I had seen on Locust. When they first moved in, Darrell resembled a long haired slightly rotund biker. Karen appeared to be his rather pleasant companion. Karen and Darrell had a son together, Darrell Junior, although they weren't married to each other. Darrell was a braggart, a bad one! I tried my best to be friends with him though. At first I thought he was cool.

These people were the main people I interacted with.

I also contacted my old "leech" Bob Zaputil.

Bob and Teri Zaputil: I called Bob's dad trying to locate Bob when I first returned to Waterloo. Bob's dad was all right. He was "Iowa's Polka King" and had been a security guard at University of Northern Iowa. Bob never talked about his dad.

Bob had married Teri a few years before. They had two boys by the time I found Bob in Waterloo. Their oldest boy was out of control and seemed to need therapy. The youngest boy seemed the only normal one of the family. He was three!

Teri Zaputil was a control freak with Bob tightly in her grip. For Bob to have friends somehow meant he might not love her. She was deathly afraid that Bob might leave her if she were to allow him to have a life other than her. Bob was drinking a fifth of whiskey a day now.

Summer on Locust was a madhouse.

Jerry Stevens became sexually obsessed with eleven year old Jenny Cooley. He began to try to lure her into his apartment.

Gary and Crystal began to raise money the easy-sleazy way. Gary became a drug dealer. Crystal became a stripper and part-time hooker.

Gary and Kay began to fight violently, but seemed to get a sexual thrill from their fights.

The father of Christy's son, Devon, was sleazy realtor, Bill Sires. There were surreal scenes between him and Christy. One day she had a nasty spot in her eye. She told me Bill had hit her with a phone. If Christy would refuse to see him, he would climb up the building to her apartment. He was another creep in a business suit.

Bob and Teri Zaputil used Bonnie as a babysitter. One day Bob picked up their son, but left his potty-chair and other belongings behind. We took the stuff back and asked what was up. They each had different stories. Neither story explained leaving their child's things at our house.

Darrell began having beer keg parties. The odd part about "his" parties was Bonnie and I had to pay for the kegs of beer.

Jill Cooley delighted in the madhouse. It gave her juicy gossip and tales to tell.

I had two stuffed chairs on the front porch. Sometimes I would sit in one outside. After while Jerry Stevens began sitting in the other. He finally set fire to the one he had been using. I had to dump it off the porch while it was flaming and then put it out. If it had been left to burn the entire building would have been enflamed. Jerry Stevens didn't say why he had set the chair on fire. He wanted the remaining chair. I took it off the porch.

Jerry Stevens also needed questioning about a robbery at Shopsy's.

Crystal wanted Bonnie to become a stripper with her. Bonnie refused. Crystal told Jerry Stevens that I was trying to get him re-committed to the mental hospital. Stevens attacked me on the front porch.

No one was coming to Darrell's parties. No one could stand his bragging. I was getting very tired of it myself. I had asked Darrell to transfer some Door's albums to cassette tape for me. Darrell only recorded half the material. He told me he hadn't recorded the other songs because they were over three minutes long. According to Darrell any music over three minutes was junk. I thought back to the Three Minute Band.

I tried to invite Bob Zaputil to one of Darrell's keggers we were paying for. Bob said he would and then didn't. When I went to his house Teri said that the party was supposed to be at their house. Had I forgotten? She was lying through her teeth.

To try to maintain a friendship with Bob Zaputil I did go to their house for a party. Teri acted cold and mean spirited. Teri invited Bob's brother Bill come to the party "just in case". Bill was a black belt. Teri wasn't about to let Bob have friends.

We gave up trying to be friends with Zaputil.

Gary and Crystal took off during the night. A day later the cops were looking for them. Apparently they had violated their parole. Jerry Stevens followed the cops around. When they told him they were looking for a Gary, Stevens told them I was the other Gary.

Bonnie became a free babysitter. She babysat the Zaputil boy. She babysat Kay's daughter, Allison. She babysat a biker's son. The biker was in rehab, but any results were marginal and up for debate. All the parents promised to pay Bonnie. None did.

I took a job trimming hedges for a shopping center. Darrell had found the job. I did the work. I was to be paid forty dollars for two days work. The guy who was to pay me drove right past our apartment. Darrell had arranged for my money to be paid to him. Darrell told me the guy only paid half of what I was due. I noticed Darrell and Karen leave right after I did. When they came back, I stopped over. Where they hadn't had anything in their refrigerator before, they now had about twenty dollars worth of beer and pop. I knew where they got the money.

Darrell also got the hots for Kay. He had Bonnie and I buy a keg of beer on the premise of a party. We went down and had a glass of beer apiece. Darrell said we should save the rest for the next day.

When we went down the next day we found out Darrell had invited Gary and Kay the night before. There was no beer left. Darrell and Karen had sat up all night with Gary and Kay drinking it. Bonnie and I had paid sixty dollars for two beers.

We quit paying for Darrell's parties.

The events I have related here were just a few among a swirling madness. In a strange way I enjoyed it all. I was around people. Actually, I was around my inferiors! That summer was like living in a riot or a car crash. The activity around me made me realize that I wasn't "useless" or "worthless". I was just another person. I had my faults, but I had my strengths. The more I survived the stronger I became. It was a giant step on the road to recovery.

There were a few good things too. All of them creative. I applied for a job at the local television station. I didn't get it, but at least I tried. I felt human again. All I could do was my best. I accepted that now. I also gave the television station a program idea. I suggested "Home Video Theater". The format suggested was identical to "Funniest Home Videos" which wouldn't come out until years later. The station passed.

I did a music video for a "Creature Feature" host on another television station. He wrote back that he couldn't use it without the music publishing rights. I hadn't used my own song. It was still a thrill to get a letter from a television personality, even a local one.

The Locust Street Circus made me strong! I would survive.

1988 ~ We have Lift-Off!

1987 had been the countdown. Spring of 1988 began the "Lift-Off". Events came very rapidly and intensely. A time of magic.

Jerry Stevens had begun to pound on the wall between the apartments, and then moan and howl like a sick crazed hound. His baying was a signal. It was time to leave the circus.

While Bonnie had been babysitting Kay's daughter, Bonnie became emotional. Kay was just another street causality. Bonnie didn't approve of the way Allison was being raised. It brought out Bonnie's mother instinct. One day Bonnie cried to me that she could have been a better mother to Allison. We had no girls. Bonnie cried that she wanted one.

Bonnie said later it was just an emotional episode, but I sensed something deeper. I waited a few days and brought the subject back up. Bonnie was still young enough to have another child. I asked her if she would like us to try for one again. I hadn't thought about it before Bonnie's emotional outburst, but I wanted to please the woman I love!

Bonnie stopped taking birth control. Several years of taking the pill had given her high blood pressure which we worried about. Bonnie wanted a daughter. I wanted her to have what she wanted. We set about getting Bonnie pregnant.

We hadn't spoken to Darrell and Karen in months. One day Karen stopped in the apartment. She and Darrell wanted us to give them money for a keg of beer. They were throwing a party. Bonnie asked what for. It was a moving party for Gary and Kay. No way were we going to do that again. It took a lot of nerve to ask! Maybe that's why Darrell waited in the car outside while Karen asked. Bonnie very acidly asked, that if we did buy a keg, if we could attend this party. Karen sheepishly said "No". She left with no money from us. It was the last time we spoke.

A few days later, Bonnie told me she was pregnant. We both hoped for a girl.

Bonnie told me she was pregnant on a Friday. We bought a Sunday paper over the weekend. We looked for other rentals, and also looked under homes, and mobile homes.

We found an ad for a used mobile home. We didn't have a phone so Bonnie walked to a phone a half block over. They wanted a thousand for it! She walked back to the apartment. We reasoned we could afford it. Bonnie walked back to the phone. We told them we were interested.

We went and looked at the mobile home that Monday. I am not sure how we got there. We may have taken the city bus. My brother, Jerry, had given us a Pontiac LeMans, but it barely ran. My old Chevy was being stored at my brother Larry's farm.

The mobile home had rough carpet and a leaky ceiling. It had no steps or skirting. It was still nicer than the Locust apartment. We thought it was fantastic.

We had no idea how we were going to afford the grand. We made arrangements to make payments. It would take all of our April income for the down payment, but we took it!

Bonnie, the boys, and I had our first home!

The LeMan's didn't make the trip and we junked it.

We now lived at Twin City Way in the area referred to as Cedar-Loo, Iowa!

April 18th 1988 was Josh's twelve birthday. We didn't have the electric or gas turned on yet. We couldn't afford to. Bonnie wanted to make Josh a cake in our new home. We contacted the Red Shield. They couldn't pay for the utilities! They did something better! They gave us the money for the down payment on the mobile home!

We used our own money to pay for the utilities to be turned on! The Salvation Army even gave us some things! We got some beds for the boys. A chair. A couch. A lamp.

Things were finally going our way. They would continue to all that year.

There was a minor bit of unfinished business with the Locust apartment. The building had been sold to Nancy Frost. She refused to give us our deposit back! We sued her for it.

It was a simple case. She was not allowed to keep our deposit without showing valid cause. She had none. She simply didn't like us.

She also let her bigotry toward long hair show. She assumed, like too many people, that long hair means stupidity. She was shocked when she read the case I presented. I had prepared our own case and simply quoted the laws covering the case to the judge. We won easily. The judge even complimented me on the handling of the case and my knowledge of law. Nancy Frost was furious, but we got our money back.

It was a time of magic. Everything was coming our way.

On one of our last trips to the old apartment, Bonnie and I were walking down the street when Sheldon Shorter drove by. He thought he recognized me and stopped his car to talk. I had known the Shorter family years before. I had gone to Shelda Shorter's sixteenth birthday. That was fifteen years earlier. Magic or fate was working for Bonnie and I.

Sheldon Shorter owned "Shorter's Shows" carnival. He needed help getting things ready for that summer's tour. Sheldon hired Bonnie and I both that afternoon. Bonnie has since forgotten being a "Carny" during that busy period of 1988. The small jobs gave us a little pocket cash. Sheldon even gave the boys some money.

Bonnie quit after a week. She was pregnant and didn't want to work anymore. The boys were also out of school for the summer. I continued working for Sheldon for another week or so. My job was to set up the "Tilt-A-Whirl" and paint it.

Sheldon had recently had major heart by-pass surgery. I worried about him while he was setting things up. He took a nap one afternoon while we were working together. I looked over and saw him hunched over, not moving. I thought he had died.

I quit work for Shorter Shows when the carnival had its first out of town dates. I didn't want to be away from my little family for even a weekend.

We had been walking everywhere. We were getting ahead though and bought some used bikes at the Goodwill. It was fun and good exercise. We rode together as a family.

Bonnie had an accident with her bike. She was carrying some groceries downhill. She got going too fast and was unable to steer properly while holding a case of pop. She fell off her bike and chipped a bone in her elbow. She had to keep her arm in a sling for several months.

Josh also ran into a few troubles on his bike. He was struck by a hit-and-run driver while on his way to school. The car that hit him was being driven by a young girl who panicked and drove off. Josh had minor lacerations. The girl turned herself in. We took a small insurance settlement and let Josh have the money. He also got a new ten-speed bike.

Another time, Josh was just riding his bike when he was shot in the back by some older boys in a car. Josh had been shot by a pellet gun, thankfully! It hurt, but didn't penetrate his skin. The cops knew who the kids were. Josh got to ride in a squad car to identify his shooter!

The magic found me another job!

The people we were buying the mobile home from gave me a job as a security guard. Keith and Nancy Weise was the couple. Keith ran a security firm. He needed a guard. I went to work for him in exchange for making payments on the home. Keith just deducted the money I owed from my pay checks. Bonnie and I also had welfare.

We didn't have a car when I started as a security guard. However, the firm did security for a car dealer. Keith took me down one night and we looked at cheap cars. I found a Jeep Cherokee I liked. Keith helped me with the arrangements to buy it.

I did guard duty on a former factory near the Waterloo airport. The metal roof would heat during the day and cool during the night. I was there from four to eleven. It wasn't bad until nightfall. When the plant would cool in the evening the shifting temperature of the metal roof would create a terrible creaking and groaning. It sounded like a ghost crew was still working the abandoned plant.

Night shift security guard work was mostly boring. It was a matter of sitting alone in an old over-seers office above the plant. Once an hour I would make security rounds with my flashlight. The building was totally dark.

The most exciting thing that happened at the plant was the night I caught two lovers with a blanket out behind the plant. I had thought they were intruders. They really jumped when I shone my flashlight and said "Security!". I was as embarrassed as they were.

There was a problem with someone dumping old tires on the plant property. I never did catch them.

That was it. No crime waves. No harrowing "shoot-outs". I didn't carry a gun anyway.

I had rigged up an old radio I found so it would play in the office. On Sundays I would listen to Doctor Demento for entertainment. It would also drown out the "ghost crew" working the plant. The Legendary Star Dust Cowboy was on one of the Demento programs. They played "Paralyzed" and "Momma Wore A Cast Iron Apron"! I was intrigued. There was also an interview with The Ledge. When he gave his mailing address I wrote it down.

I wrote a letter to The Ledge asking him about his career, his music, how he got his start. I told him I was a frustrated musician. I asked him for advice. A week later I got a package from The Ledge. It had a cassette tape of his music, an autographed picture, a postcard, and a letter of advice. I still have all of it! The Ledge told me to just "Do it!", to have faith in myself and just put it all out there.! Eventually I would.

Around late summer of 1988 my family and I had just returned to our mobile home from somewhere. A man walked up to us and asked if we lived in our home. When I told him we did, he handed me a sheet of paper and said "I assume you know about this?". The paper was an eviction notice of sorts. The mobile home lots had all been sold. All trailers were to be gone in sixty days. It was the first we had heard of it.

I sent an official letter to the new owners of the mobile home park requesting they pay us a moving fee. I got my way and we received a check for five-hundred dollars.

We used the money to hire a mover. We found another mobile home park willing to let us move our home there. The new park was concerned that our trailer didn't have skirting. I convinced them that I would fix it.

We moved our mobile home up University Avenue to Cedar Falls. We even had enough money to buy some used skirting which I installed. I also built a small deck.

We were now living in Five Seasons Mobile Home Court. Our trailer was in the first circle on Emerald Drive.

Bonnie was due soon.

I was still working as a security guard the first month in the new mobile park. Bonnie's high blood pressure was triggering worries and false alarms. Bonnie would go in for a examination. Her blood pressure would be real high. The doctor's office would call me in. They wanted to induce labor. I would arrive and walk in to see Bonnie. When her blood pressure was checked while I was there it was back to normal. The doctor would send her home. It had been a false alarm. There were several before the doctors figured it out.

I am a calming influence on Bonnie. Her blood pressure went down around me.

November 1988 ~ Beauty & The Bitch

There was someone who increased Bonnie's high blood pressure.

A few weeks before Bonnie was due, Debra Cooper moved into a mobile home in the next circle behind us. She had four or five children. Chris Cooper was around Logan's age. Debra informed us that all the children had different fathers. She wasn't living with any of them.

We didn't like Cooper from the start. She was everything we dislike. We could barely tolerate her. She wanted to know too much. She was very pushy, which Bonnie and I both hate! She didn't seem to watch her own kids. We were worried about Cooper's kids, but didn't say anything.

Debra told us she was trying to get together with her brother-in-law. We were never sure where her "husband" was. She had a few alternating guys who would come see her on occasion. None of the "guests" was the guy she called her "husband". Debra just told us that the guys were "platonic friends". They would spend the night. Cooper felt obligated to tell us over and over that she was "not a slut.". Those were her words, not mine. My word for her would have been "bitch".

For some reason I ended up taking her kids Treat-Or-Treating that Halloween. Why she couldn't I don't know. I also had to make Chris' costume for school.

We also had to watch Chris more than we would have liked. We didn't understand why either. Josh didn't like Chris. Logan reported to us that Chris was going through drawers in Bonnie and my bedroom. He didn't say what he was looking for, but we had suspicions.

Debra repeated asked Bonnie about me. Cooper seemed convinced that I did drugs, because I had long hair and drank beer. Debra didn't believe Bonnie when Bonnie said I didn't. We suspected Debra was behind Chris' searching our bedroom.

Cooper was also started pressuring Bonnie to help Debra get together with Cooper's brother-in-law. Debra asked Bonnie to have a threesome with her and the guy. Bonnie was nine months pregnant! Bonnie wouldn't have had under any circumstances anyway! At the time we just ignored the request and chalked it up to Debra's drinking.

We were getting very tired of Cooper, and had other things on our mind with the baby due. We mistakenly started to ignore her in the hopes she would go away.

November Eighth 1988. Bonnie went in for another exam. I got a call. This time it was for real. Bonnie was in labor at Allen Hospital in Waterloo.

Somehow Debra Cooper found out. She wanted the boys to stay with her and her kids. I refused and took the boys with me. I didn't want Cooper involved.

We knew that the baby was a girl. We had had an ultra-sound done. We even had a "picture" of the baby. It was a printout of the ultra-sound scan. Bonnie was thrilled to be having the girl she wanted. It was her special moment.

Debra Cooper started calling the hospital. She wanted to boss the birth. She had told the hospital she was a nurse, or maybe doctor. Bonnie refused to speak to her! Cooper called back and demanded to talk to me! She told me that the Allen staff didn't know what they were doing. She told me to tell the doctors that I wanted Cooper in charge of Bonnie's delivery. I refused. Cooper got very angry with me and I hung up.

Someone finally refused any of Cooper's calls. The staff at the hospital knew Bonnie was getting upset. Cooper's calls were raising Bonnie's blood pressure endangering the baby.

The hospital decided it might be a good idea to have a Caesarian team on standby.

The bitch stopped calling.

Once the calls quit, Bonnie calmed down.

I went into the delivery room with Bonnie. I wish I had when the boys had been born. Bonnie had a really nice room. She was comfortable. I was there and holding her hand. Her blood pressure eased. The Caesarian team started to relax. It would be a normal birth.

Everything was perfect. I held Bonnie's hand almost the entire time.

Laura Lee Forney was born with both parents in the room.

When they told Bonnie she had a girl, Bonnie said Laura was the girl she "always wanted". I was extremely happy for Bonnie. I was also proud to be a father!

I saw Laura first. They wanted to clean her before giving her to Bonnie. Laura was so beautiful. She had blonde hair and blue eyes. A perfect little girl.

Bonnie was exhausted, but wanted to see her daughter. They wrapped Laura up and gave her to Bonnie. I could see the joy and love in Bonnie's eyes when she looked at Laura.

We were now a family of five.

I named all three of the children. "Laura" is from two sources. My dad's name was Lawrence, and was one of the sources. The song "Tell Laura, I Love Her!", was the other source. "Lee" was Dad's brother, and one of my favorite uncles. There was also a mermaid named "Laura Lee" in Superman comics.

The official meaning of "Laura" is Laurel, or crowning achievement!

I quit my job as a security guard so I could be home with my family. We were doing all right without the job. I had the mobile home almost paid for and would make the final payment in December.

We were able to bring Laura home from the hospital when she was a day or so old. We bought a car seat for her ride to her new home. We had a banner on our trailer announcing "It's a Girl." We were bursting with pride.

We were friends with a lesbian couple in the mobile home park. They came over to see Laura. They gave her a nice little sleeping outfit.

I bought a box of "It's a Girl" cigars. I didn't really have anyone to give them to. I smoked most of them by myself.

Josh smoked one. Bonnie and smelled smoke coming from Josh's room. When we opened his door a cloud of cigar smoke rolled out. Josh was looking green. We told him we didn't mind his trying one of the cigars, but he shouldn't smoke it in a confined area. We told him to smoke it out on the deck. Josh went outside and very proudly sat on the steps smoking that cigar!

Logan didn't seem to like his new sister. While Bonnie and Laura were still in the hospital, before I could bring them home, I had asked the boys if they wanted to go see their new sister. Logan said he didn't want to "go see the stupid little person". Logan may have resented her taking his place as the youngest. Logan started having problems shortly after Laura's birth.

I had built Laura a wooden sleeping crib. I didn't care for the design though. I would take it apart when she got older and use the wood for a toy box. I would eventually make a nice crib that I was proud of. By the time I did, Laura used it for a doll and stuffed-toy crib.

Bonnie breast fed Laura from the start forming a bond between mother and daughter.

I loved all three children.

I still do.

Bonnie was home with Laura, who was only three days old. The boys were in school. I had taken the Jeep Cherokee to Food-4-Less to buy something.

When I came back to the mobile home I noticed a white car sitting in one of our parking spots. The car pulled out a short distance when they spotted me. I wondered what was going on.

I was smoking an "It's A Girl!" cigar. I got out of the Jeep and walked in the house. I noticed a woman watching me in the white car. I just walked up the sidewalk and into the house. I asked Bonnie what she knew about the white car. She hadn't even noticed it.

I looked out the window and saw the white car had pulled back into our spot. A Cedar Falls Police car had just pulled in beside it!

The woman from the white car, along with a police officer came to the door.

They told us they had received a report of possible child abuse from "a concerned neighbor".

We told them there was nothing going on. They insisted that Bonnie bring Laura and go with them to the police station. They told me to just wait.

At the police station they told Bonnie she was under suspicion of being a prostitute! Bonnie couldn't believe it! They also needed her permission to examine Laura. They didn't say what for. Bonnie had to remove all Laura's clothing. There was nothing wrong with Laura! They asked Bonnie why she acted nervous. She told them they made her upset. They said they believed it was because she had something to hide! They also needed to know Bonnie's maiden-name and age. They had received a report from the same "concerned neighbor that Bonnie and I were brother and sister! When Bonnie told them we weren't, they didn't want to believe her. They also refused to believe she was thirty-one! The police officer told Bonnie he knew she was lying about everything. He told her he knew how it was with "under-age girls" and that Bonnie would come crying to him in two weeks.

Bonnie found out who the "concerned neighbor" was. The cop told Bonnie that "Debbie" was concerned for Laura. He seemed very familiar with Cooper.

They brought Bonnie back to the mobile home. They told her to tell me to come out, that they just wanted to "talk" to me. I went out.

I was told I was "under arrest" and given my rights, but never told what charge I was "under arrest for". They questioned me about Bonnie and I being related. They also asked me about any previous arrest record I might have. When I repeatedly asked them why I was under arrest, they finally just told me they were "concerned" about my behavior.

They finally let me go.

The boys were questioned the next day at school about "sleeping arrangements" at our house!

A few days later we got a letter that the whole case had been "unfounded". Bonnie wasn't my prostitute sister after all, and I wasn't a newborn baby molester.

Debra Cooper was behind it. When we tried to file charges against her we were threatened by the Cedar Falls Police department. They said we were making "false reports" against "Debbie".

We were not the only ones with complaints about "Debbie"! Cooper had been dumping garbage on another couples mobile home for some reason. Debra was also tormenting an elderly Jewish woman in the court. The woman had been in a concentration camp during the war.

Cooper got worse after her “concerns” were unfounded.

Debra got herself in trouble.

The couple that Cooper had been dumping garbage on filed complaint after complaint with the mobile home park management! The couple put up a rope fence to keep Cooper and her kids off their property. I put up a fence also.

Cooper's “platonic male friends” started visiting more often. They would rotate nights. I had a feeling they each knew about the other. The guy on the first night would be seen walking to Cooper's home with a six-pack of beer. The guy on the second night brought a twelve-pack and a carton of cigarettes. When the first guy returned the following night he brought a case of beer and two cartons of cigarettes. It seemed like a contest.

The increased drinking brought more troubles for “Debbie”.

She invited the couple managing the mobile home park over to her trailer to tell her “side of the story”!

Management told us about what had happened. Cooper was drunk! She couldn't walk straight and was bumping into the male member of management. The female member of management told us that some of Debra's bumping was too “friendly”! We were also told that Cooper's voice was slurred and she had trouble talking. Management told us Cooper was drinking the entire time they were at her trailer.

Cooper apparently complained that everyone in the mobile home park was out to get her. Debra suggested we were behind it all. Cooper wanted our trailer searched along with the Jewish woman's home. Management asked her for what. They said they couldn't without good reason.

Debra Cooper told them a fantastic story!

Debra couldn't find her son, Chris! We had kidnapped him! Cooper also wanted the Jewish woman's house searched for her missing son!

It was all drunken rambling! Management did a very short search for Cooper's “kidnapped” son. Chris was asleep in his room in Debra Cooper's mobile home!

We didn't have to do anything. Debra Cooper got herself kicked out of the mobile home court. She moved out with her kids a week before Christmas.

The people Cooper had been dumping garbage on took down their fence. I did the same.

We only saw Cooper once after that. It was the following summer at the drive-in theater. She was leaving her kids unattended in her car in a rear row. She talked to someone, on the snack-bar phone, the entire movie, while watching us out the window.

For some reason, no one else ever moved in the mobile home Cooper had been renting. I don't know if she had torn it up or what. It was never again occupied during the next two and a half years we lived in the mobile home court.

Bonnie, Laura, Josh, Logan, and I had a very Merry Christmas 1988.

1989 - 1990 Slow Day in Dodge

We continued to do well the next two years. We remained at Five Seasons Mobile Home Court in Cedar Falls. The boys were in their early teen years. Laura went from baby to toddler.

The Jeep Cherokee broke a water pump. We got rid of it and bought a Toyota Corolla. The Corolla was a little small for our growing family, but a dependable car. We would have the Toyota for the remaining time we lived in the mobile home.

Logan was best friends with Jeremy "Pete" Kearns. Pete was a good kid who just needed a father-figure in his life. I provided that. Logan and Pete helped Laura take her first steps.

Josh had friends, but not any "best friend". I think it was sometime during this time period that he started to play guitar. He asked if he could have my electric. I gave it to him.

Laura was growing right before my eyes. She went from baby to toddler in what seemed like weeks. Laura and I were very close. She would scoot over to me in her walker during meals and want to share mine. I was careful what I gave her. Laura teathed herself on pork-chop bones from my plate.

Bonnie loved having her daughter! She also loved the boys. Bonnie got a job delivering newspapers around the trailer court. She gave the money to the boys.

I continued to fix up our home. I remodeled the bath. I installed sliding etched glass doors around the tub. I installed new lighting. I made the boys bedrooms. I installed ceiling fans in every room. I made lattice dividers and covered them with artificial flowers.

I got my disability back! I had been talking to a therapist about my chronic depression. She understood its causes. My depression is a defense mechanism. It didn't need drugs. It was a reaction to stress. I would be fine as long as I avoided the causes of my stress. That meant I could never work again, nor should I.

My social security credits were depleted after years of unemployment and I was given limited the limited disability that I receive to this day.

Those two years were "normal". There were no earth shaking or life altering events.

There were small events. Such as having our trailer "egged" by a moron. A guy named Thomas had lived in a mobile home next to ours for awhile. He was living rent free by some arrangement with management. He was obnoxious. He had a motorcycle he didn't know how to ride or control. He couldn't ride it well enough to make turns. He almost slammed into our home several times. I complained to management. He was their friend and they didn't do anything. So I complained higher up the ladder. I got rid of Thomas and management. They egged our trailer before they moved out! They also defecated on another woman's home! You could smell it and see the brown color from a distance. I suppose eggs are a better choice.

Gay John moved into the mobile home court briefly. He left within weeks of moving in. He hit on every guy in the court. Gay John acted like the mobile homes were tents in a traveling freak show. Last I knew he had become a transvestite.

A hot air balloon "crash" landed in a field near the court. Everyone ran out to see it. We "detassled" corn one season for a little extra money.

Life passed normally.

The children were growing.

Bonnie and I had been married fifteen years.

1991 ~ Moving On

By spring of 1991 our family had outgrown our mobile home. Josh was fifteen and beginning to learn to drive. Logan was thirteen. Laura was two. I was thirty-eight. Bonnie was thirty-four. It was time to leave the circus.

We had enjoyed mobile home life for a few years. By 1991 we were growing tired of it. Too many people seem to assume mobile homes are like tents in a traveling sideshow. We wanted to live our lives in private and not be disturbed.

I was also concerned with the kids growing up in a mobile home court. Logan seemed to be developing some behavioral problems. Josh seemed all right, but I wanted more for him than to just be all right! I also wanted better for Laura than life in a trailer park.

I had fixed up the mobile home to where it was comfortable. No matter how many times I patched the roof, I couldn't seem to find the leak though. There was only so much I could do. We felt it was time to move on.

We wanted a "real" home. Somewhere with property we could call our own. A conventional home in a regular neighborhood. We had outgrown apartment living, and moved up to our mobile home. Bonnie and I wanted the next step up to "actual" home ownership.

We began looking through real estate ads. We called a few realtors. In talking to them we began to know what we could possibly afford. We would be able to afford a modest home. Nothing fancy. Just a home with a yard. To us it sounded like paradise.

The first home we looked at, in our price range, was in Parkersburg, Iowa. We drove the thirty miles there to look. The house was a relatively large two story near a small lake. We both worried about a lake being nearby with a small child.

We had been told we could see the inside of the house by the realtor. When we knocked on the door we were met by an angry tenant. The guy acted like an angry drunk. He started to rage at us, and demanded his wife call the realtor! He acted like we had come to evict him. We just wanted to see the house. We politely left.

We decided against the home in Parkersburg.

We continued to look at a few houses here and there. We looked at one home in Waterloo, Iowa. The house was nice, but the property was too small in a cramped neighborhood. The street was narrow with no parking for the house. It reminded us of what apartment living had been. We passed.

The house we finally found the most promising was a one bedroom bungalow in LaPorte City, Iowa. It was a faded gold color. It had a garage identical to the one I had lived in during my early years in Oelwein. There were two dark maple trees out front. A towering shade tree in the rear yard. There were two larger houses on each side. It had a small yard, but the whole house looked cozy! It was directly across the street from the city park!

We thought it might be a little too small of house for our family of five. We also wanted a regular home. The park across the street was a nice feature. It was within our price range. We debated a short time and began to negotiate and make offers.

We began making offers in April or May of 1991. It would be August before we finally were able to purchase the house. Meanwhile, We would call the realtor about the home constantly! We wanted it!

We began packing our belongings in boxes months in advance. There was no deal on the home yet. We had faith we would find somewhere though.

We spent most of the summer of 1991 waiting on real estate deals.

Josh had started work as a janitorial assistant. It was a summer job program offered through the school. Josh helped a school janitor with cleaning, raking, and mowing. Dad, if he knew, didn't say anything about his grandson working the same occupation as him.

I can't recall Dad ever saying anything bad about Josh, like he would the other grandkids. Maybe it was because Josh resembles Dad. [Josh also resembles me]

Josh saved most of his money from the job to help us all with the new house. We all knew we would have to have a down payment.

Dad was against our moving to LaPorte City! I think he was being influenced by Larry. Larry and his family lived on a farm between Washburn and LaPorte City, Iowa. I think Larry was worried that his "worthless" brother would do something terrible in LaPorte and that it would reflect on Larry somehow.

Dad warned me I would be closer to my in-laws and they would be at my house "every day". I worried that Dad might notify them! He had in the past. If he did again, I have no idea. Actually, LaPorte City is NOT any closer to Independence, Iowa than where we had been living. It was designed to try to scare us out of moving. The full reason Dad didn't want us to move to LaPorte City never came out. Part of it may have been Larry's doing, but there seemed to be something hidden, too.

We finally took possession of the house in August of 1991.

I sold the mobile home for less than I gave for it. We picked up the check for selling it the same day we had to pay the realtor our down payment on the new house. We also had to add our own savings to cover the difference between what we owed for the new house and what we had gotten for the mobile home. We had to get a bank check. There was also paperwork to be signed. It was all taking time. Dad complained there was something wrong going on! He claimed the realtor was crooked, that there was no house, that we were being robbed, etc.

We got everything done! Nothing was wrong. Bonnie and I took possession of our new home by afternoon!

My parents paid for a U-Haul truck. I think it may have been Mom's idea. I guess they finally realized we owned a few possessions after fifteen years of marriage.

We loaded the boxes we had had packed for months. I drove the U-Haul. We unloaded our belongings and returned the truck!

It was nightfall. The electric was off in the house for the first week. We didn't have furniture either. We slept on the floor and used candles. We turned on the water ourselves. We weren't sure if we could.

The neighbor lady came over to say hello. Snoop is the working phrase. We still didn't have furniture.

We eventually settled in. We got the utilities turned on. We got some furniture.

We were home owners!

The first Christmas we had one hundred dollars to buy presents for three children. Bonnie and I drove to an Independence, Iowa consignment auction. We were able to buy enough items for a modest Christmas.

Our address was 109 Walnut Street, LaPorte City, Iowa 50651

We still live at that address! It's now 2006.

The property is valued at four times what we gave for it in 1991

1992 Welcome to LaPorte City of Hate, Iowa!

This is my story as told by me. I am sure that it is not the whole story, that I will omit some memories as painful or trivial. I will most likely dwell on issues unimportant to others. I will relate things from my own viewpoint. Being the central figure on my own stage this “theater production” will not be as others might see it! It is simply my story as I relate it. My own view from behind my eyes.

IN OTHER WORDS: MY OPINION!

I was able to have my old 1951 Chevy towed from my brother's farm to our new home in LaPorte City, Iowa. It was too late for it though! The engine had frozen up after all the years it had sat. My dad knew how to unfreeze an engine. He wouldn't help me. I just parked the Chevy in the garage for the next few years.

Spring of 1992 we had to have our sewer lined pumped for the second time since we had moved to LaPorte City. We thought it odd that the people next door seemed to laugh whenever we needed the line pumped. We found out later that our sewer line was on a “Y” connection with theirs. We heard rumors that they were deliberately flushing things down their line knowing it would clog our line in an attempt to drive us out.

We heard other rumors. Apparently they were spreading rumors that we had over twenty people living in our home! We also heard they were spreading the usual rumors about anyone with long hair, such as I was a drug dealer. They also were saying we had too much stuff in our garage. I found that rumor to be the strangest. What were they doing in my garage?

We discovered that the same neighbors were damaging our home. We heard that their youngest son was hitting the rear siding with a ball bat. There are signs of damage there to this day. When we first moved in, there were windows broken out on a rear room. We heard rumors that it was the same neighbors.

Bonnie sat her caged cockatiel in the backyard to let the bird enjoy the outside. The youngest neighbor boy started screaming as loud as he could and was throwing rocks at the bird in its cage! Bonnie had to bring her bird in.

Whenever any of us would go into our back yard, the neighbors would find a reason to harass us! They would yell threats, throw things, make loud comments, slam doors!

We briefly owned a German Shepard female dog. We had her tied up in our back yard. The rear yard was fenced also. We had to get rid of the dog when we discovered the neighbors were throwing rocks and dirt at her.

The whole family seemed to have an intense hatred of us. Laura couldn't go in our back yard alone. If she did, the same people threw rocks at her!

We haven't been able to do anything in our rear yard to this day! The same family still harasses us!

Logan painted our house later that spring. We didn't care for the dull gold color it had been. We started painting the front first, then the side away from the people. We did the rear after that. When it came time to paint the side of our house facing the neighbors they threatened Logan so severely that he was afraid to even go on that side of the house again. They claimed that that side of our house was on their property! We couldn't paint it!

That side of our house is still a dull gold color to this day. The rest of the house is blue.

There were hundreds of incidents within the first year we lived in LaPorte City, Iowa.

Things would only get worse!

For years a person could have drawn a line in the road marking where the same neighbors would jerk their heads to glare at our house when they passed.

Despite all the trouble from the neighbor family, we thought it was just one hateful family. We didn't believe it to be the entire town. Not yet, anyway.

We started to suspect things though when we recieved a strange visit from the LaPorte City Chief of Police!

Logan's friend, Pete Kearns, was visiting from the mobile home park we had lived in. Logan had shown Pete around the property, but they never left the property. A Laporte City Police cruiser pulled up after the boys had been inside playing Nintendo for a few hours. It was the Chief of Police. He told me he was looking for two boys. I asked him what two boys. He told me two names of boys I had never heard of. The names were so strange that I suspected he was making them up. I told him I didn't know either boy, and asked what he was looking for them for. He told me the two boys he was looking for had been walking up the railroad ten minutes before. I told him that my boys were inside where they had been for the past few hours. The cop spotted Josh and yelled "That's one of them!". I told him Josh couldn't be! Then the cop spots Logan and Pete, and declares they are the two!

I found the whole thing very strange and suspicious. IF he knew two names, he must have talked to someone who gave him the names. He hadn't talked to Logan or Pete! They never left the property! Why, also, had he insisted that Josh was who he was looking for, and then changed it to the two other boys. Something wasn't right.

I asked him again what the boys he was looking for had done? He changed his story! This time the two boys had been spotted climbing up grain silos further away from where he had told me in his first story. He also changed the time to five minutes before his arrival.

The boys had been in the living room playing Nintendo for hours. I had been there watching them play! It was a total lie!

I was extremely suspicious the entire time. He kept changing stories.

Finally, when he starting me he wasn't sure what the railroad and city could "afford"! I got it! He seemed to be wanting a bribe! I couldn't believe it!

We got rid of our Toyota Corolla that spring. Bonnie had burnt the starter out. The Toyota wasn't wanting to start. When it finally tried, it was only hitting on a few cylinders. Bonnie would just keep grinding the starter while it was running. By the time I found out what Bonnie had done, it was too late.

We decided to get another car. We bought an old Ford station wagon off my brother, Jerry.

We put a "For Sale" sign in the Toyota. A local guy named Jimmy Waggle came around and wanted it. He cheated us, but we wanted rid of the Toyota. Waggle wanted us to leave the plates on it. We stupidly did. We didn't know anything about the guy. We just assumed he would return the plates. He didn't.

We saw the Toyota being driven by all sorts of different young boys. We found out later they were all driving around using our plates. The title had been passed around to over five people who would just scratch off the previous name and write theirs in. They all drove it with the car still in our name!

I asked someone if they thought I should turn the story of the Toyota in.

I was told that Waggle was under protection of the local cops.

August of 1992 I opened a small business downtown LaPorte City, Iowa.

I had wanted to open a video game rental store. I thought it could work in LaPorte, City. I found a building to rent downtown. I had the games already. I would need a loan though. I applied for a home equity loan and got it. I was almost set.

I needed some help with business forms, tax permits, etc. I went to the State of Iowa for help. The State put me in touch with some program that helped small businesses. I was told that in order to get State help I needed to do more than just game rentals. I was told that if I also made my store a consignment shop I would be all right.

I very reluctantly opened half my business as a consignment shop. I didn't want to! It was a compromise to please the powers that be. I felt like I was selling my soul.

I named the store "The Last Door". No one got it.

At first, business was fine. I was renting a good share of video games. I was even doing some consignment sales. The business was a success, for the first few weeks.

Three women came in one day. They acted like my little store was a Goodwill. I heard one of them tell the others that people "donated" the consignment items. The next year I would learn a lot more about those three women. At the time they just annoyed me.

I had a video game contest and gave out prizes.

I advertised in the local paper. Two years later I would regret that.

One day, the second month I was open, I heard shouting coming from across the street from my store. I looked out and there was a young kid yelling at people near my store. He was shouting for people not to come into my store. He was shouting my store was "a Gay business".

I asked around as to who the kid was. I was told he was related to an important LaPorte City business man. I was told not to say anything or my store would be closed and "bad things" happen to me!.

The next day, my store was dead. Not a single customer came in!

A week later I closed "The Last Door" forever! It had cost me over three thousand dollars to stay open for five weeks.

Logan was pulled over on his moped, a few weeks later, and given an eighty dollar ticket. He had been riding his moped without having a permit. None of the other kids he was riding with had permits either. When Logan pointed that fact out, he was told "Maybe this will teach your dad a lesson!"

Bonnie and I started having serious regrets about having moved to LaPorte City.

We were buying our home. We refused to be driven out!

Things would only get worse over the next few years.

1993 Witch-Hunt!!!

This is my story as told by me. I am sure that it is not the whole story, that I will omit some memories as painful or trivial. I will most likely dwell on issues unimportant to others. I will relate things from my own viewpoint. Being the central figure on my own stage, this “theater production” will not be as others might see it! It is simply my story as I relate it. My own view from behind my eyes.

IN OTHER WORDS: MY OPINION!

Bonnie had started work at Don's Bakery in LaPorte City about the same time I had opened The Last Door in 1992. She would continue working in the bakery until the LaPorte City Police Department boycotted her job resulting in her being fired in 1994.

Sometime in March the weather had gotten warm enough for Bonnie to take Laura across the street to play in the park. Laura was four. She wouldn't turn five until November.

Logan was fifteen and had gotten his learner's permit in February.

Josh was seventeen and a junior in high school.

We had pretty much been sticking to ourselves for the past year. The Bottoma family next door continued to harass us. The house on the other side of us was empty. There would be a few occupants come and go, but for the most part no one was permanent there. A house further up the block changed tenants. It was occupied in 1993 by a family with two boys. They would eventually be trouble.

Bonnie enjoyed taking Laura to the park to play. She just wanted to bond with her daughter in peace. Bonnie also tried taking Laura to story hour at the library.

I am not sure how Bonnie met Cindy Millermon. It may have been at the park or at the library. I first became aware of their meeting when Bonnie started to complain to me about how she had met a “pushy” woman. Bonnie hates pushy people, but couldn't seem to shake this woman.

Soon, Cindy Millermon was shoving her way into our lives. We didn't really mind too bad at first. Millermon had a boy about Laura's age. We thought it might be a good idea for Laura to have someone to play with. We also thought it might be a good idea for us to have some friends too. We thought it would be a way to fit into the community better.

We were dead wrong! Bonnie's meeting Cindy Millermon was the beginning of a nightmare. A nightmare that continues to this day!

Cindy Millermon was a notorious gossip. There were plenty of rumors about Millermon. Cindy, herself, admitted to being a “former” drug user. There were rumors that there was no “former” attached to her drug use. Cindy also said she had had an affair. She didn't say with who, but we heard that it may have been with a LaPorte City Police Officer. The rumor we heard reported the affair as a way to keep either her or her husband out of jail.

Cindy Millermon had been “saved”! She made a big thing of her salvation. She talked endlessly about not doing what “the Devil” wanted her to do! How she could see “the Devil” at work. It struck me as odd. I never heard her mention Jesus. She seemed to talk about “the Devil” this and that constantly.

She was also below my intelligence level. Everything I said to her went over her head. When I mentioned Pharaoh Akhenaton introducing monotheism into Egypt with the sun disc, she acted like I had just invoked the name of a demon!

It was just the first omen. Things would get worse!

I had been doing woodworking as a hobby for some time. Millermon had been in The Last Door with her “circle of friends”. They were the three women who had made comments about my consignment shop being a Goodwill. Ignorance seemed to be a dominant theme in the case of Cindy and her friends. While in my store, the trinity had noticed a baby crib I had made for Laura.

Millermon wanted me to build her a few things. At first I didn't mind. I thought it might be advertising for a new venture. Maybe I could sell my wood workings if a few people knew I built some items. I built a rocking horse for Cindy's kids. Then she wanted a pirate chest for her kids. I built one. The free projects were starting to annoy me. I was being taken advantage of. Next she wanted some small toys and banks. I made them. I was thankful that they weren't larger. Next she wanted larger! She wanted me to build her a five drawer dresser! I had already paid for materials for enough “free gifts”! I stopped being her personal carpenter.

While I had been building things for Millermon, Bonnie had given her one of my poetry volumes. The volume Bonnie gave Cindy was a hand written calligraphy edition of The Quest. It was an elaborate ornate volume. One day Cindy had invited Bonnie over to her house, and Bonnie asked about the poetry. Cindy had hidden it in a drawer, so her children “wouldn't see it!”. When Bonnie asked her why, Millermon replied that it showed that I was “in the grip of the Devil.”. Cindy said she had shown my poetry to her church group and that they had “seen the Devil at work” in me. Cindy reported that her church group had thought I had “committed murder”. They could see it in my poetry!

Later, we asked a member of Cindy's church if they had seen my poetry. They said they had never seen it or even heard mention of it.

We stopped giving Cindy Millermon the “gifts” she kept requesting. Cindy started saying we were going to be “destroyed by the Devil”.

One of Cindy Millermon's other favorite sayings was “I forgive you!”. The way she used the term was as if she were Jesus! We never heard her ever mention Jesus. It was up to Cindy to “forgive” all sinners. We were getting rapidly fed up with her ignorance.

Cindy had her own business. She sold home cosmetics, lingerie, and diet pills. I strongly suspected any of her costumers would also receive The Lord with their orders. I also wondered how lingerie fit into God's plan.

Cindy related to us that she didn't like it when “colored people” would try to buy her products. The people she referred to were Blacks and Hispanics! I grew up in ethnic areas. I had seen her kind of racism justified by twisted religions before.

Millermon would constantly try to get Bonnie to attend her “cosmetic” parties. No one would come. Bonnie went to one. Cindy and some friend of hers wanted to give Bonnie a “makeover”! Bonnie refused. Bonnie's mother used to pop Bonnie's pimples with a straight needle. Bonnie hates being touched on her face!! Cindy saw “the Devil” in Bonnie's refusal.

Cindy was also calling us. We had had a home phone installed the year before. It seldom rang before Millermon. Now we were getting calls from her constantly! They fit a time schedule! We could look at the clock when the phone rang and know if it was Cindy. She would call ten or twenty times a day.

The longer we knew Cindy Millermon the more she irritated us! We grew very tired of her talk of “the Devil”, and how it was up to Cindy to “forgive”

We told her we had been baptized together in the Faith Baptist Temple a few years before. Cindy threw a fit! We weren't “saved” unless it was by her church! Our beliefs were wrong, and just further work of “the Devil”..

Cindy Millermon was an expert when things came to “the Devil”.

The final straw came when Cindy “invited” us to her church!

At that point Bonnie was already tired of any “friendship” or anything to do with Cindy Millermon. Bonnie is very quiet, but she was starting to hate Cindy. Bonnie refused to go to Millermon's church. Cindy kept insisting. Things were about to hit the fan!

I told Bonnie we may as well go. I thought it would be a good idea. If we went maybe Millermon would quit pressuring us to. I was also curious about her church. It was a morbid curiosity like with a car crash. I wanted to see what kind of a church spread the kind of ignorance and hate that Cindy Millermon preached.

Bonnie resisted but went.

Millermon insisted we all ride in her run down Chevy Beretta. We would have preferred our Ford station wagon. Cindy insisted we ride with her! We said we could drive there and meet her. No way! Millermon practically commanded us to ride with her! I should have known something was up!

Cindy Millermon's old Beretta was in too rough of shape to take the main highway to Waterloo from LaPorte. Cindy took an alternate route. The route took us by a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints! I commented that the Latter Day Saints were good people, and that I believed in a lot of their ideas. Cindy turned white! She floored the old Beretta! It was too worn to do much, but Cindy sped by “the Devil's church” as best she could.

It was another bad omen. I still wasn't getting the message though.

We finally arrive at her one true church! Waterloo is full of them. Some passing minister, evangelist, rents or buys some old forgotten church and starts his own. The Faith Baptist Temple had been similar. Cindy's church failed to strike me with awe!

When we walk inside a friend of Cindy's is waiting for us. The first thing Millermon's friend says to me is “I'm surprised to see “you” here!”! The second thing is “You're not the type of husband Bonnie is supposed to have!”.

I started regretting being there. Very few churches have ever made me feel that way so soon.

The service itself was uneventful. Neither God nor Jesus ever made an appearance. There was no holy spirit in that church!

The congregation was about ten to fifteen people. I don't remember being impressed with any of them. They acted tired and bored.

Towards the end of the service came the usual call for salvation, where all sinners are invited to the pulpit to be saved. Cindy acted upset that neither Bonnie or I made any moves forward. Bonnie relates that she actually felt Cindy give her a physical push from behind. I guess Millermon had her own ways of saving people. Force those sinners to salvation! Praise The Lord!!

Bonnie and I were wanting out and fast! We fled as fast as we could after the service concluded. We raced out to the Beretta! We suddenly realized why Cindy had insisted we ride with her!

Cindy's friend came to the car. Cindy was nowhere to be seen. Millermon's friend started talking to us. She said that she and Cindy were going to cure my depression with vitamins and send me back to work. [I hadn't had a depressive episode in years. I would after this.] Cindy and her friend knew more than the dozens of therapists I had gone to! Millermon's friend also related their plans for Bonnie! We were trapped!

Cindy finally comes out of the one true church with her pastor in hand. She points to us with a worried look! The pastor “needs” to talk to us! I tell her pastor we don't need his church. We have our own faith! Thank you very much! Goodbye!

Cindy doesn't speak to us all the way back to LaPorte City.

It was the last we spoke to Cindy Millermon! We had finally had it with her, her talk of “the Devil” this and that, her “forgiveness”, and her one true church! Adios! Goodbye! Farewell! Amen!

Cindy wouldn't let it end there! She started calling even more. We knew when it was her. She still called at the same times. Our phone started ringing fifty times a day! It was harassment that wouldn't stop! Millermon was determined to “save those devils”!

Events mounted rapidly!

Bonnie had to take Laura out of story hour! A few of the other kids refused to sit next to Laura as she was a “devil worshiper”. We complained to the LaPorte City Chief of Police. He said Cindy's actions were not harassment. Our complaining was! We were making the entire city look bad.

Laura was thrown off her bicycle while riding in the park by the two boys up the street. They said she ate cats! Laura came home crying. She never rode her bike again after that.

Our phone was ringing as much as one hundred times a day by summer. Most of the calls would hang up when we answered. A few would shout “Devils”, or “Cat-Eaters”. There were also a growing number of calls making death threats. We had our number changed twice and the calls just kept coming. We got an unlisted number and the calls continued. We had a tracer put on our phone! The police refused to tell us who was harassing us by phone!

We were told that Bobby Bottoma, the youngest neighbor boy, was circulating drawings of our family throughout the school. The drawings depicted us as demons! Bottoma was also telling stories of “Devil Ceremonies” he had seen us perform! He was also bragging about how he was going to murder Laura if we put her in public school. “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”!

Someone was saying they had seen me eating cats! I had eaten over thirty!

Laura was just sitting on our front porch when Bobby Bottoma started throwing rocks at “the devil girl”. He hit her hard enough that we had to take Laura to the doctor for a Cat-Scan! When we called the police, we were told anything happening to our “little bitch” was “separation of Church and State” and they couldn't do anything to prevent it.

The local idiot showed up at our door close to midnight one evening. He wanted to join our “coven”!

The boys were being harassed at school. Josh didn't say anything, but it was getting to Logan! He would finally break down the following year.

There were reports that a local group planned to burn a cross in our front yard!

One day we returned home to find a group of boys yelling “cat-eaters” and other taunts at us. It took five calls to the police and over forty-five minutes before an officer arrived. The boys had left by then. The cop told us he wasn't about to arrest anyone for doing anything to our family! He denied any of the actions against our family were hate crimes! We were the trouble makers!

Laura's only friend, Danielle Bets, was slugged in the face for being friends with a “cat-eater”. Danielle and Laura were called “cat-eaters” at the public pool. When we complained to the pool we were told not to send Laura there anymore!

I was sitting in our garage when a girl and her dog passed. The little girl told her dog that “This is where the Devil lives!”.

Welcome to LaPorte City of Hate, Iowa! Witch-Hunt Central.

The LaPorte City, Iowa Witch-Hunt consumed all of 1993. There was very little else.

We replaced the Ford Wagon with a 1980 Camaro. We took out a loan for it. I had barely parked it in the driveway when I heard Logan walking home from school. As soon as he saw the Camaro he ran the rest of the way! He loved it. He wanted to know if he could have it when he turned sixteen! I said he could.

Logan still has a love for Camaro's to this day.

LaPorte City was flooded summer of 1993. The entire city is in a flood plane. A person could have swam in our basement! The flood did some minor damage to the basement steps and a section of the foundation. We had house insurance that covered some of the repair. FEMA paid for the rest.

In an effort to escape the hate crimes in Laporte City, Bonnie and I started taking the Camaro and going to Gilbertville weekends to a small bar called the "Dew Drop Inn".

One night they had Kareoke. I sang a few songs to an appreciative audience. It was one of very few good times that year.

We met a couple, one night, who reported they had been to Cindy Millermon's house to smoke pot the week before. "Oh, Lord. Bless this joint I am about to smoke."

Josh was old enough for his first car. We bought a 1977 black Pontiac Trans Am off my brother Don. It was like the one in the "Smokey and the Bandit" movies!

Josh still loves Trans Am's. He has a red Trans Am stored in the garage as of this writing.

Josh went to work for an egg farm. Logan went to work the same place. Josh and Logan have been working since their early teens. Josh is a restaurant manager now. Logan is a U.S. Marine Corporal.

I went through some depression due to the witch-hunt. I did what I have always done and turned to my creative projects to alleviate it. I wrote several poetry volumes during the years 1993-1996.

My musical dreams and aspirations were all but completely buried. They wouldn't be awakened until 1995.

There was little by way of hope for anything in 1993.

The Witch-Hunt continued.

There was nothing we could do.

1993-1996 ~ Words!

I agree with Carl Rogers. People really do know what's best for themselves. Left alone they will heal themselves given time. There is also an inner drive to be healthy. Carl Rogers suggested communication as an aide in healing. The creative process is another key.

The years starting in 1993 through 1996 I sought the healing power of words! The bottled-up feelings I couldn't express in any other way came out in verse!

This is a listing of the poetry volumes I wrote during those times!



The Aphorisms: 1973 - 1994

**The Lords of Perception
The Formgivers**

The Poetry: 1993 - 1996

Lost Souls - 1993

The Tarot Trilogy: 1994

**The Magician
The Hanged Man
The Shaman**

Poetry Volumes:

**Travel w/o The Sun - 1995
Sullen Angels - 1995
Departures - 1995
The Pharoah Rises - 1995
Ground Zero - 1995
Kaleidoscope - 1995

Interim - 1996**

I switched to songwriting in 1995, and discontinued writing the poetry volumes. My poetry was also subject to a limited ban by the LaPorte City, Iowa Police Department in 1994.

I still write.

I am a singer/songwriter/actor/poet!

The poet will always be within me!

~ 1994 The Witch Trial ~
“Felony Devil Worship”

This is my story as told by me. I am sure that it is not the whole story, that I will omit some memories as painful or trivial. I will most likely dwell on issues unimportant to others. I will relate things from my own viewpoint. Being the central figure on my own stage, this “theater production” will not be as others might see it! It is simply my story as I relate it. My own view from behind my eyes.

IN OTHER WORDS: MY OPINION!

Things started off bad and only got worse throughout 1994.

Logan turned sixteen on February 25th of that year. He had been extremely eager to get his driver's license. We took him to the Department of Transportation testing area that afternoon. He passed his test easily. The bad part came when we got home.

Logan wanted to use his brand new license. There was a heavy snow falling. We didn't want him driving in it. We told him he could wait until the next day. He kept begging and insisting. Finally, I gave in. I told him he could drive around a few blocks within LaPorte City. I told him not to go further.

For some reason we hadn't given Logan the Camaro yet, as we had promised we would. We had bought him a Pontiac Firebird with a 440 Magnum engine. It was black. It resembled Josh's Trans Am, only without the shaker scoop. I trusted Logan with a muscle car. Maybe I shouldn't have.

We made Logan promise again that he would just drive around locally. The snow was coming down harder. He promised. He left in the Firebird. We went inside.

An hour or so later, we heard Logan roar into the driveway. He came in the house in tears. He had blown a valve pan gasket, and overheated the Firebird. He also had a ticket for driving over eighty miles an hour in a fifty five zone! The ticket said Logan had been almost to Washburn, Iowa. Logan had only had his license for a few hours!

About two weeks later, March 5th, 1994, Bonnie came home from her job at the local bakery. The bakery had been sold to new owners a few months before. A married couple now owned it.

The bakery had wanted the local police to do an endorsement of the bakery's doughnuts. The male owner had called Larry Feeker, local chief of police, the night before, to talk to him about the doughnut endorsement idea. Feeker informed the owners of the bakery that the LaPorte City Police Department was boycotting the bakery! Bonnie was a “devil worshipper” harassing the police! The woman owner called Bonnie in the basement and fired her!

Within minutes of Bonnie's arrival home a squad car pulls up and slams its door as the driver gets out. LaPorte City Police Officer, Laura Hernandez, comes barging through the door demanding to know where I am! She was given **NO** permission to enter our home. She spots me in my chair having a cup of coffee. She screams at me to put down the coffee! I am under arrest! When I ask for what, I am told **“devil worship is a felony”!**

I was searched. Hernandez told me she had to make certain I wasn't carrying a boot knife! She didn't want to believe facts when her search revealed I didn't. She yelled at Bonnie to **“take your little bitch in the other room”** and then handcuffed me behind my back.

I was shoved into the door and then out to the squad car. **My rights were not given!**

First I was taken to the LaPorte City Hall to be “questioned”!

I am taken before Larry Feeker, Chief of Police! He screams at me that I have to stop! “Stop what?”, I ask. I inform him that it was the LaPorte City Police that just harassed Bonnie off her job! I point out that the entire city of LaPorte City has been harassing my family as “devil worshippers”! His response is that the cops had a right to boycott the bakery! I had been “harassing the entire city!”. I guess it's harassment to live with LaPorte City limits if you don't belong to the “one true church”. It's also harassment to complain of harassment in LaPorte City!

Larry Feeker calls the bakery next! He loudly informs the owners that **“He's going to jail!”** over and over again about me! He also called the local newspaper for some strange reason, repeating the same **“He's going to jail!”** comments.

Months later when questioned on the witness stand at the trial Larry Feeker committed perjury and denied any phone calls were made.

I asked to talk to the bakery owners myself. While I tried to, Feeker and Hernandez made as much noise as possible. Suddenly they had very loud things to do. It may have been to drown out my conversation on a tape recording.

The bakery owner confirmed why she had fired Bonnie! I was told it was due to the police boycott.

When I got off the phone I said I should write a book about LaPorte City and its witch-hunt! Laura Hernandez coldly informed me that writing poetry was a felony also, and that I would be writing my **“poetry in prison”!**

They demanded to know where my books were available! I told them that the Oelwein, Iowa library had stocked my poetry for nearly decade. It was the only place I told them of many that had my poetry books.

A week later, I got a letter from the Oelwein Library. My poetry had been banned.

Feeker gave me a second ticket. The second one just said “harassment”. It was for writing letters to the editor of the local newspaper complaining about the LaPorte City witch-hunt. My freedom of speech was “harassing everyone in LaPorte City!” I had used a sentence with the phrase **“Would it make a difference IF”** it were happening to you?

I told them the charges were all absurd. They fired back that I would plead guilty to them anyway! I said I wouldn't do any such thing! Larry Feeker said **“Oh, yes you will! If you don't, I will be around to arrest a member of your family for every day you don't!”**

I took his threat seriously. It wasn't a threat! It would come true soon.

I asked why my actions were a crime and none of the threats against my family were. I was told that the LaPorte City Police were not about to do anything to protect my family. The phone calls, and death threats, etc, were all “unfounded”.

After a half hour of “questioning”, and threats, I thought I would be let go. I wasn't!

I was handcuffed and driven to the Black Hawk County Jail. There I was fingerprinted and threatened some more! While being processed I was arrested again for **“felony possession of contraband”** and then searched after being given my rights on the “possession” charge. It was the only charge that I was read my rights for. How could I have been arrested before the search? The whole thing was insane. It was like the boot knife, I had no drugs. I did have long hair though.

I was illegally detained after my processing. I was forced to sit on a bench for an hour afterward while they considered if I couldn't still be placed in a cell.

I was finally let go when an officer told someone to “get **that** out of here!”.

When I was finally allowed out of the courthouse, I had no way to get home.

Waterloo, Iowa is a twenty mile walk home. I didn't know what to do. I didn't have money for a phone call. Bonnie and I didn't have a phone at that time even if I had the means to try and call her.

My only hope was that Bonnie would find me somehow if I stayed where I was. I walked down the street about a half block and waited for a miracle. I also tried to stay out of sight as much as possible. I didn't want arrested for “felony loitering” or any other faked up charges like the ones I had just been accused of!

I am not sure how long I waited. I finally saw Bonnie and our car. I caught her attention and she turned around and picked me up.

Bonnie told me that Hernandez had come to the house in the squad car after leaving me in Waterloo with no transport. Bonnie had been told that I was **“in jail”** at the Black Hawk County Courthouse! Bonnie was also told that she too was under arrest for **“felony devil worship”**. Bonnie would be jailed or not depending on **“How Gary pleads.”**

At that point neither of us really cared. We were just glad the ordeal was over for the time being!

Josh was pulled over and ticketed a day later. Bonnie was pulled over. Bonnie didn't have a current license. She wasn't given a ticket, but was “reminded”!

Logan got the worst of it! When Logan was leaving school, the Chief of Police had pulled him over for no reason. Logan talked back. Something happened and Logan slammed his Pontiac into high gear in a fit of temper. He smoked his tires and let his engine roar for blocks. Feeker was in rapid pursuit behind him. Finally Logan spun a half doughnut and stopped sideways in the road. He was arrested and taken to the local jail.

We found out Logan had been arrested when a guy from the electric company came to our door. We were informed that Logan had been arrested and was in a cell. We were also told that Logan might remain there **“depending”**. The implication again was on how I might plead to my **“felony”** charges!

Logan had only had his license a few weeks!

Bonnie went down and got Logan out! She also got in an argument with Feeker, who had “no idea” why Logan had taken off! Bonnie informed Feeker that Logan may have been upset over what was happening to our family. Feeker said there was nothing happening to our family! Bonnie asked what he called the police boycotting her job and having her fired was. He denied everything! There was no boycott! The bakery owner had fired Bonnie due to my “hanging around the bakery” all the time!

I had never been in or near the bakery! Anyone could have smelt the cover-up a mile back.

Josh, Logan, and I all had to report to the local magistrate court on the same day.

I asked the clerk if I could be appointed a lawyer. The LaPorte City Attorney told me I couldn't have one as the city was “not seeking jail time”! Not seeking jail time on three felony charges? How could I even be tried in a magistrate court with a folding table for the clerk? It was more insanity!

I don't remember what Josh did. When I plead “Not guilty!”, I heard the Chief of Police slam his fist on a table nearby. Logan also plead “Not guilty!”. Logan got confused on how to leave the court. He accidentally left past the local cops. Logan said they were very upset!

My Witch-Trial would be another day!

The first thing I did was go to the Black Hawk County courthouse and request a jury trial. I thought the LaPorte City, Iowa witch-hunt needed to go public! I turned my ticket listing my “Felony Arrest” over to someone in the court offices. It was not so mysteriously “misplaced”.

At least **the “felony charges”** weren't mentioned after that. They were never dismissed or dropped either. They just weren't mentioned at the time, but were apparently still **“on record”**! Bonnie and I received a letter from Black Hawk County later that informed us that we had **“revoked”** our rights as Iowa citizens due to our **“felony arrests”**! That means we were listed as “felons”, without the charges ever being heard. It was more insanity!

Due to my request for a jury trial, the case was delayed for several months.

Josh graduated from high school in June of 1994. My parents and a few members of my family came to his ceremony at the school. In an ironic bit of conflict of interest, Larry Feeker was also head of the school board. He glared at me menacingly during the presenting of diplomas. I don't think he wanted to give Josh a diploma. He did though.

We had Josh's graduation party at the city park across the road. We were warned not to have any **“ceremonies”**. Wasn't Josh's graduation party a ceremony? We knew what they meant! The witch-hunt was now endorsed by Laporte City Hall!

The shelter where we had Josh's reception is across the street from neighbor, Jim Bottoma! The entire Bottoma family decided to stand in their front yard screaming and making nasty comments about us! Bobby Bottoma brought out his school trumpet. He stood by the road and kept blowing it as loud as he could. It wasn't music. He didn't have any talent, and wasn't attempting to make music. It was to harass us! It sounded like he was the final angel sounding the sixth trumpet, and the road was the river Euphrates! A warning prelude of Armageddon! It was definitely disturbing, and extreme harassment! We ignored the disturbance as best we could. We knew it wouldn't do any good to call the police. If we would have, we knew we would be the ones in trouble somehow! We, also, knew that if it had been us doing Bottoma's actions that we would have been arrested. The whole thing was just a further episode in the witch-hunt.

Before the actual trial there were a few times everyone involved in the case had to make an appearance before a judge reviewing the readiness of proceedings.

I had based my case on **“community standards”**. It was my intent to make the LaPorte City Witch-Hunt public. My defense was yanked out from under me! I was denied witnesses on the grounds that it would make **“the LaPorte City Police Department look bad!”**. It was an interesting legal precedent! How could I be legally tried without my right to call forth witnesses? It was more madness! It was a witch-hunt indeed.

We had a phone installed again. We had hoped the calls had stopped. They hadn't. We installed an answering machine in the hopes of recording a few threats and things. The calls continued, but the brave people of LaPorte City, who had been threatening the murder of children, were shy about being taped. They continued to call a hundred times a day, but wouldn't say anything. They'd just hang up!

All, but one! We taped what we thought was great evidence! It was of a drunk making death threats! He said he carried a gun and that we shouldn't expect to live through the night! When we took it to the Black Hawk County Sheriff's office we were told it was not a terrorist threat since the caller was drunk! More insanity! Someone is allowed to call us threatening us, and it's all right because he's drunk???

The law in Black Hawk County didn't apply to “devil worshippers”!

Logan blew the engine on his Firebird. While he had it in the garage changing engine he still needed a car to get to work at the egg farm. We bought him a really nice Mercury station-wagon to drive until his Firebird was ready. The plan was that we would take the wagon after that.

A week later, we noticed Logan had parked the Mercury as far away from home as possible. We asked him why. He didn't say why. The next day he parked closer, but tried to park behind one of the trees out front so we couldn't see the car. I was suspicious and walked out to look at it. It was severely damaged. There were signs that the car had been egged. The windshield was badly cracked. There were deep dents all over the car! The doors looked kicked in! What had been a nice car was a total loss. We questioned Logan. We demanded him to tell us what happened. Logan wouldn't say a word.

We junked the Mercury. Logan quit his job on the egg farm. He never said if the car had been destroyed by the other workers over witch-hunt rumors, but we suspected it.

I was sent home by the Black Hawk County Clerk of Court just before one of the case reviews. I was informed that my case had been transferred back to LaPorte City! Bonnie and I were upset. We knew we wouldn't get a fair trial there. We soon found out that we wouldn't in Black Hawk Country either.

When we returned to LaPorte City, we stopped for gas. A local squad car pulls up and puts me under arrest for **“failure to appear”**! More insanity! I had been to court and sent home! I was detained while the officer talks to the LaPorte City Attorney. It finally turned out that my case was still in Black Hawk County. It was Logan's case that had been sent back to LaPorte City! The LaPorte City Attorney explained away my false arrest as confusion over Logan and I having “the same first name”! We had been had again!

When I was denied any witnesses I had to send letters to the ones I had already sent a subpoena to, notifying them that they would no longer have to appear. I sent letters to all but one. The woman was a key witness to the harassment of my family! I needed her to appear!

The next day, Officer Laura Hernandez of the LaPorte City Police Department wrote the woman a ticket for having her car parked in front of her house! The car was parked legally and moved every day. It was designed to intimidate my only witness! It worked. When the trial was finally held, my witness failed to appear!

We continued to receive threats and harassment on a daily basis! On the rare occasions when we would pick up the phone we were threatened over our pending trial. Two boys broke into our garage. When I ran them out they ran off screaming “cat eater” at me! It wouldn't have done any good to call the police, so I just watched them retreat.

Someone fired shots at our house! We heard the explosions of the shells. We were terrified. Later, I looked around and didn't see where they had hit anything. It was still a terrible shock and a sign of how far some hateful person could go.

I tried to keep my mind off my impending Witch-Trial. I would go to Oelwein most weekends. I would also go to auctions in Independence. I would do anything possible to escape LaPorte City and its hate!

The adage is “You can run, but you can't hide!”.

Eventually I had to go to trial.

Drum's End

Drum's End Justice is an old military term describing a battlefield “trial” conducted using an overturned drum as a bench. The “justice” rendered was similar to The Spanish Inquisition! My trial for “**felony devil worship**” would be over a “Drum End”, but there would be no justice.

We received several threatening phone calls the morning of the trial. We weren't shocked or amazed. We had grown rather jaded by then.

What would a Witch-Hunt trial be without an accuser? Psychedelic Christian Cindy Millermon was among those arriving to witness the circus. She was heralded into private chambers immediately. If the LaPorte City Attorney planned to use Millermon as a “surprise” witness, Bonnie and I were not surprised to see her there. We did wonder how Cindy's testifying that we were “cat-eaters” and “devil-worshippers” would help LaPorte City's case though. We never found out. Cindy never took the witness stand. Her appearance was only designed to intimidate us!

Bonnie had come with me as my only possible witness. When we entered the courtroom together, the LaPorte City Attorney acted angry. I was told if I wanted Bonnie as a witness that Bonnie couldn't be in the courtroom until her testimony. There were LaPorte City witnesses already seated.

Bonnie went to wait outside in the courthouse halls, where she was threatened by a witness for LaPorte City!

I recognized a juror as one of Millermon's church group friends!

Everything was what an Inquisition should be!

I had been denied any witnesses, but LaPorte City brought close to a dozen!

My “**community standards**” defense wouldn't work without my having witnesses. The next plan was a “**freedom of speech**” defense. It was well within my constitutional rights to write a letter to any newspaper in the country and to use the words “Would it make a difference to you **IF**”. I never got the chance to use my rights as a defense.

LaPorte City lead with a dozen witnesses. No actual incident was pointed to as an act of “harassment”. I was guilty of being me! I had no defense for being myself.

Somehow it was “harassment” on my part for owning a down town business two years before. It was “harassment” advertising my business in the local newspaper. Nothing made sense! I was also accused of “**attempted murder**” of the newspaper owner! He had a bad heart and my subjecting him to stress was not only more “**harassment**” but an attempt at homicide! My trial was causing him stress?

When I said I didn't remember doing any of the accusations, the LaPorte City Attorney had my statement removed from the record. My claims of innocence were not allowed. I was guilty already!

Bonnie joined me during the break in the trial. We had barely left the courtroom when someone claiming to be with LaPorte City demanded we leave the court house. Bonnie and I lead the guy right past the court house cameras. The guy watched us until we had crossed the road and were off the block the court house was on. We turned back around when he left.

When court resumed the Judge asked me if I had a witness. No. I did not. The Judge said he thought I had had one! No.

One witness had failed to appear. Bonnie had been threatened.

“Justice” was being dealt over an overturned drum!

It was no surprise to me when I was found “guilty”. What other verdict could there be? I had no witnesses. I had no rights. I had plenty of accusers! I must be guilty.

Bonnie and I left the courthouse. We heard LaPorte City Police Officer, Laura Hernandez, scream “**YOU ARE THE DEVIL!!**” at us as we did.

Laura Hernandez was charged with use of “**excessive force**” in another case later that fall. Eventually she would leave the LaPorte City Police. It was rumored due to “**police harassment**” charges. The official story was she had quit the force due to a bad back. Strangely, I also heard that later she had tried to sue LaPorte City for having “fired” her!

I didn't care if she had quit or been fired. My thoughts on the matter were “Good Riddance, Bitch!”.

Bonnie and I had barely pulled in our driveway when we heard Jim Bottoma screaming “**HA HA!**” over and over like a mental patient! Apparently news of my guilt had spread fast. We had left the courthouse a half hour before.

Bonnie and I left right away. We needed to just forget the mess. It was auction night in Independence, Iowa. We went there. My Dad and older brother, Larry, were there. Dad had already heard I lost the case. He told me “only a fool is his own lawyer”. News had traveled very fast indeed.

It turns out that someone had broadcast the news over Citizen's Band radio, possibly a police radio. “The Devil has lost! Praise the Lord, all good Christians!”.

A few weeks later I was sentenced. Suddenly, Jail time was brought up again. When I had requested a lawyer I was told I couldn't have one as no jail time was being sought.

I was given the maximum fine of one hundred dollars! It was just more surrealism.

The LaPorte City Attorney referred to me as “Gary **Logan** Forney” during sentencing, with the emphasis on “**LOGAN**”. It was intimidation and a veiled threat! It was a verbal implying of something happening to Logan.

When the Judge asked me if I wanted to appeal, I was forced to say “No” out of fear.

I wrote a letter of appeal to the judge the next day though. It was denied as “untimely”. Since I hadn't said I wanted an appeal at sentencing it would not be allowed. More Drum's End Justice!

Laura should have entered Kindergarten fall of 1994. After the witch-trial the death threats escalated. There were even a few more assaults. There was nothing we could do though. LaPorte City Chief of Police, Larry Feelker, was head of the school board. We were frightened to report the hate-crimes against our family anymore. Our reporting the threats to kill Laura, should we put her in LaPorte Public school, made LaPorte City “**look bad**”.

We notified Black Hawk Country Children's Aid of the death-threats and harassment. Everything fell on deaf ears. Social Services just asked the LaPorte City Police about the case, who denied everything, and the threats and harassment would increase!

Laura was unable to attend Kindergarten in any school.

She was also a victim of Drum's End Justice!

“Guilty by Accusation!”, and nothing could be done.

We gave Logan the 1980 Camaro around August. He had been wanting it since he turned sixteen. He bought us an El Camino in exchange for the Camaro. He loved the Camaro. We loved the El Camino. It was a good trade all around. One of the few good things happening in 1994.

Josh enrolled in Graphic Arts at Hawkeye Institute of Technology in Waterloo, Iowa. The school is a junior college now and had changed its name to Hawkeye Community College. Back then it was just a trade school. Josh didn't get his degree. He did learn photography and a few years later would take the photograph of me used by the New York Times!

Josh had recently installed a 350 engine in his Trans Am. When he did he equipped the car with a shortened exhaust temporarily until he could replace the entire system. Years later he admitted something else. He had shoved a rag into a hole in the floorboards under the passenger's seat.

Late summer, Josh needed to go to Hawkeye for an orientation. Bonnie had the El Camino. Logan was at school. Laura and I were to ride with Josh to Hawkeye where Bonnie would meet us. We never got there.

Laura was in the rear seat behind me in the passenger's seat. Josh was driving. The car started filling with smoke! I yelled for Josh to pull over. I wasn't sure he heard me. He couldn't see or breathe! The stop was ragged and rough. When we finally stopped, Josh and I jumped out. When I went to grab Laura out of the car, I saw flames coming out of the floorboards and engulfing my seat. I quickly got Laura out of the car, but burnt my hand badly when I did. I also tried to stomp out the flames with the same hand, burning it further.

I saw that the Trans Am fire was too far gone to stop. I ordered Josh to get away from it before it exploded. I carried Laura in my arms while Josh followed me further up the road away from the car. The interior was full of smoke and we could see some flames erupting. Josh let out with a loud "No!". I was worried about him running back to the Trans Am, but he didn't. He bravely had to stand there and watch his prized possession burn.

Someone had called the police and fire department. There may have been an ambulance also. The Trans Am was roaring with flame by the time they arrived. All that could be done was to keep people away. The Pontiac was a total loss.

In all the excitement I had forgotten about my hand. I was in a lot of pain from the burns. I walked up to one of the LaPorte City firemen and asked for treatment for my hand. He looked at me for a second, called me "**Cat-Eater**" and walked away!

Logan was being tormented and harassed at school. He started having major problems in LaPorte City. When he wasn't being harassed at school, he was being harassed around town. His dad was a "Devil" and Logan was paying the price.

Logan began to blame me!

Logan and I are from the same mold. Both of us are sensitive and intelligent. I hated it when we began to argue! We would both push the other's buttons! We both used our intelligence as a weapon. Logan blamed me for the Witch-Hunt. I blamed him for bringing it home with him from school. We started having bitter arguments. The fights reminded me of ones I had had with my dad. I was always on the losing end of either! I was "worthless" to Dad, and now I was the cause of all Logan's problems.

Logan and my fights got worse and worse! Bonnie didn't know what to do. She was working at another job by then and wasn't home while Logan and I would fight. She would at turns blame me or Logan. The pressures we had all been under in LaPorte City were tearing our family apart.

It all came to a head. Logan had been screaming at me all day about the with-hunt being my fault. I kept trying to get away from him. If I just sat in the garage he accosted me there. If I went inside, he followed. When Bonnie got home she could see Logan's behavior. She was hot and tired from work. Everyone was at rope's end.

It finally blew! Logan said or did something. I forget what. Bonnie yelled at him. He yelled back that he was being harassed at school due to me! The other students were saying things about me. We demanded Logan tell us what! He refused. The mention of the Witch-hunt was fuel for the fire. The fight escalated.

Logan threatened to run away! He said he was going to take the Camaro when he did.

Somehow everything was my fault! My temper blew right off the shelf.

I ran out the door and kicked the Camaro, then I picked up a rock and threw it into the windshield. The rock cracked the windshild badly, but could have still been repaired. I calmed down after my outburst. It was too late.

Logan came running our of the house! He saw the damage to the Camaro. It was minor, but not to a troubled teenage boy being tormented as son of a "cat-eater"! Logan's temper blew!

In a fit of rage Logan jumped on top of the El Camino and started stomping the roof in. He jumped on the hood and pounded it in. He kicked out the El Camino windshield. He tried to kick in the radiator. Bonnie yelled at Logan to stop. I told her to just let him be. I was calm now, but knew it was too late for Logan. His rage would have to vent itself. Bonnie moaned that she wouldn't be able to get to work. Logan changed behavior! Now his rage seemed directed at himself. He dashed over to the Camaro and bashed out the rear window with his fists. His hands were cut up and he was bashing them into the broken glass when the cops arrived.

Bonnie screams at the cops to get Logan out! Laura Hernandez is still on the force. Hernandez asks Bonnie if what was happening was another of our devil ceremonies! Bonnie is furious and yells at Hernandez. The other cops threaten to arrest Bonnie!

Everything is a nightmare!

Logan is removed from our home. Somehow he wound up spending the night with a friend. It was for his "safety" we were informed.

A social worker comes to our house the next day.

We told the social worker that everyone had calmed down and we wanted Logan to return home! The social worker told us she couldn't allow that. When we asked why we were told she couldn't allow Logan in our home anymore due to our "devil-worship". We angrily informed her that we were **NOT** "devil-worshippers"! She replied that the police report said we were! The report also said I was the one who had broken all the windows out of both cars! Bonnie told her about Logan's actions. The social worker said she believed the police report and not us.

We had been convicted. Case closed! I was a Devil. I also no longer had a son.

My sister's son, Travis, happened to come down the next day. I asked him to go where Logan was staying. I told Travis to see if Logan couldn't go live with Carma and her boys. Logan moved in with his cousins.

When Logan came by and picked up his belongings, he didn't say a word to me

I wouldn't see Logan again until 2001.

In late December we got a call from Logan.

He wanted Bonnie, Laura, and Josh to come to Oelwein to see him for Christmas.

He told Bonnie he didn't want my troubles around..

I spent Christmas 1994 by myself, alone at home.

Logan asked why I hadn't come.

We had done well that year and were able to afford nice presents for all the kids.

We gave Logan a stereo system that had cost more money alone than what we had had for everyone's total Christmas other years!

It was a nice present. All the kids got nice presents.

Three days after Christmas, my sister, Carma applied for Child Support!

It may have been Dad's idea. His worthless son might have some money!

I guess I wasn't supposed to!

I don't remember New Years! I was just glad to see 1994 pass!



” The Renaissance came after the plague!”.

The plague had to happen first!

“Heaven awaits!”

Before you can taste the afterlife, you must taste death!



I went through Hell's fires in 1994.

There was only one way left to go!

It was time to begin again!

1995 ~ “Unlock The Magic”



Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 319 violations of Iowa Code 729A2 committed against our family in 1995!



It was a January evening 1995. Bonnie was in the bathroom taking a shower, when there was a knock at the door! A Sheriff's Deputy served papers on Bonnie. According to the notification, Bonnie was three months behind on her child support payments! It was a total shock! It was the first we had heard anything about even having owed any child support. My sister, Carma, had apparently filed for support for Logan a few days after Christmas.

The neighbor lady was on her front porch yelling over at the Deputy! She wanted to know what was going on! She wasn't dealing with the local cops this time! The Deputy told her to mind her own business! Mrs. Bottoma slammed her door on her way back in her house!

It would take a ton of paper work, and several trips to this and that courthouse, before the case was finally tossed out! Carma had no custody of Logan. He wasn't even living with her by the time the case was concluded. Logan had moved in with my brother, Don. It was a clear case of fraud. The State was sending her checks anyway! The case would go on until early 1998.

Logan was getting in even more trouble! We got a call one night a few months into spring. It was the Cedar Falls, Iowa Police Department. They had Logan in a cell. He had been picked up for driving a car he “Titled and Tagged”. To “Title and Tag” a car is to put false plates on a car. In this case a car without a clear title. Logan had stuck two plates on a car he was buying. The front plate didn't match the rear plate even! He was driving around Cedar Falls, Iowa at 3:30 am with a carload of youths. He was also given another “Reckless Driving” violation! He was also driving without a license!

The Cedar Falls Police wanted Bonnie and I to come pick him up! We refused. We were still going to child support hearings. We felt hurt and angry. We were told we didn't have custody anymore. We wondered why we should pick Logan up from jail. That was then. Now I would have picked him up.

We told the police that we didn't have custody. The police told us that they had checked with the Oelwein Police! They reported Logan as living in a house with a bunch of kids with no adult supervision. The house with “no supervision” was my brother Don's house!

We assumed Don finally got Logan out of jail.

Logan was allegedly arrested again the following day. I don't know the whole story! I heard that he had gotten the “tagged” car out of the impound yard somehow. He apparently walked out to it and got in, with my dad watching, and drove off. Dad told me he saw a patrol car waiting down the block. Dad never said a word to Logan. He just watched him drive off with no license, and be pulled over yet again!

I still don't know everything that went on to this very day! I certainly didn't approve of the way things were going! There was nothing I could do! I was no longer considered his father!

Dad told me that Don was a “better dad than” I “ever was!”

I asked my dad why no one was doing anything to keep Logan under control. I asked him why people were letting Logan drive a car without a license! Why were they helping him to get in trouble?

Dad told me that he wasn't letting Logan drive! Dad told me he was setting right across the road when he saw Logan come out, drive off, and be arrested. Yet, he said he wasn't letting Logan drive! He wasn't stopping him either!

Dad also told me about an incident with my nephew, Travis. The Sheriff's Department had been to Dad's house. They were looking for some stolen property. Dad lied to them about it. The stolen items were in Dad's garage and Dad knew they were! Eventually Travis would do jail time! I couldn't see where Dad or Don were doing anything to prevent anything.

I told Dad that!

Dad called me “useless” and “worthless”! He reminded me of the key I “gave someone” in seventh grade, etc.

Events were out of my control.

I was tired of it all.

I turned to my usual “coping mechanisms” of creative pursuits!

In late February I asked Bonnie to buy me a copy of Writer's Digest. We couldn't really afford the magazine. It was around five dollars. We were still fighting child support and badly hurting. Bonnie bought it for me anyway! Little did either of us realize how much that small purchase would alter our lives.

I had wanted the magazine to look for “Vanity Press” ads. I had self-published some of my poetry previously and was considering doing so again.

I read the magazine from cover to cover. I also circled the “Publish Your Book” ads, the “Poetry Wanted” ads. I also circled a few “Song Poem” ads. One kept catching my eye. It was for Magic Key Productions. The ad had a slogan that spoke to me! It said “Unlock The Magic”.

I wrote to the “Vanity Press” ads first! I was a poet! I wanted my poetry published.

“Vanity Press” is where you pay to have your book “published” or, in reality, printed off in a limited edition. Many poets go the “Vanity Press” route. I was no stranger to the process. I knew the “publisher” would want money!

I got one offer I seriously thought about. I could have a rather thick collection done for around three thousand dollars! If I had had the money I would have taken the offer. I might be a “poet” rather than “song poet”. It was a choice made by economics!

I did find a place to do some poems! The International Library of Poetry!

The way “poetry houses” work is to accept your poem for publication for a small fee. For a few dollars you get a word-processed print-out of your poem! Your poem is then selected for “publication” in a hard bound poetry anthology volume! To receive a copy of the handsome thick edition costs from twenty-five to forty dollars. Audio-cassettes of “poetry readings” are sometimes offered.

I eventually went with two of the book offers, and one of the cassette offers.

I also sent a song to Magic Key Productions on March 4th 1995. It was somewhat reluctantly. I had wanted a poetry volume! I was clinging to the “more is better” philosophy. I sent the words and music to “Caravan” to the address anyway. I figured maybe one song would be all right until I saved the money for the poetry volume somehow!

I still haven't done the poetry!

I received the standard acceptance letter from Magic Key. The song I had written while living on the farm could finally be heard. Maybe! It would cost eighty dollars! I knew about "Vanity Press" and knew that the offer was similar. I held on to the letter for a week or so.

What finally prompted me to have my first song done was Magic Key's offer to let us make payments. The payments would be about twelve dollars each. It was still a little much considering our struggle at the time.

Bonnie was working at Long John Silver's in Waterloo. Somehow we managed the slim little payments!

The song finally arrived in April, I think. At the time, Magic Key was still putting songs on cassette. When I listened to the first few notes I knew I had found something I wanted to pursue further. "Caravan" is still special to me! I played that little cassette over and over! Bonnie and I both agree to this day that it was the best eighty dollars we ever spent!

I made up copies of "my song" on cassette! I didn't really know anyone to give them to. I gave a few to family members. Bonnie gave copies to fellow workers.

I was hooked!

Sometime later that year, I received another offer from Magic Key. The letter said my song could be placed on a compilation Compact Disc for a slightly larger fee. Bonnie and I sent payments again!

We knew that song-poems were similar to "vanity press". We knew deep down that very few people would ever hear any of the songs. To us, though, the music was "magic"! It was worth every penny! The more songs I did the better I felt. The little cassettes, and later CD's, were a cure for depression! Certainly better than medications and quack therapists!

We allowed ourselves a few fantasies too! We secretly hoped that "**Songwriter's International**" might actually get airplay! Maybe even be "discovered"! Maybe I could buy a Corvette!! Bonnie's dream was for a new house! Josh wanted to start a band if he got some money! It was all big dreams. We knew! It was the first time, for a few years, that we even had dreams that things could get better though! It felt good to dream again.

I never did get my Corvette! I still could though! It's not out of the question! I let myself dream now!

Josh actually got his band! The Iowa Mountain Tour may not be the band he originally envisioned, but he got his dream!

How much is happiness worth? One day, after I had been doing song-poems for some time, Bonnie looked at me and asked if I was happy. I told her "YES! YES, I AM!". It was the first time in my life I had been able to say that! Bonnie's dream may have come true that day. We still had the same physical house, but it was "different" and "new" somehow!

I went from poet to song-poet in 1995. I have no regrets.

The songs I did in 1995 were:

"**Caravan**" words and music by Gary Forney

"**Setting Sun**" words and music by Gary Forney

"**The One That I Love**" words and music by Gary Forney

"**Iowa Cowgirl**" words by Gary Forney / Music by David Fox

I placed all my little cassettes on display in the living room! I was happy and proud.

We went through a succession of vehicles. I can't even remember them all. Our income limited us to vehicles this side of the junk yard. It's a fact of life for poor people.

A husband and wife stopped to eat where Bonnie was working. After their meal, the man walked up to Bonnie and told her he had put his parents away. Bonnie didn't recognize him, and just said something like "Oh?". It turned out to be her brother, Bob. Bonnie hadn't seen her brother, Bob, in twenty years. He had to ask her if she wasn't Bonnie! Neither had really recognized the other! My dad had given out where Bonnie worked, and her hours!

Bonnie's parent's had been placed in the county home. They could no longer take care of themselves. Their children put them there! It was a lesson they had been taught by their parents. When someone becomes a problem the solution is to get rid of them! Bonnie's family had done it to us two decades before.

There was a Hayzlett family get together. It was to divide up the things in Bonnie's parent's house! We didn't go!

Bonnie and I sent a letter to her brother asking about the empty house. We thought we might like to buy it. Bonnie's sister, Joan, now had control over the estate. Joan ignored our wanting to buy the family home. We would eventually receive a "Dear Sibling" letter from Joan's lawyer. Joan had sold the Hayzlett family home. Joan was the only one to receive any money from the sale.

Two weeks after being placed in county care, Doris Hayzlett died. We were never informed of cause of death. She was seventy-two!

Bonnie didn't seem affected. She later told me that she barely cried when she heard the news. Bonnie and her mother had been alienated for decades.

We were invited to the funeral and a family gathering after.

We didn't want to go to the funeral. We were forced to!

A woman, that Bonnie worked with, insisted Bonnie attend. The woman had a good relationship with her family and couldn't understand Bonnie's not wanting to attend her own mother's funeral. The woman forced Bonnie to agree to go!

My Dad, also, insisted we go! It was useless to protest!

Bonnie, Josh, Laura, and I went to the funeral. We timed things so we wouldn't have to view the body. We wanted to get in and out without being seen. The coffin was just being closed as we arrived. We had hoped to be seated with the guests. An usher recognized Bonnie! We were escorted to the family side.

I noticed something odd, even for a funeral. None of the Hayzlett's looked at the others. No one spoke. Bonnie's dad was in major grief! He asked Tom Hayzlett to take him into the hall. He couldn't bare the proceedings. No one seemed to be concerned.

We left after the service when the mourners exit the church for the drive to the cemetery. We walked by Bonnie's dad. Bonnie didn't even look at him.

We were finally able to enter Laura in school.

We were still receiving threats and harassment in LaPorte City. Iowa law does not require a child to attend Kindergarten. It does require First Grade! We would have to find her a school where she would be safe from harm.

We were able to enter Laura in Orange Township School in Waterloo, Iowa!

My interest in music had been renewed by the song poems I was writing. I started listening to the radio over the summer.

There had been a notorious rock festival in Iowa in 1970. It had been held in a field in Wadena, Iowa. The festival had been Iowa's own little Woodstock, complete with drugs and nudity! I didn't attend, but a few of my friends had.

Summer of 1995 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Wadena Rock Festival. Someone decided it might be cool to try a festival again.

I heard about the new festival on the radio and decided to go!

We came up with enough money for Josh and I to attend. It was around forty dollars each.

The day of the concert, Josh and I arrived before the gates opened. It would be hours before the first band played. The festival was in an open field. Neither Josh or I had ever attended an outdoor rock festival. All the concerts I had ever gone to were indoor. Josh and I were unprepared. We hadn't brought anything to sit on. We hadn't brought anything to shade us from the heat. We were both dressed in black long sleeved shirts!

Josh was interested in the act opening the festival. They were "Scarlet Runner", local rock band. Josh had gone to high school in LaPorte City with members of the band. Josh wanted to check them out! They were fair. We weren't that impressed. For all the local publicity buzz, Scarlet runner was over-hyped. Just another forgettable blues band. The way he acted, the lead guitar player thought he was Jimi Hendrix, or better. He wasn't! I thought back to my cousin, Martin, and Saint James Crucifixion! Ego-Rock!

I don't remember every band on the bill. It's not important that I do.

Bonnie should have been to the festival. She loves seventies music. That's what the festival was! Twenty-five years before it may have been a mini Woodstock. The festival Josh and I went to in 1995 was a lame commercial venture. Pot had floated from table to table at rock concerts I had attended in the sixties. In 1995 there were beer tents everywhere and security was hassling a booth set up to gather signatures to legalize marijuana! Times had certainly changed.

The bands were lame! Most were "signature name" bands! Someone, or some record company, would have ownership of some old band name from the seventies. A look-alike, sound-alike, band would tour under the "signature name". "The Jimi Hendrix Experience" played at a bar in Evansdale, Iowa! Jimi had been dead for over two decades. Most of the bands playing at the Wadena Rock Festival were similar.

There was "Doctor Hook and The Medicine Show", a new band with legal permission to use the name!

The faux Doctor Hook did all the actual Doctor Hook's songs, and didn't sound too bad. No one ran forward to hear them play either. We were faux fans!

The weather was almost unbearably hot! Josh and I only had enough money for a few beers. We mostly just rested in the shade of the porta-potties! The hottest thing was all the women in bikinis! The original festival had nudity. Twenty-five years later there were bikinis everywhere instead. It was still sexy!

There were fire trucks spraying the crowd with water to help keep everyone cool. It sort of worked. The sprayed water created mud. The beer tent crowd started sliding around in the black slick slamming into each other! Security made them quit when several fights broke out.

I will give a tip of the hat to Cub Coda! He had a new band there. His new band was billed as "Cub Coda - formerly Brownsville Station!". You, at least, knew you weren't hearing the original Brownsvilled Station. Cub Coda played his one-hit wonder "Smokin' in the Boy's Room!". It was a highlight! Cub had integrity!

Edgar Winter was there! Not someone using the name! The actual original Edgar Winter!

The Edgar Winter Band was the reason I had gone to the Wadena Rock Festival. “Frankenstein” rocked! One of the best driving songs ever! That song was blasted out of every car's eight-track player in the early seventies! I know I sure blasted that song out of my little Corvair! I wanted to hear the song live by the actual Edgar Winter!

I got my wish! Edgar came on after dark. We had sat there the entire day. Josh was tired and wanted to go home. I insisted we stay to hear Edgar Winter!

The performance was everything that could be imagined from a major rock star, even one whose time may have passed. You wouldn't have known that night! The performance was electric. Josh and I pressed forward as much as possible. Everyone had pressed forward. Josh and I were slightly stage right and within ten feet of the stage! I could feel the bass amp thumping like someone hitting me in the chest! The Frankenstein jam was an experience. Edgar played that song alone for over twenty minutes! Lighters were held aloft in homage! Edgar did all the patented rock star moves with style!

Edgar Winter was the show! I had paid eighty dollars to see a legend. It was worth every penny! Josh and I had sweltered through one of the hottest days on record! It was worth all the heat! We would have gladly done it all over!

The final act was “Jefferson Starship”. We left before they came on!

Josh's and my ears were ringing for hours after we got home!

Josh went out and bought a Edgar Winter VHS tape to study!



Bonnie was called for jury duty and then refused due to her “felony arrest”. She would be called again the next year. She would be refused again. I would be called some years after that. I would be refused also.

The only good to come out of the whole witch-hunt! We were unfit for jury duty!



I continued to write song poems throughout 1995 and 1996. As I wrote more and more songs I wrote less and less poetry. The poetry had served its purpose. I was now setting my words and ideas to music.

Actually, after the first few songs it was Art Kaufman/David Fox setting my words to music.

I started to secretly dream again.

My musical aspirations had been awakened.

Edgar Winter's Frankenstein had leaped into my soul.

I had been a poet. Now I was a songwriter. I wanted more!

1995 was the start!

~ 1995 ~

We gave a sixth birthday party for Laura at Chucky Cheese! The idea was to help her adjust socially with her new classmates. It worked out nicely. We were surprised by the turn-out! It cost us a fair amount, but was worth every dime.

Bonnie and my twentieth wedding anniversary was the same day. All we could afford was Laura's party. We didn't mind. We were happy for Laura to be going to school and having a few new friends.

1996 - Transition

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 236 violations against our family in 1996!



Most of 1996 was spent in transition.

I don't want anyone to think they can just send some words out, have them made into a song, and become famous! I don't want anyone thinking there is a quick-fix-instant-oatmeal cure for all their problems! Each journey needs a first step, a period of transition, and a few falls along the way!

Josh had given up on technical school by 1996. Events had not been going well for our family among other things. He failed to get his degree.

Bonnie and Josh both had been working at Long John Silver's in the spring of 1996.

Bonnie quit first. She had been being trained for a promotion to management. She was sexually harassed and denied the promotion when she complained. Bonnie went to work for Hardee's!

Josh remained at Long John Silver's for a month or so, then he quit. He had been receiving bad treatment from the new manager due to Bonnie's claims. He went to work for Olive Garden.

Josh needed a vehicle for work. He talked to a car dealer and was talked into buying a Chevy S-10 pickup! The truck was a year old. I worried about the cost, but Josh's new job at Olive Garden paid well. Josh was single, living at home, with no other bills. I thought things would be all right.

Josh needed a co-signer. My credit was denied due to my limited income. My brother, Don signed with Josh.

I continued my song writing. I had received a "royalty" check from Magic Key for the new CD. It was for \$1.97. I wasn't too upset. I had hoped for better, but knew that was a dream. I knew what the reality was. "Song Poems" were a niche market at best.

I still believed in my material. It was my reasoning that the songs could be used as "demos" to promote a possible career as a song writer. I started searching for a market.

What I found was more little advertisements in the backs of magazines!

My song poems had taken a country turn. Country songs are the path most open to amateur song writers! "I Got Friends in Low Places!" had been a demo originally! Many other country songs were written by beginners. I believed in myself and my words. Why couldn't I write country songs? I saw a possible path!

I bought a copy of a few country magazines. I found a few advertisements in Country Weekly! It was déjà vu' of finding the song poem ad. Song poems had been good to me so far. Why not try a country approach?

The LaPorte City witch-hunt continued! Some things never change.
Ignorance and hate are two!

Music has been corrupted by big business, and taken from the common man. Music should belong to the people, as folk music or the blues were in their beginnings. The early days of rock music were also the music of the people. Some country music still holds on to its integrity.

There is a sort of underground music that exists. I spent most of 1996 exploring that underground.

There are sharks in the water. I found a few. I also found a few pretentious people. I also found some good honest country people. I found a few rare souls who believe in music and devote themselves to it, not for money or gain. They follow their hearts and their beliefs.

I sent a few demos here and there. I got some recognition. Mostly I met some interesting people. I still maintain many of the old contacts.

We were still going to Oelwein on a lot of weekends. Dad decided that we shouldn't know anything about Logan. He also decided we shouldn't have contact. In his mind we were the cause of Logan's problems. We were forbidden to speak to Logan or know anything going on in his life! Whenever I had confronted Dad, about giving Bonnie's family information against our will, Dad had replied that they were "Bonnie's family" and had "a right to know!" or "Family has a right to know about family!". We were Logan's parents and family! We had no rights though!

I heard years later that Dad had told Logan that we didn't want to see him!

We had wanted to. We were forbidden to.

We stopped our visits to Oelwein shortly afterwards.

When Laura returned to Orange School in the fall, we were told Waterloo Community School District would no longer bus her to and from school. We would have to.

We needed a vehicle to do so. We were between junkers! We finally got the school system to pay a transportation fee for us to transport Laura. We took the check for three-hundred dollars and bought an old Cadillac. It was gold with large round rust spots. It was, as the saying goes, "still a Cadillac."

Two days before Thanksgiving the Caddy dropped its driveshaft on our way to pick Laura up from school. Josh happened to come along on the same road. We had him pick up Laura. The weather was already getting cold, so we went home for the night where Laura would be warm. Josh took Laura to school the next day, and dropped Bonnie and I off to look at the Cadillac. It already had an bright red abandoned vehicle sticker on it! It was scheduled to be towed within the next few hours. We made arrangements for the Caddy to be towed to my brother Larry's farm. It took the only money we had for the tow truck. We weren't able to afford a Thanksgiving dinner that year.

We car-pooled for awhile using Josh's truck. We also made arrangements with the school to bus Laura again.

A week later the weather turned frigid. Josh's new truck wouldn't start. He burnt the starter out trying! We were stranded.

We called my parents for help! We were told it was too cold. Our house was also too far.

Bonnie lost her job. She couldn't get to work.

Josh lost his job. He couldn't get to work.

We were trapped in LaPorte City with no income. We would be all winter.

1997 - Continuations

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 317 violations against our family in 1997!

1997 was a year of continuations! The LaPorte City Witch-Hunt continued in full swing with almost daily incidents. I continued the music and gained some ground. Money problems continued. Logan continued to be absent from our lives. My dad continued his treatment of me. Everything was a continuation! Things don't change over night!

The harassing and threatening phone calls continued unabated. We complained to everyone we could. The LaPorte City Police Department had indirectly declared open season on our family. They refused to acknowledge any hate crimes! To admit to the existence of hate crimes in LaPorte City would make them "look bad"! They needed to shut our complaints up! Whenever we would complain of harassment the police would retaliate with harassment of their own! We were trapped between the Witch-Hunt and the Police!

We contacted the F.B.I. and were ignored. We filed complaint after complaint with the Civil Rights Commission. We were told to sue the LaPorte City Police Department! We couldn't afford to, not only due to money, but for our own safety. After while the Civil Rights Commission told us that since everyone involved was white there was nothing they could do. I guess they didn't care about white-on-white hate crimes.

There were a few assaults in 1997.

We came home one day to find a note on our door. Danielle Bets' mother had left it. She was having problems and Danielle needed to live with us for awhile. While Danielle lived with us she was slugged in the face by a boy at the LaPorte City grade school. He did it because Danielle was "living with the cat-eaters!". We reported the assault to the school. We never heard back from them.

Laura was hit by the same boy for the same reason a few days later. We reported the latest assault to the Black Hawk County Sheriff. A detective was assigned to the case. He acted more like he was investigating us than the hate-crimes. After a few weeks he closed the case. He told us that the Sheriff's Department's investigation had discovered we were being harassed by a gang of youths! The detective said he had "talked to them" and warned them to stop.

They didn't!

We were stopped and harassed by two officers of the Black Hawk County Sheriff's Department. We were intimidated. We got the message! If we were to continue to complain bad things would happen!

Our answering machine was being worn out. It used cassette tapes to record calls. We went through a tape every other day!

There was one brief reprise. The house next to us had a small kitchen fire. The calls quit for some reason. The callers may have thought it had been our house. A few days later we saw Cindy Millermon drive by our house. The calls started again in roughly the time it would have taken her to get home!

1997 was the fifth year of the Witch-Hunt!

The State of Iowa continued to pay my sister, Carma, five-hundred dollars a month in Child Support for Logan. She never had custody of Logan. He hadn't lived with her since the year before. Logan never received any of the money. It was idiocy at our expense. I didn't have enough income to pay it. They tried to collect it from Bonnie. Bonnie would be out of a job until April. Our family of three wasn't collecting five-hundred dollars a month! The Child Support hearings would continue throughout 1997, as they had done 1996.

Dad finally came to help us get our car back in February. We had been stranded since November. He couldn't understand why Bonnie and Josh had lost their jobs!

We didn't have any money! The Cadillac needed a special drive-shaft. Dad paid for one to be custom made from two drive-shafts we picked up in a junk yard. It took another week.

I had to crawl in the snow under the Caddy and install the new drive-shaft. Dad stood by and called me useless.

When I had the drive-shaft re-installed, the Cadillac needed transmission fluid. Bonnie and I barely had twenty-dollars to get some. Dad refused to pay for it. The Caddy would need five quarts. We could afford the fluid, IF we could get a ride the three miles into Waterloo. Dad told me there was a farm store closer in Washburn, Iowa. I told him there was no farm store in Washburn! He told me there was! He said he had driven by it in December. He failed to mention why he couldn't have helped us then. I knew what Dad was talking about. There was an old sign in Washburn for a farm store that was no longer there. I told Dad that, and he told me I was a liar! We set off for the farm store I knew wasn't there!

My brother, Larry, drove Dad and I to Washburn. We pulled in by the old sign. Dad looked around and realized there was no farm store. He didn't want to admit it though. He suggested that someone might be running a farm store out of their home. Luckily, there were no homes near by. Dad would have insisted I knock on doors. I would have refused. We would have had another major fight as always. It didn't happen. Finally Dad admitted it was an old sign. He said someone should tear it down. I panicked in the rear seat. I wasn't about to tear down some sign and be arrested for vandalism. I was relieved when Dad dropped the subject.

We were in Washburn, which is a suburb of Waterloo. I told Dad that if we'd just drive another mile there was an auto store with transmission fluid. It would have cost a few dollars for each quart. Dad refused. It was "too far". He forced me to buy the transmission fluid at a gas station in Washburn. The cans of fluid were typically gas station over priced at five dollars a quart. I could only afford four cans.

We went back to the Cadillac and poured the four quarts in. It was still a quart low. I had nothing left. We had to drive back to Washburn and buy another quart for five more dollars. Dad paid the money. He called me useless again. He told me it was "another dollar I'll never get back out of your worthless hide.". By 1997 Dad didn't care who he called me names in front of. He would repeat his comments about my being "useless" and "worthless" in front of Bonnie and my children. He would tell total strangers the same thing.

It was pointless dealing with Dad. Eventually, his behavior got to me. I stopped going to my parents house completely sometime in the spring.

We had the Caddy back at least. Bonnie and Josh could look for jobs.

It would be May before they found employment.

We had been through harder and rougher times.

It did upset us that it was family causing trouble.

Josh had missed two many payments on the Chevy S-10 pickup. It was re-possessed. It was sold for less than owed. Josh owed the rest. He couldn't pay.

Josh managed to find a job working at the Lone Star restaurant. It was for less pay and was only part time. The credit union told Josh if he and Don, who had co-signed with him, would sign a new agreement, that Josh could make lower payment he could have afforded.

Dad told Don not to sign. Don didn't.

The credit union sued Don. Don sued Josh. Eventually Don and his lawyer would sue me. I would sue Don. It was all being provoked and encouraged by Dad.

The Family-Versus-Family lawsuits would continue through 1997.

There is one event of notice.

Don and his lawyer served papers on Josh to claim everything Josh owned. The Black Hawk Country Sheriff's deputies were embarrassed to try to serve the judgment. It was ridiculous. Don and his lawyer were making absurd claims for Josh's possessions. The writ included a claim for "any and all live-stock"! They wanted Josh's dog! They even wanted Josh's clothing.

They had evoked a really old legality. I fired one back. Josh was living in my home. Everything in my home was my legal property, unless Don and his lawyer could prove otherwise. The Sheriff Deputies agreed. They were also relieved. They didn't want to be laughed at for having to claim "cattle and other animals".

Don and his lawyer were upset, but Josh kept his things.

For all the troubles I held up well. I was growing stronger. The music was helping. Every new song was like a new piece of chain link armor. That new armor was being tested in fire. It was holding up. I was becoming a musician. I believed in myself.

Bonnie found a job as a cook in a senior citizen's home. She prepared meals for seventy-five old people gaining valuable "restaurant experience".

Josh was still working at the Lone Star restaurant.

The only vehicle we had for the first six months was the repaired Caddy. I car pooled for months. I would take Laura to school. Bonnie to work. Josh to work. Pick up Laura. Pick up Bonnie. Pick up Josh. Some days I would be on the road more than I was home. It wore on me, like everything else that year, but I held up.

Josh went to work for Bishop's Buffet while he was still working at Lone Star. He had both jobs about a week. Bishop's paid better with more hours. They also treated Josh better. Josh left Lone Star and went to work full time for Bishop's Buffet. He started as a dish washer.

We bought Josh a 1977 Trans Am. He was able to drive it until the transmission gave out.

Josh was getting back on his feet. He bought another car. The Trans Am is still in my garage. He knows he can leave it there as long as he needs to.

Josh has been with Bishop's Buffet for nine years! He has been a manager for five years.

Bonnie left her job at the senior center after a conflict with another cook.

Bonnie went to work for Bishop's Buffet three months after Josh had started.

Bonnie is head cook now and has been with Bishop's Buffet for nine years also.

Things were starting to go right by mid summer despite the continued conflicts, lawsuits, and hate crimes.

Bonnie dyed her hair blonde! She had been a brunette all her life. She had been wanting to do something with her hair all her life. She finally did at my suggestion. Her hair is still blonde. Josh and Laura are both natural blonde. Bonnie feels she looks more like their mom now. She would be their mom no matter what. They love her. So do I.

Bonnie's uncle had passed away in 1996, He left Bonnie a fourth of his estate in his will. A fourth was also left to Bonnie's dad. The remaining half went to Bonnie's uncle's ex-wife. The inheritance cleared probate that summer. We got a tidy sum. It wasn't a fortune. It just felt like it to us. We drove to Independence and cashed the check there. We all crowded up after Bonnie had placed her inheritance money in a bank bag. We wanted to see. The bag was stuffed. We were thrilled.

We paid off the remaining balance on our house! The deed is in our strong box along with my own will, and the deeds to our graves.

We also bought an A.M.C. Eagle for me to drive. Now everyone had cars.

If you look for it in the movie "Off The Charts The Song Poem Story", you can see my A.M.C. Eagle.

Laura continued to go to school in Waterloo, Iowa for her own safety. She went to Orange Township Elementary School for grades one through five. She started violin lessons at Orange, possibly in 1997. She would continue on the violin through intermediate school.

I continued my new found "career" as a song writer. Besides working with Art Kaufman and Magic Key, I also had a few songs done by the notorious J. Gale Kilgore in Texas. J. Gale produces song poems for twenty dollars. You get what you pay for. J. Gale sings your lyrics to a pre-recorded track. The songs are hit and miss. I had J. Gale do a song called "Jenny" for me. It sounded great. A great sounding Texas country song sang with J. Gale's patent sound. That was a "hit". The next three were "misses". I stopped having J. Gale Kilgore do more songs. I still think highly of J. Gale personally though. He's a great guy. I have talked to him over the phone. We are still in some small contact to this day.

Josh took the famous picture of me by the old car in the summer of 1997. The one used in coast to coast publicity. It was eventually used by the New York Times!

I decided I had enough songs for a small album. I had a cassette album produced by a small company in Florida. It had six songs, and used Josh's famous photo of me for the cover. I thought the tapes should have a "record company" name on them. I decided on "Circle Productions". In the beginning of the song poem thing I had placed my cassette demos next to a drawing I had done in college. The drawing was called "Circle"!

I used the name "Circle Productions" for one more cassette album.

I did three cassette albums that year. For the third cassette I changed "Circle Productions" to "Crop Circle Productions"! It's a more intriguing name that I still use to this day. Sometimes I shorten the name to "CCP" Studios, the CCP being Crop Circle Productions.

I seem to remember a good Christmas and New Year that year.

One exception: Bonnie received a letter from her sister Joan's lawyer. It read "Dear Sibling, I have sold the Hayzlett family home". Joan had sold it for her own gain.

The letter was somehow appropriate for 1997.

The Early Song Poem Years 1995 - 1997

1995 - song poems

- “Caravan” Words and Music by Gary Forney**
- “One Last Kiss” Gary Forney/David Fox**
- “Setting Sun” Words and Music by Gary Forney**

1996 - song poems

- “Iowa Cowgirl” Forney & Fox**
- “Nothing in Hand” Forney & Fox**
- “Laura's Dad” Forney & Wittemore**
- “Jenny” Forney & Kilgore**
- “The One That I Love” Words/Music by Gary Forney**
- “Empty Rooms” Forney & Kilgore**
- “And Then Tomorrow” Forney & Kilgore**

“For Bonnie” by Gary Forney

1997 - song poems

- “Demon in a Bottle” Forney & Fox**
- “Country Girls” Forney & Fox**
- “Emily” Forney & Fox**
- “I Believe in Angels” Forney & Fox**
- “Working Man's Grave” Forney & Fox**
- “Still Be Lovin' You!” Forney & Fox**
- “Aliens Stole My Dog!” Forney & Fox**
- “When Joshua Plays Guitar” Forney & Fox**
- “GhostPoem” Words/Music/Vocal by Gary Forney**

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Iowa Cowgirl video for Magic Key Video Show
SongWriter's International CD Magic Key
SongWriter's International CD Vol 4 Magic Key
The Sound of Poetry - Cassette - International Library of Poetry

Country Roadside - cassette album [single copy remains]
famous picture of Gary used on cover
cover photography by Josh Forney - a Circle Production

Side A

Demon in a Bottle
Iowa Cowgirl
Nothing in Hand

Side B

Laura's Dad
Jenny
One Last Kiss



New Frontiers - cassette Album [no copies remain]
cover photo - Gary, Bonnie, & baby Josh in frontier outfits
a Circle Production

Song information might not be exact

Caravan
The One That I Love
Setting Sun
Empty Rooms
And Then Tomorrow



Tabloid News - cassette album [no copies remain]
clip art alien head cover - a Crop Circle Production

Song information may not be exact

I Believe in Angels
Aliens Stole My Dog
Waiting For The End



1998 - Transition

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 414 violations against our family in 1998!

1998 was a year of transition. It was a year of deaths. It was a year of births.

Bonnie had two pet cockatiels die in February. We believe they died of old age.

Bonnie turned forty-one on February twenty-second. She had to work.

That morning I heard several gun shots! I cautiously looked out the front door. The shots sounded like they were coming from the back yard. I went out the back door and the shots still sounded like they were coming from behind the house. When I went in the rear yard the shots had quit. I thought it odd. I didn't see anything though. It was around nine in the morning.

Around four in the afternoon I was sitting outside. I noticed the neighbor that lived behind us was across the street at the park. I had never seen him there before. He was glaring at our house. He spotted me when I got up from where I was sitting in the garage to do something. I could see him get visibly upset by seeing me. He started mumbling to himself. I couldn't hear what he was saying. Within sixty seconds of spotting me the neighbor started walking rapidly away toward the downtown area. I thought the whole thing was strange, but by then I was used to hateful people in LaPorte City.

Within five minutes of the neighbor's departure, a squad car pulled up. The officer wants to question me. He wants to know what I know about some gun shots that had been reported. I tell him how I had heard shots, but early in the morning. He says he is just getting around to investigating. The whole thing is suspicious. He needs to know if I own a gun. I told him I didn't. I asked the officer why I was being questioned. He said he was talking to everyone. I had been outside all day and hadn't seen a squad car at any one else's house. The officer left. When he did, he left the neighborhood. He didn't go to any other house anywhere nearby.

I had the feeling that I had just been accused of shooting at my own house.

The witch hunt continued unabated. We had learned that if we complained of harassment, we would be harassed more. The gun shots were just another incident in a growing war against the "cat eaters".

By July of 1998 the witch hunt would escalate to an attempted murder.

Bonnie was returning from the local grocery store. She was driving past the side street a block behind the street we live on. She heard two young boys in a car screaming hate threats at her. As she passed them, they attempted to crash their car into the side of Bonnie's.

We tried calling the Black Hawk County Attorney to report the incident. We were told that the office was "aware of the case", but didn't want to talk to us. It wasn't until we filed a written report that we got any action. The action we finally received was the same as always. No action was taken. The owner of the car involved denied everything. It was their word against the "devil worshippers".

Two days after the event, Bonnie was pulled over and harassed by the local police!

1998 taught us better than to complain.

The hate crimes escalated.

The witch hunt was old news.

By 1998, family troubles were also old news. My sister, Carma, continued to collect child support. Logan was twenty and hadn't lived with her for two years. The state, in its idiocy, claimed we owed child support until Logan was thirty-six. We would continue to fight.

My brother, Don, continued his lawsuits also. Don and his lawyer drug Josh and myself to court several times in 1998. Somehow they decided I should pay Josh's dept. Josh was twenty-two. I think they were upset with me due to my protection of Josh from when they tried to claim everything he owned. Don's lawyer told me he was going to teach me "a lesson"!

I believe that Dad was behind everything.

I had been continuing my song writing. I was actually making some head way. I had made some contacts around Nashville's independent country scene. I hired a talent agent, Connie Lynn Wright. She did several things for me in 1998, gaining me further inroads.

February of 1998 I joined Broadcast Music Inc.

I received a letter from a San Francisco film student on the seventeenth of February. His name was Jamie Meltzer, who wanted to know if I would be interested in being interviewed for a documentary film.

We exchanged a few letters. I was hard to contact by phone. I finally agreed to help with Mr. Meltzer's student film.

At the time, Jamie had no plans to travel to Iowa. He was just gathering potential contacts. Whatever I sent him seemed to trigger a small interest. He asked if I could film some rough footage if he sent me a super-eight camera. I said I could.

Mr. Meltzer sent a camera, along with some rolls of film. I have tried to return the camera several times over the years, but somehow it is still in my possession.

Bonnie and I ran around for a few days in March filming. We had some troubles trying to figure out what might be interesting. We mostly filmed our environment. The resulting film looked like amateur home movies. A lot of the footage was also out of focus. It had been a long time since I had made films. I also recorded a voice interview to cassette on my four-track. We sent the assembled material back to Jamie Meltzer at San Francisco State College.

I was surprised when Jamie wanted more. He sent a few more rolls, and Bonnie and I ran around shooting more film. Some of the early footage we shot made it into the final PBS documentary.

There was a "Screening" at San Francisco State College in the fall. Jamie had set up several film galleries to showcase each of the song writers he had contacted. He told me that the room showcasing me had a corn field theme. I thought that was stereotyping and cheesy, but didn't say anything. Meltzer told me that my showcase had gathered the most attention. That was cool.

I also figured that that was it. Jamie said he was looking for backers for an actual film. I would keep in contact with Jamie for the rest of the year, but had no clue of what would eventually happen.

Jamie Meltzer just seemed to be a nice college student. I wanted to help him with his student film. I was thrilled to be involved, but only moderately so. At the time it was just another step along my hopeful career.

We bought a computer at a pawn shop in April and got online for the first time.

My country song writing career was taking the forefront in 1998.

My agent had gotten me in contact with Chuck Dixon, a Nashville promoter.

She also got my picture in some country magazine. I forget what magazine. It may have been Country Weekly, or Nashville Something or Other! The picture got me my first major radio interview.

I received a call from KNCI radio in Sacramento, California. The Pat and Tom show wanted to do an interview.

I believe in the “any publicity is good publicity” adage, so I agreed. I appeared on the radio show on October nineteenth of 1998. They played “Aliens Stole My Dog”! before talking to me. I think they had wanted more comedy than they got. The interview was good, and I came across well.

It was an omen of things to come!

My Dad and Mom came to see me in July. It was the first I had seen my parents in over a year. Dad spent most of the time they were there yelling at me. I had had “fraud” yelled at Carma! I had hurt Don! I couldn't get Dad off the subjects. I tried to tell him about the music. He wouldn't listen. I tried to talk to him about the film. He wouldn't calm down. He was beat red and screaming at me about how useless I was. Carma and Don were entitled to everything I owned in Dad's eyes. Mom was in our house. I don't remember what she did. Bonnie wasn't home. I finally got Dad to listen a little to me talk about music. He told me not to let Don know, or Don would sue me for it. I learned later that Dad told Don when he got home.

I released my first song for radio in November. The song was “Jon Benet” and on the Radio Jukebox label. Chuck Dixon promoted the song. Chuck had also produced Alabama. I let an unknown female singer record it. Her stage name was Laura Jackson. I had told her that I needed to approve of the vocals. She submitted a terrible version to the producers without letting me hear it. The release version had her weak vocals covered in a ton of reverb and echo! She had murdered “Jon Benet”!

Surprisingly the song still did fair on the independent country charts. It was covered in Nashville Tracker Magazine. Eventually it topped out at number seventeen.

The film commentary for “Off The Charts The Song Poem Story” implies that the charts may have been fake. That is not true. I personally contacted a few of the radio stations. They had actually played the song. Some were small stations, but others were not. I talked to a black friend who was driving through Georgia. He had heard the song played on his car radio.

Laura had gotten a small puppy in 1994. She had named the tiny black curly haired dog “Laces” in the beginning. The name was soon “Lassie” instead. Lassie was a great little female cockapoo and poodle mix. She was a beloved family pet.

Lassie was poisoned in November 1998. We are not sure how. By the time we realized anything was wrong, it was too late. Lassie died the next day! She had crawled up beside me in my chair for awhile, but she wanted moved to the coach just before she finally died.

I was the only one home!

Bonnie and I buried Lassie together the next day.

I was too emotional to place Lassie's tiny body in her grave! Bonnie had to do it.

Two weeks after Lassie died, we got a phone call.

We had placed a blocker on our phone line to try to filter the hate calls. Any incoming callers had to enter a code number. Someone, the evening of December first, kept calling and calling! Finally, Bonnie picked up the phone in anger. She demanded to know who was calling.

It was Logan with family news.

Lawrence Forney had gone to bed with his wife the night before, and died peacefully in his sleep of natural causes! He was eighty-three.

My Dad was gone!

We wouldn't be fighting anymore.

I could never redeem myself to him either.

He was gone. Just like that! Peacefully in his sleep. Mean and hateful as ever. He died peacefully in his sleep in bed with the woman he loved. It didn't seem right. It was an anti-climax. I loved him and hated him! Now nothing I could ever do could ever redeem me to him. I cried for myself, not for him.

I refused to go to Dad's funeral. They buried him the fourth of December.

My brother, Larry, tried to get me to go to the funeral. He told me that "no matter how bad things may have ever gotten, at least Dad never disowned you."

Larry "junior" was carrying on for his dad.

I refused to visit my Dad's grave for the next five years.

Dad had purchased his grave and headstone before he passed. He took everyone to the cemetery to see where he would rest. When he asked me to, I refused. Dad gave me a sad look, but didn't say anything. Maybe he knew it was an omen.

As I look back, Dad was "military".

He could never understand his poet/musician son.

It's been close to a decade since Dad died. I can visit his grave now.

I still love and hate him!

I will always be his "worthless" son!

Any tears I may still cry are still for me, not for him.

**“How do you dare to tell me, that I'm my father's son,
when that was just an accident of birth.
I'd rather look around me, compose a better song.
'Coz that's the honest measure of my worth!”**

~ Ian Anderson ~

Before he died, Dad gave some of his children “gifts”. The three oldest of his children were given handmade display cupboards.

When Dad was preparing his will, he surprised me and asked what I might like. I requested an antique civil war musket Dad owned. At the time he promised it to me.

I should have taken it then.

Before he died Dad gave the musket I had been promised to Larry.

A year before he died Dad told me he had written my “worthless ass” out of his will.

He may have.



In my own will, I leave everything to my beloved Bonnie.

After Bonnie's death, or should she proceed me in Death, my estate goes to my three children equally.

I also own two graves!

I will be laid to rest next to my mother.

Bonnie will be laid beside me.

Bonnie doesn't like how close she will be to my father.

1999 - First Tastes

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 88 violations against our family in 1999!

The LaPorte City, Iowa Witch-Hunt entered its seventh year in 1999. Some things never change in a small town. It slowed some. We didn't have a phone! There were still episodes, but now they had to make them in person.

We bought a new dog New Year's Day. The new female was a Boston Terrier mix. She came already named "Wrinkles". Apparently while in the pet store Wrinkles had been clinging to a Sharpei as a mother substitute, and was given the name.

Josh and Bonnie both continued working at Bishop's Buffet. At the yearly employee party in February, Josh was named "Employee of The Year!"

I received a pleasant surprise on Bonnie's birthday. February 22nd, I received a letter from Jamie Meltzer, the film student. He had plans to begin filming an actual documentary film. The pilot had apparently done well generating interest in his project.

During the Ides of March, the fifteenth, I received another pleasant surprise. I received my very first fan letter. It was from a youth in Belgium. They had heard my music! I was stunned and flattered.

I was getting the first small taste of fame.

Mr. Meltzer sent me a letter two days later. His letter of March 17th said he was coming to Iowa to film!

Another taste!

Sometime in the spring I ran into Bob Zaputil. I hadn't noticed him. I was talking to another old friend about music. When my friend left, I turned and noticed Zaputil had been standing nearby listening to everything. I talked a little to Zaputil, but not much. Any friendship we may have had was long ago. He asked me to send him some of my music to listen to. I did. A few days later I received everything back, along with a long letter. It was allegedly written by Bob, but I knew who it was really from. The letter said Bob "*finally loved*" his wife, Teri. Well, of course. She wrote the letter. The letter went on, but the basic fact was that Bob was forbidden to have friends. I was told to never send Bob any music again. It might give him ideas. Next time I saw Zaputil I turned my back to him. He couldn't have spoken anyway. Teri was with him making sure he didn't speak to anyone.

It was another taste of what fame brings. Zaputil was the first to resent my success.

Sometime in April a Nashville singer used one of my songs for a television showcase of her talent. She had written me for permission.

It was another taste.

I bought a CD recorder. Another investment in my career.

I was beginning to think I actually might have one.

Things were beginning to taste like it.

Jamie Meltzer arrived in front of our house during the evening April 5th. Josh and Laura were afraid to talk to him. They hid in Josh's room playing video games.

Mr. Meltzer was a rather pleasant, somewhat quiet, young man. He appeared to be just what he was, a sensitive artistic film maker. We got along fine from the start.

Jamie and I went in to meet Bonnie. She was afraid to come outside. I had forgotten how shy Bonnie can be around other people.

Bonnie, Josh, and Laura would get to know and like Jamie over the next few days. It was just a little culture shock at first for them to meet a California film student.

April 6th, Jamie, Bonnie, Josh, Laura, and I spent the day filming. Footage shot that day, that made the final movie, was mainly the interview segment that opens "Off The Charts The Song Poem Story", where I am sitting on the old car.

We also woke Josh up early to play the guitar. He was cranky at being awakened and told me to tell Jamie that "People have to sleep in Iowa!". By the end of the day, Jamie and Josh were friends.

For the record, when the film was finally shown on PBS several years later, I read a few reviews that commented on the car footage. Somehow a few critics got the idea from the film that I drove the relic I was sitting on. No. The scene was set up to match the famous publicity photo Josh had taken a year before, of me sitting on a different junk car. The footage was shot on my brother's farm. He had several old junk cars setting around and we just used one of them for background.

April 7th, We filmed more footage. The main footage we filmed that day was of the farm where I wrote "Caravan". We hadn't lived there in over a decade. The farm house had been deserted and vandalized. I was reluctant about filming there. The place brought back a ton of bad memories.

Another scene shot that day was of Bonnie driving our Lincoln. In the final film it looks like she is listening to the radio playing "Jimmie Carter". The radio didn't work in the Lincoln.

For the record, since the movie, a few people thought my family was still living in the farmhouse in the film. No. We had moved away over ten years before. Another interesting bit of trivia is the house was torn down shortly after the footage of it was filmed. It's no longer there.

Jamie Meltzer left the evening of the 7th. We had had a fun couple of days filming. It felt like a family member had left.

Filming a documentary was another first taste of things to come.

I requested Jamie send us a rough copy of the footage, which he did.

I still had no clue of the future. There were small tastes. I just thought they were nice. I figured the documentary might show on the art house circuit. I didn't foresee any other future for it. It was Jamie Meltzer's project. My project was still music.

I kept in touch with Jamie, but went on with my own life.

What I didn't know was my life had changed. Forever.

I had another strange taste of fame. Either that summer, or the summer before, Bonnie, Laura, and I were in a parade!

Laura was still going to Orange Township School in Waterloo, Iowa. Orange was entered in the "My Waterloo Days" parade. There was no float. It was just a few students and parents marching in the parade. The concept was showing our support of the school. It was surreal. We just walked the entire parade route waving at people watching. I wore my American flag shirt and felt silly waving. I noticed someone get upset when I didn't wave to him. I waved to him, and he was happy. Someone important enough to be in a parade had waved at him. He had a story to tell.

I bought a Fax machine. Just more office equipment for my growing career. I mostly received fax at three in the morning from a friend in Denmark. My music was playing there. It was also playing in the Netherlands, and Belgium. Foreign markets are more willing to accept alternative music. They are not into "stars" as in America, and judge a song for its own worth. Unfortunately they don't have charts or such either. No need. They just play what they like for awhile and then move on.

The remaining months of 1999 were spent writing songs, maintaining contacts, promoting my music. Just living a normal day to day existence.

Bonnie and I returned home from somewhere November 11th. We were met by the police who informed Bonnie that her dad had died. Bonnie's sister, Joan, had sent the officer. We didn't know if Joan couldn't be bothered with informing us, or what. We resented her sending the police to notify us though. Bonnie acted more upset by seeing the police than she did the news of her father's death.

Donald Hayzlett was buried November 13th. We didn't attend his funeral.

Joan Hayzlett came to our house with her husband the next day, the 14th. She had a paper for Bonnie to sign. Joan wanted the last of their dad's money. She had Bonnie sign, but didn't even bother to ask Bonnie how she had been. Joan's husband informed us that there wouldn't be much money, as Donald had been on Supplemental Security Income when he died. It was insulting. I was on the same income. Bonnie found their behavior in extreme poor taste. It was the day after the funeral.

It was the last contact with any of Bonnie's family.

In December I began a mail friendship with disabled American Veteran poet, Van Dee Garner. The elder gentleman in the movie. Van wrote "Night Time Whispers". We would maintain a friendship long after the film.

Bonnie and I fell for the Y2-K prophesy! We bought bottled water and a few supplies. We also bought a bottle of champagne. We were ready to celebrate the end of the world if need be..

Y2-K never happened. The world didn't end.

As far as we knew, anyway.

Without our being aware, our former lives had ended.

We had been given the first tastes in 1999.

2000 ~ The Iowa Mountain Tour

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 85 violations against our family in 2000!

Even though it was now the 21st century, LaPorte City, Iowa continued it's witch-hunt. It would be the 8th year.

The Witch-hunt gained a new member in 2000. Dustin Woods moved in next door sometime during the winter. At first he seemed all right. I would actually talk to him for the first half of the year. Sometime in the spring things changed. Bonnie and I came home one day and saw our new neighbor talking to a few people in his yard. They glared at us as we drove past. We recognized several members of the witch-hunt. Woods quit talking to us. His wife began yelling threats out the window of their house that faced ours. One of her threats was to burn down our house with us inside and laugh at our screams. When we reported her terrorist threat to the local police, we were told there was nothing they could do unless she actually burnt down our house within 30 days! And that was that! It was the same old story.

Troubles continued with my family. We had finally won our battle with child support, and my sister, Carma. But, the trouble with my brother, Don, escalated. Don's lawyer was determined to teach me "a lesson". I saw an opening in the case. Don's lawyer was stereotyping me due to my long hair. It was a definite bigotry that I encouraged and egged on. The more Don's lawyer got irritated with me the more mistakes he made in the case. Don and his lawyer finally sued me over the dept. It was simple to win the case after that. I couldn't pay. I was disabled. The case was closed due to my inability to pay. It was also dept transferal. They had screwed themselves. We won on May 26th. Their appeal was denied. Case closed.

Eventually, I would make up with Don and Carma. We speak now.

My music career continued. I was still writing "song poems" with Magic Key Productions. I was also enlarging my network of contacts. I had been a "song writer" for five years. By 2000 I had had some minor successes. My song "Jon Benet" had dropped out of sight, but I released a few other songs on other compilations.

There was something bothering me. I wanted to be known as more than just a writer. I was also having a few mixed feelings about my songs. A few people were assuming I sang the songs I wrote. I didn't want to take credit for David Fox's vocals. I began to seriously consider trying to sing a few of my own songs. I began to practice. My voice was gone. It had been a long time since I had sang. My teeth were also terrible. They were rotting in my mouth. Smoking had turned my teeth into black rotten chipped stumps. I knew something had to be done. I didn't look good. I couldn't sing with them.

The Waterloo Courier ran a half page article on me February 3rd 2000. It was a good article describing me as a local independent musician! I felt redeemed, yet cheated. Dad was dead. He could never read the article. I was getting recognition, but it had a sour taste.

No prophet is with honor in his homeland.

Or within his own family.

I resumed singing practice. My voice was weak but I reasoned it could improve.

After the newspaper piece, I saw myself becoming a public figure. I felt the need for an improved image. I wanted to try singing my own music. There were certain things I thought needed changed first. I didn't want black rotten teeth to be a part of my image. I had all my teeth removed April 27th 2000.

May 1st, I was sitting in my chair in the living room. I looked out the window and saw Jamie Meltzer pull up and get out of his rental car! I hadn't seen him in almost a year. It was a total surprise. Jamie said he had been in Chicago and thought he'd drive the six hours to visit. The intention was just to talk about his film.

Laura and Josh came right out to see Jamie! Their shyness had passed the year before. Now Jamie Meltzer was like a member of the family. Jamie and I went in to pick up Bonnie just as we had done the year before. Bonnie came out faster than she had before also. She, too, had grown to regard Jamie as a good friend.

While Bonnie, Jamie, and I were talking outside Bishop's Buffet, another employee had come out and was standing silently nearby listening. I noticed something odd and motioned for Bonnie to look over at the other employee. His mouth was hanging open in awe! He was in the presence of a California movie producer! By then, to us, Jamie Meltzer was just "Jamie".

Jamie's intention to just talk didn't last long. We talked, but then Jamie decided to do some filming as long as he was there. We filmed for six hours May 2nd.

Footage we shot that day that made the movie include the phone booth scene, and my showing of charts from a year before. The scenes shot that day are notably different from the ones shot the year before. My hair was shorter. I was clean shaven. I was wearing my brand new dentures.

There were actually three phone calls we made. Our home phone was out. We had gotten tired of hate calls. We filmed a phone call to a contact in the Netherlands. It was a good phone call and the DJ I called knew who I was. It wasn't interesting enough for the final film. There was another call that didn't make the film The call was to Art Kaufman in Utah. I didn't know that Art was also David yet. Art and I talked, but not about anything important. The scene didn't make the movie.

Jamie Meltzer later told me that he got an \$80 phone bill for the calls. He said it was worth it.

The phone call scene that did make the film was to a DJ in Denmark. The guy knew who I was after I reminded him. You can't hear that in the film. Meltzer asked me later if I thought the scene should be cut while he was editing. I said to leave it in. I thought it showed some of the struggles a lot of musicians go through. I also loved the sound of the passing tractor. One of my favorite scenes in the film!

The phone booth is no longer there. It was torn down a few years ago. I read a review where a critic accused me of driving my "old jalopy to a wayside phone". Some people take everything too literal. I have already written about the old car. The phone booth was just a phone booth by the local ball diamond. I suppose the truth isn't as exciting as some critics imagination.

Jamie Meltzer left the next morning. I would see him again that fall.

I had already arranged a "concert" to make my singing debut!

June 4th Bonnie and I drove to Nashua, Iowa. There was a small bluegrass concert there. Bob Everhart was one of the performers. Everhart was holding his own festival in southwest Iowa that coming August. It was at Bob Everhart's Avoca, Iowa festival that I planned to make my debut. I wanted to get an idea what a bluegrass festival was like.

The Nashua festival was tiny. There were only five acts. I had never been to anything but rock concerts. I got the impression that all bluegrass festivals were identical to the one in Nashua. That was fine with me. I wanted to make a simple debut. I just wanted to sing one or two songs. Nashua would have been a good place to do it. I reasoned Avoca would be similar

Nashua, Iowa is home to "The Little Brown Church in the Vale". There is an old country song written about it. "Oh Come to The Church in The Wildwood".

We returned home. I thought a simple bluegrass festival like the one in Nashua would be fine for my debut. My voice was weak, but I thought everything would work out.

In July of 2000 I set up my first website. It would be very important to me by 2001.

I had originally planned to make a small solo debut.

Josh told me his life was boring. I asked him if he'd like to join me making some music. I had asked him a few years before. He had refused at that time and had hurt my feeling. This time I was shocked when he said he'd like to.

We began to rehearse together for our debut.

We decided on the name Iowa Mountain Tour as a joke. We had no plans beyond trying one concert to see how we liked it. The name used an old Magic Key Video as its source. The video for my song "Iowa Cowgirl" showed mountains in the background. We also thought the name sounded bluegrass.

We knew we would be weak. We didn't worry about it. We expected a small festival like Nashua. We thought we would just be called upon to perform a song or two during some group jam. We were naive. We wanted to try anyway.

We were told in a letter that we had to be acoustic. We bought an acoustic 12 string for Josh. We were told we had to play country songs. We didn't know any. We decided to just work up a few acoustic songs of our own. We set a timer for three minutes and jammed. Josh worked up an interesting guitar riff based on John Lee Hooker's "Boom Boom". I made up a few lyrics to the riff. I "borrowed" quite a few lines from the Doors' song "Build Me A Woman", and added a few other lines from other sources. "Three-Eyed Boy" emerged.

We worked up two other songs.

The plan was to just make a quiet debut. Just to see if we could. We thought a simple bluegrass festival jam would be fine.

We bought some fancy "Porter Wagoner" shirts!
We thought we were ready.

My full name is Gary Richard Forney. The middle name was taken from my dad's youngest brother Richard. Richard Forney died August 4th of 2000. It was rumored around the family that he was buried in an unmarked grave.

I found his grave in 2006. He had a tombstone.

My father's generation was passing. My son and I were beginning a new venture. Was there an omen?

August 26th. Jamie arrived to do some filming. He had a small crew. Christy was nice. She ran sound. I am sorry I have forgotten her last name. There would also be a camera ran by Bruce Dixon. Jamie would run the other camera.

Bruce wouldn't arrive until the 27th. Jamie and Christy did the filming and sound for our "departure" footage. I love the scene that made the film where I am saying goodbye to Bonnie. She was actually emotional. We wouldn't be leaving until the next day!

August 27th, Josh and I drive the six hour trip to Avoca, Iowa.

When we arrived at the Avoca Motel for our stay, I crossed the parking lot to a small bar and grill to get a beer. The bartender acted redneck. It was a bad omen. I perked up when Jamie, Christy, and Bruce arrived. Bruce was a great guy and we hit it off right away.

I started having second thoughts again when we drove out to the fairgrounds where the festival was being held. There were hundreds of campers! The festival was huge compared to what I had expected. It was too late to back out though. People were depending on me.

I strolled into the fair grounds to have a look around. I was followed by a three person film crew! I also had my own video camera. People were looking at us. I heard a few saying we might be a television show. Some thought we were with Gibson guitars.

Gibson guitars were supposed to be at the festival to honor Tom Swatzell, the king of the dobro. I don't know if they were really there or not. I did get to meet the legendary Tom Swatzell though. He was very nice. He and his wife were warm and friendly. The film crew shot some footage of Tom and I together.

Everyone seemed friendly and supportive. I thought things could work. I had some hope at least. I began to think our debut would be all right.

Josh, and I, and the film crew went back to the motel to await the next day. The five of us decided to go out for pizza a little later. We drove into the nearby town of Harlan, Iowa. It was getting late, but we convinced a pizza place to stay open for us. We all ordered Foster beer. After ordering five cans we just split two. It was one of those moments in life that remain with you. We had a great time talking over beer and pizza. Two Iowa boys and three California film makers!

Josh had never been that far from home. He had never stayed in a motel.

The three days we spent in Avoca were an adventure, for both of us.

I wish Bonnie could have been there.

I missed her while we were in Avoca.

It was a time for Josh and I to bond.

We did.

At 3:30 in the afternoon of August 2000, Josh and I made our debut in Avoca, Iowa.

Just before we went on, Tom Swatzell gave me a little pep talk. He told me how every performer is afraid for their debut. He told me to believe in myself. He told me if even one or two people seemed to enjoy the show, that it would be a success.

“Our headline performer is going to be Gary Forney and his son Josh”.

I didn't like the introduction. I felt like it put too much expectation in the audience. I didn't feel as if I were a “headliner”.

The entire debut is preserved forever in the film “Off The Charts The Song Poem Story” and on the DVD of the film.

Look for the fear in our eyes! The longest two moments of my life came during the first song. One came when I reached the line “now I ain't much for” and Josh quit playing just before I utter the line “prayin”. I didn't know what to do. I knew I hadn't driven six hours to give up in front of two movie cameras! I went on and hoped Josh would come back in. He did. I also left out most of a chorus. The next longest moment came when we finished the first song. There seemed to be a dead silence that lasted forever!

I jumped into “Three-Eyed Boy” hoping a more comfortable song would help our stage fright. It seemed to.

There is a line I added to “Three-Eyed Boy” for the first time during that concert. I was looking over the audience's heads and saw two big burly guys enter a nearby gate. While I was singing, I saw them walk up to the edge of the stage. They folded their arms across their chests and stood there listening. I nervously add the line “*I got the country blues*” in hopes a country reference will keep them from beating us up right on stage. When I finished the song I didn't see them anymore.

Josh didn't notice me leave the stage during the washboard bit. He may have been afraid but he still played on.

We ended with an under rated song, “Nothing in Hand”. It was not a bad performance. I am sorry about my comment just before it, where I said “This is the moment you have all been waiting for, my final song!”. Sometimes I engage my mouth before putting my brain in gear. The comment seemed to go unnoticed.

Josh and I were just relieved the ordeal was over and left the stage after that song.

The film doesn't show the complete audience. “Off The Charts” went for a stunned reaction from a few people during “Chicken Insurrection”. The actual head count was close to thirty people. Some had come wandering up after the first song.

The two burly guys I had seen and then lost sight off had sat down to listen. They both shook my hand and told me I had done a good job. It was a lot better than a beating.

While we had been performing the first song we had seen a lot of confused looks on most of the audience. We only saw about two or three who acted like they got our music. Each new song we won over a few more. When the score cards were finally tallied we hadn't done as bad as the film makes out.

There was an open jam after our show. People were just invited up to play a song or two. Our debut would have been better during an open jam. It was what we had originally expected.

For better or worse, we couldn't go back.

We were “headliners”.

We had made out debut.

Josh and I met Ron Glaser in Avoca. You can see him in the film. He can be seen in the background of several scenes trying to get on camera. He was acting like one of those people you see waving behind the reporter on the news. He was also a fair country singer. He sang a few songs after Josh and I. The movie crew didn't film him. He was disappointed. He did manage to get in a scene though. That's the one where I am signing the CD for him. It was an hour after Josh and my debut. Any audience was pretty well gone. The film gives the impression that scene is right after the debut, and also implies an audience of five people.

Ron is not a bad guy. We became friends after the show. Ron just doesn't quite understand my music. I don't think he can understand why he can't have my career.

We left the festival a few hours later. We all went back to the motel and filmed the room scenes. It was surreal doing several takes of the phone conversation. Bonnie wasn't even on the other end of the phone during the final half of the footage. It was also surreal pretending to be just Josh and I in the room. There were three other people and movie lights.

Josh and I drove the six hour trip back to LaPorte City the 29th.
We were changed.
Josh had a new confidence. I had a new confidence.
Things hadn't changed in LaPorte City.
There was a witch-hunt episode on our return.

October 3rd Josh and I drove six hours to Omaha to see Ron Glaser. Ron had been emailing me wanting us to come visit and jam together. Josh and I took Laura on the trip. We jammed a little at Ron's house, then we all drove to Pacific Junction, Iowa to join a country jam at the community center. There were over one hundred people there. Josh and I were treated as visiting headliners. We did "Three-Eyed Boy" for our turn on stage. More people got it that time. We were getting better performing. There was no stage fright. One of my favorite concerts was the one there.

Laura was able to call Bonnie and tell her mother that she had been out of state.

The music was drawing our family back together.

The music was giving Josh a new confidence. It showed on him.

Two weeks after the Pacific Junction, Iowa show, Bishop's Buffet asked Josh if he'd like to become a manager. Josh thought for awhile and said "Yes.". He told me his choice was due to his recent musical experience.

As of this writing Josh has been a manager for Bishop's Buffet for over five years.



December 20th I received an email from Doug Kershaw encouraging me in my career!

Mr. Kershaw and I are both Cajun. We exchanged a few recipes.

2001 ~ Full Circle

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 244 violations against our family in 2001!

The witch-hunt continued in 2001 and even gained steam for mysterious reasons. By 2001 we were sandwiched between Bottomas and Woods. Both belonged to the witch-hunt.

Josh finished his training to be a manager and actually became a Bishop's Buffet manager on January 4th. He was temporarily at the Waterloo store. He was technically Bonnie's boss. A conflict of interest that would soon be changed.

I continued networking my music. I had international contacts. I would receive emails and requests for CD's from all over. I was in contact with Turkey, Sweden, Canada, Ireland, Denmark, The Netherlands, etc. I was still in contact with Doug Kershaw. The music was my second most concern and occupied the greater part of my time.

I began selling CD's on CDBaby.Com.

My own immediate family continued as my foremost concern. I was proud that Josh was doing well. Laura was too. Bonnie was doing well. I wondered how Logan was. I even had a dream about him. I had no idea where he was though. He was lost.

I had another son leave home! Josh was transferred to Dubuque, Iowa to manage the Bishop's Buffet there. I helped him load a U-Haul with all his belongings. I drove the U-Haul to his new apartment in Dubuque on February 18th 2001. Once he began unloading, I realized that he had a new home. I had lost another son, but in a good way. Josh had grown and had a new life of his own. I remember being extra quiet on the drive back to LaPorte City.

I took Laura to her violin solo recital February 24th. Bonnie had to work. I would go to all of Laura's events through out school. Laura has three violin award ribbons hanging on her wall. She played violin until high school.

I continued to hear from Jamie Meltzer. He was editing his film. Occasionally we would exchange a few ideas, but the film was his baby. The film still didn't have a working title. Someone suggested "And Other Popular Hits!". I didn't care for it. It wasn't up to me. I was glad when it became "Off The Charts".

May 29th 2001 someone had signed the guestbook on my website! **LOGAN!**

I was in shock I was so happy. He had made the initial contact.

We emailed each other a few times. He worried about old issues. I told him I didn't care about old issues. I was changed from when he had last seen me. I told him I just wanted to see him. It was the first contact we had had in seven years!

I had my very last cigarette June 2nd. I haven't smoked again since.

Logan rejoined the family June 6th 2001.

We also had a new member join our family, Mikeala Ledesma!

We were now a family of six!

June 6th was a historical day. Not only did I regain a lost son, and gain a new daughter, but it was the day Josh and I recorded “Three-Eyed Boy”!

I had been trying to get the song done professionally enough for a CD release. Art Kaufman's nephew, Andrew McCloud had done a pretty good version. It didn't sound right. “Three-Eyed Boy” was Josh and my song. I thought we should record it. All I had were live cuts taken from a few video taped performances. They weren't good enough for release. Finally, I looked around for a professional studio for Josh and I. After talking to a few, we decided on Grand Junction Recording and producer Jeff Issac. Jeff mostly recorded church music and some bluegrass. We decided he would be perfect for us.

We still record at Grand Junction Recording to this day.

We were both nervous recording for the first time. Luckily, Josh and I had done the song often enough to blast through it in one take. We didn't know what it might cost and were worried. The guitar was out of tune, but we left it in. Josh had never begun the song before. I jumped in on the beat and just went on. I added new lyrics Josh had never heard, but he answered with his riffs. We had four copies made of our little song.

The entire family went out for pizza afterwards. There was Bonnie, Josh, Logan, Mikeala, Laura, and myself. We had just recorded. The family was whole. A perfect day!

Mikeala gave Bonnie a cocktail named “Sammy” that evening. Sammy talks and says “Pretty Bird” and “Hello”. Bonnie loves him.

Bonnie, Laura, and I went to the Nashua, Iowa Bluegrass Festival again in 2001.

I started visiting my mom. I hadn't seen her since before Dad died.

I had gotten a cell phone over the winter. Josh had gotten one also. Bonnie got one sometime that summer. The cell phones solved the hate-call problem. We stopped having a home phone.

I had bought a Shasta RV/Camper-Van in 2000. You can see it in the film with vinyl letters saying “Iowa Mountain Tour”. It needed too much work done on it to use in 2000. I had my nephew Tom fix it for me that spring. We were using it by summer of 2001.

Bonnie, Laura, and I would make small trips in the Shasta. We would mostly go to various parks. We would take the dog, Wrinkles, and make it a day. It was a pleasant way to spend weekends that summer.

I had also had the Shasta repaired with the idea of actually taking it to Avoca, Iowa in 2001 for the blue-grass festival. It had been fun in 2000, and Josh and I were looking forward to returning. We were going to bring Bonnie this time! We thought it sounded fun.

There was something odd though. One of the time slots Bob Everhart had given us was for eleven at night. While we were in Nashua, I asked him about it. He said it was a good time slot on a good stage. I still didn't feel good about it, but let it go. The other slots didn't seem too bad. I thought I could live with one bad time slot. I was still learning.

We packed everything and left for Avoca, Iowa on August 26th 2001. Josh and Laura took Josh's car. Bonnie, Wrinkles, and I took the Shasta.

We had great expectations of a fun family time.

We were miserable in Avoca, Iowa that year!

We were over-charged for camping. We had only had plans to stay three days. We were charged for seven, even though we were performers. We were given a camping space in the dirt. Our fellow campers were red necks. I walked over to look for our stages and announcements. Most of the bulletins listed me without Josh. I was offended. Josh and I were equal partners in a duo. We weren't "Gary Forney and band.", or even worse "Gary Forney and to be announced."

I went to look for Bob Everhart, the festival sponsor, to complain about our treatment. The first thing he said to me was "Where's your movie crew?". I told him I didn't bring one. He wouldn't talk to me the remaining time I was at his festival.

I tried to make the best of it. When I walked back to our camp area, I called Ron Glaser on my cell-phone. I asked him if he'd like to come down and maybe do one song with Josh and I. I thought a friendly face might help things.

Our first concert was at eleven in the evening. Everyone had pretty well gone to bed by ten. It was the last time slot of the night. The sound system was terrible. The sound bounced and echoed off the opposite wall so bad I couldn't hear my self. There were no monitors. The stage announcer couldn't pronounce "Tour" and it came across like "terr". I was surprised he didn't add a "D" on, and have it be "Turd". He was certainly one.

Ron Glaser had shown up with his wife, Sharon. Ron had tried to get in free. He said he was a performer. He wasn't. I had only asked him to come down to sing one song with me. He tried to get a discount by using my name. I am not sure how that went. Not well, I would imagine. Ron also brought another guitar player with him. I wondered why, but didn't say anything. I knew the other guy and he was all right. I just didn't know what he was there for.

Just before we went on, Ron told me what songs I should sing. He wanted me to do "The Chicken Insurrection" again. I don't like performing that song. I gave in and said I would. I told Ron that I would do two songs, Josh would do a solo, and then we would all do one song together. I thought four songs would be enough at the late hour.

During my introduction, Ron interrupted constantly. At one point he implied that I had called him to Avoca to help out as I didn't know what I was doing! It was insulting! I launched into "Three-Eyed Boy" as planned. It went fairly well despite the crappy sound system. Ron pretended to strum a guitar along with the beat. I suspect he wanted people to give him credit for Josh's playing. Next, I reluctantly did "Chicken Insurrection". The next planned song was for Josh to do a solo he had been working on. I usually leave the stage while Josh plays. I want him to be the focus of attention. Ron took over the stage when I did! Josh had barely played two measures of his solo. Ron just interrupted and broke in. Josh refused to leave the stage, and remained long enough to play one song with Ron Glaser and friend. Josh left after that. I left also. I went back an hour later at midnight and Ron was still performing. My time slot he had taken was only supposed to have been a half hour. The announcer complained to me about Ron. I told the announcer to just tell Ron to quit. There were bad vibes everywhere.

I was still friends with Ron. He made me furious, but I understood. Ron is a good guy. He just doesn't understand some things. I know he doesn't understand why I have succeeded and he hasn't. It's all part of who he is. Ron is the scorpion in the story of the scorpion and the frog. We remain friends. I just don't ask him to "help out" anymore.

I was more pissed at Everhart. Why had we been booked such a horrible time?

I hoped for better the next day.

The next day was just as bad. Whenever I would stray from our camping area I was harassed by one of the security guards. I wasn't doing anything. He had a problem with "longhairs" at a bluegrass festival is all. We were given the cold shoulder by the same country folk who had been so friendly the year before. We started to regret being there.

Our second performance was on a better stage. It was being run by a friendlier announcer. The sound was good. Josh and I had good feelings about our performance.

Just before we were scheduled to go on the stage manager announces that the previous act was the final act until evening. We weren't on his schedule. It was meal time! I showed my schedule to the stage manager. He was actually friendly, but said he didn't know anything about the mistake. He told us if we wanted to perform to go ahead though. We did. There were three people in the audience. Everyone else was eating lunch. It was our best performance that year. We relaxed and just did what we wanted. Josh even got to do his solo. We took some pictures and have a video of the performance.

I tried to find Everhart to see what he had to say about the second stage! He wouldn't talk to me. I knew the reason. I hadn't brought a movie crew! I was pissed.

Our schedule for the next day was late afternoon. The stage was all right. It was the same stage we had used in 2000. It had monitors. We hoped the third time would be the charm.

While we were waiting, we left the festival grounds. We were all getting tired of our treatment at the campsite, and at the festival. We thought we might feel better to just get away for awhile. We were hassled leaving by the same security guard again as we left. Josh and Laura had been in and out earlier. They hadn't been stopped. I hadn't been with them.

The four of us did feel better away from the festival. We drove into a town in nearby Nebraska. We also drove to Forney Lake. Forney Lake is a wildlife refuge. There is no lake. If there ever was, the lake was taken out to make way for a highway. Forney Lake was just a sign in a weed patch. Somehow it was appropriate.

When we returned to the festival we were hassled by security again. They thought I was some "hippie" trying to sneak into the festival. We were getting very tired of everything. We had two more shows to do.

I checked our schedule. Our show was the same time as Marvin Rainwater being interviewed for a radio show right nearby! Everhart had screwed us again. We knew no one would come to our show! We also know we might not be allowed to perform!

I was getting angrier and angrier! I thought if I took the dog for a walk I might calm down. I had barely left the campsite when I was hassled by the same security guard again! It was the last time! I returned to the campsite and told everyone we were leaving!

Bonnie, Josh, and Laura were happy to be leaving as much as I was.

We enjoyed the trip home more than we had the entire festival.

We had another small festival to play a week later. I had booked Josh and I into a "September-Fest" at a small park in Aurora, Iowa. The park ranger was nice. Unfortunately we were last act of the day. I had invited my mom to hear us as the festival wasn't far from Oelwein, Iowa. I think around ten miles. She couldn't stay to hear us when it got too late. She had to go home to rest. When we finally went on, it was dark and cold. I had thought the park would provide a sound system. They didn't. The park ranger had two microphones hooked into his stereo. Bonnie had to join us on-stage and hold a microphone up to Josh's guitar. There were no stands. Bonnie was scared and shaking.

It was our very last bluegrass performance. We wouldn't perform again until 2004.

Our final bluegrass performance had been at Jakway Park in Aurora, Iowa on September 8th 2001. The World Trade Center was attacked September 11th!

It felt like an omen.

I remember watching the video footage we had shot in Avoca, Iowa and Aurora, Iowa that year. I kept thinking my career as a performer had ended. I was sad to see it gone. I didn't know what to do. I knew I didn't want to do bluegrass anymore. I loved music though. I would miss performing.

I finally gave in and went to see Dad's grave that October.

November 24th shots were fired at our van.

Everything seemed over!

Then things came full circle.

The middle of November I received a postcard from a writer for International Public Radio. He wanted to do a segment on song poems. Jamie Meltzer had referred him to me!

Things were hectic while arrangements were made for me to be interviewed. My cell-phone kept running out of units. I was also using phone-cards and they were running out.

The interview needed to be recorded. It couldn't be taped in a studio. The interviewer had to talk to me by phone during the process. The program was for Studio360 in New York. Michael May was the writer. He rented a public radio station to do the interview!

The radio station rented was a Jazz and Soul channel. **KBBG** was on the north end of Waterloo, Iowa. I took Bonnie, Laura, and Laura's friend Danielle. When we drove to the station Laura commented on how she hadn't seen any white people the last half of the trip. Waterloo, Iowa's north side is largely African American or Black. We were yelled at by some white red neck when we got out of our van. We ignored him. We were not racist. We didn't like ignorance or hate though.

The only other person in the station during my interview was DJ, Samuel Jackson. He was very nice. The interview went well. We were given star treatment.

I couldn't believe it! I was important enough to have an entire radio station rented for me to be interviewed!

If Dad only knew.

The program aired on Studio360 Public Radio International in New York on December 22nd 2001. The show also featured Art Kaufman, Gene Marshal, and an art critic from the New York Times.

I received a CD of the entire program. I was thrilled.

2001 had swung full circle!

2002 ~ The Twyla Scudder Affair

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 46 violations against our family in 2002!

~TWYLA~

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all doing direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
English novelist (1812 - 1870)

Any discussion of 2002 has to include Twyla. First of all, Twyla was not a “groupie” as some have thought. Twyla knew I was a musician, just as I knew she was a wine salesperson. We didn't really talk much about our careers. Our careers were not the basis of our relationship. What was our relationship? I am not sure to this day.



Early 2002 I continued to work on my career. After the last few bluegrass concerts I wasn't sure I wanted to perform anymore. I did want to continue the music somehow though. I concentrated on my networking and song writing. Many of my contacts were made over the internet. I met a few people that way.

I continued to hear from old contacts as well.

Every so often I would either hear from Jamie Meltzer, or contact him myself. I was interested in how his film was developing. In 2002 he was doing final editing, and searching for a market. I considered Mr. Meltzer a fellow creative artist. It felt good to know him.

It felt good to know anyone creative. I had spent most of my life struggling. It had seemed as though my dreams would never happen. Now that they were I wanted more. I also wanted to be in the company of other creative people.

In February I became acquainted with a singer/songwriter near St. Louis by the name of Robb Bledsoe. We hadn't met. The entire friendship was based on our both being singers and songwriters. I wasn't sure about the singing part when it came to me at the time. We mostly would exchange an email now and then.

In February I began receiving a few emails from Sheryl Clapton. She was a folk singer/songwriter from New Mexico. Later I heard she was fairly big. I didn't know it at the time. She was just another talented friend. In 2002 I was surrounding myself with people in music. Sheryl was just one more.

Sheryl had heard of the film. I was surprised. That was Jamie's baby! I didn't really know much about it. I am still not sure how Sheryl knew about it.

By April, Sheryl Clapton wanted to come to Iowa to meet with me, and possibly perform a few songs together. I mentioned the recording studio and suggested maybe recording a song together. Soon there was talk of a mini-festival.

I mentioned Jakway Park in Aurora, Iowa as a possible location. Sheryl and I agreed on the Summer Solstice for the day of the un-named event. I set things up with the park ranger. We had a place to perform.

I heard from a few more people who wanted to attend. The L.A. Cowboy from Minneapolis, Minnesota wanted to meet Sheryl. He got in touch with me, and I invited him to perform. Robb Bledsoe wanted to perform. Ron Glaser soon wanted in on things.

My little event in the park was growing rapidly!

It was also in April that I met Twyla. She was a wine salesperson. She sometimes distributed samples at wine-tasteings. Twyla was in her late forties and a widow. She had dark black hair of about medium length. She was pretty, but not ravishingly so. Twyla was a little shorter than average, not as short as Bonnie though. Twyla's build was on the petite thin side. She had small but adequate breasts, and nice legs.

Details of how we met aren't important. We would develop a strange relationship the next month.

By May 2002 the little festival that Sheryl Clapton and I had planned as a simple jamming by friends was getting out of control. I started hearing from rock groups who wanted to perform. I explained to them that the event was to be a small jam session among friends, and not to expect any audience. They said they wanted to perform anyway. I said all right. The performers were now, Sheryl Clapton, Robb Bledsoe, Ron Glaser, The L.A. Cowboy, Sunformer, The Chasers. The bill was supposed to include Josh and I. I wasn't sure if I wanted to perform anymore.

By mid May, Twyla, Bonnie, and I were doing threesomes together. We would continue to do them for most of 2002. Twyla could slip away from her job on Thursdays somehow. We would have sex together during that time. The intimacy of the sessions drew us closer and closer. It felt like three really good friends who also had sex.

I have done other threesomes. There was something about the ones with Twyla that I can't explain. She was average in bed. That wasn't it. I did enjoy her though. She was a little petite to handle my size doggy-style. Bonnie taught Twyla how to please me orally. It wasn't the sex. Perhaps it was the closeness and intimacy. Maybe we just did too many threesomes together. Twyla was special, and to this day I can't explain it.

Now matter how strange the relationship became it still mysteriously felt right. I didn't even question things when Twyla had me take her doggy-style on her son's bed. I did question her slight tendency to live dangerously. At times I got the feeling she wished we could all be caught together. None of it mattered though. I loved the feeling of closeness when we would all cuddle together naked.

We were having unprotected sex and I would finish in Twyla. We were all mature and didn't worry about pregnancy. It may have added to the intimacy.

The Festival was held June 22 2002. Sheryl Clapton arrived the night before. She brought a guitar player with her. Bud Morris was instantly likeable. A great guy and a great guitar player.

The two guitar players, Bud and Josh hit it off together right away.

Before the festival, Bud, Sheryl, Josh, Bonnie, and I all went to Grand Junction Recording Studio. I had booked some time to record a song or two.

We recorded "Poor Ol' Laz'us". I sang lead. Sheryl sang rather quiet backup. Bud Morris played guitar. Bud and Sheryl were a little off. They had driven over twenty hours from New Mexico to Iowa. It's still one of my favorite songs!

Josh recorded his first solo effort. The song was later named "Amelia" by me.

Bonnie and I took Sheryl and Bud for a ride in the country. We wanted to show them how the nearby Amish live. While we were outside a bakery, Josh called on his cell phone. Robb Bledsoe had arrived.

It was almost show time!

Bonnie video-taped the entire festival. Ron Glaser tried to tell me to tell her how to run the camera. Ron also used every opportunity he could find to try to get on stage. He was still a scorpion. I was used to Ron by then.

Ron brought his wife, Sharon. One of the highlights of the entire festival for me was when they sang "Pick Me Up On Your Way Down!". It was a moment. Sadly, they went their separate ways when Ron retired. Sharon told me Ron didn't treat her well.

Ron's performance was average. The film "O'Brother Where Art Thou?" had just come out. Ron was trying to do "In The Jailhouse Now", and fumbling badly. He should have done another duet with Sharon. Ron also wanted to entertain us with "Blonde Jokes"! My wife, son, daughter, are all blonde. I told him not to!

Sheryl Clapton was next up. Sheryl sang in a dreamy soft voice. Her songs were child like in innocence. Sheryl had been mugged at one time. She had woken up with total amnesia. Bud played subdued guitar. It was a mellow performance.

Bud and Sheryl had to leave right after their performance. They had another gig somewhere.

Robb Bledsoe came on next. Robb had a strong voice. His own songs were lacking though. Another of the highlights of the entire festival was when Robb did an acoustic version of "Born To Be Wild!" He turned it into country rock!

The L.A. Cowboy hadn't arrived yet. I let the young rock bands go on next.

While Sunformer was setting up their equipment, Ron Glaser takes the stage again. He is wearing his cap backwards and has on sunglasses. It was embarrassing. Bonnie even shut off the camera and took a break.

Sunformer was a rock band from Iowa City, Iowa. They weren't bad. Their guitar player played sad minor licks on his guitar. He had his young daughter there. I liked Sunformer.

Next up was The Chasers! After Sunformer, everyone expected more good music. The first four notes were it! The Chasers were one of the worst bands I have ever heard! They claimed to be a "funky blues rock band". They reminded me of Saint James Crucifixion! Tuneless jamming. None of the members acted like they were even aware of the other members. I was horrible. I let them have an hour. They still wanted to play. I finally ran them off the stage when I saw the L.A. Cowboy arrive.

Someone else arrived about the same time! Twyla!

She came with her alleged boyfriend. He had brought his teenage son. The son was stoned. I could tell. I had spent enough time stoned in the 60's. It was a strange scene.

Strangeness seemed to follow Twyla.

Twyla, Bonnie, and I couldn't let on about anything.

It was surreal talking to Twyla's boyfriend. I wondered what he might know or suspect. He didn't act like he knew much. I was having sex with his girlfriend. The guy's son was stoned. I gave the kid a T-Shirt. It was strange days in Jakway Park.

The Chasers were drinking beer in an historic park. Jakway had been a stage-coach rest stop. The punks were littering it with cans. I was responsible for cleaning up. I wasn't sure they were of age either.

Twyla and her boyfriend drove to the gas station in Aurora and bought more beer! I was happy to see Twyla, but I was relieved when she left.

The L.A. Cowboy was the final act. Fred is a great songwriter with a unique style and voice. His upright bass player seemed all right. They both seemed stage shy though. I don't know. It may have been their debut on stage. They had recorded several studio albums though. Fred was well received. He was the only one people asked for autographs.

I had three acoustic guitars signed by all the performers. I still have two.

It had been a long day. I passed on performing at my own festival. Josh played a solo bit to end the show.

I thought the festival was a success. There was no audience to speak of, but I hadn't expected one!

Sunformer had left some equipment and a box of T-Shirts behind. It cost me ten bucks to send it to them.

I was pissed later when they bad mouthed my festival on their website. Since then the band has changed names to Dillweed. They have tried several times throughout the years to become my friend again. I just delete their requests.

I also saw Ron Glaser try to take credit for the festival on another website. It couldn't have been that bad.

It was the last time I saw most of the performers. I received emails from most, but with the exception of Ron Glaser, it was the last time in person.

The festival had been on a Saturday. By the next Thursday, Bonnie, Twyla, and I were back in bed together.

A portion of a tree in our back yard fell mysteriously one night in June. There were a lot of limbs and leaves. We called the police who inspected for damage. The officer didn't see anything serious.

A year later, there would be a lawsuit between Bottomas and us regarding the fallen portion of tree. We would win it easily.

Twyla, Bonnie, and I were growing closer and closer due to the intimacy of the threesomes. We did more and more together sexually and non sexually. We started seeing each other for "dates". Twyla even came to Bishop's Buffet for coffee with us. Sometimes we would go to Twyla's house to sit and talk in her front yard. Once while we were there I bought ice cream for "both my women" off a passing ice cream truck. We would also go to Diamond Dave's on occasion. We were mostly just being together, in bed or out. It felt right.

On a trip to visit my mother in August I found out that some woman had been harassing Mom. The woman had lost a cat or something. She was searching my parent's garage. She had accused Mom of stealing the cat. She started tormenting Mom about it.

I caught the woman in her behavior the next time I visited. I read her the riot act. Mom called the police. My family has some power in Oelwein. Three squad cars arrived. The woman was upset when they escorted her off. Some "hippie musician" had stopped her from her harassment. The woman never bothered Mom again. Dad might have been gone, but there was still a strong Forney man around.

By August things became more intense with the Twyla Affair.

We had been taking polaroids of our threesomes. Now we video-taped a few. Bonnie and Twyla had started a few girl things. Twyla let me ejaculate in her mouth. She had also done me manually to release across her breasts. I also continued to finish in Twyla. We had been lovers for months by then. We were comfortable experimenting.

We were also getting serious out of bed. We began to talk about living together. We shopped for a house for us all. Twyla wanted to come with us to look at one, but couldn't get away from work. We talked alternative marriage! Bonnie was willing to let Twyla join our marriage. Twyla said she was giving it serious thought.

She continued to see her boyfriend though. We also suspected there may have been more than him.

The boyfriend was also becoming controlling. He had been married twice. Each of his wives had cheated on him. He began to suspect Twyla might be cheating on him also.

We couldn't call Twyla at home anymore. He was monitoring her home phone. He also started monitoring Twyla emails, which almost got us all found out Labor Day!

I had sent Twyla an innocent email using my music company address. Her boyfriend demanded to know what CCP was! Twyla called me from work and I went on-line and deleted the email before he could force Twyla to open her account for him. After that we couldn't email Twyla.

The boyfriend also started monitoring Twyla's cell phone. We couldn't call her anymore. Twyla would call us from her work phone.

There were a few nervous days over the Labor Day weekend where we all worried that he had found out about Twyla and us.

Nothing stopped the three of us! We continued our threesomes!

It was getting harder for Twyla to get away from the monitoring though. Twyla would be with us and her cell phone would ring constantly during our sex. I would tell her to shut it off. The more Twyla was monitored the more she was under emotional turmoil.

Adding to Twyla's turmoil was our three way relationship. We wanted Twyla. The boyfriend wanted Twyla. Twyla was also up for a new job in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. We all knew if she moved there we wouldn't be together.

I think Twyla wanted to be with us. It wasn't a "normal" relationship though. She also wanted to be with the boyfriend. She also lamented a guy she had broken up with before either the new boyfriend or we had come along. By September everyone concerned was riding an emotional roller coaster!

I knew I wanted off the roller coaster.

I wanted Twyla and Bonnie off it with me!

We had a sad threesome in late September. All the others had been fun. We had been lovers and friends. We had even talked marriage. I could see it ending.

Twyla's boyfriend was now dominating her every day of the week. I am not sure if he was living with her or not. It was getting very hard to get together. Our sexless "dates" were history. We continued the threesomes, but things were getting almost impossible.

Bonnie had been working for Bishop's Buffet for five years! She received a commemorative pin for service. Bonnie and I wanted to celebrate with Twyla.

Twyla told us she was having troubles getting away from the boyfriend, but we could all three meet at the Jesup Motel for a party and threesome.

Bonnie and I bought a special cake for the occasion. We had a photograph of Twyla and Bonnie made for a cake topping. The cake said "Sisters". Bonnie's own sisters had betrayed her. Twyla was Bonnie's new "sister". We were also still talking "sister-wife" with Twyla.

The day of the celebration we received a call from Twyla. We couldn't meet at the Jesup Motel. Instead, Twyla had made arrangements for us to get together at the Fairfield Inn Hotel in Waterloo.

Bonnie and I checked in and waited for Twyla to call. We had balloons and the sister cake. Bonnie also wanted to show her "sister" Twyla her five year service pin.

Twyla called and told us to let her in a side door. She had parked behind the building. I thought she had parked in an odd spot, but was looking forward to our party together.

Twyla was distracted the entire time. She ignored Bonnie's service pin. She barely looked at the sister cake. She was distracted during sex. She kept jumping up to do this and that. She was acting nervous also.

We found out later that the boyfriend was looking at cars at Dick Witham Chevrolet. The car lot could be seen below our suite window! Anyone would be nervous. I shut the blinds. I also shut off the television that Twyla had turned on. The distractions were upsetting me. I think Bonnie was also upset over Twyla's treatment of the sister-cake and Bonnie's pin. There was a tension in the room.

Finally things settled down or seemed to. Twyla and I made love on the double bed while Bonnie took some pictures. Bonnie was too upset to join us. She didn't say so, but I knew.

When I finished inside Twyla, she left a large wet spot on the bed. She had never done that on our bed or her son's. I am not sure why she did then. Maybe she was turned on by the tension. I wasn't.

Bonnie and Twyla took a shower together while I took a few pictures. In the pictures they looked like the good friends and lovers they had been before all the stress. It was a brief moment.

Twyla started acting distracted again and began dressing. She also started talking about the boyfriend. How she wasn't happy with him. How she should have never broken up with the guy before us or the new boyfriend.

Bonnie looked stressed watching Twyla dress. Bonnie's "sister" was causing Bonnie the same anguish as her real family had.

It was almost the end.

As Twyla left she turned on her cell-phone!

The boyfriend had called eight times!

After the Sister-Party at the Hotel things seemed to get better again.

It was the calm before the storm.

Twyla, Bonnie, and I did a few more threesomes at our house. We all three seemed relaxed again. There seemed to be some hope. We all three talked marriage again. We thought maybe we could all three move to Wisconsin together. Twyla seemed to think it could work.

I wrote "Twyla's Song" and gave it to Twyla. She seemed to like it.

Bonnie and Twyla began kissing again.

In early October the three of us did our final threesome together.

The threesome was fun again. We felt good together. No one knew it was the final time. I had purchased two cheap "wedding rings". Twyla, Bonnie, and I exchanged a simple vow: "We three are one for all eternity!". I placed the rings on my brides' fingers and we went to bed together for our "honeymoon".

We were all together! It felt right.

I think we all hoped it could last.

There were omens I ignored.

After I finished in Twyla she jumped up. We usually lingered.

Twyla took a tissue and wiped between her legs. She hadn't before.

After she was gone, I found her "wedding ring"! She had left it!

The ring was the same as the sister-cake.

Bonnie and I were hurt! Badly!

Twyla could remain on the emotional roller coaster. We wanted off.

We had wanted Twyla and had hoped she wanted us.

We felt betrayed by her treatment of our tokens of love!

Bonnie had been badly hurt after Twyla had rejected Bonnie's cake.

Twyla had rejected our vows. I was badly hurt.

It was time to get off the roller coaster!

It's impossible for three people to jump off a roller coaster without someone getting hurt. Twyla, Bonnie, and I had been lovers for the better part of the year.

Everyone got hurt!

Bonnie and I still wanted Twyla.

We didn't want the emotional turmoil.

In a last ditch effort Bonnie and I made several calls to Twyla's cell phone. We left several voice mails. We told her how we were feeling. We told her to choose between us and the boyfriend. We wanted off the roller coaster. We doubt Twyla ever got any of our messages!

A few days later Bonnie had me call Twyla's boyfriend. I told him everything.

I am not sure what we were thinking.

Maybe deep down we still hoped that Twyla would choose us.

Maybe if the boyfriend knew, the roller coaster could be stopped.

It was a false dream.

It became a nightmare.

Twyla, Bonnie, and I never saw each other again. There was a nasty breakup, with a few angry phone calls, threatening emails, etc. Details aren't important. It was over.

It's hard for anything like the Twyla Affair to ever be over!

Bonnie and I were hurt badly.

We did miss Twyla.

The three of us had been more than friends. We had been more than lovers.

“We three are bound for all eternity!”.

I have continued to hear of Twyla throughout the years, but rarely from Twyla.

The Twyla Affair continues to haunt all of three of us.

Perhaps we really are bound together for all eternity.

Twyla's boyfriend sent us a few computer virus attacks, eventually destroying one of our computer's. We just bought a new one.

We were briefly involved with another woman after the Twyla Affair.

Surreal as it sounds, the other woman was also named Twyla!

Things didn't last long with the other Twyla. It just wasn't the same!

Bonnie and I purchased a GMC "Jimmy" pickup in November from C&S Auto. The truck didn't last much longer than the other Twyla. We had to junk it after a week. It was a piece of junk the dealer admitted knowing was a lemon when he sold it to us.

Iowa doesn't have a "lemon law". Since the truck was sold to us "as is" there was nothing we could do.

The dealer had arranged the car loan with Quick Loans.

Quick loans repossessed the truck and sold it back to C&S Auto for less than a hundred dollars. C&S put the truck back on the lot for resale.

Quick Loans sued us for the balance of the loan.

The judge told Quick Loans to join us in a suit against C&S.

Quick Loans refused.

Were Quick Loans to sue C&S, Quick Loans might lose C&S's business.

We are still paying on the "Lemon Scam" in 2006! It seems fitting.



2002 was "the best of times, the worst of times"!

I contacted Twyla about this auto-biography.

She said she had "no issues" with my writing about her.

Twyla also relates 2002 as being a period of emotional turmoil.

She is no longer with the boyfriend.

Bonnie and I continue our own lives.

2003 ~ Off The Charts

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 147 violations against our family in 2003!

The witch-hunt was a daily fact of life by 2003. We were between a rock and a hard place. We were between Bottoma's and Woods'. It seemed as if they would just alternate turns harassing us. The LaPorte City Police Department continued to ignore everything. To acknowledge hate crimes in their city would make them "look bad."

Jamie Meltzer had called me in 2002 informing me he had sold his movie to PBS. I was thrilled for him. I still had no idea of what was in store though.

Mr. Meltzer had sent me a rough copy of his film while he was still editing it. The preliminary release I have has around ten extra minutes of footage that didn't make the final film. Jamie was worried, I think. His film treated all his subjects with respect, but we could very easily be ridiculed by those who didn't understand our dreams.

Whenever Mr. Meltzer would politely try to warn me of the possibility of being misunderstood, I would tell him I didn't mind. I was being honest with him. I had been misunderstood all my life.

I am still proud to be a major character in "Off The Charts The Song Poem Story". I have had minor misgivings at times. I have read more than a few reviews by "critics" ridiculing me personally for having the nerve to actually follow my dreams. The bad reviews get to me at times. I admit that. On the other hand, the longer it has been since the film, I find more and more people who finally understand. The critics missed the point. Song poems are a musical dream within reach of the common man. I still believe in my dreams. No one should be ridiculed for dreaming.

I would like to say one thing about "Off The Charts". I may be the star of the film, but the film is not about me! The film is about "song poems". I am more than a song poet.

The portrayal of me in the film is similar to the fable of the blind men and the elephant. One blind man feels the side of the elephant. He describes the elephant as very much like a wall. Another blind man feels the leg of the elephant. He describes the elephant as very much like a tree. Another feels the trunk of the elephant. The elephant is very much like a snake. The blind man who feels the ears describes the elephant as being very much like a fan. The tail of the elephant makes one blind man describe the elephant as very much like a whip. All the blind men are right to a degree, yet they are all wrong. An elephant is the sum of its parts. There is only a portion of me in the film. I am that image, and more than that image.

I have my favorite scenes in the film. I also have scenes that I wince at!

I enjoy the phone booth scene. It shows a hint of the frustration and struggle.

I sometimes have to leave the room during the "debut" scenes. I do have some regrets at having an awkward debut represent me for all time. I am also honored to know that the same father and son debut was captured on film for all time! The scene is a curse and a blessing.

When I had been informed Jamie had sold his film to PBS, I had no real idea what that would mean. It was a good film, but it was still just a documentary in my mind. I thought it might play once or twice late at night on a few small public television channels at best.

I was wrong! Very wrong!

I started getting hints I was wrong in January.

I got an email or a call from California. Kate Sullivan of the Los Angeles Weekly wanted to interview me! I did a telephone interview with her and was maybe a little too honest with Kate about a few things, such as the still fresh Twyla Affair.

The Los Angeles Weekly article by Kate Sullivan is still one of my favorite keepsakes.

I also heard from an old friend. Jamie Leo and I had gone to school together in Oelwein, Iowa. He was living in New York, but had caught news of the film.

The clues as to how wrong I was about a simple documentary were growing stronger!

By February I found myself in papers from one coast to the other.

There were mentions and articles in The New York Sunday Times, The Los Angeles Weekly, The Chicago Tribune, The Hartford Advocate, The St. Louis Post Dispatch. Most were kind. There were others that seemed almost vindictive! I found myself "Tabloid News"! Actually, I wish The Weekly World News had covered the film. I am sure a story in the tabloids would have worked at the time. The press coverage was overwhelming.

I remember Sunday February 9th vividly.

Jamie Meltzer had called a few days before and told me the New York Times was about to run an article about his film, and that there would be a picture of me!

Bonnie and I went down town Waterloo and bought two copies of the New York Sunday Times when it appeared. We wanted one for ourselves, and one to give to Josh. We decided to go out for breakfast and look for the article while we ate. We went to Burger King for coffee. When we saw the article we were amazed. There was a large color print of the photo Josh had taken of me years before. My picture was larger than the entire review of 50 Cent's newest Hip Hop album on the same page! It was one of my proudest moments. I was out for breakfast with the woman I love, reading about myself in the New York Times!

What would Dad have thought?

I found out.

Bonnie and I drove to Oelwein to show the article in the Times to my family.

It was a mistake. When I tried to show the paper to my mother, my sister grabbed it. Darlene began shredding it. She began taking the entire New York Times apart page by page and scattering the sheets everywhere. Bonnie was behind her trying to gather the pages up, but it was pointless. We were lucky to find the pages with the article. When we asked Darlene what she was doing, she replied that she was "looking for yard sales". In the New York Times? We were incredulous.

We knew what was really going on. Darlene was trying to hide the "evidence"! I was once again trying to make trouble. If I were to appear better than the other kids, it would make them feel bad. It was as if Dad were still alive, and Darlene was hiding the article before he could see it. If he had been alive, Darlene knew there would have been a fight between Dad and I.

Dad was gone, but his ghost was still a strong presence.

His ghost had just tainted a proud moment in my life.

I had been in the New York Sunday Times and was still a worthless troublemaker.

“Off The Charts The Song Poem Story” premiered as part of the Independent Lens series of PBS February 11th 2003. It was an immediate hit.

In a bit of irony the film didn't show on the public television stations in Iowa.

The day after the film debut I received fifty emails from people who had seen me in the film. The letters were all flattering and from people who admired my belief in my dreams. One was from the writer of “You've Lost That Loving Feeling”, Barry Mann.

I celebrated my 50th birthday on February 12th 2003.

I received an unexpected gift March of that year. I had developed a cataract in my right eye. I had it removed March 12th. I had had my will made out and signed two days before the operation. Just in case. It was a worst case scenerio that never happened. What did happen was totally unexpected. After the surgery I was sent home to rest. I noticed my vision seemed blurred worse after the operation than before. I took off my glasses to rest my eyes, and discovered something amazing. I could see without my glasses. The new lens in my right eye had given me normal vision in that eye. I had worn glasses all my life! I didn't need them anymore! I haven't worn glasses since.

When I renewed my driver's license again, I passed the D.O.T. eye test. I am smiling widely in the photo! My life was still magical. I had paid my dues. Now, I was recieving my rewards.

Not everything was going that great though. I had had plans to have a second music festival. The new one was to have been in St. Louis that summer. It fell through when I was back stabbed by a promoter. I heard later that he pocketed over a grand for himself and mysteriously forgot to pay any of the performers.

The Twyla Affair wasn't over. In April we received a few emails. Twyla said she missed Bonnie. Bonnie missed Twyla too, but didn't want back on the roller coaster. Twyla was still angry with me. She called Bonnie at work April 15th. Twyla wanted Bonnie to leave me to be with Twyla and her boyfriend. Bonnie hung up on Twyla. Bonnie might have loved Twyla once, but Twyla's new hatred of me offended Bonnie. Bonnie loved me.

We didn't know what was happening to Twyla. We weren't sure we cared.

June 5th of 2003, Bonnie decided she really did miss Twyla. Bonnie sent Twyla a registered letter. We both hoped that time would have healed a few wounds. Bonnie told Twyla in the letter how she felt toward Twyla. Bonnie said she did love and miss Twyla, and wished things hadn't changed.

We doubt Twyla ever got the letter. When the receipt for the registered letter was received by us, Twyla's boyfriend had signed for it. Twyla never responded. The receipt also had an address change. Twyla had moved to Wisconsin.

In June, Josh and I recorded again. Nothing spectacular came of the sessions.

We hadn't played together in almost two years.

We continued to receive reminders that fame doesn't eliminate problems.

My sister had shredded the New York Times! The Twyla Affair lingered.

The witch-hunt was still in full force after nearly a decade! On July 16th Bottoma's egged Josh's car while it was parked in front of our house. A week later Bottoma's placed a "FOR SALE" sign in our yard. We were very upset by the "Hate Sale" of our home! We finally called the cops. Larry Feeker, LaPorte City Chief of Police, decided to handle the complaint himself. He talked to Bonnie. I went in the the house. I knew if I were to talk to him that my temper would get the better of me. Larry Feeker had lead the boycott of Bonnie's job years before. The boycott that had cost Bonnie her job due to being a "Devil Worshiper".

Nothing was done. All though the sign was removed. Feeker indicated we were the ones harassing ourselves! Two days later we received an official letter in the mail. The police had received a complaint about Josh's car being parked legally in front of our house!

Hatred never dies. It doesn't matter how famous a person gets.

Good things continued to happen as well.

In August I recieved a request from Penn Gillette of Penn & Teller fame. Penn wanted a copy of one of my CD's.

My fame was continuing to grow.

My newly growing fame upset a few people.

Twyla's boyfriend became upset by events. I had sent a few emails with career news to everyone on my computer mailing list of contacts. Twyla's email was still listed as one of my contacts. She received a newsletter telling of my growing list of accomplishments, along with a dozen other people on my contact list. I had mass-mailed the newsletter. It must have upset Twyla's boyfriend. He emailed a nasty letter to everyone on the newsletter mailing list.

It was a big mistake.

Twyla's boyfriend's attacks back-fired big time. He had blindly emailed everyone on my contact list. Most were friends. Some were just music contacts. My friends fired back. My contacts didn't care for receiving his hate-mail. Some blocked his emails. Some wrote nasty letters back to him. It became a mess.

The whole Twyla Affair was now public knowledge.

That ghost would continue to haunt all of us.



November of 2003 I went to my doctor! I had a hernia. I am not sure how I got it. It may have been due to the weight I had been gaining since I had quit smoking in 2001.

By the end of 2003 I weighed over 200 lbs. I no longer smoked. I no longer wore glasses.

My image had changed from the one in the film

Life goes on!

2004 ~ CHICAGO

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 135 violations against our family in 2004!

. After the film debut in 2003, hits to my website had increased to one hundred and better per day by January 2004. I had achieved a strange sort of fame. I made new contacts. Some were great new people. Some were just strange.

I made my first contact with Ellery Eskerlin, son of the late great song poem legend, Rodd Keith. Ellery and I are still friends. I made contact with Chauntelle in England. We are still internet friends two years later.

Everything was being done on the internet. I was being reviewed on-line. My contacts were on-line. I became curious about meeting a few people in real life. I hadn't met Art Kaufman yet. I had known Art Kaufman was David Fox since 2003. I wanted to meet "them" in real life. I was also curious to meet a few other people. I wasn't sure how though.

I saw an opportunity in January. Jamie Meltzer was promoting the DVD release of his film. Art Kaufman had made an appearance at the New York Premiere Party. I saw an on-line mention of a similar event in Chicago!

I had been to Chicago before. Chicago was only a six hour drive! I could go there again!

I emailed Jamie Meltzer and said I would like to make an appearance at the Chicago event.

Jamie emailed back that he wasn't sure about the Chicago event. It hadn't really been planned out yet, but he would see what he could arrange.

There were some tricky details to attend to, but the event began to shape up within a month. Josh and Gary Forney, The Iowa Mountain Tour, were to be in Chicago in April.

News spread.

In February, I started an email exchange with Art and Patty Mahlon. Art was a comic book artist. Patty was a writer. I traded them a few CD's for a few comics they had produced. The comics still hang on my wall. Art and Patty soon made plans to be in Chicago.

Josh's job as manager almost prevented him from going. For a few weeks in February it looked like he couldn't go due to work. We were both relieved when he finally could. We had been asked to perform while in Chicago. We hadn't played together in two years, but agreed to for the event.

Everything was snow-balling. By March, there appeared an impressive list of performers, and guests, all scheduled to appear at a mass media event. The Art Institute of Chicago was paying for a suite at Hotel 71 for my family. The film was to be shown at the Gene Siskel Center. There were two nights of performances scheduled at The Hideout in Chicago. It was overwhelming.

I had only a vague notion of my growing cult fame.

I would discover it in Chicago.

I would also learn that cult fame can attractive a certain strangeness.

In late March, the guest book at my website was signed by "Richard Copeland". I sent a "Thank you for signing my guest book" note back to Mr. Copeland. He answered, but changed his first name to Terry. He claimed to be a cartoonist for Mad Magazine, and also Cracked Magazine. I went out and bought a copy of Cracked and found a page of cartoons he had supposedly drawn. I didn't question things. I thought he was just another talented new friend, like comic book artist Art Mahlon.

I was making a ton of new contacts. There were over two hundred plus hits per day to my website by late March. I didn't have the time to be suspicious. I was naive and would correspond with everyone who wrote me.

I didn't question anything when Copeland's emails starting getting strange. I didn't question it when he sent a blank email. I didn't question things when he started sending me strange video-mails. I was too busy getting ready for Chicago.

Before Chicago, there were a few family things, great and bad.

The bad one came when my sister, Darlene, informed me that another family member had commented that they hoped "people don't make fun of" me in Chicago! She refused to say which family member it was, but I had my own suspects. The statement hurt. It was Dad's ghost again.

The great family event came April 12th 2004! Logan and his long time girlfriend, Mikeala, were married. It was a simple event at the County Court House in Waterloo. Mikeala had her parents, and a brother and sister attend. Logan had Bonnie and I attend. Mikeala took the Forney name! I was happy for them both.

I was also concerned. Not about the marriage. I was concerned by another of Logan's recent life choices. He had enlisted in the Marines, and in war time. I was proud and worried both.

I still am. I will always be his father. Love sometimes means letting go though.

My hernia was getting worse. I had discovered it the winter before. My doctor confirmed what it was. We watched it for a few months. I would need surgery.

I wouldn't allow myself the time to be laid up. I had Chicago. I also had Laura.

Laura was fifteen already. Time for her to learn to drive! She would be taking driver's education over the summer. Until she could drive herself, I would need to.

I would continue to postpone hernia surgery for most of 2004.

Bonnie continued work at Bishop's Buffet. I received small Supplemental Security checks, but Bonnie's was our main income.

Bonnie and I had been married close to twenty-nine years.

We had struggled for most of those years. Things had slowly improved for us though. Our house was paid for. Bonnie had a good job. I had my career. Laura was the only child left at home. We were doing all right.

We decided to make our upcoming trip to Chicago a family vacation! We wanted to do things up right!

Bonnie had never been east of the Mississippi.

We rented a silver 2000 Ford Taurus for the trip.

Bonnie, Josh, Laura, and I left for Chicago early April 17th 2004

We got lost a few times. Chicago is a big city! It also took us six hours. Bonnie, Josh, and Laura had never been to Chicago. It was somewhat of a culture shock for them.

We finally found our way and parked in nearby valet parking.

While getting our baggage out of the car I had a slight accident that led to what could have been a major problem. I hadn't been wearing my dentures. They had become ill fitting. I could only wear them for a few hours at a time. I had them in my jacket pocket during the trip. I planned to put them in later in the hotel room. When I bent over to pick up one of our suitcases my dentures fell out of my pocket. The bottom plate split in half when it landed.

At one time I might have gone into a depression, but I hadn't taken my family all the way to Chicago to get upset and turn back around. I would just have to be seen and perform without teeth. I had changed since I had started the music.

We checked into Hotel 71. Our room was on the thirty-second floor with a spectacular view of the Chicago river. The room was a suite with two double beds. Bonnie and I used one. Laura used the other. Josh would sleep in a chair while we were there. The room also had an honor bar. We were afraid to touch it out of fear of what it might cost.

I called Jamie Meltzer using my cell-phone and let him know we had arrived. I also called Mom while looking out at the view. Chicago was laid out at my feet. I felt proud. I wondered what Dad would have thought of his worthless son.

Bonnie, Josh, and Laura had gone back to the car to get the last of our luggage when they ran into Jamie Meltzer on the street. They all returned to our room with Jamie with them. We hadn't seen Jamie since August of 2000. It was good to see him again.

Art Kaufman or David Fox was also staying at Hotel 71. Jamie called him and Art came to our room. It was a historic meeting. Jamie filmed it on his camera, and Bonnie filmed the meeting on our video camera. The Forney and Fox team was finally in one room!

We didn't have much time to talk. The film was showing at the Siskel Center soon.

We all met in the hotel lobby for the few blocks walk to the Siskel Center. We also met with Henry Rosenthal. Henry was Jamie's film professor and also co-producer of "Off The Charts The Song Poem Story". Henry was another long hair, which made me feel at home.

Henry had a date, or possibly an escort, with him the first night we were in Chicago. I don't recall seeing her again afterward.

We waited until our little group of musicians, film-makers, and family were assembled then walked from Hotel 71 to the Gene Siskel Center. It was early evening.

Our group included Jamie Meltzer, Henry Rosenthal and his date, Art Kaufman, Josh, Bonnie, Laura, and myself. It felt good to be walking with them.

The Siskel Center marquee scrolled "Off The Charts The Songpoem Story with Special Guests"! There was a poster promoting the film just inside the doors. The poster featured the photo of me by the old car that Josh had taken years before! I felt like a star. My photo was on display in a theater in Chicago! I was a "Special Guest". I had my wife and children with me to share everything. What a great feeling! There was more to come too.

Before the movie I saw Art and Patty Mahlon waiting. They had flown in from Pennsylvania to see me! I actually had my own fans! Art and Patty were instant friends.

I also met the Siskel Center promoter, Jim Dempsey.

There wasn't much time for talk again though. The movie was due to begin soon.

We all filed into the theater and grabbed seats in the front row!

I was a "special guest" at the showing of a film I starred in, showing on the big screen in Chicago! I had my family with me! I couldn't ask for more, and yet it was still coming.

Bonnie, Josh, and Laura all had scenes in the film. We had only seen the movie on video tape at home on our television. Now we were watching the film on a movie screen.

There was an audience there of about one hundred people. I was somewhat concerned. I listened for audience reaction to each scene. I was afraid. I had read too many reviews by too many critics. I worried that I might be ridiculed for daring to dream again.

My fears were never realized. The audience loved the film. They had even cheered during a few of Josh and my scenes.

I worried again after the film. Jamie, Henry, Art, Josh, and I stood on the stage before the screen and fielded questions from the audience.

At first the questions were rather lame. I also thought the audience was a little afraid of asking me questions. I think they thought I might not be intelligent. After I answered the first few cautious questions, and people could see I was genuine, everyone became more at ease. Toward the end of the segment the questions had become intelligent and thoughtful. I answered the difficult question of how I might feel if some people laughed at my songs. The answer I gave was the truth. I didn't care. I am the only person I have to make happy. Music made me whole and cured my depression. What do I care what anyone else thinks?

By the end of the questioning segment, I felt like I had presented the real me. I had shown I was more than the film. I was happy.

Jamie Meltzer's cousin was there. She took the opportunity to talk to me when I was walking out to the lobby to sign autographs. She was very charming.

Henry, Jamie, Art, Josh, and I lined up behind a row of tables to try to sell movie merchandise and sign autographs.

The movie merchandise sold out.

I had brought some CD's of my song poem music. I didn't sell a one.

I had broken the ice with the audience, and shown I was intelligent. I think they still thought my music was only what they had seen in the movie though. Maybe they thought we got some of the money from DVD sales. They did buy copies of the movie sound-track, which made me feel better. I still felt a little bad that my CD's were overlooked. It was one of very few lows that weekend.

Josh and I signed autograph after autograph. There was a line of people waiting to talk to us and get our signatures on their copy of the movie DVD. They all seemed very friendly.

Josh had a fan of his own. There was a young man there who had driven all the way from New Jersey just to see Josh.

It was our first exposure to cult fame.

A few of the people from The Hideout were also at the film showing.

Kelly Hogan was very nice. She would remain a friend well past 2004.

I found Scott Ligon annoying. He talked to me like he thought I was simple minded. I would never become friends with Scott. Maybe he was just pre-occupied with hosting The Hideout concert that evening, but we never got on very good footing together.

After all the autographs had been signed and the talking to fans was over, we had to leave for The Hideout. The evening had been a triumph thus far. It wasn't over.

There was more to come.

Things were a mad scramble to get to The Hideout. Laura was under-age and would have to stay at Hotel 71 while the rest of us were at The Hideout. We dropped her off in the room. In our hurry we left our atlas and maps on the hotel room bed. We would miss the material later.

We were part of a caravan going to the hideout. Jim Dempsey lead. He took a confusing route and we were all barely able to follow.

The Hideout is a funky hip bar on the north side of Chicago. The name is well deserved. The Hideout is situated near the city garages where the snow plows and such are stored. From the outside it looks like an old speak-easy house with an Old Style beer sign out front.

We arrived and saw people already gathered outside.

There were even more people inside. Bonnie, Josh, and I were heralded in. We walked back toward the performance area. There were people everywhere. The Hideout was packed to capacity. We were surprised when the crowd parted to let us through. We got to about the center of the dance floor in front of the stage when the crowd started cheering loudly. I turned around to look who had walked in behind us. I had thought David Fox was behind us. There was no one behind us. The applause was for us! I couldn't believe it. I raised an arm in triumph! I knew a spectacular evening was ahead.

Tim, one of the owners of The Hideout, came running up through the cheering crowd toward us. He called me Mr. Forney. He was glad to see us there. He wanted to know what he could do for us! I asked him where we were supposed to sit. Tim and Kelley Hogan ran and brought a table from the front bar area in for us. The table was placed directly stage right. I looked around and realized our table was the only table! We were getting star treatment.

I invited our new friends, Art and Patty Mahlon to sit with Bonnie, Josh, and I. I felt like sharing the fame! I was happy when Art and Patty sat down.

Before the show could actually begin, I was approached by Chicago street poet, Thax Douglas. He had written a poem about me! He gave me a copy that I still have in a frame on my wall.

I was slightly irritated by Scott Ligon again. He came to our table and wanted to know when Josh and I wanted to perform. I told him we'd like to go on after the first few acts. I wanted to get a feel for things first. Scott seemed to be putting pressure on me to go on first. I found out later that it was out of disrespect. He had only seen the awkward debut in the film. He was worried about our talent. I resented that!

The event started and was fantastic anyway. Cynthia Plaster Caster later told me that it was one of the coolest shows she had ever seen at The Hideout.

There was a stellar list of performers. The cream of the crop of Chicago's independent music scene.

We went on what I thought was too soon. I felt like we should have been the finale.

We were electric in Chicago. I am not just referring to the fact that I had had Josh bring his electric guitar. We put on a great show. Josh opened with his solo effort "Amelia". I heard David Fox cheering and even going "Wow!" at one point in the performance. We followed with "Three-Eyed Boy" and concluded with "The Chicken Insurrection". I commented to the audience that they had just heard "one of our infamous three song sets".

We were well received. We had taken a few chances with a few things. We had succeeded. A dramatic performance. The audience in Chicago "got it!".

The Hideout performance in Chicago 2004 furthered our growing cult fame.

Other highlights of the evening were Sally Timms singing "Peace and Love" also known as "A Blind Man's Penis", Kelley Hogan's rendition of "Jimmy Carter Says YES!", and Cynthia Plaster Caster's sing-along song poem performance!

Everyone did a spectacular job. The ones I have listed were just a few of my favorites. The entire evening was magic.

Art Kaufman donned his David Fox persona and sang the Caglar Singletary tunes, "Annie Oakley", and "Non-Violent Taekwondo Troopers". He also turned the Thax Douglas abstract poem tribute to me into a song poem. In 2005 Thax Douglas would relate that David Fox had dropped an entire verse. I didn't notice.

All good things must end sometime. Eventually the show concluded. There had been close to a dozen performances! Josh and I had been a highlight.

We received some terrible driving directions from Jim Dempsey. We had left all our maps and things back at Hotel 71. Jim gave us return instructions to downtown. We got lost miserably. We wound up deep in the west side of Chicago. We were almost hit broadside by a taxi. We stopped at 1:30 in the morning at a gas station to get directions. We were the only white people in sight. We also had a rental car with an Iowa plate. A gang of tough looking blacks were gathering. We quickly decided to flee. The attendant had nodded her head in a general direction when asked how to get downtown. We left the direction the woman had nodded. We spotted tall buildings and headed toward them. We were relieved when we spotted the Gene Siskel Film Center we had been to earlier in the evening. It was only a few blocks from our hotel. We parked our rental car in the valet parking and returned to our room. Our first night's adventure was over.

The next morning Bonnie and I just wanted to rest. Laura hadn't been out of the room much yet and wanted to see Chicago. Her main interest was the zoo. I suggested that she and Josh could take a cab. They didn't know how to hail a taxi. I told them to just tell the doorman outside that they wanted a taxi. They did.

Laura saw her first live tiger at the Chicago zoo. She had had a fascination with the big cats for some time. Seeing one was one of the highlights of Laura's Chicago vacation.

When Laura and Josh decided to return to the hotel they had a minor problem. Josh didn't know how to hail a taxi. He finally was able to, but it was a new experience.

Bonnie and I had gone for a short walk around downtown Chicago. We weren't brave enough to go far and just walked around one or two blocks. There were pan-handlers and homeless people every half block. The buildings shielded the streets from the sun. The entire city had a gothic feel. We were especially fascinated with the elevated trains. We thought it might be interesting to ride one. We didn't want to get lost though and passed.

We didn't think to buy souvenirs. We were also watching what money we had.

We took lots of pictures. We also video-taped a few things.

We had another show that evening at The Hideout again. Before we left the hotel Art Kaufman/David Fox told me he had seen Art and Patty Mahlon at the Art Institute of Chicago. He related what big fans of mine they were. Art told Jamie Meltzer that I was "a star".

The Sunday evening show April 18th 2006 was entirely at The Hideout. The film would be screened there. The entertainment would be Art Kaufman, Josh and Gary Forney, and Robbie Fulks. The song poem show would open for headliner Robbie Fulks.

Sunday April 18th 2004 - Opening for Robbie Fulks

We were told to arrive at 5:00 in the afternoon for a sound check at The Hideout. We had to leave Laura at the hotel again. Josh left Laura his cell-phone and she used almost two hours of units calling her friends. I thought that was nice.

Robbie Fulks and his band were the head-liners. He and his band seemed a little quiet. We had some photos taken together, yet barely talked. By the end of the evening Robbie and I were friends though. Robbie is just a quiet person like Bonnie or Josh.

Josh complained during sound check. He was tired and I could tell.

The screening of the movie went very well. The film seemed to go over even better with a more intimate crowd. After the film, Jamie Meltzer, Art Kaufman, Josh, and I answered questions again. The second night went even better than the first night. Everyone had a good time asking questions and answering them.

Josh and I went on first again. I didn't object the second night. I was honored to be Robbie Fulks opening act. We did almost the same "three song set" as the night before with a few exceptions. Rather than "Amelia" the second night, Josh did "Wild Thing". I interrupted just before "Three-Eyed Boy" to sing "Happy Birthday" to Josh. It was his 28th birthday. He was spending it on-stage in Chicago!

Art Kaufman/David Fox did a repeat of his previous night's performance.

Afterward, we all took positions to listen to Robbie Fulks.

During Robbie's performance he did a little routine about Josh and I. I wish someone had caught it on video. Robbie and his band also did a song poem to an original lyric I had written! It was a great thrill. The song poem was "The Worms Crawl In". Eventually I would have Art Kaufman do the song.

Robbie Fulks did some Michael Jackson songs. Robbie's "Billy Jean" and "Beat It" were real highlights. I was impressed with Robbie! We would become friends.

Sometime during Robbie's show I was looking around the room and noticed Cynthia Plaster Caster sitting nearby. I waved over to her and she waved back. When I told Bonnie that Cynthia was there, Bonnie told me she had known. Bonnie told me Cynthia had been staring at me all night. I was thrilled.

Later I went out to the bar area to get a beer. Tim, the owner, asked me to sign a movie poster to The Hideout. I signed it "To The Hideout, my favorite stop on the Iowa Mountain Tour, Gary Forney". When I returned to The Hideout in 2005 the signed poster was still hanging on the wall.

Tim also began politely hinting to me that Cynthia Plaster Caster wanted to meet me! He also hinted that she might want to cast me!

I had read a little about Cynthia here and there. She held a fascination for me. I admired what she did. I'll admit, I did want cast! To me it would have been like being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame! I told Tim I would love to meet Cynthia.

When I walked back into the stage area, Cynthia came running up to me.

Cynthia Plaster Caster is actually shy! She was soft spoken. She acted a little in awe of me. I was the one in awe of her. I asked her if she would pose for a picture with me. She agreed.

If she wanted to ask me to pose for a casting, she never got the chance. We were swarmed right away. I think everyone in the bar knew what might be happening.

Everyone wanted their picture taken with us!

In all the excitement, if Cynthia had planned to ask me to pose, she never got the chance. I was disappointed, I had wanted her to.

We returned to Iowa the next day. Even if I hadn't been cast into Cynthia Plaster Caster's unique Hall of Fame, it had been a fantastic weekend.

We experienced culture shock again on returning home. I sat down in the swing in front of our house in LaPorte City, Iowa and wondered if the previous weekend had been a dream.

There were emails waiting. One was from The Jimmy Kimmel Live television program. They were interested in my making an appearance.

There were negotiations for almost a year. I never did appear on the show. I wasn't concerned. I had a feeling that The Jimmy Kimmel Live show wanted me to be a side-show act. When they found out I wasn't stupid, I think they lost interest. They should have approached Caglar Singletary.

Life returned to normal as much as it ever had been. There were exceptions.

Terry Copeland and his current wife came to Iowa to meet me sometime in May. Terry had been emailing me for some time. He wanted to meet what he called "The Legend".

When he arrived he acted strange, almost awe struck. I couldn't understand it. I am just me. In the words of Popeye, "I yam what I yam!". I also thought he drank too much, and I can be a heavy drinker. The entire meeting was strange.

I started to receive strange emails from odd characters. There was Mr. Cindy, a creepy pimp. There was the questionable Cindy herself later. Mr. Cindy dropped out of sight as mysteriously as he had entered. Abbey Mathers soon joined in the odd trio or duet or whatever they were. The whole thing was bizarre. Soon Cindy and Abbey were offering to do a threesome with me! I passed. I didn't want involved. I was suspicious. My instincts would prove right later on.

At the time I was already involved with another woman. Her name was Kimberly. She was a thin blonde who resembled Susan Dey/Laura Partridge. Kim worked at the local Dollar Tree store as a clerk. I had hoped to replace Twyla with Kimbers. It just didn't work. We did only one threesome with Kim. She was sexier than Twyla. She was better in bed than Twyla. Kim was prettier than Twyla. I couldn't understand why it wasn't working for a long time. Then I remembered the intimacy that Bonnie, Twyla, and I had developed. No one could ever replace the feelings we three had shared. It was pointless to try. We gave up. We are still friends with Kim, but that's all.

In June we bought Laura her first car. A Chrysler LaBaren convertible. It was silver. Laura's first words about her car were "It's beautiful.". She couldn't drive it alone until school started when we got her a school permit. She loved it anyway.

An article appeared in the Oelwein Daily Register. Bonnie's brother, Tom, had been married to his wife for forty years. Next time we went to visit Mom we saw it..

My sister, Darlene, wanted to make a big thing out of it. We couldn't figure out why. We looked at it, but just said we didn't get along with Bonnie's family. Darlene got very upset. She started saying that Bonnie would rather be with her brothers than me. She said family had a right to know about family, and threatened to contact Bonnie's brother! It pissed me off. I wanted to remind her that it had been another story with our knowing about Logan. I didn't. I just went outside.

It was just Darlene's way of carrying on for Dad.

Bonnie and I didn't go to see my mother for a year after the episode.

In July, "Twyla" began contacting me. I was highly suspicious and kept asking her to prove it was her. She never quite could. The messages from "Twyla" were at my website. The guest-book I had at that time couldn't trace I.P. numbers. I think "she" knew that. I would try to get the individual to write me a regular email that I could check. They kept finding reasons not to.

By late July, "Twyla" was sending me love letters. "She" also started weaving a tale of still being in love with me. "Her" emails hinted that she was "in danger". "She" needed me to rescue her. "She" sent me an address in Waterloo, Iowa, along with a phone number.

Bonnie and I tried calling the number with no real results. We got a voice mail message was all. The phone number didn't prove if the messages were actually from Twyla or not.

The "Twyla" being in danger stories got to us. If Twyla was really in trouble, we wanted to help. We sent a registered letter to the address "Twyla" had provided. It came back marked "Not here!".

"Twyla" would continue the "rescue me" game for two months. Until I could get her to send me an email I could trace, I felt the obligation to give the entire thing the benefit of the doubt.

Josh quit his management job in August. He upset everyone when he did. He went back a day or so later. He was having some problems with the job. He had quit without telling anyone what the problems were. When he went back his higher up talked to Josh and fixed the problems. Josh is still with Bishop's Buffet in 2006. He hasn't threatened to, or quit, since.

In early September, "Twyla" created a Yahoo account and emailed me a few times as "You Know Who". I was finally able to trace the I.P. number on the email. The emails were coming from Terry Copeland!

It was a totally creepy revelation!

Laura was able to get a school permit to drive alone to school. Bonnie and I worried about our "baby" as she drove off the first day in her convertible.

In October I heard from Cindy Wonderful of Scream Club and began a friendship with her. Cindy truly is wonderful. We are just friends though. Cindy is lesbian.

I was also "just friends" with Eden in New York. She was a singer in a band. We just exchanged a few emails about music. There was never anything else there.

When Eden quit emailing me, I couldn't figure out why. I would email her and ask. Eden wouldn't reply.

I found out later that Terry Copeland may have emailed her pretending to be me, or perhaps just being too personal. I heard he had "misunderstood" Eden and my relationship. Copeland also admitted sending several "adverse" emails to other people. He had also been both the "Abbey" and "Cindy" from the previous summer.

I found myself what was probably the first song poet in history with a stalker!

In December of 2004 I abandoned my previous website for a newer more protected site. I had learned my lesson. I make a daily check of my web stats now, including I.P. numbers.

Christmas 2004, Logan and Mikeala spent the holiday with us. Logan said he was being sent to Iraq.

November 15th 2004

Hernia Surgery

I finally found the time for the hernia surgery I had been putting off for an entire year. I went under the knife November 15th of 2004. My hernia had grown dangerously large.

Bonnie and I noticed a small amount of confusion in some of the paper work. I was listed as “Jerry”. In a surreal series of events, my brother, Jerry, was also going into surgery the same day. I was going in the morning. He was going in the afternoon. We both had the same surgeon.

Jerry had fallen off a roof while shingling and was impaled through the shoulder on a sharp piece of metal. He had had emergency surgery when it happened. He was back for the complete surgery.

We straightened up the confusion.

I am not sure Jerry knew I was there. I am sure he wouldn't have wanted my operation performed on him.

I was in surgery for three hours.

I don't remember any of it. I was given morphine!

I have been told that some patients have visions while under morphine. I don't recall any. There was no “near-death” experience either. Maybe I just slept through all of it.

There was some concern about my waking up.

Bonnie was there the entire time. She sat nervously in the waiting room with a beeper in her hands. The beeper was given to her by staff to summon her to the desk should there be news.

All went well. There were some concerns over how long it took me to wake up, but I did. I was also able to urinate, avoiding having to have a catheter. I was relieved at that.

After all the concern about my being able to wake up, I was given pain pills. I was given one before I was allowed to leave the hospital. I fell asleep when I got home and slept for hours.

My complete recovery took over a year. I had to sleep with a heating pad on my genitals for three months. I could barely walk the first three weeks. I was forced to wear coveralls until February of 2005.

Despite my growing cult fame, I was not Superman!

I was growing old.

2005 A Strange Cult Fame

Iowa Code § 729A.2

Defines hate crimes as specified public offenses committed against a person or a person's property because of that person's "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

There were 95 violations against our family in 2005!

No matter who you are, normal life goes on.

Bonnie and I had started Mall-Walking for exercise the previous year. We were growing old. Our nest had emptied of two of our three children. Laura was a teenager with her own life and car. Bonnie and I enjoyed walking hand in hand together weekends. We also started to add small stops for coffee at a local cafe. We were “dating” again.

My stalker's obsession continued also. I couldn't understand it. I was barely able to walk the first few months of 2005 due to the struggle of recovering from my hernia surgery. I felt far from being a “Legend”.

My son, Logan, was in Iraq. Bonnie and I worried, but knew he was grown. At least he had been back in the family going on five years. His wife, Mikeala, was living on the Marine base in North Carolina.

Both sons were doing well. Josh was promoted higher in management. Logan was promoted to Lance Corporal. Josh and Logan were each promoted in their fields within weeks of each other!

My strange cult fame continued to grow. A band in Texas, called Southern Sea, did a tribute song to The Iowa Mountain Tour.

I got some strange letters from the Anamosa, Iowa Police Department. I was allegedly parking illegally and throwing away the tickets. I have never been to Anamosa. I had never owned a vehicle like the one the tickets described. It took a few weeks to straighten out. It had been some sort of odd paper work snafu.

Bonnie heard from her niece, Peggy Hayzlett. Peggy was Bonnie's late brother Jerry's daughter. Jerry Hayzlett had died of leukemia when Bonnie was young. Peggy Hayzlett found us due to my growing fame. She just did a simple internet search.

Peggy Hayzlett had no real recall of Bonnie. She had just been told “things”. Peggy repeated the stories of Bonnie having married a “controlling husband, who isolated her from the Hayzlett family”. Bonnie was angry and never wrote back. Some things never change.

There was one person I kept hoping would change. The only change in Terry Copeland was further into strangeness.

During the early months of 2005, Copeland, pretended to be Twyla again, pretended to be a woman named Patricia, pretended to be Twyla's former boyfriend, pretended he was going to do, or possibly already had, a threesome with Twyla and Twyla's former boyfriend! Copeland also sent me a drunken email describing a gay sex act he wanted to perform on me.

When I failed to respond to his emails, Terry Copeland began posting libelous reviews of my music, and personal attacks on me, at the Public Broadcasting Service website, and at Amazon.Com. Both sites removed the libel at my request.

I began “Googling” myself every morning after that. It was another precaution I was forced to take due to my cult fame. I had to be aware of my public image, and guard for attacks against it.

April 11th 2005 was the 30th anniversary of Bonnie and my first meeting!

She had been barely 18. I had been barely 22. Now Bonnie was 48. I was 52 and my hair was growing white. We were still in love.

Bonnie and I bought grave plots together April 30th. We plan to be together in eternity! Our final resting spots are in Oelwein, Iowa, the city of my birth.

Josh, Laura, Bonnie, and I returned to Chicago to perform again in April.

Friday April 20th, Josh and I headlined at The Hideout. We added a temporary drummer, named Jeff Ogle, for the first show. Cynthia Plaster Caster came. I was wearing a black "Plaster Casters of Chicago" T-Shirt under my corduroy suit-coat jacket. She gave me the thumbs up. We talked and she signed my DVD copy of the documentary about her. Cynthia and I had become friends and talked. I wish she had asked me to pose for a casting. She didn't. Maybe it was because Bonnie was there.

Thax Douglas made a brief appearance. Thax was being followed by two Chicago college students making a documentary. The film students interviewed and filmed me for possible inclusion in the film.

Turnout was sparse. Some famous rapper was in Chicago that evening. We heard that other clubs in Chicago were also hurting. Everyone was at the rap show! It was also cold with a few snow flurries in Chicago.

The first night's show was an average performance.

Jeff Ogle was using borrowed equipment. He had been unable to bring his own drums to Chicago. He was playing a drum set I had made arrangements for him to borrow from The Hideout. Drums are like gloves. It may have hindered his playing. Jeff was also having trouble hearing. The monitor nearest him didn't seem to be working.

The three of us hadn't rehearsed together and there was a roughness to the set.

We still managed to play fairly decent. The drum rhythm gave Josh a framework to jam around. His guitar was searing with a new electric passion. Blues riffs came exploding from his guitar.

We added a new version of "Back Door Man" to our set.

Josh and I both liked the newer bluesier sound that night.

A street vendor came into The Hideout later in the evening. He was selling hot fresh chicken enchiladas. I bought a dozen. They were large and delicious.

We had rented a van to drive to Chicago in 2005. It was roomy and comfortable, we felt like a band in it.

We got lost again that night, like we had in 2004. We were staying at the Lakeshore Ramada, and missed Lakeshore Drive and wound up going too far south on Michigan Avenue. We were in Indiana when we turned around and finally found our way back to the hotel.

The Lakeshore Ramada is only about a block away from Lake Michigan. It's a decent hotel in a fair neighborhood. We rented two large rooms for three days to the tune of \$600.

The rental van cost us \$400.

We were spending more than we expected to get in return for performing.

We were there to have fun.

We did.

Josh and Laura took a cab to the Lincoln Park Zoo the next day. They also went to the Navy Pier Shopping Center.

Bonnie and I stayed in the hotel and made love. My recovery from my hernia surgery was still slow, but improving.

The Saturday April 23rd show at The Hideout had a better turnout. The weather had improved and a people were getting out more.

We didn't bother setting up a drum-set for Jeff the second night. Josh and I went on alone. It was all right with all three of us. Jeff was a good drummer. He was also temporary. Josh and I wanted to do the final show at The Hideout as the team we had always been.

It was a good show. I accidentally shoved Josh center stage during the first song. He remained there for the rest of the show. We received a request for "Chicken Insurrection" and performed it for an encore.

A small article with a picture of me had appeared in The Chicago Reader, telling of my tour there. It drew the attention of someone from the Art Institute of Chicago. I did an interview for a possible use on radio.

Sunday April 24th was our final day in Chicago.

We were scheduled to appear on the cable access dance show "Chica-Go-Go".

Chica-Go-Go is the creation of Jake Austin. The show is freaky, yet hip. Picture an American Bandstand meets Sesame Street combined with the Ted Mac Amateur Hour. It was a blast to appear on.

I lip-synced to "Three-Eyed Boy" wearing my Plaster Caster T-shirt and corduroy suit coat. Josh sat on a stool to my right pretending to be playing a six-string guitar. The track features a twelve-string guitar. We didn't quite know what to have Jeff do. I told him to sit on another stool to my left and drum on his leg with his sticks. There was no drum track on the song. If you had listened close you could have heard me call Jeff "our air drummer".

Visually, we looked great. Josh was the strong silent blues player. I was the civil war soldier singing county rock. Jeff completed the look with a sort of union soldier appearance.

I received a video-tape of the show a few weeks later! It looked great. Our first music video!



A few weeks after Chicago, Jim Bottoma and his wife found some kittens that had been born on their property. They brought the kittens to us. We denied ownership. They were not our cats! Bottoma called the cops! The cats had to belong to us! We were "Cat-Eaters"! The kittens were finally turned over to the local vet.

I was in touch with Lloyd Kaufman of Troma Films. I was to do a few songs for Andy Deemer's film "Poultrygeist". They wanted to use "The Chicken Insurrection". It would have been a major career boast!

The deal was ruined by more of Terry Copeland's "adverse emails". He admitted emailing Troma pretending to be me, and other identities.

I also heard from our temporary drummer, Jeff Ogle. Terry Copeland was emailing him pretending to be a St. Louis promoter!

By the time I was strangely used to Bottoma and Copeland.

Late summer, Josh and I decided we'd like to record again. We also decided to work up a new song. We needed somewhere to rehearse. Since we had gone electric we knew we couldn't rehearse in LaPorte City without Bottoma or someone calling the cops no matter how quietly we might try to play. We wanted to play loud.

I rented a teen-club in Cedar Falls, Iowa. It was the former Phoenix. It's closed now. I rented the club on Wednesday nights for several months.

The Phoenix had also been the name of one of my old bands. It felt ironic to be there.

Our rehearsals at the Phoenix gave us the opportunity to create new songs. We worked out "Mojo Bone". It started as a simple blues and evolved from there. I had Art Kaufman do us up a bass and drum track after we had the basic song. The pre-recorded track freed us from needing a live drummer. It gave us the same fuller sound without one. Josh and I are basically a two man band. Just the two of us. That's all we feel we really need.

We went to Grand Junction again in early October and recorded "Mojo Bone"! The version we did was elaborately done. We had Art/David on drums and bass. I was on vocals and guitar. Josh was on guitar and harmonica. Bonnie was on tambourine.

Josh liked it. I thought it was over produced. We would re-do the song in December.

Sometime in October I watched out the window as Mrs. Bottoma opened our mailbox and went through our mail. It was a felony, but I knew better than to say anything in LaPorte City. After all, I had been arrested for "Felony Devil Worship". If I were to complain, who knows what might have happened afterward? I just kept quiet.

October 26th, Josh and I opened for Leslie Hall and Her Lys in Ames, Iowa.

I invited Ron Glaser to come to the show. He drove out from Omaha with his new girlfriend. He was still the scorpion riding the frog. I think he tried to get in free. I am not really sure. His new girlfriend was sort of sexy in a trailer-park manner.

Josh and I performed "Amelia", "Mojo Bone", "Back Door Man", and then "Three-Eyed Boy" as what we planned as our final song.

Ron Glaser requested "The Chicken Insurrection". We obliged, although I was tired of performing the song.

"Leslie and The Lys" offended me. I met the Halls. They had money and were all well educated. Leslie's mother seemed bright and friendly. But, Leslie's show mocked the handicapped. It was insulting. It was also repetitive and boring.

Leslie and The Lys also have a reputation for using other singer's careers to further hers. They used mine, later, to get Leslie on Chica-Go-Go. Josh and I were also promised two more gigs, which were given to another group. There was no reason given. I had also requested a DVD of the footage of my act I saw Hiland Hall film. Months later, Leslie sent me a blank DVD. I had posed for a few pictures with Leslie. I wasn't looking at her. I saw Leslie mocking me behind my back when I received copies of three photos.

November 8th 2005 Bonnie and I had been married 30 years.

In December, Josh and I re-recorded "Mojo Bone" as a more stripped down blues. I had Josh join me on vocals. A great version that I still love!

I was diagnosed with high cholesterol in December. I thought it was ironic. I had struggled all my life. Now that I had achieved success, and could enjoy the good life, it was killing me.

2006 - Life goes on

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Violations continue against our family!

How to sum up my entire life?

I am happy! That is something unbelievable right there. I never thought I would be. The music opened that door for me.

I have been married to the woman I love for over thirty years! Bonnie is my beautiful lover. I only hope that when my time comes I can die like Dad did, of natural causes in bed with the woman I love.

Our children continue to do well.

Josh is general manager of the Bishop's Buffet in Dubuque, Iowa. He continues to make music with me.

Logan is a U.S. Marine Corporal living in North Carolina with his wife, Mikeala. Laura will be a senior at West High School in Waterloo, Iowa this fall.

Bonnie continues as main entree cook for Bishop's Buffet in Waterloo, Iowa

How am I doing?

I continue the music. I hope to for the rest of my life. . There are still offers of concerts. I have two this fall. When I no longer receive offers I will find other ways to make the music I love. I will continue to record as long as I can. I will also continue to write.

I am healthy. I exercise and watch my diet to control my cholesterol levels.

I have enjoyed my successes the past decade. I can never redeem myself to my father, but perhaps I have to my family and myself. That is worth more than any of the rest.

I have enjoyed the fame! It can never be fully taken away from me. I will always have great memories of it. But, the greatest fame is the look I see in Bonnie's eyes when she looks at me now. The greatest fame is family, and the feeling of having touched their lives in a positive way.

Was the struggle worth the final reward?

Was the caravan journey worth it?

~YES~

I have lived my life on my own terms, and found happiness.
May you do the same.