

Chapter 6

Enamored

*beginning on October 4, 1967
and continuing for 2 years, 5 months, and 25 days*

*“Let her kiss me with the kisses of her mouth, for her kisses are
sweeter than wine. (adapted from Song of Solomon 1:2)”*

October 1967

October fourth became one of “our days”. That was the Wednesday Arlene and I got together for the first time. I was studying alone at the local library, when matchmaker Sharon and schemer Jim brought Arlene to form a study foursome. The two girls chuckled as Jim and I called them “mackerel snappers”— a reference to their Catholic upbringing.

I was in the midst of memorizing the prologue to *Canterbury Tales* in Middle English. I impressed Arlene by rattling off eighteen lines of Chaucer, beginning with:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertú engendred is the flour;

I enjoyed the attention of Arlene, but my focus remained on football and school work. In November, I decided to expand my horizon by joining the debate team. Mr. Ericsson was our sponsor and the national debate topic for the term 1967-8 was: “Resolved, congress should establish uniform regulation for criminal investigation”. Four of us debaters stayed overnight at Purdue University for the Indiana High School Debaters Conference. We advanced a few rounds, but our lack of experience betrayed us. I wished I had invested my high school years in lively debate rather than in bouncing balls.

I was elected president of the Clark German Club. As Christmas neared, I organized a neighborhood caroling party. We identified local German natives, knocked on their doors, and sang *Stille Nacht* and *Oh, Tannenbaum*. Barbara was a recipient of our merrymaking.

In December, when Sharon asked Jim to attend the winter dance, Jim encouraged me to call Arlene so we could double date. (I learned that’s what girls liked to do.) And so, I overcame my phone-phobia and called Arlene. As expected, she invited me to the formal dance. I partied through the 1967 sub-deb with a tinge of sadness. I looked backward to the 1966 event when I gazed into the doe eyes of Debbie.

Arlene lived on Lakeside Avenue across from Saint Adalbert, her parish church. I met with her family for the Christmas Eve mass on my eighteenth birthday. She instructed me when to stand, kneel, sit, and genuflect. I beheld an unexpected beauty in the Latin liturgy and continued to accompany Arlene to Saint Al's on special occasions.

A few days after Christmas, I drove to the Selective Service Center in Hammond, birth certificate in hand. I filled out required papers and received my draft card. The official told me to carry it at all times on my person.

As a newly-minted eighteen-year-old, my father finagled me a position at Youngstown Steel in East Chicago. Jimmy Francis labored alongside of me, both of us putting in sixteen hours over most weekends. I wore a hardhat, carried a lunch bucket, and earned a blue-collar wage of \$2.40 an hour. Dad took me aside to warn me of the foul language used around the mill. I assured him I was familiar with most of the terms.

It later struck me how incredibly easy it was for an inexperienced teenager to hire on to a part-time and well-paid position. Within a few short years, all the regional mills would be shuttered and all the laboring men sent home.

I spent the stroke of midnight 1967/1968 at Youngstown Steel earning time and a half— an incredible \$3.60 an hour.

1968

On January 12, Charlotte gave birth to a baby boy named Dan Mitchell Walker, my fourth nephew. As he came into the world, the Beatles topped the charts with *Hello-Goodbye*. I bought that 45 record for Arlene, listening to it together as we snuggled on her parlor loveseat.

Our romance heated up quickly, exploding into flame. Soon we were inseparable, a bonded pair of lovebirds. I passed daily notes to her written with the salutation, “2R”. My hallmark was to slip her a piece of Wrigley’s chewing gum with a secret poem inscribed on the inside wrapper. “Come live with me and be my love and I will show what I’m thinking of. You are the one whom I desire. Come live with me and light my fire”.

On February seventh—one of our days to remember— we went on a date to the Hammond Paramount Theater. We sat through *Bonny and Clyde*, hugging and kissing. Seated in my Falcon after the show, I proposed to Arlene that we officially go steady. Her face beamed as we exchanged high school rings. Hers fit snugly onto my pinky finger while mine would be threaded with angora yarn.

At school the next day, Arlene assumed the persona of Bonny and I posed as Clyde. “We rob banks!” I drawled to her, the gap between my front teeth providing a handy notch for Clyde’s ever-present match stick. Both of us were silly with love.

Rock & roll hits of early 1968 provided a soundscape to our lovefest: *To Sir with Love*, *Judy in Disguise*, *Green Tambourine*, *Dock of the Bay*, and *This Guy's in Love with You*. Each was a special song to us.

Arlene turned eighteen on April first. The link to “April fools” provided endless fodder for my punny jokes. I treated Arlene to a fancy dinner and we goo-goo-eyed into the evening. Suddenly her shining eyes filled with tears as she shared with me the tragic death of her baby niece. She said insanity was a contributing factor. She wept, wondering if I could still love her with such a troubled history. All this came as news to me, but I assured her my love was unstoppable.

Mom was still awake when I stepped through the door after midnight. She noticed my sullen expression and asked if anything were wrong.

“Yes”, I said.

Her face darkened as she asked, “What’s the matter, son?”

I spelled out the story and she responded, “Yes, I know about that. It was in all the local papers.”

“Then why did you look so worried when you first asked me about the evening?”

“Oh, I thought maybe Arlene might be pregnant or something.” She blushed.

My eyes widened and I paused. “Mom, look out that window. The last time a pregnancy like that happened, a star was shining in the east.”



Viewed through the rose prism of Eros, my entire world-scape brightened. I relished my classwork, reciting Shakespeare sonnets, and discussing presidential politics. My government teacher was shocked when LBJ declined to run for re-election. Suddenly both Republican and Democratic primaries were wide open.

Mr. Roman asked me to read aloud my political limericks.

President Johnson has quit.
Eugene McCarthy lacks hit.
Bobby’s a hippie.
Hubert’s a drippy.
The whole stinkin’ party’s unfit.

Now Ethel is pregnant again.
We thought she might stop once at ten.
But that’s not our Bobby.
It must be his hobby.
Endowing the world with childREN.

Senior track marked the summit of my athletic accomplishment. I was captain of the team and consistently high- jumped over six feet. Coach Powell initiated the first ever Clark Relays in 1968, inviting six schools to compete at Clark Field. Mom, dad, Frank, Jack, Barbara, plus Charlotte with her kids all showed up to cheer. Arlene was present, sitting in the front row in the admiration of her friends. I basked in the moment.

The school year seemed to pass at warp speed. *Tempus fugit* I noted in my Latin notebook. With track, work, and steady girlfriend, I remained deliriously exhausted. I bought a camera snapping dozens of pictures of my female fascination.

At the track sectional meet, I scored second in the high jump. At the regional meet, I finally broke the Clark School record with a leap of six-feet-two and one-half inches. I advanced to the state competition in Indianapolis on May 25—the first Pioneer in ten years to reach the state capitol. Arlene attended the championship meet with her parents. I bombed, barely clearing six feet. My track career had ended on a sour note, but my romance with R continued to sweeten.

The Pioneer News, our purple mimeographed newsletter, ran a senior edition. What did the editors see in the futures of selected twelfth graders? My entry simply read: “Chris Foreman – Arlene”.

The two of us attended the senior prom in May. The theme of the dance was “Love is Blue” named after a popular song of the day. She was gorgeous and I was infatuated. Afterwards, I parked the Falcon in the dark recesses of Whiting beach. We crossed personal boundaries, sliding into territory we had both vowed to keep off limits. The initiative was mine, but she yielded with eagerness to my embrace. We did not arrive at the terminal, but I did learn that sex is a locomotive that does not possess a reverse engine.

The political times were crazy, punctuated by anti-war demonstrations, fraught with cultural tumult, and populated by long-haired hippies and radical Yippies. Riots erupted across America when Martin Luther King was murdered on April 4 and Chicago shut down after police attacked protesters at the Democratic National Convention. Two days before graduation, Bobby Kennedy was gunned down in Los Angeles. My friend, Kevin, was despondent.

The final day of school was designated “senior day”. The class of 1968 gathered in the gym for hugs, tears, and farewells. I had spent twelve of my eighteen years—66% of my life—in the halls of Clark school. Our high school yearbook was distributed to all who paid the fifteen dollars. Thirty classmates signed their names and scribbled messages into my Powder Horn. One inscribed equation succinctly summed up my emotions that day:

2 young
2 be
4 gotton

High school graduation took place on June 6 with speeches in the auditorium and a class photo on the front steps. I talked with dozens of friends whom I figured I would never forget, but soon vanished into the void. Eric and Reinhard sat front and center as valedictorian and salutatorian. I managed a class standing of 56 of 224.

I had never before considered the distinction between the words “graduation” and “commencement”. At this auspicious moment, the first lay behind and the second ahead. The picture-pose was a seam in the fabric of life.

School was out for Chris and Arlene. The innocence lay behind us and we looked with hope to the future. I had been admitted to Ball State earlier in the year and in June, dad and mom drove me to orientation. The university seemed enormous. I gawked at the twelve-story Teachers College. Everywhere I looked I saw construction cranes. My cohort of matriculating freshmen would be the high-water mark of the baby boom flood.

Arlene’s plans proved more modest than mine. She signed up for college classes at Saint Joseph extension and found a part-time job at the power company. Of course, we hung out every moment possible.

Jim and I worked full-time at Youngstown. The United Steel Workers Union required every millwright be assigned an assistant. My job most of the time was to shadow my mechanic and shine a flashlight wherever he directed. Jim and I made fun of our labor bosses. We labeled the rotund one “Egg man” and the mustachioed one “Walrus”.

As a daily routine, I’d get up at seven, pick up Jim, and be at the mill before eight. I remember the hot summer days. Barely washed, I would find R waiting for me on her front stoop about five. What joy would be on her face! We would paint the town past midnight. I’d drop her off, sleep a few hours, then begin the cycle again. Fatigue held no consequence.

About this time, the Zelen family packed up and moved from Alabama. Don had climbed up the corporate ladder to a position in Longview, Washington. My brother-in-law now managed a new Reynolds cable plant. After a month in Washington State, Jeanne invited the family to visit the West Coast. Don hinted a job might be in the offing for dad.

It was a tearful parting for Arlene. “If you still love me when you come back, then I know we’ll be all right.” I stuck a letter into the mailbox for every day of our separation, each beginning with the greeting “2R”.

This was a memorable vacation for both Frank and me. I added eleven new states, upping my state total to thirty-six. We crossed the Mississippi River, traversed endless cornfields, marveled

at snowcap mountains, and puzzled at a sign that read: "Welcome to the Evergreen State." The hills were parched to parody.

We chugged through the Cascade Mountains, passing the iconic conic Mount Saint Helens. Dad was wonderstruck. He had to pull over the station wagon at the sight of water gushing from a hillside. He dumped his coffee to fill his thermos. When we arrived in Longview, I had the sense my parents would soon be moving west.

Our two-thousand-mile trek passed not without incident. As I was driving through Nebraska on a narrow side road, I saw ahead of me a pickup truck, towing a large boat, supporting a significant power motor. This long assemblage was backing out of a driveway. I tried to slow, swerved to the right, but the propeller blade shattered the left rear window. My father exchanged insurance information with the apologetic sportsman. For the remainder of the road trip, taped cardboard kept out the highway breeze.

We rushed through this visit. Dad had two weeks' vacation and I had to maintain my work status at Youngstown. We hosted at the Zelen home on 23rd Avenue, enjoying our extended family, cavorting with Debbie, Susie, Nancy, DJ, and Jingles the dog. Don held a well-paid position and generously co-signed for a brand-new vehicle. Mom gushed over our shiny candy-apple red station wagon.

Eileen and Terry drove up from Travis Air Force Base, California, with toddling Jenny and infant Laura. My sixth niece was born on June 24 when Simon and Garfunkel were crooning *Mrs. Robinson*, Jesus loves you more than you can know.

Foremans and Zimmermans headed south on Interstate 5, Terry piloting his newly acquired/slightly damaged family vehicle. We toured the Golden Gate Bridge, then stopped by Travis AFB and the Nut Tree. Next, we launched our long trip home, first passing south through Disneyland and the Grand Canyon, then northeast along Route 66 to Whiting. It was a rapturous homecoming. Arlene and I sang with the Beatles, "Hey, Jude, take a sad song and make it better."

I opened my first checking account at the First Bank of Whiting and wrote check number one for \$800. This amount, mailed to BSU, covered all expenses for my first quarter of college. Dad appreciated my economic independence.

As I prepared for upcoming college life, dad asked Frank and me to join him on the sofa. Mom sat by tearfully as dad explained that Don Zelen had offered him a job at the Reynolds cable plant. He and mom would be heading west and he wanted to know if we would join them. Dad left the decision to us.

My response was immediate. I intended to enroll at Ball State and stay close to R. Frank was hesitant, but decided to remain in Indiana. He wanted to finish out twelfth grade and compete in gymnastics. It was sad to see my family splitting apart.

On the last day of August, dad and I drove to Muncie in the station wagon laden with my belongings. He helped me carry bags and small bits of furniture up to the seventh floor of Shales Hall. I remember a final cup of coffee and a firm handshake. I had mixed feelings; sad to see my old man depart, but exuberant to be on my own at last.

I tumbled into the tumult of college life: new dorm, new roommate, new schedule, new classes, new classmates—everything had changed in a single day; except for R, my fixed star.

I was able to bum a ride home every second weekend. My motivation was primarily to visit R, but I also needed to maintain my employment status. To keep my job, I had to work at least eight hours every pay period (two weeks). I acquired my first credit card through AT&T and phoned Arlene's house nearly every day. The conversations ended up costing me around forty dollars per month.

In October, my folks rented a moving van packing it to the hilt. I came home for the weekend to see them off. The photograph shows mom somber, dad determined, and our new station wagon in tow. A U-Haul slogan read "Adventure in Moving". Dad bequeathed Jack custody of our corner lot, me use of the Ford Falcon, and Frank sole possession of the second bedroom where he surrounded himself with Marvel comics and gymnastic trophies.

College work soon filled my hours. My first batch of classes included English Composition, World Economic Geography, German Literature, and Swimming. I dropped by the Christian Student Foundation every Tuesday evening, more out of guilt than conviction. I remained late one November evening monitoring election results. How strange the words "President Nixon" sounded in my ears.

Ball State was on the quarter system—Fall, Winter, and Spring. The winter months found me taking more literature, history, and German. I wrote a paper on the European Common Market and failed to appreciate a class titled "Music Appreciation". My college relationships were wide but shallow, having lots of acquaintances, but few friends.

Jim Francis and I remained close, even in the military draft. On December 1, 1968, we sat together in his living room watching a TV special. Officials from the Selective Service drew lottery numbers to determine who would be army-inducted in 1969. The plastic capsule containing my birthdate matched number 95; Jim was one number away at 96. Both of us were draft bait, but I possessed a college deferment. My best buddy would soon relocate to Canada.

Jack and Barbara occupied our old homestead with gusto. A new regime established new norms. Cigarette smoke filled the air, beer the fridge, and liquor the cabinets. Barbara hosted a formal New Year's party for a dozen couples. Arlene and I enjoyed the festivities, imbibing a bit. Big Jim

Walker drank more than his limit, but Barbara could not coax Charlotte to partake in a single drop of expensive whiskey.

1969

I was driving between Muncie and Whiting every second weekend. My one-way commute of two hundred miles took about three hours. I would leave campus at noon on Friday, work at the mill on Saturday and Sunday, then rush back to Muncie before my Monday morning class. I sometimes experienced road-side hallucinations as I raced through the darkness. Living in a residence hall, I parked the Falcon free in the Stadium lot.

Back home, I spent evening hours at Arlene's house sitting and talking. Her mother and father seemed positively disposed toward me, keeping a loose rein though close eye on their only daughter. Two older brothers lived in the house as did her nephew, Martin. The little boy's favorite sport was to sneak up on us lovers and giggle as we kissed.

Whiting Park provided our favorite seclusion. We would walk down the lonely shoreline gathering colorful bits of water-washed glass. We would pass blissful hours bouncing the Falcon and fogging the windows. This nighttime activity was termed "watching the submarine races".

Sometimes I would arrive at her home in the dead of night. I would climb over her back fence to toss pebbles at her upper bedroom window. R would whisper a greeting, dress, and meet me outside her back door.



My father remained active in the Masonic Lodge. Somehow, a small Robertsdale house was left to the Masons in his name. Dad thought Terry and Eileen might want to move into it, so he asked Jack and me to visit the dilapidation. Jack appropriated a Masonic sword emblazoned with *in hoc signo vinces* and I acquired a Reader's Digest collection of classical recordings. I played those scratchy LPs for years. While Led Zeppelin and Janis Joplin rocked my play time, Mozart and Beethoven enhanced my hours of study. I recognized many of the classical pieces, discovering that Puccini authored the Lone Ranger theme and Liszt wrote a piano piece for Bugs Bunny.



My grades improved in the Spring. I got A's in Biology, Earth Science, and British Literature. With a low grade in German, I decided to drop that field as my minor. My two P.E. classes were track and gymnastics. Both were easy A's.

My freshman year in Muncie overflowed with dorm mates, classmates, dropouts, and professors. A hundred human faces flashed into and out of my life. I could once address each person by name. Now all have vanished into the vapor.



In Whiting, Frank excelled in gymnastics, especially floor exercise and trampoline. I traveled to his state meet and snapped photos of my brother receiving a first place and tenth place trophy. About a week later I attended his Clark High graduation. Mom and dad had returned to Whiting for the occasion. They put the house on the market, enlisted Frank and me for another trek west, and packed up the remainder of their belongings.

Our time as same-state brothers had come to an end. Frank and I gathered about one hundred 45 RPM records which we had purchased over the previous five years. The 45s belonged to us in common, because we split the cost or had forgotten who actually paid the dollar. We sorted through lots of Beatles, Rolling Stones, and Supremes vinyl. Frank picked the first record, I picked the next two, then we alternated picks. The moment was solemn, like a divorce. I knew we'd be walking down separate paths.

Arlene and I kissed goodbye for the second summer in a row. I planned to work at the Reynolds Aluminum plant for eighty days, long enough to cover my sophomore year expenses. Our parting was tearful, but not traumatic. Both of us were confident our romance was unbreakable.

Dad bought a second-hand pick-up truck and overpacked it with furniture. As a final flourish, he lashed a rocking chair to the top of the heap. Jack called us the Beverly Hillbillies. After stuffing the red station wagon to the gills, four of us headed West. Dad and mom managed the automobile, while Frank and I handled the pickup.

Somewhere in the endless plains, Frank was cruising down a monotonous highway. I chanced to glance left to see my brother with eyes half closed and grip rotating left. I seized the steering wheel, startling him awake. I have often wondered how life would have transformed if not for that chance glance.

We arrived in Longview at the start of July. Dad and mom occupied a customized four-bedroom home just a few blocks east of Lake Sacajawea. The previous owner of 1618 23rd Avenue had been a local physician and my folks were thrilled to own such a palace. With a big house, good job, and Zelens just next door, life shined for John and Jenny Foreman. Their only regret lay in the thought that such fortune hadn't shined upon them years earlier, before their nest emptied. Frank and I slept in a paneled upstairs bedroom. I remember an endless playing of Iron Butterfly: *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*.

A year earlier, when Terry had honorably separated from the Air Force, he and Eileen moved to Longview. Terry worked at the Reynolds cable plant with dad. I enjoyed visits with my little nieces Jenny and Laura.

My summer job was at the aluminum foundry. As an entry-level worker, I labored, swept, and hauled refuse. At the three-week mark, my boss instructed me to lift armfuls of scrap metal from one location and stack the debris by a fence. After three days of this menial toil, I was summoned into his office. He dismissed me, saying I didn't "put my heart into my work".

I was disappointed because I only earned \$500 rather than the \$1200 planned. However, I would be reunited with R sixty days earlier. Frank remained in Longview. He had earned a gymnastics scholarship to the University of Washington and would matriculate in the Fall. I flew into Chicago O'Hare, bussed to Hammond, and ran into Arlene's outstretched arms.

I had burned my employment bridge at Youngstown Steel, but was fortunate to find another union job at Inland Steel. I soon worked full time at the filthiest jobs one could imagine. For several weeks I climbed into the smoky mouth of an open-hearth blast furnace axe-picking at solidified slag waste. Even with asbestos protection, my feet swelled with heat.

Later I worked on the coke line. The furnace fires were fed through conveyer belts laden with powdered coal dust. The black powder would blow off the belts and my job was to shovel it back on. I remember one guy who partnered with me. At the half-hour break, he would rip off his breathing mask, run to the outside door, and inhale a cigarette. Before leaving for home, my partner and I took turns blasting our clothing with high power air hoses.

By this time, Jack had vacated the old homestead and I began to sleep in Walkers' basement. 1725 Sheridan became my official college home of record. But in fact, I spent more hours at R's house. I remember watching her TV on July 20 as Neil Armstrong stepped foot on the moon. We took steps into the humid night hand-in-hand to gaze into the dark sky. Could it be possible? Then, on August 15, we watched reports about that hippy rock concert in New York State called *Woodstock*. It seemed we had entered a brave new world in regard to both science and culture.

My Ford Falcon finally collapsed at Whiting Park and the junk man towed it away. I was under twenty-one so Mr. Francis, acting as a surrogate father, helped me buy a 1961 blue Chevy Biscayne. His own son had already found refuge in Toronto.

The end of August saw the beginning of my second college year. I had earned enough money in three months to pay cash for the following nine months of university.

Mark Orewiler had been a casual friend at Shales Hall and had procured an off-campus residence for the Fall term. We arranged to be roommates at 312 McKinley Street. Our tiny space was up a flight of stairs, one of three bedrooms with a communal bathroom. Mark and I became fast friends. Our old landlady lived downstairs looking after her still older brother.

About a week after I settled in, Mark burst into our room with breathless news. He had spotted the old man in the garage dangling from the end of a rope. I rushed out to see. I touched the leg of the body and he jiggled as if alive. Further observation persuaded me the octogenarian was deceased. I walked to a nearby college office and called the police who carted the corpse away.

Because of my excellent grades during my freshman year I received an academic scholarship and admittance into the honors program. The centerpiece of the Honors curriculum was a course

called “Humanities”, meeting five days a week for the entire school year. I felt I had joined the intelligentsia. Without German as a drag-me-down, I earned straight A’s during the fall and winter quarters. I figured I had my life under control: a good place to live, outstanding grades, and a faithful girlfriend. The Beatles released *Abbey Road* and I was singing “Something in the way she moves attracts me like no other lover.”

Things got even better with R. Her parents were kind enough to escort her to Ball State to attend the Football homecoming. I can’t recall the main event, but I do remember the joy. I was so proud to strut around campus holding her hand. Mark joined us on the grassy quad to throw a frisbee. We three tossed and chased the plastic disc. Mark was better at the backhand toss; I was accurate with a sidearm finger flip. Arlene was having a ball. I hinted to Mark that the two of us might be married soon, perhaps by the following summer.

In October, I visited the college jewelry shop and purchased on credit one diamond engagement ring with matching wedding bands. I didn’t consult with R and she was shocked when I showed the rings to her. I decided my Thanksgiving break would be the opportune time to ask Mr. Kurek for his daughter’s hand in marriage. R was apprehensive.

Before the lavish meal, I spoke alone to Mr. and Mrs. Kurek. I boldly asked for the hand of Arlene in marriage. They were interested, bewildered, and subdued all at the same time. The dinner was great with her two brothers and nephew seated around the table. One brother congratulated me on my straight A report card.

I never heard a peep of response from her parents; only silence. And the silence grew to estrangement, then to hostility. I was never quite sure what the issue was. R would say, “Oh, my parents are mad at you”. My hunch centered on the elephant in the room: our religious divide. It seemed the Kureks were accepting of Arlene having a non-Catholic boyfriend, but not of themselves having a Protestant son-in-law. I sensed a drift in Arlene as well.

It was a strange time. We became physically closer even as we grew more emotionally distant. Every weekend an intense quarrel seemed to trigger a more intimate embrace. The more I felt her slipping away, the tighter I hung on. I knew she was floundering.

Over Christmas break, Mark traveled with his girlfriend from Muncie to Whiting. The four of us drove into Chicago for a concert of the Moody Blues. The night was intended to be carefree, but R and I battled continually. I felt embarrassed to have my best friend witness me shouting and Arlene foot stomping.

In contrast, we celebrated New Year’s Eve, two hearts beating as one. In the backseat of my Chevy we heated the mid-winter chill to a sizzle. I had liberated a flask of liquor from Jim Walker’s cabinet. As the whistles and booms welcomed in the new decade, we sipped a toast to each other. Where there is life, there is hope.

1970 to April

I treasured my moments with the Walker family. I have pictures of Chrissy and Danny standing on a highchair and draped with a sash reading 1-9-7-0. Charlotte was so kind, putting up with my late hours, sullen attitude, and consumption of food. Big Jim mostly ignored me, and the four children clung to me at times. It was obvious Jim and Charlotte were mismatched and miserable.

I was still laboring at Inland Steel. The mill rats knew me as a college whiz-kid. I remember asking a wizened worker about pressurized tanks. Some were labeled “OX” for oxygen and some “PP” for propane. After contemplating a while, I asked him what “MT” signified. He laughed, called his buddies together, and asked me to pronounce the letters slowly.

A goofy co-worker was called “bubblegum” by the bosses. A few months before I was hired, this guy was pounding nails into a wall and dislodged a gooey substance. He sniffed it between his fingers and declared it to be bubblegum. More was discovered. He insisted it was chewed bubblegum. Still more, nearly the entire wall was uncovered. He never backed down admitting he was wrong. Bubblegum deserved his moniker.

The mill was an educating experience. A piece of graffiti scrawled on the side of a foundry crucible read: “America=The melting pot. Scum rises to the top and those on the bottom get burned.”

Ball State had a one-week break between the Winter and Spring term. Arlene cut a day of work and sneaked down to campus. It was an afternoon of erotic delight. The pattern was familiar: anticipation (of what was about to happen)—recreation (giggling and foreplay)—consummation (moments of fleeting rapture)—realization (once again breaking our self-promise)—and, resolution (not to let it happen again). We were constantly filled with guilt. Anguish followed ecstasy. I rationalized that since I was going to marry Arlene anyway, then what’s wrong with a little premarital sex? That veneer peeled away as I increasingly suspected marriage may not be in the cards. Yet my lust flamed more than ever. Arlene became an object of my passion, a means to satisfy an animal appetite.

I astounded my friend Mark by pledging a Greek fraternity. I had a hole in my heart and thought I might fill it with male camaraderie. During rush week, I pledged Theta Chi. It was so odd. There was a month of kindness, they courting me. Then came a week of abuse and physical testing. A guy named Spoolie had just left the army and treated us to military-grade hazing. I did push-ups until my arms ached. I tried my best to cop a gun-ho attitude, but like in high-school sports, my personality was too stoic. Plus, I had no palate for the keggers. I was accepted into the fraternity—I learned later—not because of my winning personality but with a high GPA I bumped up the frat house average.

In the Spring quarter I sparred with God. I had no doubt He existed, but I no longer liked Him. After all, the Supreme Being was pulling Arlene away from me. In Philosophy 101, I excelled when the topic shifted to the question of God's existence. No student rivaled me with knowledge of Scripture, not even the professor. I was able to demonstrate, without doubt, that God was just a fairy tale, a projected father figure. I received an A+ on a paper contending that the Creator might just as well be a committee of gremlins as the God of Genesis.

In my Humanities class, we studied the Bible as literature, along with the *City of God*. Again, with practiced Bible skills, I proved that Saints Paul and Augustine were closet Platonists more than Christian monotheists. At the time, I mistook my hubris to be intellectualism.

Arlene and I were still writing each other a few times a week. She shared her opinion that I was too long-haired and too radical by speaking out against the war in Viet Nam. She scolded me for suggesting I might seek asylum in Canada if drafted. In one letter she said, "Be careful. I think my mom is opening my mail and reading what you say to me."

I was filled with righteous indignation. I addressed the next letter to R and wrote in bold print an opening line, "Dear Mrs. Kurek. These words are private, directed to Arlene, not you. Please mind your own business!"

During our next phone conversation, I asked R if her mom had opened the letter clearly marked "personal". She said, "Oh yes, she screamed at you for ten minutes."

Our romance was collapsing. Her parents forbade me to stop by her home, so I picked R up at her workplace. One day she stepped into my car reluctantly and suggested it might be wise to give our relationship a few months' rest. Maybe we could date other people. I was aghast, clinging and pleading. As we left the parking lot, R glanced behind and said, "Uh oh, my dad's following us." I drove around for ten minutes. Finally, R directed me to pull into a lot.

I stepped from the car and held my ground. My passive face did not react as her mother sputtered insults. Her dad cursed so hard his dentures flung loose. Finally, he yanked Arlene from my car and pushed her into their backseat. My girlfriend was sobbing. My world was crumbling.

I plunged into despair, diagnosing my problem as "Boy meets girl/Boy loses girl/Boy loses himself". I sought a pharmaceutical solution. For a few months already I had been smoking an occasional joint with Mark and his friends. I inhaled marijuana as a means to escape reality. It seemed like a generational thing to do. I enjoyed the TCP high, but not the smoke filling my lungs. It also seemed like maximal effort to achieve minimal buzz. Hashish was better, but still inadequate. Plus, dope smoking proved to be a group activity and I was a loner.

One of my newly-acquired fraternity brothers was a known drug dealer. I scored a hit of LSD for just eight dollars. Over the next fourteen months, blotter acid was my trip of choice—without smoke, without companionship, yet pseudo-spiritual. I tripped across inner space without traveling a step. Cannabis Sativa was a recreational drug, but Lysergic Acid Diethylamide was a recreational vehicle.



I determined to take a dramatic stand to win back the heart of Arlene. I skipped classes on April first—her twentieth birthday—paid twenty dollars for twenty long-stem roses, then zoomed two hundred miles northwest to her work place. Over three highway hours, I begged God to work a miracle and return Arlene to me. I figured if God cared about me at all, He could certainly manage such a trivial request.