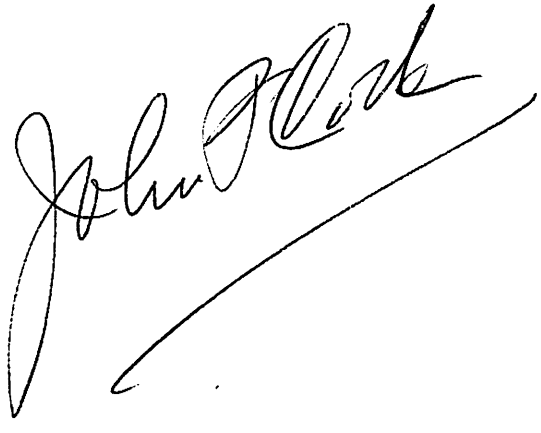
CALLED TO BE



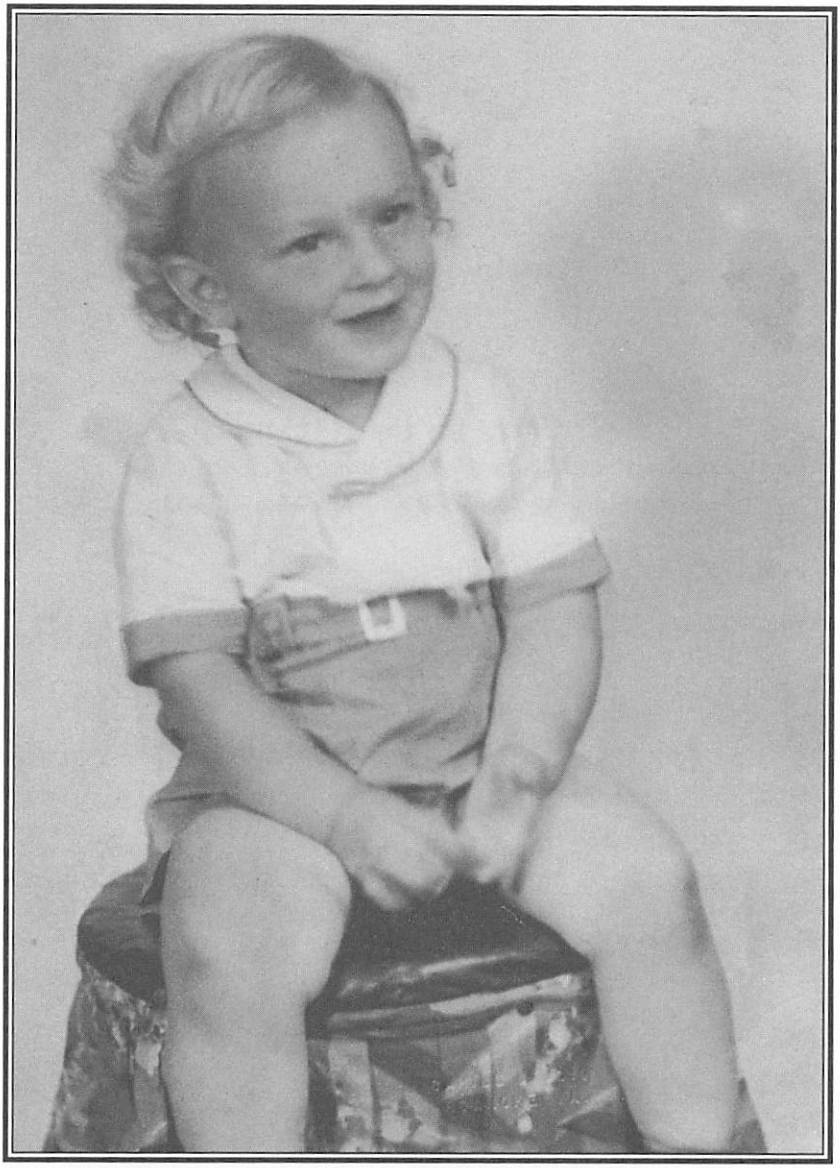
Also by John P. Cock

Books

Jesus Christ for the 21st Century:
Post-Modern Christ Images (1999)
Continuing the Reformation (Unpublished)

Booklets

Life Is Resurrectional
Living Theology
The Revolution of Grace
The Un-Literal Meaning of the Bible



Second Edition, 2000, **Called To Be: A Spirit Odyssey**

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CALLED TO BE

A Spirit Odyssey

JOHN P. COCK

tran§cribe books

That's what I have attempted here.

I could have named my memoir **Images of a Soul**, taking my cue from T. S. Elliott's lines (*Preludes*, Stanza III, 1917):

You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted.

Let me modify his lines and use them as the fore-text for my renamed memoir, **Called to Be: A Spirit Odyssey**:

I wrote, and watched my life revealing
The thousand wondrous images
Of which my soul is constituted.

John Cock
Greensboro, N.C.
January 2000

As in the original Preface, *I wish to remember special ones to me who have died since the first edition of this book: Julia Curtis Cock (Glenn's wife, Doug's mother, and my spirited sister-in-law), Lyn Mathews Edwards (spirit mentor), George and Freeman Slusher (my favorite uncles), Curtis Cock (close cousin), Mary Lippard Stradley (aunt by marriage), Bill Newkirk (spirit colleague), George Stevenson (a favorite professor at E&H), Jeremy Lineberry (young friend), Frank Vass (friend and part-time employee), Helen Truitt Jackson (Downtown friend), Payne Stewart (golf exemplar), and Walter Payton (football hero). I acknowledge them, the communion of saints, and all others—a universe full—who have helped me on my way. We celebrate their being.*

Preface
Second Edition

I cut my publishing teeth on the first edition of this book, a very small run written for family Christmas gifts. Mrs. Lineberry at Gazette Press in Galax taught me much and I thank her. It made for my best ever family present, and Mama Dotte had it in hand before she died. It also helped put me on the way to serious writing.

Before and after moving off my native mountain, I was into my second book, **Jesus Christ for the 21st Century: Post-Modern Christ Images.** My memoir gave me courage to write it. I even conceived the second in the first, when I remembered how much I had wanted to write a book about Jesus, more than twenty-five years earlier.

Significant subtractions (I cut out sixteen appendices, which the family told me loud and clear was another book) and additions have been made to this second edition, primarily because of my life-change before and during the writing of both books, and the re-writing of this one. I am older, wiser, and more at peace with my journey. The first edition had patches of cynicism and negativity that seem uncalled for now.

I have done some serious weeding, especially with the encouragement and help of my joyfully tempered wife, Lynda, whose primary message is that we are to honor all creation and especially those parts of it we bump into. I keep telling her *she* needs to write a book. She keeps telling me that she will help edit mine, substantially. So on we go, reconciliation after reconciliation, in a semblance of marital bliss into our forty-second year of courtship. I tell her I will dedicate a book to her some day, and I mean it.

Besides Lynda, I acknowledge the encouragement of all those who bought my second book, and when they learned about my memoir, wanted a copy. Having no more copies to send forced this second edition. Again, I thank Jeremiah for helping his dad get his books ready for the publisher. And I thank James Dodson, the author of **Final Rounds: A Father, A Son, The Golf Journey of a Lifetime**, who told me that there is a big difference between an autobiography and a memoir, the latter being much more a spirit journey, written from the inside out.

Preface

I began to write this book in September 1993, out of the initial urge to communicate deeply with my aging mother, who relished talking about our life together in years gone by. She loved the initial readings, so I kept it up, chapter after chapter, recounting my years at home with her and the family. Later came the heavier sections of my life.

After finishing it, I heard that the genre *memoir* was "in," maybe because readers are interested in the journey of another human soul, what life meant to him, and how he lived it. Looking at another's journey and identifying with it, one learns more about the meaning of his or her own life. Every man and every woman is on a journey and therefore has a story to tell. Taken together, these stories are intimations of humanity's soul.

I was led to tell my story. The more I wrote, the more self-consciously I brooded about my life, agonizingly at times, trying to get perspective. I was finally enabled to give thanks for my whole journey, and through this book found a way to share some of its wonder.

I have gone back and forth between titles: first, **Called to Be: Memoir of a Secular-Religious**, then, **Vocational Odyssey: A Spirit Memoir**, and, finally, **Called to Be: A Vocational Odyssey**. All say the same thing. I have been "called," without question.

John Cock
Galax, Vriginia
December 1997

Around the completion of this book, eight very special people to me died: Mama Dotte (mother), Connie Boyer (second mother), Linda Boyd Harris (schoolmate), Lacona Diamond (favorite teacher), Victor Frankl (spirit guide), Mother Teresa (spirit hero), Ben Hogan (golf hero), and Judge Earl Murphy (fellow golf enthusiast). I acknowledge them, the communion of saints, and all others—a universe full—who have helped me on my way. We celebrate their being.

PHASE III: VOCATION THROUGH THE ORDER: ECUMENICAL

PHASE IV: EXTENDED VOCATION BACK IN GALAX

Contents

DEDICATION

MAMA DOTTE

She bore me
She nursed me
She cuddled me
She disciplined me
She exemplified strength
She listened to me
She trusted me
She backed me
She loved me

CALLED TO BE

the *Poet* . . .
the *Saint* . . .
the *General* . . .
the *Wise One* . . .
the *Anointed* . . .
on behalf of all kind.

—From a song of the Order: Ecumenical

I don't know Who—or what—put the question. . . . But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful.

—Dag Hammarskjöld, **Markings**

Exert yourselves to clinch God's . . . calling.

—2 Peter 1:10, **The New English Bible**

Die every day. Be born every day. Deny everything you have every day. The superior virtue is not to be free but to fight for freedom.

—Nikos Kazantzakis, **The Saviors of God**

Do not seek death. Death will find you. But seek the road which makes death a fulfillment.

—Dag Hammarskjöld, **Markings**

CALLED TO BE

PROLOGUE

I do not enter lightly upon the project of writing my memoir, which describes and interprets my life journey. As I write, I am sure that the end of my life has not yet come, but I am equally sure at the bottom of my soul that it will. It therefore seems appropriate to begin my memoir within a context bigger than my life. Before my birth and early years begin in Chapter 1, why not stand before my death along with me and judge what is (and was) of ultimale value. My memoir tells how I came to hold and how I have sought to live such values.

The wishes for my memorial service are set in what I consider the best of traditional Judeo-Christian language, my faith tradition. There are several good theological arguments inherent in my service with thoroughgoing fundamentalists and traditionalists. There are likewise several good philosophical-spirit arguments here with universalists and new-agers. The language I choose appeals to me as reverent toward the mysterious power that I call ***God****. It is no small task to choose the worshipful poetry that honors one's self-understanding, his faith tradition, and the awesome mystery of profound reality that penetrates every religious/spirit tradition—and yet is beyond them all.*

My family and the leaders of the memorial service can be guided by my wishes as they will. I will not object verbally. But be careful when dealing with the ***Holy****.*

Following are reflections and wishes for my last rites.

THE LAST RITES OF
JOHN PEYTON COCK

SUGGESTIONS FOR MY MEMORIAL SERVICE

CALL TO WORSHIP

> *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps. 118:24 NSV).*

PRAYER

> *Eternal* ***God****, maker of life and death, give us grace in the presence of death to worship thee, that we may have sure hope in thy eternal life that is without beginning and without end—always now—from everlasting to everlasting. We confess our reluctance to commit to thee those whom we love. Restore our faith that we may come to trust in thy power, thy goodness, and thy mercy; through Jesus the Christ, who has gone before and whose living presence is our surest reality, even grace itself.* ***Amen.***

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES:

Since about age thirty, I have thought about my final celebration of this part of my life—death is a part of life, or *not being* is a part of *being*.

> *The Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. . . . Dust you are, to dust you will return (Gen.2:7;3:19 REB).*

I believe in eternal life. The power of God was in the ***beginning***—before the Big Bang—***is now,*** and ***ever shall be***. Therefore, my form, whether dust or flesh or spirit, is breathed into being and sustained in being by *God.* I may wish to remain in the flesh forever, maybe fearing that I will go out of being. Yet, even after the death of the flesh, I am sustained in being. I am always in being, and since *God* creates all forms of being, all forms are equally good. Praise be to *God.*

> *Eternal life is not continuation of life after death. Eternal life is beyond past, present, and future: we come from it, we live in its presence, we return to it. It is never absent—it is the divine life in which we are rooted and in which we are destined to participate in freedom—for God alone has eternity. . . . We are mortal like every creature, mortal with our whole being—body and soul—but we are also kept in the eternal life* ***before*** *we lived on earth,* ***while*** *we are living in time, and* ***after*** *our time has come to an end.*
>
> —*Paul Tillich,* **The Eternal Now,** *pp. 114-15*

I have participated in many funeral services, and some have been Services of Worship, lifting up *God* as the object of worship. That appeals to me and is the guiding image for my service. We prostrate ourselves before that power as did Job.

> [At the news of the death of all his family, his attendants, and his animals] *Job stood up, tore his cloak, shaved his head, and threw himself prostrate on the ground, saying:*
>
> *'Naked I came from the womb,*
> *Naked I shall return whence I came.*
> *The Lord gives and the Lord takes away;*
> *Blessed be the name of the Lord'*
>
> *(Job 1:20-21 REB).*

I believe in the resurrectional power of God, by which I mean life triumphs over death eternally. Death is a good creation of *God.* "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away [or better, 'takes back']; Blessed be the name of the Lord," for finally we are the Lord's in whatever state.

The hymn *When We Are Living* holds to the same declaration:

When we are living, it is in the Lord,
And when we're dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying,
We belong to God, we belong to God.

The resurrectional power of *God* recreates without ceasing. All life is resurrectional, not just life after the death of the body. What started the revolution that was the early church was *new life*. Persons and a people were changed in this life. That was the reason people were joining the movement of the church, the church of the open tomb, the open future. We are part of the church because we believe that life is resurrectional, full of possibility and full of hope, now.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

—Hymn of Promise, ***United Methodist Hymnal***

We keep dying and being resurrected. We go to sleep and die in the dark of night. With the sun and the singing of the birds comes the new day. Out of death of winter comes the new life of spring. A seemingly dead cocoon turns into an awesome, free butterfly. Seeds are buried and are resurrected into flowers, delicious vegetables, and fruits. Persecuted peoples sail forth and inhabit a new world. A baby comes out of the darkest womb into the blaring light of life. Resurrection is the way life is. To live is to die. To die is to live.

Praise the Lord, Christ is risen,
He is risen indeed.
Amen.
Amen.

—Wake-up ritual for the Order: Ecumenical

I believe in the eternal love of God.

Overwhelming victory is ours through him who love[s] us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God *in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39 REB).*

BENEDICTION:

Go now into ***God's*** *eternity realized in this life. Live fully, holding fast to grace, anchored in love, abounding in the living power of the resurrection; giving thanks for the past, present, and future; remembering that life is a sacred calling to be lived on behalf of all of* ***God's*** *creation, in the name and faith of Jesus the Christ.* ***Amen.***

*****

CONSIDERATIONS

SONGS:

I have delighted in the following songs from the church:

- *I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath* (***United Methodist Hymnal,*** p.60)
- *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (***UMH***, p.110)
- *Lift High the Cross* (***UMH***, p.159)
- *Amazing Grace*, all six verses (***UMH***, p.378)
- *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (***UMH***, p. 519)
- *When We Are Living* (***UMH***, p.356)
- *Come, Come, Ye Saints* (Mormon hymn)

And I have delighted in the following songs from the Order: Ecumenical:

- *At the Center Tranquil*
- *Stillness Lingers in My Soul*
- *The Sign*
- *The Vision*
- *My Consummation*
- *Those Who Wait on the Lord*
- *In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost*

SPECIAL WISHES:

- That the remains of my physical body be donated to restore life
- That I be cremated any time before or after the Service of Worship
- That my ashes be strewn from the Blue Ridge Mountain tops and wherever else my family chooses
- That my grave marker be erected in the Gardner cemetery near Willis, Virginia, beside my sisters Mary Louise and Coretta Sue, Grandmother Ida Gardner Cock, and my Great-Grandparents Anderson and Mary Gardner; or in Felts Cemetery in Galax, "my native vale," in a plot donated to us by Lon and Dorthea Miller (parents of Leah Early)
- That my grave marker include the phrase, *a post-modern evangelist*
- That my memorial Service of Worship be led by a minister of the church and a member(s) of the Order: Ecumenical, who will give a witness to the celebration of life in death
- That there be a printed Order of Service and that a eulogy be printed and read
- That Lynda, my wife, choose the Tagore poetry to be read
- That my family and close friends present symbols of my life, including a universe symbol (Earthrise), a Christian symbol (Cross), a symbol of the Order (Iron Cross), a symbol of my calling (Eagle), a symbol of my marriage covenant (Kathmandu wedding band with family symbol inscribed), pictures of my family, one of my written books, a symbol of Downtown Galax, a bulletin of Galax First United

Methodist Church, The Men's Shop business card, a golf flag (#1 or #18), a printed eulogy, and whatever else my family deems an appropriate symbol of my life

- That there be celebrative congregational singing
- That my family greet all comers in a reception line after the Service of Worship
- That there be a celebrational meal following the reception, with music from my jazz collection, especially Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World*
- That my family plant a memorial birch tree or weeping willow
- That my family finish and release my obituary

OBITUARY:

John Peyton Cock, age __, of _____, died_____, 20__, at his home at _____. Born in 1938, near Willis, Virginia, to Peyton and Dotte Slusher Cock, he grew up in Galax, Virginia. His written works include **Called to Be: A Spirit Memoir**; **Jesus Christ for the 21st Century: Post-Modern Christ Images**; and _____. In his later years, he was a writer, a spirit guide, and a traveling teacher. He was the owner of the Men's Shop in Galax for fourteen years; a founder and the first president of the Galax Downtown Association; a leader in the Order: Ecumenical for sixteen years in Chicago, Kansas City, Washington, D.C., Canberra, Jakarta, Bombay, and Denver; a United Methodist minister serving churches in Alpharetta, Asheville, and Richmond; head of the English Department of Frederick Military Academy and instructor of English at Baylor School for Boys; a graduate of Galax Schools, Emory and Henry College, Auburn University, and Emory University. Surviving him are his wife of _____ years, Lynda Lippard Cock; son and daughter-in-law, John Cock II and Sofia Tangalos; son and daughter-in-law, Jeremiah Cock and April Baggatta; granddaughter, Kaitlyn Elizabeth Cock; grandson, Nolan Avery Cock; (sister; brother). A memorial service will be held at _____ Church at ____p.m. on _____, followed by a general reception and a family celebrational meal. Rev. _____ and Mr./Ms._____ of the Order: Ecumenical

will officiate.

Memorial gifts may be given to the Order: Ecumenical/ICA for its Archives project; to the Fifth City: Chicago community project; to an Indian or Indonesian village project; to the Foundation for Excellence Scholarship of Galax Schools; to a Galax downtown project; or to a project at Emory and Henry College.

God rest his soul.

REFLECTION

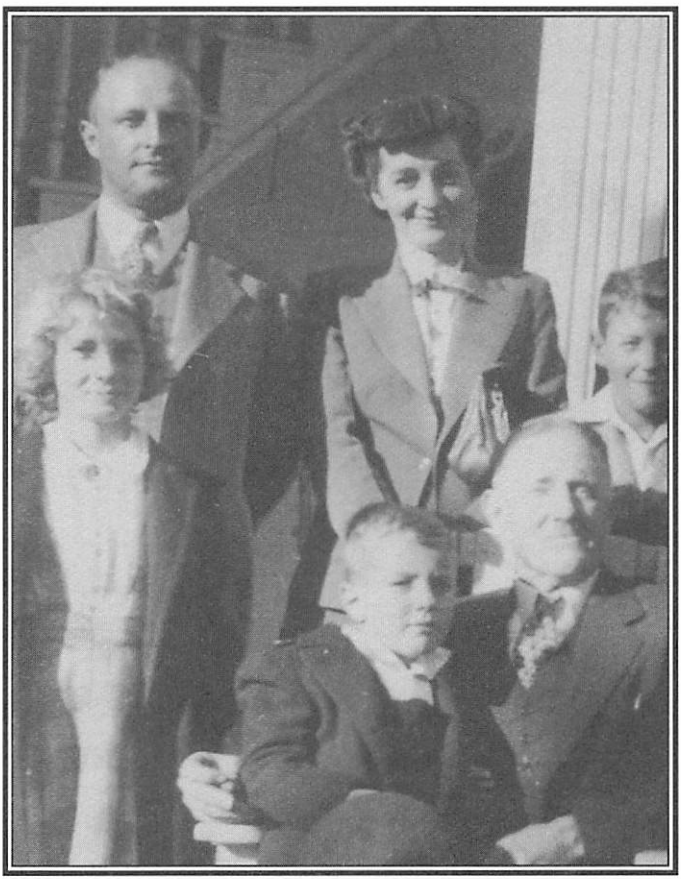
IT IS GOOD to contemplate one's death. It clears away the fog.

On a clear day, rise and look around you,
And you'll see who you are.
On a clear day, how it will astound you,
That the glow of your being outshines every star.
You feel part of ev'ry mountain, sea and shore,
You can hear from far and near,
A world you've never heard before.
And on a clear day, on that clear day,
You can see forever, and ever, and evermore.

—On a Clear Day, ***The Songs of Burton Lane***

PHASE I
PRIMAL COMMUNITY IN GALAX

My Family



Daddy (Peyton), Mama (Dotte), Ida Dean, Glenn, Granddaddy (Johnny P.), and Me

Chapter 1: First Calling

Until First Grade
Age 0-6 (1938-45)

JOHN AND ELIZABETH COCK came to what is now Carroll County, Virginia, in 1772, and settled on Burks Fork. Their son Andrew married Penelope and had a son named John; he and Janie had a son named Preston; he and Judah had a son named Joel; he and Mary had a son named John; he and Ida had a son named Peyton; he and Dotte had a son named John—me.

Uncle Jethro Martin, who lived next door, looked at the shape of my head and declared that I would be a Primitive Baptist preacher. That was a good guess, for my great, great, great grandfather "Squire" John Cock was ordained a Primitive Baptist preacher in 1836; and my great grandfather Peter Corn, on my mother's side, was ordained a Primitive Baptist preacher in 1865. Being "called" is in the genes.

I was born between Dugspur and Willis, Virginia, in the house where my father was also born, out in the country just over the Floyd County line from Carroll County. The Gardner cemetery on the hill holds many relatives, including my great grandparents Anderson and Mary Gardner, my grandmother Ida, and my two sisters: Louise, who died at age eight just after I was born, and Coretta Sue, who died at birth when I was around four.

When I was born, my sister, Ida, looked at me and screamed. I was eleven pounds of mostly bone. Since my parents thought they would never fatten me up or stop my crying, they took me to Dr. Glenn Cox, who recommended the mix of Karo syrup and Pet milk in large tins, which together did the trick. Once I stopped screaming from hunger, I was happy, they said. In one of my earliest pictures, I am pulling the cat's tail, my mouth wide open with too much delight. Even so, Mama says that I did not get into as much mischief as my older brother, Glenn.

One of Mama's most vivid memories of that time was the

afternoon she placed a net over me to keep the flies off. Several big pillows held up the net. As I thrashed, trying not to go to sleep, I guess, I pulled the pillows down on top of my face and was turning blue. Mama said something told her to check on me. She saved me when she grabbed me up and ran outside on the porch and fanned me for dear life. She said she was a shaken young mother. One should always ask how many times his parents saved him to keep in perspective how indispensable one's family is at that age. Without *them* we would not have made it.

When I was about eighteen months old, toward the end of the Depression, we lost the family farm, house, and all our belongings. That was a traumatic time in brother Glenn's life, I learned only a few years ago. Maybe it was pride, but for whatever reason, they shielded me from all of that most of my life. It was typical of Mama's stoic, German upbringing that taught her to take life's blows, stand tall, and move on. She demonstrated that quality in the death of two young children, in a marriage that broke at times, as well as in the financial devastation.

We moved to Hillsville with only a few paper bags full of essentials and some clothes on hangers, and to Galax, Virginia, very soon after—about thirty miles away from Willis. The community of Galax and my dear family raised me. We lived on MacArthur Street for a few months, where no significant stories about me are told, then to South Main Street next to where Hardee's stands today. That's where the lore begins for me, when I was two to five, 1941 to 1944.

Daddy worked nearby selling cars. Mama worked further up Main Street for a Jewish family selling women's clothing. Because Daddy and Mama worked six days a week, Glenn, six years older than I am, Ida, three years older, Marie Anders, our full-time sitter at age fourteen, and I all helped take care of each other in and around the little three-room rented apartment. We shared a bathroom with Mrs. Bartlett, the owner, who lived in the rest of the house. We were poor but never realized it, maybe because we knew we could make it.

It was at Mrs. Bartlett's house that I stuck the nail in my foot, which I'm pretty sure I remember—one of those events that may be real for me because of the family stories about it. I also remember receiving my first whipping by Mama for playing in the forbidden sewer-creek nearby. There I was, playing with my stick in the water, poking a dead

water dog, when I looked up and saw Mama glaring down at me. I had forgotten that she came home early on Wednesday afternoons.

My second memorable whipping came when I went with Mr. Ward, a neighbor, on his horse-drawn wagon to his farm outside town, a couple of miles away, south on Hwy 89. I had not asked Mama nor Daddy nor Marie nor Glenn nor Ida, and told Mr. Ward that I had. As the day wore on, little four-year-old Johnny—the pretty little boy with the whitish-blond, curly locks—felt strong fear for the consequences of his decision and started running home along the highway by himself. Some nice man in a car picked me up and delivered me home, where I knew there would be no celebration. Mr. Ward was looking everywhere for me and finally found me when he knocked on our door. Judgment was swift when Mama held court that evening after work.

MY SECOND MOTHER was Connie Schooley Boyer, the mother of Skippy, who lived about six houses further down Main Street, the second house from the city swimming pool and park, across the street from the elementary school playground, and diagonally across from the ice-cream shop. Connie really spoiled us two and I dearly loved it. She gave us most all of her time. We walked everywhere, for Galax was and still is a small town, then less than 5,000. We drank *Cokes* out of real *Coke* glasses at one of two drug stores. We did not go to the other drug store, which we were told was a bad place for little boys. We walked to the post office, to the bank, to the grocery store, to the theater, and especially to the two 5 & 10 cent stores.

In Felts Park we played in the sand boxes, tried to see-saw, and slid down the sliding board, which was scary fast if rubbed with the waxed paper from bread wrappings. The bigger kids waxed it one day, and poor Skippy came off the end of it at hurtling speed, yelling. Afraid of the same fate, I quickly hid. Also in the park was the pool where we waded and dog-paddled and bought snacks. My favorite was *Orange Crush* and Lance nabs, a nickel each.

I remember spending many nights at the Schooley house. Skippy and I ate a quarter to half a box of saltine crackers each night and talked and giggled until Connie's father or brothers called us down. I was

afraid of them, sort of, though I knew they liked me. Several times they asked us who was the best pop singer. Skippy said Frank Sinatra. I always picked Bing Crosby, who had a deep voice like mine. I remember their laughing and clapping when we crooned a little for them. They had late model GM cars, rolling up big miles, for at least two of them were salesmen for one of Galax's many furniture manufacturers. For a ride, we would help them wash and shine their cars.

Connie was a most religious person, reading us Bible stories, taking us to Sunday school and church, and praying with us at bedtime. Skippy could not sit still in church. He embarrassed me so much that I refused to sit beside him. I drew my pictures sitting in the pew with the big folks, loving it when they told me how well behaved I was. Compared to Skippy I was. Connie also taught us at Sunday school. One year she helped us memorize and recite the 23rd and 100th Psalms—which I can recite to this day—and motivated us with candy and hugs. She was also our summer Bible school teacher. I remember using popsicle sticks for a manger. *God* bless Miss Connie. When I remember her, I remember smiles, hugs, and love.

I discovered my first caterpillar in their driveway. Connie explained to us its metamorphosis into a butterfly, and to this day that image of "death and resurrection," as she explained it, has stuck with me. A vivid theological lesson more than fifty years ago.

A special Sunday school visitor to our class was Jeep, Jim Nuckoll's dog, a dirty-white mongrel. The teachers showed him due respect since he was such a well-behaved dog. They also knew we would protest if they chased Jeep out. One Sunday he vomited, lying at Jim's feet on the front row, and at that point the teacher asked him to leave. The class was somewhat distracted.

About that time I remember the long funeral home ambulance coming to our house to pick up my baby sister, Correta Sue, who had just died a few days after her birth. Because Mama was so sad, so was I. Yet, I did not really know what was happening. No one was giving me much information, just crying and telling me she had died. Death at my doorstep was a new experience. Where were they taking my sister that I had waited for so long? Was she coming back? I did not go to the funeral. Instead, Connie came and walked me by the hand to her house.

The last big splice of life from that period was Daddy's coming home in his Radford Arsenal uniform, and with a big smile announcing that he did not have to go to the war after all. I did not know what *war* was either, but as a twentieth century person, I would learn. Anyway, the family was very happy and so was I.

ONE SUNNY WEDNESDAY afternoon, Mama and I walked from Main Street, up Calhoun, down Adams, and up Oldtown to inspect the brick house on the corner of Stuart Drive. It was so big: three bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, with living room, dining room, kitchen, bath, sun porch, a half basement, and a garage. Huge. Inspection complete, Mama bought me a chocolate covered ice cream stick at the Esso station just across the street. I was eating it as we walked back down Oldtown when we met a little girl and her mother on the sidewalk. I was uncomfortable, but I did grin at the girl. After we walked away I told Mama that she was pretty. Being attracted to a girl was a new experience. Such things even happen at age five.

The day we moved, Glenn ran up the steps of the new house and got first pick of bedrooms, the biggest one in the house, although the ceiling was low. We did not have much furniture, so Ida and I slept together downstairs in the smaller bedroom with the feather mattress. During the winter I had fun running and jumping into it coming from the only heated rooms—kitchen, sun porch, and family room—through the cold hall on the colder hardwood floors. I well recall the Saturday night baths in the kitchen in the big metal tub by the wood stove. I was embarrassed and clutched the towel to me as I got out. The others watched and teased sometimes.

In that same kitchen I learned how to dry dishes, over and over. All three children had chores, especially since Daddy and Mama worked. Even so, Mama washed and hung the clothes on the line before going to work in the mornings. On Wednesday afternoons she ironed our clothes and baked lemon meringue pies. Everyday, she cooked dinner as well as breakfast. I am astounded at how hard my mother worked and did not complain. Ida would usually cook cornbread. One of my jobs was setting the table on the sun porch.

After dinner and doing the dishes, we would retire to the family room, heated by a coal stove, which required a pan of water on top to keep the room moisture normal. Dad would read *The Roanoke World News*. Glenn and Ida did homework or read comics or library books. I was not yet in school, so I was invariably looking for someone to play with me, and if they would not, my cars and trucks would.

Being together like that was a snug and warm way to spend a winter evening. Mama often knitted. I loved holding the yarn over my wrists while she wound balls for knitting, which often rolled on the floor as she pulled on the ball for more yarn.

After the paper, Daddy took over the radio. WBOB, the local station, was the only one we could pick up. He smoked *Chesterfields* and filled his ashtray each evening. Mama occasionally fussed about the dirty habit and the messy ashtray as she would pick it up to clean before retiring. (Second-hand smoke was not yet an issue, of course—nor cancer.) Daddy would just look at her without expression, as though she had just asked him a question. Clearly, he had no jobs in the house.

Before I got to know the kids in the neighborhood, I played with my cars and trucks in the little bedroom upstairs, or under the big maple tree next to Stuart Drive. The dirt and roots were conducive to my imagination. My favorite was a Shell gas truck, just like the ones I saw at the Shell station down Oldtown Street, hose and all. I would usually wash the dirt off them at the end of play, for Daddy and Mama were fanatical about our taking care of our things. Their neuroses were becoming mine: little mister clean.

Johnny and Franky Morris were the first kids I played with: Johnny, one year older, and Franky, two or three years younger. They lived across Stuart Drive on the corner. Their mother was a housewife who cared for their four, plus me a great deal of the time. Their father was a traveling furniture salesman, who always bought Oldsmobiles. He left on Sundays and returned on Fridays with presents for the children. One time, when he brought a couple of baseball gloves for Johnny and Franky, he pitched to us hard—a University of Richmond left-handed baseball graduate.

Each Saturday, the Esso station washed his Oldsmobile. We argued which was the best car, because my Daddy was selling Buicks at

the time on Calhoun Street. I was so proud to go riding each Sunday afternoon, usually in a different dealer's car, either out to lunch or to visit our relatives around Floyd.

MAMA WAS THE BABY OF FOURTEEN Slusher children, all raised in Floyd County. The boys were Claude, Peter—who died as a child—Rom, Roger, George, and Freeman. The girls: Bess, Mary, Nola, Effie, Martha, Kate—who died in her teens—Lelia, and Dotte—Mama, though her real name was Eva Doyle, which she refused to use. Several of her sisters birthed children before Mama was born; therefore, several of her best playmates were her nieces, older than their Aunt Dotte. Her parents' names were George William Slusher and, believe it or not, Dicie Clementine Permilia Jane Corn Slusher, neither of whom I remember. Grandfather had a general merchandise store and several farms, which the boys inherited. He gave the girls $500 each when they married. The Slushers were strong German stock, hard working, family oriented, and proud.

When we went visiting on Sunday afternoons, once we were in Floyd County we could turn off most any road and find a Slusher relative. On the other hand, Daddy was an only child, whose mother, Ida, died when he was sixteen. Johnny P., as his father was known, remarried a woman with her own daughter. We would visit him at his insurance office during the week in Floyd, but not his house. *She* gave no invitations, and if we happened by, she iced us out. Consequently, Sunday visits were with the Slushers.

Slusher family reunions always took place in July, ever since I can remember, at the VFW Park in Floyd. It seemed like hundreds of people to me. We would take our balls, gloves, and bats. Once there we would reach into an ice tub for a bottled drink, usually *Nehi*—strange to me—round up our cousins, and start the ball game. The adults would immediately go to talking and hugging. Since I could not remember their names, I sort of avoided them. With kid cousins, names and hugs are not the thing, just "Do you want to play?" Names came later.

Around noon, an adult called us inside for lunch. Everyone gathered round for the words of welcome, mention of special news among

the families, prayer, and feasting. Young boys are not much on food when playing is waiting, but this food was something else, especially the desert table. Later, the men would drive in the long metal posts for the big horseshoe game. We could only watch until we became teenagers. Then, if needed, they asked us to join in. Others brought musical instruments, sat in a circle, and jammed on Primitive Baptist hymns and mountain tunes. My favorites were *I'll Fly Away* and *Under the Double Eagle.*

I think it was the summer of '44 that Ida and I stayed with Aunt Bess and Uncle Earl for a week, my first recollection of being away from home for more than a night. Vivid impressions of that visit remain, especially since I remember my first encounters with farming life. I delighted in throwing corn and mix to the chickens, but ran from them if they pecked too close to my sandal-covered feet. I made a big deal about the odor, not to mention the first time I stepped in chicken doo, which is harder to miss than cow piles.

Then, horror! We watched Aunt Bess kill a poor chicken. But she did not wring its neck quite right, so Ida and I had to chase the frantic chicken down. I was horrified. When they finally caught it again, twisted its neck, and then chopped off its head with a big axe, I was a sick boy. What cruel people. They told me that what I saw was the way it's done. I cleaned up and went to the dinner table. There the chicken lay on a big tray, only in many pieces. I asked to be excused and was not hungry for several meals after that when I considered what it took to put meat on the table—and in that house meat was always on the table, usually more than one kind. That was the beginning of my reverence for life, or more accurately, my awful dread of killing a living thing, unless it was an insect or a snake. The same nausea of that first brutal killing would return later in my life during other animal and bird killing adventures.

Next came the awful encounter with the outhouse or John, and why did they choose my name? Ida and I were scared of walking out there, about fifty yards from the house, over a tiny creek, and dark as pitch at night. I could not imagine going at night, so I got my business done early. Just to sit there, looking at the cobwebs, imagining what was down in that dark hole about to jump up and bite my "bohind" was

fearsome. The only saving grace about the experience was looking at the Sears, Roebuck catalog, which of course was there of necessity. What a poor substitute for real toilet paper.

The churning of milk into butter on the porch and at the springhouse is vivid. I liked the part of making the imprint on the butter best, more than the hard work of actual churning. We placed the new butter in the springhouse, full of coolness and the sound of gurgling water. That water was special, drunk from the common silver ladle, so smooth and refreshing after romping around the farm.

The first Sunday we spent there we loaded up and headed for Floyd, to the Primitive Baptist Church meeting. Aunt Bess, a serious Christian, told me firmly that I was to be quiet. I can almost see the space inside, but can well hear the sounds of the full-toned, mournful sounding singing, without accompaniment. And the notes looked funny on the page, called shaped notes.

Do I ever remember the preacher beginning to get wound up, gasping and saying, "and da" between every pause, as he accelerated and became louder. He was slobbering, maybe having a fit, I thought. I looked up at Aunt Bess with shock on my face. She sat still as a rock, face absolutely fixed on that man who was acting crazy. I knew better than to ask her what was happening. On the way home I finally got up the courage. Uncle Earl just grinned and kept driving. Aunt Bess explained that the preacher was filled with the Spirit. I decided that was not something I wanted to be filled with.

THOSE WERE SOME of the strange things going on in my life that summer, but not as strange as what was coming with Mrs. Jennings, who had consented to keep me while Ida and Glenn were at school.

Mrs. Jennings must have been seventy at that time. She and Mr. Jennings lived in a big rooming house diagonally across the street. Mr. Jennings always sat in the same black padded wooden chair in the corner of the living room, listening to the radio and reading a paper—always reading a paper. The strange thing about that room was the fifty stacks of newspapers, old and yellowed, each as high as three or four feet. Unbelievable. Mr. Jennings smiled at me when I came in, though

he would not take his ear from the radio. It was as if he were being paid to read and listen.

Johnny and Franky called Mrs. Jennings "the witch." They could not believe that I stayed with her and definitely would not go into her house. Maybe their mother had forbidden it. One day I offered them some popcorn Mrs. Jennings had made for me. They convulsed and knocked it out of my hands onto the ground. I let the greasy brown bag lie there, now declared untouchable.

She offered room and board. Many times I sat at the table with eight to ten men and Mr. and Mrs. Jennings. They thought the food was fit to eat, as they passed it back and forth, quickly cleaning out the dishes. Control was not an issue around Mrs. Jennings. If anyone said anything inappropriate, she would call it on the spot. She was in charge. Once a man said "damn" and she preached.

I heard strumming one day and sneaked upstairs to the front room, with three or four half-beds. I quietly sank down on the floor and listened to a man they called Bill Monroe, later to be called the King of Blue Grass music. He and his *Blue Grass Boys* band—including LesterFlatt and Earl Scruggs at that time—would pick and tune instruments and talk, chew, and spit. Once in a while they played a whole tune. Later when I heard them on WBOB, I was in awe. The airways ennobled their talents. I would not meet Bill Monroe again until 1992, after he had become world-famous.

Mrs. Jennings was a notorious driver of her four-door 1935 green Chevrolet, I think it was. She could hardly see over the dash. She clutched the steering wheel mightily, scraped gears nearly every time with that long gearshift in the floor, and jerked us several times on take-off as she let out the clutch. I held on for dear life as she headed down the center of any street, not altering her position when horns blared at her. She was unswerving in many ways. When I told Glenn about the near fatal car trips downtown, he would howl. Anything that dangerous was not funny.

Mrs. Jennings' big front yard was a node for sports of all kinds. One Sunday afternoon the gang was all there, even the older kids, like Ida, when the police car drove up. The policeman got out and motioned for Mrs. Jennings. Other adults, including Mama, came over to hear

what was going on. They told us we had to go home because of the polio epidemic. The ban did not last too long, yet long enough to cramp our playtime together in the neighborhood.

The biggest surprise from Mrs. Jennings, who was miserly, was the electric football game she gave me for Christmas. The kids in the neighborhood said whithout exception, "Mrs. Jennings gave you that? You're kidding." Glenn could not believe it either and quickly commandeered it.

Dear Mrs. Jennings, strange, yet kind. My sojourn with her was coming to an end. A milestone was at hand: first grade.

Chapter 2: First Last Rites

First Grade Through Fourth Grade
Age 6-10 (1945-49)

I WALKED PROUDLY to first grade the first few days with Glenn, my seventh grade brother. A couple more times and I had the six blocks down pat and did not want any help. What about the shortcut through the Gordon's, through the Murphy's, onto Calhoun? I soon had that route down, also. All was going well until Pinky, a mean little towhead, came out into his yard and bullied me, trying to pick a fight. After that I told Glenn and Ida that I did not mind walking with them. Besides, it was good for brothers and sisters to be together.

Miss Cox was my first grade teacher, a mix of tight reign and loving pats. I don't remember much from her class, mostly that I liked school, was at least average, and could not read or do phonics—maybe she was not teaching me well, for what else is there in the first grade? The scene of the year was my sitting in front of Peggy, who was trying desperately to get out of her seat when she vomited all over the back of my clothes. As my sons would say later, "yuck"! Poor Peggy just sat down and cried, while I stood there with my arms out from my body, waiting for some kind of assistance. Miss Cox came to the rescue with orders for several classmates to swab the deck.

Back in the neighborhood, behind Mrs. Jennings' house, was Patsy Hampton's house. Her father, Sam, was another of those men who played ball with us kids, either pitching for both teams or umpiring and catching. One afternoon he bounded out of the small brick house, sticking his fist into the air and shouting, "The War is over! The War is over!" The adults began to congregate and clap their hands, hug, and slap each other on the back. We were trying to get into the spirit of things with very little context for war or no more war. We gave a quick cheer and started the game where we left off—without our umpire.

By the second grade I knew I could not read. Mrs. Todd sent

notes home begging someone to help me evenings. Ida could read anything, but of course she was three years older. It was an ongoing battle in our house to tear Ida Dean (as we called her then) away from the current book. She was in another world, *incommunicado*. Mama could not ask more than three times for Ida Dean to do this or that before getting mad—all of us have short fuses. We all thought Ida Dean was lazy, deaf, disobedient, disrespectful, or out of it. Anyway, because she was such a renowned reader, Mama appointed her my reading and spelling tutor. First came spelling. I was a whiz because I memorized quickly. No problem. Then on to the reading. Dick and Jane went no where off my tongue. "House" was "horse," "from" was "for," "one" was "only," and Ida Dean went a little crazy, tongue-lashing me and wanting to smash the book over my head. I started crying and all hell broke loose. Mama and Daddy came into the sun porch to defend me from my mean and insensitive sister. She cried and stomped out. I hated reading. How humiliating to sit in class and hear Doug, Mary, and Jim read anything out loud before the class. Mrs. Todd, bless her, stopped calling on me. She knew I could not handle the failure. In spite of all, they promoted me again.

That Christmas of '46 was one of the biggest I can remember, though Daddy did it unconventionally by taking Ida and me in a pick-up on Christmas Eve, while Mama was still working, to pick up my red wagon with four wheels in the back and Ida Dean's bike. Nothing in the pick-up for Glenn. We were riding our bike and wagon down the hallway when Mama came in after work. She hit the ceiling. Not only could he not wait, poor Daddy had bought our big gifts without even consulting with Mama. Poor Glenn. Mama had to buy him more clothes after Christmas to balance out the gifts.

During the non-school times I played with Warren and Charles Frye. (Warren died a few years ago at age fifty shoveling snow.) We ate green apples until we were green; put peanuts in our *Pepsi* bottles; flew homemade kites out of sight with record breaking tail lengths; built go-buggies to race down Painter Street—I temporarily mounted my red wagon wheels onto the hottest go-buggy around; and played every kind of ball we knew—soccer was an unknown—in the broomsage field beside their house. Around that time, Ida Dean struck again. I was hind-

catching, and she was batting when she swung the bat right into my nose on the way to hitting the ball. That was the first time I broke my big Slusher nose. We both cried, but for different reasons.

Brother Glenn was the craftsman of the family, making model airplanes and hanging them from his ceiling. I would watch with his permission. He was very fussy about his work and would have no horseplay in his room when a project was underway on his cardboard table, to which he pinned and glued the pieces. I loved to smell the glue and watch him cut the pieces with such precision. After he put the skeleton together, he would cover the frame with the special tissue paper, and then sprinkle it with water to make the surface taunt when dry. Then came the paint, the decals, and finally the hanging string for the ceiling. He was the best in the business, I thought. I reverently took my friends into his room to show them. Wow! We tried to copy his accomplishments but could not. He was thirteen and we were seven or eight. I finished one with his help, which meant that he ended up doing most of it because he wanted it done right. Perfection was more important than trial and error in our family.

Glenn was my hero. I wanted to follow him everywhere, and he did take me many places. He understood well his being responsible for his little brother and seemed to take pride in having me around, mostly. He was dedicated to making a football player out of me, one that had the reputation for being scared of nothing, especially tackling. "Don't want them calling you chicken, Johnny. You hear?" When I got hurt he would pick me up, dust me off, wipe my tears, and stick me back in. I was always scared, but he was right: the fellows I tackled with abandon seemed scared of running my way again, or they gave in when I got close. I passed the chicken test.

Those were the days when we claimed Reservoir Hill as our happy hunting ground. James Howard Kegley, Jim Nuckolls, Johnny, Franky, and I were like moles on that hill, digging foxholes and connecting corridors, covering them with boards and then dirt. We had our meetings there, picnics, faked naps, and especially war games.

Later, Franky and I conducted cat funerals up on that hill. The first one was our cat Greyboy, so sleek, smart, and courageous. He brought a rat of nearly his own size home one day and kept banging it

against the back door until Mama opened it to her horror. Once she had seen his mighty deed, he was content to walk off and leave the dead rat—the adventure was the thing. One day Mr. Thomas called me over to his station to ask me if the cat lying out in the alley was my Greyboy. It was. Rat poisoned, Dr. Eddins said. His was the first funeral we conducted, pulling Greyboy in a box in my red wagon up the hill, digging a proper hole, and beginning the liturgy of placing the makeshift cross, saying a few holy words—maybe the Lord's Prayer, which I knew mostly by then—and having a prayer and a few pats on the back to show respect. Then the long walk back down the hill. I don't know where that liturgical knowledge came from, since neither of us had ever been to a funeral. Must be a human instinct.

Next came White Foots, who was more of a house cat, happy to be sitting at our feet or jumping after Mama's knitting ball as it bobbed on the floor. She was dying trying to deliver her kittens. I packed her up in my wagon and rolled her to Dr. Eddins' office on Grayson Street. He told me he had to put her to sleep and how sorry he was. I cried freely on the way home with White Foots in a box, preparing for the second funeral on the hill.

I used that little red wagon for funerals, go-buggying, pleasure, and carrying groceries from Mick or Mack and Krogers downtown. Mama bought the groceries as she walked to work, another of her many works of mercy, and I would roll down four or five blocks to pack them in my wagon, with wooden side panels. The bigger the load the older I felt. I did things that no other boy my age was doing. They needed doing. I was the one. That sense of responsibility came from being in a family that really depended on me. I liked that, especially when Mama bragged on me: "We just couldn't make it without Johnny's help."

Just in case I was too puffed up, she would add a story about my latest mischief, and how she had sent me to pick out my own switch, how I had thrown it at her and run, how she got tickled and could not go through with the switching, how I would come up and give her a big hug and kiss to make sure nothing was going to happen, and how she would hug me back and say, "You little rascal."

Church was a big part of our lives after the evangelist Coretta Sue Mason—sister Coretta Sue's namesake—preached at revival

services at First Methodist Church on Center Street, two streets over and parallel to our home on Oldtown Street. Because of her and her messages, the Cock family left the folds of the Primitive Baptists to join First Methodist. We went every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, religiously, though we were not especially religious, e.g., we did not pray and Bible read at home. We just said table grace sometimes. We would dress to the hilt, although we were on the poor side of middle class in the early 40's. I loved dressing up, the dressier the better. Daddy and I were always the first to be ready, so we would back the car out the drive and wait for the others.

Rev. Cregger was the first minister I remember: black hair, rimless glasses, and a fine set of teeth—in all, a tall, striking figure, particularly in his black robe. I would sit on the end of our pew, and when Rev. Cregger came down the aisle after the benediction, I would take his hand and walk with him to the vestibule where we greeted all the people. One Sunday, after they had gone, he picked me up and told me that I might be a preacher. On the way home I told the folks that I was going to be a preacher when I grew up. That was the second time of calling to the ministry, the first time by Uncle Jethro's pronouncement at my birth.

WHEN I CONSIDER the orbits of my life then, first there was family, followed by church, by school, and playing. School was rising in significance, for that's where I was spending most of my time, year after year.

In the third grade, a different Mrs. Cox began to give me a different image of myself as a student. The emphasis was on math, thankfully. I cannot recall the subject of reading in that class. Multiplication tables and flash cards were making me a star. Mary Moore was the best at word problems.

Miss Bishop, the kindly spinster who lived beside Connie on Main Street, was my fourth grade teacher. We could look out her window and see her house, the playground, the park, the Carnation Milk plant, Webb Furniture factory, and the Radio Hill antenna. Not only did Miss Bishop teach subject matter, she taught us her personal and social culture.

I knew she must have been talking directly to me when in class she asserted that no mother should be giving her fourth grade boy a bath. I told Mama and our special time together—when she washed my hair, getting soap in my eyes, and when she dug into my ears—soon ended. I kissed a girl for the first time in that class when Mary and I were seated together in double desks. Miss Bishop sent me out into the hall without any chance for my justification. I was doubly embarrassed.

That was the first year I can remember national tests,for reading and math skills. The good and bad news helped define Johnny Cock: math, seventh grade equivalency; reading, third grade equivalency. Talk about a reinforcing negative image—I hated reading even more and knew I would never be a good reader.

Our roving music teacher was Mrs. Horace Cornett, a one-time opera singer, of Italian descent, I think, with a big bust and very cultured ways and speech. With dramatically inflected and enunciated voice, she made a to-do over "Johnny's wonderfully deep voice." She pulled me out of class several times to teach me bit parts in school productions. One time I had to go to her house on Center Street to learn a special part. She had me doing fa-so-la's. If my buddies had known that stuff was going on, they would have razzed me without mercy. Several of us, however, started singing in the children's choir at church led by Mrs. Branscome. The congregation would "ooh" and "aah" and strain to see their little ones, especially in our bathrobes at the Christmas Nativity scene.

About age ten we met with the minister during Sunday school hour to prepare for church membership. On the Sunday we were to be brought into the church, Jim, Howard, and I were sitting in the back where the older youth sat. The minister, Rev. Stevenson, called on those to be baptized to come forward first. Jim knew he was supposed to go forward on that cue. Embarrassed to go alone, he begged Howard and me to go with him. In the second of decision we were on our way to the altar. Babies, as well as those in the membership class who had not been baptized—plus Howard and me—were there at the altar. When it came my turn to be sprinkled, the minister seemed confused as he asked for my full name—it was not on the list. On the way home, Mama and Daddy told me that I was baptized when they joined the church in 1940. To this day, if asked if I have been baptized, I answer, "Yes. Twice."

DADDY WAS A MAN of strong opinions and convictions. He either did or did not like the preacher, and gave us the particulars during Sunday lunches: "He only knows how to talk about the problem. He doesn't seem to know the solution." Another time, "If that man can preach, I can fly." Another, "He preaches the heart of the gospel." One more, "He practices what he preaches, he tithes." Daddy had little appreciation for any church member who did not give 10 percent of his or her income; therefore, our family was always among the top ten givers of the large church, for there were not many tithers, not even all the ministers, according to Daddy.

He always attended the Men's Bible Class, known for large attendance and outstanding teachers, some who out-preached the minister. Each Christmas season they delivered baskets to the poor. Two times I went with Daddy and his partner, one of those times to "Colored Hill." I had only driven through that section on Calloway Street once or twice before. That time we got off onto an unpaved street with a couple of shacks about to fall down. Where we stopped, the front door was on the ground, leaning against the porch. Three dirty children were grabbing at the basket, showing no manners at all. The old grandma stood in the door and pulled the snuff stick out of her mouth and said, "Ooh-wee, we sho' do thank ya'." I stood there transfixed. Daddy had to call me back to the car. "Those people need more than a basket," I said. That was one of the first gripping moments of compassion in my life.

Daddy took me with him on sales trips to neighboring counties. In the front seat, straining to see over the dash, I felt important being with him. One trip took us to see a family near to my birthplace, a man who had bought a pickup once before from Daddy. His grey customer file box of 3" by 5" cards indicated it was time for the man to buy a new vehicle. Around five o'clock we pulled into their driveway, knocked on the door, went in, and on their sincere invitation, sat down and ate dinner with them. "No problem," Daddy said later. "If the people treat you like family, then they'll trust you enough to buy a pickup from you." I noticed that Daddy took off his coat, loosened his tie, and rolled up his sleeves as he sat down to eat. They also liked me and included me in the conversation. I felt part of the team. They ordered a new pickup.

I was very proud when Daddy was featured in the *Ford* national

magazine for salesmen during the early '50's, giving practical information like chewing tobacco in the fields with farmers who needed a new vehicle. He was among the best car salesmen in southwestern Virginia, for many fellow salesmen and satisfied customers have told me so. They said in chorus that they could trust what Peyton Cock told them.

On family trips to Floyd, Daddy was an excellent driver, who pressed the metal, especially when someone passed us. Once I was down beating on the floorboard in the back seat and crying for Daddy to slow down. That plus Mama's pleading finally brought him closer to the speed limit. On a trip back from Floyd, riding in a 1940 Ford, the snow deepened in the road and choked the wipers, causing us to stop intermittently. On the long, curvy Faddis Hill road, coming up to the turn-off to the Midway Drive-In, we could not make it the first time. Backing and sliding to the bottom, we tried again, successfully. We were all nervously exhausted when we parked and went in the house. The lights were off. We had only the neighbors to rely on since we could not buy an electrical fuse on a Sunday afternoon.

Daddy hardly ever disciplined me, but once when he did, he unbuckled his belt, whipped it out of his pant loops, doubled it, busted me one or two licks, and went back to his chair. Some minutes later he called for me. He took me onto his lap, rubbed my back, and soothed my hard breathing. Then he reached into his pocket, took out a quarter and told me to buy anything I wanted. Little needed to be said. Reconciliation happened.

Mama was the more frequent disciplinarian. Glenn and I got it one afternoon when we failed to do our afternoon chores before dinner: start the stove and set the table. The place was cold and dark when she walked onto the porch. She marched us into the basement and cracked a stick of kindling wood on Glenn and broke it on me, though she later denied it. Mama, like Daddy, was quick to let fly. Spank them, then talk about why.

THE SUMMER BEFORE the fifth grade, I participated in many firsts. I played in my first organized sport, sandlot baseball. Junior White, a semi-pro baseball player who had moved back to Galax, was

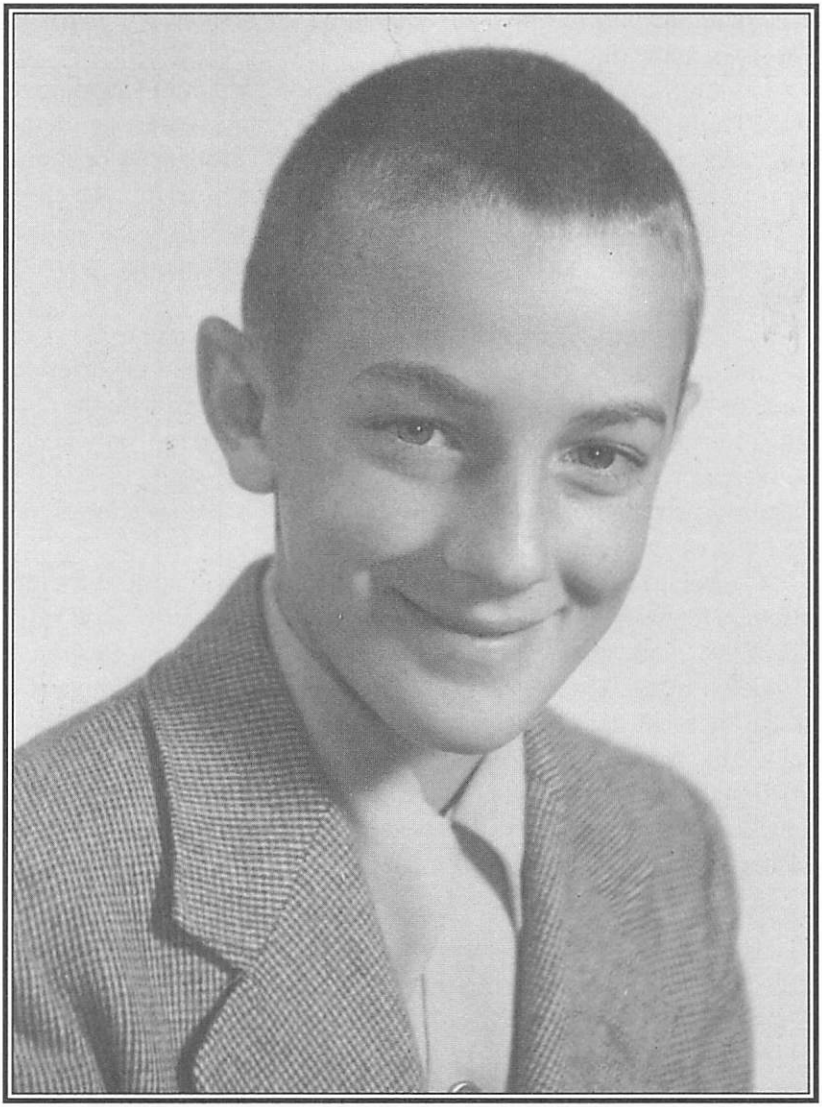
one of our coaches. The only problem was that they tried to teach us how to play on the same field as the new Galax Leafs, our class D league team. A ten-year-old third baseman and shortstop could seldom throw it all the way to first base, and hitting the ball out of the infield was like a home run.

Anyway, we were better "knot-holers," the faithful supporters of the Leafs. Some of the players, especially pitchers who sat on the bench most of the time during the games, began to adopt a few of us and sneak us into the bench area. Lefty liked me and gave me my first chew of tobacco—*Red Man*—the juice of which I swallowed in some volume. My world began to swirl and tumble and flip. I turned nauseous green, I'm sure.

That summer of 1949 was the first time I began to try to sleep upstairs, sometimes going to sleep before Ida Dean and Glenn came home or came up. I was so afraid at the top of the steps with the dark little room to the left—there was no light switch at the top, only in one of the next bedrooms, where we fumbled for a pull-string or lamp. I shuttered each time, and for many years to come. The dark was awesome, yet I was stepping into it.

Being accepted into the Grapevine Club was a capstone for that summer, for the bigger kids were checking us out. On W. Stuart Drive, near West Galax, a huge grove of trees overshadowed the little branch of water beneath. On the other side was a swampy area. The object for all the "non-chickens" was to swing out on the big grapevine and land beyond the swamp. The older guys went first and all landed successfully. My first try I did not drop—I tightened up on that vine when I looked at the distance down and over. The next try I let go and landed half in the swamp. But on the third try I made it, they said, though water was oozing between my toes of one foot.

Another rite of passage maneuvered.



Chapter 3: We Rode the *Dragon*

Fifth and SixthGrades
Age 10-12 (1949-51)

MRS. CALLOWAY, my fifth grade teacher, had the reputation for strictness, orderliness, excellent posture, and hard geography assignments, i.e., standing to recite states and capitals in front of the class. Under the windows was a jungle of vegetation, cared for by assigned teams. The universe she ruled had limits, harmony, and spirit—she would not tolerate mediocrity in our grooming, our attention, our posture, or our class performance. We were on her stage, following her directions. If one did not play the role she envisaged, the production stopped, the director intently stared at the player, and if that did not work, she spoke openly and objectively about his or her poor performance. Most times the stare was enough. For a break she stood us up, had us place our spelling books on our heads, and marched us down the hall and back. Amazingly, most of us became proficient in the exercise, some even walking up and down steps not dropping books.

At recess, during free play, we boys took out our bag of marbles and steelies (the balls out of automobile bearings) and drew circles, bent on our knees, gripped our steely and let fly. Before and after school, only, would we dare play keepers: all the marbles I shot out of the circle were mine. I was pretty good, good enough one day to beat the tall boy in our class who was three years older. He proceeded to pick me up by the seat of my knickers and ripped the bottom out. What to do? I waited outside the classroom and motioned for Mrs. Calloway. When I turned and showed her my catastrophe, she immediately brought back her sweater and had me tie the arms in front so that it covered my rear. The good news: that was the last pair of knickers I ever wore, until I bought a pair for golf in 1988, following the Payne Stewart style.

Mrs. Calloway seemed to have an answer for every problem, except the day Johnny A. sneezed a big glob onto the girl in front of him

before he could raise his hand to cover his nose and mouth. The girl went into a minor fit of noises and arm contortions, not really knowing what to do. The class held its breath. Finally, Mrs. Calloway took the girl with her and sent Johnny to the bathroom for tissue. The rest of us looked at each other, breathed, and broke out laughing, but only when she was out of earshot.

Tommy Hawks met me after school one day after an icy snow. He was a grade ahead of me and for some reason kept picking on me. That day he smashed a heavy chunk of icy snow over my head. He did not know what had hit him when I was a crazed animal tackling, jumping on top, and swinging my fists as hard and fast as I could into his head and chest. The boys watching pulled me off before I hurt him too badly. I was crying, heaving, and straining to keep at him. He brushed himself off, took a step to leave, and said, "I was just playing." Tommy never bothered me again, nor did the boys watching. I was out of control, mysteriously strong under the circumstances. Adrenaline and pride are a dangerous combination. When Glenn heard about it, he immediately said, "That a boy, Johnny. He won't mess with you again. If he does, you know what to do." I did not want to do that again, for I was also afraid of my loss of control.

Another day after school, Mary and Jim were trying to pull me up over a cement retaining wall. I slipped and hit the brick wall behind me full force with the back of my head. The proverbial stars flew. I tried to stand up and fell back down, tried to speak and made no sense, tried to look at them standing over me, but saw double. They began to revive me and finally walked me to Mary's house on Center Street where I rested until I was all right. I went home with an excruciating headache. When I finally told Mama what had happened, she gave me aspirin and placed hot packs on my forehead. The next day I was back in school. She said again, "You are the most accident prone boy I've ever seen." She was right. As a Cub Scout, not watching what I was doing, I fell off the long truck-bed float. I was only embarrassed that time and jumped right back on with the help of our scout leader, Etoile Berry.

Other adult leaders during that time were Mr. Bobby Nelson and Mr.Tom Morris, our football coaches that fall. We were a rag-tag team that scrimmaged a lot and played only two games, one at Bassett

and the other at Fries.

During one scrimmage, Mr. Nelson played on the team that had the least players and talent. Being on the other team, I protested, saying that it was not fair and that I would not play. He said okay, and let it go at that. I did not speak to him on the way home in his car and did not say "thank you" or "good-bye" when I got out. I pouted through dinner until Mama got it all out of me. She told me the right thing to do was to go tell Mr. Nelson that I was sorry. Apologize. I slowly consented and walked up Oldtown to where he lived and knocked on the door. He asked me to sit down beside him on the sofa, for he could tell a heavy moment was at hand. As I was getting out the "I'm sorry," I started crying. He just put his arm around my shoulder and patted me while I sobbed. Teeny, his wife, fixed me a bowl of ice cream. Though I was ashamed of crying at my age, I recall the authentic feel of that moment of confession and absolution. The spiritual goes, "I feel better, so much better, since I laid my burdens down." I whistled all the way home.

During the Bassett and Fries games I played fullback. I always came through the line with my helmet down so low that no one could tackle me. I would go five to ten yards every time and finally run my head into the ground. I'm sure I had my eyes closed. Mr. Morris kept telling me what a good runner I was, and I would be even better if I would keep my head up so I could see the blocker and a hole to run through.

As the manager of the Rex Theater, Mr. Cecil Curtis was our Saturday leader. He kept us in check by walking the aisles, thumping us on the back of our heads with his thick ring if we were too rambunctious. Starting at 10 a.m. and ending at 5 p.m., the serials and western movies were playing. Over four hundred seats were mostly filled with kids cheering for the good guys with white hats. My favorite cowboys were Hopalong Cassidy, the Lone Ranger, and Randolph Scott, who was the grand marshal of a downtown parade and a special guest at the Rex.

We could pay for our ticket, a popcorn, and a drink for twenty-five cents, which Mama or her boss, Mr. Joe Goldstein, gave me when I went by the store to ask permission to go. Some days we even packed a lunch to sneak in under our shirts or behind our backs.

The Rex was a big part of our lives. Ida Dean and I went to see *A Man Called Peter*, the life story of the great American preacher Peter

Marshall. On the way home that Sunday afternoon, she said she would not be surprised if I grew up to be a great preacher like him. That was my third time of "calling" into the ministry. I even picked up the book, thick for me, and read it through. He impressed me with his authentic grappling with *God's* will.

Early May that year, 1950, Mr. Wyatt Exum, one of our scout leaders, and one of the favorite men in our lives because he was always thinking up novel stuff for us to do, took us below the mountain to Raven's Knob Park, close to Low Gap, North Carolina. Jim Thomas and I pitched our pup tent and dug our rain ditch around it. When sack time came, we jumped in and shivered to sleep, until the great rain came and flowed right under our sleeping bags, soaking us. So cold and wet and no relief. About 9 a.m. the next morning, Wyatt (he wouldn't let us call him Mr. Exum) was hollering for us to meet him down at the waterfront. He said he had already been swimming and was going to give $5 to the first one in. We had to line up and wait for the signal. When we hit the water, we died—the coldest moment of my life. Then Wyatt ran up and down the edge trying not to let us out. We finally gang tackled him and all piled on.

That summer we found out who our real leaders were, our parents. One of my best buddies was Jim Nuckolls. We gathered at his house, just up the street on Stuart Drive, one evening when his parents were out. From the orchard beside his house we gathered pockets full of apples, hid behind trees, and waited for trucks to go by. The rule was to only throw at the beds of the trucks. Well, Jim lobbed one right into the cab of an old truck and just missed the driver, who came to a screeching halt and started after us. But we were long gone. When the coast was clear, Jim, now on a roll, got out his dad's shotgun and started shooting it in the air. Wow! I knew we were in for it.

The police were prompt. We were long gone again, but back came Jim's parents. His mother came back toward where she suspected we could hear and demanded that we come there. We lined out of the hiding place beyond Howard's house and with heads down stood before his parents and the two policemen. We admitted guilt on all counts, though really we were just Jim's accomplices. A few weeks later we were at court standing before the judge—our fathers behind us—as he

delivered a stern, moral lecture. Our parents took custody of us, which was quite enough. We were saved from repeated crime by the strong arm of the total community system. Not even Jim became a criminal. He is now a successful doctor in Galax and a ranking member of several national medical organizations.

When Jim moved up on Terrace Lane, we spent many an afternoon out in the woods above the Reservoir with his portable radio. Lying down in the leaves and listening to radio suspense, *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B* and the *Shadow*, we gave in to the power of commercials and happily munched on *O. Henry* candy bars.

By that time in my life I took responsibility for mowing our small lawn, though it had a steep little hill on Oldtown Street and on Stuart Drive. That push mover was a pain, but the greater pain was clipping. I hated clipping. One day I paid the woman doing Mrs. Branscome's yard next door $1 to mow and clip the lawn while I went swimming. When I got home, Mama asked me why I had not clipped. It was only then that I knew I'd been cheated. Mama somehow knew the whole story and laughed as she commanded me to clip the yard.

At the Felts' Park pool that summer, I learned to jump off the tower and do gangly flips off the regular diving board. Before Ida Dean and I left for the pool one afternoon, the water went off on our end of town. Of course we had turned on the faucets to figure out the situation and did not turn them off again. Upon our return home a few hours later, the kitchen, dining room, and sun porch floors were under an inch of water. We were scooping and mopping when Mama came home. Joy.

Another time Mama caught us as she came home from the hospital for a varicose vein or a hysterectomy operation. We were all three cleaning like gangbusters when she and Daddy drove into the drive. I was doing a lick and a promise on the front porch with the broom. She was in pain getting into the house, but she thought that was so funny, catching us all red-handed. We laughed with her and helped make her comfortable.

But Mama found out some things too late. In the heat of the summer, Johnny Morris, Jim Nuckolls, and I were playing in a newly dug-out house basement, sliding down the loose dirt to the bottom. Johnny was the first down with a mighty scream and grabbing his toes, then Jim, then me. All of us landed feet first on a pile of crushed, sharp

slivers of stone, cutting our feet something awful. We were a site hobbling down Oldtown Street with bloody wounds. The two of them had stitches. A chunk of skin on the under side of my big toe was hanging, but instead of stitches, Mama tied it up, which was a mistake. It took forever to heal that toe that I walked on every step.

Another time that Mama should have been there to tell me not to do something before I did it was the winter before. Snows in Galax were deep, sometimes drifts up to my shoulders. When a car tried to make it onto Stuart Drive off Oldtown, it often got stuck. We guys felt manly when we helped push cars until a wheel caught hold and stopped spinning. Sledding was an adventure, sometimes on blocked-off Center Street with a bonfire at night, with adults, youth, and kids together. One time we went out to a buddy's farm and rode a toboggan sled, which we steered with a foot out and by shifting our weight. That time four of us jumped a fence and slapped down with tremendous force. Luckily, we escaped harm.

But the time that I will never forget, I had a short sled. We came off the very steep hill in front of Rose Lane Motel, hitting a bank next to a ditch, jumping the ditch and going down to the fence, on flatter ground. When I came down that last time and hit the bank, the sled slid forward in the air. My privates landed with such force on the back of the sled that I moaned and cried and could hardly walk. My badly bruised testicles led to conjecture that I could never be a father. Mama was ever so merciful toward her young, headlong son who was hurt again. Yet, the biggest hurts were yet to come.

THE MOST MEMORABLE YEAR of school for me was the sixth grade in Miss Diamond's class. She oozed love and worked us harder than any teacher before. I even began to read and enjoy it, especially American biographies: Lincoln, Jefferson, Washington, a few that I remember. I liked writing and seemed to do well at it. Homework every night—with no help from Ida Dean—I was in the groove of discipline and proud of it. Miss Diamond was a merciful pusher, going over each mistake with us personally at her desk, often with her arm around us, looking up at each of us with a big smile before she let us go back to our

seats. Over forty years later when I attended Miss Diamond's graveside service in Felts' Cemetery, I was consciously thankful for her deep care for me. She had given us the best part of one year of her life.

THAT SUMMER I spent two weeks at the adjoining farms of Uncle George and Uncle Freeman in Floyd County. Memories flood me for some reason, maybe because I learned so many new things. We were up mornings at 5 a.m. milking, which I never mastered, only a squirt here and there. I learned to drive the Ferguson tractor to the barn and back, even shifting gears with great bucking motions, often killing the engine. We cut thistle bushes, picked blackberries, turned hay rows over after rain and before bailing—my un-favorite job—stomped wheat stacks after we tied them in bundles and stood them in the field, hoed the garden, ground meal, fed the animals, herded cows with the dog, stacked bails of hay and alfalfa in the barn lofts, shot ground hogs, took cows to market in Christiansburg, took eggs to town to sell, put milk cans in the spring house, dug fence posts and stretched wire, and even delivered a calf. The grandest job was thrashing wheat, when all the neighbors came in to help. The chaff was so thick around the machines that I wore a handkerchief over my nose and mouth like the bad guys in cowboy movies. I contacted hay fever that I have never kicked. The lunches were like a big family reunion, prepared for hours by the women, and did those men put it away.

On their property was the old home place of my great grandfather Oliver Perry Slusher, where his son, my grandfather, George William, was raised; and in the adjoining family cemetery are the tombstones of great-great-grandfather, Jacob Slusher, and his father, Christopher, the son of Peter Schlosser (later Slusher) who sailed from Germany on the *Dragon* in 1732 and settled near Philadelphia. Uncle Freeman and his daughters Nancy and Janet have become the Slusher historians and are now preparing a family history to be called **250 Years on the Blue Ridge.**

On weekends we kicked up our heels by being with the nearby relatives who loved to play their musical instruments and sing. One night at Uncle George's house, we had a large watermelon feed after the music. I woke up about midnight lying in a wet bed, the only one I can

ever remember wetting. At twelve years old I was mortified. I immediately got up, made the bed, and sat there until milking time. They must have heard me, for Uncle George asked me why I was up so early. The truth finally came out and was passed up and down the family line to my great humiliation.

BACK HOME I TOOK UP GOLF, which was to become the great avocation of my life. Franky and I dug several holes for our golf course in our yard. With his uncle's old 7-iron and whiffle balls, we played back and forth, making mighty divots. That was the beginning. That summer I began caddying at the Galax Country Club for seventy-five cents for eighteen holes, and sometimes a quarter tip. Mrs. Waugh was the one person the caddies most feared, and I soon drew her. She decided to train me well, for she started asking for me. Once we were looking for her ball too long when she barked, "Johnny, I do not intend to look for a ball again. That is why I hired you."

Bobby Nelson, my football coach, was the club champion most years. His swing was beautifully long and smooth. I loved to caddie for him, and at every chance I would imitate his swing. During the club championship that year, I caddied for a man who became very drunk, so drunk that he paid me fifty dollars, which he would not take back. When I got home, Mama could not believe I had accepted it and told me to take it to his house on Sunday morning before church. He could not believe he had given me that much, and because I was honest and he was embarrassed, he did give me ten dollars, by far the biggest tip I ever received caddying. I played some with Franky that summer, the crowning blow a 54-hole marathon, beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at dark, close to twenty miles over our extremely hilly course. Quite a hike with a bag over the shoulder. We were beginning to love it for sure.

ACROSS THE STREET from Franky and beside me on W. Stuart Drive lived Richard Honeycutt, who had a Frazier car, the prize of Galax, and probably the most cleaned and polished. Glenn taught me how to clean and polish a car that summer with Simonize, the hardest to put on

and take off, but the best, he said. He pointed out places I missed until I stopped missing them. We took the cars out to Felts' Park, under the shade of the huge oak trees, and would stay most of the day. All my muscles were tired, but it was worth it to hear Daddy say we were the best. Daddy always told it like it was, good or bad.

Toward the end of the summer I started my first paper route, *The Roanoke World News*, starting at the Bus Station, working throughout downtown businesses—filling up with sweets at the bakery—and moving into the residential sections almost to West Galax, and finishing at my house. Of course I had to have a big bicycle, so I picked out a fine maroon Schwinn at Mr. Green's store and bought it on credit at ten dollars per month. It cost about sixty dollars. That was the first of three I bought, for at one time I had four routes going, another Roanoke paper, the *Galax Gazette*, and the *Post Herald*. The two Roanoke papers were daily, the other two, once and twice a week. I could not handle that much and slimmed back to one daily and one local, making as much as twelve dollars per week, enough for spending money, necessities like clothes and bikes, and the rest in savings for college, over $600 dollars by the time I quit three years later.

Daddy and I got up at 6 a.m. on Sundays. That's when he taught me to drive. After picking up the papers at the Bus Station, we delivered those big Sunday papers in the car as we listened to the local preachers and gospel groups on WBOB. We were a strong team, his easing up to the next stop for me to gather another half-dozen papers from the back seat to run and stick in the screen doors. I decided that I would not throw papers but place them. The tips were bigger when I gave them full service.

That was the closest Daddy and I ever were, those fifty-two Sunday mornings a year, for several years. We didn't talk much, just communed in our common effort, long before the town was awake, and before Sunday school and church. I found out that work on the Sabbath could be a blessing.

Chapter 4: Definitely Heterosexual

Seventh Through Ninth Grades
Age 12-15 (1951-54)

IN THE SIXTH GRADE, Miss Diamond occasioned in me a real zest for learning. The seventh grade had no center, just a swirl of rotating classes. I can hardly remember the teachers. Ace-ing tests was the order of the day. Disciplined study gave way to last minute cramming. When the report cards came out, the good grades seemed hollow. It was like cheating. The once good student was only after good grades from then on.

Football became a big priority in my life. Above my desk were pictures of Johnny Lujack and Doak Walker in the air jump-passing, cut out of Glenn's sport magazines. He wanted me to be a quarterback because of my speed and good moves, but we both knew my throwing hand was too small for me to ever be a great passer. I was okay. Mr. Carl Rector, my math teacher, was also my coach. He taught us three sets of offenses: T, Wing, and Split. The latter, the one used strategically with the most success, was two clusters of three players placed ten yards left and right, and five of us in the middle. I either passed to the side clusters behind the line of scrimmage or ran the big gaps. The opponents were off-guard, not knowing whether to rush or plug the gaps.

We beat Hillsville when Joey Reavis ran back a kick 103 yards, all 5 feet, 2 of him slithering down the field. But Mt. Airy was a different story. Their guys were giants, probably closer to sophomores than seventh graders. We were scared watching them warm up, so scared that our guys got out of the way on the first play they ran. Playing middle linebacker, I was the only one between the giant fullback and the goal. His knee caught my helmet with such force that the inner straps broke. Out for the second time in my life, I was not able to count fingers or say my name, much less to tell them where I was. I was carried off and came round toward the end of the game, seeing the score about 50-0.

My head hurt so badly my eyes kept watering. Why had I thought football was such a great game?

GIRLS WERE BECOMING A PRIORITY, also. I always had liked girls. My first real girl friend was Alma Jane, the granddaughter of Richie, whose car became the traveling bus for our gang: the two of us, Margaret, Jim, Howard, Sally, Doug, Delores, Tommy, Linda, and Patsy. Always more girls than boys. After school we went to the drugstore, after ball games we went to the dance, after church we went to someone's house. Our favorite games by far were kissing games: spin the bottle, post office, or one-minute date. We were finding out how to kiss in spite of giggling from shyness, not knowing what to do with our hands, and not knowing what was going on when someone kissed with her mouth open—how weird. The girls seemed more skilled, less shy.

The only real issue in our gang was our hot debates over church, whether the Baptist or the Methodist church was better. The Baptists were so sure they were *God's* chosen that they were trying to save the rest of us. Their carrying their Bibles to church seemed ostentatious. They really showed off at their Bible school graduations, each raising a hand when finding the scripture verse, and standing up and reading it to the applause of the congregation. Someone held a stop watch to clock the person who could say every book in the Bible in the shortest time. Real motor mouths. But compared to us Methodists, they knew their Bible.

Alma Jane was a Baptist, but not gung-ho, thank goodness. She was short and spirited, a cheerleader along with the others I mentioned. A great dancer. A good kisser. We even went steady for a few months before we got tired of each other. I told her it was over, she cried, and two weeks later she was going steady with Doug, whom she later married. I dated all the girls of the gang but Patsy and Delores, who were going steady with Charles Bolt and Tommy Lineberry, whom they later married. Two or three months were enough to find out if that was the girl I wanted to marry, and if not, why continue? That was my philosophy of dating. We understood each other and remained close friends through graduation from high school.

I was spending my earned money for dates and for clothes. I ordered my first pair of shoes from the Sears catalog store on Main Street for about fourteen dollars, a fine piece of brown leather, plain-toe shoes. Before I wore them I polished them with Esquire polish just like Glenn always did. The inner lining was soft, padded leather. Of course I outgrew them before they were well broken in. I bought my first pair of jeans at Globman's from Mr. Potalsky, a part owner. Wrangler's were the most popular jeans and among the first worn in Galax, with the cuffs rolled up two times; no belt, therefore pulled down on the hips. Mr. P. was a sad man because his boy and the oldest Bennington boy fell through thin ice on the river and drowned. Our small community was deeply affected by the tragedy.

I also spent a quarter one day at the drugstore on one of those camera magazines with one or two classic nude shots among its pages, along with all the shots of churches, nature, boats, and children. I hid it in the attic closet in Glenn's room, since I was using his room while he was at VPI (now Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg. The real girlie magazines were not sold locally, and that was the pre-*Playboy* era. Sex education was hard to come by. Not much from Glenn—less from parents, church, and school. My peers were as dumb as I was, and we really did not talk sex much. Things were happening to my body that were mysterious, full of pleasure and anxiety. I was exploding into young manhood as best I could, feeling guilty over thoughts running through my head.

Besides all the money spent on clothes, dates, magazines, and bicycles, I even helped pay the historic dental bill of that year, twelve fillings because of too many bakery products on the paper route and no fluoride in our water yet. As I sat in Dr. Kapp's chair and looked across Main Street at the First National Bank building, and the people going in and out, I was waiting for the Novocain to kick in on the whole upper mouth, front and both sides. We were going to tackle half the job that day when the electricity went off downtown for the remainder of my appointment time. "Johnny, I'm sorry. Can you come back in next week?" A mixed blessing: no drilling today, but *Cokes* and cookies tasted awful with a numb mouth. Poor Dr. Kapp was into my mouth too much during those years, but the dentists that checked out his work during later years in other places always commented on his good work,

a mouth full of dark silver fillings.

I would have even spent part of my money on the green 1940 Ford Daddy brought home one day after school to see if Ida Dean and I wanted it. Of course we did, but even though Ida Dean had her learner's permit, she knew nothing about driving a car with gears and a clutch. She got under the wheel, started the motor, and held the starter too long until it ground noisily. Daddy was heating up. He erupted with oaths when she killed the motor twice letting out the clutch. As I remember it, he cursed, she cried, and I blamed it on her that we could not have that car. Daddy got behind the wheel and squalled tires out of there. Mama's estimation of the situation when she came home was predictable, "A bad idea to begin with."

April 22, 1953, I received a Certificate of Merit from the Roanoke Times-World News Corporation for my good work delivering newspapers. The certificate said that I had demonstrated the qualities of self-reliance, self-control, dependability, and initiative. At fourteen, I was the caliber of young man that mothers and fathers didn't mind their youth hanging out with, or so went the word on the grapevine.

I ATTENDED SCHOOL through the eighth grade at the old high school building next to the elementary school. I was in the last class there, before it was torn down and made into a parking lot, and the first freshman class at the new high school building up higher on the hill, at the end of Front Street. The first day of school we carried desks from the old to the new building.

The Maroon Tide football team of Galax High School was the team of my brother, Glenn, who played end and predicted since I could remember that I would be a star on that team, and that I would even be good enough to earn a college scholarship. During the first days of practice my freshman year, the exercises were calculated to make us so sore that we could hardly walk. Success. The push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, roll-your-helmet, sprints, and laps lasted in earnest until we started contact blocking and tackling, and then the calisthenics started and ended practice unless a goof-off was sent aside to repent by doing special push-ups and laps. The survival of the fittest process was working—10

percent of the squad did not return for the second week.

A couple of senior first-stringers were really pulling for me. Glenn had probably told them to. They took me aside and gave me extra pointers on head-on tackling, a fearsome activity for freshmen tackling the big stars. Once I tackled Richard Honeycutt, who weighed well over 200 pounds, running at me in a straight line with a five-yard start. I screwed up my courage and brought him down hard enough for several guys to say, "Way to go, Johnny," as they helped me up and hit me on the butt pads. I acted tough, but I knew I could not take too many of those blows at 135 pounds, 5 feet, 10. My skeleton rattled.

I was about third-string quarterback. No contest there, but I was fast earning the position of right linebacker through my tackling heroics and pretty good luck breaking up passing plays. I found that open field tackling was less wracking for me than the head-on tackling of practice. I remember tackling big Bobby Bartlett, first string halfback, coming around end and breaking into the open, he thought, until I left my feet and flew at him, grabbing him low and toppling him easily. Coach Springer blew his whistle and hollered for all to hear, "That's the way to tackle, Cock." Bobby said, "You keep that up and you'll make the team, Johnny."

I felt like one of the boys after sweaty practices, taking off my helmet and slowly trudging up the two hills to the shower room under the elementary school. I was too shy to parade around in the shower room without my towel, like the older guys did, showing off physique and jewels. Several times John Faddis whipped his wet towel at my butt as I was getting ready to put on my clothes. I do remember the sting and John's howling, "What's wrong, Johnny? You look a little mad, Johnny. What are you going to do about it, Johnny?" I was only a freshman and let it slide as I forced a tight-mouthed smile and pulled on my briefs. He came over and patted me on the back, mussed my hair, and said, "You're going to make it, Johnny. You're tough." I learned to take it and soon they let me alone.

At practice on the afternoon of the day before the first game, we were dressed out in our game uniforms, running formations in a no-contact practice, supposedly. The Felts' Park ground, the infield of the baseball diamond, was especially hard from no rain. I caught a punt

and had already outrun the two ends coming down to tag me and was about to toss the ball back to the center when Darryl tackled me from the rear. I went down on my right shoulder with all my weight and heard something snap. I passed out partially from the pain. Coach Springer ran over to curse Darryl and to check me out. He was about to crank my arm when Mr. Collins, the assistant principal, told him emphatically, "Don't you dare touch his arm. Can't you see his collar bone sticking up?" I was hearing and not hearing that conversation. They wrapped me so I could not move my shoulder and took me to the Waddell Hospital. The emergency doctor looked and immediately called the bone specialist in Roanoke and told him I was on my way.

About thirty minutes out of town we recognized Daddy and flagged him as we passed. We changed cars and after about two hours of driving down Highway 221, we pulled into Lewis Gale Hospital where Dr. Rippley was waiting. He took me into an operating room, gave me a couple of shots in the shoulder area, and put me on a operating table, my upper body suspended off the table and supported by a broom handle. Daddy held my good shoulder up as Dr. Rippley cranked my bad shoulder until the broken bones came together. With much good humor he started wrapping me in a cast around my upper body, four inches above my navel, with holes for my neck and arms. I was back home by midnight, trying to sleep on my back, which I had never done very restfully, and not at all that night. The next day at home, trying to get comfortable, I listened to the coach on his weekly pre-game radio program say that the Tide had lost one of its *first string* defensive linebackers at practice the day before—me. That was the first time I had formally heard that I was to have been a starter. I was proud and sad.

The attention I got because of my accident and cast—which I knocked on with my knuckles and gave half-hearted ape calls—was fun for a couple of days, and then the afternoon blues came on as I sat watching the team practice. All was not lost, though. WBOB asked me to be the spotter for the away games. At least I was there. I wore the cast until past Thanksgiving, and when it was taken off, I looked emaciated underneath, all pimply. I felt faint looking in the mirror. Weightlifting and plenty of sun brought me back to better than before, but my dream of stardom was not to be.

IN THE CLASSROOM, Mrs. Bessie LaRue Jones was my Latin teacher that year and the next. Her style was classic: purple-tinted, white hair with deep, sharp waves set by the beauty parlor, rimless glasses, dark suits with white, ruffly blouses, and a slow and a little above-a-whisper speech pattern that got attention. She was a stickler for orderliness: "Bobby, your desk is a few inches out of line. Would you mind lining it up, please? Thank you." One time she caught a girl friend turning her head at the black board, which was a violation since several were there at the same time writing the conjugations for the day. "_____, please sit down. Thank you. I have placed a zero in my book for you today."

The dances after football and basketball games were held in the YMCA building that we all helped build by selling bricks for a dollar apiece. Under the basketball court and bleachers on the main floor was the room for our dances, accompanied by 33-rpm records: Fats Domino, Bo Diddly, Elvis, and Little Richard. Our generation brought in rock and roll (a group of us saw Fats and Bo in concert in North Carolina). We did the shag and slow-dance (records by Pat Boone and Johnny Mathis), only body-to-body if going steady, and not then if worried about what the adult chaperons would say. The girls wore full skirts and white socks with loafers, the socks rolled down to just above the ankle. Their skirts really swirled during the shag, sometimes embarrassingly high if the male flipped her over his back. I loved dancing, danced to every tune, and with as many girls as I could, even older girls. We were blessed with good dancers.

DURING PART of my fourteenth and fifteenth years, Daddy was teaching me how to drive, early on Sundays before we picked up the newspapers to deliver on my route. We tried to start on a straight-gear 1951 Ford, but Daddy did not have the patience with my stalling and grinding. The blue 1952 Ford—which later became Glenn's—had automatic drive, praise the Lord. He began to relax and enjoy my driving him to the Blue Ridge Parkway just seven miles south on Highway 89 each Sunday. The 1953 Ford was tan and automatic. Daddy got a new demonstrator each year, so my dating cars were the latest and best,

though I did not start driving the car after dark until late in my sophomore year. The cardinal rule was keeping the car spotless. It went without saying that a driving violation was intolerable. Lucky for me I never had an accident with one of Daddy's cars.

Although I did not have a car of my own—less than a half-dozen kids in our class did—my sixteenth year was a rite of passage for sure, and my driver's license and the car were the big symbols of my liberation.

Chapter 5: Half Blind

Tenth Grade
Age 15-16 (1954-55)

THE SUMMER before tenth grade, I began working at N & H Grocery in West Galax as a stock boy and gas pump operator. One of those hot summer days I brought cases of bottled drinks out of the upstairs storage, temperature over 100 degrees, and placed them manually into a cold, dry cooler downstairs. While I was taking a bottle of *RC Cola* out of the case and placing it inside the cooler, it exploded and shattered into hundreds of small pieces, one catching my nose and the cornea of my left eye. It stung and felt as if I had something in my eye. Someone saw the blood on my nose and handed me a towel. Mr. Newman took me to the hospital emergency room where they stitched my nose and checked my eye. Again, they referred me to Roanoke, this time to Gill Memorial, an eye, nose, and ear clinic.

Dr. Bell examined me and explained that the glass had lacerated the cornea as it passed by, causing damage to my vision, which was blurred. They treated me, taped on a patch, and saw us for regular appointments. My vision deteriorated. I asked about playing football that fall. Daddy and Mama answered before the doctors. They said and meant no. The doctors said the primary risk was general—being hit from the blind side. The *blind* side? I dared to ask the question, "Is my sight ever coming back?" Everyone already knew the answer. The fact was sinking in.

I began to question *God* on my cumulative accidents. "Why me? I am yours truly. What have I done? What?" No answers came. I did not tell anyone about my agonizing psalms with *God*, trying stoically to take the given as the *Lord's* will.

I started punting the football at practice, sometimes as far as 60 yards with the roll. The coaches asked me to ask my parents if they would give permission for me to only come in on punting downs. No,

was their firm reply. Then the coaches asked me if I would coach the junior varsity. I said yes. Our line averaged over 200 pounds. The opposition did not score on us.

In mid-October, Mama and I went to stay a few days at Gill Memorial for surgery on my blind eye. I received local anesthesia so I could look and move my eyes for them during the operation. The cutting was audible and terrifying. Though I could not see what was going on, imagination was quite enough. I can remember cringing until I shook.

After returning to my room, I had to lie on my back and hardly move for several days, with patches over both eyes. Almost impossible. My marvelous nurse, Mama, did magic acts to help me do as assigned. She read to me, talked to me, rubbed me, and generally soothed my frayed nerves.

We listened to the World Series, the year that everyone named their babies "Dusty" after the hero Dusty Baker. Herman Reavis was a disc jockey on Roanoke radio, promoted from Galax's own WBOB. He wished me well on radio and dedicated songs to me.

A strange lady came through the rooms visiting and asked if she might pray for me. I felt deeply touched by her prayer for healing. The next day the doctor said that the leakage had miraculously stopped. Mama squeezed my hand and later said it must have been the prayer. I did not question it.

Hard times for a while. My friends did not know how to relate to a person who was blind and whose eye was slightly disfigured. I became more self-conscious about the scar across the eye and felt that I was less attractive to the girls. After a little time we all adjusted. One best friend, Linda Boyd, commented on how well I took it all, and how brave everyone thought I was.

My biggest adjustment was learning to judge distance again, reaching out for a string to an overhead light, catching a ball, or hitting a golf ball. Calculated memory came quickly. On the basketball court, going in for shots I took some hard, abrupt hits from the blind side, and often the foul was called on me—definitely unfair. I did not go far in basketball either.

I had a small accident insurance policy that paid $1000, no questions, once the doctors declared me blind. The Royal Crown Cola

company paid $2500 in settlement since no defect could be found in the bottle pieces. Our lawyer mentioned the figure $50,000 if negligence could be proved. Daddy said there would be no suing the N & H owners: "We don't do things that way, and besides, they're our friends." He was also Daddy's barber. It was no big issue at the time that I was not covered by any insurance policy at N & H.

I loaned Mama and Daddy most of the money to cover a financial crisis: Glenn and Ida Dean were in college that same year, Ida Dean a freshman at Radford University. Mama and Daddy paid back every penny. Our family believed in paying its debts, even before the allotted time. The good news, the total $3500 later paid a major part of my college costs.

A NEW MINISTER, Prince Eades, came to First Methodist Church at the right time. He catalyzed a dynamic youth program that had a tremendous effect on my life. The old parsonage, a two-story white frame house, immediately next to the church, became our youth center. Joyce was our first hired director, a bubbly soul from North Carolina with charm and enthusiasm. Before long the old house filled up with second-hand furnishings from the church members, even a TV, record player, ancient *Coke* machine, popcorn popper, ping-pong table, and card tables for Rook and Bridge. Our home-away-from-home was coming together.

Joyce was engaged when she came and soon was married and gone. Along came Mrs. Rubye Branscome, less than fifty, a member of the church, and our next-door neighbor. Would she understand us as well as Joyce? Would she let us have fun in the youth center without a bunch of adult rules? Before long the youth center was the place to go for youth in Galax, as many as a hundred there at one time, open day and night, seven days a week. We played cards, ping-pong, horse-shoes, volley ball, we watched TV, we danced, we shot the bull, we met our dates there, we smoked ("in" for youth in the '50's), we cooked, we prayed in the prayer room upstairs, we kissed in the corners, we tutored each other, we rode around and came back, we sat on the porch, we sat on the bank, we sat on the cars out front, we went to Sunday school and

MYF there, we became one big family with our second Mom, "Ms. B." Our parents knew that if they asked us where we were going or where we had been, that we would say the youth center, and they felt good about that.

Of course there were rumors of this or that by fuddy-dud snipers, but the preacher, the board, and our parents stood behind the venture until its reputation was beyond such attack. Our youth center was elevated to the same category as motherhood and apple pie. The Baptists thought we were doing a few too many worldly things there and started their own center in a nicer building with nicer furnishings and a nice director, but they did not allow dancing, smoking, cards, nor shorts—and lights out at 10 p.m. It folded in no time, and the Baptists came back to our youth center, if they ever left.

If problems needed to be dealt with, *we* dealt with them. One of our guys was caught lifting merchandise at Globman's, downtown. We verbally "beat him up," prayed with him, told him to take the stuff back, and to never do it again. It worked for a while until we found out he was a borderline kleptomaniac. We kept him under control without eradicating the mania. He knew we accepted him and hung out at the youth center religiously until he graduated from high school and left for the university in the big city.

If church is about giving and nurturing life in a loving community, the youth center was a prototype, probably the highest water mark of First Church, Galax, and one of the highest in my life.

To add to the spirit in our church, Rev. Eades and the board invited Dr. Johnson and Ms. Roberta to conduct a revival. They pulled up with a large trailer hooked to his large Chrysler, loaded with electronic keyboard instruments, sound system, printing press, and visual system—the works. He was an educated preacher, powerfully dramatic. Ms. Roberta was a beautiful enigma who played the instruments and humbly smiled. He said his wife was chronically sick and had persuaded Ms. Roberta to help him in his ministry. Their relationship was a mystery to all.

Dr. Johnson led a youth hour before the evening services, where entertainment was the lure: magic, ventriloquism, popular music, a talent show from amongst us, team competitions of all kinds, with an emphasis on points for new members brought each night. He set a strong context for the altar calls to come later at the service, that if the spirit moved us, go, and

take another person, for he or she might just need a nudge to do *God's* will.

We were at the altar in droves that first night, setting the tone for the week. I got a warm feeling kneeling there with my friends, singing and praying, knowing we were doing the right thing, all of us seeking to do *God's* will. The hugs from the adults afterwards were most supportive. Dr. Johnson kept reminding us to bring others. Hardly a youth escaped our *Godly* nudges. It was embarrassing for the one being nudged to resist when everyone around was looking to see his or her response. One guy whispered for us to leave him alone in an "I dare you to touch me" tone. Nearly a hundred came to the altar that week, and one man's life was turned around for sure. Ben stopped drinking and later became a minister.

I stopped shooting pool at Hines's poolroom on Main Street for a while after the revival. We were gambling and enjoying it a little too much, eight ball and nine ball. I read the Methodist devotional book, *Power*, and said my prayers each evening before bed for a month or so. All of us were in a more reflective mood at the youth center, having heavy conversations about the will of *God*, vocation, and morals. Ms. B. was a very objective sounding board, one who did not try to manipulate our emotions. She forced us to figure out our own answers.

Late that spring, I went with Eula Thomas, an adult from our church and the wife of Mr. Thomas who ran the Esso Station across the street from our house, to Camp Farthest Out (CFO) near Black Mountain, North Carolina. Frank Laubach was the spiritual leader of the week. He preached with his eyes closed, fervently praying maybe more than preaching. He seemed authentically concerned about each one of us on retreat and the people of the world, as if he knew and prayed for each one by name. He was a man beyond prejudice of color, creed, or class. He was a man possessed with *God's* will for his life, which was a radical life of service to the people of the globe. He absolutely believed that his "Each One Teach One" mission would change the world. I will never forget the power of his presence. He was the most holy man I had yet encountered.

An eventful year. Through my eye accident, the youth center, the revival, and the influence of Frank Laubach, a life of Christian vocation was coming into focus for me.

Chapter 6: Horrible Thoughts

Grades Eleven and Twelve
Age 16-18 (1955-57)

THE SUMMER BEFORE my junior year in high school I worked for one of the most cantankerous bosses of my life, Les Scanlon, the old pro—mostly bald and about 60—at Galax Country Club. My job description was golf club cleaner, counter attendant, and general gofer. Everyone had a strong impression of Les. Most found him objectionable because of his abrasive manner of setting the world straight. Several of his students came off the practice tee crying or cursing, for Les had just lost patience with their inability to execute what he was telling them to do. I knew, for he was exasperated with me and my swing on several occasions. "No, no, no," he would say, "You may be hopeless. Can't you at least try to do what I'm telling you? I don't know why I bother with the likes of you. Now, pay attention, damn it."

He liked me and my work and let me know it through special bonuses and occasional fatherly advice after I had stayed till 8 p.m. cleaning up the last set of clubs coming off the course. I liked being around the golf course, but played less golf by working there. I do remember my first time driving the old #1 hole, now #7, less than 300 yards. Like most, the big drive was more gratifying to my male ego than a long putt.

Two of the guys in our extended gang had pool tables at their houses, where we congregated for all-nighters if their parents were out of town, one cluster at the pool table and another at the card table playing poker, nickel-ante and dime limit. We had to write out what beat what, if a straight or a flush was better. We were serious, sitting there smoking cigars—*Crooks* the favorite brand—and cigarettes and sipping our *Pepsi's* or *Coke's*—not beer as I remember—maybe winning or losing a few dollars all night.

We spent many evenings at Pat's new mansion on Country Club

Lane, dancing, gabbing, and eating—the best snacks in town, prepared by the maid. Pat had the best collection of records around, and we literally rolled up the carpet in the den and let go. Sometimes we danced in the garage. One of the best dancers was Ann, three years younger, whom I dated for a while, but decided she was too young.

On to Independence, about fifteen miles up the road, and dates with Libby. She was pretty but shy, maybe because I was her first real date. I remember navigating the road to Independence, knowing that if I could drive that road, I could drive. Like most beginning drivers, I did not know how to drive when I received my permit. It took years to learn to maneuver the dangerous curves of that mountainous learning ground.

The parents of the girls I dated would not let their daughters go to the drive-in movies unless double-dating, and then with reluctance, for everybody knew that sitting in the drive-in with a date was different from sitting in the Rex downtown holding hands. In fact, the Rex was losing business to the three drive-ins in the area.

I remember one embarrassing moment with a young lady. I had reached over without looking to grab her shoulder to bring her round so that I could kiss her. Instead of grabbing her shoulder, I grabbed her in the bra area by mistake. I do not remember what she said or I said. I am sure neither one of us wanted to be there at that moment. I excused myself and went for popcorn and drinks.

Another girl I took to the drive-in would not kiss me, for her mother had drawn the line. Another date was so uninhibited that I was uncomfortable and went for more popcorn and drinks several times. With the help of family, church, and community, I came up with a set of limits for myself beyond which I would not go on a date. I respected my dates and wanted them to respect me. I had decided to save myself for marriage.

BEING SELECTED for Virginia Boys' State was an honor, but I remember it as another in a long list of unsuccessful runs for office for me. I was nominated for Governor, but a boy on crutches who had a strong campaign strategy and a powerful speech beat me, even though I was a pretty good speaker and had won a public speaking contest a year

earlier. I had been nominated for class president each year, as I remember, and was only elected once during high school. Maybe my peers saw me as a leader, but I was not as popular as some who ran against me.

I visited Radford later that year. Ida Dean's roommate had a steady out of state, but she wanted to go to the big college dance. I was to be her escort. I rode over and stayed the night in the motel with Johnny Nunn from Galax, who was dating Mariah, one of Ida Dean's best friends. A name band played. I outdid myself dancing with sister's friends. I remember how proud Ida Dean was introducing her little brother, all dressed up in a tuxedo.

That same year I attended the Virginia Key Club Convention. We stayed in prearranged homes. The local guys laughed and told me to be careful with my host, their principal, the Man of the Year in their city. They said he was queer, which I did not comprehend fully, for we never did really discuss what "queer" meant back in Galax—"gay" was not a word we used back then.

His aging parents lived with him. He picked me up after the session that night, took me home, and showed me my bedroom. I was about asleep when he came in wearing his pajamas, saying he could not sleep, would I mind if we talked awhile. I said okay, but immediately sensed things were not right. Then he lay down on the bed beside me.

I about jumped up then, but did not. I was rattled. There was a small replica baseball bat on the nightstand next to me, which I kept my eye on, animal instincts rising within to defend myself. After a few minutes of stupid conversation, to which I grunted yes and no answers, he said he could sleep now and hoped I would not mind his staying since he was so comfortable, or something like that. The adrenaline was surging in me. I kept looking at that bat, ready to beat him to death if necessary if he abused me.

He acted restless and started a fake snoring, I knew. Then he rolled over and flung his arm around me. I was up in an instant, rushing into the next room, sitting and standing, my heart pounding, my mind whirling with horrible thoughts of killing a man if he came on to me—the bat was in my hand. A few minutes later he came into the room where I was, wiping his eyes, asking me if anything was wrong. "I can't sleep," I said, with a voice broken with heavy breathing. He said, "Maybe

you can sleep better if I go back to my room. Good night." I lay there the rest of the night with the bat in my hand.

I acted civil at breakfast the next morning with his parents, but took one huge sigh of relief when I was back at the convention, out of harm's way. I kept that secret to myself for a long time, and even to this day, when I think about it—like now—I breathe deep and hard.

ANOTHER FEARSOME EVENT of that year was riding with a carload in Jim A.'s Oldsmobile, which belonged to his visiting father, a famous lawyer at the Nuremberg Trials. Coming back toward Galax on Highway 89, Jim was pushing 90 mph coming down a hill and starting up the longest hill into town, when suddenly we were on top of a horse-pulled wagon. No lights, of course. We yelled and Jim swerved right. The tall bank on the side of the road kept the car from turning over and kept us in the straight and narrow until he got control of the car near the top of the hill. He stopped. We all piled out and tried to catch our breath. We were at least three things: shaken, thankful, and mad as hell at Jim. We were so lucky. The man driving the wagon caught up and glared at us as he rolled by at a few miles per hour.

Back at school, one particularly bizarre day in class with Mrs. Wampler must be told. She was past retirement and relatively new in town. She was one of those substitute teachers easily tilted. That day she lost control from the minute she walked in. We had moved her desk to the back and placed a cat under an upside-down trashcan. As it started moving, she shrieked. She picked it up and sucked in breath when the cat darted out. She cornered it, picked it up, and started to throw it out the second-story window. We booed her, so she flung the cat down and ran out, talking to herself on the way to the principal's office. Mr. Hillman came and sat with us the rest of the period. Obviously he had heard the whole story and showed understanding with his wry smile as he told us we should show more respect for our teachers.

At the junior-senior prom that year at the Country Club, the young rock-n-roll band that came from Goldsboro, Carolina, was in the groove. I had particularly prepared for the event, along with several other guys, by peroxiding my naturally wavy, brownish-blond hair a

blond-orange. Daddy told me not to come back home until the mess grew out. For the occasion, I bought an olive Palm Beach suit at Globman's. By 3 a.m. the suit was soaking wet from dancing. I well remember taking off the coat and wringing out the water. I had ruined its shape. We ended up at someone's house for a breakfast of ham and eggs. A week later I had my hair nearly shaved to relieve Daddy as much as possible. We never discussed the hair again.

By then I was working several jobs. At Piggly Wiggly I bagged groceries for Mr. Gordon, our neighbor. That December I worked at Witherow Men's Store—which I would later own—for Mr. Ballard, another good man to work for. After Christmas, I did inventory for Standard Auto Parts and White Chevrolet Sales, counting nuts and bolts and mufflers for two weeks. After that, Mr. Jarrett at Standard Auto Parts hired me for after school and weekends. He talked little and chain-smoked, but was the best of them all to work for. I could have had a job at any of those places for the rest of my life. They liked my work and my attitude.

ANOTHER TIME OF CALLING came while Rev. Eades was still our preacher. On Sunday nights our youth choir filled the choir loft and was ably led by Ms. B. One of those nights, Rev. Eades said, "Johnny Cock, who I pray will answer the call to be a minister some day, will lead us in our evening prayer, if he will." Heavy. I stood up and did the best I knew how and sat low in my seat afterwards, knowing every eye in the house was on me. By then I had preached a couple of times at prayer meeting on Wednesday nights.

Early on in my senior year, Rev. Eades and Johnny Messer, a wealthy leading layman, took me to Emory and Henry College to meet with the President and Dean. They gave us a verbal commitment that I would receive a National Methodist Scholarship if I kept my grades up. I was headed for the ministry at a Methodist college, two hours from home.

MRS. MOORE was my senior English teacher, the one who taught those going on to college. She had also taught Glenn and Ida Dean

before me. They claimed they were well prepared for college English. There was the matter of the weekly theme that put the fear of *God* into us: if one did not place a comma before the conjunction in a compound sentence, automatic *F*. Split infinitive, *F*; dangling participle, *F*; sentence fragment, *F*. She was tough and even failed some of her favorite students. She took Shakespeare seriously, *Macbeth* that year. She took term papers seriously. The best way to win points with her was to volunteer and work one's rear off on the high school yearbook, which she always sponsored.

Not everyone loved and revered Mrs. Moore, however. Johnny drove his Jeep to the farm that Halloween and filled a small tub with cow manure, which we shoveled into small paper bags. He deposited one on Mrs. Moore's porch, set it aflame with a lighter, and when she responded to the knock on her door, she stomped out the fire with her bedroom shoes. What a scene. We watched from a distance. I said to myself, "Poor Mrs. Moore," while Johnny was howling and slapping Franky on the back. I was an accomplice.

About sixty-five were in my graduating class, led by Bill Jones—who now holds two Ph.D.'s—and Doug Pedigo. I think I was number five. I was over-ready to graduate. School had been boring since the sixth grade. Graduation exercises must not have been a stellar event since I cannot remember a single thing.

THAT SUMMER I worked with Mr. Hillman's son, Benny, and Doug Pedigo spraying Japanese beetles for the State of Virginia, from Harrisonburg to Bristol to Roanoke. The State department gave us a black Chevrolet and a red '48 Ford truck, which we had to learn to double clutch—fun until going up steep streets from a stopped position. One of us drove the truck, the other two were on its bed, one throttling the gas engine to blow out spray and the other one on the seat behind the engine guiding the spray outlet, about two feet in diameter. The whole contraption did a 360. As the truck creeped by houses, the object was to quickly throttle and release spray between the houses. With heavy wind or poor coordination of the process, we became very unpopular as we sprayed many windows with the tiny white specks of chemical. At nights

we stayed in cheap boarding houses, went out to eat and to the movies, came back and played cards.

By the end of that summer I had saved over a $1000. When we returned the truck and car to the Agriculture Department in Richmond, I spent several hundred dollars on clothes for college: a brown pin-stripe suit—a mistake; a Harris Tweed sportscoat that I never wore out but outgrew; wool slacks; several button-down dress shirts and silk striped ties; sport shirts and khaki pants; and a pair of loafers. I was ready for the ivy league, which Emory and Henry was not.

I was dating Augusta, a couple of years younger, before going off to college. She was a really fine girl who lived with her mother at Bowie's Apartments. I was the first guy she had ever dated seriously—another relationship where boy teaches girl how to kiss at the drive-in. *Friendly Persuasion* with Gary Cooper was on, for I remember we sang the theme song together several times on the way to the Dairy Bar afterwards, where the carhop delivered our burgers, fries, and *Cokes*. How many of those little memories does one store up over a lifetime? Probably not more than a million.

THE GOOD OLE DAYS back in Galax, atop the Blue Ridge Mountains, were coming to an end. When one leaves his small hometown for college, chances are he will never return. The mighty magnet was there, however, always pulling me to come back home.

Chapter 7: Phase I Reflections

Primal Community in Galax
Age 1-18 (1938-1957)

AS I RE-READ the first six chapters, the following reflections come to mind, in no particular order of time or priority. They begin to gestalt the objective and subjective elements of my experiences, leading toward meaningful interpretations of the whole. Quality of life happens when one reflects upon and interprets one's living, and further, when one discerns what it all has meant to him or her. The past and future do fill the present with meaning. Through this process, history becomes significant.

- I was completely dependent upon my family for the first years of my life. Without them I would have literally died. That is a sobering fact for all of us self-made types.
- No ancestors, no me. I carry their genes, their cultural proclivities, and their religious sensitivities.
- The Blue Ridge Mountains created a luscious ambiance for those formative years, giving me the wonder of the four seasons. Home would never be home without such awesome mountains.
- From my mother I inherited grit, work ethic, frugality, risk, aggressiveness, impatience, efficiency, thoroughness, practicality, honesty, follow-through, and caring.
- From my father I inherited imagination, orderliness, persuasiveness, inquisitiveness, generosity, spiritual questing, despondency, quick temper, perfectionism, rationality, opinionatedness, and pride.
- From my brother and sister I learned the nature of a team, bull-headedness, craftiness, responsibility, studiousness, competitiveness, independence, self-respect, and winning.
- In school I learned discipline, visioning, analysis, structured living, information, poetic expression, communication, process thinking,

and perseverance.

- From church I learned a wider sense of community, forgiveness, mission, meditation, listening, singing, ritualizing, and vocation.
- From friends I learned how to play, camaraderie, sharing, fantasizing, adventure, creativity, and friendship.
- From adversity I learned toughness, patience, strength, how to keep my own conscience, how to adjust, how to overcome, and how to empathize.
- From my work I learned respect, obedience, negotiation skills, salesmanship, confidence, economic self-sufficiency, pride of performance, and dealing with boredom and menial tasks.
- From sports I learned the fear and fascination of combative competition, the deep satisfaction and frustration of performance, the cruciality of the team, and dealing with defeat and victory.
- From girlfriends I learned honoring, conversing, fickleness, dealing with emotional extremes, and that I liked girls and wanted to be intimate and to marry.
- From Galax I learned that the small town enables a child to fend for himself within a protective atmosphere, gossip is seldom creative, walking everywhere necessary is desirable, the simple life is right, that classes and races have to get along, pillars of the community make things happen, and volunteerism is quite human.
- From the times I learned that most people were working hard to make ends meet, life could be lived at a leisurely pace, global happenings were affecting us locally (war deaths), inequality of the races and classes was everywhere, and technology was accelerating social change.

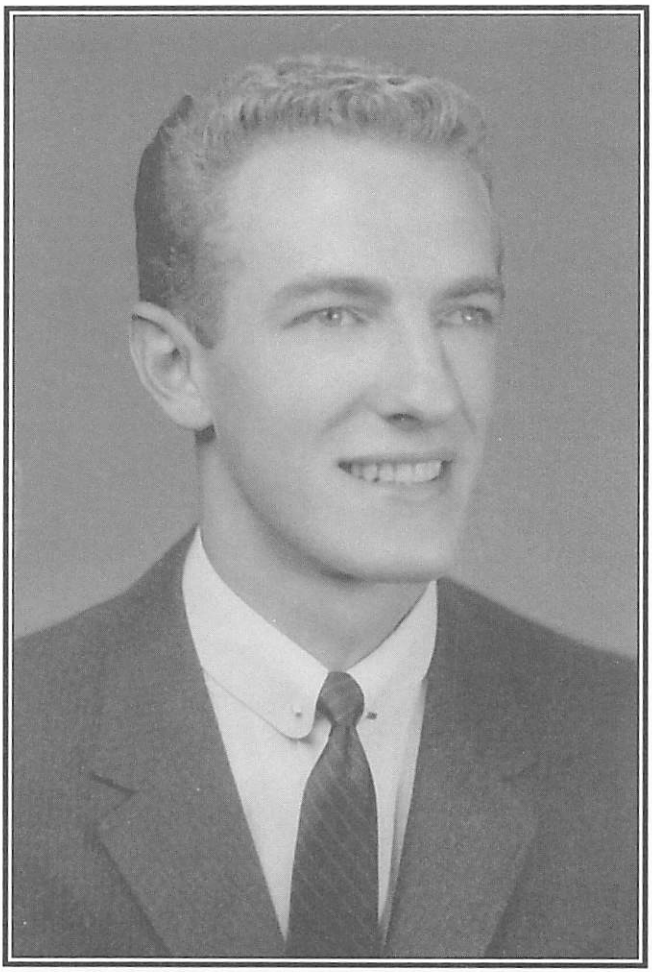
My early formation was hardly an accident: my parents, my brother and sister, Marie, Miss Connie, Mrs. Jennings, my teachers, my Sunday school teachers, Ms. B., preachers, my friends and their parents, scout leaders, coaches, extended family from all sides—all of them were touching and forming this piece of clay—without whom I would have been a dysfunctional hunk of clay. My family and my community did not espouse dysfunctionality.

All these elements of my formative years merge into what I

wish to call *primal community*, that total environment or ethos that gives *quality of life* to one's development through the family and community-wide processes of nurture, training, vocation, and signification. Primal community is more easily achieved in a small town than a city or a sprawling suburb with less tangible delineations. Galax community raised this child. The overlap of relationships in school, church, job, and recreation makes for tight community, for some, too tight. Yet, those who grow up in such a community long for it again as years go by, for it deeply cared for them.

MY MEMORIES of my life in Galax are rich. That time and place was a blessed experience for me, so much so that I later wished it for my children as well. For these reasons primarily I did come home again.

PHASE II
VOCATIONAL PREPARATION



College Freshman

Chapter 8: Jeb and I

Emory and Henry
Age 18-19 (1957-58)

ONE LONGS for independence during his youth and goes to college for this reason as much as for any other. Next to entering the first grade and getting my driver's permit, entering college was the biggest rite of passage for me. When Mama and Dad drove me to Emory and Henry campus on that Sunday afternoon in 1957, conflicting thoughts of "at last" and "I'm not ready for this" stirred in me. We carried the car trunk full of belongings into the oldest looking dorm on campus, Fulton, a shock for all three of us, especially when we walked in on the football jocks playing poker in the hall. They stashed the dollar bills and change and scrambled when they saw Mama and Dad standing there.

I asked where my room number was and found it behind me. Unbelievable! Maybe J.E.B. Stuart slept here when he was a student: big dust balls on the floor, paint peeling off the ceiling, an army cot with deeply sagging springs, one dilapidated little dresser, a desk chair and no desk, hooks on the wall to hang clothing, and a window that would not stay up without a stick. Mama was ready to take me home. Dad muttered oaths. I said bravely that I would be fine. I hardly slept that night, wondering if I could handle this strange new world.

During registration I complained about my room and was issued another in Carriger Dorm, but with the same army cots. I met my two roommates, one named Larry, who sat at his desk most of the time staring at the wall and fiddling with his pencil, and the other named Ben, a short, stout senior who was seldom there before two in the morning and seldom out of bed before twelve noon. When he *was* there during the day, he was listening to Gene Krupa on drums, full blast. There was no way to study in my room with the crowdedness, noise, and the patterns of my roommates.

The lowly freshman process started promptly with the issue of

little yellow billed beanies with a blue "E&H" on the front. We were massed together as "rats" in the auditorium, at bonfires, at the cafeteria—anywhere the upper-class-folk wished—and were set to performing on cue to such rituals as "Jigalo Abernoski, rat!" by shouting in unison, at attention and with beanies over our hearts, "God bless him; may his soul rest in peace." For weeks we praised that fictitious E&H saint and even got down on the ground and cried over the memory of him when told to. The guys spent time polishing shoes, gofering, cleaning rooms and dorm bathrooms. When we did not perform acceptably, two upperclassmen swung us out into the duck pond, one holding the legs and one the arms. One could not drown in the three feet of water, but could become furious and stomp out, in which case he was thrown back in. A proper show of humility came hard to many of us.

Then we became "goats," the rare privilege of becoming servile before future brothers of a fraternity. Goating was just short of hazing in those good old days. We had to buy and saw, whittle, plane, and sand our own paddles with which to be busted in the arse by all future brothers. The paddles must withstand the onslaught, less one had to saw and sand down another one. A brother would inflict the blow as we bent over to grasp our ankles. The object for the brother was to hit the goat so hard he would lose his balance. If so, repeat the process. If not, then shake his hand and sign the paddle, which became a hallowed souvenir.

I unfortunately was ill advised and chose a too green piece of wood. For sure it did not crack or break, but neither did it give. It hurt and it bruised. It was wise to check one's arse in the evening before bed. Before long, mine was turning blue, so much so that the "goat-master" came to see. No more for "Cock," as they called me with delight. But almost all had already paddled me and signed their names anyway. I was more than a little concerned when into the next summer my bottom was going to sleep when I sat on hard chairs or pews for long periods.

Late the final night before initiation into the fraternity, the brothers blindfolded us and put us into the trunks and the back floorboards of cars by two's and took us on hour-long trips into the desolate countryside. There we were let out, our faces blackened, our I.D.'s taken, given one dollar between us, and told to be back on campus by breakfast, so we would not miss classes. Tom and I were let out

somewhere on the way to Gate City. When we took off the blindfolds, we were standing in the dark by a small river on a dirt road. After washing some of the black off our faces and wiping them with weeds, we walked for an hour or so before we saw a soul. We flagged an old truck and got onto the back. With two more hitchhikes, we were back to within walking distance of dear old Emory and Henry.

It was still dark, so we boldly took the pleasure of knocking hard on the doors of the brothers who took us on our missions. Wiping their eyes and uttering oaths at us for waking them up, they gave us "go away" signs and shut the doors. We stayed up and celebrated, took showers, and walked to breakfast as if nothing had ever happened. That night we were initiated as we kept nodding in our seats.

I was going steady with Augusta back in Galax, so I rode home with Roger every weekend, dragging all my dirty clothes with me for dear Mama to wash and iron before we left on Sunday nights. I was between worlds, usually wanting to be back at E&H if at home, and vice-versa. It was a hard first semester. Augusta and I broke up at Christmas, freeing me to go back and date Mary or Sara, but my timing was poor. They were asked for by that time. All was not lost. I would go to Carriger Lounge after dinner and dance with Ann and Othella, two of the best dancers on campus.

At the beginning of the next semester I had found a room in the relatively new addition behind Carriger, rooms for two with decent beds, desks, a sink, an open closet, two ample dressers, and enough electrical outlets for the stereo, radio, clock, and razor of my roommate, Tom. All I needed was the outlet for my desk lamp, which I seldom used, for studying was not a habit.

We listened to Nat King Cole (*Unforgettable*), Julie London, and the Weavers most of the time, unless I was there by myself. Then I listened to classical. A guy from Norton, whose Dad owned the radio station, kept bringing classical LP albums, like samples, never played on that station. I could buy a record for fifty-cents to a few dollars for the multi-record albums. Tchaikovsky became my first favorite, so I joined Columbia Record Club and received his major works free. I began to enjoy piano and violin concertos by the likes of Van Cliburn and Jascha Heifetz. One of the last recordings of Toscanini, Verdi's *Te*

Deum and Boito's *Mefistofele: Prologue*, became my favorite, with the voices of the boys' choir spiraling heavenward. I coveted those private times in my room listening to my new treasures. From Galax's WBOB to Toscanini was a quantum leap.

Music was becoming a priority in my life. I joined the Collegians, the male chorus on campus, which sang at special events and toured during the spring break. I was a charter member of the Concert Choir, which sang during services at the chapel and toured during the semester break. Chick Davis was our director, an alumnus of E&H—Little All-American in football—and of Westminster Choir College, whose concept of overtone was everything. I took voice lessons from him, trying to learn how to breathe all over again, filling up the diaphragm area with air to support the tone that imaginally came from the sternum, not the throat. One passing by the practice rooms heard strange grunts and groans as we learned the technique.

Before long I was the bass soloist, stepping up to my biggest feat the next year in the *Messiah*. The runs and the shakes were a challenge. Pravda Sikorski, child prodigy with perfect pitch, and daughter of Ludwig, the head of the music department, said that my overtone was too heavy, making me sound flat. Other mortals did not seem to hear it the same way, thankfully. I was deciding to minor in music.

Although I did not go to college to play sports, I was on the intra-mural football team for the fraternity during the fall and softball team during the spring. As was my fate with football, I did not last long—not quite until the end of the first game, when I broke my nose for the second time. Touch football was maybe more dangerous than tackle.

I became the L&M cigarette rep on campus for $100 a month. The only problem was, I could hardly give them away, especially *L&M*, *Oasis*, and *Duke*. The joke on *Duke*: they give you a hernia instead of cancer—it was most difficult to draw smoke through those filters. That money, plus the Methodist Scholarship, plus my eye insurance money, plus my savings put me through college. I was proud that I did not have to ask Mama and Dad for financial help as they helped to pay off Ida and Glenn's college loans.

I do not remember a great deal about my classes that year. Life was too full. I remember that English was easy for me because of my

good background; the education course was sort of a joke; Latin was more of the same from high school, not difficult; math I cannot remember at all—maybe I was exempt for some reason; voice of course; religion was boring; and then there was history with Dr. Stevenson, who played Socrates with his penetrating questions. One prayed to *God*, as he hid behind the person in front of him, that "Steve" would pick someone else that day to wrestle intellectually. He was relentless, always asking "Why?" until one was over the abyss, trying to answer what all philosophers had tried to answer before us. It was there that my Sunday school answers were blown to bits, and I really began to question what I believed.

I was marked because I had declared that I was a pre-ministerial candidate from the earliest interviews. That meant I would of course participate in the Christian groups on campus. I found them offensive from the start. I did not want a "holy" tag, especially when I began to meet the "holy club." I missed several meetings and was told by one or two of the righteous that they were praying for me. That was enough for me: 1) Stevenson, 2) a boring religion class, and 3) the righteous drove me away from my calling. I felt guilty about taking the Methodist Scholarship and turning away from my announced vocation.

I was a blue freshman and thought about quitting college. One dark night I walked to Chick Davis' house and asked him to walk with me for a while. We discussed it in depth. I remember crying. That was my first memorable bout with despair. My life did not make sense. Chick pronounced my struggle good, affirmed me, and sent me home to sleep it off. I experienced grace that night. Soon after that, I decided to be an English teacher.

DURING THE SPRING, Sara was showing a prospective young lady around campus. They were sitting in a booth at The Hut when Sara called me over to introduce me to Lynda Lippard from Cleveland, Tennessee. I sat down with them. Lynda had a radiance about her and an engaging manner. I told her we hoped to see her at E&H in the fall.

RIGHT AFTER SCHOOL was out in May, Dad asked me if I would sit with Mr. Snow during lunch hour, where he was custodian of Felts' Memorial Cemetery, to learn the ways of Masonry, preparing for initiation. I did it for Dad and Glenn, who had done it before me. Glenn was on his way to becoming a Shriner like Dad. I never made it.

Benny, Doug, and I sprayed Japanese beetles again that summer for the State of Virginia. Toward the end of the summer, Dad and Mama were having a painful argument about their relationship. Dad was abusing Mama verbally when I came in. I immediately took her side. It was the first time that any of the children had ever taken Dad on, who was the patriarch-type, never to be challenged. It was a stormy shouting match, the kind where too much is said. Mama was crying hard and begging us to quit. I slammed the door, left the house sobbing, and walked around for a long while. Dad and I did not make eye contact for days after that. I wanted to forgive and be forgiven, but I was too weak to bring it off. Painful, unresolved separation lingered, the kind that can only be healed by absolution.

I was glad when the college called and asked me to come back early to help move in the freshmen girls. Little did I know how glad.

Chapter 9: "With One Lucky Date, I'll Make Lynda Mine"

Emory and Henry College
Years Two and Three
Age 19-21 (1958-60)

I WAS WAITING at the gate to E&H when the blue and white 56 *Olds* with Tennessee license rolled up. Jack started toward the car when I stopped him: "Jack, I know these folks," I said. In fact I did, the girl from The Hut, Lynda Lippard. I met them at the new girls' dorm, Martha Washington, and started carting her stuff to her room, which made a good impression on Mr. and Mrs. Lippard. As her parents pulled out, I asked her to go with me to dinner at the cafeteria and then to vespers. She did. Jack gave me a mean stare. We were going to every meal together, even breakfast, which I seldom ate before. A bell was ringing. Maybe she was the one.

She was 5'4", attractive in every way, especially her warm smile that was there most of the time. She was full of spirit, friendly, well-mannered, a good conversationalist, confident but not stuck on herself, disciplined, a good student, religious, a strong member of whatever she joined, a leader type, well thought of by all, concerned, and caring. An authentic, classy freshman who swept me off my feet. One little problem: she had been going with a high school boyfriend who was on a football scholarship at Alabama, and they were still writing regularly. Also, she already had said yes during the summer for a date to the Homecoming Dance, with a senior. But that was weeks off.

We went on the freshman hayride together, an enchanting evening under the moonlight. We sat together every evening after dinner in her dorm lounge. I was very cool. It was not until the thirteenth night together that she leaned over and kissed me on the lips and ran to her room. That was the point of no return. The romance was on. One night

soon after that she said, "Let's go study." Till this day I think she said, "Let's go steady," though she denies it. It was not until after Thanksgiving holiday that she gave the bad news to her football boyfriend back home and then came back to really go steady with me.

We jointly baby-sat for the sons of Chick Davis and Dr. Hunt, President of E&H. Several times we shopped for groceries together at Denton's Store for meals to cook at their houses. We double-dated off campus to Bristol and Abingdon to the movies, went to Chilhowie for hamburgers at the Rainbow Inn, and went to every event on campus from chapel to plays. At the big fraternity party that year I pinned her, which meant something between going steady and engagement.

We both leaned toward being English majors, both liked music, both liked children, both were raised in the church, both were Methodists, both were from lower middle-class families, both were concerned for the downtrodden, both had strong principles and convictions. We both wanted to do well in school. We had much in common. At the same time, Lynda did not like my smoking, my playing Bridge into the night and missing breakfast, my undisciplined study patterns, which forced me to stay up all night writing papers and studying for tests and exams and then sleeping for a day or more to catch up—especially if I took "bennies" (Benzedrine) to keep me awake. My longest "crash" afterwards was over forty hours of sleep.

I did not like it that she felt uncomfortable dancing, playing sports, and cards. If she did not already know how to do something, she did not want to learn, lest she be humiliated. She was a bit nagging at times about my few bad habits. I reminded her that I did not drink, carouse, nor beat her.

On one memorable date in Abingdon, I had finished my dessert long before she did. She was the slowest eater I had ever known, besides her mother. I kept teasing her as she ate her pecan pie. I noticed that she had pushed the heart piece over to the side, leaving it for last. I reached over with my fork, speared it, and popped it into my mouth. She flinched, glared at me, and said, "I can't believe you took my last bite!" Big tears welled up in her eyes. I could not believe that. I learned that she had plans for every bite on her plate, and that she would savor every morsel up to her last bite, especially her last bite. The evening was ruined.

MANY MEMORABLE PRANKS happened at E&H. Around Halloween, a bunch of us guys put Little Richard on the chapel chime-speaker system after midnight, full blast. We watched as Dr. Hunt was shuffling quickly across campus in his house shoes, p.j.'s, and robe, hollering for Joab, the night watchman. It was a sight to behold. We flew Mom Chamberlain's huge panties at the top of the flagpole. Someone led a cow into the Administration Building, to roam and plop all over. We lifted Ditty Belle's (another housemother) dynaflow Buick onto cement blocks at the cafeteria, her rear tires just off the ground. She cranked it up, put it in drive, and started accelerating faster and faster, to the cheers of all around. She finally got out, looked at the rear of the car, muttered something, and stalked off on foot. That night two guys, one a preacher now and her favorite young man then, sneaked into her bedroom and short-sheeted her. The girls said she came out of her room late that night screaming, bald without her wig.

Joab, his full name, Joabner Proffitt, was the night watchman with the wonderfully strange vocabulary. To him the Administration Building was the "Menstration" Building; the Science Building, the "Sinus" Building. He told us that the Bishop was coming to "desecrate" the Chapel. He was amazed that the coach could throw with both hands: he's "amphibious." Sikorski made him one of his main characters in his operetta about E&H. When we got bored, we would sit and talk with Joab and come away enlightened.

Classes went on. Dr. Goldsmith's hearing aid made his Shakespeare class fun. As he read his yellowed note cards, someone would raise a hand to get his attention, then start moving his lips to make him think his hearing aid was off. He would turn the volume up, and then the person would shout. The poor Dr. was visibly rocked as he pulled the aid out of his ear. After adjusting his aid again, he would pick up his notes, look into space, above our heads, and start droning again, as though talking to someone out there somewhere—certainly not to us.

That year in chapel, the distinguished and sophisticated Dr. Buttrick preached about "chasm speaketh unto chasm," a laugh because no one understood a thing he said, though his words seemed to be in proper order. Great was the impact of Harry Denman, by comparison, a layman who gave away all he owned but a suit of clothes and a change

of underwear. He simply stood and spoke from the heart about following in the Master's steps.

That summer I attended E&H summer school, planning to graduate in three years and two summer school sessions. It was a simple decision: it would save money and get me out of college sooner. I was getting tired of going to classes. I had been in school for fourteen years, sitting in class listening to teachers talk, reading books, doing homework, taking tests—in all, the same rather unimaginative methods used throughout. Fourteen years is a long time to do anything over and over, especially if one is looking forward to making a place for himself in the world. Three years of college instead of four was a simple decision.

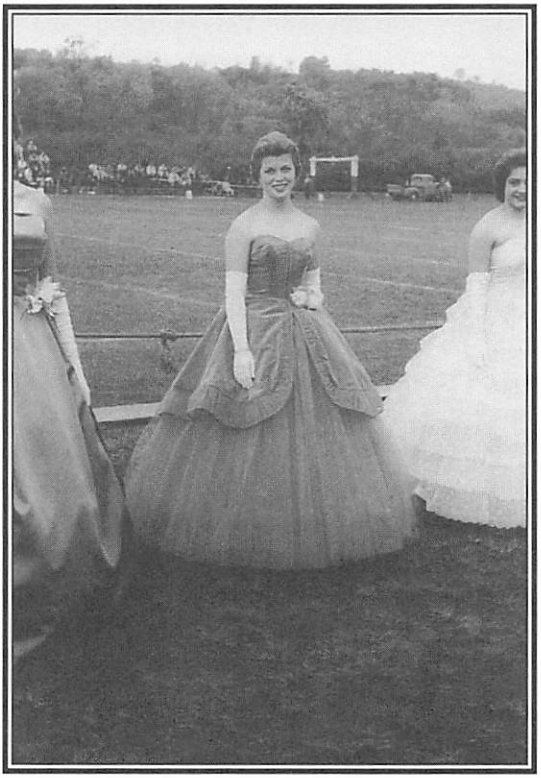
We were out of class by noon during the summer, leaving twelve hours to do whatever. We played golf at Saltville, a few miles away. One hole is still vivid in memory, a seven- to nine-iron over a weeping willow tree that blinded the green, backed by a piece of the lake. The shot had to be high and perfect in distance, else into the willow or into the lake. Other days we went to the Holston River and messed around on a friend's houseboat, swimming, playing cards, sunning, eating, and listening to music. Classes were much less demanding. I enjoyed the summer school party.

The last year of college I lived off campus in Dr. Hillman's basement with Lewis Dozier, across the hall from Buddy and Sally, who had come back to college to graduate after marriage and a time away. Lewis and I had the room looking sharp with matching black and red bedspreads and the same cover for an easy chair. Bright red throw rugs accented the room. We had a phonograph, two desks—the works. We both kept a neat room and enjoyed being in it. We smoked pipes at the time, so that smell was ever present, sometimes sour if the pipe had not been cleaned regularly.

We kept apple juice in the joint refrigerator outside our room, which fermented; that with a Benzedrine tablet one night, as we studied for an ancient philosophy exam, gave us a real buzz. Instead of studying, we got silly and cackled half the night, fell asleep, missed the exam, and woke up after lunch. Dr. Mielke let us make up the exam, so we still had to stay up all night a few days later. That was the operating procedure.

Our fraternity selected Lynda as our nominee for Homecoming

Queen, each fraternity picking a candidate for the student body vote. We took hundreds of pictures of her and pasted them on posters around campus. She was so photogenic. We cut a large outline of her shoulders and head in black and tacked it on the side of the cafeteria for all to see, with two-foot letters saying "Lynda Lippard." I was proud and embarrassed at the same time, with her pictures all over the campus and with guys ga-ga-ing over her. She lost by a couple of votes, and several of my fraternity brothers failed to vote. That hurt and we let them have it at the next meeting.



The fall play that year was *Dear Brutus,* by James Barrie. I played Mr. Dearth, the drunk. Lynda was in stage properties. Dr. Blesi,

my favorite professor, directed it. I was not a good actor and felt like a piece of wood on stage. But if Dr. Blesi wanted me to play a role, I did it. He was imaginative in class, always cackling and picking on students by name to participate in readings and lively discussions. He said I was a decent writer, judging from my essays. We were not into creative writing. He was the main reason I majored in English and decided to become an English teacher. I simply enjoyed his classes, his style, and the literature he brought to life. When I think of Dr. Blesi, I think of *Our Town*; he played the stage manager, among the best I've seen in that role.

Thanksgiving 1959, I went home with Lynda to Cleveland, Tennessee. We had been dating over a year and had decided to be engaged, which was no surprise to anyone. We thought we would try out her parents with a 5 and 10 cent store ring. At dinner, Lynda held out her hand. Her father choked up and her mother shed a tear. We could not hold it any longer and burst out laughing. They were good sports. That was my way of asking the family for Lynda's hand. Granted.

Dad helped me pick out a real diamond ring at a jeweler's in Hillsville where he had done business over the years. I think it cost $250, maybe including the band, or knowing Dad, that's the amount he negotiated. He rarely paid retail. Making a deal was in our blood.

As the time approached to give it to Lynda, I grew more and more scared of the marriage commitment. Rev. Mason's office gave us pre-marital counseling and testing. Lynda and I both did poorly on the sexology test and received a bibliography of books to read. He told Lynda that our marriage would be difficult because she had such fixed expectations of a husband from her father, who, for example, got up early most mornings and cooked ham and eggs and grits for the family. Rev. Mason knew I was not that type. I was getting the proverbial "cold feet." Maybe it was a mistake. Maybe she was not the one. I held on to the ring for a while.

That winter, a few of us decided the time had come for us to start a new fraternity, breaking off from our old one, which had lost its idealism and was going through hum-drum participation. Although, as rush chairman during the fall, I had made sure we picked up a dozen or more really outstanding new members, trying to revitalize the organization. About twenty of us, including most of the new ones, started

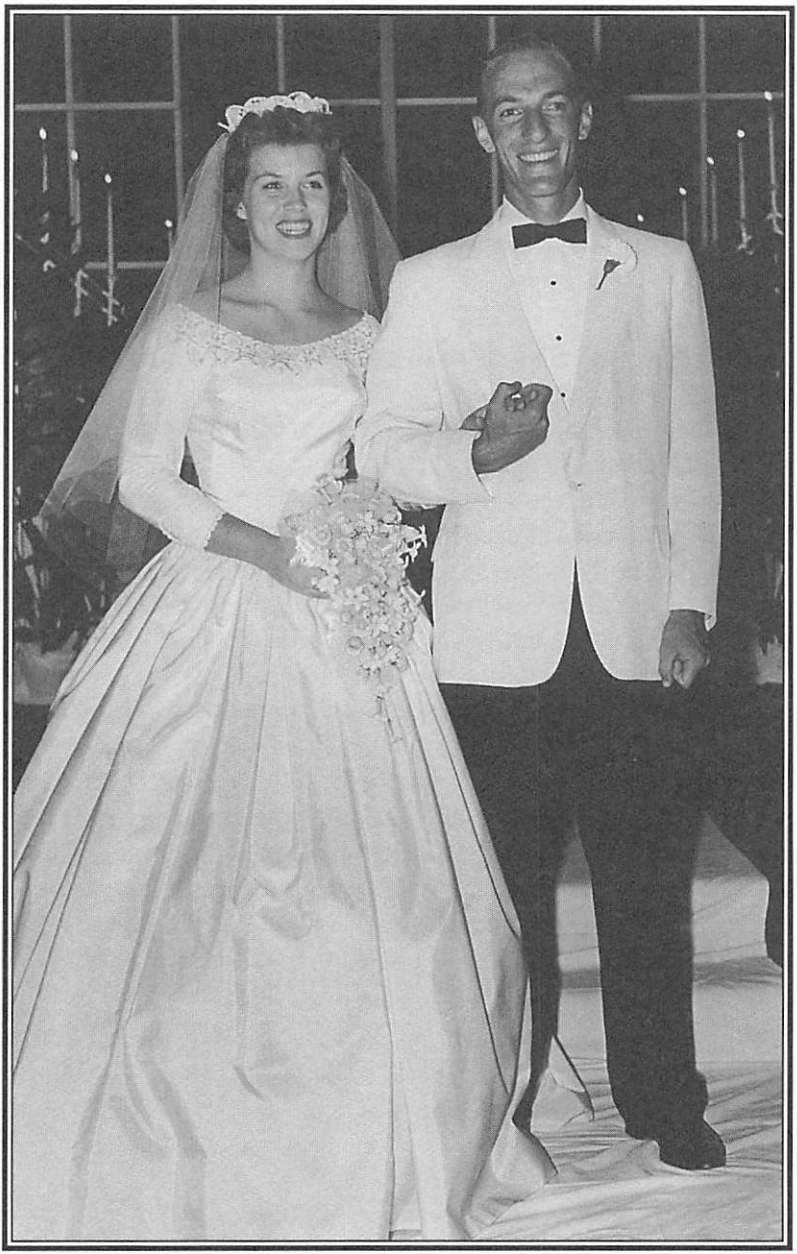
Theta Chi Epsilon, putting priority on scholarship, leadership, service, and collegiality. The rift with the old fraternity was traumatic; we hardly spoke the rest of that year. The new fraternity became a strong leadership group on campus during the very next year. We learned much about building a new organization in the process.

It was at our spring fraternity function that Lynda and I were engaged, at the Virginia House in Marion. I had never seen her more radiant. Maybe she was the one. The date was set for August 20, 1960.

I BEGAN to mail resumes and to go on interviews for teaching jobs. The public school systems were locked into a certain amount of education and psychology classes. Those classes were not helpful at E&H at the time, so I did not take them, confident I could get a teaching job anyway. The salaries were miserably low, less than $5,000 a year, and I would have had to take education courses on the side.

A fraternity brother suggested I apply at Baylor School for Boys in Chattanooga, where he went to high school. Only thirty miles from Cleveland, Lynda liked the idea. A great private school, she said. On my interview at the beautiful campus on the river, I was much impressed by the emphasis on academic excellence and wanted the English teaching job. The head of the department took me to his apartment on campus and asked general questions. I won the job, I think, when I talked about the universality of literature, about which I had written a recent essay for Dr. Blesi. We would receive about the same salary, but with room and board and other benefits thrown in. I signed on the dotted line.

For my pre-graduation gift, Dad and Mama helped me buy a used '55 Ford, the one that Cecil Curtis in Galax had driven. It had low mileage and was in good shape to be five years old. My very first automobile. I took it to E&H for the last few months, relishing the drives back and forth to Galax in my *own* car.



Chapter 10: What An August!

Marriage and Career Beginning
Age 21-22 (1960-61)

I TRAVELED back and forth to Cleveland several times that summer preparing for the wedding and fixing up our two-room apartment in Red Bank, outside Chattanooga. I did wonder if we would be too close to Lynda's family, just thrity miles away. I was raised to be very independent and did not want to become dependent on them.

Her style of family was very different. The Cock family was close, yet not too close. We were more career oriented as individuals, especially since Mama always worked. I would say we were interdependent. The Lippards were family above all else, held tight by mother Blanche, who was always there. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were to be eaten together by all if at all possible, around an intentionally set table, with grace and conversation about the day. They, like my family, were pillars of the Methodist church, were good citizens of the community, and loved their children. Finally, not much difference, yet our style of family was going to be our style, not their style; and Lynda said it was not going to be the Cock's style. We were having to forge for ourselves what style of family we were to be.

I finished summer school with graduation on August 19, by noon, one day before the wedding. Mama, Dad, and Granddaddy Johnny P. came to the graduation in their car. I was all packed up in my car as we set out from Emory to Cleveland, about four hours, rolling in for the rehearsal and dinner that evening. On the four-lane Route 11 outside of Knoxville, they passed me in Dad's new car, Granddaddy riding shotgun, grinning, and waving at me as they passed. I could not let that be, so I started to pass them back, but Dad kept his speed up till we both were cruising for a long while at around 80 mph. I was pleased that my little car was not shaking to pieces. I'm sure Mama must have slowed him down, for soon I passed them going only 75 mph.

Granddaddy was the star of the group, always inclined to get attention through his stories and antics. His big act that time, at about 85 years old, was to get everyone at the motel to slide down the sliding board, even the manager and his wife, who were around sixty. He demonstrated it several times until everyone was clear it was possible, then he cajoled until all participated, even Dad, who was upset by all the details of the ceremonies in progress, especially the fact that his tuxedo did not fit.

The wedding in the First Methodist Church and the reception in the adjoining hotel lobby went off without any real problem. There was a large crowd because the Lippards and Lynda had many friends and many near-by relatives. The relatives on both sides got to look at each other and seemed to approve. Lynda's Granddaddy Broadrick and Granddaddy Cock were the best mixers by far. What I remember most was that Mama grabbed me after the service and cried, hard but softly, like I had never seen her cry. She usually hid deep emotion. I was her baby, her last to leave home, and the fact I was leaving home for good hit her at that moment.

We worked out the car getaway with Mr. Lippard, Joe, and Lynda's maid of honor, Julie Kirkpatrick, and her friend Webb Smalling so well in fact that we were chauffeured to it in another part of town. Nothing had been done to it, no marks at all, or so we thought—only rice inside our clothing from the reception line. Off we drove to our honeymoon destination, Fontana Lake, in the Smokey Mountains. A ways up the road we stopped to get gas. The attendant checked under the hood and came back to the window, smiled, and said congratulations. Lynda and I looked at each other and asked him what he meant. There was a small sign under the hood that said to congratulate the newlyweds. Julie, Webb, and Joe had their little trick after all.

THE HONEYMOON was memorable, of course. The first night all the electricity went off in the section we were in. That did not prove to be a big problem. The next day, my unathletic Lynda, who could care less about golf, made a hole in one on a little three-par course, the ball ricocheting off a tree into the cup. I could not live that one down: "John,

how is it that you have been playing for years and could not even get a hole-in-one? Seems pretty simple to me."

We had to be at Baylor for orientation by August 25. I graduated, got married, went on our honeymoon, moved into our home, and started a new job, all in five days. We looked forward to getting settled in our little apartment, storing most of our wedding gifts, over 150, in the Lippard's basement. We had only a kitchen, bathroom, and living room-bedroom combination, with a sofa bed that was not at all comfortable, but no problem for a while. The only problem was unexpected visitors, like one of many ministers visiting us, who came about 8:00 one night when we had already retired. To open the door without seeing the bed was impossible. He politely said he would call again. All three of us were embarrassed, especially Lynda.

The first major acquisition after the sofabed was a fine three-piece stereo, the main piece a cherry apothecary cabinet, and two side speakers that doubled as end tables. Although we had neither radio nor TV, we did have the best of music.

Lynda was working as a secretary at the University of Chattanooga and taking classes toward finishing her degree. We drove to Baylor early in the morning for breakfast. She would take the car, then return to Baylor for the sit-down dinner, where we were assigned a table with about ten boys. Therefore, we had little use for our kitchen. This was the beginning of a life together where we did little cooking.

We had to be up early in the mornings. Lynda was a morning person; I was a night person, established by my college routine. The first big fusses were over my not taking responsibility for getting up early enough. We had to fly out of the apartment and break the speed limit on the way to our jobs in the rush hour traffic. It got to the point that Lynda said that she would divorce me if I did not get up on time; and if she was particularly agitated, she would throw in the "quit smoking" dagger that originated in my promise to quit smoking when we were married. She brought up her Dad, how he was the first out of bed and usually made breakfast. That really got to me. The big threat went on for some time. One day I said that we had a problem, and that grown-up people did not go around threatening to pick up their marbles and leave; they dealt with the problem. I told her the divorce threat was

an intolerable method, and I did not want to hear it again. We both apologized and did not talk about divorce again, at that time.

We became very active in St. Luke's Methodist Church and made strong friendships with several families. The relatively young pastor, Harrison, and his wife, Peg, were authentic in their ministry and very encouraging to us. They invited me to lead the children's choir and to sing in the adult choir. We were at the church several times a week, filling the rest of our life, except for the time reserved for my golf.

I became an assistant coach on the Baylor golf team, going out and playing with the boys each afternoon during the golf season. The other coaches asked me to play with them on Saturday as well, which did not go over well with Lynda, since Saturday and Sunday were the only days we had together. Making matters worse, I bought a new set of golf clubs without checking with her. She could not believe I would make such a big decision, $150 worth, without her consent. Golf was an ongoing irritant to our relationship.

We moved to a three-room apartment in White Oak and bought a few more pieces of furniture, especially the walnut antique desk at a used furniture store. With a new little maple desk we had and $40 we traded for an 1875 vintage plantation desk. I saw one like it recently at an antique mall for over $3000.

My getting up did not get much better fast. One morning Lynda came to the bedroom door, dressed and ready to go. I was still in bed. She put her hands on her hips and announced, "Enough of enough is a thing!" I rolled onto the floor in a fit of laughter. She finally figured out that she had twisted her words, tried to keep from laughing, and walked into the next room. That phrase has become our signal to laugh at our pettiness when we begin to take such irritations too seriously: "Enough of enough is a thing."

I TAUGHT freshman English, emphasizing grammar, and even began to compile my own text. I stayed one day ahead of the boys that first year, determined that each of them would thank Mr. Cock one day for making them learn the English language. I decided that I would use all the motivation I could bring to bear and kept a yardstick close at hand.

If one of my boys missed his memory work for the day, i.e., what is the definition of an adverb, he would have to come to the front of the room, grab his ankles, and receive one swift crack on his derriere. That brought some of my smart, lazy boys around. I never cracked them for behavior, only for subject matter. The stick worked back in those good old days. One of the laziest of the boys—one who received the most motivational strokes—wrote me several years later to tell me what a good teacher I was and how much he appreciated the motivation, looking back.

My students could tear a sentence apart, and even learned to punctuate by the rules. They could spot an introductory phrase, a compound sentence, and an appositive. I was out to guarantee that Mr. Ashby, the perfectionist and their next English teacher, would not come to me the next year and tell me that one of my boys did not know his grammar.

During the winter season I became the assistant soccer coach, not knowing how to play the game. Back in Galax High we had football, baseball, and basketball. My English colleague was the coach, and my coach as well. During the third week I became only the statistician after painfully separating my big toe nail from my toe when I dug my shoe into the ground kicking the soccer ball.

My greatest sports' joy came that spring when three of my students invited me to play golf with them at their club on Signal Mountain, where I shot my first par round. I remember playing one fabulous shot after another. The next time I played I was ten over par. A fluke round it must have been but it's part of my history.

The assistant head master tried to sell us a set of Britannica Encyclopedia. We said no, wondering if that was politically strategic. Soon we were telling him that I was taking a new position as the head of the English Department at Frederick Military Academy in Portsmouth, Virginia, so no harm done.

Chapter 11: The English Major

Frederick Military Academy
Age 22-24 (1961-63)

SUDDENLY I WAS A MAJOR—Major Cock, they called me as they saluted. Frederick Military Academy was the charity of Frederick Beasley, a philanthropist in Portsmouth. He also had a college going at about the same time, both schools for poor and deserving young people, the Academy especially for high school age boys who had not learned the discipline of study. Since Mr. Beasley had placed the campus on an old army base he had bought, all faculty and students lived in WWII structures, more or *less* renovated. A faculty family in each dormitory played the role of parent, tutor, and disciplinarian. We were one big family, with little privacy for newlyweds like us, with boys rooming beside and above, some twenty of them in each dorm. Lynda especially enjoyed being the parent to so many young men—listening, doctoring, and mothering. For a bunch of boys, they showed her the utmost respect. Once in a while she got a whistle from another dorm as she walked across campus.

Our three rooms and a bath looked empty with the few pieces of furniture we had. During one trip to a used furniture store, we found a hutch-style, seven-foot tall, gray post office piece with tens of small shelves used for storing stationery and the like. It was solid oak with double doors on top and on the bottom. Lynda's idea was to strip it, take out the shelves, take out the wooden panels in the top doors and replace them with glass, put antique hinges on the doors, and put about six shelves in for dining room storage and display. The idea made sense until we started trying to implement it, especially lifting and hauling the monstrosity, and I had blisters for weeks after screwdriving into that oak. Four or five coats of paint made stripping it a job for professionals. We finally decided to paint it again, an antique orange, and forget the glass and hinges for the time being. Lynda discovered during that project

that she had not married a handyman like her father. With little skill, few tools, and no patience, I was without joy doing such work. Working together on building our nest was supposed to bring us together, she thought. I cursed. She cried. A bad idea.

We painted the whole apartment a beige color, since that was the color of choice in the free paint supply at the Academy. I was a decent painter, finding it easier to do with my temperament. In a couple of days I had huge headaches, especially around my injured eye.

We went to see a recommended ophthalmologist, Dr. Powell, who discovered that I had glaucoma and suggested I take the medicine that kept down the pressure, but also interfered with my sex drive. Either that or take the eye out. What a choice. Home improvements were getting me down.

The classroom was a different story. As head of the English department, I and the other five faculty got together often to talk curriculum and lesson plans. One of our number was the best grammarian I had ever encountered and recommended the best book on the subject I had ever seen. We decided that we would devise a manual for our students, laying out the basic sentence forms, the parts of speech, a common diagramming model, and the basic rules of punctuation. No student could graduate without knowing the subject matter in his manual. We decided to teach it to all levels that first year and then phase it into freshman and remedial work thereafter. Every student was taking the same grammar that year and swapping war stories. That system was quite effective, except in the classes of one faculty member who thought it was a waste. We replaced him the next year with one of my fraternity buddies from Emory and Henry, making three of us from the Theta Chi fraternity at E&H in the department, and one Sigma Iota friend teaching math and physics.

We placed equal emphasis upon weekly writing for each student, keeping us all hopping grading papers. There is no other way to learn to write. We got together as friends, watched television, talked, and graded papers, reading the mistakes to each other and laughing painfully. We developed the required reading list for each grade, putting as much emphasis on modern writing the boys would like, i.e., **Catcher in the Rye**, as we did on classics. We wanted them to learn to love books.

Jerry even suggested that some of his students read Ann Ryand, but the philosophical book reports meant they were grappling with a personal philosophy. The Baptist orientation of the founder and president would have made them frown if they had known all. Our department was getting the job done well.

I helped form the golf team and was the golf coach, going out with the team each afternoon to Bide-a-way Golf Course, the home of Chandler Harper, the pro that Lew Worsham beat by one stroke with an iron-shot eagle two on the final hole of the World Championship in 1954. That loss was his claim to fame, since it was about the time televised golf began. I was playing good golf with my Powerbilt irons and persimmon woods, scoring my first hole-in-one, using a nine-iron on the short fourth hole, as I remember.

Lynda fumed as usual over my spending too much time on the golf course. She was "be-damned" if she was going to be a golf widow. Later on I played with three other faculty members whose wives were glad to get some free time together, and that helped Lynda's attitude a little. There was a strong principle there somewhere she was defending. I could have understood it if I came home drunk or lost hundreds of dollars playing cards at the nineteenth hole. I just loved playing golf.

THE EYE PROBLEM was complicating my life, and the pain was quite noticeable again. That spring I returned to Dr. Powell to reconsider my choice, this time the surgical one, since there was no possibility of restored sight with a dead optic nerve. Dr. Powell did the deed, leaving the option for an artificial eye if I chose. After due time for recovery physically—psychologically there was a hole in my being without one of my main parts—we met with an artificial eye technician who calculated sizing and color. The discomfort of the plastic eye was too much. The color was bad as well. I became Major Long John Silver with my black patch.

Dr. Powell made an appointment for me to meet a specialist in New York City, on Manhattan. I traveled by myself by train, made an early afternoon appointment, and did not have time to look around much—what a city. We spent much time working on color, trying tens

of pre-made eyes. What I discovered was that the changing dilation of the pupil could not be matched exactly. No one could duplicate the original.

Back in Portsmouth, I received the new eye, but was very hesitant to wear it out in public, wondering about the reaction. Lynda kept telling me how handsome I looked; with her sensitivity she often stretched the truth to make a person feel better. I took the plunge eventually and went on about my life, suffering when I had to wear the eye too long during the day. I wore my patch back in our apartment, always replacing the eye when going to the door.

That summer we took an apartment in Norfolk to be near Lynda's college at Old Dominion and my summer job, working in the pro shop for Tommy Wheelock at Eagle Haven Golf Course at Little Creek Amphibious Base. I was up at 6:00 a.m. most mornings, driving about forty-five minutes to the pro shop each way if I was lucky with traffic, and getting home as late as dark, after 9:00 p.m. One had to love it and I did.

The place was a mess with old merchandise all around. Tommy and his retiree assistant were not being creative. Before long we had sold dozens of made-up starter sets, mostly used, to the sailors who were on leave. Tommy asked me one day to make sure we did not sell out. We began to display new clubs and clothes and redecorated the shop. It was a fulfilling summer for me. A high point was playing golf with Tommy and the father of Curtis Strange, Tom, at a near-by course where he was the pro. I was embarrassed with my game. Unfamiliar courses and better golfers do me in. Tommy asked me several times to stay on with him full-time and become a teaching pro, even take over his job when he retired. It was tempting.

AT FREDERICK MILITARY ACADEMY we had great collegiality among the faculty and wives, and we were a stronger than average bunch of teachers, turning out students who were grounded in the basics and some of whom were on their way to great careers.

One in particular, Merv Sessoms, a captain in the corps, tracked me down by letter in Galax in 1989 to tell me he had been chosen Teacher of the Year in North Carolina schools and had been crisscrossing the state making speeches. In them he told of his high

school English teacher, Major Cock, who inspired him to be a teacher. What a surprise to receive that letter. Little did I know what had happened to him or that I had had such an influence on his vocation. Merv has become one of those who is inspiring others to become teachers of excellence. "The seed I have scattered," as the song goes.

Frederick was another significant piece of my significant journey.

Chapter 12: Called Again

Auburn, Atlanta, Alpharetta
Age 25-27 (1963-66)

DURING OUR LAST YEAR at Frederick, I took the Graduate Record Exam and applied for scholarships to graduate schools in English. I was successful. My experience in teaching at boys' schools and as head of the English Department at Frederick for two years must have helped, for soon I received scholarship yeses from the University of Tennessee and Auburn University. The National Defense Education Act scholarship to Auburn was better, covering all university and living costs, plus a handsome stipend. With Lynda's teaching salary at Fairfax, Alabama, teaching eleventh grade English (a whopping $3,400, plus some benefits), we were on easy street. We could even save money.

Our course was set. Dr. Blesi, the head of the English Department at Emory and Henry, our favorite professor, wrote excellent letters of recommendation, saying that E&H wanted to hire me when I completed the Ph.D. program. Lynda loved the idea of becoming a college professor's wife and living at our *alma mater* where we met. Our future dreams conversation while driving down to Auburn was enough to alleviate the catastrophes of the trip.

We had packed many UHaul trailers in our short marriage and rented the biggest we could hook to our first new car ever, a white, two-door 1962 Ford with straight gears. With all the newly accumulated pieces of new and used furnishings, books, and brick bookcases, we had a full load. We knew we were in trouble from the start and pulled over to repack the load on the outskirts of Portsmouth. We had too much weight in the back of the trailer, causing the front end of the trailer to lift the back end of the Ford up dangerously relative to swerving. Upon repacking most of the load, we over-compensated and put too much weight in the front of the trailer, putting too much weight on the pulling capacity of the Ford. The bumper was close to the ground, but we were

not about to repack it one more time. By the time we hit Georgia, we were beginning to smoke a little. Our new car smoked and guzzled oil from then on. In all, a very expensive "inexpensive" move.

We had a two-story townhouse apartment—very new compared to the WWII buildings at Frederick—with trees in the yard full of pecans, which we shook down, picked, shelled, and gave for Christmas presents that year. I had a study, which I did not use very much, for, as usual since the seventh grade, I would not hunker down to studies. I continued my pattern of waiting to cram for tests and putting off assignments until the last minute. That's the way I got started at Auburn.

The first class was Old English, with an about-to-retire professor who told wonderful stories during the class, spending very little time having us translate the reading assignments. He was from Mississippi and thought jazz music was the cause of most evil in our society, with elaborate theories to back up his racism. I could not believe he was serious, but would not confront him for fear of failure. There sat twenty educated students humoring this old geezer by laughing at his bizarre worldview. Looking back, I am ashamed.

My best professor taught Robert Browning and assigned us to do a complete bibliography of the hundreds of pieces that he had written. If one was omitted, failure. What a chore for undisciplined types. That November day I was sitting in the huge library trying to crank out another piece of the bibliography assignment when I heard a commotion at the front desk area of the library, so loud that those of us in study carrels all over came out to see what was going on.

The unholy noise in the library was the news of the assassination attempt on JFK. Nobody wanted to talk about it or hold eye contact. I don't remember whether I packed my books or not, but I somehow got home without being run over. I was honest-to-God stupefied. What the hell was going on in our nation? I started getting very angry, seething. President Kennedy had become a symbol of hope and integrity for me, though I had voted in my first presidential election against him and for Nixon, because I was raised a Republican. But I was secretly glad he had won and was more glad as he administered his presidency. He inspired me. And now, O *God*, he lay dying. The awful tragedy shook my foundations.

Lynda heard it on the public address system at school, and a boy in her class whispered for all to hear, "I'm glad they shot him!" By the time she got home from school, about a thirty-minute drive, he was dead. We sort of propped each other up after she came into the apartment. And the long day's journey into night began. I wanted to hit something with all my might. I wanted to forget what I knew. I wanted to scream at something in charge of this absurd universe.

And later the nation and I began to watch TV together, for days. I mourned and cried and breathed hard and walked in and out of the apartment and smoked and prayed and tried to make sense of life and my life. I picked up the little book **Our Faith**, by Emil Brunner, that had made sense to me before. He wrote it for me at this time, calling me to faith in that power that is absolutely not this earthly madness, but has called *me* to do something about it. "Lynda, studying Old English and doing that damn bibliography on Browning makes no sense. I am going to call Bishop Hunt and ask him what I should do." He asked me if I felt called to the ministry again, since I had "lost" my calling at Emory and Henry when he was president there. His question/answer seemed to click. He said he would call Candler School of Theology at Emory University and see if they would receive me, starting the next semester. They would indeed.

I called home to share all this with the folks. Mama was still not home from work, so I spilled it all out to Dad, and added what I hoped would be authority enough for him, that Bishop Hunt thought I had been "called," and he had helped get me into seminary. Dad retorted, "You're a fool!" I remember well his words said over thirty-three years ago. Dad always spoke his mind. He saw that I was giving up a very secure scholarship and a very prestigious teaching career for a vagabond ministry where preachers moved every few years and made small salaries—which is not the situation today.

A couple of days later I told the head of the English Department that I was leaving Auburn to enroll in seminary. He cursed me, for his department would lose its three-year matching NDEA grant money. I was receiving mixed signals about my calling.

The loudest voice was yet to be heard. Lynda did not want to be a preacher's wife. She wanted to be an English professor's wife at

Emory and Henry. But she was of the old school back then, meant to follow her husband into hell, if that was where he was going.

We took another apartment, not as nice, between Emory and her new teaching job in a suburban Atlanta high school at College Park. I remember the apartment as dark and dreary, I think mostly because that was the mood of our relationship at that point. I could do nothing to please her. She became victim to my calling to the ministry and felt trapped. She did not want to hear about my studies. We were living together in separation. But, thank *God*, we experienced a rebirth of our relationship in Alpharetta.

Alpharetta is a place of rich memories for us. We had two "children": Lulu, our half-breed dog, and Scratch, our mongrel cat. We loved them both. Lulu was on a long leash on the clothesline behind the duplex during the day. Every time we came home she would jump as high as our heads trying to lick us. She had a smooth, reddish coat, was long-bodied and short-legged, a cross between a Dachshund and the Lippard's Chihuahua named Chi-Chi. Lulu was so big at birth that her dear mother died. She was full of vitality—some would say hyper—and only content to be touching us some way or other, sitting in my lap as I read theology, or at my feet as I was writing. If I disciplined her hard, she was back near me immediately, licking me frantically. She got me clear on unconditional love, better than any theology book or professor. Poor, lovable Scratch gave us our worst case of fleabites ever. But to this day we cringe when someone says, "We made it from scratch."

We moved to Alpharetta because I was hired as assistant minister in charge of music and youth. It was about an hour's drive to Emory each day, going about 75 mph on the Interstate, just rolling with the flow, in our second new car that Dad sold us at discount, a black '66 Ford *Fairlane* two-door sedan, straight shift, with red interior. A beauty.

Lynda became a much-loved English teacher at Milton High School. As she would do in every place we would live, almost without exception, she adopted "her special one" to care for. This one was a high school girl, poor, with very low self-esteem and few social skills. As always, Lynda helped her to blossom. She was sponsor of this and that, always having kids over to the duplex for special chats and quasi counseling. They loved her for her authentic concern.

We both did the youth programs at Alpharetta First Methodist Church, a congregation of about 200, all white. While we were there, the youth participation grew to between 25-40, through a youth choir, MYF, and special events such as Lay Witness Mission, where visiting youth spent the week-end and witnessed to the presence of Christ in their everyday lives. It was a powerful experience for us all, much more effective than a traditional revival, and its staying power remained vital through a follow-up small group for our youth. Some of them visited other churches to share what was happening in their Christian journey. We became second parents for many of the youth, advising them about their relationships with the opposite sex, with their parents, and about their vocations. I delight in having made contact with several of them in recent years: Jane Burgess, Bobby Herrin, and Jerome Hunter. They were a special group of young people.

The adult choir was a fun and challenging experience for me, especially since I was not too proficient with reading music. My experience with the choral group at Candler School of Theology, two choral groups at Emory and Henry, and choir experience throughout my growing years at Galax gave me what I needed. I was also writing hymns at the time and had the choir to teach them to the congregation. Two favorites follow.

OUR GOD IS BOULNDLESS LOVE

Tune: *Old 134th (St. Michael)*

Our God is boundless love,
Such love defies degree;
Held free within its bounds we live,
God's love, our liberty.

He plants us in His love,
Yet we His love deny;
Our freedom have we turned to chains,
Ourselves we magnify.

Will God His love restrain?
Will He our pride forgive?

He comes to us despite our sin,
He loves that we might live.

Shall we forever fail
To worship and respond?
God, grant that we may hear thy Word,
Thy Word of love, our bond.

God's Word is boundless love,
Such love defies degree;
Held free within its bounds we live,
God's love, our liberty.

I AM YOUR GOD

Tune: *Eisenach*

I am your God and dwell with you;
My promise is my presence free.
No life exists beyond my love;
My spirit you can never flee.

I am your God, within your midst;
Your cry of pain is my lament.
I come to you withholding nought,
Ev'n when the veil of death is rent.

In deepest depths why cry aloud?
In darkest night why light your face?
To you I bend, to you I turn,
For I am He who fashions grace.

Behind, before, above, below,
My love encircles all your need.
I chose the Cross because of love,
Through my dear Son's most loving deed.

We came to love the families of the church, who took us into their homes and lives with great affection and caring. Many of them wanted us to be the pastor family, but I had to remind them that I was just a seminarian. We could have been very happy serving that church. Today, with the sprawl of Atlanta, that almost rural church has become a huge suburban complex of over 2000 members.

I gave thanks that I could get away from the ivory tower and into a *real* environment every day. Seminary was another educational term to live through rather than a vibrant community of faith. I soon came to know the polarity between the fundamentalists and the liberals among the faculty and the student body: everything from faith-healing going on in the chapel to debates over "God is dead" with professor Thomas J. Altizer of the university's religion department. I veered toward the liberals, though followed the faculty who had been influenced by the continental theologians: Barth, Bultmann, Brunner, the Niebuhr brothers, Gogarten, Bonhoeffer, and Tillich. I began to see that I was more of a Lutheran than a Methodist, although I had a strong appreciation for Wesley's disciplined small group movement.

My favorite classes were with Theodore Runyon, a student of Carl Michalson and Friedrich Gogarten. His theology, in the mold of those mentioned above, made sense to me. Through an early class assignment to write my personal credo, he helped me to see that I did not have a theology anchored in experience, but in abstraction. I realized that I had been theologizing abstractly for years, at least since my days at the youth center bull sessions in high school.

During seminary I vowed to find out what I believed and live it. I liked the way Manfred Hoffman, with his absolutely-sure style and guttural language, taught Barth. I imagined his sounding like Barth. Barth passed my authenticity test because he fought the church leaders who capitulated to the Nazi regime, even at great personal risk. Bonhoeffer's **Letters and Papers from Prison** introduced me to the martyr who has influenced my Christian faith as much as any other person I have read about. Another of that ilk was John Woolman, whose journal had a strong impact as I learned how he helped revolutionize the States through the early abolitionist movement. Theology that was born out of human crisis spoke to me. I did not trust pedantic theologians.

Norman Perrin taught New Testament and introduced me to Bultmann, whose **Jesus and the Word** and **Jesus Christ and Mythology** liberated me relative to all I could not literally believe in the New Testament. I was left with the task of finding meaning through demythologizing the scriptures. I found the scriptures to be the truth in a new way. I went on to demythologize the creeds and hymns of the church as well. They too became true for me.

I had other memorable classes. Earl Brewer taught sociology of religion, and though he was not a lively lecturer, his assignments were adventurous. I went with others to Americus, Georgia, for several days to conduct Dr. Brewer's prayer survey. We knocked on doors, told them who we were, and that we were there to ask them a few questions about prayer. They were a little dubious but usually invited us in. Before the interviews were over, more than half of the interviewees were misty eyed and confessing, sometimes in depth, as they remembered eventful prayer moments in their lives, usually centered around crises. A stranger walks in, asks a few questions, and awesome moments are remembered. Interviews can be profound. I understood firsthand how religious we Americans are, or at least south Georgians.

I remember homiletics, the preaching class, with pain and amusement. Standing up front in the chapel with guys and the professor spread around the pews, I failed miserably during the first sermon presentation without notes. I had tried to memorize the text, but a page into it I forgot the next words and froze. I stood there for at least a minute, which felt like fifteen. Finally, Professor Brokoff asked me to sit down, after reminding us all that a few notes are good for such a situation. I wanted to hide.

A classmate preached about Simon Peter. He got carried away and started pounding on the pulpit: "What we need are more Peters (pound). Peters that stand up (pound), Peters that stand up proud and firm (pound), Peters to rise to the occasion (pound)." By that time we were rolling in the pews, as the Alabama student stopped, looking around without a clue. The good professor hid his laughing behind his handkerchief, cleared his throat, and asked the student to proceed without interruptions. We took big breaths and struggled to get control.

The most difficult class by far was pastoral counseling at Grady

Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, the huge inner-city structure that dealt with most of the welfare patients. Without much preparation, I was assigned to a ward for females, mostly with terminal illnesses. All I had to do was go into the rooms of women who knew they were dying, get related, and be a healing presence. It was a terrifying responsibility. One middle-aged black woman attacked me verbally early on: "What are you doing here? What difference will it make, your mumbo-jumbo? And don't ask me any of your stupid questions. Just leave me alone and let me die in peace." What was I there for, anyway? What difference did it make, my being there? I was not going to heal anyone. Why even pray for healing? What should I pray for besides comfort and peace? "*God*, take me from this place!" was my real, unspoken prayer.

When I read my case studies in class, the professor and students kept asking me how I felt, what did I think was my role with the patients, what I hoped to accomplish, etc. I ended the course not much better able to answer their questions. I felt inept and helpless most of the time. My Grady experience called my role as pastor into question.

As a member of the Candler Choraliers I received a partial scholarship. Besides leading chapel services, we represented the seminary during the annual spring break. Two memorable trips were to Orlando, where we stepped off the bus to be overcome with the smell of orange blossoms, and to Mississippi churches the year after the Civil Rights legislation was passed. We did not know what to expect, but found the church people normal and very gracious as they took us into their homes. Of course, we were a lily-white group ourselves.

While I was in seminary, Diane's fiancé, Dick Galbreath, invited us out to a swanky restaurant in Atlanta to meet us. It was important for her that we approve of him, especially since it was his second marriage. We were very impressed and encouraged the relationship. Lynda and Diane's father, Joe, had memorable words related to his second son-in-law-to-be: "Lynda married a Cock; Diane is going to marry a Dick; all we need now is for young Hal to marry Mary F- - -." To visualize his chuckling as he said that—especially as his wife, Blanche, chastised him—makes it all the more worthy of words of a lifetime uttered by a family member.

At age 60, Dad was very nervous, and against his will, came

with Mama to my seminary graduation in Atlanta, driving their red 1963 *Thunder Bird* with the black top. That was the car Mama learned to drive (she bought two more *T'Birds* after that). Dad was very nervous by that time in his life, age 60. He had parked the *T'Bird* at the end of the corner on a hill, so no one would back into him as they parked or pulled out. Of all things, a car on the next corner in front of the *T'Bird* rolled back twenty yards and hit Dad's car, leaving a really bad fender dent. Dad could not handle it. We finally got him into the car and on the way back to Galax. He forgot to say "congratulations" to his graduating son, who graduated *Cum Laude* with a Masters of Divinity degree. My seminary experience started out and ended badly for Dad: he fussed as I began seminary and wished he'd never come to my ending exercises.

WHAT WOULD I SAY about seminary education upon reflection, some thirty years later? First of all, it was an existential impact for me, being addressed by mentors who would go with me the rest of my life. I still reach for Bonhoeffer and Bultmann. I also have books by Runyon and Perrin that I still refer to. I would have to say that my personal theology took a great leap forward. I began "to know" what I knew.

Second, I was not at all satisfied with the practical learning offered at seminary. I was not taught how to really prepare a sermon, how to really preach, how to make the liturgy come alive, how to really counsel the sick and dying, how to educate the laity, how to help the laity plan for and implement the internal and external mission of their church, how to pray and meditate, how to appreciate other religions, how to make the scriptures come alive through explication. I am glad I went straight through, graduating in three semesters and one summer. That was enough. On to two more churches and the Ecumenical Institute where my advanced education for ministry began.

Chapter 13: Ministry of the Laity

Asheville
Age 27-29 (1966-68)

DURING THE SPRING of my final year at seminary, I took my first airplane flight—free—paid for by Central Methodist Church of Asheville, North Carolina. It was a beautiful flight right up the mountain range between Atlanta and Asheville. I was a very nervous fellow during the hour flight, experiencing absolutely no control over what was happening with that plane. I could not even see who was flying it. What a profound relief to land and pull to a stop.

The committee and the District Superintendent, an ex-pastor of the church, liked me and my credentials, and laid out the position of assistant minister for the over 1500 person congregation, with emphasis on youth and young adults, and all other duties a minister performs. I could tell it was a done-deal when they showed me the furnished two-bedroom apartment at Gracelyn Gardens that the church leased for the family who took the position. It was very nice, and had a king-size bed for the very tall minister before us. I cannot remember how much the salary offer was but do remember being well pleased with free housing, furnishings, and benefits.

Lynda was excited when I told her about the city, the church and the people, the position, and the apartment with the king-sized bed, in a nice neighborhood about ten minutes from the church. She said she would love it until someone called her "Sister Cock, the wife of Brother Cock." When school was out that spring, we loaded a UHaul truck and wound our way up that mountain to Asheville, our new home for the next two years.

I'd no sooner pulled up to the church when Dr. Nicholson, the new senior minister, informed me that we had a funeral to conduct. That was my first ever. We led twenty-eight more that first year, several of which I conducted alone, at the church, at funeral homes, at gravesides.

That was the year I got on my hobbyhorse against funeral homes taking the place of the church by trying to twist arms to make sure the services were held at the funeral home, for more money and less trouble for them. Also, I was appalled at the cost of the funeral home expenses. One funeral home would not even sell a simple pine box if requested. That was when Lynda and I started discussing our being cremated.

The congregation was aging; therefore, there was much emphasis on young adults. During the two years we were there, over two hundred young adult families participated in church services and programs, a marked increase. This happened through the weekly evangelism visits to homes of potential members, which I organized for our lay people to carry out. The new families then entered one of the adult membership classes that Dr. Nicholson and I taught, and after that a regular adult class and/or a weekly small group meeting in homes of members—as many as ten groups were organized, with emphasis on Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. An adult and youth Lay Witness Mission, led by Ben Johnson, its creator, catalyzed much participation. The youth also formed small groups in homes, in addition to their other spirit-nurturing activities.

I began to preach *the ministry of the laity*, fanatically some would say, through membership classes, church school, sermons, newsletters, and face to face conversations. I knew this was the key to the renewal of the church, and Christian *avant-garde* literature was pushing the theme as well. I was surprised that this was such a radical idea for educated, modern people. They had been raised on the image that the leadership of the church was really in the hands of the ordained ministers. My following newsletter excerpt countered that mentality:

> *I read recently that 97 percent of the people of the church are laymen. . . . The driving principle of the Reformation was* ***the priesthood of all believers****. Not until* ***each*** *believer takes seriously the calling to fulfill his or her distinctive ministry will renewal come to Central Methodist Church.* ***You are a minister of Christ if you are baptized****. Literally, that means that* ***all 100 percent of us are ministers****. A nice little perk goes with this: those two parking places outside that say 'Minister' are for all of us. Or maybe better, we should put a 'Minister' sign on every parking space.*

Bill and Chris Jobe, a newly married couple, became the symbol of the ministry of the laity at Central. Bill's success as a lawyer, his experience as a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., and his deep commitment to the Gospel and the church set him up for the role of minister. We gave him more to do than any layman in the history of Central, probably. Other lay persons were catalyzed to deeper commitment because of the example of Bill and Chris. I noticed a new walk and talk among the laity as the concept of "all 100 percent of us are ministers" took hold. Something very profound clicked in their sense of who they were. As they took charge of *their* church in new ways, Dr. Nicholson and I looked on proudly.

The struggle began to manifest itself in the question of mission. Does each one of us ministers have a mission or do we have a distinctive mission as the congregation, and/or groups within the congregation? It was good to understand oneself as a Christian mother, banker, teacher, student, or grandparent. But what was the self-conscious, corporate ministry of all 100 percent of us ministers at Central? Obviously most members of churches do not feel any real passion for the outreach of the church through the denominational giving. Most do not even know where the mission money goes. So how does a congregation fulfill its ministry beyond its walls in a self-conscious, obedient Christian way?

I began to get in trouble with Central over mission. Just a few blocks away from the church was a blight of slum landowner housing. I say it this way, because a man who was gouging the poor renters owned the houses. It became known to a group of us young ministers around town. who met occasionally, that the main water pipe into one of his houses was broken and the poor mother and her children living there were sent a bill for $106 that month, like $300-$400 today. The owner, when approached, was not about to fix it. We found ourselves a professional camera operator who put together a video called *The $106 Water Bill*, which we showed to churches and other groups. It got the press we intended.

Soon I was called on the carpet before a special committee of Central Church, convened by the Board. Those nice men—I do not remember any women—who smiled at me, shook my hand, and slapped my back at church, normally, were not as pleasant at that meeting. "Who

did you think you were, out there doing that tabloid movie? You are a hired representative of Central Methodist Church, and everything you do is a reflection upon this church. All you had to do was to go to that owner and he would have done the right thing. The Christian thing for you to do is your job with the adults, youth, and children, and leave outside social issues alone." I was mad but kept my mouth shut. Someone spoke up, tried to soften the blows, and complimented me on all I had done and how happy they were to have me. Dr. Nicholson, bless him, spoke about the integrity of my convictions and said that finally I was not only free to do what I understood to be God's will, but was obliged to do it.

No threats were made, no restraints placed on me, but I got the message that those would come if I persisted. I was risking my position at Central. I laughed later with Lynda that at least I was not whoring around—just giving the church a bad name by trying to fix an isolated water problem. I got out there into mission, but did not take any of the 1500 Central ministers with me. Stupid. How did one go about involving the church in local mission, anyway?

Part of my weekly mission was visiting the sick at home and in hospitals. I struggled with praying for healing. The fact is, I struggled with praying, period. Yet, when I held their hands, articulated the most authentic prayer I could, sometimes their squeeze of my hand and the moistened eyes led me to believe that a real connection was happening. Trying to get beyond pat and pious phrases at moments of crisis was hard. What does one say to a person who just saw his or her loved one die? I found that a touch or an arm around the shoulder was the most natural thing until they wanted to talk. I was not good at saying the person had slipped into heaven or had gone to be with Jesus. Those second-story images did not make sense to me without my demythologizing them, and I was pretty sure most members of church tried honestly to believe in heaven at such times, unnatural as it was, or just as honestly closed their ears and hearts to the other-worldly jargon. It was hard to tell which was going on with some people. My integrity would not let me play both roles. I did a lot of listening, nudging persons to reflect and ask questions freely. Yet, I never quite knew what was the right thing to do or say unless I had really come to know the person and

his or her distinctive way of expressing the faith. I felt trapped when some persons seemed to expect a certain style or expression from me, *the Minister.*

Many persons ministered to me when I went to minister to them. One dear soul, Mary, was my favorite minister of the 1500 at Central. She was clear that she was to minister to anyone who came into her room. Consequently, I went to see her more often than I did the others. She had a huge room in a kind of nursing home, with pillows, dolls, and doilies everywhere, for that was her job now, making these things to sell and to give away to her friends, like me.

Mary was 55ish, large figured, and a chain smoker. But her distinguishing mark: her legs had been amputated up to the trunk of her body. It hurt me to watch her struggle to position herself on her bed up against solid pillow props to sit erect and do her work. When I entered her room, she would beam and start her raucous laughing and talking to greet me. She was a worldly-wise woman and could tell a good joke. Before I would leave, she would give me some little gift and say, "Okay, John, pray me one of those good prayers of yours. I need it, and you need to pray it." She was wonderfully direct.

No cat and mouse games with Mary. Would she complain? Never. This was her given life and she was sure enough going to live it up fully, legless and all. She told me outright that one's spirit and heart were not in the legs. "I just walk on water," she loved to say. And she did. (She knew the art of demythologizing the scriptures well.) After visiting her, I had more courage to go see the whiners and little-faiths.

I WAS WELL ACQUAINTED with the nurses and attendants at St. Joseph's Hospital where one of the biggest events of my life took place. John Preston Cock II was born there on August 4, 1967, after lying around in his poor mommy's tummy for over ten months. He wore us out with waiting. I took Lynda to the hospital mid-afternoon and stayed with her for several hours, playing cards, which she never did except at such moments, and doing all the things to make her comfortable and to lessen her fears and anxieties. She had been under the care of a fine pediatrician, Dr. Macatee. He popped in and out a few times toward the

last, making his little jokes. About midnight, I gave her many hugs and kisses and left her with the nurses.

A couple of hours later, Dr. Macatee came out into the waiting room with John's head in his hand, his body cradled up his arm—without much covering him, and not thoroughly cleaned yet. He said, "Mr. Cock, come here. I want you to see something strange." I almost fainted from fear. When I got to him, he held him up and said, "The boy's been in there so long, he's rusted," of course referring to his full head of red hair. With that, and "Your wife's fine," they turned and marched back through the swinging doors. I just leaned back on the tiled wall, overcome with a rush in my being. Such emotion I had never felt, and I had only seen him whiz by, not even touched him. I was like Paul, blinded and knocked off my ass.

The new little chick in the Cock house was more a blessing than we dreamed. I loved to rock him and blow into his little eyes until he collapsed in sleep. I loved to wrestle with him on the king-size bed until one day his shoulder popped. Paralyzed, I knew I had broken him. He cried a little and went right on. He loved to swing outside on the apartment playground, one of those little boxed-in swings with the wooden slat coming down in front for him to hold onto. He loved to ride in the car seat up front with us, one of those old-fashioned car seats that was functional, not safe, with a little steering wheel for him to drive and go "budd'n, budd'n."

All of his grandparents and his great-grandfather, Johnny P., for whom he was named, came for his baptism. He wore his grandfather Peyton's baptismal gown and yawned a holler in his unusually deep voice, calling forth a roll of laughter from the congregation. I reached him over the altar rail to Dr. Nicholson for the baptism. They "gooed" at each other in the process. It took, for John has been a spirit man his whole life.

Around the end of his first year, one of our members cut his pretty red curly locks, and Lynda cried buckets full.

I used to take him with me out to the near-by golf course practice area, where I pitched and putted after dinner when possible. I relished practicing golf, a contemplative experience. Or at least that was my rationalization. I played at least once a week and won the Methodist

Ministers 1967 Asheville Invitational Championship at Grove Park Inn. No money, just a trophy. It really did not take much to beat the other ministers. I do not remember, but I probably shot in the high 70's or low 80's to win. They razzed me with comments like "too much golfing and not enough preaching."

We got to know our neighbors at Gracelyn Gardens and enjoyed them. They too were mostly young adults. In the next building was a Muslim from Tehran, who taught at a local college, and was married to a quiet, blond American. He and I played some golf and had dramatic arguments over the merits of Islam and Christianity. They even attended a couple of our church services, when I preached.

I preached not so often at the Sunday morning service, but led the ritual up to the sermon. I was in charge of Sunday evening services, which were times of experimentation with the liturgy. We did conduct some experimentation in the morning service as well, especially the all-jazz service of worship with a professional visiting jazz ensemble—a rousing service, not enjoyed by all. I did dialogue sermons in the evening quite often, with another ordained minister, a lay adult, or a youth. We had people witnessing from the congregation, music of all stripes, spontaneous praying, videos, and lectures with discussion.

ALL WAS NOT SO FULFILLING during that first year. I went to Charlotte to stand before the Methodist committee for ordination for my deacon's orders. Some twenty ministers sat and looked benignly on as the minister in charge began to ask me questions, like "Do you drink, Brother Cock?" to which I answered "No." I had never approved of drinking for several reasons.

"Do you smoke, Brother Cock?"

"Yes," I answered, for I believed in being honest.

"Will you stop smoking?"

"I hadn't planned to."

"But, Brother Cock, I thought you understood that smoking was prohibited for Methodist ministers."

"I'm sorry, but I don't see it as a real moral problem, sir."

A significant pause.

"Well, Brother Cock, I think we will have to excuse you while we discuss your answer."

As I waited outside for ten or more minutes, I could hear the heated dialogue inside, though I could not hear the particulars. They finally invited me back in.

The minister in charge smiled a false smile, held out his hand and said, "It's with a great deal of reservation, Brother Cock, that we extend to you the right hand of Christian fellowship," to which there were some disapproving mutters among the ministers. Obviously the other brothers were split in their reception of me. A few of those supporting me came up to congratulate me before I left.

John Wesley would have cringed at their petty moralism, though he would have figured out a way to get me to stop smoking. They did not ask one question about my faith, about my vision for the church, about my understanding of the bedrock principles of Methodism, about my devotional life. They did not ask me if I would refrain from wearing jewelry, which Wesley also asked prospective ministers, which was hardly an important question in his list of mostly questions of faith.

I was also very disappointed with the other ministers' meetings of the denomination at the district and conference level, which seemed political and self-serving: how can we get better appointments, raise the minimum salary, and legislate more benefits and perks? It was like belonging to a union. The second most important set of priorities came out crassly as more members and more buildings. I was repulsed and ashamed, and spoke my piece a number of times, probably not to the benefit of my career. But I knew the three men that counted most supported me: my senior minister, my district superintendent, and the man who got me back into the ministry, Earl Hunt, my bishop, who was also preaching church renewal and the ministry of the laity.

TWO SENTINEL EVENTS at Lake Junaluska—the majestic mountain retreat center for southeastern Methodists—during those two years refreshed me spiritually. The first was a week with Carlyle Marney, a maverick, retired, Southern Baptist minister, who moved to the mountains to read, write, and lead retreats that would save the lives of

clergy for the life of the church. He was a radical man of *God*, a poet, and a spiritual surgeon. From his slumped position in his chair, he led us ministers into a love for the scriptures, theology, and a new vision for the church. He relished calling something bullshit when it was. I delighted in his authentic presence that inspired my sojourn with him. I gained freedom, courage, and insight for the crusade to renew the church.

The second event would later lead to a dramatic change in our lives. A college friend invited Lynda and me to participate in a Methodist Student Movement conference being held at Junaluska for hundreds of college students, conducted by the Ecumenical Institute out of Chicago. We had read about the Institute's church renewal work in *Together*, the national Methodist magazine, through an interview with Joseph Wesley Mathews, the Dean (March 1966):

> *Q: What can laymen actually do in renewal of the church?*
>
> ***JWM:*** *When an elite cadre moves out from the status quo, calling into question and dreaming new visions, these are the ones who lay down their lives on behalf of the mass of humanity. History never has been without the people of God, and it is not now and never shall be. The people of God are those who move out into the twilight zone, onto the beachheads, those who throw their bodies over the barbed wire, calling upon the mass of humanity to move into greater possibilities of humanness. And while they move, they declare the one word without which no human being has ever been a human being and never will. That is the word of Jesus Christ.*

I was impacted by the article and fascinated by the group and their methods. I clipped it for my church renewal file.

A year later, *Time* magazine (March 17, 1967) did an article in their religion section on the Institute, subtitled *Church Laboratory for the Future*. The article ends, "the institute is able to 'articulate the mood, style and pattern of the post-modern world view' in ways that conventional churches cannot. Members of the institute . . . are 'guinea pigs' who offer themselves in experiments that seek to discover 'what

new life style and structures are necessary' for Christianity's years ahead."

We jumped at the chance to see them for ourselves. I knew they would be different, even strange, and were they ever. With our friend, we sat in on a faculty session preparing about twenty-five seminar leaders for the next day. They were to lead their groups in discussing Tillich's sermon, *You Are Accepted.* The precision and thoroughness with which they approached the text amazed me. They were serious educators. Their methods meant to provoke and to bring forth a decision "for or against" the essence of the subject matter, or at least to allow one to know better what he or she believed. When they turned to rehearse the closing worship rituals for the next day's groups, the leaders shocked us with their loud chanting and swaying. Overall, they seemed dedicated to their task of the renewal of the church. A little scary to be around, yet very intriguing. Lynda and I had a big conversation on the way back to Asheville late that night and decided we wanted to find out more about them firsthand. I went back to work knowing that I had not been overly revolutionary in my insistence on the renewal of the church by the laity. I felt there were colleagues out there, thank *God.* Their commitment inspired me. There was hope for the church.

DURING THE WINTER of our second year at Central, I received a phone call from Richmond, asking if I would be intersted in becoming the minister of education at Reveille *United* (church union had taken place) Methodist Church, the mecca of the Virginia Conference, and even larger than Central. It so happened that Diane, Lynda's sister and a member of Reveille, recommended me to her minister, Dr. Purnell Bailey, a radio and syndicated newspaper pastor. We went and liked what we saw, especially a greater opportunity for releasing my passion for the ministry of the laity through lay training. We prepared for the next move, leaving behind so many new Christian friends and colleagues. We cherished our years in Asheville.

Chapter 14: Reveille Call

Richmond
Age 29-30 (1968-69)

WHEN WE MOVED to Richmond, with Diane's help, we found a house to rent at 4408 Bromley Lane, close to Reveille Church. Johnny was ten months old, crawling up and down the wooden stairs, walking behind his stroller—no longer wanting to be pushed. He was into everything. We have a picture of him sitting in the middle of a big suitcase on the bed as we were unpacking, throwing the contents out with a mischievous look on his face. His little belly was fat. His pants would not stay up, so his shirts were always too short to cover his tummy. Lynda was full-time mother for sure while I began to settle into my new position as minister of education.

I had a huge office, partly an informal meeting space or classroom, but like everything at Reveille, large and fine. Reveille buildings were Williamsburg colonial-style, antique brick, set off by boxwoods, birch trees, and other ancient trees, on a beautifully landscaped seven-acre lot. Its postcard says, "adjudged to be one of the most beautiful churches in World Methodism." True.

I had a part-time youth director for the summer and a part-time secretary. I even had a Dictaphone, on which I began to dictate volumes, starting with meaningful yet unorganized scraps from the past. For example, I built a full file folder on the ministry of the laity. I immediately began a weekly news sheet that went to the membership. The second one for June 21, 1968, which the chairman of the commission on education, Ed Mills, wrote (with my help), went like this:

> *As Minister of Education, Mr. Cock will do his utmost to continue and establish a ministry of education here at Reveille. By* ***ministry of education*** *we mean not just a* ***ministry to our people,*** *but a ministry* ***of our people, by our people, through our people.*** *His major responsibility*

is to help us prepare for our several individual ministries as laymen [I had not learned to say ***lay persons*** *yet] and our corporate ministry as this part of the Church of Jesus Christ. Biblically, he is responsible for equipping us for our ministry. For example, the concept of* ***church school*** *we will take quite literally: this will become increasingly a school for motivating and training us to better carry out our ministry at and beyond Reveille, so that she becomes the instrument of ministry God envisions for her.*

In the October 18 newsletter, I included the following true/false test that I gave at the beginning of the September book review of **The Ministry of the Laity**, by Francis O. Ayres:

How Do You Score as a Minister?

True or False:
1. A professional minister should live a more holy life than a layman.
2. There are four ministers at Reveille.
3. A good layman helps the ordained minister do the work of the church.
4. A church's success or failure depends primarily on the professional ministers.
5. Literally, a professional minister is a part of the ***laity****.*
6. The professional minister is the head of the church.
7. 100 percent of Reveille's laity are ministers, good or bad.
8. All aspiring church members are called to be ministers.
9. All baptized members of the church are ministers.
10. A good professional minister helps the lay ministers do the work of the church.
(My answers—False*: 1,2,3,4,6;* True*: 5,7,8,9,10)*

I catalyzed a core of adults and youth who began to take charge of the educational ministry of the church along with me. We met regularly and kept adding on new persons who shared our vision. We began to train the church school teachers—who taught some 400 persons weekly—every way we could think of, although some of them were committed to

the International Bible Lesson series and would not be involved with what we were doing. Most teachers, however, came to special training events. One of our university professors, Vivian Ely, who was head of the education department at VCU, became one of our key leaders and trainers of the new educational curricula we were drawing together.

I took special classes in Christian education at Union Seminary in Richmond. We began adult membership seminars in my office during church school; we set up a Lay Witness Mission for our adults and youth, which helped to catalyze many small renewal groups for spiritual sharing and strength; we sent a group to visit the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., whose books **Call to Commitment** and **Journey Inward, Journey Outward** became foundational sources for our educational vision and strategies; we even conducted a "Church of the Savior" month; we began to influence the monthly book reviews at the church library, which had a large attendance; we held spirit life retreats for adults and youth; we organized a formally commissioned task force on Reveille's Mission and Structure, which began to reshape its future; we conducted a Sunday morning dialogue sermon on Christian education, led by myself and three of our education core leaders, Ed Temple, Virginia Binns (the church librarian), Vivian Ely, and the chairman of the board, Bill Lester, who were among the symbolic lay leaders of the church and were taken quite seriously by some five hundred laity attending that service. We were doing tens of tactics to bring about renewal within Reveille and to change the image of the laity to see themselves as ministers. We were having success.

IN THE FALL, Diane and her husband, Dick, who were dabbling in real estate, came upon a real house deal for us, across the Nickel Bridge, south of the city. We negotiated it down to $21,000 and jumped on it. We assumed a 3¾ percent GI Loan. Our first house ever, and payments less than renting. A dream come true, for Lynda especially. It was in a quiet little neighborhood on Osoge Road, with a nice size lawn, tall shade trees, a bay window framed in wood, and the rest of the house bricked; inside, a thick carpeted living room which stepped up to a dining room (Johnny liked jumping off the little step and rolling into the living

room), three small bedrooms, a combo kitchen/den, bath; outside, a connected storage room, a concrete patio, and two apple trees. Lynda did a great job of cleaning it up and catalyzing me to strip and refinish antique furniture that she scouted out. I hated that job. Dick relished it and finished pieces off for us when I quit. Again, Lynda was sadly convinced I was not like her father.

After eight years of marriage we were beginning another struggle. I came home one day late from the office to a crying wife.

"What's wrong?" I asked genuinely.

She told me through her sobs, "You know what's wrong. You stay at that church doing *your great work*, day and night, and come home whenever. I'm here with Johnny all day, everyday, in this house. I feel left out."

She was having a vocational crisis. It had been about two years since she was last in the classroom. She missed the joy and challenge of teaching. Although she loved being with Johnny full-time, she had never imagined herself as a stay-at-home-mom. She had worked for the first seven years of our marriage. Like most young couples at that point in the marriage, we were having ourselves a struggle, manifest every which way.

IN NOVEMBER, Carl Ennis, a Methodist minister near Richmond, contacted us about a potential course for clergy families to be taught by the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago. He and Bill Newkirk, a layman from D.C., who was a ranking staff in the Forestry Department, came to Richmond to talk with interested clergy families about the seminar. As it turned out, Carl and I headed up recruitment, site selection, the brochure, and all other local coordination for the event. We set the date for January 1969 at Roslyn Episcopal Center. About forty attended, including Lynda and me. She was excited to be away from home with me and other adults for three nights. Little did she know how the course would deal with her vocational malaise.

George Holcombe, a Methodist minister from Louisiana, and Jim Addington, a layman, both from the staff of the Ecumenical Institute (EI), led the Parish Leadership Colloquy, as it was called. The first half

was a reintroduction to twentieth century theology; the second half, building models to take back to the local parish and congregation to implement.

We started out the first session, "The Question of God," with a lecture on the theological revolution, changing emphasis from "Who am I?" to "What do I?" We then learned the study methodology (charting) for the four papers we would look at and discuss. The first paper was an excerpt from Rudolph Bultmann's paper on *Faith*, lifting up times and experiences when the question of God is raised in our lives. That mysterious power that delivers us into such situations and demands our response, Bultmann calls "God."

EI was very particular with language as we found out when they kept pushing us for life examples of what we meant when we used theological language. One could not get away with words like *God, Christ, Holy Spirit,* and *Church* without "grounding" them: what "going-on-ness" one points to in his or her life when using those words was what the colloquy was all about. Most church persons, they maintained, did not know what they meant when they used the holy words; therefore, churchy jargon kept second-story, other-worldly images of faith alive that did not sustain one in his or her daily life, and also turned off would-be church participants.

I found myself wanting to say *amen* many times. Several others, including a seminarian and a social programs director from the Methodist conference center, became irritated early on when the pedagogues kept asking them what they meant when they used the word "God," and they could not come forth with seemingly satisfactory answers. I am sure the two up front were being pedagogical in order to provoke authentic struggle, which they would have said enhanced education. Bultmann is very clear. Did we agree with him or not? Was his image of God true or not? To answer those questions, one was declaring what his image of God was. This clash of images, I later learned, was what they meant by the methodology of "imaginal education." It was obvious that they were out to have us clarify our foundational life images to see if they were adequate for living. If not, we were being given permission to alter them. The process indicated change and pain.

During the second session we dealt with the "Happening of Grace," or the "Christ Event," as they also called it. During the lecture

the pedagogues offended several more participants as they graphically walked through one example after another of personal life events that had burst illusions—that stuck a pin into the balloon of one's supposedly integrated life—therefore giving back one's real life to live as given, through the yes response of faith. Everyone knew that being confronted with raw truth by one's mate could be a life-changing event, but few wanted to associate that happening with the Christ they knew from Sunday school and church. The pedagogues inferred that grace was part of the very structure of life, that it happened to every human, and that the church came along and named that going-on-ness the Jesus Christ Event.

We then charted and discussed Paul Tilllich's sermon, *You Are Accepted.* Probably all present had read at least parts of that sermon, but it came to us as brand new through the dialogical method. There was much debate over what is sin and what it is not. Tillich named sin the life dynamic of *separation* from self, others, and the ground of being. Then we went through the grace happening paragraph, sentence by sentence, being asked "When has that happened to you?" Obviously, persons were deeply touched by the realization that grace had happened to them over and over and that they were indeed accepted just as they were, separated, broken, sinful. It sounded and felt so revelatory, but upon further reflection it was the same Gospel dynamic we had heard before, only in this-worldly terms that made sense. There was healing going on through that crazy, difficult methodology, through the leadership of those pushy guys up front. My soul was getting a message and a massage.

The third session, "The Life-style of the Holy Spirit," started with a lecture on the roles a person of freedom plays. I remember well the quote, "The situation is never your problem." We were addressed by numerous examples of the style of freedom that finally answered to no one. Then we tackled an excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's **Ethics**, on *Freedom.* We were confronted with the truth that if one is 100 percent free and 100 percent obedient, he or she is the "responsible man" or the authentic human. We worked our way through the straits of those two "humanly impossible" sets of percentages: absolutely obedient to everyone and absolutely free from the authority of anyone or anything, even the authority of the Bible. Every decision is to be made in the crucible of *deciding for oneself* what is the will of God and then doing

"had faith in God" as Jesus did. The air was very rare after that session. We were under judgment: our churches were not being the church as we may have come into the seminar thinking. The hope in the midst of the judgment is that the church dynamic, however small, is present in every group.

We had finished the first half of the colloquy and were drained spiritually and physically. Were we ever ready for the practical! During the next four sessions, they challenged us in a quite different way, guiding us through the most thorough context and planning process we had ever seen relative to our local congregation. We heard lectures on contextual ethics, the external mission of the local congregation, the internal dynamics of the local congregation, and the spirit movement. We drew a grid of the world, did a global problemat, gridded our local parishes, did our parish problemat and strategic objectives, built our congregational training plan and our local cadre operational plan. We had a plan in hand to go back and revolutionize our local congregation if we decided to implement it. An awesome consideration.

All that was left was the closing ritual and evaluation. We had done worship experimentation all through the four days, even art forms and conversations over meals. However, the closing ritual was the high point. George took a loaf of bread and tearing it in two said, "This is the brokenness of life. We can take it into ourselves and feast upon it," and he did, passing it to Jim to do the same. Then George took a cup of water from in front of him, poured most of it out on the table and said, "This is the spilled-out-ness of life, and we drink it (which he did), knowing that our lives, just as they are, are good." Awe was thick, hanging over the room. The central ritual of the church came to life. Our images swirled into another orbit.

During the evaluation, many shared in one way or another that we felt like we had been together for a month, because we had experienced so much depth and made so many decisions about our parishes. Some got out their negative criticisms, but for every one mentioned, someone else turned it into a positive reflection on the colloquy. George and Jim told us about the work of the Ecumenical Institute, and how the Institute was some two hundred clergy and lay, and their families, who were modeling their life together in the ghetto of Chicago after the thrid order

it with "open eyes and a joyous heart."

Lynda and I floated out of the seminar and back to our room. We were giddy with the fascination and fear of the freedom we had just rediscovered. We were filled with possibility and surely knew we had some big decisions to make. We began to see we could go anywhere, do anything. We truly experienced our freedom anew. I found it hard to breathe.

We needed a break and looked forward to an evening of art forms: Picasso's *Guernica* and the award winning movie *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, with Anthony Quinn, Mickey Rooney, and Jackie Gleason. It was not a light evening, either the Picasso conversation or the movie, with the long conversation afterwards, where we found out we were having a test on the colloquy thus far: where did you see the activity of "God"? the "Christ event"? the freedom style of the "Holy Spirit"? We thought, "But this is not a religious movie." They said it is a piece of life and is therefore as religious as any other piece of life. What we came to realize was that Miss Grace Miller in the movie, who was a social worker out to do good in her liberal way, was taking away freedom from the main character she was out to "save." Even a mobster delivered the Word to bring new life to the punch-drunk heavyweight. Theology is happening in every life at every moment was what that session was all about. What we had wrapped up was coming unwrapped. We were learning the old-fashioned way.

The next morning came the "Church" section. The lecture was riveting, talking about *the people of God*, and *God's people*: both loved of God, but the first, who have always been in history, give themselves on behalf of all the rest. We heard a distinguished roll call of those in history who had decided to be the church and what difference it had made. That was the lure. We next charted H. Richard Niebuhr's one-page zinger called *The Church as Social Pioneer*. During that discussion we got very clear on what the church is not and is, and that it has nothing to do with the institutional building on the corner called "church"—in the first instance. Niebuhr was talking dynamically: when you see this, this, and this going on, that is what I point to and call "church." Again, it is a dynamical part of life, built right in. Most clear was that the church dynamic always acted on "behalf of" the other, not itself. The body of Christ "reduplicated the deed of Christ." The body of Christ

expeiments in Europe. They asked for our financial support, and told of seminars we could set up for our church members and friends. George turned to David DeBerry, the black conference bureaucrat, to send us out as a group, and as he was thinking about that, George addressed his life by telling him how strong a leader he could be, even another Moses, if he had the courage. Of course, David had a hard time saying much after that. The colloquy was over for everyone but us.

WE TOOK George and Jim to eat at Diane's house. George volunteered to prepare some Cajun-style raw oysters, being the good Louisianan he was. I almost got sick watching him eat them. We ended up in a deep conversation about vocation as we asked them questions about EI and their life-style as a family order. They suggested we come to Chicago for the spring eight-week Academy for Global Churchmen, beginning in April. Lynda said something to suggest that it would be hard as a young mother, to which George said that one could be the body of Christ or a mother sow. Instead of caring for one or two children, he challenged us to build stuctures that would care for many children, to be responsible church revolutionaries to look beyond "me, myself, and my canary." We were offended with his images, but got the message. The conversation seemed to lose its power after that; however, looking back, all our lives radically changed. We drove the guys to our place to sleep and drove them to the airport the next day.

One of the cadre plans Lynda and I made during the colloquy was to recruit a core of lay persons from Reveille to a Religious Studies I seminar taught by Ecumenical Institute. Within a month, about fifteen of us from Reveille, including Lynda and me, joined with a dozen from other churches at a nearby retreat center to go through the *God, Christ, Holy Spirit, Church* sections that we had at the Parish Leadership Colloquy. Two more EI staff flew in from Chicago, Phil Townley, a minister from Detroit, and Marilyn Miller, a tall, single lay woman.

One reason our lay people took to the learning process was the thorough context we gave them for the 44-hour event. One strong memory of the weekend for me was another man there with a black patch over his left eye. (I wore a black patch at home, not in public. This was the

first time my lay people had seen me wear it.) He was a bleeding-heart liberal, who was not getting along well with the methodology and was rebelling. During the movie conversation, he identified with the liberal social worker, Miss Miller, and he and I had a very loud and contentious argument about who was really caring for the boxer, Mountain Rivera. The two pirates with black patches stopped the conversation, or really got it started. He was naive enough to poll the group, and when they said that they agreed with me, basically, he pushed back from the table and left the hall in anger.

After the course, we talked with the pedagogues on the way to the airport. They too suggested our coming to the Academy, and that if we liked it, we could stay on for an intern year with the Institute. We were convinced by then that there was no training that would match that of the Ecumenical Institute. After we put them on the plane, Lynda and I began a several-day conversation, with sleepless nights, on what we were going to do. We knew we were talking about a vocational decision to pack up and leave for a new style of life, not a two-month training exercise.

But we could not just walk out on Reveille before the first year was up. We could not make the transition by April with our house and possessions. We needed to find out more about the Ecumenical Institute. Johnny was too small to take into that environment. What would our parents and relatives think? What would we do for a job if we did not want to stay on after the eight-week Academy? We had never been to a city like Chicago, which was full of crime and corruption, from all reports.

On the other hand, the family order was intriguing to us. We had heard how simplifying our living could free up our resources for more missional use. In the context of the world's housing conditions, we were clear that having a big house was not a necessity—more often a real luxury, or even a thirty-year trap, binding its owners everyday and every weekend to its upkeep and care. We as a family needed to be in mission together, for what we had at the moment was not working. Johnny would get a real cultural education being in such an environment, and he too would be with us in mission. We needed to be in the ghetto where the need was, not in the suburbs.

The weekend gave us the context that we could handle all the practical decisions if we really decided to do something. We could always

find a church-related position to come back to. For the most part, the relatives would be supportive of our decision—not Dad. Reveille was on a good path, under the leadership of the committed lay core we had pulled together and trained. Finally, it came down to one of those Bonhoeffer decisions: we had to decide the will of *God* for ourselves, observing, judging, weighing up, deciding, and acting. In the context of putting first what I perceived as *God's* will, even over family, I told Lynda we had to go. We would never really be sure whether we had made the right decision or not—history would decide. Did we really want to be the church or not?

Lynda was on the fence. She had just finished reading David Wilkerson's **The Cross and the Switchblade**, a compelling story of their work in the inner-city of New York. Wilerson's family had also come to a similar vocational crossroads. Like Gideon, they decided to lay out "fleeces" as a sign of answered prayer. Lynda decided that putting the house up for sale was our fleece. If it sold right away, it was our sign to go. It sold the afternoon it was in the Sunday morning classifieds. The next day she had decided it was *God's* will. I had never been so proud to be married to her.

We began to make our plans. We called Chicago to find out details. We talked with Diane and Dick about the disposition of our house and possessions. We talked to our parents. We talked to our lay core and then the minister at Reveille. We were committed to be in Chicago by the end of March, about six weeks off.

Once everyone was clear that we were going to do it, they got behind us and started helping with mighty deeds. We listed the house in the Saturday Richmond paper and had it sold by Sunday noon at a profit of $3500. The low-interest loan did it. The church got behind us and had a going-away celebration after a Sunday service of worship, made speeches, and gave us a check for $1000. Here we were walking out on them after nine months, and they did that. We stored most of the furniture that we wanted to keep, literally filling to the ceiling a room at Diane and Dick's. The rest of our stuff we sold at yard sales.

The Richmond paper, *The Galax Gazette*, and *The Cleveland* (Tennessee) *Daily Banner* did articles about us, picture and all, trying to explain the work of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago and the

strange family order—they were thinking *communal living*, but never used the phrase. The *Virginia Methodist Advocate* wrote a column about our going to EI for a year and included my sermon, *You Are a Minister*. Our decision to go was definitely in history, declared publicly in three cities and two states.

Chapter 15: Phase II Reflections

Vocational Preparation
Age 18-30 (1957-1969)

I WENT into Phase II of my life, age 18, deciding to be a minister, and after many spins and turns, I did become one. At age 30, I reached the zenith of my ministerial career in the traditional sense.

Vocational Preparation is the name of those eleven years, a time of deciding what to do with my life and why. I left home secure in my self-understanding as a white, Southern male, born and reared in the bosom of primal community. I had committed to serve *God*, but had no image of that except to be a minister or missionary. When at college I lost my religious calling, I became an educator. I married one who was similarly called to serve *God* through church and education. We were definitely kindred spirits. We established our home during this phase, had our first-born, and had a good chance of making it as a family because we had the same vocational calling.

As we began to live out our vocations, we became committed to excellence in education and reform in the church. We intended not to be mediocre in our vocational expenditure. We were strong leaders because we saw what could be done, needed to be done, and wanted deeply to bring it to be. We had vision and passion. We needed more practical training, which was one reason the encounters with the Ecumenical Institute appealed to us.

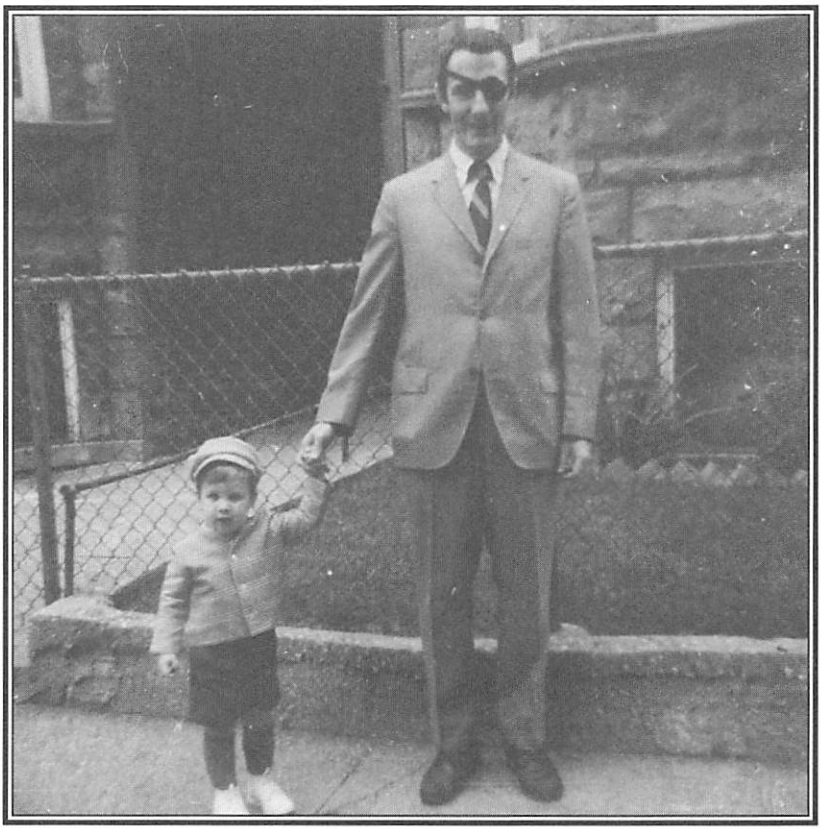
During this phase:

- I continued to want close community: i.e., I helped form a successful fraternity; we wanted a home with an open door for youth to visit, whether from the student dorm or from the church.
- I learned that I was a reformer, wanting to bring to being the more nearly perfect fraternity or church.
- I longed romantically for the true and beautiful marital relationship

and felt I had found it with Lynda, to discover painfully that *true and beautiful* is a relative phrase.

- I had a gift for teaching and was in my orbit as I stood before a class of students or church laity.
- I was a man of principle, standing up for what I thought was right regardless of risk: i.e., standing before the Methodist committee that could not force me to stop smoking, and standing before the Methodist committee in Asheville that could not force me to stop social action.
- I was a man capable of much love, both for my wife and my first son.
- I was a man of detachment: I could strip down from the security of a Ph.D. scholarship or from the security of house, furnishings, car, and income and move into mission.
- I was a thinker, much taken by theology.
- I was an effective leader, calling people forth to commit for a disciplined spirit journey as individuals and small groups.
- I found that I longed for internal authenticity more than external success.

PHASE III
VOCATION THROUGH THE ORDER: ECUMENICAL



Johnny and I Standing in Front of Our Apartment Building Four Months After Moving to Fifth City: Chicago

Chapter 16: Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience

The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago
Age 30-31 (1969-70)

DURING THE LAST WEEK of March, we left Richmond with a small UHaul trailer, carrying special pieces to Mama's house, including a cherry bedroom suite, the antique plantation desk, a rocker, and the three-piece cherry stereo. We sold our black Ford to Gooch Harmon for cash, paid it off, and got a ride to Bristol where we stayed with Asheville church friends, the Osbornes, and then flew out to Chicago with only two large suitcases and a footlocker. We had stripped down materially, and it felt good on the other side of the wrenching detachment.

We arrived in Chicago late at night in a snowstorm, visibility about 0, so I was holding on for dear life as we finally descended through the clouds and touched down immediately upon seeing the runway. A young, alternative styled couple from Canada, the Fishers, met us at the baggage claim area with their worn out VW van. We loaded up and went down the wrong freeway in blinding snow for thirty minutes before we backtracked. All we saw were freeways for well over an hour before exiting onto Homan Avenue off of Congress Expressway, a couple of miles west of downtown Chicago. We stopped at 410 S. Trumbull, a narrow little one-way street outside the former Bethany Brethren Seminary, which had moved further west when the neighborhood began to deteriorate. Families of the Ecumenical Institute had signed a balloon note with them and moved into the two dorms, the administration building (all three adjoining), the chapel, and the recreational building, with about an acre in grounds—a small block enclosed by a sturdy seven-feet-high fence.

We unloaded through a guarded door, with another guard inside. Within the next twenty-four hours we would be assigned to building

security ourselves, either roving different floors of the buildings, sitting guard, standing guard on the roof, or roving the grounds with a walkie-talkie. We arrived right at the first anniversary of the West Side riots of 1968, sparked by the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Everyone was on alert, for the rumors were out that a couple of gangs were going to torch some buildings. The Institute had escaped damage the year before, but many buildings in the neighborhood had been burned out. The mood was tense. We could not believe our timing.

We wound our way to a second floor dorm room with a double-decker bed, that sagged mightily. A mattress was on the floor for Johnny. Our male and female bathrooms were down the hall. Lynda and I did not say much about anything as we opened our suitcases and prepared for bed. What in the name of *God* had we done? was what we were thinking.

At 5:00 a.m. we bolted upright, hearing a man beating a gong, announcing loudly as he marched down the hall, "Praise the Lord, Christ is Risen," to which some muffled responses came from the rooms, "He is risen indeed." Although we had participated in the wake-up ritual and the worship in the EI seminars, we did not know exactly where to go or what to go to. After dressing quickly, we followed the moving bodies out our building, through the wood chip covered courtyard to the deteriorating gym. There a couple of hundred adults and children were seated on two sides, facing each other across an altar. At the sound of a gong, everyone rose and faced the East and responded to the liturgist. The liturgy was traditional, but not the loud chanting, swaying, gongs, bells, and drums. We kept looking at each other and at Johnny as we took it all in through his wide-open eyes. He and we would grow to love that Daily Office, standing before huge painted banners of the saints high on the walls, especially the one of Abraham lifting the knife high to sacrifice his son Isaac, which reminded us daily of real obedience to *God.*

After Daily Office we followed others to the preschool dining hall, where we left Johnny with other little guys supervised by EI parents, and proceeded to the collegium hall for singing, scripture/news conversation over breakfast, and a report on Academy preparation. I was glad I was a smoker, but poor Lynda about choked with all the smoking. Phil, who had taught our RS-I, introduced us in very complimentary terms. He ended up saying that he hoped I would work

with him in the fundraising office. That was hardly the assignment I had in mind. Almost everyone graciously received us, especially the Southerners.

Lynda started immediately to work in the Fifth City Preschool as a teacher in training in the *imaginal education* methods. I was assigned to the printshop to help collate a national mailing of the EI quarterly. My first walk through the neighborhood was depressing: stripped down cars left to die, dilapidated houses, many gutted apartment houses, potholes deep enough to break an axle, graffiti on walls of buildings, sooty covered snow, straggling bums with bottles in brown paper bags raised to their mouths, barred shops that were closed, and others with accordion bars that were open—in all, bleak and gray.

Before long, Phil had his way. I took a desk in development (fundraising) against my strong objections. I was going to the Academy in a few weeks, so why bother to complain? Assignments came out at collegium and mistakenly our names were not on the Academy list. I went to one of the priors and pointed out the mistake, to be advised it was not a mistake; maybe we could go to the Fall Academy, they said.

I was angry. We had moved heaven and earth to get here for the Spring Academy and we were going, so I needed to see whoever could straighten the mess out. They avoided me. I became livid. Either we go to the Academy or we leave. I finally spoke to Lyn Mathews, who along with her husband, Joseph, helped found EI. She was the most pleasing person one could ever want to meet, on first impression. She kept smiling and kept giving me reasons why we needed to wait until fall. I also gave her my ultimatum, which she received graciously and hoped we would not leave, but since we had requested to be a part of this family order, we would have to operate under corporate assignment like all others. I continued to tell her that we did all that we did to get here for Academy, but continued to receive her gracious, steel no. I knew that she knew that we would not leave, for we had invested too much in our decision to come. I went to my lair, wounded and defeated.

Fundraising was not for me, but somebody had to do it. Phil was as good as they came, although I did not trust him at first. I made trips to the Loop with him and others to call on corporations, foundations, and rich individuals, to get the feel of a successful call. I cleaned up

well and had good people-skills. Maybe my patch would put people off, but Phil thought the opposite: "It will add a touch of mystique and they will remember you." Because of the the irritation to my glass eye from long hours, and pollution from all the smoking and the expressway nearby, I was wearing my patch full-time

Before April was over, he took me to New York to follow up on pending contributions from corporations and foundations. We checked in at a Manhattan two-star hotel, made some funding calls into the tall buildings, went to see Anthony Quinn in *Zorba* on Broadway, skipped down the sidewalk afterwards, went back to the hotel and went to bed, for it was past midnight and we had gotten up the preceding morning at 5:30 a.m. I reflected as I went to sleep: What am I doing here? Why had we left Richmond? On the plane back to Chicago, Phil went to sleep. Not me, I could not sleep on airplanes, and especially with this assignment battle going on in my head.

JOHNNY WAS THE NEW WHITE KID in the predominately black preschool. When I returned, I discovered a red, mouth-wide bite mark on the right side of Johnny's face. Later that night when we bathed him, we discovered four or five more bites on his body and arms. Lynda "lost it" and considered leaving when she saw what had happened to our eighteen-month-old son. She had to settle down when she found out from the teachers that our little Johnny was going around biting everyone, and they bit him back. He went to the discipline corner often for biting, to reflect on his behavior. He was learning the hard way. He was not a racist, just a biter. He cried at first, not wanting to go, but later got used to the program and ran to mini-school. His greatest learning at that time was mutual respect.

The Order's schedule was intense. We were at it night and day, from 5 a.m. till 9 p.m., with a few exceptions. Monday night was family night, when we had a special family meal, at EI or out to a restaurant, fast food usually. We created our family ritual for meals, had a conversation about the past and coming week, celebrated birthdays and anniversary, and sometimes watched TV. During one family night, we created Johnny's bedtime ritual, which he asked for religiously until

about the sixth grade:

Parent: Who are you?
Johnny: John, loved by God.
P: What are you called to be?
J: The Church.
P: What does that look like?
J: Showing all people they're loved by God.
P: So who are you?
J: St. John the Evangelist.
P: In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. ***Amen***.
J: ***Amen***.

We made the sign of the Cross on his forehead during our last line, followed by "beep, beep" on his nose, the part he liked best.

Tuesday through Thursday nights were meetings, Friday and Saturday nights depended on our Week II assignment, and Sunday night was the high celebration of the week for the community, House Church, with a special service of communion.

The celebrants of House Church broke the bread and spilt the wine. At each table, one person passed the bread to and poured the wine for the next person, which had community significance, each serving the other. The community celebrated birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events. The birthday persons all stood and told the significant event of the past year; all anniversary persons stood and answered to the question, "Have you been faithful to your covenant of marriage during the past year?" It was an awesome question, to which one could only answer "Yes and No," or "No and Yes," knowing that each person is never perfectly faithful, nor is a person ever totally unfaithful. Designated persons addressed words of personal affirmation and absolution to those standing, then the community sang in mighty voice celebrative songs written for the occasion.

Symbolic reports were given for the activities of the last week, including reports from the growing number of religious houses. It was a time for all members of the families to dress up and celebrate individuals, families, and the life of the community. Spirits were high.

Families scattered back to their living spaces to reflect on the week that was, and to prepare for the coming week.

Experimenting with the dynamics of the chruch, we initiated *Ecclesiola* (Greek for "little church"): three nights divided into "college" (spirit disciplines), "seminary" (interpretive study), and "sodality" (missional reflection). During college we were writing the Solitary Office booklet, built around meditation (communion with historic colleagues), contemplation (communion with the mystery), and prayer (communion with the past, present, and future). During seminary we charted and discussed edge books. Those that I remember during that time were Tillich's **A Complete History of Christian Thought**, Walter Nigg's **Warriors of God**, and Kenneth Boulding's **The Image**. During sodality we configured in our Day I teams, financial development for me.

DURING WEEK II ASSIGNMENTS for one month, we ran into the buzz saw of Religious Studies I Pedagogy, preparing to teach the forty-four hour course across the continent. I thought that pedagogy would be great fun. I had studied all the theologians in seminary and had been through the Parish Leadership Colloquy and the RS-I in Richmond recently.

Again, I ran into the gracious steel that was Lyn Mathews, who had been teaching the course since she helped construct it back in the Faith and Life Community in Texas between 1955 and 1959. How humiliating it was to stand before the theological inquisition of a laywoman who had never been to seminary. She understood the dynamics of *God, Christ, Holy Spirit*, and *Church* far better than any theological professor I had studied under.

She was a master teacher, understanding rationally and instinctively individual and group dynamics—which meant she could nail anyone who was playing games with his or her faith journey. Like an Eastern guru, she formed questions that seemed to be coming out with no import. Really, she was winding up like a pitcher to deliver an existential fastball, hitting the center of the will, leaving one to answer with the yea or nay of faith.

"John, you have a great gift for rationality, like my husband,

Joseph. In fact, you know more about Tillich than I do. Far more. I just want you to think about the best method for teaching Tillich. You might consider—now this is just a suggestion—*teaching out of images rather than ideas and words.*

"You have power and presence in front of a group, John. I can imagine you up front with only drawings on your teaching sheet, weaving poetry around powerful board images. Am I making any sense? Sometimes I think I'm just rattling inside my head."

Then she would stand up and illustrate what she had just said, drawing on the board simply and profoundly how Tillich says grace strikes. Then she became pedagogical and started helping several of us to remember and articulate, through leading questions, when we had experienced grace. After some twenty minutes she said, "Oh my goodness. I am so embarrassed. We are late for lunch. Please excuse me."

With a bow of her head and a smile she asked, "Well, John, what do you think? Was any of that helpful?"

John was deeply addressed and honored, and got the point. His teaching was never the same. Out of the mouths of laywomen. . . .

I was looking forward to becoming a continental pedagogue after that month of pedagogy weekends. But what was my assignment the next Week II? Enablement in the kitchen for a course of forty, plus the rest of our EI community—5 p.m. Friday till 5 p.m. Sunday. I was in the kitchen more that weekend than I had been in all my thirty years. There was a team of about twelve of us doing the cooking, serving, clearing, and washing—over and over. I was doing grunt work. How was this becoming a great pedagogue? I did not leave Richmond for this. Though I did not know it at the time, EI was training me in obedience, which *was* at the heart of my spiritual struggle.

I was not going to be assigned to just any assignment. I had my priorities, and Academy was still at the top of the list. We were coming upon the summer program during July-August, and a demonstration Academy was on the schedule. Finally, we would go. They assigned Lynda, not me. Another battle to fight, but, instead, I repressed my anger and began to withdraw. I continued to do my assignments but did not have my heart in them. I was on a deep, slow burn. Nor was I much interested in what Lynda had to share about Academy.

During the evenings while she was in Academy, I started reading Tillich's **The Courage to Be**. His wisdom was what I needed theologically to begin to deal with my growing despair, rather than psychologically or morally, the usual methods. While I was not getting my way with assignments, I was rehearsing how unfairly I was being treated. Life would be meaningful when I could go to Academy and teach RS-I, so my story went. Doing fundraising and enablement were not meaningful assignments. I was cursing my life situation and blaming the Order, becoming cynical in the process. The Word came through Tillich: courage to accept one's acceptance (RS-I) is the same as the courage to accept one's despair, or accepting one's despair is in itself faith. "The act of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act. It is an act of faith" (pg. 176). I was being driven to despair, which was driving me to faith, to the courage to be. That was the first time I ever really heard that despair was good, even redemptive. Like Johnny, I was learning the hard way.

Lynda, too, was experiencing hard times as she found herself in new roles. Especially during her RS-I pedagogy sessions at Academy, I had to prop her up and affirm her in *her* struggle. Her litany went something like this. "John, I can't do this lecture. I haven't been to seminary. I don't understand these theologians. I don't understand RS-I. I can't do it. I won't do it."

I would respond, "You understood it when we went through the RS-I and the PLC in Richmond. Of course you can do it."

She would cry and say, "I don't know what I believe any more. Those pedagogues have no mercy. They will tear me apart in front of everyone, and I will break down. I will *not* be humiliated."

I would respond, "How can I help you? We will get you ready. You will do fine."

After a good cry and many hugs and strokes, she would wipe her eyes and we would begin working together. But the ritual was often repeated. She always came through, struggling but never quitting.

Apartment space was at a premium. To stay out of a dormitory style of living, we moved several times during the first six months. Moving was easy with only a couple of suitcases and a trunk. Our second apartment was two blocks from the Bethany center, which was a

scary walk after dark. We only walked by two's or more. Late one afternoon, Lynda's handbag was snatched right off her shoulder by a black man running by. That made us believe all the talk about being careful. Our third apartment belonged to the Hilliards, who were teaching Academy at the time. Very nice compared to our other rooms before.

After the Hilliards returned, we moved to the Wests' apartment in the same building. They were teaching at the Urban Academy for black churchmen that summer. The room was small, with a neat custom-made loft bed above their two desks, with ladders on each side. We did fine because Johnny was spending the summer with the Lippards in Cleveland, Tennessee, and Mama and Dad in Galax. We needed that time alone.

THE PLANETARY EVENT of the summer of 1969 was the Moon Landing. I sat there in Room E watching our astronauts romp, wise crack, and play golf on the Moon. Then lo and behold, there was the Earth on TV. I was sitting there looking at the Earth—the whole Earth, not one continent or country, but the whole Earth. The click of transparency happened, and I got clear that my life was about caring for more than my family, or my job, or one congregation, or one community. I experienced myself in a state of gratitude for all creation, "called" to the ultimate vocation. I said to myself that all the money the US government spent on getting our guys on the Moon was spent for me. What a cosmic delight. I can remember in some detail where I was and what I was doing then. That was one of the key events of my life. After that, most of the families of the Order had the Earthrise as part of their decor. I had a picture of it in my briefcase. We were at the beginning of a global society, symbolically at least, for the image was set in humanity's consciousness. Tribalism and nationalism would never be the same, though they would not die without much bloodshed.

Lynda started teaching that fall at Charles Sumner Elementary School, a black school about a fifteen-minute ride on the elevated train. The Order's economic guideline was that one member of the family would make income that was turned over to the Order for the support of that family, plus other operating expenses. The other family member

would work in one of the volunteer positions, i.e., fundraising, Academy staff, preschool, or other work in the community. Families in the Order lived on a monthly stipend, which was $115 for each adult and $60 per child. That seems impossibly small, but we had no payments to make for housing, utilities, food, car, school, or medical and dental insurance. If we watched it closely, we could go out a couple of nights a month, and a couple of trips to the shopping center on the train to buy snacks and toiletries. If we ran out of money before the month was up, we simply did without and ate on campus.

To expand our program activities, seven more religious houses were commissioned that summer, with staff from Chicago to help staff them: New York, Houston, Rockford, Sydney, Osaka, Apia, and Singapore, which added to the four sent out the summer of 1968: Boston, LA, Atlanta, and Kuala Lumpur. EI was growing steadily. A new family showed up almost weekly. The courses, the summer programs, and the Academy were bringing people in to sojourn for a short time or to intern for a year in the Order. Following religious order tradition, designated leaders were called *priors*. We assigned at least a first and second prior family to be the leadership team in each house. For a house to exist, the region had to request it and furnish as few as three families to live in the house with the assigned prior families from Chicago: at least a dozen people in all. The regional houses operated as did the Chicago House.

That fall, again, I was not on the Academy list. I kept trying to grow up to the ordeal of obedience to corporate assignments. It was painful. We were in our fourth apartment, this time the Morrills', who were assigned to the Osaka House. We had the pleasure of also being second parents to one of their daughters, Anita, who was able to take care of herself mostly. She became Johnny's loving big sister.

One afternoon I heard Johnny jabbering in the bathroom. I went closer and looked through the crack in the door to see him perched on the potty slapping his arm above his wrist and saying, "No, no. Bad boy." I listened more closely. He had a little book in his lap. And then out of his mouth came, "You frogs! You do not pee-pee in your pants. Why don't you pee-pee in the potty?" (I about exploded with laughter as I remembered we had heard a dramatic reading of the scripture at

Daily Office that morning, "You frauds! . . . Why can't you interpret the meaning of the times in which you live?" Lk.12:56). He was saying the familiar "bad words" he knew and pretending he was reading them from his little book, then doing his ritual of slap and admonish: "Poo-poo. No, no. Bad boy." "Pee-pee. No, no. Bad boy." His moralism was intact.

Lyn Mathews stepped back into my life as prior of my *Ecclesiola* that fall to help teach me about consensus—as usual, the hard way. Many of our members were not at Daily Office on time, some not at all. She proposed for consensus that each person missing Daily Office be charged $1 for each time. I could not believe that she, of all people, could be so off the mark. I immediately objected with the point that one does not tie spiritual practices and money together. I reminded them that it was like paying indulgences, which started the Reformation. She had little to say back to me. She again simply stated the consensus to be that we would pay $1 each time we missed Daily Office for a one-month experiment. I objected again. She asked me if I had a different consensus to offer. I fumbled for one, but only ended up saying that the consensus was to do nothing different. She told me that was irresponsible and stated the consensus again as before. Not one of the twenty around the table, besides Lyn and me, said a word. I sat there dumbfounded.

I had been going to Daily Office off and on, but after that I would not even respond to the morning ritual of "Praise the Lord, Christ is Risen." I just let them bang on the door. I wrote out a check for $20 to cover a month of Daily Office absences and gave it to Lyn to make my protest louder. She thanked me. A week later, Joseph Mathews came back from a trip and heard of the consensus. He took a good portion of the breakfast collegium to lambaste those who had consented to such a symbolically heretical idea. I was deeply vindicated and started going to Daily Office more religiously. Lyn never mentioned it again nor offered to refund the $20.

During the winter quarter, I finally went to the eight-week Academy, where the total secular, religious, and spirit curricula of EI was dumped on us. As a staff member in training, I was excited, but found I was doing too much grunt work to suit me. Not what I had in mind. Gene Marshall was the dean, and one powerful pedagogue he

was. He taught me my luncheon RS-I pedagogy, which was another big step toward my teaching. Academy was intensive: hard physical, intellectual, and spiritual work. Kazantzakis' book **The Saviors of God** and Kierkegarrd's *Sickness Unto Death* paper on despair were pivotal studies for me. In an experiment with time to heighten our awareness, we participated in a weekend spirit *Odyssey*. We slept every other three hours, and in between meditated, contemplated, and prayed—but not conventionally. During one of the exercises, I scrubbed my six-foot grave plot with a toothbrush for one chunk of time and then wrote my reflections on the experience. That was real contemplation.

After all my fight to go to Academy, it was not something one would go to if he really knew what was going to happen. It did not solve but intensified my struggle with life and faith. I meandered through my assignments for several weeks afterward, trying to let it rest, but the pitched battle inside kept raging. I got the struggle reduced down to my decision to stay or leave the Order, for our year's internship was about over. Maybe my vocational struggle was causing my despair. I did not know. I did know I was in despair.

Again I went to Lyn Mathews and did the best I could to tell her what I was experiencing. This time I was pensive. I told her I was struggling with my decision to leave the Order. She listened while I poured out my soul.

She finally said, "John, I can tell you are suffering. You have fought all year, a genuine fight I might add. You have struggled with obedience and vocation like all interns. But I don't think that is at the heart of your struggle. The more you struggle, the guiltier you become, as though you still believe that your struggle is wrong.

"You still feel guilty over being who you really are. You are a wild man inside, like Paul, Luther, and the man I live with. Your first impulse is to fight, to try to be perfect in your faith—which for you means *no* struggle. You try to make the world around you perfect. That is not wrong, John. That is noble. That is your gift. That's who you are. That's the *you* that God accepts. And that's the only *you* you can say yes to, that you can accept, that you can love.

"That's what Kierkegarrd meant when he said sin is not willing to be oneself before God in despair. You are a wild and wonderful man

in despair before God, John. That's who you are right now. And that's exactly the man God loves, just the way you are, in despair.

"Do you understand me?" I thought she was going to hug me, but instead she came up with a plan.

"John, I know the nicest little hotel off North Michigan near the Water Tower. Why don't you take a couple of days off, go there and read, write in your journal, rest, walk by the lake, and let this acceptance sink in. How does that sound?"

What a priest. I did what she suggested and wrote in my journal mostly. I was deeply graced and reunited with all and *myself*. I celebrated my great year of *purification in the refiner's fire*.

Lyn called to check on me the second day and sent Lynda over to spend the night. Lyn Mathews was not only a master teacher but also a master spirit guide. We decided to be the Order for another year.

Chapter 17: Planetary Orbit

Global Odyssey
Lake Bluff
Age 31-32 (1970-71)

THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE was in demand around the world. Lynda and I decided to spend the $3500 profit from the sale of our house in Richmond for a research trip to explore future mission areas for the Institute and to see firsthand the agony and ecstasy of our planet. We knew we would never be the same. Along with twenty others in the Order and three local leaders from the Fifth City project, we began to plan for our Global Odyssey during July 1970. In the spring we met three nights a week and some Week II's (weekends) to get ready: economical ticketing, visas, health prep, itinerary, lodging, transportation, and other preparation details. We wanted no guides, no five-star hotels. We used our contacts around the globe to advise us on how to make our visit authentic and not touristy. We studied the cultures, religions, economics, and politics of the fifteen cities we would visit in thirty days, representative of the cultures of the world. We prepared and printed special reflective journals and decided priorship and team assignments.

Our first stop was Mexico City, about 7000 feet higher than Chicago. A group of us walked into a hotel bar and ordered tequilas. I almost fell out of my chair. The strength of the drink at that altitude got me good.

On to Los Angeles to be photographed as one of the first groups to fly the 747. We stopped in Anchorage to refuel on our way to Tokyo. That was the first time across any ocean for Lynda and me, and I had sweaty palms the whole way. In Tokyo, we visited Justin and Delores Morrill, who gave us the grassroots tour of Tokyo. Lynda and I spent the night in a *ryokan*, a traditional Japanese country inn. No furniture, just futon floor mats for sleeping after we went through the scalding

bath and put on our kimonos.

At the train station to buy tickets to Kyoto, I asked the ticket agent if he spoke English. He said, "Hell no. Do you speak Japanese?" and turned and walked away. Through him I encountered my cultural expectation that the world would be English speaking. I was in the minority and did not like it.

The gardens in Kyoto were more exactly kept than we saw in pictures, and to see a gardener tending one was captivating. We eavesdropped on a Shinto baptism and a wedding. Lynda and I were among the group that went to the World's Fair. Another group went south to Hiroshima and gave us their reflections of being deeply addressed.

We flew out of Tokyo on the 747 again, on our way to Hong Kong. Soon, the pilot announced we were experiencing difficulties and would return to Tokyo. We noticed that the attendants seemed anxious, overhearing them whispering to each other that the gas thanks were being emptied. We began to study our emergency folder and to pray. The community leaders from Fifth City were verbalizing their fear and praying out loud. What had taken thirty minutes took only about fifteen minutes to return. Obviously we had clearance, for that pilot flew that huge airplane down on a straight descending line, with no soft landing. Looking out the windows we could see firetrucks foaming down the runways. So thankful for our safe landing, someone started singing the Doxology and many others joined in, including us.

We were transferred quickly to a trusty 707 and arrived in Hong Kong by midnight to stay in the only five-star hotel on the trip. Of course we did not have to pay for it—we earned it. In Hong Kong the unbelievably crowded living conditions and the shack villages on the mountain impacted us. I had black Nehru shirts and a pair of shoes made for incredibly cheap prices in some of the many shops set up in tiny spaces along the sidewalk. The ingenuity and vitality of the people impressed us.

Next destination, Bangkok, where the people of the beautiful smile live, probably inspired by the smiling Buddhas. At our hotel a clerk asked if we wanted a covey of young ladies to care for our evening needs. I was tempted to find out what that meant, but said no thank you. The next day we floated along the klongs and sensed the gentle spirit of

the people. On the trip to the Buddhist monastery an hour's drive away, we experienced another of our many reckless bus rides of the month.

Lynda and I tagged along with a guide-led group and stayed behind at the Buddhist temple. The guide had said that no one could enter, but we caught the eye of a monk at the door and hand motioned our desire to enter. He smiled and finally bowed, which we took to mean yes. We slipped off our shoes, stepped in, and stood in the shadows in the rear as about fifty monks faced each other and chanted deeply resonant *Om* sounds. Those sounds plus gongs and bells, the sight of billowing smoke, the smells, the temple icons, and the color of that sea of orange saffron robes opened our senses and lifted us to new liturgical heights. We saw some of the roots of our own Daily Office and knew then without doubt that a chanted spiritual language lifts the spirit. Through the power of their non-verbal, sensual worship, we felt connected to the Unknown, the Mysterious Other, *God*. Indeed, we had worshipped.

We loaded up a French jet for another thrilling ride, this time flying over the Himalayas at about 25,000 feet. We were not ready for the radical downward turn when we had cleared the mountains and headed for Kathmandu, cradled in a valley at the bottom, about 20,000 feet straight down. I was petrified as we descended thousands of miles, nose down, through total clouds until we broke through to see verdant green terraces at about 1000 feet.

After deplaning, we rode to the center of the city, dodging cows and people and getting stuck before we got to our two-star hotel. We were not at all ready for the poverty or the maimed lining the streets. One man came up to us with his hand out, his sores bleeding, and one of his eyes literally hanging out of his head. I could not take it and went to my room, not wanting to come out. I was sick at my stomach and heart and did not eat the rest of the day and night. Dylan Thomas' prayer line, "Let him scald me and drown me in this world's wounds," became our experience.

The next day we traveled into the mountains to watch a religious ceremony of thanksgiving. They squirted the blood from the cut throats of young animals on the statues of the deities. Although this reminded us of Old Testament sacrifices, it was too much for us to observe. We traveled on up the mountains to Tibetan refugee villages. I haggled with

one woman for about fifteen minutes as I got back on the bus. She was tough as nails, but finally let me win a little on the small cymbal-shaped bells on the string that I bought. Their awesome sound was part of the worship at the Buddhist monastery.

Back in Kathmandu, a nine-year-old boy got our attention and in his few words of English contracted to make us wide silver bands with our family symbol engraved on the outside. How much? $9 for me and $7 for Lynda. Reminding us of "this world's wounds," we are wearing those bands daily in place of our jewelry store wedding rings, thirty-seven years later.

The flight out was a great drama. The French jet was down, so we could stay over at their expense or fly at once in an old DC-3. I elected now. A white-haired Indian pilot with a turban and a white silk scarf hanging down past the bottom of his bomber jacket invited us onto the plane. Produce and butchered chickens filled the back of the plane. The seats were wooden-backed benches for three, with one long seat belt strap. The pilot revved up the machine, ran it a few feet, then cut the engine, and stomped off telling us to follow him. Soon after, a fuel truck rolled up with rag-tag attendants to pump gas into the wings, sticking their arms in the hole to see how full the tank was. They overfilled both sides. Gas covered the pavement out beyond the span of the plane. Next came the water truck to spray off the gas. The pilot adjusted his turban, smiled, and invited us back on. We all looked at each other. I went through a fast internal decision workshop before lining up. We poked down the complete jet runway until we barely lifted off, going about fifteen miles an hour, it felt. We ever so slowly spiraled our way up twenty-five thousand feet over the mountain, and then let her glide down to Calcutta. I was right. Flying was a risk.

Calcutta was not so hard on us after Kathmandu, although it had its own searing experiences. As we watched a cremation, the wife screamed as her husband's body leaped into flames, his skull popped, and it took all his sons' might to pull their grieving mother away. I nearly passed out standing in the wind stream coming across the burning pyre. Intellectually we knew the necessity of returning dust to dust versus creating huge burial grounds in a country of such population density, but existentially we identified with the mother. About that time,

one of our female colleagues was cornered by an Indian man at knifepoint. He took all her money.

From our downtown hostel we saw the rickshaw drivers asleep under their rigs. They woke up the next morning to a dip bath at a public catchment of water. Two of our heavier women were almost too big for one rickshaw. We wondered if the skinny little man could haul them, but he lifted up and ran down the street. We were getting used to the poverty, but were incredulous to see and hear about the generations of families that had lived in the Howrah Bridge train station. The movie *City of Joy*, filmed some twenty years later, captured some of the montage that is urban Calcutta.

Flying into a small airport near Agra, a French propjet pulled out of its landing to miss a cow wandering across the runway. We traveled to Sarnath where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon about the Eightfold Path, about 2500 years ago. In a dwelling nearby, we met and talked with the Dalai Lama, not knowing that he was the international figure he was and would come to be. His western styled glass frames seemed out of place on him. Full of life—maybe *frisky* is the word—he wanted to discuss theology with us, and in the conversation kept smiling and picking at us with comments like, "You don't really believe that, do you?" He made sure he asked the questions, not us. He was interested in our life in the Order but did not seem interested in our mission. After fifteen minutes he said a quick good-bye, bowed, and left the room. On TV since, I still see that playful smile and manner, in spite of the horror of his people's journey out of Tibet.

The Ganges at Varanasi was close by where the religious pilgrims washed themselves in the holy river, one of four river basins of earth's early civilizations. On a small boat, out from the bathers, we came close to a family in a boat who were strewing the ashes of their beloved. On the shore, two cremations were in progress. I never hear the word *Ganges* without recalling such holy rituals.

At New Delhi we saw the Red Fort, and in Bombay we experienced the hoards of people in the streets, moving by foot, cart, bike, bajaj, car, bus—all in a frenzy, yet moving. The cities of India truly are teeming masses.

We flew to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We watched King Haile

Salassie do his charitable birthday walk through lines of hundreds of beggars, giving each a silver coin. We were told the beggars had filed the stumps of their bodies for the occasion to expose fresh bloodiness. The next day we visited a leper colony outside the city. Enough! Our trip to research the needs of the world was overpowering our senses.

In Cairo, three years after the Seven Day War, soldiers in military trucks, seeing my eye patch, called to me, "Welcome to Cairo, Moshe Dayan." That was disconcerting. We attended mosque after mosque and watched the people prostrate themselves—a religious practice that has always captivated my attention. We went up into an inner chamber of a pyramid and began to test the acoustics with lines from our Daily Office. Awe inspiring. I experienced myself being 5000 years old as I climbed down out of the tomb.

AFTER THE EXTREME POVERTY of the third world, it felt strange to put a foot back in the West. At Athens, the Mediterranean was so blue and inviting. We rented a car and rode through the countryside of Greece, on our way to Corinth, eating bread and olives and drinking local wine. Topless women on a secluded beach nearby fascinated us. Different from Cairo, and the States. Back in Athens, we visited ruins, stepped into a Greek Orthodox wedding service that had been going for hours and was still going when we left. We ate at a mom and pop sidewalk restaurant and walked the streets into the evening.

The closest we could get to the USSR at that time was Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, the pearl of the Adriatic Sea, an idyllic walled-in village right out of the Middle Ages. People were standing waiting for us as we got off the bus, hawking their houses for bed and breakfast. We stayed with a fine family who spoke no English. Their bed sheets were starched rigid—a strange luxury: they were so stiff they hardly draped the body. Within the last few years of the fighting in Croatia, we were sad to hear that our dream town was blasted.

In Rome, like Japan, few spoke English. The city was irrationally laid out, but was a fine place to eat out in the street, almost literally. St. Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, and the ruins I remember.

After the starkness and otherness of the third world, Europe

and places we had always read and heard about seemed less intriguing. By the time we arrived at our last two stops, we had experienced more than enough.

I felt like I had been to London before, although the burial markers of all the greats at Westminster Abbey existentially bit me. At Reykjavik, Iceland, atop the world, the British restaurant attendant hassled me when I showed up with my Nehru shirt under a sportscoat. I told him that where I came from in India I was more highly dressed than a man in a suit and tie. He told me again their British rules. In my not-to-be-intimidated-style, I told him that his rules were provincial, walked passed him, and sat down. The West was too full of its regulations.

While in Reykjavik, we reviewed the trip, brainstormed and gestalted it, wrote it up by city stops, and sent it to committee to write the formal report for the Order. We were spiritually drained, yet the importance of reflecting on and naming the gift that each stop along the way had been for us was a fitting closure.

One distinct memory stood out upon our return to the West Side of Chicago: we were afraid, and had not been afraid anywhere else around the world, except maybe in Calcutta. Driving back from O'Hare, the line from the song leaked out of consciousness with a twist, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place *called* home," or the world is our home. We had become global citizens in that month.

WHEN WE PICKED UP JOHNNY at Cleveland, Tennessee, during our two-week vacation ("discontinuity," the Order called it), we heard more about his learning the hard way. His granddaddy would not let him do something he wanted to do, so Johnny called him a "motherfucker," with the precious pronunciation of a not quite three-year-old. (The word was in the top ten among the ghetto children in the preschool on the West Side.) His granddaddy had to turn his head away so Johnny could not see him laughing. He then put on his stern face, picked him up with one arm around his fat belly, and marched him to the kitchen sink where he proceeded to wash his mouth out with soap. What a scene that must have been. His granddaddy loves to tell that war story.

That fall we went with Charles and Patricia Moore and Pat

Jones as the leadership team to begin a satellite house on the North Shore of Chicago at Lake Bluff. We moved into one of several buildings on the campus of the United Methodists' orphanage that had been shut down. Charles and I went immediately to Green Bay to talk with two families that were thinking about interning. Those were two of many families I would help recruit to the Order over the years. Lynda and Pat began a preschool with about fifteen children, including Johnny and Bonnie from our religious house.

I began to call on churches on the North Shore to tell them about the Local Church Experiment the Ecumenical Institute had launched, and to recruit people from Wisconsin to the Academy. What I discovered when I talked to clergy from the North Shore suburbs was that they were satisfied with the way things were. They were well educated, high salaried, living in "ideal" communities where their children went to the best schools in the country, and not interested in risking anything. Establishment they were. Secure. Bought, even. I despaired about the future of the church under their leadership.

That fall I got a deeper insight into the character of Joseph Wesley Mathews (JWM). At a picnic at the home of one of the North Shore cadre members, he was standing nearby when a horse inside the fence was acting up, probably because the owner had just pulled the saddle tight. I was leaning on a fence post when the horse charged and butted it loose, obviously coming at me. JWM instinctively grabbed the reigns and mounted the horse. The horse reared up and spun around trying to throw him. Flipping the horse with the tips of the reign, Mathews was muttering something as they galloped off down a trail at full speed. When they returned and JWM dismounted, the horse seemed kinder and gentler. JWM was a man who seemed to seize any challenge fearlessly.

Most of the people I called on in Wisconsin had been through Ecumenical Institute (EI) courses. I would drive up on Monday and come back on Friday, stay in their homes, eat at their tables, and talk to them late into the night about their spirit journeys. I knew well how hard it was to carve out two months of one's busy, committed life to take off to Chicago's dangerous West Side ghetto. Their decisions also revolved around the loss of income and an extra burden on the family, not to mention the cost of the Academy. About ten went in the fall, and

nearly twenty during the winter. I became well-known for recruiting people to Academy, the eight-week training school for serious lay and clergy. I knew it would change their lives.

Lynda and I attended the Individual and Family Course that fall. Not only was it a very provocative weekend, it was most practically helpful. We came away with our family preamble, family symbol, family rituals, family time-lines, a family night format, family assignments, and a family budget. We had never thought through our family life so thoroughly. It was a very intense experience that strengthened many marriages. We all left understanding covenant was that without which a marriage could not be fulfilling.

Lynda and I both began teaching RS-I (Religious Studies I, the course we took in Richmond) that fall. My first assignment was in Corpus Christi, Texas, as third teacher, which meant I led meal conversations, led worship, and made sure the practics of the course came off. During the course I took notes like crazy, knowing the next time I would probably give a lecture or lead a seminar on one of the four theologians' papers. I was itching for the chance.

The next time, in our building on the West Side, I gave the Freedom lecture and led the Niebuhr seminar. I did only fair on the lecture and very poorly leading the seminar, being interrupted by the lead pedagogue who asked me to move to the key section of the paper, which required about thirty minutes of probing discussion. I had butchered my time-line and was quite flustered. From then on, he had to mostly lead the seminar from the back of the room. During the debriefing after the course, I could not lift my head as the lead pedagogues tried to give helpful criticism for the next time.

I taught three or four more times before I was assigned to a PLC, Parish Leadership Colloquy, outside of New York City at a New Jersey monastery. During that course, one of the clergy, disgruntled from the beginning, tried to close down the colloquy with an impromptu speech in which he challenged our methods and theology and asked the participants to walk out with him. A feisty Irish Roman Catholic priest from the inner city of Paterson, I think, stood up and took over. He told the man to leave if he must, but as for him and those he had talked with, the colloquy was by far the best training for their work in the parish they

had encountered. With applause, the session went on from there, with one less participant, regrettably.

AFTER ATTENDING a cadre meeting one wintry night in Milwaukee, Bob, one of our interns in Lake Bluff, and I were driving back in my red '64 VW *Bug*. The crosswind kept me turning back into it to stay in our lane. I was anxious and kept my speed at about 55 mph, slow for the Interstate. Trailer-trucks kept passing and blowing us this way and that. As we neared the Illinois line, little did we know that a layer of ice had formed on the highway. At the next gust I turned back into the wind. We began to spin round and round. Somehow we took flight and began to roll through the air. I kept expecting one of the big trucks to hit us. I waited for the final splat.

The reality of death overtook me. I experienced blinding light and was utterly at peace. The next thing I knew we were bouncing on all four tires at once, down in the grassy median. We reached for our seat belts and the doors, staggered out to the front of the car, looked at each other, smiled, and touched hands in seemingly slow motion. Our motor was still running, and our lights focused on a bloody man slumped over his steering wheel. We heard screams, looked around to see several other cars in the median with us. Most of them were not as lucky as we were. We charged up and down that median like Florence Nightingale. Finally, the police and rescue squads got there. By then, two other cars ended up in the same median. The police told us that black ice was covering the highway.

They towed my VW away the next day, totaled with a bent frame. For twenty-four hours I was in a state of euphoria, going without sleep. I was amazed to be alive. And then the bottom dropped out. Deep despair engulfed me for several days. The life-question swirled in my being, "*Why* am I alive?" I had encountered death and was spared. "For what good reason?"

As I gave thanks for the present, it was the future that got me. My life vocation had to be worked through all over again. I told Lynda that I was going to leave the Order. She asked why and I could give no good reason, for I experienced no good reason for anything at that

moment. She tried to talk me through it. The main thing I remember her saying was, "Johnny and I are staying, and we want you to stay with us." That was bad news for a despairing man.

I went through the motions of being present. Charles, the prior, was getting on my nerves, especially in my state. I was having trouble with his leadership style, though he was a deep spirit man. The four churches he worked with in the Local Church Experiment in Milwaukee were responding quite positively to his leadership.

I told Charles I had to talk, so he suggested we go for a drink at the Lake Forest Inn. Neither one of us was good with the chitchat. I got right to the point.

"Charles, ever since the wreck, I've been in a funk, if you haven't noticed. I've about decided I can't take this life anymore. I've decided to leave."

Charles looked over his glasses at me and said, "You'll go to hell if you do."

Before he could tell me why, which I did not want to hear, I pushed back in my chair and stormed, "Why did I think I could talk to you, anyway?"

Charles broke in, "Do you want me to tell you what I mean?"

I was leaving, "Hell no!"

Charles tried to grab my shoulder, and I sharply pushed his hand away and gave him a stare that dared him to touch me. I turned and walked to the restroom.

When I came back, Charles was gone. I found him in the car, backing out. I barely got in before we sped away—back to the house in pounding silence.

The very next day I overheard Charles talking to Joseph Mathews on the phone. I got the gist of the call: Are the Cocks ready to prior a religious house? I was surprised at the question and more surprised at Charles' positive response, espeically after our encounter. Maybe he wanted to get rid of me. Maybe he knew I was ready. I hardly thought so, on first reflection.

Lyn Mathews phoned later in the day and asked for Lynda and me to come to the West Side and talk with the Order priorship about a new assignment. We were about to become regional priors at Kansas City.

Chapter 18: Religious House Prior

Kansas City, Washington, D.C., Galax
Age 32-36 (1971-75)

THE KANSAS CITY Religious House was in trouble. The regional interns virtually ran off the first and second prior families, and the mission was going undone. The Order priorship told us to accelerate the mission, primarily focusing on courses, and all else would fall in line. The Tolman family from the Boston Religious House came as the second prior family.

On arrival, we dealt with two big contradictions within days. There were no house cars for doing the mission. Warren Tolman and I went to a used car lot, found two durable, medium miles, work-horse Plymouths and offered the manager $1000 cash for the two of them. He was not ready for our offer and started poor-mouthing. We repeated the offer as we turned to go. Relunctantly, with more jabbering, he said okay. The cars perfomed legendary feats.

We dealt with the second contradiction by sending Warren and a disgruntled intern wife on a recruitment trip to western Kansas for a week. While she was out there beginning to enjoy doing the mission, we resettled all the families in the house, moving her family out of the room she thought belonged to them. Geri Tolman took over her house finances responsibility. By the time the intern came back, she had a new context, was effectively engaged, and was able to accept all the changes. We were beginning to roll.

We also started calling on regional colleagues to intern. Two seminary families, a Reformed Latter Day Saints family, and a single dentist moved in right away. Sub-divided rooms, especially in the basement, were imperative.

Two youth assigned to our house (children of Order parents in other house locations) were challenging our parenting skills. One I challenged by threatening to take him to the city limits. After our heart to heart conversation—either straighten up and get with the program or

move on—he made a new decision, thank goodness. The other young man was not as belligerent, especially after he got clear on his options and received some personal attention. Lynda and Geri gave them plenty of TLC, helped get them up on time in the mornings, and motivated them to start performing nearer to their capacity at school. They began to thrive on corporateness.

My duties focused on finding four congregations to join the national Local Church Experiment, catalyzed by the Ecumenical Institute where religious houses were located. In Kansas City, two Disciples of Christ churches, one United Methodist, and one Roman Catholic church joined the experiment. That was my first real exposure to the Disciples and the Roman Catholics. The Disciples have a historical tradition of the ministry of the laity. The Roman Catholics have a profound sense of care for the parish, the neighborhoods around their churches.

Two of our four clergy families struggled to take the PLC and to allow their lay people to take RS-I. Once the lay people took courses, they began to push the clergy to deeper involvement. We met together weekly for three hours with the four cadres—core groups—to do the Ecclesiola dynamic we had piloted in Chicago: spirit, study, and mission. During the mission part of the meeting, we built tactics for the cadre, the congregation, and the parish for each church. About thirty people were journeying deeper into commitment. When several of them attended special courses in the region and the Academy in Chicago, they grew in their faith.

Lynda and I had a baptism of fire at the Summer '71 program in Chicago. The summer programs of the Institute were focused on research, international movement building, and global assignments. Lynda became one of JWM's "Room E" (mission-control) assistants for the New Social Process Research Assembly that summer. After reading over a thousand books and determining the comprehensive dynamics of society under the economical, political, and cultural arenas, we perceived that the underlying contradiction in society was the tyranny of the economic over the political and cultural; and that the rebalancing of society lay in the empowerment of the cultural dimension, which then begins to enlighten one's strategic directions if at all serious about the future of the planet. JWM gave Lynda the task of helping to organize

the pre-research data, an overwhelming assignment that often brought her to tears. She was so humiliated by that experience that she finally said, "Johnny and I are going to leave." I told her that Johnny and I were going to stay and we wanted her to stay with us. A reversal of roles from a similar conversation when I had intended to leave. We were struggling against our vocational decisions—first one then the other! She was crying and praying her heart out, and with the passing of the night came a new day and a new decision.

Priscilla Wilson and I were in charge of getting the corporate research printing coordinated and finished by the final plenary of the summer at Malcolm X Junior College—a cast of a hundred putting out about 500,000 pages in less than a week. And why? We were pioneering research in the context for and the process of a new society. Worth our best energy and excellence. All I can remember is a phone growing out of my ear during a marathon where I monitored progress, gave orders, held accountability, stroked people, handled machine breakdowns and supply glitches, and kept in touch with the research units, which seldom got their pre-publications to us on time. I felt like I was coordinating the launch of a space ship. When the final documents were presented to the thousand participants, I experienced liftoff. Then I went to our apartment and crashed. Strange fulfillment. Vocation in the trenches only feels glorious upon reflection.

After living again on the West Side of Chicago during part of that summer, Lynda felt more comfortable in our mostly white neighborhood when she got back to our house in Kansas City in August. One very warm night when I was out of town, only the screen door was locked. Lynda woke up when a man grabbed her leg and was trying to stuff a sock into her mouth. She screamed and kicked him with all her might. The intruder turned and ran down the hall and out the front door. He had taken her pocketbook, but we found it without the money under the front bushes the next day. After that we called her "the lioness that roared." When she tells the story to this day, she shivers.

That next program year we began to make a difference with the church hierarchy and other churches in our two-state region. I was very pleased when the United Methodist District Superintendent paid for any of his clergy to attend the PLC, and when a Roman Catholic Bishop

wanted us to train his clergy and parishioners. I also began to work with Pine Valley Christian Church in Wichita regularly. Their clergy family had much EI training and was passing it on to their congregation. To become a member of that church one had to take the RS-I course over four weeks, taught by the pastor and his wife.

Johnny, at age four, used to love to ride with me on the Wichita trip. We would talk like colleagues. He was becoming a little spirit man. He played Daily Office, mimicking everything he saw the adults doing. He would sing lustily, pretending to read the words. At bedtime, one of his favorite books was **Heroes of the Church**, stories (with pictures) about Polycarp, Boniface, Francis, Luther, Wesley, King, Laubach, *et al.* His reflections were perceptive, like "Daddy, why did so many of them get hurt?" When I told him they were followers of Jesus, he thought and said, "It's dangerous to follow Jesus, isn't it?"

Our house staff and regional colleagues were recruiting hundreds of lay and clergy to RS-I's and PLC's from local churches in Kansas and Nebraska. Sojourners began to visit the house to experiment with our disciplined life-style. We held several in-house retreats with emphasis on vocation. More moved into the house. The next year we petitioned the Order to send first prior families to join at least ten interns, including children, in new house locations at Lincoln and Wichita. We had the facilities, the interns, the regional support structures, and our promise to back them up.

At the Summer '72 Order Council the two new houses were commissioned. Several lay people from Pine Valley congregation joined the Wichita Religious House, and two families became dynamic priors in the Order. Four strong church families in the Lincoln region also became priors in the Order, going out to live in our global houses.

Two other things I remember about that summer program in Chicago: we loaded nearly a thousand people on buses and drove to Ravinia in Highland Park to hear Benny Goodman and his band, including Gene Krupa on drums (he died the next year). He was the man my roommate at Emory and Henry College had listened to non-stop. Second, after eighteen months in Kansas City, with a reputation as effective house priors, the Order assigned us to the Washington House. JWM also suggested I meet with the six North American Area Priors, as their

equal, since the D.C. region was strategic nationally. The area priors made sure that suggestion did not stick. They were probably right but I felt wronged.

THE LOCATION of the Washington Religious House on Rhode Island Avenue was next to a cemetery, not ten yards away. It was the old facility of the Carmelite Monastery who had built a new facility next door, and who were now few in number and needed our rent money, I think. Of course we were a white island within a black section of the city. There were some fourteen rooms on two floors and a full basement. The house members had covered the walls in the great hall with burlap, a way to get around major wall repairs. Therefore, the Washington Religious House was not a place to invite Bishops or members of Congress.

We and Pat and Lynn Coker from Wichita joined four adults and one child. The dedicated metro colleagues were around so often we figured it was time for some of them to move in. Within several months we conducted a vocational retreat that allowed them to make that kind of decision. Within a few months our self-support team included two government employees, a doctor, a lawyer, three teachers, a bookkeeper, and two temps. The house was too full, with a total of nineteen house residents, and more on the verge of coming to join us.

In the Washington Local Church Experiment we worked with a dynamic black Episcopal church, two United Methodist churches, and a Lutheran church. Three of the clergy were strong leaders and committed to the project. The numbers in their cadres were uneven, but the lay people were committed. They implemented cadre and congregational tactics effectively but were hestitant to risk local parish mission. Most churches were focused internally. We wrestled with the question of how to catalyze change in the surrounding neighborhood or area? That was so difficult that the national experiment was bogging down because of it.

Bishop James K. Mathews, the brother of our founder, was head of the United Methodist Church in D.C. I consulted with him in two ways: how to revitalize his congregations and how to help him lead his ministers in spirit life retreats. He was a strong leader, especially in articulating the gospel and in leading the national United Methodist Church

in social concerns. He gave us introduction to Bishop Bernadin of the Roman Catholic Church, who later became the famous Cardinal in Chicago.

I began to meet many of the black ministers in D.C. and preached in a couple of their churches. I had been preaching in churches in Kansas, Nebraska, and our home churches in Tennessee and Virginia, and had learned to take only one sheet of paper into the pulpit, usually with only three or four graphic images. Not totally free from my notes, however, I was almost lifted to freedom by the *amen's* and other loud words of praise rising from the people, sometimes with their hands waving.

It was delightful to see the white-gloved deacons and deaconesses in their white suits and dresses and hats as they moved rhythmically to the altar area where a little replica church sat on a table. Then about thirty tithers lined up in the front and placed their contributions proudly into the slit in the roof of the little church. Only after that did the plates pass for the general offering. The spirited singing and shouting in the black churches was inspiring.

As in Kansas City, our work in Washington was growing. We began to prepare for adding two more houses, one in Richmond and the other in Baltimore. We found the house location in Richmond with the help of Diane and Dick, Lynda's sister and her husband, who helped in so many ways. A team finally found a vacant rectory of a Roman Catholic Church in Baltimore. We recommended the Cokers and the Ballards to prior the Richmond house and the Newkirks and Leonards for the Baltimore house. There were six new adults, plus children, ready in Baltimore and five, plus children, in Richmond. The Order approved the two additional houses during the summer assignments. Forty-five souls lived in the three houses.

Looking for what was appropriate for the capital city house of the Institute, we moved our Washington Religious House from one temporary facility to another. Even JWM helped in the search. I can remember four moves within that first year. Real estate was very expensive. We ended up at the recently built Viatorian Seminary, a large structure for us, with two floors and a full basement—about four suites, twenty-five rooms, eight meeting rooms, and a large sanctuary. We rattled around in it for a while, but began to expand our missional opportunities, using it for conferences and courses, though it demanded

more staff and more self-support salaries to pay the lease. Fortunately, more families came to intern and sojourn.

We were in the midst of shifting from the Local Church Experiment to the Local Community Experiment, a wrenching experience for all of us who had met weekly for two years doing local church tactics. Charles, the Episcopal priest, who had a love/hate relationship with the church experiment, was now deeply upset because the church experiment was to be no more in that form. The Local Community Experiment, with a comprehensive parish emphasis, was the precursor of the human development projects under the banner of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, the secular organization begun by the Order, whereas the Ecumenical Institute was the religious organization.

Johnny was growing in every way. He attended a super pre-school with a good mix of cultures. It was then that I knew his bed-time ritual had become part of him. One day I was late picking him up after school. When I got there, Johnny was standing with the patrolman, who attended the comings and goings of the children. He was laughing when I pulled up to apologize for being late.

He said, "No problem, sir. I have been having a fine conversation with this little man of yours. I asked him who he was, and he answered, 'John, loved by God.' That's quite an answer." The patrolman had set Johnny's bedtime ritual in motion with his question.

The religious house had at least two persons needing special care: one, a twelve-year-old boy. We kept missing money, a watch, a camera, cassettes, and the like, and suspected him all along. One night his father and I went searching in his room and turned over his mattress to find most of the missing items and more. By myself I invited him into his room and shut the door. I let him look at the evidence. He would not confess he did it until I threatened him with expulsion—for which I had no plan. He broke down and confessed to taking all the things. I asked him how and when. I asked him what we should do about it. We decided that he would individually return the goods and apologize to each individual and then make a public apology before the house (which he did through tears). I then went to the adjoining bathroom and brought back a small container of water and poured it on him and said, "Son, you have stolen, you have confessed, and now I absolve you. You are

washed clean." I then reached over, put a big bear hug on him, and helped him wipe his tears. The boy of twelve took a big step.

Another time I had to physically restrain another intern with all my strength. She was striding up and down the hall screaming and crying. When she finally went limp, Lynda and I took her to her bed and let her sleep for twelve hours. The power went out of me. She thanked me afterwards. We helped her find professional help. When she got wild at other times after that, I gave her the eagle eye, which sometimes calmed her down. She was a great, wild spirit woman. Conclusion: living in community is often painful.

At that time the **Dark Night of the Soul**, by St. John of the Cross, was our reflective study. Its title was becoming the story of my life. Dealing with the wild ones, moving all over Washington, the expanding mission, shifting from the Local Church Experiment, journeying many new interns, keeping up with the growing budget—all these were grinding me down. My bowels absorbed the stress and colitis was the result.

And our marriage was stale. Lynda had gone to Chicago to be on the staff of the Academy in the spring, came home for a little while, and then returned to Chicago to be in charge of practics for some seven hundred persons at the Summer 1974 Research Assembly. When she took such an assignment, she bolted herself to the task as a *kamikaze* pilot bolted himself to his cockpit, truly committed. I was not even showing up on her screen. We had the biggest altercation of our marriage of fifteen years. She and Johnny went to Tennessee. I became infatuated with another.

JWM and I walked together the big block around the Kemper Building in Chicago when I asked him to assign Lynda and me to different houses. As I told him of our marital problems, he laughed knowingly, as if every couple goes through such straits. But instead of granting my request, he took me and his brother, Bishop Mathews, with him to Europe for a month.

WE TRAVELED first to Lisbon, where we met with Christian leaders and told them of the work of the Ecumenical Institute. We then drove

into the countryside to the *Mateus* winery, which Bishop Mathews claimed belonged to their ancestors. I really think he just wanted to sample their product, which we all did, c. 1910 bottle, the smoothest I had ever tasted—but inexpensive house church wine was all I knew.

Rome was the real reason for the trip, visiting contacts of Bishop Mathews in the Roman Catholic Church, telling them about the Order: Ecumenical (handing out a five-page brief entitled *Toward the Establishment of a Religious Order for the Post-Modern World*). The dimension of a family order was of interest, though few understood the implications of an *ecumenical* order, especially bringing together families of different religious faiths. Leaders of the church in Rome gave us good entree to Roman Catholic orders around the world, which another team of the Order followed up. (The response of Roman Catholic orders to the Order: Ecumenical experiment was enthusiastic, and several orders we visited wanted our help in their reformation.)

I learned the Mathews brothers' stories of their growing up in Ada, Ohio, of Joe's riding to Hollywood on boxcars to become a movie star, of their growing up in the church, and of their past and future strategies to renew the church, which they both dearly loved. I remember their prancing in long towels in the early mornings in our rooms before and after their showers, of their teasing each other about their body shapes, of even popping each other on the rumps with damp towels. Though they had different revolutionary strategies for the church, without a doubt, they respected and cared for each other.

Bishop Jim flew back to the States as JWM and I next stopped in Paris to check out the work of our Order there. I was deeply brooding over my life at that point, and stayed apart as much as possible, doodling into creation a new song about the journey of faith, which the body sang in Chicago upon our return.

MARCHING THROUGH THE NIGHT

Tune: *Les Bicyclettes de Belsize*

La, la, la . . .

O when Dark Night assaults my soul and nothing's presence fills the All,
And when the fire burns out my love, I suffer death before I die.

I am marching through the Night, silence and stillness, blackened light,
Trusting that Heaven will come at last and vanquish Hell.

Wounded so deep by awe I swoon, oppressive weakness seals my doom,
No place to hide, no will to live, I suffer death before I die.

I am marching through the Night, silence and stillness, searing light,
Mystery has won the war in me, I melt away.

I hear a voice, "You are my son; you are well-pleasing, blessed one!"
I am the one who's come to life, born of the fire before I die.

I am marching through the Night, silence and stillness, filled with light,
Assured that Heaven has made its shrine in darkest Hell.

And now Dark Night and I are friends; I trust the Long March never ends,
For now I see by fire of love; I've found the Way before I die.

I am marching through the Night, silence and stillness, blazing light,
Leaping as one consumed by fire, my passion born.

La, la, la . . . .

Our next stop was the London Religious House, where JWM asked me to lay out my task force's product of the previous summer's research assembly: the *comprehensiveness screen.* It was a two-hour intuitive exercise that called forth key issues and helped an individual or a group plot them into ten frames, under such titles as "underlying ruminations, low key ponderings, intruding issues," etc. The intuitive gimmick was the "knot-hole," on the other side of which a person's context shifted, or at least fluttered.

I made a side trip to Glasgow and Edinburgh on the way home to see a special friend and was much impacted by the home of my ancestors—I have always been told I am part Scotch-Irish.

MATHEWS WOULD NOT HEAR of separate assignments for Lynda and me, so I left the D.C. House and headed for Galax to figure out the next move, hoping to force his hand. Soon after, Lynda and Johnny moved to the Chicago Nexus House, on the north side. Days passed, weeks passed, and no word from the Order. I wrote several letters to JWM. No response. They were delivering their quiet ultimatum. I did hear from the new prior of the D.C. House, Don Cramer, who suggested I come and help them with a special project. I was not about to respond to anybody except JWM.

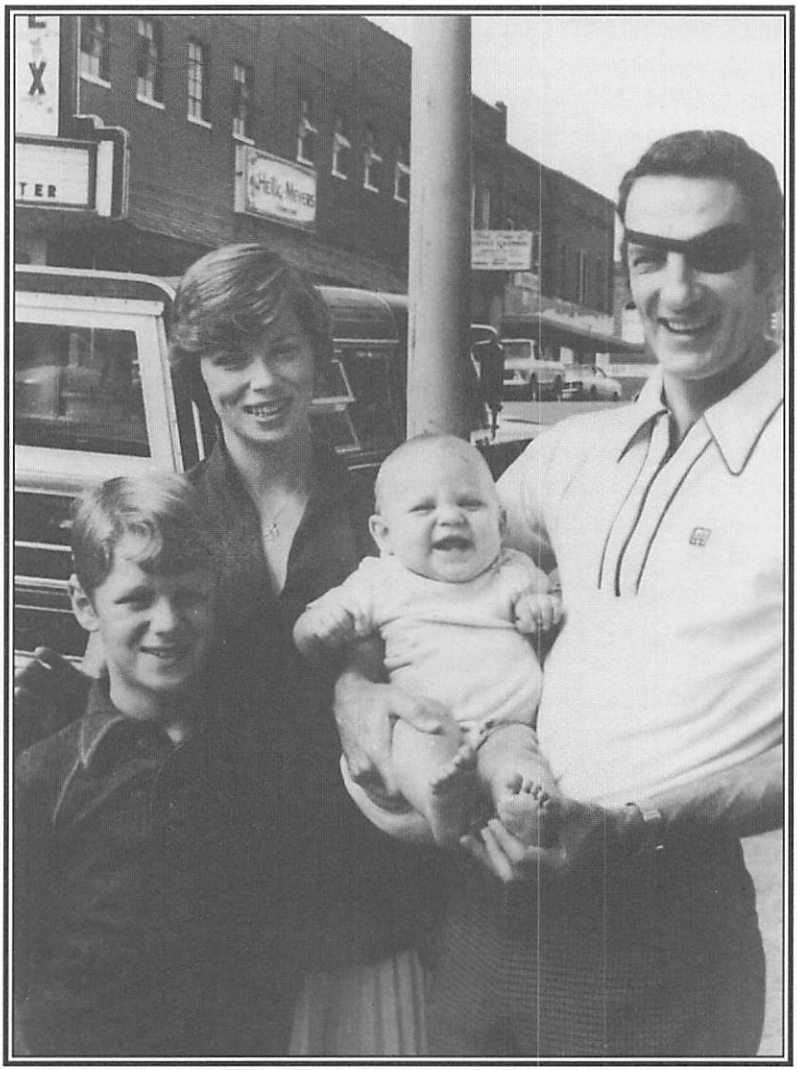
I went into sulking semi-depression, eaten up with guilt over leaving Johnny, mixed in my guilt over Lynda's letters and phone calls, and summarily dismissed by the Order and my mentor. I was a fish out of water living with my parents as an adult, and dodging contact with acquaintances in my small hometown who wanted to know why I was back and where were Lynda and Johnny. I was up against it. The colitis intensified. To keep equilibrium, I took tranquilizers, threw myself into golf, reading and writing, and trying to re-bond with Mama and Dad. In all, a miserable time, or, as the old mountain man said, it was like being buried in too small a hole.

Finally, I did hear from the Order through Lyn Mathews, inviting me to go to Oklahoma and participate in a statewide campaign of Town Meetings. I jumped at the chance and drove all the way from Galax, going by brother-in-law Hal's army base in Alabama to see him and get some free dental work. I felt let loose as I rode the open highway in my used *Pinto*, attempting to re-engage in authentic mission.

The Town Meeting that Marilyn Crocker and I led was like a revival, with many of the leaders of the small town giving heart-felt testimonials at the end. Within about five hours the town had strategic directions, a story, a song, and a symbol. They had worked hard. At the end, they celebrated proudly the fifteen-page document they had created together. Their future was brighter. They were misty eyed as they sang their song, read their story, and held up the banner holding their symbol.

The Institute conducted hundreds such meetings across the US before the Bicentennial. It was fulfilling to be involved in such an effort, especially after being disengaged for too long.

To The World



Our Family on the Way to Australia (Downtown Galax)

Chapter 19: "The World Is My Parish"

Chicago II and Australia
Age 36-39 (1975-78)

I DROVE BACK to Chicago to help evaluate the Oklahoma Town Meeting campaign. Joe Slicker, one of the founders of the Order, pulled me aside and asked if I would head up the Chicago Region Town Meeting campaign, living at the Chicago Religious House in Fifth City, on the West Side. We had teams working throughout the region, setting up over fifty meetings that quarter. During the year of 1976, the Order and movement set up over 1000 Town Meetings or Community Forums worldwide.

I told them I would only accept an assignment apart from Lynda, though I wanted to be close to Johnny. Now we were all in Chicago, about twenty minutes apart. I was back in business, doing something worth doing. God, I had missed the crummy outfit.

Later, we decided that we would try a new family experiment for a year, so Lynda and Johnny moved into my apartment at the Fifth City House. Lynda and I respected the presence of the other and were civil. I was tired of fighting the consensus of the Order in regard to no separate assignments for our family, and I knew they were upholding the integrity of our marriage covenant, as a congregation in the traditional church pledges to do. Finally, I respected Lynda for her tenacious resolve to keep us together. She and the Order had given me the freedom and time to re-decide to be this family again.

Problems with colitis recurred. One thing led to another and depression set in. Dr. True of the Order and a member of our Town Meeting team ran all the tests at his practice in Oak Park. Nothing we tried worked. I got worse in every way. He finally sent me to Mayo's Clinic, where I received the most thorough exams of my life, a week of them. The British doctor told me I had a societal disease called stress that attacked my lower track instead of my heart and prescribed

medication. It worked and I began to retain nutrients and to gain strength. Above all, I began to feel healthy and regained a new motivation for my work. I stayed on the medication for eight years.

I found it refreshing to get away for a while to teach in the Human Development Training School in Cano Negro, a village near Caracas, Venezuela, which was in a black Hispanic section of the country. Our staff had been working in that village and area for a couple of years and used it as a demonstration project and laboratory for the Caribbean movement. Participants came from the villages and from a dozen nations and/or island groups—a blend of uneducated villagers and well-educated church people. The four-week curriculum, which was a precursor of the Human Development Training Institute for demonstration projects around the world, emphasized imaginal religious/secular curriculum and village work projects. With George West, the project director, I helped set up a gober gas tank (heat from human and animal waste), a bathroom for the staff, and worked on the community plaza. We were within walking distance of rain forest where we went for materials: an eerie experience to be enshrined in foliage, not seeing the sky.

During a sub-village (stake) meeting we looked at a global map and traced where one of the villagers was going to the Institute's global human development project meeting in South Korea. He was the first from that village to ever travel by plane. They were awestruck talking about and imagining his trip, and hoped he would have fun with the women there, and laughed heartily. The curriculum of the school and the spirit of the villagers doubly impacted all the participants, especially the sophisticated ubran ones. We all remember Cano Negro.

When I returned to Chicago in early April, I was very glad to see Johnny, and, yes, even Lynda. During this time, intent upon reconciliation in our relationship, Jeremiah, our second son, was immaculately conceived, since the doctors said we could have no children. He would be a sign of resurrection for our marriage.

The Fifth City five-year planning consult was at hand that April in 1976. With the community leadership, outside movement participants from across the nation, private and public sector participants from greater Chicago and the West Side, and members of our staff, we went through a week of visioning, contradiction analysis, strategic and tactical

planning, and published a five-year plan in rough document form by the closing plenary and celebration.

After that I was reassigned to assist the Fifth City organization and especially the block development program. As I went door to door visiting residents, I discovered Mr. Connie, a retired postal worker who lived on Adams Street and was that block's prime mover, especially in beautification. The uniform chain-linked fences, lampposts, newly poured cement sidewalk sections, newly planted trees, and lush and trimmed grass all signified exceptional care. That block was the oasis of the forty-block area. Mr. Connie told us how they operated: when someone got an idea, he or she would discuss it at their monthly meeting. Once they agreed, he took responsibility for gathering the materials or having the political Ward system donate them. A block workday followed. Very appropriate technology.

Mr. Connie took a liking to me, I guess, for I ended up lounging with him in his bar-basement, learning to play Whist with his cronies at his backyard barbecues, and going with him to meet the Ward politicians. I became his shadow. There is a lot to learn from a savvy, local man who really cares about his piece of creation.

We highlighted Mr. Connie's block progress in the community newsletters. Other block leaders began to stop by for a look-see and conversations on how to do the same things on their blocks. Peer demonstration catalyzes development better than any other means.

The Fifth City project was conceived as a parish demonstration for the church. Through that research and the Local Community Experiment that followed the Local Church Experiment, the Order and the Institute put into being twenty-four Human Development Projects, one in each time zone around the world, emphasizing comprehensive development—to teach employable and productive skills, literacy, health care, community reorganization, and leadership methods—with the emphasis on *deeply human*. And we wanted to symbolize that any sensitive and caring person on earth could be in touch with, or even volunteer in, a demonstration community project in their zone of the globe.

Therefore, over about two years, the Institute launched the Band of 24 Human Development Projects and assigned staff to live there with regional movement colleagues. There were two projects in Canada,

four in the USA, four in Africa, and one in each of the following: South America, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, Micronesia, Philippines, China (Hong Kong), Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. This Band of 24 stretched us in incredible ways.

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1976, Lynda was driving down Eisenhower Expressway on the way to the Loop when a man, probably on dope, the police said later, ran into the rear of our brown Ford *Pinto* going about 50 mph. He leaped the fence and fled. She had seen him coming and decided if he hit her she would keep her foot off the brake and head up the adjoining embankment. The back of the car was smashed up to the front seats. No explosion, very luckily, for that model had that reputation. During this third wreck in Chicago, the little brown *Pinto* finally died. Two young men on our Town Meeting team almost killed it with their wrecks.

Lynda was shaken, but her primary concern was the baby, for she was about four to five months pregnant. Months later (both boys were a month late), January 14, 1977, Jeremiah Joseph Cock came out reluctantly. The name *Jeremiah* came from the Old Testament prophet, and from these verses: "I make you . . . an *iron pillar* . . . to withstand the whole land. . . . Though they attack you, they will not prevail, for I shall be with you to keep you safe" (Jer. 1:18-19). Fifth City has as its central symbol a huge iron statue of the Iron Man, reminding them that they can stand, come what may. Jeremiah's bedtime ritual captures this, also:

Parent: Who are you?
Jeremiah: Jeremiah, called by the Lord.
P: What are you called to be?
J: The new Iron Man.
P: What does that look like?
J: Standing tall and firm in every situation.
P: So who are you?
J: Jeremiah, the Prophet of Hope.
P: In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. ***Amen***.
J: ***Amen***.

Like brother John's ritual, we finished with two beeps on the nose.

Soon Joseph Mathews came by to meet his new namesake (though *Joseph* was after Jeremiah's grandfather, also). Our boys brought us back together and kept us together during the seemingly impossible times. That's the way family should be.

Johnny's entrepreneur spirit flowered during that period. The little brother he had prayed for needed his diapers and clothes cleaned. He began to wash, dry, fold, and put them in the drawer for a dime a load. It clicked with him that he could make more by washing others' clothes as well. He charged them a quarter a load. He delighted in his business and did a really good job, for people kept telling us so.

Johnny was also a good student, attending the Leif Erickson Elementary School in Fifth City, with all black children except those of the Order. During that winter, *Roots* was on TV and he became very engrossed for a third-grader. He was incensed and cried when the slave owners treated their slaves cruelly. His sense of social justice was manifesting itself. Rather than reading and writing seven book reports during the next year, with our help he proposed to his teacher, who was one of the best he ever had, that he read **Roots** and divide it into seven parts. She readily agreed. He was very proud when he finished reading that big book, and so were we.

While the series was still on TV, a black student, who had special problems, had watched *Roots* also and was out to get the first white person he met. He jumped Johnny on the way to school, without too much damage: his black friends in Fifth City came to his assistance. Very frightened, Johnny told us after school that day and did not know what to do. He was afraid of retribution from the boy if he told his teacher. I talked to his principal and said we were not out to get the boy dismissed. She understood and gave him a stiff in-school punishment. He did not bother Johnny again.

DURING THE SUMMER program of 1977, our family was assigned to be continental priors in Australia. Jeremiah was seven-months-old when we flew out, pudgy fat with long blond curls. A happy baby, but once on the plane he began to cry and fret. We tried everything. After

an hour or so, we happened to take off a sock to discover his foot was turning blue from lack of circulation because of the tight elastic roll above his ankle. From then on he was a joy, visiting with people all over the plane.

We stopped at the Singapore Religious House for two weeks to get our Australian visas processed. What a wonderful climate, about 80 degrees year round. And one cannot find a cleaner city anywhere in the world. There are fines for throwing a cigarette butt or chewing gum on the street or sidewalk, and for jaywalking. If a household discovers a mosquito, they report it to the health department, who comes immediately to remedy the situation. Taxis travel at 35 mph. I asked one why they drove so slowly. He simply said that 35 mph is the speed limit. Lee Kuan Yew had built an ultra orderly society. Whether it is more human is debatable. Just do not get caught breaking a law.

We loved the food, especially chicken satay, the meat grilled on a skewer and served with peanut sauce. One of our colleagues ate forty sticks for his dinner. We drank our first Singapore Slings at another meal of roast duck. Multiple food stalls were everywhere. Rice for every meal was a foretaste of things to come.

Families, the stated foundation of their society, were everywhere and almost always with one child. The first child is educated free as far as he or she wants to go. The second child the family pays for. More than one child is almost taboo because space on the small island is at a premium.

Singapore Airlines became our favorite in the entire world because of hot towels, slippers, beautiful female attendants, delicious food, hardy snacks, and the graciousness of the whole experience. They flew us to Sydney, our first Australian stop.

Sydney is quite cosmopolitan compared to Canberra, the capital of Australia in the Blue Mountains (reminding me of my Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, though not nearly so majestic) southwest of Sydney. Canberra is a small city of bureaucrats mostly, which rolls up its streets in the early evenings and is almost totally shut down on Sundays. It's the only place I know where McDonald's couldn't make it. We lived in a suburban religious house, since suburbs is about all there is. From Canberra we especially coordinated the Institute's mission with the Aborigines with the national government.

The boys liked the change to a suburban house because we were next to a park. Johnny and the neighbor kids built a wooden airplane with wheels, big enough for Jeremiah to sit in. He slobbered "budd'n" and pretended to turn the stationary steering wheel. We saw a kangaroo in the park and a kuala bear at the zoo. A magpie strafed us as she guarded a young one nearby—the sound and sight of the swooping bird next to our heads was terrifying to Jeremiah. It was delightful to hear the conversations between Jeremiah and the wild parakets in the backyard. His first word was "bird."

The Australians made sure we knew how the *Aussies* ticked. They told us we had to be sensitive, for to Australians in general we Americans were just a rung above the more detestable Brits. The English decided that Australia was a good dumping ground when they sent over about 160,000 convicts between 1788-1852 to survive there as British laborers, just as they pushed thousands of religious dissenters onto boats to America. (From this precedent, we should not be so surprised at the blatant idea some racists have of depopulating the USA of so-called *undesirables*: "Put the _____ on a boat and send them back to Africa.")

The new settlers began systematically to take control of the continent and to kill the spirit and ways of the Aboriginal peoples who had lived there for 50,000 years. One of the most demonic means for killing their spirit was putting them on the dole—like our welfare—at age sixteen automatically, which destroyed self-esteem. There is an interesting correlation in the US as our new English and European "citizens" did the same with the original inhabitants of some 30,000 years—the American Indian, the first human citizens. All we did was kill them, take their land, put them on reservations, and force our culture on them.

The Institute staff had worked for several years at Oombulgurri in the Northern Territory, near Darwin, helping to create a demonstration Aboriginal community. Our staff had just begun a new project with the Aboriginal community of Murrin Bridge, two hours from Sydney. Leaders from these Aboriginal communities and our staff were leading community forums for the Aborigines across the continent to help them to plan their future and to recreate their symbol system. Spirit malaise was their problem. That's why too many seemed to be hopeless alcoholics

(Aussies referred to them as "no-hopers"), especially in the urban areas away from their out-back roots. They had become victims of a powerful socio-economic revolution that did not honor their value system. It died, with help from all sides. To illustrate this, two fine male leaders, who were about to go lead walkabout community forums for the first time, drank twenty-four beers the night before they were to leave. They could not handle the new possibility. With freedom often comes crisis. But they got back up and succeeded when they saw the difference the forums made to their people.

There was much guilt among the sensitive whites in Australia because of the devastation of a race of people. Although there was neither a Hitler nor gas chambers, their demise happened just the same. Just like in the States, Australian whites thought they were more advanced than the tribal people, whose depth human wisdom is superior.

The Institute had a model for resuscitating and sustaining the life of the Aborigines that was working and that needed funding to take it to the next step. With brochures describing the need and how our programs were successful, a blue suit, a calling card, and company research notes, I began to spend my time in Melbourne and Perth calling on the corporate heads of industry, especially those in mining, whose operations were contiguous to the Aboriginal territory.

We could not afford to fly much. My first transcontinental trip was by bus on highways not wide enough for two vehicles to pass, so each ran with two wheels on the pavement and two off. Thankfully, there was not much traffic. At stops, people went to Milk Bars and ordered a sandwich called *the lot*, the biggest I had ever eaten, with eggs, meat, cheese, lettuce, tomato, beets, unions, between large slabs of bread. Add an order of chips, very large chunks of fried potatoes smothered with salt and wrapped in butcher paper, weighing about a pound, and I gained some weight. Add to this a beer pub or tavern on about every corner where the *blokes* congregate ritualistically after work to drink their *grog*. I finished my three-day flu and a big book, **Shogun,** by the time we rolled into Perth on the west coast of the continent.

I had an appointment with the ex-mayor who took me to a swanky restaurant in his Jaguar. He had already supported our work, but I was there for his contacts more than his personal money. The ones who

liked what we were doing gave us references when we pointed out from out research that they obviously knew so and so. They usually commented that we had done our homework. A little probing on how to best get funding from at least three other companies became part of the meeting design.

In Perth, we added to the description of us as the Institute of Cultural Affairs: us *also* as the Order: Ecumenical. That drove some Australian colleagues to paranoia. They reminded me that the Australians were not as religious as we were in America, and that they purposely had kept our religious background out of our community work.

Sure, the established church was near death in Australia, but the way I experienced those industry heads when I talked seriously about our staff's living with the Aborigines was the way I talked with any sensitive and caring person, religious or not. I quickly realized that one of their primary questions of me and us as the ICA was Why are you doing what you do when you could be making a lot of money for yourself? Without an authentic answer to that question, we were suspect. If they asked if we had a religious motivation, I said, "I do." That satisfied them when I went on to assure them that we were not some sort of cult.

Back in Canberra, Lynda was making self-support money for our continental staff by working part-time for the Canberra College of Advanced Education and substituting at Roman Catholic schools. I was gone most of the time that year, so she had to be the primary parent. Jeremiah stayed with a sitter during the day, and Johnny attended the fifth grade, with the strong compliments of his teachers on his excellent background (black schools in the States). His uniform of shorts, over-the-calf socks, dress shirt, tie, and sweater was the tradition for public schools. He played on a soccer team. The first game I ran up the sidelines shouting for him to move in toward the goal to receive a pass, only to have him penalized for being off-sides twice before I remembered what little I learned about soccer back in Chattanooga. Jeremiah watched his big brother run and kick the ball and of course wanted to get in the game, also.

He was turning two-years-old and enjoying our morning worship, as did Johnny at that age. Jeremiah would sing "Oey, Oey, Oey" ("Holy, Holy, Holy"), beat the drums with or without an adult's help, crawl under chairs and jabber reverently, and clap and dance wildly as we

passed the peace. We were clear that sensory and participatory worship was a highlight experience for our younger children, so we let them add their uninhibited expressions of praise—for of such is the kingdom.

Lynda and I took a trip to Murrin Bridge to participate in the project there. On the way the old car radiator boiled over, and as I foolishly tried to remove the cap to add more water, the force of the remaining steaming water knocked me down and blistered the skin of my right arm, neck, chest, and abdomen. Luckily, it missed my face. After treatment in the local hospital, nurse Lynda tried to keep me comfortable in a motel that night.

In spite of Vegemite, a product like peanut butter here, though horrible tasting, our experiences in Australia were mostly positive. Their people are *fair dinkum* Aussies, meaning to me, likeable, hard working, dependable, even pillars of iron. I liked Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth for different reasons. The natural environment is awesome and full of wonder. The climate is desirable, though I nearly froze in Melbourne during their winter, since there is little central heating. Liza Tod's down comforter saved me. Australia, excepting its Aboriginal catastrophe, is an admirable invention of humanness. "She'll be right, mate." "Ta."

From this year on we began to understand what John Wesley meant when he said, "The world is my parish."

DURING OUR YEAR down under, Joseph Mathews died back in Chicago. Only travel money for select representatives—in our case, Australians—from each Institute area was possible. We grieved for our founder in Australia and did our own memorial service. We suspected that things would never be the same in the Order and the two Institutes, but never dreamed of the wrenching pain that was to come after our founder died.

Chapter 20: "Assalamu-alaikum"[1]

Indonesia
Age 39-41 (1978-80)

AFTER A SUMMER back in the States, our new assignment was to be the directors of the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Columbus discovered America trying to get to Indonesia. The Dutch colonized the islands in the sixteenth century until their Independence in 1945. Under the leadership of Soekarno, the first President, and Adam Malik—the Foreign Minister who encouraged the ICA to set up village projects—Indonesia set out a noble vision for their nation under its *Pancasila* philosophy (five principles: belief in one God, civilized humanity, united nation, representative democracy, and social justice for all). Their motto is "Out of many, one" or "Unity in diversity" (*Bhinneka Tinggal Ika* in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language).

Indonesia is the fourth most populated nation in the world with almost 200 million, living on 3000 of its some 17,000 islands. Ninety million live on Java, the most populated island in the world. Over-population on Java has led the government to attempt inadequate transmigration projects to relocate some twelve million to outer islands. Indonesia is the most populated Islamic nation, with 80 percent of the population Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 10 percent other. Eight million live in Jakarta, where our ICA office was located in the three-star Sabang Hotel.

Soon after we arrived, Jakartans chuckled at the government-run newspaper article heading , "John Cock, the new Head of the CIA [instead of ICA] in Indonesia." That snafu and the description that I know everyone must have used behind my back, "the American with the black patch," made me a stand out.

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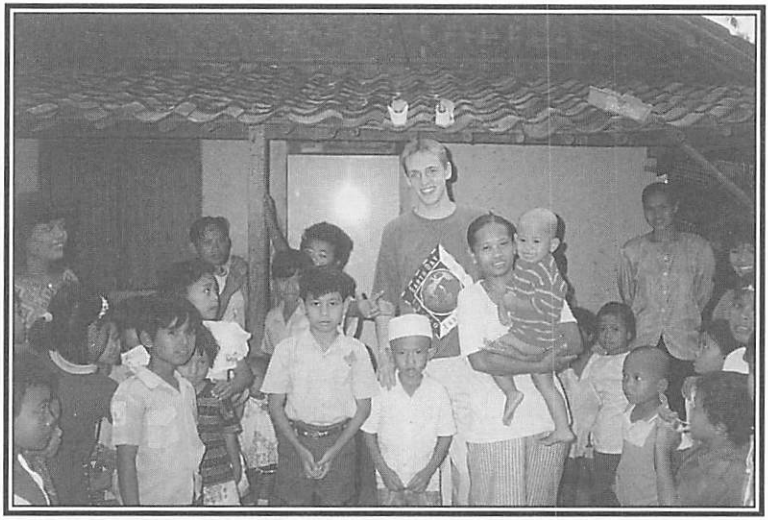
[1] The ordinary Arabic greeting in Indonesia, meaning "Peace be upon you."

The Indonesia receptionists loved it when I got on the phone and said, "This is John Cock." I didn't understand their giggling at first, but later found out that the pronunciation of my name sounded like the Indonesian word for "squat," as over the latrine. My name also made me a stand out.

Our home was in the newly constructed project house and community training center in the village of Kelapa Dua, about thirty miles from the center of Jakarta. Kelapa Dua was made up of three smaller villages, Dahung, Nurdeen, and Asam, where we lived on a hill surrounded by rice patties, the walls of which were our paths to the other villages. We were about four miles from Tangerang, a lively town where Jeremiah went to preschool by rickshaw with his village nanny, Wati.



Jero at 15, Revisiting Village (Wati Holding Her Baby)

At 1½ years old, he was a roly-poly, curly headed blond-haired boy who quickly became the village pet. Since he was just learning to talk, he learned Indonesian very quickly, even faster than English. In fact, the villagers told us that he could speak three different dialects that he picked up from his walks through the three villages. "Jaro" is an official title for the headman of the village. He became affectionately named "Jaro Miah" by the men and then by everyone. His lasting

nickname has become "Jero." He and Johnny, whom they named "Jono"—also a nickname that stuck—were conversationally fluent with the villagers, much better than Lynda and I. We would take one of them with us whenever we visited. When the government officials visited the villages, they marveled at the little towhead who translated the essence of the conversation sometimes ahead of our staff translator. They and everybody wanted to touch and pinch him, which he resented.

The villagers would sneak him off and feed him whatever they were eating, so he had a stomach full of worms when we moved; and his impetigo rashes were difficult to heal in the tropical climate. He broke his collarbone playing ball with the big boys and narrowly missed a serious eye injury when a soccer ball hit the van window, which shattered and cut him just above his eye. But he survived and loved his life in the village, mostly because everyone loved and cared for him.

He got potty trained much like the village children, running around bare bottomed. He took his bath in a tub next to the water pump in the courtyard of our staff house. He became a hilarious Balinese dancer with the little Indonesia girls who were daughters of our staff.

Since we only drank boiled water, cold drinks were a treat. Jeremiah walked around with a *Coke* in hand at every opportunity—the Coca-Cola king. We bought ice at Hagi Mabub's store at the entrance to the villages and put our *Cokes* on it in our cooler in the apartment. *Cokes* never tasted better than in that steaming heat, especially right out of the icy water. He would roll the icy bottle on his skin to cool down. When I let him have a *Coke*, he would say, "*Terima kasih, Pak* John Cock" ("Thank you, Mr. John Cock"), and just laugh and rub his fat tummy.

Pak Galon from Asam took care of our generator that went on at dark and off at midnight, providing light and sound for our evenings. In the kitchen we had a kerosene refrigerator that sort of worked. Like the rest of the third world, we bought groceries daily, mostly fresh at the markets, except the goodies from the embassy store in Jakarta where we bought peanut butter, cookies, cake mixes, hamburger meat, instant coffee, toiletries, etc. The Indonesian staff, about fifteen, did much of the cooking by choice because we could not get it spicy enough to suit them. One Thanksgiving we prepared a traditional American meal for them. They sat there looking glum, hardly touching the food until one

of them went to the kitchen and came back with the chili-pepper sauce and passed it around. Jeremiah put some on his food and began hollering, *Pedas*! *Pedas*! meaning spicy hot.

My favorite foods were *gado gado* (a salad with peanut sauce), *sate ayam* (chicken on a skewer cooked in peanut sauce), *nasi goreng* (fried rice with shrimp, beef, and chicken), although we had to be on guard for rocks in the rice, which broke teeth. When I went to Medan, I always ate their specially fried chicken (which I called *kampung ayam*, or scrawny village chicken, which ran somewhat wild) and spicy hard-boiled eggs.

The preschool meal ritual was uproariously loud and very true:

Leader: Makan (Food) . . .
Children: Baik (Is Good)!
Leader: Hidup (Life) . . .
Children: Baik (Is Good)!
Leader: Semua (All) . . .
Children: Baik (Is Good)!
All: Bagus! Bagus! Bagus! (Very Good! Very Good! Very Good!)

When in Jakarta, we often ate lunch at the American Embassy, and what did we order? Hamburgers and French fries about every time—the true mark of an American. (McDonalds was not there yet.)

The Cock family apartment in the village was a 1½ room apartment—for Lynda, Jero, and me; Jono roomed with another youth—in a concrete block structure with a corporate kitchen, three baths, dining room, and village training rooms, all connected by stone walkways around a courtyard. Our bathrooms were very modern by village standards, but quite different for us. There was a concrete box about four feet square that was pumped full daily from our deep bore well. A shower (*mandi*) consisted of soaping down and rinsing off with dippers full of cold water, more like icy in the early morning and the rainy season (November to April), but very refreshing in the heat of the day. The Asian style toilets were extremely hard to adjust to. There was one American style toilet that some villagers could not figure out, so they

stood on it and squatted until we put up a pictorial sign with an "X" superimposed.

Lynda secured a job at Jakarta International School (JIS) as the attendance counselor, which paid a substantial salary that helped support our staff and enabled Jono to attend the sixth and seventh grades free. He thrived on the superior education and its international flavor. It was difficult for him to participate in extra-curricular activities because of the long trip back and forth to the village, but one teacher put him up sometimes so he could play in soccer games or attend school social events such as dances. The teacher even bought him soccer shoes, a luxury for our small stipend.

Other teacher friends loaned us their fine houses when they were on vacation or when the road into the village was flooded. We spent both Christmases in such homes. The teachers' homes were marble-floored, spacious houses with servants, either a cook, a house cleaner, a gardener, a driver, or a watchman. A real retreat for us.

One of those friends, Keith, less than fifty-years-old, was found dead of a heart attack. The Indonesian servants at his house and other Indonesian friends took us all through their rituals of bathing the body, wrapping it in funeral cloths, prayers for the ascension of the spirit, and a feast with reflections on his life. Lynda and his wife, Lyn, together journeyed his body through the awesome ritual of cremation, sitting outside the crematorium as the smoke ascended.

We literally lived in two worlds. Children of ambassadors, international business heads, and affluent Indonesians attended JIS. They often rode up to school in Mercedes and chauffeured Japanese cars. Jono was very embarrassed—often hiding on the floor—to ride up to the school in our muddy, doors-tied-shut, windowless van. The glass in Indonesian vehicles was not shatterproof, and it was not unusual to lose a door window when the van hit a pothole too hard. At one time, the van had three windows missing. Sometimes roads out to our project were barely passable. The main roads were thrillingly dangerous because of the narrow, potholed pavement and the daredevil spirit of the taxi drivers going at breakneck speed. Several times the side mirrors of our van were knocked off by close calls with them.

THE TRIP INTO JAKARTA took about 1½ hours because of traffic and conditions. Many a time we had to get out and push the van through the mud. I even lost one of my flip-flop shoes in the mud and could not find it. During the rainy season, we sometimes had to park the van and hold hands as we crossed the least flooded section on the way up to the project house. Because of such rigors, we had to take an extra set of clothes, or Lynda would put on her clothes inside out until getting to school.

Sometimes colleagues and I took a taxi van to Jakarta by another route. One day I was riding in a Mitsubishi *Colt* that as usual had fourteen passengers although it was built for nine. We had a thirty-minute ride to Grogol, where I changed transport. I was hot, packed into the back-most seat. In front of me were a village woman and her five-year-old daughter. I noticed the woman kept clearing her throat and spitting out the window, for wet substance kept blowing in my face. The daughter got sick and vomited on the seat and floor. I nearly gagged. I was trapped by people, heat, smell, sight, and sound that were seemingly unbearable to a person from the, quote, developed world.

I stepped off the *Colt* at Grogol, tried to straighten up, finally got my legs moving, wiped my brow, and hailed another *Colt*. This time I sat in the middle seat next to the door, thank goodness. Before we could shut the door, we were off at a hurtling pace, dodging people walking on the edge of the pavement, the young driver keeping his palm on the horn, puffing his strong clove cigarette as he danced in his seat to the loud music. The next thing I remember is the sound of screeching tires, the van's swerving, and a small person's body thudding against the front and bouncing off. People outside started screaming and crowding the stopped van. I immediately got out, pushed through the crowd, and ran away from the fray, for I knew what was about to happen: a trial by raging family and neighbors of the small boy lying in the road. The last I saw, they had the driver by his shirt jerked up to his throat, retribution in process. I never heard the outcome.

I hailed a taxi, cleaned up and changed clothes at our Jakarta office—like superman—hurried to an appointment at the American Embassy with a USAID evaluation staff person who had spent most of July in our three projects across Indonesia. We had a conversation about development in the projects that ended up on criteria for evaluation.

He kept asking what the ICA meant by *human* development. He reminded us that USAID measured *human development* only under economic and social categories, and that our continued grant from them depended upon those indices only. I had been advised to bite my lip and keep my mouth shut, mostly. Let him make his speech. Though it would do no good, I could have shown him how to measure corporate participation in workdays; the involvement of villagers—men, women, and children—in the planning process, instead of just a few male leaders; the pride and significance of being a part of a replicating process of villages locally, regionally, nationally, globally; actually helping other villages do their development; the life stories of hopelessness changed to courage and hope.

The AID agencies around the world were so entrenched in their measurements that they did not begin to deal seriously with human motivational indices that finally made all the difference. They felt that a better economy and better healthcare were the pillars of humaness. These villagers cared deeply about the next village, and the next, and the next, and they were willing to sacrifice and volunteer. Human development is giving structure to such compassion, releasing people to share approaches that work in their own village and beyond.

Well, I had an intense day: spit on, vomited on, wrecked, mobbed, and talked down to by a social engineer who, from his vantage point of commuting to the villages occasionally from the comforts of his city dwelling in the West, thought he knew what would save the villages. Anyway, we went over his head to more understanding AID staff who had seen and appreciated our efforts over several years. We received even more grant money for implementation of the projects the next year.

On another trip I met with the head of Pertimina, the largest export industry in Indonesia, sending oil and gas around the world. He asked his colleagues to leave the room after I briefly explained our village work. Then he really began to talk personally. What he wanted to know was what motivated me to live in a village to help his people when he was not willing to do that, even though he was raised there and loved the memories. I could tell this was no ordinary fundraising call. He asked me if I did it out of religious motivation. I said yes. He understood. He asked me if we had had any trouble being there as Christian Westerners. I said yes, that the local government was very concerned that we not

proselytize the villagers, and the headman first thought our health clinic sign with the black Iron Man from Fifth City lifting his arms to the sky was a symbol for Jesus and was a lure for his Muslim villagers. The Pertimina chief asked what was really the key to village development. I told him *human* development, and then began to explain and illustrate what I meant. He understood right off and congratulated us on our wisdom as compared to all those who thought economic and social development were enough.

As we talked with leaders in the government and private sector in Indonesia, we found a strong network of deeply sensitive and caring people, beginning with Foreign Minister Adam Malik and Ms. Malik, whom we visited many times to report on our work. Because of them, we got land on which to build our project house at Kelapa Dua. Mr. and Ms. Abideen, who owned a cosmetics and medicines industry, visited Kelapa Dua several times and gave much help, including a new van. Mr. Ionkers, head of Singer in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, gave our villages sewing machines and skills assistance for economic development. His family became our close friends. Pak Soedjai, head of plantation projects in the nation, used our staff to train his and by doing so knew that he was helping us to make crucial self-support income. Governors and heads of departments at the province level were instrumental in our expanded development efforts. They knew we could go nowhere without their approval and support. They wanted our work to succeed, of course.

We were well connected and had to be. I was to fly back to the US to represent our area in the Order council. At the airport, I could not board because I did not have the proper papers for exit. I had a ferocious conversation with the authorities there and found out the last plane left in four hours. I took a taxi to the office—I did not have to tell him to go fast, they always did—and called the head of the Department of Immigration at his home. After hearing my dilemma, he told me to go back to the airport and all would be well. The airport authorities met me with apologies, smiles, and bows. All of this with no money under the table, better known as bribes, which make the third world go. Just good connections because we were doing a crucial job for Indonesia.

I spent part of my time traveling to the other projects in Indonesia

and Malaysia. We were invited by the government to start a project in South Sulawesi, near the main city of Ujungpandang. The Bontoa project was a village built around a courtyard the size of a football field, with houses built on supporting stilts, which added to coolness, avoided rising water, and provided storage under the house. The village was the most cohesive I had experienced, led by a wise headman.

The trips to Bubun, a fishing village a couple of hours from Medan in North Sumatra, were adventurous. To get there we flew Garuda Airlines to Medan (*Garuda* is the mythical bird of the Hindu religion, which was part of the culture of Indonesia). From there we traveled by rickety bus to a town. Along that road one day we could not pass because of a hundred or so people all the way across the pavement watching a Mohammed Ali fight on a TV run by a generator. Once in town we traveled by a motorized bicycle cab to the boat house, spent the early night trying to sleep on the floor, and then packed with about twenty locals into a less than reputable looking motorboat for a beautiful midnight ride up the river to the village. On one such trip with the family, Jero was sitting on everyone's lap. When he had "to go," Sherwood just lifted him up and held him out over the water to do his business. The villagers could not believe the little blond who could speak their language and eat their food, all except their favorite, little salty fish heads with peering eyes.

At the five-year planning consult in Bubun, the public sector of government officials and staff, plus the private sector of business leaders, stayed in the villagers' homes as guests of the local sector. Bonding happened to all as the ICA, the volunteer sector, led the other three sectors through workshops on vision, contradictions, strategic proposals, and implementing designs. The guests came to consider Bubun their adopted village, their project. Such insures successful implementation of a project. At the ending plenary when the mimeographed five-year plan book was passed to each participant, awe was thick. As the villagers held their book about the past, present, and future of their village, history was blowing wildly in their faces.

I did not know it then, but my malaria pills did not work. The mosquitoes of Bubun got me. I began to cough and became run-down until I could hardly make it through the day. I went to doctors in Jakarta

and Singapore and was diagnosed with TB and other exotic diseases. I continued to decline until I was resting every hour or so. Pak John Cock, at nearly six feet tall, got down to as little as 135 pounds.

One doctor directed me to an Italian tropical disease specialist and his wife, who had been in Indonesia for twenty-five years. At their modest bungalow, his wife took my blood and went on the other side of the curtain to test it as her husband began to examine me. Within thirty minutes he diagnosed me with a rare strain of malaria, prescribed the medication and recovery practics, and wished me well. That was the last time I saw him. I began to recover, but had several relapses for as many as three years later.

On another trip to Bubun, when the leaders of the nearby villages were undergoing intensive training, I was away from civilization for about five days. When I got back to a hotel in Medan, I got the message that Mama had called the day before. I returned her call and heard her announce that Dad had died two days earlier of a stroke, had died in her arms an "easy death." I whirled in silence. She was so far away and barely audible. I did not know what to say. She told me that the funeral was the next day, and that they knew I wanted to come, but it was best for me to wait until summer, considering the time and cost. Again, I did not know what to say. She told me how much she missed me and loved me and said a too-quick goodbye. I walked back to my room watching my feet stepping out one after the other, feeling very alone. The fact of his death was trying to bore into my being. I was not ready to comprehend it all.

Not being at Dad's last rites made it more difficult to bring the truth to closure. The high symbolic rites facilitate our accepting the reality of death: seeing the body in the open casket; receiving friends and relatives who speak of his gifts and telling stories out of his life; seeing the closed casket at the service of worship; hearing the church's articulation of the meaning of his life and this experience of death; driving to the grave site; sitting before the casket before it is let down easily into its last dwelling place; the reception meal afterwards; and being with Mama, Glenn, and Ida. I missed all that, and consequently he was there one day and gone the next. That is too abrupt and too impersonal for us humans. The ceremony I missed is what makes this final transition

human and befitting our relationship to the one we have loved throughout our lives. If I had it do over, I would have told everyone to wait until I get there.

THE SUNGAI LUI PROJECT in western Malaysia, near Kuala Lumpur, was a more developed project in some ways. Their electricity and running water made a big difference in development potential, e.g., small industry. Yet, the spirit of the village was not as cohesive as in the villages in Indonesia. In eastern Malaysia, we had a project near Kota Kinabalu in the state of Sabah (used to be northern Borneo, the land of the headhunters; the last scalp was taken thirty years before I got there, fortunately). The Chief Minister invited us to the village of Serusup. The project catalyzed two successful small industries. I visited the sewing room where the women were chewing and spitting beetle nut, which gives one a buzz and a noticeably red mouth.

While the Chief Minister was visiting the States about a year after we started the project, his assistant, who may have thought we were Communists [or maybe read that I was the Head of the CIA in Indonesia and Malaysia, who knows], and who, we were told, was about to vie for the Chief Minister's job, had our staff deported in a hurried-up, two-day process before his boss returned. The Chief Minister for some political reason was not free to talk with us after that. So we were out, but our staff left behind a year of development successes and many good friends in the village. Having good political connections is crucial to work in such nations, but even that is not enough.

OUR INDONESIAN STAFF were very eager and dedicated at first, but as the days and months passed, the attrition rate mounted. Why? Rising at 5:30 a.m.; being under assignment; along with the rest of us, doing all sorts of housekeeping tasks at the project house, from cooking, to washing dishes, to cleaning the toilets; learning English in earnest; not making any salary, only a stipend of less than $20 per month (which is what we received as well)—though all living expenses were covered; and having to assist the villagers in the unending task of development.

The developed nations' staff were a hard working group who had endured the female revolution and knew both men and women could do most any job. The Indonesian males had not yet experienced that revolution.

Many of the Indonesians that stayed on became giants. Wau, a Christian from Nias, was one. He cared deeply for the villagers, was disciplined, and learned the methods of development quickly. Netti, a Muslim and a nursing student from a nearby village, was invaluable with village healthcare. After several months, they fell in love and came to us to announce their wedding intentions. We counseled against the wedding unless one or the other would convert to the other's religion. Wau promised to become a Muslim. They reminded us that their Indonesian principles stressed people of all religions living in harmony, like in our project house. We were still reluctant.

At her parents' house on the day of the ceremonies, Wau and Netti knelt before the religious leader to take their vows. At the point in the service when Wau was to say, "Yes, I will become a Muslim," he balked. Netti began to cry. The religious leader and the parents were deeply embarrassed and angered as they called the service to a close. We took Wau and our family and exited quickly to the van and rode off. We heard the rumor that her relatives would seek retribution against us as leaders of the ICA, and we were advised to hide Wau and our boys since we were responsible for her family's shame. Our Jakarta teacher friends kept the boys, and we put Wau on a boat to the North Sumatra project at Bubun. Her family did come to our village, but our local Islamic leader was able to bring them to their senses.

Besides our family trips to the other projects, we took vacation trips. One of our most memorable was the sleeper train to Jogyakarta in central Java. The boys had fun on the triple bunks. Lynda had fun buying batik gifts and garments for us and watching the craft persons in process. We enjoyed visiting the Sultan's Palace and listening to the Gamelon music. The Borobudur Temple, with a Buddha statue under each stupa, rising like a pyramid, shows the Buddhist influence on the culture. The Wayang shadow puppet shows came from the Hindu influence of India. So the Islamic nation and culture is actually a wonderful mix. On the train ride we marveled at the terraced rice fields rising into the hills and wondering how many person-lifetimes it took to

bring them to fruition.

On another trip, when Diane, Dick, Julie, and Rob visited us, we went to the Puncak Pass where the plantations of tea and coffee flourish. I took Dick with me on a village visitation trip to Surabaya in East Java where we talked with the government and villagers about doing future projects. On another trip, when brother-in-law Hal came to do dental care in the villages, we visited volcano sites, some still recently active. But in all our travels we never got to Bali.

During the summer back in the States, after our two years in Indonesia, we "luxuriated" in hot showers, ate French fries and hamburgers, touched electricity switches, and drank water straight out of the tap, but all with very fond memories of our work with those great people in that enchanted land. We pledged to always live the simple life to keep in touch with them and most of the people on this planet.

By the time we left Indonesia, the Order/Institutes had 1250 staff, and thousands of volunteers, operating out of 130 offices in 34 nations.

Chapter 21: "Namaste"[1]

India
Age 41-42 (1980-81)

OUR WORK in Indonesia had prepared us for third world living, but somehow when our names were read out for our new assignment in India, tears ran down Lynda's face. India has always symbolized for us the poorest of the poor. Yet, when I read recently that India has the largest middle-class in the world—about 275 million, about a third of India's population—I was pleasantly confused in my images. India is fast approaching one billion human beings, or a sixth of the world's population. But when one considers that about 75 percent of India's population lives in mostly poor villages, and that 35 percent of the population lives in poverty, the old images still make sense.

Uneasily but obediently we accepted the assignment. Jono was going to be in the eighth grade and was anxious to participate in the Student House, a boarding educational experience for many of our seventh and eighth grade staff children. After a summer in the States, Jero was almost over his stomach and skin problems. We were not anxious to take him back into another strenuous environment. We reluctantly decided to leave him to come over later after we had had time to secure adequate living facilities and someone to care for him when we were on the road. I flew on ahead while Lynda stayed to get Jono settled in his new school and the Student House and Jero settled in with his new family, John and Judy Montgomery, and to arrange all travel documents for his trip over with the next team traveling to India.

Lynda's first night in India colored her entire stay and convinced us both of the radical need for India's rural development. The young

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[1] The ordinary Sanskrit greeting in India, loosely meaning the divine in me bows to the divine in you, said with the hands together while bowing to the other.

Indian mother in the dorm with her was the wife of one of our village volunteer leaders, who was hospitalized with tubercular meningitis and in a coma. She had just arrived from her village with her young son, who was very sick as well. Lynda gave him the children's aspirin she happened to have and began to sponge his hot little body, which became limp. As soon as daylight came, they took him to the hospital and found that young Pintu had polio.

He was left paralyzed from the waist down. His father, Vittu, was not so fortunate. After six months in the hospital, partially paralyzed and unable to speak, he mercifully died at the age of 26. To this day we help Ratnamala and Pintu—Avinash, now—and his older brother, Raju, with their education expenses.

Our village development work was spread throughout the State of Maharashtra, with headquarters in Bombay (Mumbai, now). For five years, our staff had been catalyzing the Maharashtra Village Development Project, or Nava Gram Prayas, a new village movement of self-development. They were moving toward staff presence in 232 villages, one in each county (*taluka*). At the Maliwada Human Development Training Center, the first demonstration village, they had trained 3000 Indians, of whom 1700 became part of the Volunteer Service Corps for short to extended periods.

Along with Cyprian and Mary D'Souza, from the Bangalore area of southern India and members of the Order for several years, our assignment was to be the directors of the village movement. Our strategic objective was to solidify that burgeoning statewide effort, which was whirling out of control because of unseasoned young leadership. For a month, we holed up in Bombay to listen, learn, and analyze the underlying contradictions. Along with the Indian leadership and international staff, we devised a Phase III model that configured a demonstration village in each of the 25 districts; 6 cluster demonstrations (10 villages); three Block demonstrations (100 villages), with training centers in a demonstration village near Bombay (Chikhale village), Pune (Jawale village), and Nagpur (Sevagram village, where Gandhi founded one of his ashrams); a state-wide training center at Maliwada; a series of community planning forums (*Gram Sabhas*) in 10 percent of the villages of the state; and an emphasis on women's advancement programs with a circuiting team, which Lynda helped lead.

With model in hand, we systematically covered the state by rickshaw, motor-rickshaw, train, bus, bullock cart, and truck. Traveling from Bombay to Pune by bus was a horror ride. The roads over the western Ghats (mountains) were two-lane, often covered with fog. During the night, the drivers pulled out to pass on blind curves in the thick fog. Lynda and I were down in the floor bracing ourselves for a terrible fate. Third world bus drivers operate out of "whatever will be, will be." The State was working to straighten the worst curves. I vividly remember watching too-thin women workers bend over to pick up heavy rocks, put them in baskets that they then lifted onto their heads, and walk to the bank to throw the rocks over the side. Often their small children played on

cloths close by.

Traveling by train was exciting in other ways. In third class, the seats were hard-sitting wooden benches. Never have I been so cramped. People slept in the storage areas over head, on the floor under the seats, in the aisles, and on top of each other. Men even traveled on top of the trains and stood between cars and on the steps. The huddled masses and the smells made me long for the first world.

We held meetings with the village leadership and the Volunteer Service Corps. We lived in village homes on those treks, often sleeping on the floors, sometimes next to the cattle stalls. We felt kin to Mary and Joseph as we spread out our mats on the hard mud floors and looked at the dung plastered walls and thatched roofs. Before two months were up, we had cut the Corps dramatically—very painful—and had expanded the national ICA staff with those who had proven exemplary leadership and commitment. Our statewide Council modified the new strategies, made assignments accordingly, and celebrated the past, present, and future of Nava Gram Prayas. The strategy turned the movement inside out and re-energized the total effort.

Exhausted from the two-month blitz, we took a few days off. We had hardly had time to think about Jeremiah's coming, but after all the travel and the prospects of the same in the future, we decided to hold off on bringing him to India, even though we missed him terribly. We found an out-of-the-way little hotel in Pune and caught up on sleep and food.

We ate *kulfi* (Indian ice-cream) and drank *lassi's* (a yogurt drink designed to cool the palate after spicy food) at our favorite dairy bar, ate steaks at the western style restaurant and couldn't digest them, and ate great Indian meals (Tandoori chicken, *chipati's*—a wheat bread—and very spicy curry with everything) at the Blue Diamond Hotel where many international followers of Bhagwan Rajneesh (now Osho) in their red colored garb lived and hung out. We tried to make up for the daily diet of rice and *dal* (lentils) in the villages. Even though Lynda and I drank boiled water only, bouts of dysentery had visited us. I began to only drink *Thumbs Up*, the Indian version of Coca-Cola.

Refreshed, we hit the road again. We played divide and conquer, as Lynda helped lead the team that worked on village beautification,

nutrition, sanitation systems, women's leadership, youth programs, and village unity. I worked on staff and village leadership training and sector support for the villages.

Although India has officially abolished the caste system, a class system is still very much present. In one village would be Hindus and Moslems, as well as several castes from Brahman to Harijan—the untouchables—who could only use certain wells, for example. Using our organization's experience around the world, we talked about people of different races, classes, and creeds living and working together for a better future for all. Imagine our pride when one of the villages, Jawale, was awarded the District Unity Prize.

We worked with service organizations, businesses, and industries in the cities and towns to acquaint them with our work in the villages and to solicit their support. The Rotarians began village eye clinics in central villages. Another key partner was Thermax in Pune. Mr. Bethane, its founder and a devout Parsi, hosted us at every chance out of his sympathy for our work in the villages and his hunger for deep dialogue. Under his leadership, and that of his son-in-law, the company devised the system whereby each working unit adopts a village. They assist the villages monthly through a village workday (*shramdan*) and through ongoing logistical support. They have also catalyzed the involvement of other industries and groups.

Through such efforts as these with the private sector, health clinics were set up; small cottage industries were started to establish a cash economy in the villages; banking services were begun to enable farmers to receive the necessary loans. Schoolteachers began to volunteer to spend time in the villages. India had an excess of schoolteachers, but few had been willing to submit to the rigors of rural life. Therefore, one of our tasks was to make the villages appealing to them for the cause of the children's education.

In our work with the villages, we stressed their planning together and transferred to them appropriate methods. They also became more skilled in implementation. Through their Community Development Associations, which began to include women and youth, they had the legal and practical organization to take out loans and invest corporately. Through imaginal methods, all ages could enhance their learning.

Consequently, the total fabric of the village life was developed, and each quarter they celebrated their life together.

Jawale, near Pune, a village where I spent much time, had the following Arch of Victory painted on a prominent village wall, listing their accomplishments:

> Rs. (*rupees*) 1000 Unity Prize; Road Leveling; Youth/ Women's Organizations; Village Pre-school; Village Television; Weekly Workday; Village Hospital; Village Tap-Water; Bank Building; 60 Buffalo Loans; Milk Dairy; Lift-Irrigation; Community Development Association; 85 Houses Electrified; Village Park.

That's integrated development. Gandhi would have been proud of their self-sufficiency.

It was in Jawale that I worked with Shakuntalah Belge (holding village child), a very strong sixteen-year-old staff person who has become one of the present leaders in India's ICA. She has visited our home in

Galax three times and led Lynda's visitation group in India during 1997 for three weeks, showing them the fruit of the ICA work in town and village. She is a great soul, though she would not want me to call her "mahatma." She reminds me of a thirty-two-year-old Mother Teresa doing her miracles in international boardrooms and villages. Along the way she even finished college.

BESIDES RECEIVING MONEY from our two churches back home, to help in our self-support while in India, we also earned self-support money by leading LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) seminars for the private sector. This two-day event demonstrated our indicative planning methods with an organization or company to help them devise a plan through the implementation phase. Deep consensus, future vision, and intense teamwork revitalized their corporate spirit.

Leading a LENS in Miraj, at the Marathe Research Foundation, we stayed in the home of the head of the foundation and his family, an upper middle-class family of strong Hindu faith. During our conversations into the night, he read to us in Sanskrit and explained basic tenets of their faith. We ate their sumptuous vegetable dishes and delighted with them in their bright and loving children. Their hospitality was amazingly warm.

During the second half of our year in India we began to help enlist India sponsors and other representative projects that would attend the ICA catalyzed International Exposition of Rural Development (IERD) in February 1984, which was to be held in New Delhi. The 650 delegates represented over 200 development projects from 55 nations. As the organizing sponsor, the ICA compiled development successes from over 2000 projects from the 73 participating nations. That event and the following two phases brought together, shared, and documented approaches that work from around the world and highlighted our village development in India. In preparation for that global event, Cyprian and I began to swirl our network during the year 1980-81 until we were visiting with the real leaders of the private sector in India, from the Tata's—leading industrialists—on down. My fundraising work in the US and Australia helped prepare me.

But in the midst of this campaign, my physical state deteriorated. My flare-ups with malaria revisited me and set me up for acute dysentery and another cycle of colitis, which brought me down again to 135 pounds. I ran out of energy, and as usual my spirit spiraled downwards. I drank lassi's at the dairy bar in Pune and ate noodles and soup at the Chinese restaurant near the religious house in Bombay. I was in and out of the Methodist guesthouse and the YMCA in Bombay and our special little hotel in Pune. I was becoming unfit for the task.

Lynda was hospitalized soon after arriving in Bombay for acute dysentery and later for hepatitis, which kept her down for most of a month. On one of her later Maharashtra bus trips she became severely dehydrated and fortunately found a YWCA hostel, where she collapsed. She went to a Dutch missionary hospital in a nearby town where the husband and wife directors helped her with boiled water and food prepared in their personal kitchen, knowing their hospital was not geared for her. We understood, for our Indian staff who came to the USA often suffered the same way as they adjusted to our germs.

Because of our sickness, we were assigned back to the States after a year in India. It had been a year of high adventure, of deep appreciation for the deep collegiality with the Order, the Indian ICA staff, the private sector, and the villagers, whose courage and spirit we will always remember.

Rabindranath Tagore, the Poet Laureate of India earlier this century, wrote poetry that captures the hope of the villages, our part in it, and the spirit undergirding it all:

I look back on the past
and see the ruins of a proud civilization
lying heaped out of history.
And yet I shall not
commit the grievous sin
of losing faith in man.
Perhaps the new dawn
will come from the horizon,
from the East,

where the sun rises.

In **Gitanjali** he wrote:

Let My Country Awake

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into
the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening
thought of action—
Into that haven of freedom, my Father,
Let my country awake.

And in **Stray Birds** he wrote:

Farewell

I came to your shore as a stranger,
I lived in your house as a guest,
I leave your door as a friend, my earth.

After an emotional send-out celebration, I flew home before Lynda, for I was sicker at the time. I was in a stupor until I boarded my last leg from Dulles Airport, outside Washington, D.C., to Roanoke, Virginia, about ninety miles from Galax. The twelve-passenger plane flew low, down the sunlit Shenandoah Valley that June. That view of my native vale was one of the awesome moments of my life. So lush and green compared to the brown dust of Maharashtra. I was filled with the wonder of where I was raised. On deeper reflection, I was filled with the wonder of where I had just been, as a stranger and an honored guest, and realized the whole Earth is my friend. *Namaste*: I bow to the divine in you.

Chapter 22: Leaving the *Journey to the East*

Denver, Chicago III
Age 42-45 (1981-84)

AFTER RECUPERATING for a couple of months with family in Virginia and Tennessee and at the summer council in Chicago, we were assigned to the Denver Religious House. The spaciousness of that old house next to the park and the public golf course and the wide-open spaces of the Rocky Mountain area were a healing environment. I got back up to 150 pounds in no time.

Jeremiah was still in preschool and learning to ride his bike without training wheels. He was the only young one in the religious house for months and became the center of attention. He liked to go with me to the golf course if I would let him sit on my lap and drive the cart. He was not much interested in the game itself when he swung and missed more balls than he hit.

Young John was preparing to leave for a year as a ninth grader to live with another of our staff families in Nairobi, Kenya, in eastern Africa. As a part of the Order's education program for our youth, all ninth graders spent a year overseas. He and three other sons of Order parents were assigned to work in village projects. He learned to wash his clothes in a bucket, to carry water up from the river, and to send his school assignments to the American Correspondence School. He attended the village leaders' training school, worked with the children and youth programs in the villages, assisted in building a clinic as he made bricks by hand, and traveled with a health caretaker team. Although we missed him very much, we knew he was doing a crucial mission and gaining invaluable life experience. I hardly recognized the tall young man as we greeted him at the Denver airport the next year. We loaded him up and headed to a mountain retreat. Jero would not let him out of sight and slept with his arm around him.

We were assigned to Denver for a couple of reasons. First, for

us to get our health back, but more importantly, to lead the religious house and the regional movement. We put emphasis on both the external and internal mission. For self-support, Lynda and I took a contract with the Colorado Office of Energy Conservation to lead twelve planning meetings across the state. We devised a three-hour workshop, plus a thirty-minute meal conversation and a thirty-minute closing plenary, usually conducted from 5:30-9:30 p.m. The method took the participants through vision, blocks, directions, and implementing actions. Names went beside each action. They could not believe they got so much done. An adjunct person duplicated the seven-page document of their work during the session, which the participants leafed through with pride during the last minutes of the plenary.

Along with Louise Singleton, we also used the same sort of method to arbitrate meetings among the factions trying to resolve water rights issues on the western slopes. Mobil Oil retained me for a handsome fee to consult with their management and their field mangers in that area. From the boardroom to the lonely drilling sites, which I flew to on a company plane, we used the same sorts of methods and the formal LENS seminar to facilitate their operations and community relations.

In the Denver House, we began to create the environment and rhythm that brought the regional colleagues in for courses, celebrations, House Church, and spirit-life retreats. The religious house hummed and sojourners and intern families were filling it up. With the help of the colleagues, we spent many workdays renovating the house and the grounds. Carl was in the cherry picker fixing the eaves and chimney; a team was tearing out and replacing the floor in the kitchen; other teams were painting walls and weather stripping windows.

The colleagues were special. A heart surgeon gave tens of thousands of dollars for our global work. A Boulder insurance man and wife won a $1000 grocery-shopping spree and gave it to the Denver House. A retired carpenter gave us his spare time. A colleague gave us his station wagon. Another framed expensive pictures and hung them in the corporate areas of the house. A painter moved in to sojourn while he helped paint the house and renovate walls. A extended sojourn couple cut up all their credit cards in the kitchen one night to try to get their family management back together so they could make it and also help us

with the house finances. A young man emotionally scared by the Viet Nam war found healing in our community.

We faced the challenge of the junior and senior youth in the house, who were only there to finish high school—they thought. The Order wanted the older youth to participant fully in the Order as young adults. It was a difficult year for us, for we were out of touch with youth habits in the first world. One parent flew out from Chicago to talk with us about her youth's non-participation in the house. New decisions were made. Before the year was over, and with the extra care from Lynda, the youth were even participating in our life together. They have gone on to distinguish themselves in academic and career pursuits.

Mama Dotte flew out to visit and went with us south to the Great Sand Dunes National Park near Alamosa for a mini-vacation. We played the fine three-par golf course outside our rented condo several times. Back in Denver we saw the movie *Chariots of Fire,* which inspired Jeremiah to become a runner.

FROM DENVER we were reassigned back to Chicago for the third time, this time as the Midwest directors of the work of the ICA, living in Fifth City. We coordinated the work of six ICA offices and O:E religious houses: Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and two houses in the Kansas City region. I exercised many roles, from prior to methodologian. Lynda worked for our self-support as an instructor at Oak Park Training Inc., which was a thirteen-week office simulation course that had a 90 percent job placement rate; hosted the many visitors to Fifth City from around the world; helped in the Fifth City leadership training programs; and later returned to the training program for young men and women, Fifth City Business Careers—like Training Inc. Jeremiah attended kinderschool in the neighborhood elementary school, experiencing being very much a minority in the all-black school. He had a scholarship to the nearby Lutheran school—mostly black students and faculty—for his first grade year. Having grown up in Indonesia with tan skinned people and educated in predominately black schools, he did not surprise us with his question, "When will my skin start turning dark?"

Jono was assigned to the Youth Religious House in Kansas City, where he set up a national youth council for our Order youth, fell in love for the first time, and decided he wanted to become a doctor. Since Kansas City was part of our Midwest territory, we were able to see him often. We began to relate to him as a colleague more than as a son. After all, he had been on his own for the last couple of years, had even been in the villages of Africa doing the mission of an adult. He attended Lincoln High School, gained math honors, ran track, and participated in an internship for students considering medical careers. He was definitely maturing and had a deeper than usual understanding of vocation.

In Chicago, we helped create a film of the work of Fifth City. It showed the beginning construction of a state-of-the-art Bethany Community Hospital, built where once stood the old Bethany Brethern Seminary where we lived when we first came to Chicago. It showed over 140 apartment units that had been renovated. Trees and grass-laned walkways lined many of the streets where neighborhood beautification projects had been started during our previous stay in Fifth City. Programs such as the men's Safe Street Program, the Fifth City Business Careers, and the Fifth City Preschool—which has become a model for inner-city education run by community residents—were great shots on film, especially with the kids in uniform doing their rituals and singing their songs. A five-business shopping center occupied an area of property in the center of the community where so many buildings had been burned out during the riots of 1968. A community center with a very active daily program for elders and a neighborhood health clinic was across the street. A complete auto service center was constructed and initiated by the visit of Mayor Washington, right across from the major reconstruction of the Chicago city bus storage and service center. The film was a great tool for telling the Fifth City story on Chicago TV and around the world.

And the Iron Man was standing even taller after all these years. The Fifth City story is not just about buildings and new programs. It is primarily about helping people to recover their dignity. It is the story of new life.

The task of Fifth City would not have happened without the strong cadre of committed leaders in those forty square blocks. They

were the men and women of iron that have stood over many years: Lela, Ruth, Floyd, Verdell, Mr. Connie, Mr. Washington, Bertha, Minnie, Gladys, Mr. Thurman, Betty, Anna, Audrey, Narvel, Phyllis, Lilly, William, etc. They were the core of Fifth City. Many of them went around the nation and the world telling the Fifth City story. They knew in their hearts the last stanza and refrain of the *Fifth City Love Song* (to the tune *And I Love you So*):

I've lived with you so long, no other love have I,
Your pain is all my own, your buildings, streets, and cries.
Soon I may pass away, but love will still remain,
The Iron Man standing tall, that all the world may gain.

And yes, we've known this world's great agony,
The billions still denied their hopes and destiny.
But we will go wherever they may be,
Till all communities live free.

Lynda, Floyd, and IRON MAN Hosting Indonesian Staff

Our Chicago House divided our troops into four teams: Fifth City, the West Side, the Northwest Communities, and Training Inc. Karen and I spent much time on the West Side working with schools, police, and communities, helping them through planning and training in imaginal methods. Terry and Bill concentrated on the Northwest Communities, taking our Colorado shortened method and leading many seminars there through the community college. Jim and Pam worked on Fifth City economic development and social programs; I met regularly with the Fifth City core. Shirley, Theo, Lynda, Christine, Fred, Bev, and Jean led Fifth City Business Careers and Training Inc. Bill was on special assignment to care for his son, Wesley.

I also spent much time on the road to the other five houses and regions, helping them to plan and implement their regional programs. On one such trip I drove past at least twenty-four jack-knifed trucks in a snowstorm in Iowa. I just kept on creeping along until I got past the storm. We held annual midwest summits at our West Side house in Fifth City. We piloted the 44-hour Vocational Journey Lab for university students at our Fifth City House, in an attempt to recruit new life to the Order and to help the participants to deal with their vocations out of the big picture and spirit deeps. As they saw the movie *Gandhi*, I realized I was seeing it for the eighth time, and each time reliving my time in India.

During the second year, as an Order priority, we spent many weekends as a house thinking through and preparing documents for the Global Order Council coming up the next summer. We were out to catalyze renewal trends within the Order.

That year we were heartened by the guest speaker after House Church, Dr. Robert L. Moore, who then was director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Chicago Theological Seminary; a psychoanalyst on the staff at the C. G. Jung Institute; and a co-author of **King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine**. He made the following comments about the Order and the global movement:

> I would be hard pressed to find another group that is addressing the contemporary world situation as directly and with as much energy and creativity as you are. . . . I don't know of any other community like yours that has really

> been manifesting what it means to be a global community, living the true. . . . You are doing what the reality of this time and this globe is calling all of us toward. . . . The world needs leadership like you are providing because the world is not transformed by information even in an information age. . . . You have to get your message out. . . . There needs to be much more concern about challenging others to join you. . . . You people are advocates of truth.

He did not know that we self-consciously did not seek publicity, but simply sought to be servant leadership.

Several other spirit events marked our year. We attended a Progoff reflective weekend, using the journal method of capturing the biographic details of our lives—I think I knew then there was a book in the details of my life. As a community we experienced the death of one of our youth, Wesley Salmon, who was stricken with leukemia. Our 24-hour vigil after his death was profound. We experienced another type of pain as we daily sought to deal with a seriously disturbed teenager.

When Mama Dotte visited us again, we saw *Zorba* on stage at the McCormack Theatre, starring Anthony Quinn at 70, still dancing to life. Terry and I began to collect used records, jazz for me and blue grass for him. And Terry, Jim, Pam, Karen, and I played Hearts and drank more than our share of *Dr. Peppers*. It was refreshing on occasion to stroll in the beauty of a golf course. But the first day out after many years, I hit a couple buckets of balls with my driver at the course practice area without warming up. My back hurt me then and hasn't stopped hurting for the past sixteen years.

During the summer of '84 at the Order Council at the North Side, about fifty of us decided to stop smoking. I had been smoking since the age of seventeen, about twenty-eight years. The *Nicorette* chewing gum and the peer pressure did it for me, though I had to chew until the following October to do the deed.

But there was much more happening about that time that took its toll on me—the Order: Ecumenical was struggling for its life. We joined the Order to help renew the church, to give her structural ways to serve the world. Young and energetic, we came for training in methods for an intern year, saw the power of covenantal corporate life, and stayed

on. We lived around the world with our sons and our colleagues, doing mighty mission feats. Sure, we scrimped and sacrificed, but we felt rich compared to those whom we served. Things started to change and priorities shifted. In many religious orders there is a decline after the founder's death. That was true for us. Self-support for the expanded international members was beginning to tyranize Order economics. Many staff were aging, and what were the care structures for them—and later, us? My body was definitely wearing down. I had not been healthy since age thirty. Jono was approaching college age and we had no money for college or anything else. My father had died, my mother and Lynda's parents were aging. We were experiencing a multi-faceted crisis.

In short, I was in despair over the future of the world, the Order, my family, and my vocation. My health was noticeably deteriorating again, so I took a health-related leave . . . and never returned.

I STRUGGLED and still struggle to answer ***why I really left***. When I give reasons, I know I can never finally articulate *the* reason. Yet, I feel I must try, for the sake of the past, present, and future.

First, the Order began to veer from its Spirit movement vision. The destinal calling of the Order: Ecumenical was not to renew the structures of society. Yet, our primary focus became fashioning a *new social vehicle*, which is finally the destinal calling of civil society. Essentially, the Spirit movement—of which our secular/religious Order was always a part, when authentic—is in being to keep watch over the depths of humanness itself. It is in being to be guardian of the mystery at the heart of life.

The mission of the Order got confused with campaigns or strategic service thrusts of its Institutes: for example, Global Social Demonstration communities and LENS (an indicative strategic planning method developed by the Order) were carried out by the Institute of Cultural Affairs program arm of the Order; the global Local Church Experiment and Global Academy were carried out by the Ecumenical Institute program arm of the Order.

These service strategies and methods were simply great do's of the Order. To identify with what one does is a reduction of Spirit. As

our founder Joseph Mathews said in a speech in 1972, "What is [our] life all about? The poetry that you build is the secret of the new mythology that will enable mankind to find its way to swim [and not drown], if you please, in the rivers of radical consciousness and become human." What the world needed from us was giving people a new vision, and building spirit structures and methods to help them sustain that vision; not showing people with an old vision how to do better social programs.

Had we continued with the major focus of enlivening spirit life as our thrust, over a few decades we could have made a significant difference in fashioning a *new spirit mode*—at least as important a master strategy of the Order as fashioning a *new social vehicle*.

A ***second reason***: The pluralism that we self-consciously attracted to the Order overwhelmed our structures, and especially our spirit life. When we began to do the global demonstration communities, we opened the doors to hundreds of non-Western, non-Christian members into the movement, the Institutes, and the Order. We used every training method and format we had ever imagined, and created scores of new ones. There were hundreds of young staff in India, mostly Hindu; in Indonesia, mostly Muslim; in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan, many Buddhist; and secularists from around the world. Besides religious and cultural differences, the language barrier was baffling. How could one share depth common memory and rehearse depth spirit rituals? We were creating new secular rituals in every location, but there was no common ritual that began to hold the primordial, the profound, and the futuric dimensions of our human journey in a way that deeply sustained us all.

For example, I tried to do an after-dinner spirit reflection on **The Saviors of God**, by Nikos Kazantzakis—one of our Order mentors—with a room full of young Indian staff in a village demonstration project, with translation from English into Hindi. They went to sleep. I went to another project and tried the same. This time Manu was there, a great spirit man himself with excellent facility for both English and Hindi. Like a great plow blade, he turned over Kazantzakis' poetry, and the room came alive, resounding with clapping at times—absolutely no sleeping. Well, how long does it take to clone a Manu? The spirit

capacity of Indians, and all new movement and Order members around the globe, was at least as great as that of our original Western, Christian members. Yet, we were stretched too thin. We were not producing spirit giants as fast as we needed them. To say the least, it was a different task than training young people to sling hamburgers at McDonalds. We had to train our staff to be spirit leaders and methodologians for long-term, comprehensive human development.

The committed, effective, and organized network of leadership that we needed to do a local community experiment became a major contradiction when we began to work with communities globally, especially doing replication in India and Kenya by the hundreds of villages. Developing leaders of iron takes years. Out of 1000, 100 may stay involved, 10 will become strong leaders, and one will become the iron man or woman around whom a local movement can form and stand. Though our training prowess was beyond equal, we became extremely over-extended. Our global community demonstration strategy overwhelmed us.

A ***third reason***: God knows, new communities globally needed catalyzing, but it was way beyond our capacity to pull off. Unlike the Local Church Experiment, there was no existing social entity to plug into. We gave up on the crusty institution with one million steepled buildings and nearly two billion Christians around the world. The revolutionary zeal of the Order to reform the church was the main reason I joined. As Joseph Mathews said in a *Together* magazine article we read in 1966, "We . . . are fanatics at the point that the church is renewable from within." Renewal of the church was a huge vision, alone worth a lifetime.

A ***fourth reason***: During the Council of 1984, I anticipated our designating and committing to the symbolic forms of the Order. We did not. While Joseph Mathews was alive, his power and charisma were enough to keep us together. After he died, the symbolic core had to take form, for the leadership vacuum that occurred began to destroy our corporateness. Unselfconsciously we became overly democratic: "every person has an equal say" became the misunderstanding of our consensus polity. There had to be twenty to fifty who chose to be the Order unto death, just as those who took life vows in the traditional orders.

There had to be a hundred ready to make penultimate vows. Hundreds had to covenant to a third, and maybe a fourth, form of covenant, living inside and outside religious houses.

We forgot that authentic corporateness only lives with covenant unto death. We did not take seriously the history of religious orders before us. We forgot that covenant is the bottom-line of any form of human community, from the family on out. We had remarkable leaders, but for whatever reasons, we would not formalize the covenantal forms of the Order, which were also the leadership forms crucial for the Order and movement to survive.

The ***fifth reason*** is quite paradoxical. We all joined the Order to get a revolutionary job done. But what seemed utilitarian became the essential: the Order became the demonstration that was attracting the attention of the religious and the secular. The world was awed by the presence of a pluriform body of families who lived out the classic order vows in the twentieth century, living in secular-religious houses in inner-cities, ghettos, and third world villages around the world. Why would hundreds of well educated, mostly successful people give up the good life and adopt such a life-style? Most religious and secular persons who came into contact with the Order were addressed. They knew they too could live the same way, that they were not that different from us, especially if they were sensitive in spirit and to human need in the world. An even bigger impact was our taking our children with us into the ghettos and villages to live.

Why then would such an exemplary demonstration of human community—the Order: Ecumenical—begin its demise? We told ourselves that we joined the Order to perform a service, but too often the service became practical rather than transformative. For example, our methods too often became oriented to economic and social contradictions in communities and organizations, which is a worthy focus, but not the focus of the Order: Ecumenical, which was in history to reveal the sacredness of existence.

Individually we became so adroit at methods facilitation that companies and institutions of the world, from Mobil Oil to the UN, began to hire us to help them achieve their strategies. That was worth doing and helped us self-support our religious houses. We became known

as "super-methodologians, part of some sort of institute." We became useful functionaries rather than a living symbol. We did not know, or we forgot or wanted to forget, that our power was in the symbol of who we were, the Order: Ecumenical, a demonstration of spirit community that the world needed most from us. *We were called to help create **the new spirit mode** for **the new social vehicle**.*

WHEN I BECAME somewhat clear about all of this—before, during, and after the summer of 1984—I left the Order and never returned.

I saw no way to save the Order. The assignment commission considered Lynda and me to be priors of the Chicago Nexus House during the coming year, but I felt the Order was hurtling out of control, that those who understood us to be the Institute of Cultural Affairs, primarily, were in the ascendancy. I did not feel I had the stomach, literally, for the task of redirecting the consensus. As it turned out, close friends became the prior couple of Chicago Nexus but left the Order soon afterwards, telling us later that at that point consensus on any substantial matter seemed impossible.

The Order was over. About four years later, the Order: Ecumenical was *formally* called out of being during the Council at Oaxtepec, Mexico, 1988, with son John and Diane and Dick, Lynda's sister and brother-in-law, in attendance. I found it too painful to consider attending.

Yet, as Mathews reminded us many times, the Order of Melchizedek will never go out of being. The order dynamic, like the church dynamic, is a part of *the way life is* and will take on new form as long as life shall last. So be it.

THE ORDER WAS OUR LIFE. It became our home, our church, our family, our colleagues, our mission for the prime years of my life, 29-45. For me, I left the journey, as Herman Hesse says in **Journey to the East**. I quit my radical vocation of serving *God* and being the church. Someone said that however long anyone stayed in the Order was a wonderful stay, not to be diminished by guilt over leaving. Well, I felt absolutely guilty—I walked away, I did not stick it out to the end,

I let the Order die.

Son John, then a senior in high school, had a hard time relating to me because I left the Order, which he also loved. I deeply disappointed him. He has forgiven me, but still thinks about those days when Dad and Mom were leading incredible spirit and social crusades. His white knight fell off his horse. Jeremiah does not remember the Order in the same way, since he was seven when we left.

My past in the Order haunted me, so I became engaged on many fronts to try to fill the emptiness I felt. I did not want to talk about the Order with any old colleagues. Nor did I want to go to church. I was disillusioned with both the church and the Order—or I did not want to be reminded of my leaving the best demonstration of the church I probably would ever know. What I knew was that the depth human problem of society was neither economic nor political, but spiritual, and I was no longer a part of an effective group with which to authentically covenant to do the task of global spirit renewal.

The pain of being sidelined ate me up, probably not unlike what Walter Payton felt upon retirement from his adventure of a lifetime with the Chicago Bears. What was he to do the next day or the next football season? In a sense, his life was over. I became a man with a strange perspective in a strange land, though Galax was once my home.

I groped for Spirit nurture through reading. The books of Scott Peck and Matthew Fox made some sense, though depth dialogue was not happening. Colleagues from the Order called, wrote, came by to stay a day or two, but they only reminded me of the cessation of my vocation and the death of the Order: Ecumenical.

All the King's horses and all the King's men could not put the never-to-be back together again. My dialogue was with the death of my vocation. A future with spirit vitality, authentic collegiality, and global mission seemed impossible ever again.

Chapter 23: Phase III Reflections

Vocation Through the Order: Ecumenical
Age 29-45 (1969-84)

HOW DO I BEGIN to list what I learned from my years in the Order: Ecumenical? Maybe with a variation on some of the Order's operating principles that are quite applicable to any sensitive and responsive group:

THE 20 PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATENESS

1. Corporateness grows out of a mutual calling.
2. Covenant and discipline sustain community.
3. Regular accountability of each member is necessary.
4. Absolution is that without which corporateness fails.
5. Each member has a gift to be developed and offered.
6. Everyone is responsible for the whole mission.
7. Worship of *God* is the most important act of the community.
8. The community has one mission, not many.
9. Sacrificial commitment of time and resources is crucial.
10. Care is provided structurally.
11. The power is in the center of the table.
12. Decisions are made by consensus, not by majority vote.
13. Equity, not equality, is the key to fairness.
14. Effectiveness, not efficiency, is the hallmark of service.
15. The first response is always yes.
16. Indirection is preferred to direct encounter.
17. Only criticize with an alternative model to offer.
18. Only decide or act as a team of two or more.
19. The external situation is never the real problem.
20. The community has local autonomy and global responsibility.

I list my learnings during the sixteen years in the Order under

the five categories of the spirit journey: *primal community, functional aptitude, destinal calling, historical engagement, and spirit prowess.*

PRIMAL COMMUNITY

- Corporateness is very painful, especially when one is as individualistic as I am.
- Religious houses of 12 to 20 persons were more creative living and missional environs for each person than a nexus group of 50 to 250 persons.
- Living with persons of other nationalities and religions is most difficult, though very human.
- Living in a black ghetto, an Indonesian village, and an Indian village give one perspective on being an outsider and being a guest.
- A missional/covenanted family is an awesome sign in our time.
- A missional/covenanted *family order* is a more awesome sign in our time.
- The team, cadre, or guild is the crucial unit of corporate mission.
- Demonstration children, youth, and elder structures are catalytic to social demonstration.
- Our sons had an upbringing *par excellence* in the Order and around the world.
- There is no such thing as a perfect community, and those who go looking for it are doomed to despair.
- The humanness of the poor is no less than that of any other group; maybe their humanity is more pronounced because of their living on the edge.
- A secular-religious community is much preferable to a religious or a secular one.
- Individual and community journey markings and celebrations are crucial to community vitality.

DESTINAL CALLING

- Encounter with the mysterious presence calls one to vocation.
- I appreciate the opportunity to decide my vocation even if I become angry with the person or situation that confronts me with the *Word.*
- The human need seen in ghettos, third world villages, and first world

suburbs calls forth my compassion.

- The church is our vocation, not an avocation.
- Universal compassion is inherent in human beings.
- The paralyzed masses call me.
- One's story, myth, or operating images indicate one's vocation.
- The communion of the saints, the league, or the crimson line (Kazantzakis) are my colleagues.

FUNCTIONAL APTITUDE

- Consensus allows the whole group to move together rather than dividing it through a vote.
- Pedagogy for the Religious Studies-I course by all the members of the Order built a deep common memory and operating context for corporateness.
- Corporate discussion after individual study of a particular piece focuses a group and reduces the sharing of common ignorance.
- A methodology can be built for any human activity and facilitates rather than restricts creativity when one makes the methodology his or her own.
- A model is a human invention, not a supernatural gift.
- Contextual re-education, social re-formulation, and spirit re-motivation are strategic directions that most interest me.
- Every human needs the Academy experience, an intensive 8-week format of comprehensive wisdom and intentional life in community.
- My internship year in the Order was the most radical year of my life.
- The corporate memory of the Order still reinforces my life.
- The Other World methodology is a break-through that the church needs.
- The conversational artform method is the most generally useful social method I know.
- Humanness is built upon sociality (community), sexuality (male/female ontology), phaseology (four life phases), and transparency (relational meaning).

HISTORICAL ENGAGEMENT

- Being under assignment by a group I respect can be more human than my trying to figure out what to do with my life by myself.

- All time is assigned time.
- Long-range planning and short-range modification keep the corporate mission on track and give the persons involved a sense of autonomy and responsibility that produce authentic expenditure.
- We are always re-creating the world for good or ill.
- Social demonstrations create signs of possibility.
- Global reconstruction is a crucial task.
- Engineering the new religious mode is a *more* crucial task.
- The 15 percent of the global population with the resources must take responsibility for the 85 percent who are denied easy access to the essentials of life.
- Economic tyranny and imbalance is a most obvious cause of human paralysis.
- Human resurgence is my vision.
- Everyone finally cares, but those who care most comprehensively, passionately, and in depth change history.
- Calling forth, training, engaging, and sustaining *those who care* into a global servant force is the work of the church or the Order.
- Xavier (or the Iron Man or Woman) is the *one* who leads the 10 who train the 100 who catalyze the 1000's.
- Awakenment, formation, demonstration, and permeation are strategies to build and sustain a human development movement.
- Universalism and ecumenism are big enough frameworks for mission, if given an eternal context.

SPIRIT PROWESS

- Spirit disciplines and structures are inventions we make to help sustain our lives in mission.
- Weekly accountability and absolution helped release me from the burden of guilt.
- Beginning the day with worship is the proper human stance.
- A high weekly celebration (House Church) is essential to *esprit dé corp*.
- Weekly accountability and absolution are essential to the human journey.
- Despair can be creative.
- We live out of symbols and images.

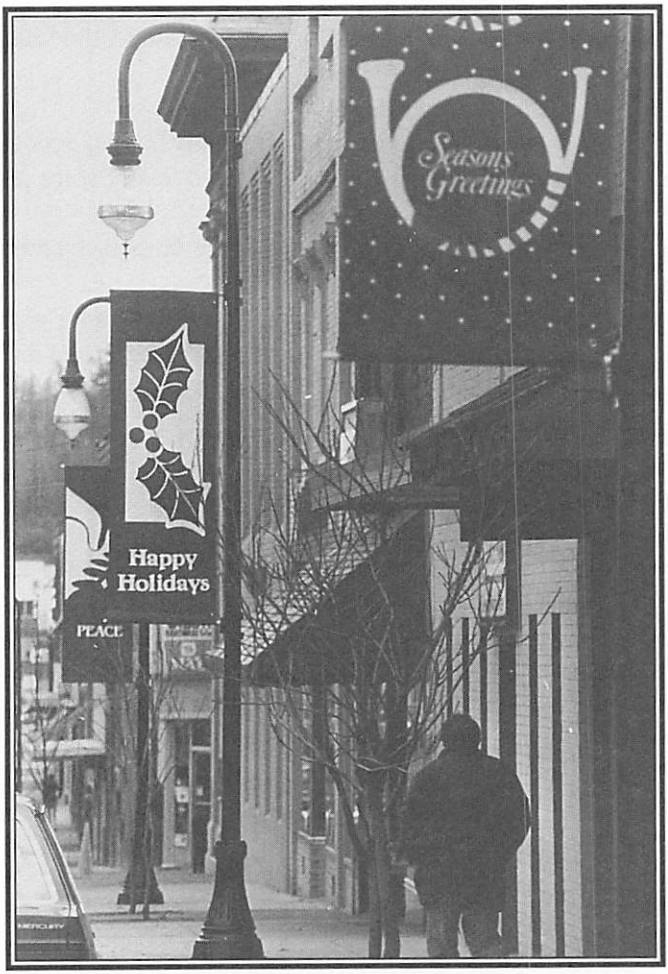
- We are reflective by nature.
- Because of the impingement of the mysterious power in life, I can transcend my given situation to find meaning in it.
- I can decide to be or not to be a victim.
- Awe is objective.
- There are no absolute answers in a relative universe. To want such is to live out of illusion.
- Humanness operates effectively out of the archaic, the futuric, the comprehensive, and the intentional.
- I can play the necessary role.
- I only know the *Word* if I can ground it in my human experience.
- Poverty, chastity, and obedience are human dynamics, not restricted to monasteries.
- Meditation, contemplation, and prayer are human dynamics, not restricted to the religious.
- Spirit resides in matter, or one can bleed the meaning out of any piece of creation or any situation, or matter can be turned into spirit.
- The land, river, mountain, and sea are primal symbols.
- I am my relationships.
- Beholding, revering, and serving the mysterious power, that I call *God,* is the meaning of life
- Above all else, I learned that *all* is good, *my life* is received, the *past* is approved, and the future is open.

BRIEFLY, WHAT I LEARNED IN THE ORDER IS

To live simply
To love structure
To live on behalf of
To celebrate our living
To reflect on the mystery
To serve the shattered earth
To dream the impossible dream
To build the earth, the common earth

PHASE IV

EXTENDED VOCATION
BACK IN GALAX



Downtown Galax in Winter

Chapter 24: Mom and Pop Shop

The Men's Shop
Age 45-55 (1984-94)

COMING BACK to live in Galax after more than twenty-five years was strange, even though I spent the first eighteen years of my life there. In spite of what Thomas Wolfe said, I *had* to make Galax home again. Galax was a safety net of family care and security, since we had no money. There was nowhere else for me, I felt, coming off the adventure of a lifetime, having divorced myself from the Order: Ecumenical after sixteen years. That's my victim story.

On the positive side, we thought about going into business for ourselves for several reasons: a family mission, we could do it our way, we could make more money, and we could fit the work schedule to our lives. We thought about the type of business where we could work until we died, if we wanted to, without forced retirement, a leading cause of death in our society. And Galax was a great place to grow up, so why not give Jeremiah the same environment.

Son John was preparing to enter college the next year. He was already living his last year of high school life with Ida and Yates in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where a college town's twelfth grade program was rounding him out.

Mama, then age 72, housed us in her apartment above her ladies' fashionwear store. We began to think about how we could make a living here in Galax. In a brainstorm of business opportunities, Mama suggested I go down to Witherow's Men Store—a block away—and find out if they were thinking about selling, since they had been in business since 1921. Ellis Ballard, the seventy-year-old manager, had been there since the early 40's. He now spent his most creative energy dreaming of retirement. He had hired me during Christmas while I was in high school. That was where I bought my first sportscoat.

Mr. Ballard told me to approach the owners, the Witherow family. The daughter, Virginia Nuckolls, I knew very well, since she helped raise me as I grew up with her son Jim, now a physician in town. She was all for the transaction, but put me onto her older brother, Dr. Gene Witherow, in Roanoke, who came up and began to work out details with her and Ellis. The negotiating went back and forth with some bit of drama before Mrs. Nuckolls finally said with graceful authority—to her people—that now was the time, and the offer was best since there were no others. So, on November 15, 1984, *The Men's Shop* became the new name for Witherow's Men Store. I wanted a name easy to spell and to remember and that designated the kind of shop clearly.

Within five months we bought a business and building with a seven-room apartment upstairs, in dilapidated shape; completed a going-into-business-sale and a successful Christmas business; learned how to sell and mark suits for alteration; set up the bookkeeping and merchandising system; remodeled our apartment upstairs; rounded up our furniture from storage and bought some used and new furnishings; remodeled the store with new lights and a heat pump; and helped Jeremiah settle into his new school in the second grade—my old school. We borrowed part of the money, received a nice chunk from Mama Dotte, and set up a five-year mortgage with the Witherow family for the remainder.

Mr. Ballard helped us until January, but he could not wait till retirement so he and his wife could work everyday on their newly bought little farm in Baywood. We noticed his persistent cough. Dr. Nuckolls diagnosed cancer a few months later. He was dead by Father's Day. Forty-seven years downtown, and years later customers were still telling us how "that nice man" fitted them for their first suit.

Our life experience had prepared us well for this major transition: we resettled again, for the thirty-third time, I think, since our marriage in 1960. Soon after moving into our apartment over the shop—Chinese style—we kept hearing weird noises, especially at night. We described the sounds to a neighbor. He said bats. One evening, a flying commotion above the skylight panel sent shivers through us. We put on masks, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and took the panel out to open the space above. With a butterfly type of net we kept trying to catch the spastic creatures. No luck. We called the farm extension agent and followed

his recommendations: fill all holes in the outside walls and put out mothballs where the bats would come in contact with them. Later, we picked up the remains of a couple and had no more trouble. Yet, nearly fourteen years later, when we look up at the skylight we think of bats.

We have encountered other problems above our heads. The coldest winter on record, when the wind-chill-factor was 45 below zero, the roof split. Benny, our contractor, climbed up and smeared black tar-like gunk into the long slit. Later, rain kept leaking in. Mr. Williams suggested we try a special compound and mesh. We tried it many times. Rain kept filling our buckets under the skylight. After three years of the bucket brigade, we tried the ultimate—sealed, rubberized roof covering. It has worked, praise the lord. Our only problem of late has been the icicles damming the gutter and causing runoff from under snow or ice to leak in around our windows.

The heat pump filter upstairs has clogged three or four times during August heat, forcing accumulated moisture to leak through the ceiling into the shop. Luckily, it just missed thousands of dollars of suits. There was the flash flood of '94 that filled all the storm drains on Main Street, backed up under the front door of the shop, and seeped into the basement. Oh, yes, the basement has been a foot under water from storms washing under the basement door in the rear of the building—which we fixed. Professionals had to pump it out. Other times we used a shop vac. Our natural disasters list would not be complete without Hugo's ripping and knocking down the four upper awnings in front of the shop.

We have done our share of repair work, or better, hired it done. I am not a handyman and quickly lose patience when confronted with the mystery of how things work or don't work, e.g., when I climb up a stepladder to change a four-foot or eight-foot fluorescent bulb. Lynda wants to run each time I do. She knows I am about to let out a stream of what she calls unhelpful phrases, and to start my god-awful sighs.

Downstairs, since the initial renovation, we have built my corner office in the back, added two computers (one for each of us), lowered the ceilings and added new lighting, put up maroon awnings with The Men's Shop logo on them, built our Golf Shop in one back corner, and turned the basement into storage. Upstairs we have remodeled a storage

room into Jono's bedroom, added a front room when Jero was a teenager, added a second bathroom with shower, and built a cedar room with double high racks for off-season clothing storage. Lynda tries to plan such renovations when I am away on golfing or buying trips. I have a hard time dealing with the chaos of reconstruction.

The shop has been a helpful structure for me, 9:00-5:30, six days a week—a place and a reason to be. Though those fifty-hour-weeks are constraining, they have been what I have needed to order my life after the Order. There my life was so full, more than the ordinary person could stand. I have needed the daily frame of the store to keep body and soul together.

The shop was my first real job out in the world. We were on our own, sink or swim, with no more set salaries from schools, churches, or even the Order's small family stipend. Admittedly, the first year was extremely tight, but over the years we have been able to make a good living.

Our customer base had been growing since 1921, mostly under the image of dress clothes. We began to buy more casual clothes to appeal to the younger man. We began to concentrate on the tuxedo niche for proms and weddings by contracting with Mitchell's Formal Wear, the largest and best vendor in the Southeast. Their center in Charlotte was an overnight UPS delivery to our shop. They kept their tuxes current and in style. Many young men have started out with us at prom, come back for their job-interview outfit, for their wedding tuxes, and for their ongoing clothing needs.

We also began to attract some upper-class customers who were mostly going out of town to shop, either to Winston-Salem or Roanoke. A few wealthier families in town have shopped with us religiously since we opened, understanding that local economic vitality and local pride are part of their civic duty, I think. Other families went elsewhere, not seeing the need to keep their money on the mountain, and wanting a better selection, I'm sure. There is no other local men's shop to go to since Globman's Department Store closed in 1990. When I was growing up, there were five.

When we first opened we carried Hathaway shirts but soon found out they were too pricey for our customers. With my black patch I also thought the customers would associate me with the *Hathaway*

Man. They made the connection but did not buy the shirts. Recently, however, we ordered and sold some $75 Tommy Hilfiger sport shirts, $125 sweaters from Northern Isle, and $375 ultra-suede sportscoats.

For the most part, however, our clothes are medium priced, with some lower priced goods for those on minimum-wage salaries. Not until 1996 did a sports line, Woolrich, take over first place as our highest profit line. Always before, one of the suit companies held the honor, Bowdon or Botany 500.

The style of dress has definitely changed during the past fourteen years. At first, I dressed to the hilt, suit and tie. Later, sportscoats and tie. As the customer wanted more casual dress, I switched to sweaters—and no ties—and golf shirts, khakis, and Nike shoes. This change has caused over 60 percent of the men's clothing specialty stores in the nation to go out of business, and consequently caused many industry bankruptcies and/or reorganizations: Manhattan; Botany 500; Munsingwear; Farah; Stetson; Yorke; Higgins; English Squire; Arrow; Enroe; Volk; etc. Salesmen who have survived have been forced to get out of dying companies and pick up additional lines.

Men's fashion has been less in flux than in earlier decades. Only the wide tie, pleated pants, all-cottons, and fleece are notable changes. Khaki pants, jeans, golf shirts, button-up sport shirts, navy blazers, two-button suit coats, dress shirts, and ties are still and have been the fashion for my lifetime. Minute style changes come and go: colors, fit, length of shorts, length of collar point, banded sleeves, banded collars, pattern, etc. But still the man in the USA is quite traditional and predictable in his dress style. Fortunately, he still wears clothes when it is much too hot to do so, and he still dresses up when necessary or when told to by his first lady.

I am thankful for women who love to shop for their men. Not until the mid 60's did women begin to do the shopping in this store. Mr. Ballard told the story that at one time there was the potbellied stove in the back of the store with a dozen chairs around it for the designated loafers. Women would not come in because of the spitting, smoking, and loud carrying-on. As the regulars died off, he would remove chairs. The potbellied stove was replaced by an oil stove, which they intentionally placed behind the back wall. Now women are at least 75 percent of

our customers.

Men hate to shop. They hate to try on anything. They operate out of need: "I don't need it." Women operate out of desire and style: "I want him to have it," and "That's new, isn't it? I saw so and so wearing that on TV." Women can easily take two hours buying an outfit, trying on everything in a lady's store. Men can easily buy a suit, shirt and tie, and a pair of shoes within thirty minutes. Women buy for their men at Christmas, Father's Day, birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day. They think their men need clothes for special events, such as weddings, cruises, vacations, honeymoons, church, funerals, as well as the job. It is not unusual for her to take clothes on approval, back and forth two or three times, saying, "I wish he would come in here himself, but he won't." And this from women who are working as many hours a week as their men do. Most men are good-for-nothing that way.

Our women are those without whom the celebrative dimension of life would flounder. Beyond tradition, they understand that dressing up is sheer invention, part of the ritual of declaring the importance of a life journey event. The Men's Shop and I say, Bless the women!

But of course, some of our most disagreeable customers are women. There is the *beat 'um up* type who drags her poor man in, does all the talking, beginning with, "He wants a suit." She tells one of us the color, the size, and the price range. Then she picks it out and tells him to try it on. He dutifully goes and does it. When he comes out, she tells him to hold his shoulders up, asks him why he is so fat, and tells him generally that he is an awful specimen of a man. I want to take such men aside and give them a big pep talk on selfhood, and take such women aside and give them a lecture on honoring the mate they have, by the grace of *God*—and no other obvious reason.

Don't think for a moment that men are not about as vain as women when it comes to their sizes. Many dear ladies know the trick of not letting their husbands know the size of their slacks, for example. They have me take the size tags off before they take them home, even have me cut out the woven tags inside the slacks. They simply say, "He won't even try them on if they are not 34's," and he wears 36's, at least. And, my, how some men do primp in front of the mirrors. I try to give that kind over to Lynda. We also have fun watching the older men who

are obviously courting, by the way they cut loose and buy.

Over our fourteen years in business, we have had only two bad checks. Oh, we have had to call many customers and tell them their checks did not clear the bank, usually for bad check-keeping practices. And we have been ripped off very few times. A few street people used sad stories to take a jacket or suit for a funeral and never paid. One young man stole a Stetson felt hat one afternoon. After he left, I noticed it was gone. I got in the car and cruised down Main Street to Hardee's where he stood against a car with the hat on.

I walked up to him and took the hat off his head and said, "That's my hat."

He replied, "I just bought it off a guy up the street."

I told him I was going to get the police, which I did. By the time we got back, he was long gone. A few years later, he came in and bought some shirts and a jacket, acting like an old friend.

Jeremiah was a great young worker, though hard for his mom and dad to motivate sometimes. He hated to dust. For some reason, most of our workers have. So do I. He liked to sell, work the cash register, wrap packages—our best wrapper—and shovel snow. He made many a dollar shoveling for the neighbor businesses. He was a natural at the sidewalk sales during Fiddler's Convention week. He would engage the passerby with "That sun sure is hot. We've got a good sale on straw hats," or "Where did you get that tee-shirt you're wearing? Neat." Jeremiah went with us to the Charlotte market as our junior buyer. We rewarded our young businessman with side trips to the music store, or the computer store, or our favorite Indian restaurant, where on a spicy scale of 1-10, he ordered a 7. What he liked most was our buying him samples from some of the vendors, especially Ocean Pacific.

Lynda and I have trained many part-time help. Some of our teenage help would freeze before customers; most had good people-skills. April, Jeremiah's wife, was also a natural. As were Jana and Faison—Jim Nuckoll's daughter—she and I sold the one-day-record during the Christmas season when Lynda was sick. Lois Brown, who helped Mama maintain her house and apartment for over forty years, and later worked in her store, gave us her three boys, Tracy, Keith, and Joel, for most of our years in business. They could clean the store and

do repairs better than anyone, and they helped with customers as well. Then there were Harry and Adam, who had great personalities but had a hard time getting to work on time on Saturday mornings. Bobbie, Frank, Donald, Yates, Ruth, Carol, and Kim have been the adults we have used part-time. They have done it all, from pinning a suit to haggling with a customer over price. We use them on our short get-aways.

Alteration ladies have been hard to come by. Hazel, Dora, Mary, and the one who was a born-again type, who could do it faster than any we have ever seen, though not the best. She gave us a framed picture of *The Rapture* one Christmas, the one with car crashes, people falling out of buildings, and explosions, with Jesus floating above it all in white garments. Betty is our shared seamstress with The Fashion Shoppe, set up in the back of Mama and Ida's business. This is a dying art since very few seamstresses are coming on. The fees seem high, but when the man from California wanted us to UPS him his hemmed slacks because the fee there is $15, I felt better.

Our list of helpers would not be complete without the hoard of advertising people who walk in our door or phone us: the regulars, The Gazette, The Declaration, WBOB, WBRF, WCOK; then the less regulars, Hillsville, Sparta, Wytheville, Mt. Airy; and then all those with special gimmicks, like promotional pieces for every motel room, bench sign, golf course marker, school discount card, and benefit auction. We figure about two hundred different people call on us a year. We are sitting ducks. But the best promotion by far is our computerized mailing list used for quarterly mailings to our 1200 preferred customers. One of those is the fall suit or sportscoat trade-in sale: we give $30 for a used suit of any description—we have seen suits at least seventy-years-old—and $25 for a sportscoat. We donate them to the Seventh-Day Adventists clothing store for our poor downtown people. Our next best advertising is the bonus gift certificates that large employers such as Hanes, Galax City Schools, and Twin County Regional Hospital give to their employees at Christmas. They can use them for an extra 20 percent off a purchase at the participating downtown stores. Lynda and Becky expanded on this existing idea and have taken charge of it every year.

Besides donating clothes to the poor and for fundraising auctions for needy individuals and organizations such as bands and rescue squads,

we give downtown merchants discounts, and of course our immediate family gets clothes at our cost. It is fun for us to have them roll in each year around Thanksgiving to do Christmas shopping. We give them our brown cardboard boxes and leftover wrapping paper and let them help wrap. Sister Ida thinks I am a bit chintzy that way.

Some days we give away more than we sell, or we sell more downtown tee shirts, Christmas ornaments, and Rex Theatre tickets than we do clothes. Small towns survive that way. I accuse Lynda of being constitutionally against selling clothes for profit and tease her by saying I only do the shop in order to pay her to be our full-time downtown volunteer. I call her my *street woman*, since she is quite often on the streets going door-to-door for some good reason.

She is a super-salesperson in the new sense of the word. She greets people with that *Let's chat* presence. I give her all the tough and gnarly characters, or the ones who need extra special attention, e.g., the infirmed. People love her for her caring ways. She can gently and persistently lead any horse to water and make him drink, because he trusts her. She is authentic. She has the patience of Job and the smile of a cherub. For these reasons I also let her develop the nursing home clientele, where she takes suggestions over the phone and carries clothes to the ambulatory men. They of course love her attention.

She is also the new style of bookkeeper, who talks to the arrogant Yanks and pushy Rebs on the phone as if they were her brother and sister, colleagues—always on their side. She can work miracles over the phone. Her first response is always yes, but watch out for that *no* if somebody pushes her too far. She can be unyielding. She and her sidekick Bob, Mama's retired accountant, keep her Quicken system updated and purring, especially as they prepare the forms for our tax accounts each quarter and year. She has an old, slow computer, but she says she likes it slow. Her third big job is the tuxedo business. She delights in the celebrative aspect of our business, dressing up the prom and wedding guys. She tells me that this may be the only time some of them will ever be really dressed up before their funeral.

She writes notes, clips the newspaper for our friends and customers, keeps scrapbooks on downtown, stores window decor, fixes lunch upstairs and brings it down, digs in the flowers out back, gets

photographs developed, and phones friends and relatives. When she is doing none of the above, she is volunteering for one of her many organizations: the Episcopal Hostel of the Good Shepherd (a homeless shelter), the Galax Downtown Association, and First United Methodist Church. She attends a monthly luncheon with friends, the Book Club, a homeopathy group, and the Women's Golf Association, although she only plays once or twice a year. She loves to walk the streets, dropping in on shopkeepers as she works on downtown promotions, Christmas parades, recruiting volunteers, etc. She is respected by all, enough that the City Council asked her to fill out the term of a council person who had to resign. Thankfully, she did not. She is a busy, busy person, who never runs out of get-up-and-go. She truly is the most indefatigable person I know.

I enjoy being with her day in and day out. She keeps her spirit and mine up, except when she is preparing for an up-front assignment with one of her organizations, or when she has to work with a mean-spirited person. She will do well working with that person, but the thinking about it before and after calls for my TLC. She cries easily.

My job description is different. I buy, unpack, hang, and mark the merchandise. We go to market in Charlotte quarterly. I buy from Woolrich in Christiansburg twice yearly, and since we have had to buy smarter, we make the southern run to Georgia and Tennessee factories each January. We sometimes buy ties factory-direct in North Carolina. I send out quarterly mailings, keeping the mailing list on the computer updated. I am in charge of newspaper and radio advertising. Both Lynda and I do the cleaning these days, until we train another young person. And I rather enjoy washing the front windows with the brush and squeegee and taking the garbage and boxes to the trash bin.

I have been honing my skills as an investor for several years. With the help of Eddie, Rex, Doug, David, and Cousin Jean, we have invested every dollar we could and have done well in mutual funds, stocks, and bonds, but of course the bull market has been longtoothed. One speculative stock gained over 1000 percent in four years, just to turn around and lose 900 percent in a few weeks. I'm still holding it. That type of lesson keeps me diversified and leery of the latest hot stock. I periodically monitor our rise and fall on the Internet screen during the day.

I have selling in my blood. Mama and Dad sold dresses and cars most of their adult lives. Dad was featured in the national *Ford Times* as an excellent salesman, specializing in repeat customers. Mama was well known in these parts as the best saleslady for mature women. She started out at ladies' fashions in 1940 and actually retired in 1994. I learned from the best. She taught me to be very up-front, always asking first, "What can I help you find today?" assuming that each customer comes in with something in mind. "May I help you?" is not that effective since one can easily answer, "No, I'm just looking."

Lynda and I are semi-retired at The Men's Shop, compared to our life in the Order. We both take time off for trips, golf, meetings, etc. Lynda said she does not make much salary, but what other place of employment would give her three weeks off and pay her way to Indonesia or India? Life is easy here. We planned it that way. This mom and pop laugh when the shopping centers ask us to set up shop out there on the four-lane. Too much work and we do love the downtown.

WE ARE MAKING A LIVING. When we lock up each day we try to remember to thank the shop, for she has blessed us. But she is not our vocation. I find myself spending as much time as possible at my writing screen in the back of the store. Maybe the shop is becoming a front for what I'd rather be doing in the back.

Chapter 25: A Mountaintop Vision

Central Galax Neighborhood
Age 45-58 (1984-97)

FOR MANY REASONS, Lynda and I wanted to help revitalize downtown: out of nostalgia I wanted the downtown of my boyhood to be like it used to be; we were new residents of downtown, living above the shop at 115 South Main Street; our shop, of course, was right in the center of downtown, and a lively downtown would help our business; and the two of us had leadership and methods skills from our years of community development and team building to help downtown.

Ida and Yates were also new and eager shopkeepers downtown, coming back to buy Mama's business, The Fashion Shoppe. Before long we were all working with the Galax Retail Merchants' Association, picking up the reigns from guess who: Mama Dotte. Where their focus was on the entire city, ours was delimited to downtown, for strategic purposes. The Merchants' Association had a nice little stash of money, about $8000 left over from the sale of a failed parking lot. With their help, we began to analyze the situation downtown and convene meetings of the business and building owners and the city leaders.

With big dreams we formed the Galax Downtown Association (GDA). Our first project was to work with the City through a large Block Grant of $1.2 million to redo the underground infrastructure downtown. We helped convince the City how much better it would be to redo the street scape above ground as well, with underground wiring, new traffic lights, shepherd's staff light standards, trees, shrubs, trash receptacles, brick pavers, new sidewalks and street pavement, benches, banners for the light standards (now six sets)—and during phase II, two years later, four new parking lots of 149 spaces, an outdoor stage with huge banners, and a farmer's market. The cooperation between the City and the GDA grew strong.

In the process of all this physical reconstruction came the

opportunity to become a part of the Main Street Program, a nation-wide project of downtown revitalization. A young graduate from Virginia Tech, our first downtown director, helped us maneuver through the reconstruction and the Main Street Program application successfully. A strong volunteer core of about fourteen persons was emerging during the planning and implementation of these endeavors. The general meetings of the GDA brought out as many as forty.

With our experience in grant proposal writing, one weekend Lynda and I cranked out the application for 501-C3 tax deductible status with the IRS. Through the connection of one of our core, dear Mary, who contacted our Congressman, we received that status in a couple of weeks. The City Manager thought it would take at least six months. At the same time, we wrote up our by-laws. We were a formal entity, recognized by the law of the land.

We began to organize formally the structure of the association. I was elected the first president, Ida the secretary, Robert Webb—manager of Dominion Bank—the treasurer, Lynda and Becky Guynn, the co-chair of the promotions committee, and Yates a co-chair of the façade committee along with Nancy Luague. Our executive committee began to meet regularly at 7 a.m. at downtown restaurants for breakfast. We operated out of consensus more than *Roberts Rules of Order*. During September and January, we met with the general membership to do planning and remotivation. At Christmas we had potluck dinners up over one of the banks and celebrated the long service of recent retirees. The annual July picnic, when the families of the association came out, was good for a wider context. At our first GDA banquet, Lynda received the first Spirit of Downtown Award. I received the Leadership Award. The spirit and effort was very high in the early years.

To solve the money issues any organization has, we created a Downtown Tax District with the City, charging a 22 cent mill tax to property owners in the district, coming to some $20,000 a year, to help pay our operating costs. We created a Memorial Fund for small gifts and large bequeaths, receiving one $75,000 contribution from the Rose Thomas Smith estate, which we invested strategically. From the large industries adjacent to downtown, we received some $20,000 in contributions, since they resisted being in the tax district. Other industries

not close to downtown, like Hanes, gave us another $10,000. Families and friends gave gifts in memory of persons who worked and loved downtown. We became quite solvent.

Besides paying our staff, our first big money outlay came with the purchase of the historic Rex Theater, which was leaking badly, becoming a nesting place for pigeons, and fast on its way toward condemnation. We bought it at auction, and with GDA gifts and money raised from the Save the Rex Campaign, led by Ida, over $100,000 was spent on its purchase, renovations, and operations: marquee, heating system, rubberized roof, new electrical and plumbing, paint, seating repair, concession area repair, and three part-time directors. The first big performance was the *Masters of the Banjo* concert, a national tour that filled the Rex to the brim, about 450 happy citizens, who loved being back in the Rex, for many of them went there as children and teenagers. The performers could not say enough about the acoustics and the intimate contact with the audience. Programs have been diverse: music from Ole Time and Bluegrass to baroque to gospel to hard rock; plays; pageants; political rallies; benefits; etc. But it keeps losing money. We are now engaged in a new effort to finish its renovation and to solicit some ongoing support from the local government, for it is a cultural gift to the citizenry.

The promotions committee has been the most active, led by Lynda and Becky over the years. They have organized events from whopping Christmas parades, with as many as 5,000 watchers, to a four-day Fiddle Fest downtown on the streets during August around Galax's world-famous Fiddler's Convention. They networked large companies and businesses to give up to a total of $35,000 discounted downtown gift certificates to their employees during each Christmas season. The annual downtown Halloween Trick or Treat Parade brings as many as 500 little goblins walking the streets with moms and dads; we sometimes run out of candy. To encourage people to buy locally instead of in Winston-Salem and Roanoke, they promoted the "Buy on the Mountain" logo. Countless newspaper articles and guest interviews on the radio stations have kept downtown in the public eye. Lynda has collected twelve large scrapbooks of clippings and important downtown memorabilia and has loaned them to other cities applying for Main Street

Program status (their photocopies of all the pages was a mammoth book). The updated downtown map and directory of businesses has been an ongoing success and involved all the businesses.

The GDA catalyzed a movement of façade renovations with low interest bank loans; we agonized over parking regulations with owners, employees, and police; we regularly informed and encouraged local business owners and employees; we hired and trained a series of five managers, full and part-time; we politicked to keep our post office downtown, and it's here; we have fought and celebrated with the City; we built solid relations with the welfare recipients living downtown; we networked a strong relationship with the newspapers and radio stations; we lured in more small businesses than we watched die; we grieved the passing of a generation of business owners, many of whom had no one in the family to pick up the baton—among them the closing of three large furniture stores that have left big vacant buildings; we helped to attract a community college branch downtown; we have emphasized tourism, using our mountain music theme as the cornerstone; and we have grown twelve years older.

Although we have had a dedicated group revitalizing downtown over the last twelve years, we all are in some state of burnout or resuscitation. I have had to go back in as president to reconstitute the leadership operations in the past few years. I am bowing out again to see what emerges. At forty-six I was much more engaged than I am at fifty-eight. I knew that happened, but didn't think it would happen to me. Downtown revitalization is a life-long challenge.

Downtown is up against the powerful forces of a major four-lane highway—taking development out of downtown—shopping strips, and super-stores. When we lost our major department store right next door, I began to really wonder about downtown. But if I use my contradiction analysis process, I know that new shopping patterns and places outside downtown are not the underlying contradiction to main street decline across the nation. What is obvious to us after twelve years in the foxholes of the war to save downtown is the shortsightedness of *all* of us citizens and our chosen leaders. In cities across the nation, we do not see the need for and therefore are not dedicated to saving the heart of our cities and keeping them vital. We are more interested in the

taxable income of a Wal-Mart (son John, who is getting a master's degree in community design, gave me a bumper sticker that says, *WAL-MART SUCKS the life from your downtown*) than in the symbol of the downtown that bespeaks quality of life. We are more interested in sewers, city pavement, and a growing police force than we are in a healthy downtown that makes us all proud to live in Galax. We in the USA are letting our main streets fall into ruin in the same way as our nation's capital. The symbolic centers of our towns and cities are being held hostage by the developers' emphases upon suburban and fringe sprawl, but the end of that fifty-year phenomenon is in sight. In the meantime, we are still living as though some god ordained this trend.

When, for example, the Galax Downtown Assoication pushed for choosing one of our big empty downtown buildings—in the center of the city and with ample parking—for the new site of our public library, some of our leading citizens thought we were out of our minds. Why recycle an old building that is close to our schools and would help restore the heart of our city for a few hundred thousand dollars when we could spend several millions and have it out of the way of public traffic (and the wrong sorts of potential users)? While those images are being transformed, downtowns must persevere.

Son John has shared with us the new trends in development: *new urbanism* or *neo-traditionalism*, with the emphasis on pedestrian-friendly (walking) neighborhoods. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, which is designating downtown Galax as a historic district, describes the *old development trend of sprawl* this way: "low-density, land-consumptive, rigidly-separated, centerless, auto-oriented development typically located on the outer fringes."

WHAT IS NEEDED is a healthy, pluriform Central Galax Neighborhood, that I image being bounded by West Stuart Drive on the West and North, McArthur Street and the High School and Health Center on the South and Southwest, and Meadow Street on the East. From these boundaries, it would be a healthy walk to the center of downtown. This area is filled with residences, businesses, industries, and services where citizens can WALK—not drive—to everything we need.

We can walk to pre-school
walk to elementary/junior/senior schools
walk to community college
walk almost to the library
walk to the Fiddler's Convention
walk to carnivals, to rodeos, to tractor pulls, to car shows
walk to outdoor concerts
walk to indoor and outdoor swimming pools
walk to parks
walk to walking trails
walk to lighted ball fields and tennis courts
walk to the gym
walk to arts and crafts
walk to health-care
walk to churches
walk to movies, plays, and indoor musical events
walk to the post office
walk to city hall
walk to banks, brokers, lawyers, realtors, CPA's, and insurers
walk to architects and designers
walk to beauty parlors and barber shops
walk to auto dealers
walk to taxi stands
walk to motels
walk to the funeral home
walk to the cable office
walk to service stations
walk to all kinds of work opportunities
walk to restaurants
walk to the coffee shop
walk to procure everything we need:
- groceries
- pharmacies
- hardware
- clothing
- drycleaners
- garden supplies
- computers
- furniture
- gifts

music
books, magazines, and newspapers
toys
office supplies
florists
etc.

We need to leave our cars PARKED and learn

to stroll
to bike
to skate
to skateboard
to jog—and while doing that
to learn again to stop and talk to each other
to watch the flowers grow
and to look up at the sky and breathe deeply.

We can love

living over shops on second floors (we and Mama do)
living in new and rehab houses close to downtown
on tree-lined streets
sidewalks for the kids to pull their red wagons to pick up
the family groceries
getting our bikes fixed to use on the new bike trail.

There will be

workdays to clean up the neighborhood
all kinds of parades
street festivals
children's Halloween Parade
neighborhood meetings quarterly
on the syle of New England town meetings.

And why not develop one of those new co-housing communities and one of those independent living centers for seniors in the boundaries of this geographical area?

Put all this together and what do we have? The Central Galax Neighborhood that includes Downtown Galax, an ideal model for the next wave of smart development, that is if *all* of us of all ages, races, classes, creeds, and sectors—government, business, industry, volunteer, service, religious, residential, school—get together and build a serious long-range plan, get it funded, and hire the full-time leadership to catalyze it and make it happen. I maintain that the leadership and the funding can be had, if we decide to do it. What is not present is the commitment to such a strategy.

This possibility of a demonstration Central Galax Neighborhood is at least as important as luring a Super Wal-Mart to the fringes of the City, which will only have 5 percent of the quality-of-life benefits listed above—and which is the enemy of most of what I have described above, a champion destroyer of the center of small towns and a champion accelerator of sprawl. Besides, its life span is judged to be fifteen years max, and then on to the next hot location, even out of town. *Location, Location, Location*—that old development mantra—which means further and further out where only cars can go. Wal-mat is on the front end of the old wave of development that is going out to sea. Maybe they will get smart and start building in deserted downtowns where real estate is the cheapest—and become champions of restoring downtown neighborhoods. If I wanted to be the king of the red-white-and-blue, that's what I'd do.

Central Galax Neighborhood can rise up and be a model for small towns and the new smart growth wave coming in. It's the type of big central neighborhood I was raised in, the kind we raised Jeremiah in, and the one I want to retire to—I only add one more necessity, at least a golf practice area we can walk to.

When I consider the 5,000-year-old culture of China, with all its dying and revitalizing towns over the centuries, I get perspective. When I visualize the hundreds-of-years-old European central neighborhoods, I have hope that our shortsighted sprawl mentality will be transformed. It can happen and it's starting to happen nation-wide. Pluriform neo-traditional community is coming back around, modeled on such traditional central neighborhoods as ours.

Wouldn't it be something for central Galax to be a *demonstration*

in such a movement and to reap all the quality-of-life benefits? This is my vision, and three-fourths of it is already in place. We just need to convince ourselves, pull all the pieces together, and be about completing it as we market it—our traditional neighborhood on this *God*-given mountaintop.

Chapter 26: Continuing the Reformation

Church
Age 45-58 (1984-97)

SINCE LEAVING the Order: Ecumenical, I have seriously tried to find my place in the local church again. I have talked with several district superintendents of the United Methodist Church about an assignment to part-time ministry, as I continue to be a tent-maker like Paul. In order to serve one church, I would have had to drive three hours, round trip, over the mountain. The twelve elderly African-Americans of that congregation did not want to join with any other congregation nearby. I thought they needed to make a new decision, so I did not serve them. One superintendent wanted me to serve a congregation nearer Galax, but first the congregation—one lady in particular, who held the purse strings—wanted to check me out and see if I held her fundamentalist beliefs. I suggested to him that that congregation needed to re-evaluate its being part of the United Methodist system.

I also met with the area bishop of the Lutheran Church. He wanted me to go to at least one more year of seminary. Same with the Unitarians, who were in driving distance, more school. I feel qualified to teach in seminary, for goodness sake.

I preached on occasion for United Methodist congregations, taught the Genesis II class at First United Methodist, and jointly taught the ecumenical classes among the three churches on Center Street. Over the past year I have preached and led the services at two Presbyterian churches on the Blue Ridge Parkway that Rev. Bob Childress built. These local church experiences held some high moments for me, but I still found myself praying for the reformation of the church all over again, which is praying that we who think we are Christian become Christian. I am reminded of John Wesley's famous sermon, *The Almost Christian*, or in Revelation 3:16, the "lukewarm, neither hot nor cold"

Christians of the church at Laodicea, that the Lord says, "I will spit you out of my mouth." A rather powerful image.

Carlyle Marney, a prophet in one of the largest churches in Charlotte, Myers Park Baptist Church, wrote in the early '60's: "The gospel of the status quo is the only gospel we know." *Corinthians* says the Gospel is about our authentically hearing, doing, and embodying the *Word* as Christians, as the extended body of Christ. If the powerful *Word* is seldom preached, if the bread and wine are seldom passed, if the mission is done in an impotent manner, and if we Christians seem to embody some *other* word, then the church is inauthentic. Yet, I know with Luther, even though she's a "whore, the church is still my mother."

H. Richard Niebuhr's ***vision*** of the church has become mine. He says the church is

> *the first to repent for the sins of a society, and it repents on behalf of all. When it becomes apparent that... [anything, i.e., slavery] is a transgression of the divine commandment, then the Church repents of it, turns its back upon it, and abolishes it within itself. It does this not as the holy community separate from the world but as the pioneer and representative. It repents for the sin of the whole society and leads in the social act of repentance. . . .*
>
> *As the representative and pioneer of mankind the Church meets its social responsibility when in its own thinking, organization and action it functions as a world society, undivided by race, class and national interests.*
>
> *This seems to be the highest form of social responsibility in the Church. It is the direct demonstration of love of God and neighbor rather than a repetition of the commandment to self and others. It is the radical demonstration of faith. Where this responsibility is being exercised there is no longer any question about the reality of the Church. In pioneering and representative action of response to God in Christ the invisible Church becomes visible and the deed of Christ is reduplicated* (Niebuhr, ***The Responsibility of the Church for Society***).

I cannot imagine a more compelling vision for the baptized. How do

I help the church to authenticate *this* vision rather than the reduced one it now operates out of? The reformation question. But conviction comes before reform. And a new vision comes before conviction. When one considers Niebuhr's vision for the church, then the hard question, What is keeping this vision from being realized? As I now see it, there are ten key blocks or ***underlying contradictions*** to Niebuhr's vision becoming reality in our churches. (This is the Order: Ecumenical methodology: a vision reveals indicative contradictions; if we can articulate the contradictions of the church truthfully, indicative strategies emerge. This is why we call it *indicative planning*, rising out of the truth of our common experience.)

Contradiction 1: SUPERFICIAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

We in the church, like all human beings, try to earn our salvation, try to make our lives right. We try in every possible way to justify ourselves at the expense of any and all others. Why do we forget that grace is the un-earnable gift of *God* and that faith is gratitude and commitment to our gracious *God* and his creation? We act as if we don't know that faith is the life of discipleship that demands more than heart and will—it demands our bodies. Questions like What is the will of *God*? and What would Jesus do? are absolutely valid for all Christians. They are not for the olden days or for the less sophisticated baptized Christians or the radicals. What are the fundamentals of the Gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ? Grace, faith, and discipleship. When these dynamics come together in the lives of two or three, church is real. Without grace, faith, and discipleship, the church is not the Church of Jesus the Christ.

Contradiction 2: LITERAL SPIRITUAL IMAGES

Early in the church's history, images of other-worldliness had meaning for people of that worldview. However, if we take these images literally, they do not make sense to us today. Just scan any denominational hymnal to discover the mythology of other-worldliness. One hymn implies that what it means to be spiritual is to wait on Jesus, for "soon he's coming back to welcome me far beyond the starry sky; I shall wing

my flight to worlds unknown; I shall reign with him on high" (**United Methodist Hymnal**, 1989). What does this mean? Besides the other-worldly images, there is the ongoing mix-up of great mythological truths of the church with historical fact, i.e., virgin birth, angels, walking on water, the parting of the seas, etc. Or look at another facet of this contradiction. Many in our churches say that they do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. From there it is easy to throw out the baby with the bath water. A whole generation of baptized quit going to church when they were led to believe that the myths of the church must be taken literally. How do we sustain the baptized? Certainly not with literalism. How do we best communicate the life truth that the Christian images *point* to, without our worshipping graven images carved out of literalism?

Contradiction 3: HUMANISTIC OPERATING IMAGES

Most who call themselves Christian, like most human beings, operate out of humanistic values devoid of a spiritual basis. We are basically materialistic, this-worldly, pragmatic humanists when it comes to the real decisions of living. We would appear schizophrenic when we consider our humanism alongside the other-worldly images we pretend to live out of in church. But not to worry. Ninety-nine percent of us are this-worldly, not other-worldly. Yet, what this leaves us is a matter-of-fact, womb-to-tomb existence. We crave myriad forms of entertainment and self-help to enliven our spirits. We try to live on 2 percent milk, seldom feasting on the fullness of the Spirit. We are humanists who are spiritually starving.

Contradiction 4: MINISCULE MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Few congregations today are dealing with the diseases of this world in their own localities or parishes: racism, AIDS, homelessness, illiteracy, drugs, alcoholism, war, broken families, teen pregnancies, hunger, classism, crime, welfarism, unemployment, and destruction of planet Earth, to name the diseases that first come to my mind. The media has convinced us that the totality of such brokenness has reached critical mass, meaning survival is at stake. Without powerful, hands-on

engagement with the ills of individual, social, and universal life, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not served. Individual Christians doing their mission at home, through their jobs, or in their spheres of influence is not enough. We can send our money through the denomination to somewhere, but the local congregation finds it extremely difficult to engage directly outside its walls, face-to-face with people in real need, be they poor or rich, or somewhere in between. Everyone knows that delivering food baskets at Christmas is but a grain of sand. Try something more effective, like a hostel for the temporarily homeless, and watch the neighborhood and community reaction relative to depressing property values. Little wonder that mission is reduced, for it demands all kinds of sacrifices.

Contradiction 5: INDIVIDUAL OVEREMPHASIS

Not only does the external mission of the church suffer because of individualism, but also individuals suffer from not doing a mission beyond their own self-centered interests. Without a corporate community of faith, we can do little effective mission, for most of us are too weak. There are few Schwetizers among us who can go out and do a mission almost single-handedly. We run out of spirit, which depends upon community worship, prayer, covenant, study, counsel, camaraderie, and methods. Radical mission is for the long haul, meaning crucial arenas of mission such as homelessness demand up to life-long efforts of a committed group. Individualism in the church also includes the overemphasis on individual nurture at the expense of the nurture of all the members. Members demand that the clergy serve individual needs in a pastoral manner rather than train and motivate groups of the congregation to implement powerful corporate mission to *all* members *in* the church and *all* members of the parish *around* the church.

Contradiction 6: INAUTHENTIC COVENANTAL DISCIPLINE

During Services of Baptism, we as the congregation "renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service, that in everything

God may be glorified." The real situation, however, finds the church less disciplined than many other organizations, such as civic groups (that expel members who do not uphold the vows taken at initiation), ball teams, military units, job teams, street gangs, drug cartels, mobsters, terrorists, etc. Is the mission of these groups more important than the mission of the church? Should these people have deeper commitment? Should they be more devoted to the implementation of their mission, no matter what the cost? Why does the church not take its discipline seriously? Why do we not renew our covenant annually—or leave the fellowship? Church *school* is a misnomer. Secular schools are being criticized by our society at every level, yet they are serious about education. The church is not: thirty to forty-five minutes at Sunday school once a week by a few members is not serious. How do we know whether the discipline of prayer is authentic in our church? By what means do we know whether a member is exercising one of his or her real gifts? What ministry of service is each member doing individually and corporately? Who knows this vital membership information? We certainly know who is contributing how much money, as if that were more important than other disciplines. Shamefully, the churches resist covenant and discipline, as though they were not called to follow Jesus in obedience to God for the sake of the world.

Contradiction 7: INEFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organizational structure of the local church is skewed toward its own maintenance rather than its mission, which is understood biblically as giving itself for others. The parish should be the target of its mission. Good Methodists understand the parish as their sphere of responsibility: "the world is my parish," as John Wesley taught. Taking this as given—living on behalf of the parish—is the church organized to care for its mission? Not very well. Its organization is directed toward the care of the congregation in its worship, study, and fellowship. This is not bad. It's just another mission, called taking responsibility for the congregation. Is the church organized to care for the congregation? Not very well. A great number of the membership fall through the net of care. The few paid staff do not get the

comprehensive care job done effectively. Will committees, classes, and random groups get the job done? Not very well. If the congregation were organized well, every member would be accounted for every week relative to his or her chosen/assigned participation in the life of the congregation and its mission beyond. In short, the organization is ineffective in two ways: each member is not being cared for and the parish mission is not being cared for.

Contradiction 8: DESIGNATED MINISTERS

The image that the ministry of the church is primarily in the hands of the ordained and paid staff continues to keep the church down, though books about the ministry of the laity have been coming out for years, ever since the Protestant Reformation, or better still, since the Book of Acts. The laity continue to be the sleeping giant in the saga of the renewal of the church. For the most part, the ordained clergy continues to be the leader rather than the enabler of the multitude of lay ministers. The laity as the potential real leadership of any congregation—with the assistance of the clergy—is the key to dealing with the malaise of the churches. For example, most churches could catalyze and train a cadre of members to take as their mission the care for the sick and dying within the congregation and beyond. Most seminaries, however, do not prepare clergy for the task of training the laity to be doing a corporate ministry that could be hundreds of times more effective than the direct ministry of just the ordained clergy. Therefore, the laity, with unchallenging images of their ministry, poor training, and unfocused mission structures, end up with casual commitment that retards the reform of the church. How does the church come up with a design for the ministry-in-common of all its members? More fundamentally, the laypeople do not really understand that they are called and have all the gifts necessary for Christian ministry. What if 100 percent of the baptized members become ministers and are formally commissioned, held accountable, and absolved regularly by the congregation?

Contradiction 9: UNFOCUSED WORSHIP OF *GOD*

At the heart of the church is the Service of Worship of *God*. Yet the order, content, and dynamics of the service distract the worshippers rather than focus them upon the divine worship of *God*. Children's sermons, announcements, reports, special recognition of members, didactic prayers, people walking in and out, lectures or talks instead of the preached *Word*, the opening chat in the pews: all these are distractions from the worship of *God*. Divine Worship is not a compilation of fellowship hour, church meeting, Christian education, concert, and lecture series. Christian worship is about *forgiveness*, *thanksgiving*, and *rededication*—these three, all focused on *God*: *God's* forgiveness of us, our thanksgiving to *God*, and our rededicating ourselves to serving *God* and creation. The question is How does the service of worship rivet our attention to the mighty acts of *God*, calling forth our reverent worship?

Contradiction 10: FALSE CHRISTS

Christians operate out of myriad images of Jesus Christ that give false hopes and cheap grace rather than new life. Jesus Christ does not remove us from our human situation but transforms *us* in it. Through the Jesus Christ event we are empowered to love the life we have, to give *God* thanks for our lives as they are, and to offer them in service. Jesus is not a magician. Jesus Christ is not an icon we can rub and receive miraculous favors or the gift of heaven. Jesus the Christ is the Word event that changes our lives by radically altering our focus and offering a new way of living. The Jesus Christ event calls us out of the human trap of worldly self-worship to a gracious life of faithful obedience to *God*. The miracle the Gospel promises is the miracle of faith. All other promises of *false Christs* fill us with illusion and disappointment. Finally, *false Christs* do not deliver; they only bring despair. More than this, these *false Christs* divide us Christians, each group worshipping its own version of Christ as the true way ordained of *God*.

Some will say these ten contradictions are too radical, and will dismiss them and me out of hand. Others will say my list of

contradictions is *not* radical enough, only fine-tuning. Such dis-established radicals might list their contradictions this way:

> *1.* **Unimaginative, Cowardly, and Mercenary Leadership.** *They would propose that a Lee Iacocca type work a 120-hour-week for room and board.*
> *2.* **Worldly Bureaucracy.** *They would propose dismantling it.*
> *3.* **Puny Ecumenical Thrust.** *They would propose that the churches move beyond their Christian Gospel hang-up and become a part of a pan-religious organization, with new creeds and liturgies.*
> *4.* **Unspiritual Membership.** *They would propose the modern equivalent of the desert fathers, minus celibacy.*
> *5.* **Un-Christian Mission.** *They would propose that the denominations and churches sell all their assets and give the money to the poor.*

Basically, people who think this way are the *dis-establishment*. They bulldoze our consciousness, sometimes as powerfully as did the prophets in Old Testament history.

On the other side is the *pro-establishment*. They have held the denominations and institutional church together, in spite of all odds, for two millennia. They have continued the tradition on which we stand.

Yet, within that awesome tradition, the churches would have surely stagnated without the reformers, or what I wish to call the *trans-establishment* (the images of *dis-*, *pro-*, and *trans-establishment* are from the Order:Ecumenical). Luther, Wesley, and John XXIII are this type. They have been radically dedicated to the transformation—reformation—of the churches. They have authentically intended to re-form and trans-form the existing church, not to tear it down. The trans-establishment reformer thanks *God* for what is, as a part of the good creation, and blesses it with his prayerful and dedicated action. The church is changed, not destroyed. It is re-formed. It takes on new form.

What I call radical is clergy and laity re-committing to the discipleship of our baptismal vows: to worship and serve our *God*; to pray and plan in the way of Jesus the Christ; to be a part of the powerful Spirit movement and the historically corporate body—the Church—

that loves creation locally and universally. What a powerful force we baptized Christians can be with almost one-third of the world's population.

Today, the ***reformation strategies*** for the churches begin with "R":

Rediscovery of the Word
Revival of spiritual disciplines
Re-empowerment of the laity
Rededication to corporate mission

How do we begin? A key ***first tactic*** to the reformation of the church locally must begin with the clergy and lay leadership: they must pray, plan, and tangibly symbolize their re-commitment, something as simple as a tithe, plus, of their money *and* time, meeting at least weekly to figure out how to call forth, assign, and sustain the members. Without that much, nothing will fundamentally change.

I still believe in the church and its reformation because there is no more comprehensive institutional coverage of earth geographically than our thousands of churches with our nearly two billion members; because there is no more profound symbol system than the church's; because there have been no more dedicated people in history than the followers of Jesus Christ; and because our *God* of creation, of our universe, our planet, our parish, our congregation, and the human heart has called us to continue the reformation. Life—and the church—is always being reformed by the power of *God,* if we but let it happen. It is *God's* Church, and it can be what it really is. So be it.

UNTIL THE SPIRIT tells me something different, I will continue to write . . . as I pray for the way I can best help continue the reformation of the church. I like the quote from somewhere: *Service is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on God's earth.* I am looking for my authentic way of service, the particular new form of my old calling.

Chapter 27: My Cock Clan

Expanding Family
Age 45-58 (1984-97)

SOME OF THE COCKS who moved far away from Meadows of Dan, Virginia, changed *Cock* to *Cox*. We goad them and their descendants just a little at the Cock reunions with the prefix "chicken" before their devalued *Cox* name: a nice ring, *chicken Cox*. One *Cox* man who moved to Galax from New York, but no immediate kin, said that his name derives from *Cock*. I kid him by saying it takes guts to remain authentic.

We have roosters on our coat of arms, on ties, on weather vanes, on china, on napkins, on wall decor, on keychains, on jewelry—you name it. Most of us are proud Cocks and will certainly have the name on our grave markers.

I learned from cousin Leon, a super salesperson and very proud of the *Cock* name, that when a secretary—who is uncomfortable with the sound of "Leon *COCK*" and hopes that it is *Cook* or *Cox*—asks him to spell his name, he spells out L-E-O-N. I spell out J-O-H-N. A great icebreaker that often brings forth a snicker, a flush, or a bold laugh and gives us valuable information about that person.

Sons John and Jeremiah, like their dad, have had to take the good—and sometimes malicious—ribbing about their last name. Each of us, as a boy, has had at least one fight defending the honor of that good name. But we know it builds character to decide to be a *Cock* everytime we have to give our name, especially the women who keep the name after they marry into the family. Lynda has been especially brave and has not asked once for us to change our name.

Jeremiah was in the second grade when we moved to Galax in the fall of 1984. He rode the school bus at first but later walked to school, the same school I walked to as a boy. He was a good student who relished reading and drawing. For many years he wanted to be an architect, partly because of his very large *Lego* collection, which would

occupy him for hours in creative solitude.

He was a very affectionate child. He delighted in smaller children and was so good with them. Everyone said he would make a good daddy. And adults mentioned many times how polite and conversant he was.

His bike phase was fun to watch until he ran into a fence at his granddaddy's in Cleveland, Tennessee, and rammed the base of the handlebars into his privates. He was one black and blue little fellow. The doctor said the injury might prohibit his fathering children. Wrong.

He, like his granddaddy Lippard, is a "Mr. Fix-it." He began to fix all our electronic problems at about age ten when he became infatuated with our first computer. He set everyone's clocks, VCR's, and put together everyone's electronic Christmas gifts, including Mama Dotte's and his aunt Ida's. He began taking our computer apart about age eleven and tinkered with this and that to enhance its speed and memory. He traded computer games and played them continuously. He stood over anyone's shoulder who knew more than he did about computers and lapped up what he saw them doing as he asked tens of questions. His passion for the computer was obvious.

During the summer of his sixth grade, he joined with about twenty other children of the Order: Ecumenical in Arizona for a month-long rite of passage. They hiked three states, slept under the stars, did their own cooking and cleaning, and spent a twenty-four-hour solitary vigil away from the group. He flew back into Greensboro looking and acting five years older.

Jero—his nickname since Indonesia—participated in all sports, but especially liked soccer and running, which he was very good at and was ranked seventh in the State as a freshman. But like his big brother, who had to drop out of cross-country at Davidson College because of leg injuries, his career was also short.

During the summer of his sophomore year, Jero and his mom visited brother John in Indonesia for three weeks. They went back to the village where Jero had lived as a two-year-old, met his village nanny and her children, and others who remembered him as the little fat blond who spoke their language. As another rite of passage, he stayed an extra week with his brother and flew back to the States on his own. He did fine until he decided to go shopping on his layover in Singapore and

had to use all his running skills to keep from missing his flight when he realized the hour's time change. He says that experience ranks among the top ten scary moments in his life.

After I taught him to drive, we bought a used '86 Honda hatchback with only 32,000 miles—what my Dad would have called a "cream-puff." He immediately began to upgrade the radio and speakers. One night he loaned it to three of his friends while he rode around with a friend in another car. His friends ran it up a telephone pole and flipped it on the curvy Hebron Road. Luckily, no one was hurt, except the car—totaled. That did not go down well with me. After that, he began to date April, who had a car. He had no more cars until he started commuting to the university.

During his junior and senior years he attended Governor's School at Pulaski, about an hour's drive on the school bus. He began to learn to haul out of bed early. He continued to excel in math-related courses and began to learn computer programming, which he used during the summer at Kanbay Company in Chicago, owned by some of our friends from the Order. On an internship program with Volvo, near his school in Dublin, he became fascinated with computer aided design.

Signing up for computer engineering at Virginia Tech was a natural step. Tech is over an hour's drive from Galax, with many State Police en route as Jeremiah keeps finding out. He is attending on scholarships and a very small college loan. At the same time, he began to work for Innovative Systems, a computer store in downtown Galax, during his off days. He has moved into the networking stage of his apprenticeship and farms himself out at $45 an hour on his own time. Of course he helps dad and mom learn the newest programs and keeps urging us to upgrade our equipment. We could not function well in this medium without him.

Jeremiah's teen years kept us off balance. His advanced school program, his job, and his dating consumed his time and made him very independent. We really lost control of him at about age sixteen when he started driving, or put positively, as he grasped more and more of his freedom. He and April Baggatta had a short and intense courtship, which culminated in their running off to Carolina during their senior year. When they came back, they moved into a small apartment near the

high school and continued their senoir year. They graduated together and Jeremiah gave the salutatorian address at the commencement exercises. We were all so proud, and the two families gathered at their apartment afterwards to celebrate with them.

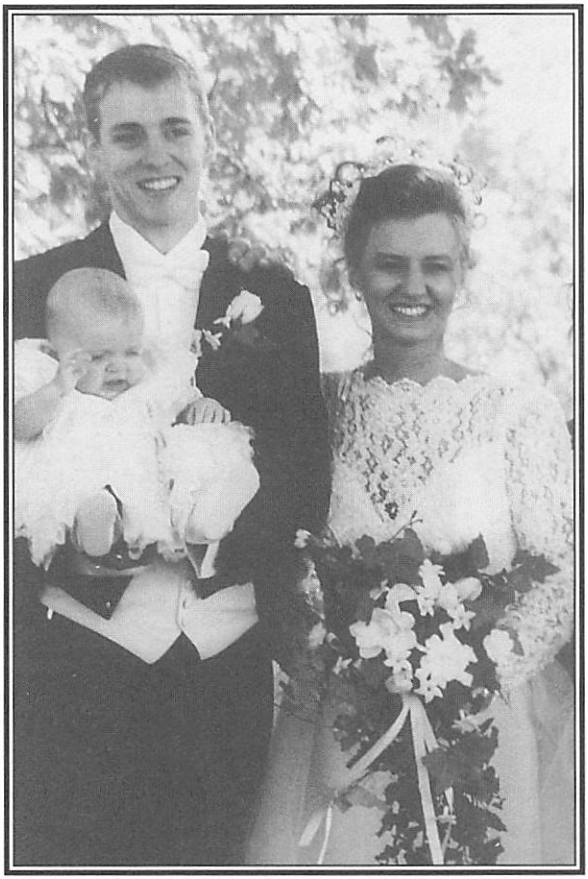
Fair to say, we were stunned with their suddenly becoming family, and somewhat alienated for a while, but we all worked at reconciliation. The turning point was our holding and loving our first granddaughter, Kaitlyn Elizabeth, born nearly 1½ years ago. What a wave of feelings she let loose in us all, healing us by just being and beckoning forth our love for her. There is miraculous power in the birth and being of a child, demonstrating to us again the creative force of grace in the universe.

As April brought Kaitlyn to visit us at the shop almost daily, we became the proud grandparents. Once, when Lynda had a very negative phone call from a vendor, she began to cry. Kaitlyn, less than one-year-old, reached for her grandmother. She held Lynda's face between her hands, talked gobbledygook, and wiped at her tears. She expressed such sympathy—with sort of a little smile at the same time—staying in grandmother's face until she finally smiled through her tears. Lynda squeezed her granddaughter with great love for being with her in her pain. Where did Kaitlyn learn to do that? Do all babies come knowing how to do that? Maybe love is innate.

Jeremiah and April married at the end of his first year at Tech. We could not hold our tears of joy as he carried precious Kaitlyn—the honorary flower girl—down the aisle and handed her to the grandmothers as he took his place standing beside his brother, John—his Best Man in every sense—to await his bride.

They have made wonderful parents and have now moved into a cozy little rental house in Galax. April works for the City Health Department part-time and teaches aerobics several evenings. She is a fine Italian cook, a neat housekeeper, a motivator for Jeremiah, and a bundle of spirit and energy. They seem happy. We are very proud of their new family and are so thankful to have a new little being, Kaitlyn.

Recently, Kaitlyn got into the computer business herself as she stumbled and pulled the keyboard out of the motherboard. She sent her parents a bill for $500.



WHEN WE MOVED to Galax, son John was a senior at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, living with his aunt Ida and uncle Yates, who were preparing to move to Galax during his mid-year. He moved in with their good friends to finish the year. We took both sets of his grandparents and attended his high school graduation before he entered Davidson College in North Carolina, where he majored in world religions and minored in international studies. We were proud and relieved that he attended the college on mostly scholarships and a work-study program. He took many hours in Arabic language and was about to get a job in

Jordan when the Gulf War broke out. While at Davidson, he helped start a fraternity as I did in college.

He liked Davidson very much, but like me when I attended college, he thought that four years was excessively much. We both agree that two years of general liberal arts courses is enough, and then a advanced degree, for those wanting it, for two to three more years of intensive major study and related work, like an intern program. Students today are completely worn out with our school system—starting school as early as three-years-old these days—and have basically lost motivation by the time they're in high school.

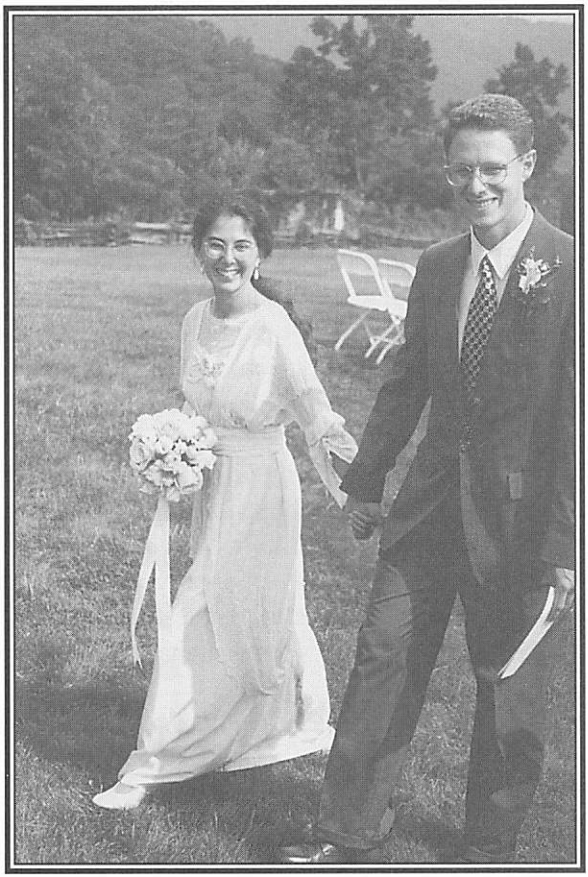
During five summers of his college years, John, who was nicknamed *Jono* in Indonesia, worked at the Roaring Gap Club near the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. He was close to Galax and made great summer money heading up children's programs and waiting tables and parties. Like Jeremiah, he got more than his share of speeding tickets. Maybe their heavy feet came from their two granddads, Pate and Joe.

After college, Jono found work in Washington, D.C., at the Mid-East desk for a sub-contractor to the State Department for placing and monitoring international students who studied in the States. While there he met a petite young lady named Sofia Tangalos, who was on the North-African desk and spoke four languages. Among other things, they had in common years of living overseas and their love of travel. One of their many exotic dates was a week in Paris.

After D.C., they went to teach English at Bandung University in Indonesia, one of the favorite two or three places in Jono's life. For two years they taught and traveled among the 17,000 islands of the nation, going to very remote regions. Their presents to family for several years afterwards have been out of their stash of batiks. Our apartment looks like a batik boutique, fortunately for us, for they remind us of Indonesia and that life is full of patterns of wonder and beauty.

John and Sofia married three years ago this summer on the Blue Ridge Parkway, with me officiating, along with the participation of Sofia's father, Andrew, and John's uncle Dick. It was a memorable event with parquet flooring in the field for dancing to a jazz band. Later the sparklers streaked the dark with their circular trail. It was Mama

Dotte's last major outing, and we helped her to the dance floor and held her up as we danced with very limited moves. She always loved to dance.



Sofia is a fine Greek cook and collects antiques to place in their present townhouse in Baltimore, a thirty-minute walk from the Harbor. She too lived around the world, following her father, who has spent his career working for the State Department. She and John are quite the cosmopolitan couple in a deep sense: they care for the earth by cherishing its resources and peoples.

He is now into applying for graduate studies in community revitalization, and has narrowed his choices to Rutgers in New Jersey

and the University of North Carolina. Sofia is learning a fifth language, Italian, and commuting to D.C. to work at the job where she and John met.

John and I have had many deep conversations over the years, sharing an interest in religion. He is trying to educate his extended family, and anyone else who will listen, to conscienciously care for the Planet. He will take public transportation before he will drive their '91 Honda *Civic*, for he thinks the automobile has tyrannized the nation, killed the center cities, and desecrated our quality of life. Like his mom, he and Sofia believe in drinking water rather than pop, and eating vegetables and fruits mostly, though neither is strictly vegetarian. He loves the Cubs and Wrigley Field but is turned off by the glitz and suburban feel of Camden Yards in Baltimore. They are in no hurry to bear us grandchildren, but we and evolution would be proud of their offspring.

AT THE SAME TIME we were moving back to Galax, so were Ida and Yates. They bought Mama Dotte's store, The Fashion Shoppe, just up Main Street. They soon began to build a beautiful seven-gabled, gray, wooden house on the top of one of our lovely hills, surrounded by a Blue Ridge Mountain panorama. It is our celebration house, the place for most birthday parties, Thanksgiving meals, and the Cock family Christmas gifts sharing.

Their two children, Elizabeth and John (there are many *Johns* in our family), have entered interesting careers: she, a tenured professor at Notre Dame in the classics' department; and he, a brother in the Episcopal Holy Cross Order in New York on the Hudson. Elizabeth's husband, Tadeusz Mazurek, is finishing his Ph.D. in classics at the University of North Carolina this year. Their son, Marek, is a few months younger than our granddaughter, Kaitlyn, who kept tackling him the last time they were together. He learned to walk in self-defense.

Older brother, Glenn, and his wife, Judie, and son, Doug, live in Bristol, Tennessee, where he was head of the Burlington Industries' carpet plant before being hired to run another independent carpet company there. He began to build houses on the side until he started contracting them full-time, getting his realtor's license to boot. We visit often, since the drive is little more than two hours. Judie's father, Cecil, owned and

ran the Rex Theater in Galax during the years she was growing up, which doubly connects us to the Rex.

MAMA DOTTE worked for fifty-three years on Main Street before she retired. After her hip replacement and the fall soon after, when she cracked her pelvis, she has been declining. Naturally we have been preoccupied with death during the last few years as the Alzheimer's disease and several near-death experiences have taken her quite low. At one point, her death seemed so imminent that we prepared her Lutheran service with Pastor Bob, even writing a eulogy for her friend Cynthia to read during the last rites. But Mama keeps coming back to life, God bless her. She has known us children through it all. That would be the worst part, total separation before the final separation of death, our touching not my Mama, but a strange woman who did not know us.

She still has passion for life: loves to eat, especially ice cream; loves to see us; loves to see and touch her two new great-grandchildren; wants to sit up, though she can hardly be lifted out of her bed. She still chooses life, bed-ridden as she is at 84. She continues recreating. We have made a self-conscious decision to stay in Galax as long as she needs us.

WE CELEBRATE with the extended families around birthdays, reunions, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and special events such as weddings. Lynda has brought celebration to high art on our side of the family, so I changed my birthday party from December 19, when I got honorable mention with presents saying "Happy Birthday and Merry Christmas." Now that my party is celebrated on Valentine's Day, I have been receiving twice as many presents, and besides, it gives us another winter celebration—can't have too many of those.

Great uncle Cecil and his wife, Polly, from Meadows of Dan, Virginia, keep the greater Cock Clan together through reunions and communication. We have grown closer to the Cocks across the nation since coming back to Galax. And the annual Slusher (Mama's extended family) reunions are still a favorite Sunday in July each year, although Mama and her brother Freeman will not be able to attend again. Only

her brother George, age 94, of the fourteen children, is still able to go to the reunions.

Recently, Lester Gardner of Fancy Gap, a distant relative, brought by a booklet to the shop about my Gardner relatives. As it happens, my father's mother, Ida, was the daughter of Anderson Gardner and Mary Dalton (aunt of Ted Dalton, who was almost elected Governor of Virginia), who was the tenth son of Alexander Gardner and Susanna Webb, who was the son of James Gardner (April 25, 1755-April 21, 1849—fought in the Revolutionary War as a 19-year-old) and Tabiatha Martin (December 6, 1780-September 7, 1862—both buried in the Gardner Cemetery in Hillsville), who was the son of we are not sure which Gardner. The booklet says in summary, "I will have to assume our ancestors came from Massachusetts via Connecticut to Fishkill Township, New York, prior to 1758. Then our ancestors moved to New Jersey and to various parts of Virginia.... I am pleased to live on part of the late James Gardner property at the junction of US 100 and US 221, east of Hillsville, Virginia" (*The James Gardner Memorial—1758-1968*, by Rufus S. Gardner, Sr.). Now I begin to be related by six generations to my Gardner roots. My relatives say I carry the Gardner gene noticeably.

I am Gardner and Cock and Slusher and Corn, a wonderful handful of all four reigns of history, gee and hawing out of their past and into our future. How does this make me feel? Awed and proud, glad that I am not just the residue of the Cocks and Slushers only, but the embodiment of the wondrous gifts and neuroses of the Gardners and Corns as well. I get my flamboyant style from the Cocks, my stick-to-it-ness from the Slushers, my depth from the Gardners, and my religious yearning from the Corns.

I stand on all their shoulders, listening to them cry out to me from the past to finish their work, to live their dreams. I am not the captain of my fate altogether.

ON LYNDA'S SIDE, we continue to delight in her mom and dad's ability to travel to see us at ages 82 and 83. Besides Blanche's heart problems and Joe's bursitis and a hip replacement, they are in good

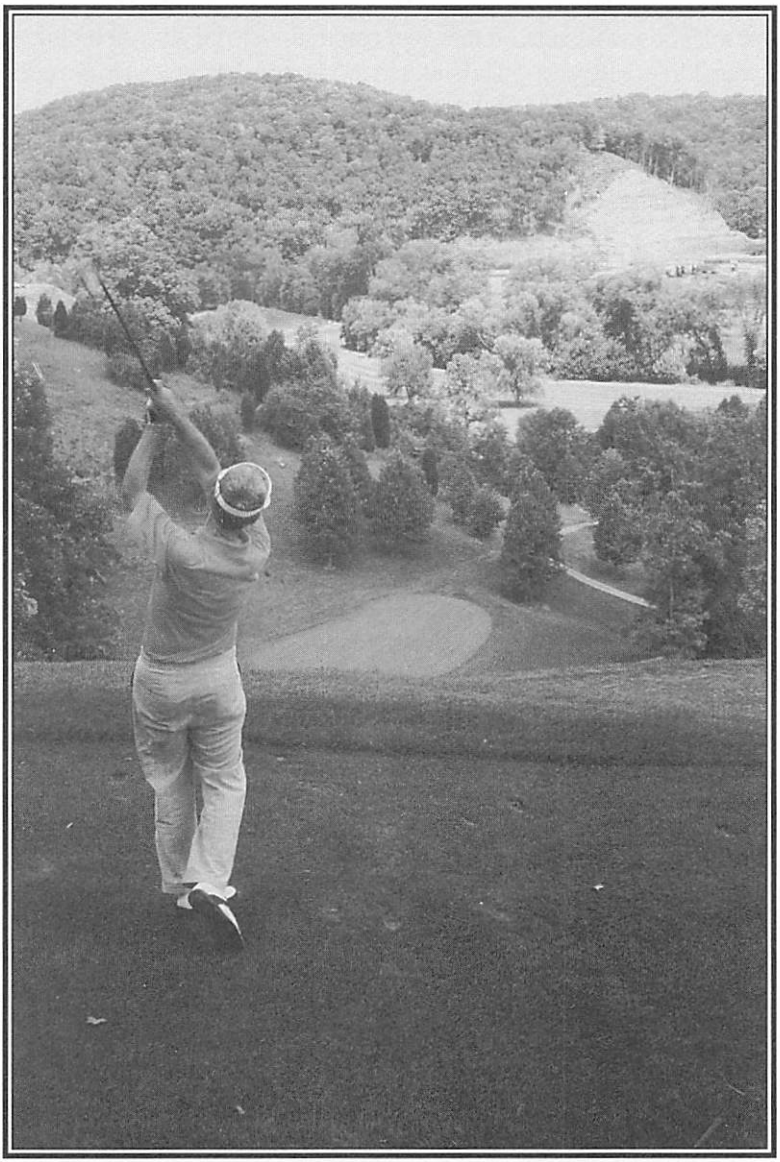
health. All their three children live in Virginia, along with most of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. One would think they would leave their home, friends, church, and community to be with their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in Virginia, but they have deep roots in Cleveland, Tennessee, and dear friends that they do not want to leave.

Lynda's sister, Diane, and her husband, Dick, live in Dinwiddie County where she is an elementary school principal and Dick has become a United Methodist minister after a career in bridge engineering. Diane was on the national board of the Institute of Cultural Affairs recently. This past fall, I performed the wedding of their daughter, Julie, an RN in geriatrics, and Derek, an entertainment tours manager. Diane's son, Rob, is finishing dental school at the Medical College of Virginia. He and his wife, Tammy, an RN who works for Blue Cross Insurance, are the parents of our beautiful great-niece, Alexandra.

Hal, the brother of Diane and Lynda, is a dentist in Charlottesville, Virginia, and married Cathy last fall in a service led by our brother-in-law Dick. Hal's adopted daughters, Morgan and Amy, added their beauty to the service. Cathy works for Siemens as a manager. Since they are located centrally among John and Sofia, Diane and Dick, Julie and Derek, Rob and Tammy and Alex, Jero and April and Kaitlyn, and Lynda and me, their home is a convenient node when we celebrate family events.

THERE IS A SURE KNOWLEDGE our family will take care of us, will be there when the chips are down, till death do us part. We are deeply sustained by the covenantal love of our family. The family is not my vocation but is surely that without which I don't want to live.

Reliving these years, I am struck with deep emotion. Life *is* profound. Creativity coming through birth and death is deeply painful and joyful, refusing to let me be the same old man I thought I was becoming. I keep being spiritually undone and redone on the journey of my life.



Chapter 28: The Mysterious Game

Golf
Age 45-58 (1984-97)

SPORTS have been a source of radical discontinuity for me, especially golf. I watch NBA basketball when Michael Jordan plays (and one season he did not); I have followed the Braves since I left the Cubs in Chicago; I watch the NCAA final four basketball games; and I watch golf events on TV and two in person, the Greensboro Open and the Vantage Championship in Clemmons, N.C. How can anyone not stand at attention to the marvels of Michael on the court, Maddux on the mound, and Tiger on the links?

There is something mystical about golf. Each spring my sap still rises, experiencing the sight of rolling green fairways; smelling freshly mown grass; touching the ball as I pick it up to push off a dab of mud with my thumb; tossing up a handful of grass to decipher the wind; adjusting my cap and holding my hand to my forehead to shield the sun; sticking a tee into the green and jabbing all around to repair my ball divot; kneeling down to line up a putt; feeling the cool metal heads in the bag as I wait for the click of decision—measuring the yardage, wind, slope, and receptivity of the green; hearing the swish of my practice swing and the brush of the grass as it makes the slightest contact; waggling the clubhead and relaxing my body as I address the ball; focusing on the length, height, and shape of the shot; entering the still zone of concentration before the take-away; wondering if my body remembers what to do; releasing through the ball, enthralled in the explosion of that nanosecond of contact; receiving the feedback of a perfectly executed shot that is one of golf's most satisfying feelings; following the white speck until it touches down and bounces and rolls to a stop; walking to it, dealing with the ecstasy or agony of the last shot and rehearsing the next—always wondering if I can pull it off and never knowing what will happen. Fear and fascination at every shot, especially if I am under pressure.

To wax a bit: I am a universal convergence of fifteen or more billion years. Am I prepared to execute one of life's most precise creaturely feats: to coordinate untold numbers of biological, psychic, rational, and numinous factors to hit a single golf shot? I stand there swinging as an outcropping of the cosmos, energized to perform that feat, immersed in the tango of the universe, and awed that all this is happening through me. Golf is miraculous.

One who understands better than most that golf is coming from the center of the universe is Ben Hogan. Lynda gave me the book **Hogan: The Man who Played for Glory** and on another Christmas a video of the old movie of Hogan's life, *Follow the Sun* (1951), which I saw and loved as a boy. He was my idol then and is still "the man" of the 20th century in golf as far as I'm concerned.

I have two pictures of him in the back of the shop: first, his swing displayed in a series of four pictures in a glassed frame about 4' X 1½' in my upper room; the other, the famous 1950 one iron shot (some say a strong two iron) at the US Open on the 18th hole at Merion to set up his par to tie Mangrum and Fazio (Hogan won the play-off the next day). Thousands of spectators watched in rapt silence as the white speck flew about 220 yards to an elevated green. All the more miraculous was the shot and the win when we consider that he had nearly died in a car wreck about eighteen months earlier and was not given much chance to walk again.

He is a mysterious fellow who was called to be a golfer. He obeyed with most all his being.

> *Whether my schedule for the following day called for a tournament round or merely a trip to the practice tee, the prospect that there was going to be golf in it made me feel privileged and extremely happy, and I couldn't wait for the sun to come up the next morning so that I could get out on the course again* (**Hogan**, 1957).

Golf is compelling. It is not the exercise, at least for me. Challenge is the game. I am always over against par, a very high standard for 99 percent of golfers. I want to lower my handicap as long as I play, knowing some day, because of age and body condition, it will start rising.

Well, in fact, it already has risen from 5 to 8 since I had to give up practicing because of my joints. I loved to practice, standing there thinking I was Hogan or Watson. Now I want to lower it to a seven handicap.

The conditions are always a challenge. The weather is too windy, too cold, too hot, or too rainy. One May 1, we played the second day of our Calcutta tournament at Galax Country Club in wind of 35 to 40 mph, snow, and a windshield factor of about 20 degrees. I could not believe we finished. At Ken Robert's annual cancer tournament in Lynchburg, it always rains one day about two to three inches, so wet that I can't hold onto my clubs, or keep the rain rolling off my visor from distracting my putting. Everything is wet. Water stands over my shoe soles. I ask why am I here, why is the tournament still on? I always promise myself I will not come back next year.

The conditions of the course are always challenging. There are roughs at many levels. At The Virginian course, near Abingdon, I dribbled my ball just off the tee and could not find it in the short, creeping vine, which is the second cut of rough. I hooked a ball into the third cut of rough, broom sage up to my knees, and could not find it. On golf courses there are out-of-bounds fences. There are creeks and lakes; bushes and trees; up-hill, down-hill, and side-hill lies; blind shots; elevated greens; sand traps and bunkers; undulating greens; and even gopher holes. The course is too hard or too soft; the greens are too large or too small; the fellows in front did not rake the trap; spike marks alter the line of my putt.

Human competition is another challenge. The competitive dialogue starts up: "My worthy opponent is playing way below his handicap. He can't miss a putt today. He is getting all the breaks. He is smiling at me. His comments are getting to me. Now he's humming. He hit out of turn. He's rushing me. He is always raising the ante and wanting to double on the last hole. Too many people are watching me on the tee next to the clubhouse and will be asking, 'What'd you shoot, Cock?'"

But the greatest challenge is the inner dialogue. "You could hook it into the trees. John, what if you push it over the fence? You could chunk it into the pond. Your release is late. You're gripping the club too tight. Slow down your swing. Are you going to push or pull

this putt? What if you hit this sand shot thin and fly the green? Is this the right club? Try to halfway keep your eye on the ball until you hit it. Why can't you concentrate? What are all those people thinking; they are watching me on every shot." The voice is incessant, always inside talking to me; it won't shut up. When I'm playing by myself, it is more congenial, even praising me a lot and building my confidence. But that voice becomes the nagging, negative nemesis when I play with someone, except on rare occasions when I get into the zone of no dialogue, no swing thought: nothing, *nada*.

Golf camaraderie is special in spite of the grudging competition. David, an Emory and Henry grad and a member of the fraternity I helped start while he was still in knee pants—and a distant cousin—is my best golfing buddy. We will both play till we drop, and of late, because of our back and shoulder ailments, eighteen holes is about all we should play. We both play to about an eight or nine handicap and consequently have rambunctious rivalry, with a lot of pride on the line and little money, but enough to keep it serious.

During February, a gang of as many as twenty have gone regularly to Myrtle Beach for a four-day outing, the most golf courses per square mile of any place in the world. Some years we leave snow in Galax and end up playing in short sleeves at the beach. Other years the ice and cold make it unbearable. About $200 gets us nice lodging, breakfast and golf. We usually play four different courses. My favorites have been the Surf Club, Marsh Harbor, Oyster Bay, and Arcadian Shores. I seldom break 80 at the beach because of strange courses and sea-level altitude. Galax is close to 3,000 feet and the ball flies further.

We put up $20 at the start of the four days to cover individual and team places in the Calloway System. The most I have won is $60. After eighteen or twenty-seven holes, we go back to the hotel, clean up and go out to dinner. The best place has been in North Myrtle, a small out-of-the-way place, which serves the most scrumptious broiled seafood platter I have ever eaten. Some of my esteemed colleagues eat crabs by the blue enamel tubs-full. Johnny can eat 100 broiled shrimp. We have played the piano and sung lustily there, some of my brothers feeling very good by that time of the evening.

Later, we go to the hotel and start the small-time poker games,

quarter ante. When Jack or Ford, another Emory and Henry crony, are around the table, we play funky games like Baseball or Dr.Pepper. My favorite is seven-card draw or showdown, nothing wild. I still get confused on which is higher, a straight or a flush. Ford loves to razz me about that, or about anything, really.

The biggest difficulty of the trip for me has been snoring roommates. I kept drawing the worst each year until I finally got lucky and had two years in a row with no roommates. Even my friend David snores on other outings. One night before a Lynchburg tournament, he woke me up snoring, so I got up, dressed, and told him it was time to go. He hurried and couldn't believe it when we walked outside our motel room into the dark. At that point he noticed it was 1 a.m. He let me get to sleep first from then on.

THREE OLD COLLEAGUES from the Order: Ecumenical, two of whom now live and consult with organizations and villages in Africa, came to visit us in Galax. We played two of the best courses around: Olde Mill and The Virginian. Frank said he had an 11 handicap; we figured he played to a 3. I really get mad when guys falsify their handicaps, not saying he did; anyway, I iced him out during part of the three days, even though he had come across the big pond to get here. I tried to get back at him during the evening Hearts games, but Terry and Tom won. We have planned a June rematch here in Galax in 1997 and the Alabama Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail during Spring 1998. Those guys get their schedules out there about two to three years ahead. We pick on each other over the Internet about baseball during the season and about our upcoming golf outings.

We have enjoyed our golf with other Order colleagues. Joel and I go way back in our golf together. We played on Christmas day in Jakarta, Indonesia, when I could hardly pull my sick body around the course. Recently we had planned to join the Wrights at Snowshoe resort in wild and wonderful West Virginia. A hurricane blew five inches of rain on us, so we looked at the TV weather channel and saw we could drive across the state to Huntington and be dry. We set off in two cars through the most extended trip of snaky, narrow mountain roads I have

driven on, and around Galax they are pretty bad. After four or five hours, we were there. We found a motel and courses and made up our own package for two more days. What we don't do to play golf.

The Earlys, other Order colleagues, have come to Galax, and we met them in La Jolla, California, one year to watch the PGA Tour stop at Torey Pines and to play all the golf we could. While watching the tournament, we were standing at the 18th when the announcer mentioned that Scott Gump was coming to the home green.

I turned to Lee and in a mocking voice asked, "Who is Scott Gump?"

A well dressed, petite young lady, wearing a wide, white straw hat, turned in front of me and said, "He's my husband."

We made some embarrassed small talk and left. Lee laughed his arse off when we were out of earshot.

When Jeremiah was about ten, we took him to see the Vantage Championship tournament outside of Winston-Salem. He was very interested in the snack huts and in the autograph area at the home hole. He easily got Chi-Chi's signature on his Vantage cap bill, but had to wait for thirty minutes for Arnie's, and only then got it because his caddie was nice enough to take Jeremiah's cap into the locker room for Arnie to sign.

Another outing I remember well was the Pinehurst trip with a different bunch of guys from Galax. We played the famous Pinehurst #2 course, where Hogan won his first tournament in 1940, the North-South. That was a mystical eighteen holes for me, especially when I birdied the hole Hogan birdied to win a play-off. *God* and Donald Ross outdid themselves on that one. Other memorable courses I have played are Harbour Town in South Carolina, where I shot 78, Farmington in Charlottesville, Jefferson Landing (a Larry Nelson course design in Jefferson, N.C.) and Olde Beau at Roaring Gap, N.C.—probably has the most blind shots of any course I've played. A course that I have played about ten times is the Roaring Gap Country Club, an old Donald Ross design. Of all the courses I know, I would choose to play it everyday over all the rest. I am close to Greenbriar, but have yet to go. I don't know if I want to go to St. Andrews, but I would pay good money to play Augusta and Pebble Beach. However, if I never go beyond Galax

Country Club and Blue Ridge Country Club here, that will be fine, for they are two of the best golf values in the world

BEFORE I BOUGHT out the Witherows, I even thought about setting up a golf shop. Mr. Earl Nuckolls told me it would be a big mistake, that Galax was not big enough. He was right. What I did instead was put a golf shop in the back corner of The Men's Shop, with a small inventory of new and used quality equipment. It is natural, even if not helpful, to reach for a different putter in my shop if my putting goes sour. I have continued to make enough from The Golf Shop to pay for my golfing fees and expenses, and I have fun swapping golf equipment and war stories with the good ole boys who come in.

Where was I going to get new equipment? In 1984, I walked into the Tee to Green Golf Shop in Eden, N.C., and started talking to the owner, Ken Roberts (since then Ken has set up another shop in Lynchburg, Virginia). I told him I was setting up a small shop in Galax and needed merchandize, but it was not big enough to buy from the major suppliers, and asked him if he would he be willing to sell to me at a small premium over wholesale. Imagine, a stranger with a black patch asking him on a Saturday to take my mother's check on an out-of-state bank for about $5,000 worth of golf equipment and accessories. That sort of gagged him. We talked some more, but he ended up taking a chance. I took my carload back and have been buying from him ever since. We have become good friends. He still tells people the story and what a fool he thought he was after I left that Saturday with all that stuff and how glad he was when the check cleared the bank.

No two people love to scour the countryside more than David and I, looking for premium used clubs: Ping and Ray Cook putters; Ping Eye 2, Titleist, and Yonex irons; Cobra, Calloway, Yonex, and Taylor Made woods; and Cleveland wedges. We go to Roanoke, Lynchburg, Winston-Salem, Hickory, Greensboro, and Charlotte, sometimes playing golf while there—like Tanglewood where the Vantage Championship for seniors is played each fall—and sometimes just hitting five shops in a row.

One of our favorite stops over the years has been to the house

of Mr. Turner, a seventy-five year old, in Greensboro, who has the biggest collection of used clubs we know about, and guess where: literally in every room of his house, so crowded that one has to watch his step. After rummaging through his bedrooms and kitchen, we come back to his living room where he sits in front of the TV. If we ask him about a particular club, he hollers at his wife to look for so and so and bring it to him, which she does every time, obediently. We have made some good and not-so-good trades with him. One I remember well was trading him three sets of slow moving irons for three Yonex drivers, back when David and I were hitting only Yonex woods. David said on the way back to the car, "You dog. How did you pull that off? He'll never trade with you again once he sees how hard it is to move those irons."

As it turned out, I had a hard time moving the three woods and finally had to trade them to my second favorite used club vendor, Rocky, who shows up with a yellow school bus full of clubs at the Greensboro Open and the Vantage Championship. He always says he absolutely will not trade and always ends up trading. I started to buy a set of Kunnan irons for myself last year but was afraid they would not move if I did not like. He asked $325. The next week I called him back in Durham and asked him if he still had them.

"Yea, I got 'um."

"How much?" I asked.

"$400."

"But you said $325 in Greensboro," I said.

He shot back with a chuckle, "You missed a good buy," and hung up.

But I have finally come to know that the club is not the big deal. It's not even the swing. And it is not what's between the ears. More than anything else, I at times realize the big deal is my relationship to the great challenge, to the great course, to the great camaraderie, to the great mystery that golf is.

ON THE EIGHTH DAY, *God* created golf, although we humans have only been keeping score for the past 500 years.

Chapter 29: And Called Again

My Vocation Re-created
Age 50-58 (1989-97)

Tired
And loney,
So tired
The heart aches.
Meltwater trickles
Down the rocks,
The fingers are numb,
The knees tremble.
It is now,
Now, that you must not give in.

On the path of the others
Are resting places,
Places in the sun
Where they can meet.
But this
Is your path,
And it is now,
Now, that you must not fail.

Weep
If you can,
Weep,
But do not complain.
The way chose you—
And you must be thankful.

—Dag Hammarskjöld, ***Markings***

1984 TO 1997 were the hardest years of my life. I call them "the dark, sacred night," from Louis Armstrong's rendition of *What a Beautiful World*, coming just before "the bright, blessed day." I had left my destinal calling, washed ashore from a heroic venture. At first, I could do nothing but the shop, downtown, family, church, and sports. Together, these helped me ease the grief of my separation and divorce from the Order: Ecumenical.

Not until time passed, until I had read a lot, had taught at First Church, and had begun to write did the real healing begin. I am an indomitable spirit man, as I have discovered over the journey of my life. My spirit will not die, a blessed fact for which I do not take credit.

I began to write in late 1989 as I prepared to teach an Advent series. Out of file drawers and boxes I began the first round of organizing my printed, copied, and written materials from the days in the Order. The wisdom of it all washed over me. I was driven to do something creative. At least a little, the energy of the original fireball let loose in me.

Disillusionment with the church and the Order was where I was. Why not wrestle with it? That's when I began my first book, **Continuing the Reformation** (unpublished). I had so much to say about the church, for I had been raised by the church, had decided to be a minister early on, had fallen out of that decision, was recalled when JFK was assassinated, went to seminary, read all the church renewal literature of the 60's and 70's, ministered in Alpharetta, Asheville, and Richmond before going to the Order, where I spent years leading local church experimentation and teaching laymen and clergy. I had wisdom to share.

At first my negativity and cynicism spewed forth, e.g., Jesus preached *Thy Kingdom come*, but the church came instead. But I knew from my years in the Order that one simply starts listing the frustrations, gripes, problems, blocks, and issues, and before long, patterns emerge. The indicative stuff that came forth was the grist for my contradiction analysis of the church. But over against *what* was all this a contradiction? I must have a vision down there somewhere. H. Richard Niebuhr has articulated it best for me. I pulled my vision together and then went back to really do the contradiction analysis. From there I began to articulate the strategic indications that rose out of my analysis. Within a matter of a few months I was well into a book. Pent-up brooding came

forth. I was amazed at the creativity that was happening through me.

I liked what I was doing, *writing*. Part of the fascination with it was watching it unfold on the computer screen, later on the print preview, page by page, and then out of the laser printer so professional looking. I found that I could write much easier on a well-ordered wordprocessor than on a yellow pad. I never cared much for looking at my scratch. It was a distraction, along with setting up the typewriter and doing it over again, time after time. I could reflect better on the computer once I got beyond learning the mechanics of it and thinking about losing what I had written, which happened several times. The first piece I ever did on a computer, under Karen Troxel's tutelage, about seven pages, I lost to a thunderstorm when the power went off in Fifth City. I really cursed and flailed after losing a couple of days' work.

I got up the courage to ask my sister, Ida, to look over my chapters as I wrote them, for she was a journalism major in college, had taught creative writing, and had published some pieces. She was gentle and encouraging, knowing first-hand about the frail Cock egos. She loaned and gave me books about writing and authors whose style I might find exemplary. I have struggled to discover *my* style. I do not like the prosaic style, the effulgent style, the folksy style, the cutesy style, the too poetic style, the describe-every-little-detail style, i.e., the shape of her curl or paragraphs on the spiraling smoke of a cigarette. In short, I do not like any style that calls attention to itself, or distracts from the content, in spite of what Marshall McLuhan said about the medium being the message—but he also said the printed book would disappear, so why take him seriously if one is a writer?

Of course, I had done some college, seminary, graduate school, sermon, and research writing (in the Order). However, I found out I had seldom written about my life experience. It was a fearful and fascinating adventure to start writing out of the sheer expanse and depth of my life, telling whomever what I think and feel. My freedom exerted itself. Reflection entered my consciousness, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in messages that I wrote down on the pad beside the bed, especially at early morning hours, around three o'clock. I began to understand that all my wounds and scars from the war of church renewal could be the badge of a writer.

It was a natural next step to think about writing about my life, which I thought I knew. I was there and had done it for sure, but it was a life waiting for me to recall in detail, reflect upon, piece together, interpret, and write about. I toyed with it a little to hear how it sounded. Ida, Lynda, Jeremiah, John, and Mama Dotte were encouraging, but they didn't have much more distance for a fair critique than I did.

I wrote hard and heavy until I was through the college years—about nine chapters—through innocent years that were mostly delightful for me to relive. Then I stopped, blaming it on spring that brought golf, the NBA finals, and Atlanta Braves' baseball. I could not pick the writing back up. It seemed too heavy as I began to think about marriage and separation, vocational struggle and despair, over sixteen unbelievably full years in the Order: Ecumenical all over the world, and of course leaving the Order and trying to start a new life. Too much *angst*. If it had taken me nearly six years to begin to reflect on my years in the Order, I knew well enough that only pain would come as I got the rest of my journey onto a white page.

In the meantime I taught some more and preached around. I began to do all my lesson plans on the computer, but not my sermons. I found out in the Order that one half-page with introductory and concluding phrases, and about four graphic images with a few phrases under each, brought out my best presentations. I left the page and spoke from inside. That is the kind of speaker I will listen to, if s/he is thought through and does not hem and haw too much.

I began to collect quite a stash of my creative writings on subjects that meant something to me. One Easter I compiled a booklet of six reflections, *Life is Resurrectional*, which I printed for the Genesis II class. Other printed and bound series were on *Living Theology*, *The Revolution of Grace*, *The Un-literal Meaning of the Bible*, and a more recent one on *Who Do You Say Jesus Is*? I did not like the Sunday school material that was available, so I compiled my own. The classes took it more seriously and so did I.

I also began to write some spirit pieces: *Life Understanding and Methods of the Order: Ecumenical*; *The Company of the Faith of Jesus*; *Who is Religious*? *Value Begins with Sacredness*; and *Underpinnings of the New Mythology*. As a writer about the faith, I

was beginning to feel that I had something to say.

Finally, I had to face up to the hard years of my past and finish thinking them through and writing about them. After several years of putting it off, things began to happen. From 1995 to 1997, I passed through a veil and turned from stoicism—Just hang in there!—to a new motivation. Maybe it began, it probably did begin, with the birth of my granddaughter, Kaitlyn. What a numinous experience her birth was for me, not unlike when John and Jeremiah were born. When she was born, I wrote about the encounter in a Christmas poem:

The mystery of the messiah comes
into our world anew in the birth of a baby,
whoever it belongs to,
whatever gender, nationality, color, or religion.

It comes to us who think we do not want it or need it.
It comes to us hardened cynics who have given up
on new life ever happening to us again.
It comes to us who think we have learned to live with separation and have given up on reunion.
It comes to us who have shunned religion;
yet, it rattles us with deep religious rumblings.
It comes to us who are following every wise man and every star, looking for that which we will never find
and which was never promised.

The mystery of the messiah comes as it wills,
where it wills,
when it wills.
Sometimes it wills to come in the form of a child.

The Messiah has come.
Be ready or not for its coming again.

What a delight to my soul every time I was with her. I have told Jeremiah, in a teasing and yet serious way, that she is the greatest thing he has ever done (of course, until he and April helped conceive Nolan Avery Cock, my first grandson). She reconciles everything in her sphere.

Another key to my turning was designing and bartering with Haley Wherry to build my raised, corner office with the portal to see what was going on in the shop in front of me. Little Robert called it my tree house, someone else, my upper room. Bookshelves, desk, reading chair, computer and printer, little TV, radio/cassette player, tapes (i.e., Ramsey Lewis, Sadao Watanabe, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Dave Grusin, the local favorite guitarist-postman Wayne Henderson—who played at the White House—and the later Paul Simon). Special pictures and personal icons surrounded me: Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross*, a montage of my saints, Joseph Mathews, family pictures, Hogan pictures, a Downtown Galax winter scene, my wooden sign "St. John the Evangelist," and my eagle statue. I loved being up there in my sacred space.

Jeremiah kept me updated with my computer needs. I again reflect that I would not be writing without the computer. He networked us with the upstairs PC and put us on the Internet, which I found to be a lively enterprise with all kinds of regular, practical favorites (i.e., news and investments), as well as reflective (book reviews) and fun explorations (*Bulls* and *Braves* stats).

The upper room and the computer-related arsenal made it conducive for me to write more regularly between customers and business. Sometimes unfairly, I confess, I let Lynda cover the front when I was deep into writing, but we worked out fairness in other ways: she took many trips when I stayed behind to keep the shop, like to Indonesia and India.

What happened to help me get off dead center with my writing was a spirit impulse in early November 1996 to print for Christmas presents to the family all I had written on my memoir, on the church, on resurrection, Sunday school material, poetry, letters, etc.—over 250 pages, 8½ by 11. I worked very early in the mornings to get print-ready copy and about ten pages of pictures to the Gazette Press in Galax by November 25, to have it in hand by the second week of December—fourteen copies for close family and Lyn Mathews at about $36.50 each.

After completing that task, getting good feedback from the family and Lyn, and hearing several of them ask why my memoir is only half done, I committed in my New Year's resolutions to go the rest of the

way. By March 9, I had written eight new chapters as well as re-editing the earlier published chapters many times. I found I could go as much as five to six hours at a time before my back, eye, brain, and inspiration would give out. It was a time of therapeutic meditation, a time of centering, what Karen Armstrong (*The Future of God*) calls prayer.

Reading, watching videos, listening to cassettes, and teaching Sunday school also helped me make the turn. Besides the bread and butter input of Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, Kierkegaard, Kazantzakis, Gandhi, and Joseph Mathews (whose many writings are included in the Order/ICA cd/rom *Golden Pathways*), I added other truth-sayers: Danah Zohar, Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Joseph Campbell, Thomas Merton, Ken Wilber, Thomas Moore, and Matthew Fox (interesting that the old list was mostly Protestant clergy and the new has several Catholics—four of whom were in religious orders—and a Jewish-Methodist female; Swimme's lineage is Native American; and Wilber is a western Buddhist). I have learned from Zohar the ramifications of quantum physics for individual consciousness and social renewal; from Moore, a contemporary Brother Lawrence, the practice of the sacred.

From Wilber I have learned about grace and grit in crisis and the dynamics of meditation, self, and consciousness. I read about the *Witness*: if hatred of a feeling arises, we internally witness that; if hatred of the hatred arises, we witness that (consciousness of consciousness). To witness our states is to transcend them (**No Boundary**, pp.125-7). When I lose awareness of the Witness, I am left with self-contraction, only with my ego (p.141). During times of meditation I watch myself watching myself watching myself doing this or that, thinking this or that, feeling this or that. As Don Juan says in Castaneda's books, it's having death on one's left shoulder as the prompter. When I experience transparency, I am less stressed, less prone to justify my self, less defensive, more attuned to the other, less apt to talk and more apt to listen, more interested in what is going on around me—all in all, a very desired state of being, but hard to stay in. I quickly return to ego-centeredness.

From Merton I learned about the life of truth, or vocational integrity; from Campbell, the wonder and the essentiality of myth; from Berry and Swimme, the underpinnings of the universe story and its

dramatic articulation; and from Fox, who borrows from Meister Eckhart, a mystical understanding of the blessedness of life.

These last eight are spinning new threads of spirit thought, which for me has to do with the sacredness of creation. They are discerning new manifestations of the outer and inner universe. They and their colleagues are building a bridge to the 21st century, a bridge I call *new spiritual sense*. I am seeing much light through their eyes. Still, I have little reservation when I say that Bultmann, Tillich, and H. R. Niebuhr were the last great theologians of the 20th century and that Joseph Mathews had as much insight into the life-changing dynamics of the Christ event as anyone in the Christian tradition. These four will probably be the plumb line of my theology until I die.

As a Protestant Christian, I have sought to do the will of *God* by following the faith of Jesus; I have been called by the Holy Spirit not to waste my life but to give it passionately on behalf of all *God's* creation; I have struggled more than most with obedience and freedom, despairing as I desperately try to fulfill and justify myself in the eyes of *God*, others, and self; failing at that, guilt swallows me up; in that state I sometimes experience grace and forgiveness; my response is faith, out of which I seek to serve *God* and neighbor from a new motivation of thanksgiving rather than from my righteousness. Grace is eventful and ever breaking into my life.

On this foundation, add an unfolding appreciation of universal spirituality. I am coming to understand that I do not have a soul, but exist in the soul; creation is blessed although we can destroy it—partially; that science has left out the universal journey of consciousness and spirit awareness in its materialistic deliberations, and the consequent *I-we-it* worldview has devalued our lives; sin is separation and parochialism; salvation is communion with what is; we humans are not the pinnacle of creation, but share in the equality of all beings; that the universe of which I am part is always regenerating; that revelation has been happening for at least the past fifteen billion years—better said, since before the beginning of this universe—and that the Christ event is at the heart of that revelatory process; grace motivates the universe, and faith in that gracious activity is the authentic response of the creature; the communion of all beings is the universal church, of which each institutional church

entity *can be* a microcosm, but is not automatically; love, the gift of grace, is the glue of the universe; and sacrifice on behalf of any part of the universe is the essence of love.

This understanding of life is enough. Yet, I keep reminding myself—lest I devalue *the way life is* and relapse again into humanism, thinking that *I-we-it* is all there is—that everything has its context, even the universe. The ultimate context, if you will, is always the *numinous*, the eternal *Spirit* that is from everlasting to everlasting—this *One* alone has *no* context, *no* referent.

NEW HOPE came through the presence of my newborn granddaughter, through my being at home in my sacred space, through the Christmas book, through the mission of writing, and through the wisdom of my colleagues, old and new. I was spinning myself a new story and a new mission out of an enhanced glimpse of reality. All of it was a gift of the *Spirit*—a gracious turning for which I am profoundly thankful.

Then the question came, why not share the gleanings of my journey? That is the role of the elder in other cultures. "I am a writer" sounded very presumptuous. What if I can't be published? I answered, I will keep on writing, for it feeds my soul and I like it. And most important, *John the Evangelist* was who I was always called to be. I wanted to enrich the journeys of as many as I could. I wanted to soar like the eagle from my Blue Ridge mountaintop. I dedicate this my memoir to that end.

CALLED TO BE

I have rehearsed my life and found it good,
Rich in experience,
Planetary in orbit,
Profound in depth,
Wonder-full.

Do I wish I could live it over?
No,
For what would I add?
Money? Fame? Things?
I have had Love,
Vocation,
Collegiality,
Adventure, and
Communion.

And what is my secret?
No secret, but
From everlasting to everlasting
I AM called:
I am ***Called To Be***.

—j.p.c. 1997

Chapter 30: Phase IV Reflections

Extended Vocation Back in Galax
Age 45-58 (1984-97)

DURING THOSE FOURTEEN YEARS in Galax, my life's chart-line started at a twenty-year low, maybe a forty-five year low. Much activity kept the line wiggling with life, but the low plateau continued until 1990. At that time I began to reflect self-consciously upon my life journey through teaching, writing, and preaching. The quality of my life intensified. The line of my life began to rise.

My reflections revolve around knowing, doing, and being:

KNOWING

- I began to think on my own, more independent of the Order: Ecumenical and my theological mentors.
- The *story of the universe* and the picture of the *Earthrise* became essential symbols of my new mythology.
- I continued to use the myriad methods of the Order, for which I am eternally grateful.
- The edge of knowing today is the study of the evolution of consciousness, which would merit a Ph.D. if I were so led.

DOING

- I became less passionate about selling clothes and renewing downtowns and more passionate about articulating the truth of the secular-spirit journey of humanness—another way to say *evangelism* in a post-modern sense.
- I was becoming a writer, practicing the art over seven years.
- I was becoming quite active in caring for my mind-body-spirit health.
- I spent much quality time with my aging mother, my blooming

granddaughter, my wife, my sons and daughters-in-law, and my extended family.

BEING

- The mysterious game of golf still intrigued me, in spite of my bad back and joints.
- Reflection through writing was bringing a new spirit.
- The dynamics of grace and faith were still the fundament of my life.
- *I AM* kept calling me to vocation, kept calling me to *be*.

EPILOGUE: Post-Modern Evangelist

Great Transition
Age 58-60 (1997-1999)

I AM MOST THANKFUL that I finished a small publication of this my memoir before Mama died, and that she could look at the pictures and listen to others read it to her. She was so pleased with the book, especially the *Dedication* page to her, which we framed and put on a shelf near her bed.

Mama was struggling mightily to live. Alzheimer's and mini-strokes began to take parts of her away from us. Yet, after being in the tomb for several days, she would continue to rally and even have moments of near-normal clarity. What a blessing. Jackie, Nettie, and Trish were the best team of caretakers one could have ever wanted, as they faithfully and lovingly nursed her in her apartment over the Fashion Shoppe. She wanted to die at home, and Glenn, Ida, and I, along with our spouses, Judie, Yates, and Lynda, made sure that wish came true, although it was more demanding on the resources and us.

That last spring was a blissful time for her as she sat at her open window and watched the new spring flowers grow on her window-sill, as great-granddaughter Kaitlyn on a regular basis and great-grandson Marek, Ida's grandson, on a quarterly basis, sat in her lap and patted her with tenderness and shared their stuffed animals and dolls with her. She loved those growing babies more than anything at that time of her life. All three seemed to sense the enlivening bond that they were to each other. The rest of us got very clear about the power of a many-generational family.

On the Sunday of Father's Day weekend, Nettie called us about 7 a.m. to come. Ida and Yates were on their way to Indiana to visit their Marek and his parents, Elizabeth and Tadeusz. Nettie and we sensed this was another time when we should call the doctor, who sent one of the specially trained home-heath nurses for a visit. Mama's vital signs were flagging. While Lynda, Nettie, and the nurse were in the front

room discussing next steps, I sat beside Mama's bed, holding her hand, sponging her forehead, and whispering sweet nothings. She was in some pain and struggling to breathe. Then, as though the colloquy of heaven and she had just worked it all out, finally she was at rest. With her eyes closed she squeezed my hand and said, "John, I love you," very softly but clearly. Almost immediately she breathed her last. I utterly held my breath and squeezed her hand . . . but now with no response. The fact eased into my consciousness . . . she who bore me had been born away. Just like that, she was, and now she was not, there. I sat for some time, I guess, in the stillness . . . enshrouded in awe . . . just beginning to embody every kind of emotion, when I felt Lynda's hand on my shoulder.

Mama died in June of 1997 at the age of 85. Jeremiah, April, and Kaitlyn had just moved to Greensboro, where he landed a super job as a computer systems engineer, with the help of our colleague Nelson Stover. Having lost a mother, our younger son, his wife, and our only grandchild, all in about a week, the roots in Galax started coming out of the ground. Soon after, Lynda and I began to articulate a new future vision. We had always said our time in Galax would be a time to re-group and prepare for the next stage of our mission. Well, the reconnoitering was about to begin for real.

We began to think of people who would be good for downtown Galax and who would do well in our business, for we wanted to make that transition as smooth as possible for all concerned. We approached one couple first, and lo and behold, it was *not* out of the question for them. In fact, we thought we could even be out of the apartment and business by the up-coming Labor Day. Obstacles emerged and they said they might be back in touch after the first of the year. We then began to explore several other potential buyers, and some of them seemed most serious, but not actually. We were struggling to be really present in the store and in our downtown work, for we had already moved in our imaginations.

We approached the first couple again, and this time he said they wanted a weekend in our apartment when we were out of town. We knew them well, so we arranged the time. Real negotiations began. We closed on the deal in early March and passed the baton in mid-May. The Robinsons moved into our apartment above the shop and picked up

the business of The Men's Shop without missing a beat.

The Galax Downtown Association convened a wonderful crowd for the send-out picnic for us at Becky and Jay Guynn's four-generations home under manificent trees in Woodlawn and presented us with t-shirts with the picture of the Rex Theater on them. On the Rex marquee on our t-shirts—and on the actual marquee downtown—was the three-line message,

Lynda and John,
Thanks! Good Luck!
& We'll Miss You!

Tens of our dear friends and colleagues over the last fourteen years signed our t-shirts, several made speeches, and Tony Truitt, Mary and Becky Guynn presented us with an eight-piece set of luggage on behalf of the group. Another awesome ending. The roots kept coming out of the ground.

UPON SELLING THE BUSINESS, we struck out on a big trip to visit friends and relatives, starting in Virginia with Lynda's brother, Hal, and wife, Cathy, and Lynda's sister, Diane, and family; on to Rutgers in New Jersey to visit son John and wife, Sofia. We rode the train with them into New York City. The most incredible event for me was sitting in Central Park for a couple of hours watching the people go by: all sizes, colors, ages, conditions, classes, pairings, dress codes—but mostly all seemed glad to be alive. A wonderfilling human parade.

Next stop, our longtime friends Julie and Drew Peacock in Pittsburgh. At that point, we read three very sad e-mail messages: the death of my dear cousin Sue in Roanoke, the death of Bill Newkirk, who recruited us to our first Ecumenical: Institute seminar and was our Washington House colleague, and the death and scheduled memorial service of our mentor Lyn Mathews, Joseph's wife. We decided to drive on to Chicago for her service and a great celebration with Order colleagues from around the world.

We stayed with our Order friends Karen and Jim Troxel and had the added delight of Pam Bergdall's presence. While there, we

watched on TV as *da' Bulls* won their sixth championship in seven years. On to visit more Order colleagues, Ken and Ruth Gilbert and family, at Champaign, before rolling into Cleveland, Tennessee, to stay a while with Lynda's parents, Blanche and Joe.

We were planning our mission exploration while en route. We knew we wanted to be close to the children and grandchildren, that we wanted to live in the Southeast where our extended family lived—either Virginia, North Carolina, or Tennessee, where Lynda's aging parents lived. With those parameters, we began to consider church-related colleges where I could teach and we both could be resource persons for special programs.

We considered other ministries and had the good fortune of my becoming an adjunct faculty member of the Lay Ministry Center (LMC) of Lake Junaluska, North Carolina—the third time this mountain center influenced our journey. The LMC is under the direction of Dr. Evelyn Laycock, a person a church has to schedule at least two years in advance because of her spirit vitality and her missional conviction and savvy. We first met her through our dear friends Margaret and Doug Vaught, and her parents, Al and Pauline Zachary. Evelyn and her husband, Bill, have been great colleagues to lean on as we have made this transition. Through the Lay Ministry Center I am also leading seminars, retreats, and workshops for church groups, primarily, in the Southeast. I am finding a significant way to serve and renew the church.

WHILE WE SEARCHED for about three months, putting over 13,000 miles on the car, I was using my new portable computer that Jeremiah had suggested I buy. I borrowed books from the college libraries we visited and from the library loan system through the Galax and Greensboro libraries, and accelerated the new research and writing project I had begun the preceding November of 1997. I read and scanned well over a hundred books on the subject of *christology*, or the historical theology of the Christ image. I had written an outline of a book about Jesus over twenty-five years before but did not have the gumption, the time, nor the passion to follow it through. Now, in a sabbatical year mode, I thought things would be different. And they were.

I entered into dialogue with the Jesus Seminar through their research and writings. Lynda and I attended the *Jesus in Context* seminar sponsored by Duke University in the spring of 1998, where we heard and chatted with several of those I had been reading, especially Marcus Borg and Jon Dominic Crossan. Later I read from others who were on the panel: E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, and Paula Fredriksen. I also read books of the founder of the Jesus Seminar, Robert W. Funk. Of all the Jesus Seminar scholars, Walter Wink has made the most sense. Appreciative of the popular Jesus dialogue they are stimulating, the theology of the "new questers after the historical Jesus" are not deeply satisfying to me. But as it turns out, without their knowing it, they have been partly the cause for my writing the book I had always wanted to write about Jesus. I had to put not just Jesus, but "Jesus Christ," in context. The question for me was What difference does Jesus *the Christ* make in my life or in the life of anybody? It was far more than a research project on the historical Jesus. Is Jesus the Christ for me? If so, how so? If not, why bother to call him anything more than one of the greatest men of history?

If Jesus is the Christ, he is *only* the Christ for *me*, in one sense. He is not some universal Christ that engulfs us mystically. For him to be the Christ, I have to decide that in him and through him I see the quintessence of grace at the heart of life itself—even *God*. I see *God* through Jesus. Not that Jesus is *God*, but without Jesus I do not have the most profoundly human understanding of the significance of life as given, lived out, and sustained by gracious *God*. What is *God* like? My best answer is Jesus, who personifies grace and love. I enter the kingdom of *God* in communion with Jesus. Through grace I become a "new being in Christ," as St. Paul and Paul Tillich have said. I quite agree and would add that we become new beings through the *mutiversal* Christ event. This is the starting point of the new human or the new mythology for humanness (which is only one small part of the new mythology of the universe, as Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme remind us; and to keep all this is perspective, Andrei Linde indicates we need a new mythology of the multiverse, which contains untold numbers of universes; further, Genesis reminds us, and physicists Alexander Vilenkin concurs: before anything was, there was nothing—and out of nothing, *God*,

[I say, but everyone must fill in the blank his/her way] created and keeps creating the untold numbers of universes, faster and faster, multiverse without end, *amen*).

My passion was rising to the task. I was reading, making notations, entering reference material into my laptop, beginning an outline and a few chapter drafts by mid-summer. After Labor Day, we settled in Greensboro for the short term, within walking distance of Kaitlyn and Nolan and their parents. We wanted to be there to bond with Nolan early on like we had with Kaitlyn. We even brought the same *Radio Flyer* wagon to pull him in, especially to the park halfway between our lodgings.

Lynda took part-time employment with schools and the court system as I sat at my computer and wrote (and watched over our investments). I began to sense after Thomas Merton's yearning to be the hermit, to be alone to reflect and write. Someday I too will have a hermitage—Lynda calls it my dream outhouse.

I began to write chapters on the christologies (Christ images) of the thinkers who had meant the most to me: Schubert Ogden, Rudolf

Bultmann, H. Richard Niebuhr, Jon Sobrino, Juan Luis Segundo, Friedrich Gogarten, Norman Perrin, Søren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, and Joseph Mathews. Comparing their christologies in the context of the Christian tradition, I then articulated my own Christ image in several chapters, before designing exercises to enable readers to create their own articulation—or re-articulation—of what Jesus the Christ means. I finished with six *edifying discourses* that pulled together in simpler form the essence of the book. I had intended to write a readable, scholarly, and life-addressing book for seekers and believers.

I completed most of the writing of **Jesus Christ for the 21st Century: Post-Modern Christ Images** by the end of February 1999. Then the harder work of preparing it for publication began. Lynda helped me edit the book every-which-way, over and over—and over—but never enough. Son John gave editorial advice as well. Son Jeremiah came to my rescue by learning and leading me through the process of putting all my thirty chapters into *PageMaker* and reproducing them in final hard copy. After about a hundred hours of his help, when we did Herculean work and adult bonding, we presented the 296 pages in 2-up saddle-stitch format to the publisher, the one that daughter-in-law April scouted out in Greensboro. We celebrated the feat in mid-April and had 500 copies of my first really published book in hand by mid-May. By July 4, we had sold over 350 copies to friends and relatives—mostly—around the world, sending some two-dozen copies as far away as India, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia.

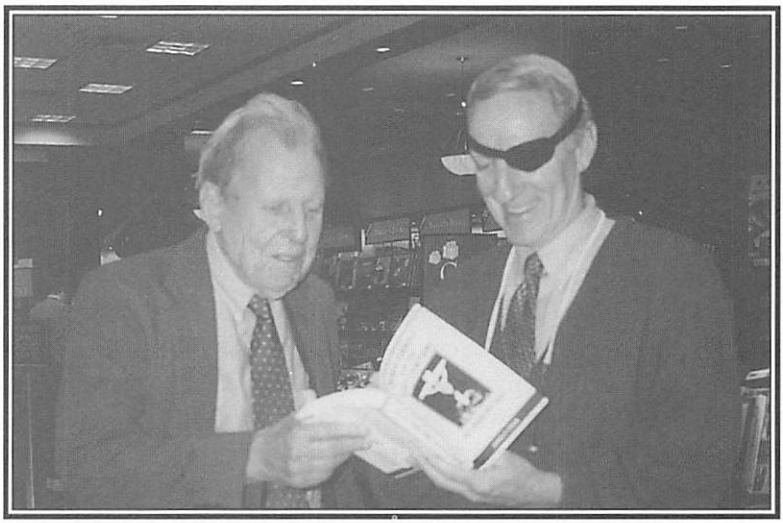
I had fulfilled another dream, to be a published writer. When people ask me now what I do, I tell them, "I'm a writer." For the last couple of years I have been a very chaste writer. When I presented Father Thomas Berry his complimentary copy of **Jesus Christ for the 21st Century**, I read him the chapter on transestablished style, wherein I quoted him. In our conversation I asked him what he does these days, to which he answered, with his wry smile, "I write . . . and I don't write." As a writer, now, I too write and think about what I am going to write when I'm not writing. Maybe this is the chastity of the writer.

Visiting sister Ida's family at Caswell Beach, North Carolina, earlier this year, one morning about sunrise I sat on a damp wooden rocker on their deck as a good-sized seagull cawed—I think at me—

perched about twenty feet in front of me on the boardwalk. She looked at me eyeball to eyeball, for the longest time without flinching, as if to ask, "What are you doing here in my space?" I shivered the eerie shiver of being addressed by the other, that which is not I and which *is* I, in a strange way. In that intense moment, I realized I am the self-consciousness of the universe, the one who's job it is to reflect upon creation. I wondered what the seagull's job is.

My job is to take a picture, write about what I see, to stand in the clearing of consciousness and artform what encounters me. The notebook of the writer is his record of his self-conscious experience. He is taking notes on what really calls him to attention. He is the reflector of the universe, its interpreter, its sensor.

I am becoming a writer for many reasons. First, I see it as part of my new mission and vocation. Second, it is healing, spiritizing, challenging, and riveting—it definitely ups the quality of my life. Third, the family is joining the mission at serious levels of participation—our family-style since before the boys can remember. Maybe my writing is becoming instrumental to my vocation. How many more books are there in me?



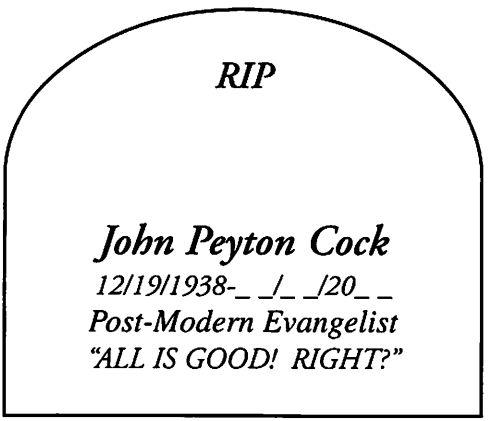
Signing My Jesus Book for Thomas Berry, a Mentor and My Candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize for All Species, Including the Human

MY CALLING, from the beginning of time, has been to be an evangelist. Through the medium of writing, I yearn to be a *post-modern evangelist.* Sounds like pious jargon to many, I'm sure. I mean something like this: I want to help as many as possible to see the meaning in life and to decide to embrace it—to live life fully. This is my *bliss*, as Joseph Campbell says it. This is my *vocation*, as the spiritual traditions have said it.

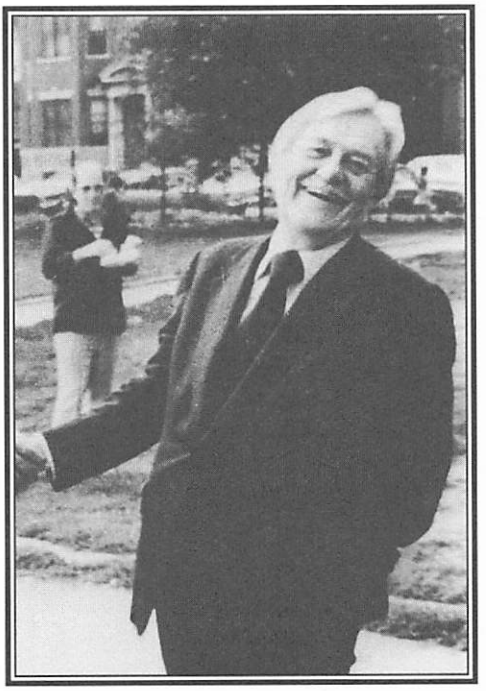
I heard on National Public Radio the young blues singer Shemekia Copeland tell what her daddy, blues singer Johnny Clyde Copeland, told her: "Nobody wants to listen to somebody sing just to make money. You've gotta sing because you need to. If you have the blues inside you, you'll have to let 'um go. Your soul will die if you don't." Likewise for me: *Only evangelize if you need to, have to, only if you have the Word inside you and you have to let it out. Your soul will die if you don't.* That is being called. That is vocation—even if one leaves the trappings of his denomination's ministry or his religious order. Vocation is complicity with the Spirit.

I want to be a *pure* evangelist: I want to appeal to the religious and the non-religious, the believer and the agnostic, even the atheist. By *post-modern* I mean the worldview that comes after the *pre-modern* worldview of the New Testament through the Reformation, and the *modern* worldview of scientific enlightenment and progress, extending into the twentieth century. The *post-modern* worldview believes that this existence is the place of meaning, and that meaning is not a supernatural reality but an extraordinarily mundane reality, transparently present in every moment to the eye of the beholder. I want people to understand that the *life within* is more real than objective stuff, and more real than supernatural notions. Finally, I want people to understand that existence is graced, and therefore precious, and that their living life in self-conscious thanksgiving and universal dedication is its meaning.

So, please put on my grave marker, after performing my last rites (guided by the *Prologue)*, the following, ending with a line from our meal-time ritual that we did with the boys and now with our grandchildren:


RIP
John Peyton Cock
12/19/1938-_ _/_ _/20_ _
Post-Modern Evangelist
"ALL IS GOOD! RIGHT?"

IN MEMORIUM



JOSEPH W. MATHEWS

He called me
He pushed me
He trained me
He priested me
He assigned me
He mystified me
He motivated me
He challenged me
He emboldened me
He communes in me

A mountain boy becomes a citizen of the universe . . .

"We share the good life, writing about what we know best and love. Reading **Called To Be**, you too will be addressed by John's faith and compassion."

— James Dodson, author of acclaimed **Final Rounds** and **Faithful Travelers**. Assisted Arnold Palmer in writing **A Golfer's Life**.

"Knowing a thing or two about memoirs, I give John's high marks, especially the parts where he wrestles with the renewal of the church and its mission."

— James K. Mathews, Ph.D., Bishop, The United Methodist Church. Author of **A Global Odyssey**, his forthcoming memoir.

"**Called To Be** is at once a journey and a quest as well as a readable account of putting into practice the values of simple living and small-town revitalization. I highly recommend it."

— Wanda Urbanska, co-author of **Simple Living** and **Moving to a Small Town** and host of PBS documentary *Escape from Affluenza*.

"A story of a true post-modern Christian, and a latter-day John Wesley, who has plumbed the depths of his religion. What a life! What a read!"

— Brian Stanfield, author of **The Art of Focused Conversation** and the soon-to-be-published **The Courage to Lead**.

"John and I have been best friends ever since growing up together in Galax, where this mighty tale of adventure and commitment begins and continues."

— James Nuckolls, M.D., FACP; Medical Director, Carilion Healthcare Corporation; and Clinical Professor at the University of Virginia.

John P. Cock, *a native of Galax, Virginia, attended Emory and Henry College, Auburn University, and Emory University. He and his family were members of the family Order: Ecumenical for most of two decades, living in inner-cities of the United States and in villages of Indonesia and India. His second book,* **Jesus Christ for the 21st Century: Post-Modern Christ Images**, *was published in 1999. He is a writer, a traveling teacher, and a spirit guide.*

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