

Chapter 5

Fledged

*beginning on November 22, 1963
and continuing for 3 years, 10 months, and 12 days*

“I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14).”

When plumage first appears on a bird, it remains bound to its nest and the feathered creature is termed a fledgling. In my early teens, I was acquiring adult plumage and was beginning to stray from my comfortable nest.

November 22, 1963, began as a typical eight-grade day. I had just returned to school after lunch and was sitting in math class. The voice of our school principle sounded over the loudspeaker, announcing an immediate assembly in the auditorium. As the hallways filled with students, I heard whispers that President Kennedy had been shot; maybe he was dead.

Teachers were in tears as students took their seats. The principal announced from the podium “President Kennedy has died. Teachers and students, please take off the rest of the day, watch television for the news, and we will see you tomorrow morning.” That completed the assembly. We walked home in a daze.

News flashed across the airwaves. I saw Lyndon Johnson sworn in as president, Lee Harvey Oswald marched past reporters, and Jack Ruby pump bullets into Oswald. The planet seemed to careen out of orbit.

Then followed a state funeral with little John John saluting a flag-draped coffin. My family bought the *Kennedy Memorial* album and ditched the frivolous *First Family*.

Looking back, the Kennedy assassination marked a boundary. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations encompassed my boyhood while Johnson and Nixon demarcated my youth.

After watching endless TV coverage of the Kennedy assassination, I began to follow national events. The Vietnam war was heating up and Walter Cronkite began to present his nightly scoreboard: number of Americans killed, wounded, and MIA; number of South Vietnamese and Viet Cong killed.

I was getting involved in top forty music. Jim really liked *Surfin' Bird* and could mimic all the goofy sound effects. Frank and I began acquiring our own forty-five records, splitting the one-

dollar cost. As the calendar flipped into 1964 my adolescent world was rocked by four lads from Liverpool.

1964

The first time I heard *I Want to Hold your Hand*, I sensed my paradigm shift. The beat exuded youthful energy and the shaggy hair hinted at rebellion. Beatlemania spread like a pandemic among American youth and I caught a high-grade fever.

It is difficult to explain the spell the Beatles cast over me. After watching my idols perform on the Ed Sullivan Show, I purchased every album the Beatles ever released. And they were gigantic, monopolizing the top five slots on American pop charts. I was obsessed, wanting to play their music, dress like them, and be them.

As a matter of fact, I did become John Lennon. Our music teacher staged an operetta and wasn't recruiting boys. Jim suggested she allow a Beatles tribute band to perform on stage. And so, I became John, Jim played Paul, Cary was George, and Botch was Ringo. "The College Beatles" strummed the instruments and lip-synched *She Loves You*- yeah, yeah, yeah. As a fourteen-year-old devotee, nothing could have been groovier.

When classes started in January, I found myself in the third semester of eighth grade. School authorities wanted us mid-terms to either advance to the class ahead or regress to the one behind. Since I was an athlete, I elected to redshirt a semester and graduate from High School in 1968 rather than 1967. I was ineligible to play sports from January to June.

Without basketball or track, my class load was light. I listened to hours of Beatles music and hits from groups in the British Invasion: The Rolling Stones, Dave Clark Five, and Kinks.

Our fountain of coolness was WLS radio. Frank and I began to collect the weekly Silver Dollar Survey and tick-mark the forty-fives we had purchased. Every evening at ten, WLS would unveil "the top three most requested songs in Chicagoland". Frank kept a binder of top-three statistics.

Cassius Clay was also a source of entertainment. His February knockout of Sonny Liston combined prowess with humor. I chuckled as Howard Cosell played the boxer's straight man. I monitored the ups and downs of Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali over the next fourteen years.

Charlotte and Jim moved into the back apartment with little Jimmy and baby Shelley. I relished my role as Uncle Chris. My career goal was never to become a doctor or lawyer, but a family man. I aspired to find a good woman and rear children. Debbie, Susie, Nancy, Jimmy and Shelly filled my life with joy.

In the summer of sixty-four, I was also into pogo sticks. I managed to bounce all around the block. Our private rules allowed us to pause at each corner and lean against a lamp post. Frank won this contest with three complete laps.

My parents bowled in a summer church league and I learned the sport by substituting for an absent adult. My average was around 90, but I once bowled a 150 game. On an equal footing with adults, I felt grown up.

I continued to be a big Beatles fan. Jim, Frank, and I walked to the Hoosier Theater to see *A Hard Day's Night*. The British humor zoomed over my head. A few days before school started, I peddled my bike around the block shouting to any within earshot, "I'm going to see the Beatles".

On September 5, Eileen drove Frank, Jim, and me to the International Amphitheater in Chicago. It was crazy. From our cheap seats we could barely see the Fab Four prancing on stage and we couldn't hear a word of song. Female shrieking shattered my ears. Jim stacked chairs to get a better view but tumbled to the ground. Dozens of girls swooned and were carted out on stretchers. Sensible Eileen was disappointed but I was thrilled to be a part of this cultural phenomenon.

As school kicked off in the fall of 1964, I was a high school freshman. My class of 1968 swelled by one hundred after an influx of parochial-school students. I made lots of new friends and gawked at new girls.

My classes were new too. I took English lit, German, typing, biology, and geometry. I remember my theological reflections in geometry. I learned a straight horizontal line with end dots indicated a line segment; a line with an arrow at each end stood for an infinite line; and a line with a left dot and a right arrow indicated a start point but no end point.

My argument was with my scientific classmate, Reinhard. I contended that the double-ended arrow represented God and the right-ended arrow man. He argued in the actual universe everything is a line segment, passing into and out of existence.

I noted as freshman football began that my size and speed were being challenged. Other guys were getting bigger and hairier than me. A few from the influx outplayed me. I settled for defensive safety and did all the kicking.

My dad loved gadgets. He was early to buy a movie camera, Polaroid camera (with the goop), and color TV. He now acquired a large real-to-reel tape player, wanting to record church events. However, Frank and I appropriated the bulky machine, recording rock songs from the radio.

The year ended with a new nephew. When Don John Zelen was born on December 31, the Beatles topped the charts with a two-sided hit: *She's a Woman/I Feel Fine*.

1965

My parents remained perplexed by my obsession with popular music. Yet they were indulgent. In 1965 my dad was employed at Youngstown Steel and, through job contacts, he was able to buy tickets to pop concerts. Frank, Eileen, and I went to see several rock shows in Chicago. Slip covers from 45 records plastered one wall in the living room. When adult visitors noted the unusual pastiche, my dad would comment, “Oh, it’s just a phase they’re going through.”

My basketball season began in January and I played forward for the freshman Clark Pioneers. I failed to display the talent or motivation to make the starting five and played about half the minutes. I was too sanguine to excel in aggressive sports.

About that time, Don Zelen accepted a position with Reynolds Aluminum and the Zelen family of six relocated to Lisle, Illinois. I missed that big chunk of my extended family. We made occasional visits—it was only an hour’s drive—but I perceived my close-knit world was unraveling.

On February first, Frank picked up the telephone to hear an unfamiliar voice. He shouted out, “Hey Eileen, some guy named Harry Zipperman wants to talk to you.” Terry later told me he was so embarrassed by that mangling of his name that he almost hung up the phone. And so, Airman Terry Zimmerman entered our life as Eileen’s new boyfriend.

To accommodate her need for private conversations, dad bought Eileen an extra-long coiled cord that stretched neck-high from the wall near the kitchen into her bedroom. It proved to be a strangulation device as I dashed through the house.

I was a star in track even as a freshman. I broad-jumped over twenty feet and high-jumped five-feet nine inches. I also ran fourth leg in the eight-eighty relay. I earned medals and ribbons galore. I clipped track reports from the Hammond Times and saved them in a binder. I earned a Clark varsity letter in track which mom sewed onto my C-club jersey.

Sports finally ended my regular participation in Boy Scouts. I remember saying to Coach Powell, “About this Saturday track meet? I have a hike with the Scouts. Is it okay if I skip this one?”

He was understanding. “Chris”, he said, “Scouts is a good thing. I’m all for it, but you have to understand if you’re on my track team, I need you for every meet. Why don’t you talk to your dad about it”? I had the talk and skipped the scout hike.

I became an uncle once more. Herman’s Hermits were singing *Mrs. Brown You’ve got a Lovely Daughter* when Chris John Walker was born in May. Now two nephews and one niece were living in the back apartment.

In June I attended two summer-school classes. I was eager to drive a car and took driver’s training. I earned my learner’s permit and Eileen let me drive around town. I also took advanced biology. I joined up with Eric Tangelos and we scoured the neighborhood to build a large insect collection.

I enjoyed learning for learning’s sake whether it be academic or Biblical. In my church youth group, I created charts of Adam, Eve, and their descendants, while in biology class I wrote about Cro-Magnon man. In my bifurcated world Adam and Troglodyte existed hand in hand.

Once when I was talking to Frank at the dinner table, dad interrupted, “Chris, how can you believe that nonsense about monkeys evolving into people?”

I responded with academic arrogance, “I don’t. But it seems true that men and monkeys derive from a common ancestor.”

In August our family drove to Texas to visit my two uncles. Both Stutz and Joe had retired from the Air Force and both had resettled in San Antonio. We brought along my Grandpa Dydek to re-connect with his two sons. This was my first trip west of the Mississippi River. I remember paddle boats on canals, the Alamo, and a dash across the border into Mexico. I also remember the Beach Boys singing *Help Me, Rhonda*.

Frank and I attended our second Beatles concert on August 20. Eileen drove us to Comiskey Park in Chicago. With 37,000 in attendance, we cheered through hits like *Ticket to Ride* and *Twist and Shout*. This time there was an ad campaign on WLS radio called “don’t scream” and we were able to hear most of the songs.

As summer was ending, Frank was still advancing in Boy Scouts. He was striving for his God and Country award. Dad suggested we get the award together, so for a few months we met with George Davis and learned the rudiments of our denomination. The official photograph shows me standing about eight inches taller than Frank as we pose together with the preacher. After twenty-eight merit badges and an Eagle with bronze palm, I stopped striving.

When school started up in September, I began my sophomore year. I considered myself more of a jock than an academic. I played football for the B-squad and participated in several games. The cyclic rhythm of football-basketball-track seemed as natural to me as autumn-winter-spring. I never considered dropping any sport.

Although I was capable, I never strove for academic distinction. To me and my parents, average was normal and normal was desirable. In any case, I was too involved in sports, watched too much television, and listened to too much rock music to make any honor roll. It was not my priority at the time.

At fifty years old, dad was still laboring at Youngstown Steel. I remember his routine. He would open the back door about five-thirty. Mom was usually in the kitchen cooking dinner. She would greet him with a kiss as he set his empty lunch pail on the counter. Any children around would greet him as he walked toward the bathroom to clean up.

After a few minutes, he would emerge in fresh clothes and ask us about our day. He kept a mat behind the couch and would lie on the floor. He said he needed to stretch his back. When mom called us to dinner, he would rise and stow the mat. Eileen had set the table for five and we all ate together, engaging in conversation.

Meal portions were generous and food hardy. Mom was a good cook. She typically served a central meat dish—one piece per person, beef, pork chops, or chicken. There were always potatoes, vegetables from a can, bread, sometimes rice or pasta. The only ethnic food we consumed on a regular basis was sauerkraut. Oftentimes there were sweets for dessert. Fruit, salad, and cold cuts were reserved for the lunch menu.

After the meal, we continued the tradition of Eileen washing the dishes, Frank drying, and me putting away. My sister always led us in songs or recitations. An hour after supper, dad would pull the chains on the coo-coo clock, winding it for another twenty-four hours.

For Christmas, Eileen bought Frank and me a nifty 45 rpm record player. It was battery operated and the records clicked into and out of a playing port. It was so cool to listen to my music sitting on the school steps. It also attracted girls. Eileen hit a home run with that gift.

1966

In the first week of January, dad drove me to the DMV. At sixteen, I was finally eligible for my driver's license. I passed the written test with a near perfect score. When I finished the driving portion, the man said, "You're a good little driver, but I could fail you on this test".

Although, I had clicked the signal at every turn, I failed to use my hand gestures out of the open window, as the book proscribed. He said he could have deducted points for every turn, but he only docked me for the first mistake and I passed with a 92 of 100.

Jim Francis got his license about the same time, but he was into motorcycles and acquired his first Honda.

In January, basketball season picked up again. I played junior-varsity and at six foot I had leaping skills. I could stand under the hoop, jump straight up and touch the rim with both hands. Coach Dougherty was always screaming at me to be more aggressive. I guess I lacked the killer instinct. I figured I was like Ferdinand the bull; big and powerful, but content to lie in the grass and watch the world at whim.

In mid-February, track began. Although Clark High School fielded a freshman-sophomore team, I ran varsity. I was the premier high jumper and competed with Bob Bobbin for first spot in broad jump. Again, I ran fourth leg in the half-mile relay. After a mediocre football season and poor basketball season, track re-built my athletic esteem.

Rinehart taught me how to play chess. I was a quick learner and we would spend our study hall moving pieces around the board. He usually won the match. I never book-studied the game, except for one move, the Fool's Mate. Rinehart was so shocked when I shouted "checkmate" after my black made two moves: e5-Qh4.

In my church youth group, Mister Davis railed against rock music. He claimed it had no redeeming value. I brought in my copy of the Bird's *Turn, Turn, Turn*. The lyrics were directly taken from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. He listened but said he couldn't understand a word of the gibberish. Talk about a generation gap!

On Sunday, February 27, I began writing a one-year journal. I managed to fill a complete page of lined paper every day for the following 364 days. This is how the first day read:

Last night I stayed up 'til 3:00 playing chess with Mary Ann. I beat her three games to one. I was tired this morning for church. During church, I let Jimmer (Jimmy Walker) play with my ring and watch. Frank got sick at church so 'Neen (Eileen) took him home. Had a good lunch. Lone Ranger today was in color— weird.

It is now 13 minutes to 3:00 p.m. Jimmer is sitting across for me. He just drank part of my coke. Mom and dad are getting dressed to visit some people at the hospital. Frank is talking to Pig (Jim Francis) about *Ivanhoe*. They're sitting on the couch. Jim has to turn in his book report for his English teacher. A basketball

game is on TV. Jimmer is now playing with my diaries. I'll let him sign his name.
JIMMY W.

Mom just read the above and she said, "Put down there you should be going to the singspiration."

7:00 p.m. – Helped Jimmer paint his jeep gold and silver because we were painting this diary. When I came home from church with Jim in the evening, I asked Jimmer if his jeep was still wet. He said, "No, but my fingers are." Dad let me drive the car to church and back. I'm watching Ed Sullivan. Jimmer is driving his jeep around the rug; Frank is reading my diary and Jim is writing in his new one. 10:32 – I just decided to take a bubble bath. The high today was 37 and low at 28.

As I peruse the thirty-one pages of March, 1966, several things strike me. First, I find it incredible how much television I consumed. On March 8, I listed ten consecutive shows: 5:00-Garfield Goose, 5:45-News, 6:00-Bullwinkle, 6:30-My Mother the Car, 7:00-Don't Eat the Daisies, 7:30-Dobie Gillis, 8:00-F Troop, 8:30-Twilight Zone, 9:00-The Fugitive. It wasn't that I sat staring at the screen for five hours, but the boob tube constantly flickered and chattered in the background.

Second, I had forgotten how the three Walker kids co-inhabited my space. Jimmy at age six, Shelly at three, and Chrissy at nine months, were continually under foot. Charlotte popped in and out while Big Jim dropped by occasionally. I grew to love children and wished for my own.

Third, I participated in a track meet once a week. I recall the ribbons and medals, but had forgotten the anxiety and anticipation. I did not recall the day-to-day butterflies in competitive track.

Fourth, I forgot about our single bath tub. On Saturday evening, five of us would take consecutive baths—not showers. The order was Eileen, Chris, Frank; then later Mom and Dad. I marvel that in 1966 it seemed so natural.

In science class, Eric and I teamed up for a project. Together we built an incubator of wood, wire, and shredded newspaper; then we split a dozen fertilized chicken eggs. With a light bulb to provide heat, we watched the drama of life unfold. Unfortunately, our cooperation turned into competition. Each of us wanted to hatch the first chick.

When my first hatchling pecked through the shell, I grew impatient and "helped" it by pulling some shell fragments away from featherless flesh. I claimed I won the contest, but my poor baby bird bore wounds from where I pulled skin away. I felt bad and learned a lesson in patience. There are some things in nature you just can't hurry along.

As I study the months of April and May in my 1966 journal, I discern four different groups of acquaintances that seldom overlapped. First was my academic clique. This was Reinhard, Eric, George, Lance, and a few others. I talked science and philosophy with them. When graduation time came, Eric was number one in the class, Reinhard was number two, and George number five. I fit with this group, but I never focused enough to make the high marks they did. My semester grades were: History-A, English-B, German-B, Geometry-C.

A second group was the jocks. In the spring, these would consist of my track buddies: Rocky, Botch, Jim Ruf, Mike, Bob, and others. We spent hours together in practice, meets, and travel. Athlete buddies were different during the football and basketball season.

A third group was Boy Scouts. I was still involved in outings with Steve, Tex, Bob, Spike, and others.

Finally, a fourth group was from church, both boys and girls, who I saw only on Sundays. Other teenagers floated in and out of my life, but most could be placed in their proper sphere. Of course, Jim Francis was in a sphere without peer.

Jim even participated in a scouting event. This outing involved a loose group of three fathers and six scouts who convoyed cars and canoes to Xenia, Ohio. Three boats were put in the water on Saturday morning and raced down the Little Miami River. Jim and I got stuck with the worst of three, an old wooden hulk. We struggled to paddle for a while, but realized we could not keep up with the lighter metal craft. So, Jim and I just enjoyed the eight miles of downstream flow, passing under bridges, and wading to shore on occasion. We spent one night in the big Canadian tent and got home on Sunday evening.

Jim skipped some of his fast-food meals, saying had to save his money to buy a fancy ring for his girlfriend, Peggy.

On June first, the transition from school time to summer vacation was dramatic. Classmates, homework, and sports, all melted away. I didn't try to fill the chasm. I loafed more, slept more, and got bored on occasion. But events soon picked up. Eileen was to be married in a few weeks. Mom had me cleaning the house day after day. I greeted Terry when he arrived on June 8 from an Air Force leave. We all bought new clothes and visited the First Church of Christ for planning sessions.

A few months earlier, Don Zelen was once again promoted. The family now resided in Alabama. They called it "the heart of Dixie". The six of them arrived on June 16 from their new home in Florence. Below is a transcript of Eileen's wedding day, Saturday, June 18, 1966

Mom got me up at 10:30. I wanted to sleep later but mom needed me to help her get ready. Watched a few cartoons and Dad got a little mad because he said it was such an important day. We started getting dressed at about 12:00. I didn't know how to put on

my tux. A guy who was there taking pictures of 'Neen showed me. My cousins, the Seigenthalers, came over at 1:00. We took a lot of pictures on the front porch.

I left for the church at 1:15 in the station wagon. When I got there, I got a carnation to wear. Then I found the best man and Terry up in the preacher's office. We stayed there for about ten minutes joking about Terry's "misfortune".

At 1:30 we started to march out. First Mr. Davis, then following, Terry, the best man, and me. Once we were situated, Jimmer in his cute little tux came walking up and stood on a small piece of paper we stuck up there. Mary Ann came up slowly, then Janet, then the flower girls: Nancy and Shelley. Did they go slow! Dad and Eileen had to start before the flower girls were set. George Butler sang before and during the ceremony (*Because*). Immediately after the wedding we went downstairs and stood in line. I can't begin to name all the people there I knew. I had a little punch, wedding cake and peanuts and then went outside. I threw some rice on Terry and 'Neen.

When I got home there were mobs of people in our little house. We had to fit some on the front porch. A rough estimate of people there is fifty-five. After I ate some ham and polish sausage and drank up a gallon of punch, I snuck up in the attic and slept 'til everyone was gone at 5:30. We saw Terry and 'Neen off to their honeymoon. They came back right away. 'Neen forgot her radio.

Watched Saturday Night at the Movies. It was Jerry Lewis in *Rockabye Baby*. Me and Deb left with mom and dad in the middle of it to go to the St. John panel room to see Dick Wetnight's wedding reception. Me and Deb left it because it was too loud. We watched *Broken Arrow* on the late show. Got to bed at 12:30.



The Zelen family stuck around in Whiting for ten more days, then they headed back to Alabama—but not without Frank and me. We enjoyed a great vacation from June 26 to July 30, which constituted my first sojourn into the deep south. I added three states to my travels. We lodged in Alabama, crossed into Mississippi for fireworks, and camped in the Florida panhandle.

Frank and I visited the Civil War Battlefield at Shiloh, Tennessee; climbed into the depths of a dank cave; exploded M-80s unattainable in Indiana; and splashed in swimming pools almost every day.

Soon after we arrived, Don joined an exclusive country club at Bailey Springs. On a typical day, we would do morning chores around the house. Then, after lunch, Jeanne would drive us to Bailey Springs for swimming, tennis, horseback riding, and just hanging out. Frank and I spent four nights in a country-club cabin where we collected weird-looking insects and listened to far-off WLS-AM radio.

As a sixteen-year-old, I was slow to get out of bed in the morning. Jeanne discovered an ingenious solution. She would unleash little DJ on me. After ignoring a few calls to breakfast,

Don John would enter the room, growl at me, and bounce on the bed. A better alarm clock could not be imagined.

I grew close to Debbie, Susie, Nancy, and little DJ. For three weeks they were like my younger siblings. I was allowed to drive Don's car chauffeuring the kids from place to place. One day I wanted to show off my newly acquired driving skills to passengers Frank, Deb, and Nancy.

I drove the Chevy to Colonial Court, going uphill in drive and coming downhill in reverse. I lost control, bounced over a curb, then plunged down an embankment. I tried to extract the car by gunning the engine, then I put bricks under the back tires.

After I couldn't get the car out of the ditch, Frank walked home to speak to Jeanne. She arrived with a welcome mat, but after seeing the car, she phoned Don. When he arrived, I was surprised he wasn't too angry. He borrowed a friend's truck, but a towing rope snapped twice. Finally, he called a professional tow truck which extracted the Chevy back to the roadway. The muffler was ruined and the bumper suffered a small dent, but otherwise it was okay. The tow truck driver said if the car had progressed a few more inches down the hillside, it might have flipped over.

Dad and mom arrived in Florence on July 22. After a one-day pause we headed south to Panama City, Florida. Don pulled his Apache camping trailer and dad drove the station wagon. The gulf was azure and the sandy beach bright white. Mom and dad slept in their station wagon; Don, Jeanne, Nancy, Sue, and DJ in the Apache; Frank and Debbie in Zelen's station wagon; while I was stuck with a pup tent.

We spent four nights on the beach, running in the sand, collecting crab parts, and complaining about heat and mosquitoes. We all took a ferry to a place called Shell Island where I collected some near-perfect sand dollars. I also read Mitchener's book *Caravan* a few hours every day and Frank enjoyed surfing.

Just before driving north. Dad made Frank and me toss out our extensive crab part collection. Admittedly, it was getting stinky. We stopped off at Dothan, Birmingham, and Montgomery. Florence felt like home to me.

We devised one last project for the final five days in Alabama. Dad led in the construction of a back-yard tree house. Don did the buying and hauling; dad did the sawing and nailing; Frank and I did the painting. A photograph shows ten of us smiling over the treehouse rail. This backyard feature was well-built and massive. In 1968, when the Zelens sold the house, Jeanne told me it was the treehouse that clenched the deal.

When we arrived in Whiting, much had changed. Frank and I moved into Eileen's refurbished bedroom and Walkers were established on Sheridan avenue. Jim (the pig) told me two pieces of news. He had a new girlfriend named Jeannie Grinstead and Jim Buckner from school had

blown off two fingers with a cherry bomb. Listening to Jim's conversation, I felt the comfort of home again.

When August arrived, I went to work. I was striving to save money for a 1967 trip to Germany. The work I found was at Mrs. Zimmerman's house in Hammond. For two weeks I labored painting her porches, pillars, window trim, and outside floors. I also removed and cleaned windows and screens. Mom drove me on a few occasions, but mostly I took the bus. Jim Francis helped a few times. I earned \$76 for all the work.

My activities changed after August 15 when football practice began. The summer schedule went like this: I got up at 7:30, drank a glass of milk, and rested until 8:20. I walked the twelve minutes to Clark Field and got on my sweats. We ran laps and did calisthenics under the direction of a senior student, then I lunched at home. In the afternoon, coaches showed up. We scrimmaged, learned plays, and did various reaction drills. This summer practice schedule lasted until Labor Day.

August 30 was a good day for both Frank and me. My brother had been buying Marvel comic books for a few months already. Mom drove to a trailer court where a man was unloading his extensive collection. Frank bought ninety Marvel comic books for three dollars. He was ecstatic. His prize was Daredevil #2. Over the next few months, Frank studied these books, sorting and cataloging.

On the same day, I played in an exhibition football game called the Football-o-rama. Four high-school teams competed. I performed well, making six tackles, and running the ball a few times. Coach Peterson said I had improved. I had earned a starting position.

My football world crashed ten days later when I started at defensive halfback but made no tackles in the first half. I was pulled out and scolded by the coaches. For the rest of the season, I was relegated to kick-offs and punts. I was discouraged and nearly quit a few times.

My five classes in eleventh grade were: German with Mrs. Calvert, Latin with Mrs. Wilcox, History with Mr. Roman, Physics with Mr. Watkins, and Advanced Algebra with Mr. Aldridge. In spite of too much football and television, I managed to earn an A in history and B's in the other three.

Mr. Roman taught me a valuable lesson. He required a daily one-page report on the reading material. We turned in our new assignments before every class and received our previous day's work. When I saw my paper come back with a big F, I belly ached to the teacher. He said, "Read the instructions! It says 'one page only' so I didn't read your sentences on page two". I was upset, but I learned the value of following instructions. I didn't make that mistake again.

On September 15, my journal contains this note: "Let's see. At 7:30, I watched *Star Trek*. I think it's gonna be one of the better shows of the season." On September 26, a note reads, "Mom got a letter from Eileen. 'Neen is suspecting".

In October, my busy life continued. I studied Latin and German simultaneously, reading about Julius Caesar and Wilhelm Tell. A big part of algebra and physics involved memorizing mathematical formulae. In history I recited big chunks of the U.S. constitution for extra credit.

Football continued to be an aggravation. I dressed for varsity games on Friday evening without getting my uniform scuffed. Then I played every minute of B-squad on Saturday morning, muddied from head to toe.

Dad decided to enroll both Frank and me in a Judo class which met at the Hammond civic center. We attended about eight evening sessions. I was big enough to win many matches, but didn't learn many moves. I did earn an orange belt before we lost interest.

Dad bought a second car for \$180, a 1961 Ford Falcon. From that point, Mom only drove the station wagon, while dad and I shared the Ford. I was constantly driving Walker kids, football friends, and Frank to various activities. The Falcon was odd in that it had a "warm up" button. You couldn't just crank the ignition. The spark plugs needed ten seconds to heat.

At the end of October, the family planned a quick trip to Alabama. For the occasion, Frank and I bought belated birthday presents for Deb, Susie, and Nancy. We went to the department store and couldn't decide what to get for Deb. All of the Halloween merchandise was on display so I decided to buy her a Ouija board. I figured it was like our Scrabble game, only spookier. Mom and I worked the board that evening and it predicted Eileen's baby would arrive on April 23.

Over the next few days, Frank and I plied the Ouija board with question after question. My brother said it was scary. I knew for certain that my fingers were not directing that heart-shaped pointer and I studied Frank's closed eyes and could swear he was not choosing the letters. How then did this amazing board operate?

We left Whiting on Thursday about 11:00 P.M. and arrived in Florence about noon the next day. Eight of us packed into one station wagon: Dad, mom, me, Frank, Char, Jimmer, Shelley, and CJ. In the afternoon, we gave the Zelen kids their presents.

I gave Deb the Ouija board after dinner. That's all we did until 11:00. Here are some of the question and answers.

Frank: "Where is Dare Devil #7?" ~ "In the attic under the bed, Frank F."

Char: "Where is Jim?" ~ "Don't worry. He is where you want him to be."

Deb: "How long will the Zelens live here?" ~ "Six months longer than six years."

Chris: "Will I go to Germany next summer?" ~ "Yes."

The last question Deb and I asked was: “Do you want us to sleep?”

The response was “Yes, very much so. Go to bed please.” The pointer really paused on each of those twenty-six letters!

As I processed my short encounter with that uncanny board, I asked myself. “If neither Deb nor I manipulated the pointer, then what source provided the articulate answers?” I intuited three things. First, the source had to be supernatural. Second, it was not all-knowing because answers were often wrong. Third, the power behind the Ouija board was not heavenly. The God of the Bible would not move a child’s fingers along a painted surface.

The Ouija board provided me with first-hand evidence that a transcendent realm does exist. Materialism became forever an alien philosophy to my reason. Odd to say, but in my life, God used an occult means to bring about a heavenly end.

Soon it was time for basketball. All the fun had left the sport. I played second string on the B-squad. One Saturday I missed the bus for a game in far-off South Bend. To my surprise, dad offered to drive me. Coach Dougherty was so impressed, he made me captain for that game. But after only two points in the first half, I was yanked out.

A few weeks after that, I mustered the courage to talk with the coach. There was no joy and little prospect in basketball. He respected the face-to-face interview saying most players would just stop showing up. When, I returned home, I felt a burden lift from my shoulders. I began running “winter track” and joy quickened my pace.

In November, joy leapt into exuberance; a girl entered my life. This is a note from November 16: “I knew something was funny when I saw Jim’s face with a big smile on it and sure enough, he and Jeannie had Debbie Argus there. So, I talked with her a while, only I was a little embarrassed.”

At first, I conversed with Debbie as an acquaintance of Jim and Jeannie, then the three of us went to her house. I discovered that Debbie was one class behind me and the younger sister of Bob, a fellow Boy Scout. Her family attended the local Congregational church—where the scouts met. She seemed perfect.

I wanted to call her, but I had a severe case of phone-phobia. After three days of Jim’s urging, I dialed 659-6711. Debbie answered and we talked for an hour. I learned she played the clarinet, ice skated, and her favorite Beatles song was *Here, There, and Everywhere*. I accepted her invitation to attend a winter formal called the sub-deb. When I told my parents, they were surprised saying they’d have to teach me manners.

We continued our phone conversations, sometimes talking over two hours. I felt alive to the marrow, walking Debbie home after school, carrying her books, and sharing her umbrella. My world sparkled with hope.

On December 9, just as I was getting to know her, my world shattered. With eyes downcast she whispered, "We're moving to Virginia at the end of the semester." I was devastated. I stumbled home in a light snow, didn't eat dinner, and tried to sleep off the awful news.

My life was a roller coaster for the next few months. Debbie truly liked me and I became obsessed with her. Teenage passion drew us together, while common sense pushed us apart. One moment we were all cuddles and hugs while the next we argued about me getting too close. Debbie's father tried to cool our jets by setting strict rules for her behavior. I would ask, "Why can't I put my arm around you?"

She would reply, "My father said we shouldn't do that." And thus, the next six weeks unfolded. Desire battled self-discipline which equaled frustration.

I saw Debbie every day at school. We hung out in German club and I snuck in to see her play clarinet. When we didn't meet, we spoke on the phone. Finally, after Charlotte couldn't contact the house, my dad dictated a phone limit of thirty minutes.

My journal is filled with confessions of love for Debbie. I wrote it in German: *Ich liebe dich*, and I confessed in Latin: *semper amabo Debram*. I had built my world around this girl even as I foresaw my world crashing to the ground.

The sub-deb finally arrived on December 22. My shoes were polished, my suit was pressed, my heart was full, and her corsage was in my hand. Dad let me borrow the station wagon for the night. I first drove to the Argus home and exchanged carnations. We chatted and posed for pictures. Then I drove to the Grinsted's to pick up Jim and Jeannie. I returned to my house for more pictures.

We arrived at Vogel's Restaurant at 9:20. The refreshments, slow dancing, and romancing, lasted until 11:30. We drove around for a while and ended up at Jeannie's house for pizza. I didn't want the evening to end, but I dropped Debbie off at 2:30 a.m. Her brother and mother were waiting up for her. The delight of the night ended in sobs as I fell into bed knowing this joy was terminal.

Mother invited Debbie to our house for my seventeenth birthday. After cake and song, she presented me with a brass bracelet engraved with *Chris*. I couldn't take my eyes off her, hardly acknowledging the presence of family. Charlotte said I was *twitterpated*. I spent the moment of 1966/1967 on the telephone with Debbie.

1967 to October

After Christmas break, we returned to school to complete the Fall semester. I began a countdown. As a hopeless romantic, I believed that love could conquer all, but love did not hold back the tide of time. The days ticked by.

I did not behave well. I wanted to possess her and her to love me. I perceived a void that only Debbie could fill. I pouted, clinging to this fifteen-year-old girl as a drowning man clings to a life boat. I discovered no magic to prevent her relocation to Virginia. And yet a minor miracle did occur.

The Argus family had planned their departure for January 27. However, on the evening of the 26th snow began to fall in Whiting and after thirty-three straight hours, over three feet had accumulated. Roads and airports were closed down. Did God answer my prayer?

School was cancelled and after shoveling my own sidewalks, I phoned Deb. Yes, they had to postpone their departure. Yippee! I asked if I could help clear her driveway. After an okay from her dad, I leapt through snowdrifts to reach her. Deb met me outside decked in snow gear, her cheeks rosy. We laughed as I flung snow in every direction. I was invited inside to warm up and reality struck. I saw her house filled with boxes and draped furniture.

Misery filled the next few days. I was angry at God. I wrote Debbie a long letter filled with the pain of our separation. I determined to become “a martyr for love’s sake”.

January 30 was her last day in town. I walked to her house with a stool and sat across the street just to catch a final glimpse of her beauty. After two hours she never showed her face, so I stuck my ugly missive into her mail box and trudged home. I never saw Deb or heard from her again.

I felt heartsick at her loss. A diary couplet encapsulated my teen-age angst: “I love a girl named Deb. The worst happened the thing I most dread. She moved far away, leaving me here to stay, and now I wish I were dead”.

In retrospect, I see that Christian love cannot describe my relationship to Debbie. My hungry heart did not wish the best outcome for her. Rather, I wanted to consume this girl like candy. This would not be the last time.

My obsession had limited the horizons of my vision. Events outside my personal tragedy occurred in January. Frank was upset because the *Merry Marvel Marching Society* left the TV airwaves (January 9); Mom got mad at dad because he worked a double shift on their wedding anniversary (January 12), The Packers beat the Chiefs in Super bowl I (January 14), and Jack married Barbara in Berlin (January 20).

February was a month of decompressing from my seventy-five-day ordeal with Debbie. I returned my focus to school and track. I even flirted with girls on Valentine’s Day. On Sunday,

February 26, Frank and I led a youth church service. I closed in prayer and served communion. Dad congratulated me. I confessed to my journal, "I seriously considered being a minister."

I concluded my journal at the one-year anniversary asking a series of questions.

What will be the future relationship between Debbie and me?

Who shall be the girl whose hand I next hold?

What about Jim and Jeannie? How long will they stay together?

What about Europe, will I go? And what effect will it have on me?

What about track? Will I jump six feet this year?

How about Eileen's baby due in May, boy or girl?

I'm now six-foot one inch tall and one-hundred seventy pounds. Will that ever change?

What profession will I be? At the present I have no idea.

What about the Walkers, Zelens, and Zimmermans? What does the future hold for them?

What about the war that went unmentioned during my year of writing?

What will become of this war in Viet Nam?

What about 1984? Will the prophecy in Orwell's book happen that way?

How long will this book keep intact? The beginning pages are already turning yellow.

The months of March, April, and May passed quickly. Some journal questions were answered. Debbie did not respond to ten letters. There was no future relationship; Jim broke up with Jeannie in March; I did clear six feet in my last jump of the year; and Eileen gave birth to a baby girl named Jennifer on May 28. Just after her California arrival, Donovan was singing *Jennifer, Juniper*.

My final grades for the semester were: Advanced Algebra, B; Latin, A; German, B+; History, A; Physics, C+. Considering all my distraction and laziness, I was not displeased with the results. I couldn't believe that Pig actually made the honor roll: AAABB. He had finally applied himself.

My plan was to spend the summer in Germany as part of a student exchange program. I had already made a fifty-dollar deposit. But after consulting with my Air Force brother, we decided I could just as easily live with Jack and Barbara in Berlin. Dad bought me round-trip tickets for a summer in Germany for which I contributed about half of the cost.

Just as school let out, a new Beatles album debuted. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was their twelfth album. Jim and I played it constantly. It was the first pop album with all lyrics printed and a no-cut flow on each side of the vinyl. We grooved to it every day until I departed to Germany on June 17.

In my fifty-day journal, I detail my jet ride from Chicago to London, then on to Berlin. It was my first time in the air and so novel. I kept my vomit bag as a souvenir. I was puzzled upon my arrival at Tempelhof Airport. I sat for an hour but no one appeared to greet me. Fortunately, mom insisted I carry the address and phone number of Jack's apartment. I called but without

answer. I located a taxi and managed to find his place in the French Sector. It cost seven Deutsch marks.

Barbara was shocked when she opened the door. She pointed at me then shouted, “Jack, it’s your brother.”

I was happy to see them, but hurt. “Why didn’t you meet me at the airport? Didn’t you get the letter with my itinerary?”

“No, we didn’t get a letter”, Jack said. “And you’re lucky. We were just about to leave.”

After the shock of my arrival, conversation and beer flowed. I drank the brew, but never developed a taste for it. I grew tired after my long journey and fell asleep on a fold-out couch.

My days with Jack were variations on a theme. The pattern was Jack working at Tempelhof from about eight in the morning until three in the afternoon. I slept in, listened to American radio, wrote in my diary, and strolled the local streets. When Jack came home, we visited city sites. After a week, I learned to ride the U-bahn to Tempelhof where our tourist activities began. Barbara worked in a small shop until five and we often picked her up in Jack’s 1962 Mustang.

We toured museums, monuments, towers, and festivals. At each location, I took a few pictures with a camera borrowed from Big Jim Walker. I preferred slides to prints and during my adventure I developed five boxes of transparencies.

West Berlin seemed to have one foot rooted in the past and one stepping into the future. I saw the ruins of Kaiser Wilhelm Church and bullet-pocked walls, testaments to World War Two. I toured the Berlin Wall, Checkpoint Charlie, and walked past Soviet soldiers, all features of the raging cold war. I was also surrounded by tall glass buildings, constant construction, and bright colors. Berlin was striding into an uncertain future.

A major event was the wedding of Barbara’s sister, Heidi, to Lothar Wothe. I attended a bachelor’s party, gift giving, and over-drinking. One evening, I asked Jack for his car keys in order to sleep in the cramped back seat. The summer sun awoke me at 5:00 a.m.

Jack helped me cash in the return-flight portion of my TWA ticket. My revised plan called for me to ramble by train, bus, and ferry to Scotland, catch a cheap flight to New York City, then bus to Hammond. I was seeking adventure.

On July 11, I assisted Jack as he mailed giant boxes to Whiting, packed his duffle bags, and caught a military hop to Frankfurt, where he met up with Barbara for their flight across the Atlantic. I moved my bags to spend a few weeks with Barbara’s parents.

Kurt Gierke was a retired shop owner and looked after me most days. He escorted me on the U-bahn to various locations. We went to the city’s huge stadium, site of the 1936 Olympics. He liked to bet on horses so we went to the race track a few times. He seemed to know everyone we

met. Claire Gierke treated me like a son, always tucking in my shirt and fussing over my meals. Because of their limited English, my German speaking improved. I was sad to leave them and my adopted city of Berlin.



I said *Auf Wiedersehen* to Berlin on the last day of July. I flew Pan Am over East Germany landing in Hanover. I taxied to the train station then traveled by rail to Frankfurt then Mainz. I wandered miles to find a hotel for thirteen DM. All of this was accompanied by delay, misdirection, and confusion. But I was on my own and loved the role of international vagabond.

On the next day, I ferried for six hours up the Rhine River to Cologne taking pictures of castles, countryside, and cathedrals. I was constantly hungry with little money. I remember glancing at a boisterous German foursome who were consuming platefuls of sausage and pastry. The waiter removed half-filled plates. How I longed for those crumbs.

My flophouse in Cologne cost me seven DM. I then traveled to Aachen and on to Oostende, Belgium. I counted and recounted my money. I figured I had just enough to reach Whiting, but I would have to be thrifty. I met an English chap named Chris Martin and for twenty-four hours he was my best friend. Our conversations refreshed my spirit. I gave him one of my Kennedy half dollars as a gift of appreciation.

Together we crossed the English Channel, looked upon the white cliffs, and passed through UK customs. We traveled to London and toured the city. My friend caught a train to Bristol in the late evening. I decided not to book a hotel but remain in the station all night. He advised me they cleared the depot at one, but said I could reside in Hyde Park until morning.

About midnight the Bobbies swept through the depot asking for tickets. I decided it was time to skedaddle. I walked to Hyde Park, then strolled until 1:30. My feet and back were killing me so I sat on a park bench, soon stretched out and sleeping, my bag as a pillow.

I felt a baton tap on my boots. A Bobbie asked me what I was doing. I told him and he asked for an ID. I produced my passport and he left me alone. I was a little stressed so I walked a few blocks to a Wimpy Hamburger joint. With a purchase of one burger and coke, I slouched there until the 4:30 closing time. I went out into the cold night and sat on a bench. The summer sun began to dawn and I felt safer. About 7:00 I found a hotel with a vacancy and booked a room for three pounds. The space would not be available until afternoon so I rested in the lobby, then explored the city again. I slept in a comfortable hotel room until dark, got up to snack, then slept again until morning.

I did not have enough money for a daily hotel, so I planned to stay every second night on the street. This day I accomplished a walking tour of Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abby, and the Houses of Parliament. I sat on a bench long enough to hear Big Ben chime out three hours. I sat in the train depot playing chess solitaire and thumbing through Readers Digest. I struck up a conversation with two locals and told them my problems. They said I could come with them and

stay in the basement of their night club. The lights went out at four in the morning and I slept soundly on a sofa until noon.

I was in London for another two days, wandering streets with blistered feet. I tossed out my worn razor allowing my beard to sprout. My poverty freed me and constrained me at the same time. I visited the wax museum, Tower of London, and spent hours in various museums. On Carnaby Street, I purchased a souvenir recording of the latest Beatle release, *All You Need Is Love*.

I walked a few miles from my hotel to King's Crossing. The burden of my duffle bag strained my shoulders. My northbound train passed through Newcastle and into Edinburgh. I was in the Scottish capital from 6:30 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.

Daylight lingered so I was able to walk from Waverley Station to Edinburgh Castle. I rested in the manicured park until dark and then trudged back to the station to wait for my early morning train. About 11:00 p.m. I was approached by a friendly Scot who engaged me in conversation.

He invited me to visit his place for a meal and nap. I considered, then followed him through winding streets and into an upstairs apartment. After sardines and crackers (yuck) he invited me to rest on his cot. The lights went out and the next thing I knew the man was lying next to me with his hand on my crotch. I sprung up and shouted, "What are you doing?"

He responded, "Don't you trust me. Please just rest. It won't happen again. I promise"

Just as I was dozing off, I felt the hand again. I slapped it away, grabbed my stuff, and dashed from the room. As I huffed back to the train depot, I felt fortunate to have escaped with my body and gear intact.

My train ride to Glasgow was uneventful, although I did have trouble locating the international airport. People kept directing me to the local Glasgow facility. I was the last person to board the transatlantic flight from Aberdeen to New York City.

When I landed at JFK, I didn't understand the geography of the great American metropolis. I figured I could just switch to a Greyhound bus and be on my way. I was tired, hungry, and aggravated when a cop explained to me that I needed to catch an express carriage to the Manhattan bus yard. After a two-dollar ride I arrived at the gigantic depot trying to find my way to a Chicago-bound bus.

With stops in Pittsburg, Cleveland, Toledo, South Bend, and Gary, I finally arrived in Hammond at 1:00 the next day. This was far behind the time I had telephoned to dad.

I concluded by travel journal like this:

Once in Hammond, I asked where the regular bus stop was. She directed me to a location about two blocks away. I gave the bus driver my only money, a JFK half dollar. I got off

at 118th street and Calumet. But I didn't feel like going home. I just didn't want my adventure to end! I walked slowly down three streets. I felt like a stranger. I looked down our alley and noticed it was newly oiled. I didn't want it all to end then, so I walked around to the front instead of entering at the back door. I stood bravely and knocked. My magic adventure had come to an end!

Only mom and dad were home. They both were really happy. Dad said he had gone to Hammond but I wasn't there. Pig had made a big sign, "Welcome home, Chris", now draped across the couch.

Mom said, "Gee, you look thin". I got on the scales: 158 pounds. Wow! Down twenty pounds. I only had thirty-five cents left in my pocket, too. Man, I just made it. That's about it. I got my big bag the following day and my German-sent box came too. So, I close. Never again will I write in a diary.

When I arrived in Whiting, former Air Force sergeant Jack greeted me from the back apartment. He had just landed a management position. Barbara worked in a local medical clinic, adjusting to the American way of life.

Within a few days I was practicing football at Clark Field. Once I had reconciled myself to the kick-off and punt teams, my final football season wasn't half bad. I enjoyed the sideline banter with my second-string flunkies.

In September, I began my terminal year at Clark School feeling I had scaled a twelve-story mountain. I met with my career counselor. She smiled, "If your goal is to teach school, Ball State University is a good choice." She frowned, "Too bad. You're just a few points short of making the national honor society."

I too was disappointed in my lack of academic achievement. I had finally discerned myself as more intellectual than athletic. I dropped a fourth-level math class, opting instead for French. I was now studying three foreign languages. Plus, in English literature, I read some Old English (Beowulf) and Middle English (Canterbury Tales). I embraced my new identity as a Renaissance man.

Jim acquired a new girlfriend while I was in Europe. Sharon played matchmaker for me, pointing out a few of her friends who—rumor had it—liked me. I gave one young lady a second look. Her name was Arlene Kurek.