

## CHAPTER V - THE STERLING'S MOVE TO GALVESTON



I'm studying a model of Ball High School constructed by a classmate.

During the early 40's not only was the government recruiting and drafting men for the military, but they were also recruiting both men and women for the war industries. The United States needed massive amounts of weapons for our fighting forces and they needed them fast. All of these weapons had to be delivered overseas, and we needed ships to make these deliveries. Shipbuilding was especially critical since German U Boats were sinking our merchant vessels almost as fast as we could build them. Dad decided to go to Galveston, Texas and help build these badly needed ships. He could help build ships or risk being drafted into the army. He chose to become a welder at Todd's Shipyards.

Mama and my three-year-old brother went with them to Galveston. They left me and my older brother with Mama and Papa Sterling in Panama. Bill and I looked forward to joining them with great excitement. One of our aunts who had made a quick trip to Galveston and back told us that Mama and Daddy were living in a place called "The Edgewater Cabanas," and we would be living right on the beach until the "Oleander Homes" were completed. The Oleander Homes were emergency low rent apartments built to house the families of shipyard workers. My aunt told us that these government apartments were constructed with adobe bricks, just like in Old Mexico. I found all this to be very exciting. Especially the thoughts of living in a real authentic adobe brick house. You can imagine my disappointment when I discovered what my aunt had thought was adobe turned out to be ugly light gray cinder block.

### BUS RIDE TO TEXAS

When the Oleander homes were almost ready for occupancy, Bill and Papa Sterling and I caught a bus for Galveston. The bus ride from Panama to Galveston was a long one, requiring changes in McAlistier, Oklahoma and Houston, Texas. The bus from Panama to McAlistier was a "local" that stopped at every little jerk water town along its route. When boarded, it was fully loaded and had a half dozen or so standing in the aisles. Quite a few disembarked when we stopped at Poteau. Papa and I managed to grab a seat together just behind the bus driver. There were still passengers standing so I felt pretty lucky ride sitting for awhile. My luck didn't hold however. At the very next stop, a real pretty lady got on and Papa made me get up and give her my seat. The bus thinned out at the next stop, and I got to share my seat with another pretty lady. My pretty lady was prettier than Papas. This all happened on my tenth birthday. I shared this information with my pretty lady and she made the day really special by giving me a bright shiny fifty cent piece. Fifty cents was a small fortune to a ten-year-old in 1943. That wonderful big

shiny coin was the nicest birthday present I have ever received. Most presents that have been given to me over the years were given because they were earned in some way or another. This fifty cent piece was given to me simply because this wonderful lady sensed my loneliness and wanted to do something nice for me.

We had a several hour layover at McAlister, so I had plenty of time to spend my newly-found fortune. I spent about a nickel on candy and some more of it on a fascinating five cent baseball arcade game. I can vaguely remember Bill begging and bullying me out of what little remained of my fortune. None of it survived McAlister.

## EDGEWATER CABANAS

Upon our arrival in Galveston, Mama and Daddy met us at the bus station. We took a city bus out to east beach and the Edgewater Cabanas, where they were staying. Bill and I both found the Edgewater Cabanas interesting yet boring compared to the lure of waves that were rolling up on the beach, just yards away. Mama gave us permission to investigate the shoreline but told us not to get wet. We kept our promise not to get wet for about five minutes. After a couple of waves roared in on us, we were completely drenched, street clothes and all. It was wonderful. I made up my mind right then that I loved Galveston. When it comes to swimming fun Galveston's East Beach is a definite improvement over Branson's pond.

## OLEANDER HOMES

The next day we moved into the Oleander Homes. The project covered a five square block area and consisted mostly of two story apartments with a living room and a kitchen/dining area downstairs. At the top of the stairs were a bathroom and a hallway that led to two or three bedrooms. About one forth of the units was all one story buildings and was mostly one bedroom units. The Oleander homes were fully occupied almost as soon as they were completed. In order to meet the heavy demand for shipyard worker housing, another project called the Oleander Addition was built. Nearly all of the parents of the kids living in the Oleander Homes and the Oleander Addition worked at the shipyards. Overtime was encouraged and most of the adults worked long hard, shifts. After work, most of their time was spent unwinding in honky-tonks and bowling alleys. Most of us kids went unguided and totally unsupervised. I sensed the wrong of this and took over the job of looking after my little brother.

## BILL FINALLY CAUGHT ME

Bill was a good runner before he busted up his feet back in Panama. From that moment on, I could easily out run him. The only thing I really had to worry about was being cornered. I never had a tiff with Bill that I didn't have a planned escape route. Well, almost never. During one fight, Bill managed to catch me in the upstairs hall. He threw me down on the floor and sat himself down on top of my chest. Next he grabbed my head, like a basketball player getting ready to shoot a free throw, and banged it on the floor a couple of times. As he banged my head on the floor, he demanded that I submit to his will. I answered that I would rather die first, and Bill decided he would do his best in granting my wish. He started banging my head harder and harder. In desperation, I reached down, grabbed his testicles and squeezed with all my might. Bill really went crazy then. He started pounding my head even harder, with me hanging on for dear life. Lucky for both of us, Dad was next door at Grandma Sterling's house. My

Grandmother had invited the family over to her house for Sunday dinner. Dad heard all the commotion coming from our house and made us stop fighting. He was furious. He demanded to know who started it. Bill and I both denied blame. Determined to get to the bottom of it, he took off his belt and started whipping Bill. Even after several impressive swats, Bill denied blame. Dad then turned his fury on me and achieved the same results. Dad continued beating one and then the vowing to continue until one of us confessed. At this point Mama Sterling dropped by, wondering what was keeping Dad, Bill and me. Observing the ugliness of it all, Mama Sterling made Dad stop the beating and the incident was over.

### MY POULTRY FARM

Unfortunately, I was to suffer more than anyone else that Sunday. About six months earlier, I had bought a half dozen baby chickens from a nearby feed store. I also constructed a small chicken coup to keep them in. As far as I was concerned, these little chickens were cute as could be and made wonderful pets. Also it was war time, and our government was encouraging everyone to plant victory gardens. My miniature backyard chicken ranch wasn't exactly a victory garden, but I felt it was close enough. Apparently some of the neighbors didn't think so, however. Unbeknownst to me, Dad had received a notice from the housing office that if he didn't get rid of the chickens immediately, we would be evicted. Mama Sterling's answer was to serve them for Sunday dinner. I must admit that my chickens were delicious. Right after dinner someone told me that it was my chickens we had eaten and my heart was broken. Dad showed me the eviction notice though and that helped some. After a few minutes of mourning, I was much better.

My love of poultry farming didn't die with Mama Sterling's chicken dinner. A couple of years later, I forgot all about the threat of eviction and bought myself a dozen little ducklings. I scrounged enough scrap lumber to construct a small pen next to our backdoor stoop. The apartment buildings we lived in were laid out in a "U" shape with a small utility building capping off the top of the U. The vacant area enclosed by the three apartment buildings and the small utility shed made a perfect softball field for us kids. We used the small shed as a back stop for home plate and our door stoop as first base. Someone found the seat of an old chair that made a perfect second base. The door stoop for the apartment across from ours was our third base. Why I never moved my precious ducklings to a safer location, I'll never know. One by one my little ducks were picked off at first base either by a line drive or an errant throw.

### ALAMO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

My vacation from academics after leaving Panama was short lived. Mama took Bill and me down to Alamo Elementary School and enrolled us. Alamo School was a pleasant seven block walk from the Oleander Homes. Bill was three grades ahead of me and even though we were living in the same house and going to the same school, we rarely ever saw each other during the day. That was fine with me because Bill has taken to running with an older crowd that I was uncomfortable being around. Bill could blend in with an older crowd because he was big for his age. He looked and acted several years older than he really was. I was big for my age too, but I was still content with being a little boy.

## BILL BECOMES A DROP OUT

Bill didn't spend much time at Alamo Elementary School. At the end of the school year, he graduated and went on to Lovenberg Junior High. Bill only made it through one year at Lovenberg before he dropped out. He decided to withdraw from school and find a job. He told the school officials that our family was moving back to Oklahoma, and he was enrolling in school back there. Lovenberg became suspicious when Oklahoma failed to verify his transfer. Bill was caught red handed, and they penalized him with an expulsion.

Free from academia, Bill lied about his age and found work at Todd's Shipyards as a welder along side of Dad. Dad was proud of Bill because Bill was passing as an adult and earning an adult's pay despite the fact that he was only thirteen years old. When Bill was fifteen, he was laid off at Todd's, and he decided to turn to taxi driving for a living. The big problem here was that Bill didn't know how to drive. Uncle Charley told Bill that he also needed a driver's license so they decided to team up and get their license together. Armed with less than an hour behind the wheel and a quick read-through of the driver's manual, Bill passed the drivers' test. Ironically, Uncle Charley failed his.

Bill was living life in the fast lane spending most of his time driving or partying, leaving little time for sleep. His career as a taxi driver ended abruptly when he fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into a telephone pole. As luck would have, it his main injury was to his pride and his lower lip. His lip was hanging by a thread on either end, having been severed by his lower front teeth. The wound required many stitches, both inside and outside of his mouth. Even though Dad and I sympathized with Bill's pain, we couldn't help but laugh at the way Bill was trying to talk without adding additional pain to his lower lip. Bill then got tickled at Dad and me because we were laughing at the pained expression on his face. The more we laughed, the more Bill wanted to laugh but the pain wouldn't let him. It was the first and only time I've ever seen a man laugh and cry at the same time.

## BILL TEAMS UP WITH JACK REEVES



Bill Sterling (on right) after accident.

Bill's next adventure was in the Merchant Marines. He managed to obtain seaman papers and caught a freighter from Galveston, Texas to Hook, Pennsylvania where he was bumped off the ship by another seaman with more union seniority. Bill returned to Galveston where he worked on the docks as a stevedore while waiting on another ship. With a lot of idle time on his hands, Bill decided to join the Marine Corps Reserves. At this point, Bill met up with an old friend, Jack Reeves, and the two of them decided to seek their fortune in California.

Unable to find work in the southern part of the state, they headed north on US 99. They picked up a hitchhiker in Los Angeles and proceeded to Fresno, where they stopped for gas. Since they were desperately short of money, Jack suggested that they fill up their tank and drive off without paying. Unknown to Bill and the hitchhiker, Jack had switched license plates with stolen plates in an effort to escape being identified. The State of California used this fact later to prove premeditation. As Jack was filling the tank, the hitchhiker went inside for a coke, and Bill went around back to use the restroom. As the hitchhiker was returning to the car, Jack pulled a gun, stuck it in the station owner's face and demanded money. The station owner told Jack that he wasn't about to be robbed and grabbed for the gun. Jack shot him dead. Hearing the shot, Bill hurried out of the restroom to see what the commotion was about. Jack and the hitchhiker were already in the car and were yelling at Bill to hurry up. Bill spotted the victim's son running toward the scene. Bill made a snap decision. He jumped in the car, and they sped away. An alert Highway Patrolman stopped and arrested them in short order.

### BILL IS CHARGED WITH MURDER

As soon as we heard that Bill was in trouble, Dad took a leave of absence from his job and rushed out to California to see if he could be of any help. About the only thing he accomplished was he had left Mama, Luther Ervin and me impoverished in Galveston. Mama started working at the B & C Confectionary for a token salary, and at the end of the day she was allowed to take home a few staples like milk, bread and eggs. I managed to get a full time job as a butcher's helper at Evans Food Store. The butcher told me that as a condition of employment, I would have to steal from the customers. He then taught me how to short weight and over charge the customer. I resented the fact that I was obliged to steal. I made it a point to keep a mental tab on how much I stole from my customers and later, when the butcher wasn't around, I would steal the same amount from him. I felt that if I had to steal in order to keep my job, I would steal from the person I was stealing for. The boss finally caught on and let me go. The bottom line was that I was making \$20.00 a week and all I could steal. Except for a little change I held on too for bus fare and incidentals, I gave all my money to Mama.

The B & C Confectionary was the creation of Uncle Charley and Papa Sterling. Uncle Charley had been discharged from the Army and needed a job. Papa was bored and offered to help out. The two of them decided to put their heads together and go into the restaurant business. They would call their restaurant the "B & C Confectionary," The B stood for Papa's name, "Bill" and the C for Charley. They added confectionary instead of café because they thought it sounded classier. Papa joked about naming it "The Busted Eyeball" but decided that was a name better suited for a sleazy Irish pub. They hoped to sell a lot of hamburgers and fries. The B & C also served ice cream sodas, sundaes and banana splits. They had a counter full of penny candy that didn't sell very well. Mama Sterling was collecting dimes at the time and gave her blessing to their enterprise on the condition that she was allowed to keep all the dimes that made it into the cash register. Unfortunately, there wasn't much of a demand for an eatery at that location, and business wasn't very good. Everything suffered except for Mama Sterling's dime collection.

### BILL IS FOUND GUILTY

Even though Bill was barely seventeen, his age couldn't be proven. His driver's license said that he was 21, and the State of California accepted it as proof that he really was an adult and not a minor. Bill waived his right to a trial by jury, and the judge found him guilty of

premeditated murder. He was sentenced to life in prison. Jack and the hitchhiker received the same sentence.

Bill's sentence came as a great shock to me. Dad had gone out to California for the trial. He called Momma and gave her the news. Mom became visibly pale and just stood there speechless. I asked her repeatedly about the sentence and she just stood there, saying nothing. Finally, she gave the phone to me and managed to say, "Your Daddy can tell you". I asked Dad and he told me that Bill had received a life sentence. This news numbed me like a high voltage electrical shock. In a trance, I repeated over and over, "They can't do that" and over and over all Dad could manage to answer was "But they did."

### BILL'S SILVER LINING

A few months after Bill's sentencing, I was surprised by an unexpected visit from a U.S. Marine Sergeant. The Sergeant was looking for Bill. He told me that Bill had been ordered to go on active duty and was expected to report immediately. I told the sergeant about Bill's misfortune, and the sergeant thanked me and left. Not long after that, Bill's unit was called to active duty and was shipped to Korea. The entire unit was trapped and massacred at the Chosin Reservoir. Ironically, Bill's misadventure in California had saved his life.

In prison, Bill put his time to good use. Time was something he had plenty of. He worked hard and grabbed every educational opportunity that came his way. He went on to serve as president of the local Toastmaster's club and taught the prestigious Dale Carnegie Course. He was both admired and respected by prisoners and officials alike. He earned a parole in minimum time and was released from his life sentence in eight years. Later, Governor Ronald Reagan reviewed Bill's history and granted him a full pardon.

### I LOVED AND HATED SCHOOL

I never realized how much I loved Bill until his incarceration. I missed tagging along behind him and the older guys he hung around with. Mom and Dad were not around all that much, and now Bill wasn't around at all. Ironically my best times were either in school or skipping school. Lunch and recess accounted for most of the fun times I had at school. The only things I remember learning in regular class was how to cover a text book with butcher's paper and how to give the finger. I didn't know what the finger meant, but I mastered giving it with great gusto. I wasn't alone; everyone in my class seemed to take great pride in giving a proper finger.

I do remember getting excited over one class project. The teacher had obtained this gigantic outline map of the United States. She asked the class to submit drawings of various industrial, agricultural or national wonders that would represent one of the states. This was right up my alley. I drew an ear of corn to represent Oklahoma. The farmers around Panama grew lots of corn. She told me that Iowa was better represented by corn. I then drew an oil derrick for Oklahoma. That wasn't acceptable. Oil was a representation for Texas. I then proposed coal for Oklahoma. Over half the population of Panama made their living off of coal. The teacher rejected it in favor of West Virginia. The teacher finally got tired of rejecting me and suggested teepees for my home state. Teepee? The only teepee I had ever seen was the one my great grandfather had lived in for awhile and he sure wasn't an Indian. As a matter of fact, the only

Indians I ever saw were the Indian School Indians that Panama High School played a game of football against.

### WORKING IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA

The school administration got it in their heads that I came from a real poor family, and I wasn't eating enough at home. I've always been abnormally tall and exceedingly skinny. I was an even six feet tall on my twelfth birthday. Secretly I resented standing out like some freak. I pretended not to mind being called, "spider," "stretch," "high-pockets," "bean-pole," and such. The only nickname I really didn't mind was "sterilizer," which is a corruption of my last name, Sterling.

It wasn't that I didn't have enough to eat because I ate like a horse. I seemed to have a talent for burning up calories. Anyway, because the school thought I had a nutrition problem, I was assigned two lunch periods. I was assigned a job in the scullery the first lunch period and was rewarded with a free meal the second lunch period. What I liked most about this arrangement was the fact that my parents never had a clue. Every morning Mama would give me a quarter for lunch, and I would spend it as I saw fit. I enjoyed this arrangement for the rest of the time I went to Alamo Elementary School.

### HOOKY BECOMES A HABIT

It was during these times that I began to play hooky a lot. As far as I was concerned, almost anything was better than going to school. Most of my hooky adventures were almost as boring as sitting in class. One of my hooky playing buddies discovered a dude ranch down on the west end of the island. The stable master would let us ride for free if we would clean the stables for him. It was fun for a couple of times but then it began to be too much like work. Most of the horses seemed to have minds of their own. They pretty much went where they wanted to go instead of where I wanted them to go. It didn't take me long to decide that I wasn't meant to be a horseman.

A lot of my hooky-playing time was spent downtown at the movies. Downtown Galveston had five movie theatres within a four-block area. Two of them featured B westerns and cheap budget horror shows. They always had double features and a cartoon or two along with a newsreel updating the audience on the war in against the Axis. Admission was 12 cents but I usually found a way to sneak in without paying.

### MY HOME TOWN HERO

I watched so many war newsreels that I had a whole slew of war heroes, both real and fictional. My number one hero was a real live person named Mark Curtis. He was my number one hero was because he came from Panama, Oklahoma, the same as I did. Mark also had "Hero" written all over him. He was both gentle and a war hardened veteran. After joining the Army he fought in the European Theater during WWII. The Germans over ran Mark's unit and he was taken captive. Mark managed to escape somehow and made it back to the American lines. After the war he was discharged and sent home to Panama, where he got a job in the family saw mill. Things went well until one dark day Mark received an urgent telephone call telling him that something had happened to his mother, and it looked as if she was dying. He

needed to get there as soon as he could if he wanted to see his mother before she died. Mark jumped into his truck and headed home ignoring the speed laws. The local sheriff hadn't lived in Panama all that long. To most of the residents, he was still considered an outsider.

While making his regular rounds about town, the sheriff spotted Mark, speeding like a maniac. Somehow he caught up with Mark and ordered him to pull over. Mark tried to explain that his mother was dying and he needed to be home but the Sheriff thought Mark was lying. The sheriff cuffed Mark and locked him up in the county jail at Poteau. The sheriff then made some calls and found that Mark was telling the truth. The sheriff then released Mark with an apology and let him go on his way.

All this took up quiet a bit of time, and Mark's mother was dead by the time he arrived home. In his grief Mark went a little crazy. He drove around town until he caught up with the sheriff that had detained him. The sheriff was cruising with one of his deputies. Without giving either of them a chance to draw their weapons, Mark beat the Sheriff and his deputy unmercifully. A short while later, a friend caught up with Mark and advised him to get out of town. He told Mark that an all points bulletin had been issued, and the police had orders to shoot to kill.

While hiding out, Mark managed to get in touch with his best friend, Owen Barlow. Owen and Mark high tailed it together. They didn't stop until they arrived at our front door, in Galveston. Back in those days Mama collected the down and out like the Humane Society collects stray dogs. This was especially true if the needy person was kin folk or near kin folk.

Owen Barlow was Uncle Harry's brother-in-law. Since Owen was Aunt Eva Nell's brother he was close enough to be kinfolk. Mama made Luther Ervin and me double up with Bill and gave my bedroom to Owen and Mark. This was great, as far as I was concerned. I felt honored, having someone who I thought was a real hero stay at my house. I idolized Mark. I would follow him and Owen around, at a respectable distance, of course, like a sick puppy. He was the first honest to goodness hero that I had ever known.

A couple of weeks later, I was sitting on the floor, in front of the radio. I was listening to one of my favorite radio programs and doing my math homework when I thought I saw a shadow flash by the rear door. A few seconds later I noticed another, but this time it was a flash by the front door. At first my eyes were glued to the complicated math problem I was trying to figure out, so these shadowy images were not much more than a minor distraction. Suddenly these minor distractions turned into a major event. One of my dark shadowy distractions yelled, "Police" and swarms of uniformed police, with weapons drawn, filled the downstairs of our apartment. One of the police officers demanded to know if I knew Mark Curtis. Just as I was about to answer the policeman, Mark yelled out from upstairs, "I'm up here." He then placed his hands on top of his head, walked down the stairs and surrendered himself to the police.

The police held him in the Galveston jail until he could be extradited to Oklahoma. I visited him every day. I brought him a carton of cigarettes one day, a sack full of fruit the next day and a bag of candy bars on another day. Everyday I brought him something he could use or trade. A law officer finally drove him back to Poteau, Oklahoma where they charged him with two counts of attempted murder. In Poteau they gave him a trial by jury. The jury found him not guilty. The general feeling was that the sheriff and his deputy got what they deserved. Instead of stopping Mark, they should have escorted him home with sirens blaring.



## THE 1943 HURRICANE

In July of 1943, our country was in the middle of WWII. During the war our country imposed strict censorship that permitted no ship to shore radio and absolutely forbade any mention of the weather, over the airwaves. Newscasters were even forbidden to say the word "weather." As a direct result of all this secrecy we were surprised by the biggest storm since the hurricane of 1915. Unfortunately the 1943 storm killed a few people and did some major damage but to me personally, all it amounted to was an awful lot of wind and rain. It was also an exciting experience for a ten year old. I remember being fascinated by the eye of the storm. We experienced about an hour of beautiful weather when we were in the eye. Bill and I used this lull to run over to Fay's grocery store to buy all the candles that we could. Despite the short notice, all my kin in the Galveston area managed to find their way to our house and ride out the storm. The grownups hung around downstairs visiting and playing cards while us kids busied ourselves with making new candles out of the melted wax from the old ones.

During the eye of the storm lull, everyone was out buying anything and everything that might be of some use. Someone said that Uncle Frank had bought several cases of seltzer water as an emergency source of drinking water. After the wind had picked up and was blowing full force again, I decided to run over to his house and have me a drink of Uncle Frank's seltzer water. I unlatched the front screen door and "twang," it was gone. Uncle Frank's house was about a block away, and the wind was blowing straight towards it. I stepped out into the wind and in about a dozen steps, I was there. A single sip of that seltzer water was enough for me. I don't see how anyone can stand that stuff. The trip back was a real challenge. I had to make myself as small and as wind resistant as possible and struggled my way back home. It took me at least a half hour to make it back, and even though I enjoyed the journey, I don't recommend challenging high velocity hurricanes. The hurricane finally blew over, and things slowly returned to normal.

We were without gas and electricity for several days, and the drinking water was contaminated and had to be boiled before you could drink it safely. Gas service was the first thing to be restored. That was good because on our gas stove we could boil drinking water. Unfortunately, Galveston had the foulest tasting water known to man back then. It was so foul that I found it all but impossible to drink without ice. The local ice company was also without electricity and was unable to make ice. On the fourth day, Uncle Charley managed to buy a 50 cent block of ice for five dollars. This made him the hero of the day.

## LOVENBERG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Somehow, I managed to graduate from elementary school and was passed on to Lovenberg Junior High School. The neatest thing about Lovenberg was that the school sat right on the seawall with a wonderful view of the Gulf of Mexico. How the school district ever came up with money enough for expensive beach front property is a mystery to me. Lovenberg and its wonderful beach location were very much appreciated.

It was here that I fell in love with track and field, Even though I was a smoker, by then I could still outrun nearly every kid in school. I picked up the habit of smoking back in my hooky playing days and was too pig-headed to stop when the track coach confronted me about it. He would have thrown me off of the team except he felt that I had the potential of becoming a champion high jumper.

Eventually, I turned out to be pretty good high jumper. I wasn't a real champion, but I was good enough to win district in both junior high and in high school. I also won my share of invitational track meets along the way.

As a jumper, I started winning when I was in junior high school. My style of jumping could best be described as unorthodox. I took one step and threw myself over the bar somewhat like a gymnast doing a cartwheel. Eventually, I learned to run up to the bar and jump the conventional way. Eventually I managed to master both the "western roll" and the "belly roll." Both of these styles were especially difficult for me because as a gangly youth, I was still suffering from acute clumsiness and growing pains.

In junior high, I managed to jump five feet eight and a half inches. As a matter of fact, I could clear five feet eight and a half inches all day long, seven days a week, and then some. I "owned" five feet eight and a half inches. With the bar sitting at that height, I would soar. I amazed my Coach by clearing the bar with a foot to spare. He would then place the bar at five feet nine and I would miss it terribly. Understanding my phobia about anything over five feet eight and a half inches, the coach set the bar higher and lie to me hoping to trick me into a better performance. It didn't work. I was the master of feet eight and a half inches; anything higher was the master of me.

Many years later, I was hitchhiking home to Galveston on leave from the Navy. A motorist stopped and offered me a ride. Almost immediately the motorist started telling me that he was a junior high school track coach and somehow I reminded him of one of his boys. He went on to tell me about his young jumper who had just broken the district high jump record. The record he broke was mine – five feet eight and a half inches. My record had stood for over six years. I felt nothing but happiness for this nice gentleman and his young high jumper. It was almost as if I were in the Twilight Zone.

#### FAMILY JEWELS EXPOSED

Two or three years after my five feet eight and a half inches high jumping days, Galveston Texas sponsored the first annual Oleander Relays Track Meet. I was entered as one of Ball High School's representatives in this exciting meet. I seldom wore undergarments in those days. Normally, this wasn't a problem. As I changed from street clothes to my track uniform, which consisted of warm ups, a loose knit top and light running shorts, I discovered that I had forgotten my jockey strap. In desperation I canvassed my track buddies, hoping that one of them would have a spare. No such luck. The meet was about to begin and here I was, minus a jock strap. Rather than pass up my chance for glory, I decided to compete without one.

Starting out wasn't a problem. I jumped the lower heights easily with my warm-ups on. High jumpers do this as a matter of custom. They would shed their warm-ups only when attempting the more difficult heights. I was jumping well and soon there were only two of us left in the competition. We both missed our first attempt at what turned out to be the winning height. Desperately wanting to win, I removed my bulky warm-ups and stripped down to my thinly clad nylon shorts. My next two attempts were total disasters. Instead of concentrating on proper form, I was more concerned with keeping my private parts from flopping in the breeze. Each time I jumped, I could hear giggles coming from the viewing stands. A bevy of young school girls had gathered to watch my embarrassment. Much to my humiliation, I had become the most exciting show of the meet. My opponent missed his fourth and final jump. I had one final jump left. I would either clear the bar, wining first place, or I would have to settle for a two way tie.

By now, word had spread and there was a large gallery of young ladies waiting for me to win or fail. With deep concentration I cleared the bar with ease. Giggles turned to applause as I was crowned the Oleander Relay's high jump champion.

Applause and a shiny gold medal was my reward but a cold shower was necessary to mask the yearnings inspired by those giggles. I was in love with every one of those girls. They often visited me in my dreams.

### MY DREAM GIRL

In those days, girls and boys usually conducted themselves as ladies and gentlemen. It was ok to take a girl to a dance or a movie and maybe even treat her to a soda before you took her home. Things rarely went beyond that. Messing around with a "good girl" simply wasn't done.

The girl I dreamed the most about was a neighborhood girl named Nell Stanley. Nell and I dated for about a year. We spent a lot of time, over at her house, mostly talking and listening to music on the radio. One day Nell had a baby sitting job and she invited me and one of her girlfriends over, to keep her company. Things went well, at first, but it didn't take long before, just being close to Nell, began having its effect. I had an involuntary erection that was obvious to both Nell and her girlfriend. They giggled knowingly at each other, and then Nell pounced on my lap and started wiggling around. I found this both exciting and disturbing. I scooted myself out from under Nell and sat down on another chair only to have her follow me and repeat her previous performance. We repeated this little game we were playing for at least a half an hour. I finally bolted for the door and made my escape. If I hadn't been so terribly shy and such a coward, I would have lost my virginity to Nell that very day. The presence of Nell's girlfriend was probably what saved me. Once home I masturbated several times wishing my fist was Nell. I broke up with Nell right after that. My hormones were raging, but I wasn't ready for the action that Nell was longing for.

### POST OFFICE STREET

I was too shy to learn from Nell but I wasn't too shy to learn from the professionals. Galveston was a haven for prostitutes back in the 40's. Galveston was probably the most wide open town in America. Galveston was a part of Texas but at the same time its citizenry took great pride in the fact that Galveston was an island and they looked upon it as being separate from the State of Texas. Gambling and prostitution were wide open on the island. It was an open secret that these enterprises were controlled by the Mafia. It was obvious that the Island Police liked things the way they were and turned a blind eye to all of this illegal activity. As far as the local government was concerned, everything was legal short of rape, robbery and murder. The star in the crown of this sinful town was an area called Post Office Street. About four blocks of this street was lined, on both sides, with magnificent old Victorian homes. These beautiful, well-kept homes were all whore houses. They all had waiting rooms reminiscent of luxurious hotels. They were all beautifully decorated, featuring magnificent Chrystal chandeliers. Next to the waiting room, each mansion featured a well stocked bar.

The guys I ran with rarely had any money, but we visited Post Office Street fairly often anyway. The girls were nice and sociable even though they knew we were broke. We would visit with them in the downstairs ante-room and act as if we were deciding which girl we were

going upstairs with. My favorite was a girl that called herself Sunny Summers. I was dumb enough to think that Sunny Summers was her real name until one day it occurred to me that Sunny Summers was probably a working alias.

My gang wasn't a gang as you think of them today. We didn't have colorful names like the Crypts or the Hoods or anything like that. We were just a group of teenagers that ran around with each other. Ralph "Deak" Deakle was pretty much the center of our group. He had an outgoing personality and everyone liked him. He was also the creator of all our nicknames. Glen Hudson carried the colorful name, "Bucket". There was a popular country western song back then called, "My Bucket has a hole in it." I figured that Bucket's name came from that song, but I never really knew for sure. Another gang buddy was Walter Dale Price. Everyone called Walter "Blue" because of his deep sky blue eyes. The only remaining member besides me was "Rat" Brown. Rat was a couple of years older than the rest of us, but he fit in because he was also the smallest. He was a wirily little guy with facial features that were reminiscent of a rat. Deakle started off calling me Sterling which he quickly shortened to "sterl." Apparently Sterl wasn't colorful enough so he expanded Sterl into "Sterilizer."

One sunny afternoon, our group of restless teenagers meandered our way to the amusement park area next to the seawall. This area consisted of an old wooden roller coaster about a block down from a one square block carnival area. In the next block there was a canvas covered bingo parlor, and out on the gaily decorated Pleasure Pier there were hundreds of pinball and slot machines that paid off like Las Vegas, if you were lucky.

None of my buddies had any money, and since they were broke, they were not interested in gambling. For some reason I can't explain, I had 35 cents in my pocket. I spotted four nickel "hold-um" slot machines near the entrance of a small souvenir shop. These machines had three cylinders that had fruit painted on them. They paid off if the cylinders of your machine stopped matching desired combinations depicted on the pay off chart. These machines had an option allowing the player to hold any of the cylinders so long as the previous play was not a pay off. I started looking for cherries. Two cherries plus anything else paid off 3 nickels. Every time another player walked away leaving a cherry showing on a machine, I would hold the cherry and give it a whirl. I would hit the 3 nickel pay off more often than not. It didn't take long for me to turn my 35 cents into 4 or 5 dollars. I finally became bored with the "hold-um" slots so we wandered over to the Bingo Parlor. My luck was incredible. I collected on three Bingo's totaling \$70 over about a ten game series. I was feeling extremely lucky, so I went out on the Pleasure Pier to try my luck there. I managed to increase my earnings to a little over \$130. My fun finally ended when I was playing a slot that would accept up to seven nickels and up to seven quarters for each play. I filled up the nickel slots and put one quarter in the quarter slot. I could feel lady luck smiling down on me, so I gave Rat Brown a five dollar bill and asked him to buy me some more quarters. Blue was hollering at me telling me not to do it. He just couldn't see risking \$2.10 on a single pull of a slot machine. Just as Rat Brown was handing me my quarters, Blue took it upon himself to pull the handle. The machine hit three plums paying 16 to 1. Needless to say, I was having a ball but my buddies were getting bored, not having nearly as much fun as I was. I decided to stop gambling and take them all down to Post Office Street and treat them to a good time.

## I RUN AWAY FROM HOME

I was a sophomore at Ball High School in the fall of 1948 when a neighbor kid named Carroll Homer Smith started telling me all his troubles. He said that he had been playing a lot of

hooky lately and that his misadventures were about to catch up with him. He said that he had figured a way to make a telephone not ring when someone called his home number. He would take off the metal dust cover and locate the tiny telephone bell. Then he would jam a small piece of cardboard in between the bell and the tiny little hammer that made the telephone ring. This mechanical adjustment only took seconds. Every morning when Carroll planned on being truant he would fix the telephone so that it wouldn't ring when the school called checking on him. Later, when he felt that it was safe, he would remove the cardboard so that the phone would be able to ring again. The next day, he would forge a note excusing him from the previous day's absence.

The school somehow became suspicious of one of Carroll's forged notes, and Carroll was suspended until he brought one of his parents in to vouch for him. Carroll knew that his parents would be furious. Rather than face his parents, he decided to run away from home. For the next couple of hours, Carroll and I talked about running away from home as a possible answer to his problem. The first thing we talked about was money. We had about \$2.30 in cash between the two of us, but we could pack sack lunches and act as if we were going to school. That should hold us for the first day or two. After that we could go door to door and work for food until we found a place to stay. We also had to consider that once it was discovered that we had run away, our folks would start looking for us. To keep from arousing suspicion, Carroll smuggled an old suitcase out of his house. Then we threw a few clothes into the suitcase and hid it in an old abandoned car out by the curb. Now all we needed was to get up in the morning, swing by the old abandoned car, grab our suitcase and be on our way.

We started out by hitching rides from Galveston to Liberty, which is a small town just north east of Houston. At Liberty we were dropped off in front of a roadside fruit stand. The fruit stand advertised bananas for ten cents a pound. Carroll and I were both hungry and we both liked bananas so, we pigged out on a dimes worth. At Liberty we were lucky enough to catch a ride with a truck driver who was hauling beach rental equipment from Galveston to Miami Beach. He rented beach equipment at Galveston during the summer months and Miami during the winter season. He stopped to rent a motel for the night at Mobile, Alabama. We told him that we were broke and asked him if he would let us sleep in the truck for the night. He thought the situation over and treated us to a night in the motel, a nice meal and breakfast the next morning. As we traveled east the next day, Carol told me that he would rather go to Harriman, Tennessee than to Miami. He said that he had been born and lived in Harriman before his folks moved to Galveston. That sounded fine with me, so we left our truck-driving friend at Tallahassee, Florida and started meandering north through Georgia. I'm not sure, but I think our first night in Georgia was in Macon. Carroll and I were both tired, cold and broke and in need of a place to stay, so we wandered into the county court house. We figured the worst that could happen was that they would lock us up in their jail and notify our parents.

There were some long benches along a long corridor. We asked one of the deputies if we could lie down on the benches and catch forty winks. He said that it would be ok as long as we didn't snore too loud. I slept hard and sound. I always have been a good sleeper. Carroll was restless and stayed awake most of the night. Carroll said that a man came through about midnight and was asking questions about who we were and where were we going. He said that the man looked me over real good, measuring my long lanky body with his eyes. Carroll told him that I was almost six foot six inches tall. The man then identified himself as the undertaker and told Carroll, "I hope he doesn't die here. I don't have a casket long enough to bury him in."

Leaving the court house the next morning we looked around getting our bearings. The main street was barricaded off. There were a lot of people milling about waiting for the big

parade. Asking about the parade someone told us that Congress had just passed an anti-Klu Klux Klan bill, and President Truman had signed it into law. The bill made it unlawful to hold a parade or demonstration while wearing a hood or a mask. The local Klan had decided to parade down Main Street to demonstrate against the new law. Most of those marching in the parade wore robes but not hoods as if to say defiantly, “now that you can see our faces, what are you going to do about it?” Carroll and I forgot our hunger in the excitement of the moment. We worked our way through the crowd and managed to catch a ride out of town.

A nice middle aged lady gave us a ride. Carroll and I both had to sit up front because the entire back was loaded with gunny sacks full of pecans. She offered us our fill and Carroll and I gladly accepted. I only ate a couple hand full’s before I began to feel funny so I quit. After she let us out, Carroll and I decided that we needed some real food. We decided to knock on some doors and offer to work for food. We got lucky right away. The lady of the house said that she didn’t have any work for us to do, but she would make us a couple of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We thanked the lady and left with sandwiches in hand. We were barely out of hearing range of the nice lady when Carroll announced that he couldn’t stand peanut butter. I reminded Carroll that we were starving and peanut butter is better than nothing, but Carroll insisted that nothing was better. I gratefully ate both sandwiches.

Our next problem was rain and fear. We were suffering a double dose of bad luck. It was raining like crazy, and no one would give us a ride. We had absolutely no luck at all hitch hiking for over a day. We stepped inside a filling station, to get out of the rain for awhile and mentioned our bad luck with the mechanic on duty. The mechanic told us that a local citizen had been brutally killed by a hitch hiker just a couple of days before, and people in the area were afraid of picking up strangers. We were lucky to catch a ride not long after that. We finally made it into Harriman later that evening.

Once in Harriman, Carroll led us to the house he lived in before the Smith’s moved to Galveston. After a moment of nostalgic rhetoric about his old house, Carroll walked across the street and knocked on a neighbor’s door. The lady who answered our knock acted overjoyed at seeing us. She invited us in, fed us and offered us overdue baths. While I was enjoying my bath, she called the Smiths in Galveston and talked with Carroll’s mother. She yelled at me through the bathroom door that Mrs. Smith had told her that my mother had suffered a heart attack and wasn’t doing well at all. I needed to call home right away. I was relieved to find out even though our running away had caused my parents a good deal of grief and worry that they were both ok. My mother having a heart attack was a made-up story to motivate me into calling home. When they asked me why we ran away, I told them the truth. Carroll had run away because he didn’t want to face the music, but I ran away just to keep Carroll company. It was kind of like climbing Mount Everest. You do it just because it’s there. Either my daddy or Mr. Smith wired money for railroad tickets back to Houston. I was dreading my reunion with Mom and Dad. I was sure it would come in the form of a good thrashing. Instead, all I received was a few polite hugs and kisses. Carroll wasn’t as lucky. He was met with a real brutal strapping. It was a beating that I’ll never forget. Even so, I was envious of Carroll. The fact that I didn’t receive the punishment that I felt I deserved made me feel unloved.

## I QUIT SCHOOL

It wasn’t long after my run away adventures that I decided to quit school and get myself a full-time job. I boldly marched into the principal’s office and informed Mr. McFarland of my plan. Mr. McFarland informed me that I was too young to quit school. He said that under Texas

law I had to be at least sixteen before I could legally quit. He said that under the truancy law, my father could be fined fifty dollars plus five dollars for each day I failed to attend classes. I decided that if I couldn't quit school, I would force them to expel me. I became unruly in one of my classes and backed up my unruliness by telling lies about the teacher's conduct. It was obvious to everyone that I was lying about the teacher, and the teacher had acted honorably. Mr. McFarland rightfully stood behind the teacher, informed me that I was expelled and ordered me off the school grounds.

Not wasting any time, I walked the four blocks from Ball High to the American National Insurance Company and filled out a job application. I was interviewed by my future boss, Mr. Axtell who hired me on the spot as a "floor runner." He told me to report the next morning for indoctrination. A "floor runner's" job was basically that of a mail man. He delivered company mail from one area to another.

In 1948 the American National Insurance Company was housed in two high rise office buildings that sat next to each other. These two buildings were separated by an alleyway but were connected on the fifth and eighth floors by enclosed covered walkways. Mr. Axtell supervised the fifth floor of the "new" building and the eleventh floor in the "old" building. American National had to keep complete records of every policy that was ever issued by them. Unfortunately, these records were not on archival grade paper, and most of the older documents were in pretty bad shape. Mr. Axtell's job was to supervise the inspection and restoration of these old documents and then have them recorded on microfilm. Mr. Axtell had hired fifty ladies to do this job. Mr. Axtell and I were the only males in the entire department. At first I thought that this was a good thing, but I soon changed my mind. Mr. Axtell was lucky. He had an office in which he could hide, in but my presence was out on the floor, in the middle of all of those women. Each of the ladies had a small work table and room for a five drawer filing cabinet. Each of them would work her assigned file cabinet until all of its documents were in the best possible condition. I would then take that file cabinet away and replace it with her next assigned cabinet.

At first I really enjoyed my work. I had a nice two wheeled dolly to help me move the cabinets, and the ladies were usually sweet and well mannered. It felt good being appreciated. There were also little bonuses that I enjoyed. I learned early on not to pack a lunch for work. Several of the older ladies would bring more than enough food and would invite me to join them. I would nibble my way from table to table trying not to offend anyone. One of the ladies brought in homemade Mexican food every day. I made the mistake of bragging on one of these ladies dishes to my mother. Mama tried to cook Mexican dishes for several months after that, but she never quite got the hang of it.

That wasn't the end of my Mexican troubles. I told one of the younger Mexicans that I would like to learn Spanish. She volunteered to help me. After a couple of days I was beginning to accumulate quiet a vocabulary. The only problem was that she was giving me wrong definitions. Instead of saying something like "I like you," I would be saying, "I loathe you." Without knowing better, I had learned to cuss up a blue streak in Spanish. Another Mexican cutie was after me to marry her and join the Marine Corps. One of the other girls warned me away from her, saying that she only wanted the government allotment that comes with being married to a service man.

My biggest problem with them was one of jealousy. If I showed any of these ladies just a tiny bit more attention than another, they wouldn't hesitate to let me know about it. The strain was terrible. It is all but impossible to treat fifty ladies equally.

My favorite ladies at American National were two sisters who were former prostitutes. It was easy to see why they retired from prostitution. Neither of them was much to look at. I adored them though because they were honest and forthright. I could also confide anything to them and I knew they wouldn't judge me.

My most memorable moment at American National was when one of the younger girls cornered me and sang a little ditty for my amusement. The song went something like, "Why don't you do to me what you did to Marie behind the barn last Saturday night?" I was very shy in those days and practically ran to get away from her. At the same time, I was intrigued and wishful. I couldn't help but dream of what I was supposed to have done to Marie and longed for the chance to do it again.

## CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL IN FORT SMITH

I continued working at American National until September of 1949 when Mama received a letter from Aunt Lucille who lived in Fort Smith, Arkansas. In my aunt's letter she mentioned that summer vacation was over and that her kids were starting back to school the following week. I suddenly realized that working was getting me nowhere fast. I asked Mama if it would be alright if I could move in with Uncle Frank and Aunt Lucille and go back to school. Mama asked me why I didn't return to Ball High in Galveston. I told her that I was ineligible for re admission because I had been expelled. Mama accepted my explanation and called Fort Smith to ask her brother if I could stay with them. Uncle Frank said that it would be alright with him, so I packed my bags and moved to Fort Smith.

I promptly enrolled in Fort Smith's Central High School. I was lucky enough to get all the classes I wanted except one. I wanted to take a drafting course, but that class was full. As a substitute I signed up for an art course, hoping to switch over to a drafting class the following semester. Much to my surprise the art course was a toughie. My art teacher was absolutely wonderful. She taught the basics of color, scale, texture and working with various media. Most important of all, she introduced me to calligraphy, the art of beautiful lettering. The art of fancy lettering would serve me well in the future after I returned to Galveston and later in the Navy. After school jobs around Fort Smith were scarce, but I was lucky enough to find a part time job at the Gateway Bakery. The Gateway Bakery had the Colonial Bread franchise for Western Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma. Uncle Frank worked there driving a truck over a large loop that covered almost a third of the state of Arkansas. His route was made up of seven small towns. He would stop at each of these towns and transfer bread from his large truck to a smaller local delivery truck.

Gateway Bakery baked every day but Sunday. To make up for the Sunday shut down, Gateway doubled their output on Fridays. They hired me as a part time relief worker. The bakery floor was organized as an assembly line. Once production started the several stations of the assembly line had to be manned continuously. The only way a worker could take a break was for someone to relieve him from his station. I started my shift by dumping about a ton of flour into a mixing chamber. After that my job was to go from work station to work station, allowing the regular workers to go on break. The only drawback to this job was that it started at 1p.m. and didn't end until the early hours of the morning. I didn't mind the long hours but I was having trouble with the 1p.m. start. In order for me to make it to work on time, I had to skip three of my classes every Friday.



By early December, Central High had caught on to my pattern of Friday truancy, and I was called into the principal's office and asked to explain. I told him that my aunt and uncle were kind enough to let me live with them, but they were poor people and I had to pay for things such as school expenses, transportation cost, and clothes. Unfortunately, my clothes were well suited for tropical Galveston, but Arkansas gets down right chilly in the winter and I didn't have much in the way of winter clothes. He said that he understood and forgave my Friday trancies. He also said that because I was under age, I would have to go to the Labor Department and get a work permit to continue working. The lady at the Labor Department said that she could issue me a permit but I could only work from 4p.m. to 10p.m. These conditions were unacceptable to the bakery, so I was let go.

### MY MOTHER SENDS BUS FARE

I called my mother in Galveston and explained my situation. I told her that without my job, I couldn't make it in Fort Smith any longer. I also told her that I was homesick and I wanted to come home. I told her that I would come home during the Christmas break, if she would send me money for transportation. She said that she would.

On the last school day before the Christmas break, I began checking out and saying goodbye to my friends at Central High. Much to my surprise, one of the coaches offered me a part time well paying job watering the athletic field. Another coach offered to legally adopt me. If they had only made their offers before I talked to Mama, I might have accepted but just hearing Mama's voice made me even more homesick.

On the first day of school after Christmas, I went back to Ball High and applied for readmission. The school registrar refused my application. She said that I had been permanently expelled and the only way I could get back in would be by direction of the school board. She said that she would draft an appeal to the school board in my behalf. In the meanwhile, I should try for enrollment into Galveston's Catholic High School. I was lucky that Kirwin High School accepted my application for enrolment. I had nowhere else to go.. In late March, the school board considered my records from Central High and from Kirwin High and agreed to allow my readmission to Ball High.

### BACK IN BALL HIGH

Back at Ball High School, I did well in all of my classes and received high praise as the lettering editor of the school yearbook. I was also doing well as a high jumper in track. Because of my position as lettering editor for our yearbook, I was allowed to sign up for two separate art classes. One class gave me time for lettering and the other allowed me to do what the other kids were doing. There was a real nice park that sat between Ball High School and City Hall. I usually went to the park to eat my lunch and then stay over and sketch during the next period. It was ok with Mrs. Schwerdsfeger, my art teacher. The only problem with this routine was the sea gulls. The sea gulls would arrive promptly at lunch time looking for a free hand out. They would be a real nuisance at times. One of my classmates, who had too much mustard on his hot dog, let his guard down for a moment. An alert sea gull swooped down and flew off with his mustard laden snack. As the seagull was flying off, a blob of mustard slid off of the hot dog and landed on the cheek of another student. The other student just knew that he had been bombarded with something more sinister than mustard. He uttered a few words of disgust and wiped the mustard off of his face. He was really relived when he realized that sea gull poop isn't yellow.

## BASKETBALL DOES NOT LIKE SMOKERS

Everything was going wonderfully well for me except for basketball. When I first started going to Ball High I was assigned to Coach Brown's P.E. class. Coach Brown lined us all up and asked if any of us would like to try out for the basketball team. Several of us raised our hands, indicating our desire to try out for the team. He then asked if any of us smoked. I confessed to being a smoker. He then asked me if I was going to quit. I told him that I wasn't. He told me not to bother coming out for the team if I wasn't willing to quit. Coach Brown loved playing the game and would divide our gym class into teams, with him being an active member. More often than not I found myself on a team facing Coach Brown's team. I loved covering the coach man to man. I had the advantage of being both taller and faster than the coach. I took great delight in the fact that he couldn't score on me. I was especially delighted when the Coach Brown, getting his team ready for the next season, invited me to come out for the team. I had waited a whole year for this moment. I answered, "I still smoke, Coach," and walked away.

I continued to smoke for the next twenty three years. During this time, my habit became much worse. I had become a chain smoker. I smoked at least three packs a day and a cigar or two for good measure. I enjoyed smoking. I was vaguely aware that my smoking habit was killing me but I took the fatalistic view that something would kill me anyway. It might as well be cigarettes as something else.

In the couple of years before I finally quit smoking, I tried to quit several times. Some of these attempts appeared successful for a while. I would refrain from smoking for a month or more. During these times, I was in sheer agony. My every waking moment was filled with the craving for nicotine. I was totally obsessed with the desire to fill my lungs with nicotine-laden smoke.

## MY SON, RICHARD DIES

This was all changed by the tragic and unexpected death of my son. On November 13, 1972, my son was hanging out with one of his buddies. The two of them decided to "get high" by sniffing Right Guard antiperspirant. I have no idea as to how long or how often they had misused this deadly substance. I only know that Richard's friend burst into our home and anxiously informed me that "something was wrong with Richard." The two of us ran the several blocks back to his friend's house, and I found Richard lying lifeless in the center of the living room. Richard's friend told me that Richard had been sitting on the windowsill and yelled "I've been shot." He then collapsed into the position that I found him. The source of Richard's outcry is still a mystery to me. He had not been shot or anything like that.

According to the autopsy Richard had been getting high from inhaling an aerosol. He passed out from the effects of the aerosol and vomited simultaneously. He drowned in his own vomit. I immediately attempted artificial respiration. I vainly continued my efforts until the ambulance took him from me. The ambulance rushed him to the hospital where he was declared DOA.

The rest of the day was an awful blur. I vaguely remember trying to console my wife and youngest daughter. Even more painful was calling my oldest daughter in California. Telling her the awful news was all but impossible but, I somehow managed. I spent the rest of the day

surrounded by loved ones. In my grief, I felt so very alone. My mind seemed to race over thousands of things. Why? Why did God have to take my only son?

I went to bed that night asking myself that question. In my search for answers, I brought the Lord's Prayer into the forefront of my mind. I went to sleep that night saying the Lord's Prayer over and over and searching it word for word, phrase by phrase for meaning. One phrase "deliver me from evil" seemed to stand out above all the others. With great sincerity, I asked God to deliver me from evil.

When I awoke the next morning, I felt completely rested. I got up from my bed and went through my usual everyday routine. Several hours later, I noticed something was not routine. Something was very different. In all this time I had not lit up a single cigarette. I had absolutely no craving. I had not even thought of a cigarette. That day went by, as did the following days, the following months, and the following years. Since then I have not once craved a cigarette. The night after God took my son, he also answered my prayer "Deliver me from evil." Tobacco is truly evil. I also feel that my son is alive in Heaven and that he watches over me. Coach Brown had tried to save me from the evil of tobacco when I was a kid, but I was too stubborn to listen. I was destined to learn the hard way.

### THE 1950's TEXAS RELAYS

In 1950, Ball High School was loaded with gifted trackmen. Our school's team consisted of six proven champions and another dozen or so promising hopefuls. I was one of the promising hopefuls. Our coach, H. C. (Pee Wee) Greenfield, was as good as they come. Unfortunately, he had to spend too much time raising money for transportation, lodging and food that was necessary to enter out of town track meets.

The Texas Relays, hosted by the University of Texas, was the most important track event held in this part of the world. A little before the event, Coach Greenfield announced that he only had enough funding for six athletes. Nothing more had to be said. My heart sank. I wouldn't be going to the biggest, most important track meet in the State of Texas.

I decided to make the trip anyway. I would thumb my way. I walked up to the highway, stuck out my thumb and hitchhiked my way to Austin. I arrived there in fine shape except that I didn't have much money. I only had enough for a couple of hamburgers, but that was about it. I certainly didn't have enough for a night's lodging.

I had thought that I could bunk with the track team, but that didn't work out. The six legitimate members of the team were afraid of getting into trouble if they let me squeeze into their already overcrowded room. I didn't push the issue because my being in Austin was a no-no, and I didn't want Coach Greenfield to find out that I was there.

As the members of the Ball High championship team settled in for the night, I wandered off, looking for a place to spend the night. It was getting late and I found myself on the University of Texas campus. I took notice of some cars parked around one of the many fraternity houses. For the moment, it seemed as if I had a good idea. Finding one of the cars unlocked, I crawled into the back seat and settled in for the night. Or so I thought.

Just as I was about to doze off, a couple of young fraternity brothers got into the car and drove off. Thank God they hadn't noticed me. I laid there, scared out of my wits listening to

them discuss their high hopes for the evening. From their conversation, I could tell that they had but one thing on their minds. They wanted sex, and they wanted it now. They were looking desperately for a young lady or two who shared their craving. They drove to one sorority house and then another, looking for hot and eager companions. Each stop resulted in failure, and they hurried on to the next possibility. Frustrated, they decided to return to the frat house and try another approach. Maybe they could make a connection on the telephone.

They left the car with me still unnoticed in the back seat and returned to their frat house. Whether or not their luck improved or not, I'll never know. I left their car as fast and as quiet as I could. Spending the night in someone else's car had lost its appeal. I wandered around a bit after that and finally ran across a police substation. A police officer was kind enough to let me spend the rest of the night on a waiting room bench.

The next day I was delighted to watch our school's team win the High School Division of the Texas Relays. I rode my thumb back to Galveston, very tired but very happy that I was privileged to witness this great Ball High School team at the very height of its glory. Over the rest of the season and the one that followed, I improved enough to win a few meets and placed in several more. Through experience, I learned that it is better to earn a place in glory than it is to stand on the sidelines as a witness. I also learned that a police substation makes a better motel than the back seat of a stranger's automobile.

### I'M THE OLDEST KID AT BALL HIGH

Because I had spent an extra year in the second grade and lost another year from my expulsion, I was probably the oldest student at Ball High that didn't graduate in 1951. Mr. Greenfield, my track coach urged me to remain in school that final year and graduate. He said that several colleges were interested in me, and he was sure I would be offered a scholarship at the end of my senior year. He also said that I should continue working out and improving my skills as a high jumper. The only problem with all that was because of my age and my "lost" year I would be ineligible for competition at the High School level. I gave it a lot of thought and finally decided to drop out of school again. For one thing "my" class had graduated, leaving me behind. Another reason was the war in Korea. I decided that I would go into military service if they would take me.

Early on, the Army had been my first choice. When I was 15, I tried to join by forging documents and lying about my age. I was afraid that I couldn't pass for 18 so I told the recruiter that I was 17 and forged my parents name to a document consenting to let me enter on what they called a "minority enlistment." I didn't say anything to Mama. I just packed a few essentials and looked for an opportunity to sneak out of the house. I wasn't slick enough and Mama caught me. She called up the recruiter and made him void my enlistment contract. The recruiter thought that I had been truthful about my age but had forged my minority permission papers. He called me a year later on my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, thinking it was my 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday. He was hoping to enlist me again. By this time I was no longer in the mood for joining so I declined his offer. That was past history. Now that I really was 18, there was nothing to stop me from joining the Army if I really wanted.