

Scéal

by Gary Hope

“Scéal,” by Gary Hope. ISBN 978-1-62137-592-0.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014915422

Published 2014 by Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 9949, College Station, TX 77842, US. ©2014, Gary Hope. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Gary Hope.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

1

I was born in October of 1950, the best month and year to be born, in my opinion. I was told that my mother was in downtown Red Springs that fateful day, enjoying the Fall Festival parade, which included some tractors, a new Ford, an almost new Chevrolet and some horseback riders...pretty fancy stuff for our little town. Then, as a Palomino horse and rider passed by, I decided it was time; they rushed my mother over to Womack Army Hospital in Fort Bragg and shortly thereafter I made my appearance in the world. I don't remember it. I was born at Fort Bragg because my father was in the Army at the time, his name was Andy Hope—that's all, just Andy Hope, no middle name. The Army insisted he have a middle initial for their records, so he chose the letter J. So, officially in the Army he was Andy J. Hope. My mom's name was Doris Townsend, one of six children, all of whom had middle names except my mom...I don't know why that was. Nearly everyone I've ever known had middle names, except Andy Hope and Doris Townsend...maybe it was fate they had met; but, maybe not. A few years later, after my dad's Army career, he promptly joined the Navy; why, I don't know. I think he just liked being gone and not being tied down, which he proved when he disappeared from our lives 5 years later and we never heard from him again, until a phone call one night 15 years later telling us he had died (more on this story later).

My little sister, Anne, was born three years after me and we were nurtured and raised by our Mom, of course, but also by our grandparents, Grover Cleveland Townsend and Ida Elizabeth Townsend, with whom we lived until we left for college. There were also many aunts and uncles and cousins around all the time, it was a grand, joyful and charmed boyhood I lived—my sister may look at it a bit differently; there were times when my playfulness may have extended the boundaries a little—but I think she's forgiven me for most of the tricks I played on her...I hope she has. Anne? Please?

The year my dad left us, my sister and I visited him in Athens, Tennessee; I was 5 and she was 2...it would be the last time we ever saw him. He picked us up in Red Springs and drove us over the mountains to Tennessee; incredibly enough, my sister and I both remember that trip. We stayed with our Granny Hope, while our dad was at work at the radio station where he had a country radio show. We both remember chasing lizards up the walls on the outside of the house, a strange memory, and I remember being in the car with my dad when we stopped at a softball game and they wanted him to play, but he had me, so all he did was bat once and hit a home run—I was very proud of him.

Each night at the radio station, we would listen to him, and he would end his show saying, alright Gary and Anne, time for you to go to bed. We thought that was the coolest thing EVER! What a great dad we had. This was in 1955 and a very young Elvis Presley was making the rounds of the radio stations trying to publicize his songs and himself, when one magical night my dad interviewed him on his radio show. The only thing I remember was my dad asking Elvis to close the show by telling Gary and Anne it was time to go to bed, which Elvis did...how awesome was that? Elvis talking to me and Anne (more on Elvis later, by the way).

That is the extent of my fatherly memories...good ones, as memories go, but too few, way too few. However, I don't hate him, or blame him, or even miss him really; there were times I missed the concept of having a father. But I can't say I really missed him at all...my life was charmed in so many other ways, it probably wouldn't have been fair for me to have had a great father as well. I was as happy as a boy could possibly be. Surrounded by love, spoiled rotten and blessed with the best circumstances imaginable—at least I thought so.

When my dad left us, we were living in Norfolk, Va., because that's where he was stationed in the Navy; so there we were, my mom with two little kids to take care of and no child support and no family in Virginia to help. How she got through that is amazing to me...I couldn't have. But, she did somehow; she got a job, kept house and raised two children in an era where mothers didn't work—they stayed home in the 1950's and the husbands worked. Soon, however, the demands of working and caring for two kids by herself became overwhelming. My Aunt Mary, living in Red Springs, volunteered to keep me when I started first grade. My mom just couldn't afford the day care for us both; plus, I loved Red Springs and my Aunt Mary. One of the few memories I have of living in Norfolk then was pleading with my mom to change my middle name to Red Springs—which was way better than Raymond, in my opinion.

So, off to Aunt Mary's house I went for the first grade...And except for her giving me an enema one night, I had an absolute blast. About once a month or so, Aunt Mary would put me on the bus (6 years old) and I'd ride up to Norfolk to stay with my mom and Anne for a few days. It was quite the adventure back then; certainly no hint of danger, the bus driver took care of me and gave me sandwiches. But, my Mom wanted me back and was able to get a better paying job where she could afford daycare, so I moved back to Norfolk for three years—2nd, 3rd and 4th grades. Unfortunately, I don't remember much about it, except for the great Christmas' my mom always planned. Then, the best news of all happened...my mom got a job at Fort Bragg and we all were moving back to Red Springs with my grandparents...oh happy days! That's the selfish look I suppose, certainly from my Mom's perspective, moving back in with your parents, with two small children couldn't have been the ideal life for a young, attractive 30 year old woman.

But for me it was PARADISE! First of all, my grandparent's house was perfect...PERFECT! My grandfather was a first rate gardener and planter, and his goal was to feed us from his garden. In the back yard we had several peach trees, an apple tree, a fig tree, a pecan tree, two grape vines (one with blue grapes which was so big you could climb inside the grapevine and hide in it

and another vine with white grapes). Still in the back yard, further out, he planted watermelons (one of my three favorite foods), plus cantaloupes and strawberries.

On one side of the house he had planted about 10 plum trees and another pecan tree and on the other side of the house was the main garden, normally potatoes, green beans, cabbage, corn, field peas, lettuce, tomatoes, radishes, turnips, etc., etc., etc...and my favorite—a pomegranate bush! Across the street from us were blackberry bushes with the most luscious tasting berries you could find. No wonder today and all my life really, I've been a fruit-a-holic; what a garden of Eden we enjoyed. I can still smell the aromas of my grandmother canning jellies and jams and canning all the vegetables for us to eat in the winter. And the memories of all of us sitting on the back porch shucking corn, shelling peas and swatting flies...glory days. We stored potatoes in the barn out back; a huge stack of spuds maybe 4-5 tall in a 10' circle—enough to last all winter and spring until the next crop came in.

And, 95% of this gardening work was done by my grandfather, who was paralyzed on his right side and only had the use of his left hand and leg—pretty amazing stuff! He had a man come in with a mule and plow each spring to turn the ground over; other than that he did it all with his hoe and various other tools, one handed and one legged. Except for helping dig some potatoes, and picking beans and corn, I mostly just threw dirt clods at my cousins and sister and played tricks on all those around me whenever I could. My grandmother (Granny) was my favorite subject for tricks, after lunch she would lay down for a short nap; when I was sure she was asleep, I'd take her glasses off her face and replace them with sunglasses. When she woke up, she would go around the house turning lights on, opening up shades, wondering out loud why it was so dark in the house. She also loved watching a few soap operas in the afternoon; she would sit in her rocking chair and get so engrossed in those shows, she never knew I was sneaking up behind her, untying her apron and tying it around the slats in her rocker—effectively tying her to the chair. There was a “little” danger in it for me, my grandfather DID NOT PLAY! I could do all these things (and more) as long as he was out in the garden. You did not want to get him mad, his walking cane could leave quite a welt across your back or legs.

My grandfather had an old tackle box hidden in the bottom of his closet, but he had to know I could find it—he HAD to know that—knowing me. Anyway, it had things in it that blew my mind back then—things I'd never seen before and didn't think I'd ever see again. He had a chunk of petrified wood that amazed me—I wanted to hold it and feel it; and, he had some old coins from the late 1800's in there. Truly, amazing things for a nosy, little kid to see. He was also somewhat of a hoarder and saver, which I must have inherited from him...I'm sort of the same way. He would save the rubber bands the daily paper came tied in; he saved snuff boxes, jars, bottles, nails, screws...he wouldn't throw anything away. I don't blame him, I'd love to have some of those snuff boxes today. In later years, after my grandmother died and I had a driver's license, he would have me drive him over to the next county to the ABC store and he'd buy a ½ pint of something—I never knew what it was, or where he kept it—and I looked, to no avail. That was one secret he could keep from me.

I loved him with all my heart, I was always a little scared of him, but I loved him—he understood me and would even giggle at some of the tricks I played on poor, little Anne. A year before he died, he asked my mother to take him to see the ocean and the mountains one more time...we did that; I wish we'd done more for this great man.

My grandparents' house, my house as well, had a tin roof—you don't see those anymore, but it was awesome during rainstorms. The sound of rain on that roof could put me to sleep any time of day or night. Of course, there was no air conditioning in those days, but you didn't miss things you never had. I'm sure it was warm in the summer, I remember always turning my pillow over to the "cool" side trying to sleep; but with the windows open and screen doors, I never remember being uncomfortable. We had a gas heater in the front of the house and a coal stove at the rear of the house—the middle was just cold in the winter. But that was okay, we didn't mind. We had one bathroom, with a bathtub (no shower) for the five of us, which seemed normal to me—why would we need more than that?

Our house had this big wide front porch that wrapped around to the side as well. I could (and did) ride my bicycle back and forth on that porch when it rained. It also had a swing that seated 2-3 adults or 4-5 kids as well as several chairs...all great vantage points to watch the rain, or to watch people walk by, to sit and eat grapes, or to do nothing at all but enjoy being a boy. The swing had this big thick, shaggy, blue rug in it...we were told my father made that rug. I never knew if that was true or not, why would anyone make that up? But since I didn't have anything else of my father's, that rug was always special to me. I wish I'd kept it when the house was sold and torn down...but I didn't, now it resides in my mind only—but that's good enough. When I go back to visit in Red Springs now, I always visit the lot where our house was located. It's nothing more than a paved lot next to the Piggly Wiggly now. A paved lot full of the best memories a person could ever have; full of more love and fun and adventure than I deserve. A paved lot...A paved lot.

There was also a Chinaberry tree in the front yard, (a tree that was easy to climb and that had these little, red "chinaberries" growing in it). One of my favorite pastimes was to climb up high in the tree, hide as best I could and drop chinaberries on passing cars. Hard to explain why, but it was so much fun that one day I brought my dog up in the tree with me for him see how much fun it was...he didn't think so. He squirmed so bad that I lost control of him, he fell out of the tree and broke his leg. Not one of my better decisions.

Back in those days, we were never asked what we wanted to eat; my grandmother and Hazel cooked, and we ate what they cooked...if you didn't like it, you had the choice of not eating it, simple as that. But I don't ever remember that happening. I do remember fried chicken and white rice on Sundays after church; and I remember field peas and corn and Irish potatoes (the best kind) and pinto beans. My grandfather liked to use his fork and mash up his pinto beans into a mush; I thought this looked cool so I started doing it as well. They didn't taste any different, it just looked cool. Anne and I were also permitted to have one Pepsi per day (10 oz. bottles back then). I would save mine for nights when some of my favorite shows came on:

Gunsmoke, Have Gun, Will Travel, Perry Mason, Andy Griffith, the Dick Van Dyke Show...good programs that didn't need nudity and sex and filthy language to be good and entertaining. I would always put my Pepsi in the freezer for about 20 minutes before I wanted to drink it, this way, it would have some icy chunks in it that would be heavenly to drink. The only snacks I remember us having were fruit from the yard, or the always available peanut butter sandwich—peanut butter being the second of my three favorite foods, along with watermelon and bacon...I have simple tastes. Every once in a great while, mama would get some popsicles and put them in the freezer for us—oh, what a treat that was. They came on two sticks, so you could break them in half and eat just one at a time—made it last so much longer—oh me, I wish I had a grape popsicle right now! These memories only confirm that which I already knew...I had it made! I knew it then and I know it now...I have always been blessed; I don't know why, I certainly don't deserve it; but somehow the Lord has chosen to bless me throughout my life—and I certainly do appreciate it. More on this later.

2

“Whether you think you can or can’t, you’re right.”

I would be extremely remiss if I didn’t spend some time describing a lovely, lovely woman in my childhood who was not a blood relative, but who was definitely a part of our family...Hazel Mae Ray, one of the best human beings I’ve ever known. Hazel was, in the vernacular of the times and her own definition, a Negro. Later, she would become Black, however, in her own words, she never became African-American. As she told me at my mother’s funeral, I’ve never been to Africa, my parents weren’t from Africa, my grandparents weren’t from Africa and their grandparents weren’t from Africa...I’m a Black American woman. I agree with you 100%, Hazel.

Hazel worked for our family, heck, she took care of our family; we relied on her and depended on her for nearly everything. My grandmother was frail and had a bad heart and my mom worked and was gone 10-12 hours a day, so Hazel became our surrogate everything. We loved her...and she loved us. She would cook us breakfast before school, she knew how to cook the eggs just right, cooked enough so the white didn’t run, but not enough to keep the yellow part from running—oh yes, I liked the yolk runny. Two of those eggs and bacon on some toast with homemade grape jelly—oh my Gosh!!! I think I’m going to cry. She also made my sister pancakes that weren’t completely cooked either; for some weird reason, Anne liked the inside of her pancakes runny. Now as odd as these two breakfast menus seem, it takes great care and experience to achieve this runniness consistently. How Hazel was able to do this, day after day, in retrospect, seems very admirable—if not downright amazing.

She helped Granny cook all the meals as well, can the fruit, shuck the corn, shell the peas, peel the potatoes, wash and iron the clothes—any and all duties around the house...which included taking care of me and Anne. Which was half easy, and half very hard, that is all I’m going to say. My favorite times with Hazel were during the summers when we were out of school and I had time to just hang around and talk to her...she had so much common sense it made the world seem easy to understand. She explained things to me in a way that made perfect sense—hard things, things that I couldn’t ask other people for the fear of offending them. But I knew that no matter what I asked Hazel, she wouldn’t be offended; she knew I was curious and I knew she would still love me. As an 11 year old, I wanted to know things, like, why the palms of Hazel’s hands were very light colored while the rest of her was black. As she explained, it was because

the Lord made us so that we worked with our palms, so they ended up scrubbing and scouring which wore the skin and color off them quicker. To prove this point, she showed me the bottom of her feet, which were also a lighter color because she walked on them all day. As she explained it, we are all the same, just a little different color and when the skin wore off, we are all just alike underneath that skin. Made perfect sense to me.

Hazel was special to me...to all of us; we depended on her for so many things. She had a son named Johnny who was about 6 years older than me; he was already over 6 feet tall when I was barely 5 feet tall. And, he was a good athlete, how good I don't know, because in those days the schools were segregated and we didn't get to see each other play. But I do know that Hazel somehow coerced Johnny and a few of his friends to play some pick-up baseball games with me and some of my scrawny friends. We thought we were good, and I guess we were for 11-12 year skinny punks; but we were WAY overmatched by Johnny and his friends. They hit balls farther than I thought was possible by a human being. We were awed. Amazingly, and I don't understand why, but Johnny and his friends enjoyed playing with us, and we all had a great time. I know somehow Hazel was behind those games and making us friends...that's the kind of things she would do.

Years later after we were all grown up and had moved on and away from Red Springs, I met Hazel for the last time at my mother's funeral. She was just as beautiful as she was 25 years earlier; her hug was just as comforting and her smile just as warming. A year or two after that sad day, I learned Hazel had died. That too was a sad day...I didn't get to tell her goodbye, or how much I loved her and appreciated all she had done for me. That's my fault for not making that minimal effort; shame on me, but you know what Hazel would've said about it? "No need to worry honey, I know how you loved me, just as I loved you."

My beautiful little sister loved Hazel as well and she needed Hazel's comfort more than me, because of all the tricks I subjected her to. I know she thought it was meanness on my part, but I never looked at it that way...I just thought my pranks were funny. But poor Anne didn't see the "fun" in it at all...in fact, she would get so mad at me steam would be coming out of her ears. For example, in our little town, for some unknown reason, you could dial the last three digits of your telephone number, hang up the receiver and the phone would ring—I don't why it would do that, but it did. So, me being me, I'd make the phone ring when Anne was in the next room, then I'd answer it and say "no...Anne's not here—bye." Well, let me tell you, she would get so mad at me, but I just thought it was funny; and the madder she got, the funnier I thought it was.

Other times, as I sat around doing nothing in particular, I'd see her go outside for something and I'd lock the screen door, locking her out...then I'd hide. Temper, temper, temper...she had one and I must say, I did all I could to exploit it...I guess that was meanness, but to me it was just fun and tricks—heck, I did that stuff to everyone, she was just more accessible. And, I knew I could get away with all that stuff because my mom loved me so much...I was her pet—Anne knows it, and accepts it. I know our mother loved us both with all her heart, but I could seldom do wrong, whereas Anne was a loaded pistol at times and could be hard to handle. I know there

were times when she wanted to join in and hang around with me, but I was three years older and just didn't want my sister tagging along. Completely different now...I'm still three years older, but I wish she was with me all the time. Who wouldn't...she's smart, gorgeous, talented, successful, funny and most important of all...she loves her big brother—even after all that, she still loves her big brother. She's a good old girl.

More on Anne later...now, back to my childhood in beautiful, bucolic Red Springs, garden spot of southeastern North Carolina. Home of Trouble, June Bug, Pony, Lizard, Tunk, Moonface, Hollywood, Jub and many other assorted nicknames, in-laws and out-laws. I loved living in Red Springs, I'd probably live there now if my wife had Alzheimer's and didn't know where we were. (Just kidding Susan). Simple days and simple pleasures in the mid 1950's to the early 1960's. Throwing dirt clods at each other, playing hide and seek, hitting rocks with an old baseball bat, riding our bikes all over town and all the pickup games of baseball, football and basketball we played...treasured memories, treasured times.

Our good friend Phillip Bragg, who lived halfway between me and my friend Dickie, had a basketball goal (as we all did), but his was in his driveway, which was a crushed coal surface. Since he lived in the middle, we played there a lot; after an hour or two of bouncing that ball on coal and wiping sweat from your face with your coal blackened hands, we were about as dirty as dirty could get. But we didn't care...we were playing ball—that was all that mattered. Same way we played baseball in Ed Leigh's backyard, where the train tracks ran through the outfield. It was always fun when the train came by, I'd save an old penny and put it on the tracks and let the train crush it into an ultra-thin piece of metal...I thought that was so cool. I always wanted to do that with a nickel...but couldn't afford it. A nickel meant something then...you could buy 5 baseball cards, 5 pieces of candy or even get a cherry coke at the drug store...no way I could afford to flatten a nickel...no way!

We all collected baseball cards back then (some of us still do), our goal was to get all the players from each team, a full set—or, just get ONE Mickey Mantle card. One Mantle equaled everything else. He was the man, he was our hero, he was what we all wanted to be—good looking, powerful, popular and the best baseball player on the best team in the world. (my apologies Willie). First thing I'd do in the morning was to check the box scores to see how Mickey did the day before; one hit –great, two or three hits, I was walking on air; but an 0 for 4 day would break my heart. Just saying the name could make you happy...Mickey Mantle, Mickey Mantle...it rolled off your tongue and sounded so incredulous—how could he not be great. Later in life I wondered if he'd been named Irvin Jones, would he have been as good as he was, or as popular as he was. I don't know, but I sure am glad he was named Mickey Mantle.

Obviously, I was a Yankees fan growing up, but also a Green Bay Packer fan as well. Mama worked with a guy who was in love with her (she was never in love with him), but he was a nice guy named Maury Perrinboom. Maury was from Green Bay and truly loved the Packers and he got me hooked on them. He would have a friend of his from Green Bay send me the Monday morning papers from Green Bay after each football game...I thought that was great and saved

those papers for years. This was in the glory days of the Packers when Vince Lombardi was coaching, Bart Starr was the quarterback, they had Jim Taylor, Paul Hornung, Willie Davis, Ray Nitschke, their whole lineup was NFL all-stars and future Hall of Famers. I loved the Packers...still do. Paul Hornung was the golden boy on those teams, halfback and field goal kicker; blonde haired and handsome, he won the Heisman Trophy while at Notre Dame and was the playboy of the league—before Joe Namath came along.

Hornung wrote a book at that time called “Football and the Single Man,” Maury got a copy of it and somehow got Hornung to sign it “to Gary, best wishes, Paul Hornung.” Thrilled could not describe how I felt about that gift...I still have the book and will always treasure it—for the memories. Maury also sent me a book by Vince Lombardi called “Run To Daylight,” I still have that one as well. Yes, old Maury was a good guy, but he could never convince my mom to marry him—she just didn’t love him that way, he was more of a friend to us all. Too bad for Maury (more on him later).

From time to time in the summers, we would camp out in our backyard—a great adventure. Dripping candle wax on your fingers and hand, listening to the AM station from Chicago after dark, chasing fireflies, and telling the most outrageous lies we could think of. Sometimes, late at night we would roam the streets, walking through town, past the grocery store, which sometimes had some fruit delivered out front for in the morning. I remember stealing a banana once and running like wildfire with my ill-gotten gains...I still feel guilty about that and hope to reimburse Piggly Wiggly at my earliest convenience. In fact, maybe I won’t, now that I think about it. My first so-called job outside of home was at Piggly Wiggly; I was 15 or 16 (no minimum age laws back then). I went to work there one Saturday morning at 9:00 and worked till 6:00 that evening; I was so glad to see 6:00 come only to have my bubble burst when the manager said, “okay, everyone mop the floors.” You cannot be serious! Work all day, and then mop floors? But, I mopped floors with the others, dreaming of what I was going to do with my first paycheck. I went back the following Wednesday to collect my check, in anticipation of that glorious day. \$5.67...How could that be? 10 hours of working and mopping for \$5.67??? There had to be a mistake, what are all these minuses from my check? Taxes? What?? Minus for this, minus for that; thoroughly heartbroken I had learned a valuable lesson—never work at Piggly Wiggly again—EVER! So there you go, I figure my work that day makes up for my ill-gotten banana...Piggly Wiggly, we’re even.

3

“Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you.”

Another job I had during summers was picking watermelons. We were paid 1 penny per watermelon and for me and my friends, we thought this was a pretty good deal. You get to hang around with your buddies and make some money and eat the hearts out of all watermelons you wanted. They would bring us lunch out to the fields; we would break open a melon and wash our hands in it. A tractor and flatbed trailer would be on one end of the field and 8-10 of us would line up and relay the melons toward the trailer. Someone would count them, then we’d load them on a trailer and each person would be paid 1 penny for each melon we loaded. Plus, you could take home a couple of melons each day—since this was one of my three favorite foods; it was a win-win situation for me. The money wasn’t good, I’ll admit, but at least they didn’t take out taxes, and the side benefits were extraordinary.

There were only two things I didn’t like about that summer job...the first was the occasional snake—don’t like ‘em, don’t care what kind they are, I don’t like ‘em. The second thing was the ride out to the farm. My friend Michael Davis (more on him later) would pick me up and drive me and a couple of others to the fields—he being the only one with a car. The problem was that he would drive 100 mph! It scared the pure fire out of me...but what can you say in front of your friends? You can’t whimper or cry, so you just hold your breath and hope he doesn’t kill us all...he didn’t. But a few years later, he did wreck his new Corvette and almost killed himself; fortunately he only lost his spleen and broke some bones. At least none of us was in the car with him that day...he was indeed a crazy guy.

Those lazy summers were so much fun and I was very blessed to have so many great friends and such a large family to share time with. Seemingly, every week or two we would have guests, ranging from regulars like Aunt Myrtle, who called my Granny Ida—I’d never heard anyone call her anything except Granny before—it was very strange thinking she actually had a name other than Granny. They would sit and gossip for a couple of hours each week and catch up on all the floozies and drunks in town. My aunts and uncles also made fairly regular visits to see their mom and dad. Uncle Earl only lived across the field from us, so we saw him and Aunt Annie Lou regularly, and I even let Scott and Branson share a peanut butter sandwich with me occasionally. Uncle Paul and Aunt Dot would visit from Charlotte about once a month (more about this in a previous book) and Uncle G.C. and Aunt Ginny would visit with their 6 kids every month or

two. However, Uncle Donald, Aunt Pat and their three kids would only visit from Florida about once a year...this was very special. Uncle Donald was just a big kid in my opinion...he was one of us. He liked to play and cut up and just have fun—he was up for anything. He married his wife Pat when she was just 14 years old...they had their first baby when she was 16, then another a couple years later, then another—all beautiful babies and children. I had a special place in my heart for the youngest of his three kids Brenda—more on Brenda later, a lot more.

Uncle Gurney and Aunt Margaret would visit from St. Paul's every so often and Uncle Gurney would pull quarters out of your ears! And, he'd let you keep the quarters! I always figured they were rich. And I guess they were, but being rich didn't spare them the tragedy of losing their only son in a swimming accident when he was only around 19 or 20 years old...they were never the same. A tragedy like that changes people...parents shouldn't outlive their children. My Aunt Mary, who I lived with for two years, had moved to Orlando, Florida. It was always special when she visited because I KNEW I was her favorite...I'm special that way. But it was even better when I got to visit her in Florida!

I would ride the train down there (again, in the late 1950's and early 1960's it was safe for a kid like me to travel by himself). I only had one problem, on one trip...the trains would stop at most towns and the conductors would walk through the cars and announce the name of the town where we were stopped. I had been dozing when I thought I heard the conductor yelling out "Orlando, Orlando, Orlando"...I jumped up, grabbed my bag and got off the train just in time; it was a close call. However, I didn't see Aunt Mary anywhere on the platform...to be sure she wouldn't be hiding from me—that's something I would do, not her. I looked all around, and no Aunt Mary, then I looked up at the sign in the train station and it say "Deland." When the guy was yelling out "Deland," I heard it as "Orlando." Oh boy!

Fortunately, the people in the train station took pity on me—cause I'm special—and called the Orlando terminal and got the message to Aunt Mary, they put me on the next train south, where she met me in ORLANDO. What a magical time I had with her—this was all pre- Disneyworld. But there was Gatorland...big gators, little gators, dangerous gators; you could walk over a little wooden bridge and throw them pieces of bread—very exciting. Aunt Mary knew how to entertain. She would take me swimming, we went to Silver Springs and rode in the glass bottom boats and she even took me on a tour of the new Tupperware plant! Well, she could've skipped that one, but they gave out free samples at the end of the tour, so...

My favorite memory with Aunt Mary in Orlando was the night she took me to a drive- in (me in my pajamas) to see "A Hard Day's Night," the Beatles first movie. I was completely smitten and spellbound—in fact, the spell is still working overtime in my simple, little brain! The bug had been planted that one fateful night in early 1964 when we all saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show—that show changed the world as we knew it. Musically, culturally and sociologically...things would never be the same again.

Another memorable boyhood trip was with our Little League up to Baltimore and Washington to see some major league baseball games. Our first stop was in Baltimore, at the old Memorial Stadium. Guess who they were playing? The New York Yankees! Mantle, Maris, Whitey Ford, Elston Howard, Tom Tresh, Bobby Richardson, Clete Boyer...I could go on and on about their lineup, but the only one that really mattered was of course Mickey Mantle —the “Mick,” the Man, my hero. We got to the ballpark early on a drizzly, rainy night, not even sure if they would get to play the game or not—we were praying. First thing we did was all run down the steps to the Yankees dugout and wait for the players to come out...well, actually waiting for THE PLAYER to come out. Finally, here he comes, the Mick, standing right in front of me, ten feet away...it was as if one of the Greek god’s had descended upon earth and landed right in front of me. Blonde hair underneath that iconic NY hat, massive forearms and shoulders that looked as if they would burst from the uniform. I was so star struck I completely froze; did not ask for an autograph and did not speak...at least I didn’t pee on myself. Fortunately, I finally had the presence of mind of take his picture before he trotted out to the field—a picture I treasured for many, many years.

Well, the Mick played left field that night...we all yelled to him and he waved back to us; he went 0-2 and the game was called after 6 innings because of the rain. Disappointing? Yes, but my friends...I saw the man in person, in all his glory and greatness, and I will never, ever forget that. The rest of our trip was quite uneventful...we went over to Washington, visited the White House and the monuments, etc. We even went to see the woeful Washington Senators play the Cleveland Indians...Washington had Frank Howard, who was huge, and Cleveland had a guy with one of the great names in baseball—Rocky Colavito. But, I remember nothing of the game, other than Rex Bullock caught a foul ball...after seeing the Mick, all else was achingly dull and even mundane. But what could you expect, after you’d been to the mountain top, seen the glory, and experienced your life, long dream.

I remember our first trip to Hardee’s, in Lumberton, we had no fast food restaurants in Red Springs; in fact, we had no restaurants in Red Springs—unless you consider the Bus Station a restaurant. So, the trip to Lumberton, to the first Hardee’s anywhere near us, was very exciting. This would have been in the early 1960’s...there was no indoor seating, you went up to the window and ordered and they gave it back to you outside—very chic at the time. Hamburgers were.15, cheeseburgers were.20, fries.10, milk was.12 (which seemed expensive to me, you could buy a carton of milk at school in the lunchroom for.03), Pepsi or coke was.10 and.15 (small and large) and milkshakes were.20.

And it was all good! Very good in fact, we all looked forward to the 18 mile drive over to Lumberton to feast on this incredible menu...A hamburger for.15...truly amazing. I was in the car once with my friend Michael Davis, we were going to over to Lumberton to eat at Hardee’s; he and his brother Stanley and I were all in the back seat and his parents, Holmes and Sara (who were excellent people), were in the front seat. We were very excited and hungry. Michael was sitting in the back seat directly behind Holmes, who was driving, and it was summertime and all

the windows were down. Michael, being Michael, had been drinking a Pepsi in a glass bottle, he decided he was going to throw it out the window and try to hit a sign with it (sounds strange now, but really it was not that uncommon in those days to do that, or to simply throw your trash out the window as well). So Michael rears back to backhand the bottle out the window and when he does, he whacks Holmes in the back of the head, knocking him out! Holmes slumps over, blood is gushing out of the back of his head, Sara is screaming at Holmes while reaching over to grab the steering wheel. She keeps us in the road, while screaming at Holmes to wake up, which he eventually does and we somehow get pulled off the side of the road with no further damage, except to Holmes' head and the blood on the car seat. Was Michael punished? No, I guess the whole ordeal scared us all so bad that no punishment was needed. The really bad end to this story (except for the gash in Holmes' head) was that we turned around and went back home...no hamburgers, no fries, no milkshakes—poor, poor, pitiful us.

My mother worked then at Fort Bragg as a civilian employee at the JFK Special Warfare Center. She was very smart and eventually became the civilian controller there, responsible for a budget at that time of over \$187 million dollars. I was very proud of her, she was smart, talented and very attractive as well —my sister has all those genes passed onto her; I got the bad genes. Fort Bragg was about 26-27 miles from Red Springs and several people carpooled together to save on gas, one of those being my cousin Jack Smith —maybe the most intense competitor I've ever played with or against. However, one day my mother knew she had to work late so she drove to work by herself that day. After work, driving home in the dark, in her old, large Buick (a tank of a car), she had an accident...a bizarre accident indeed. I was in the 8th grade at the time, so it must have been around 1963.

The facts, as I know them from my mom and several other witnesses are as follows: she was just coming into the Red Springs area, not far from my friend Allen Simpson's house, when suddenly she saw a man lying in the road directly in front of her. As she started to swerve into the other lane to avoid running over the man, she noticed an oncoming car in the other lane coming right at her, so she aborted the swerve into the other lane and had no choice but to run directly over the guy in the road. Keep in mind, this whole scenario took just a second or two to unfold—no time to think, no time for anything except what reactions and reflexes occur. So, unfortunately, she hit the guy lying in the road and felt the sickening thump of the wheel as it ran over his body. She was so concentrated on the man in the road that she never saw the oncoming vehicle in front of her. The man in the other car, we're guessing, thought my mother was going to swerve into his lane, so he swerved over into her lane. When she actually stayed in her lane, the unavoidable happened...a head-on collision of two cars going 50-60 mph.

The poor man in the other car died on impact, my mother sustained untold major injuries and broken bones. I remember seeing her in the hospital where she had tubes in her mouth and nose and bandages all over her and they didn't know if she'd survive or not. She was in the hospital at Duke for several months...not weeks—months. Miraculously, the man in the road that my mother ran over did not die. When the ambulances all got there and took my mother away and

the dead man away, they then lifted the man in the road—whom no one knew, he didn't have a wallet on him—put him on a gurney, strapped him down and lifted him into the ambulance for the trip to the hospital. Before the first aid person could get into the ambulance and start the engine, they heard the back door open and a shut. They thought maybe someone else was checking on the man strapped down, so the ambulance driver got out, went around to the back of the ambulance, opened the door and saw an empty gurney. The straps had been broken and the man was gone. No trace whatsoever...the police and all emergency personnel searched everywhere...they never found that man and never heard anything from him ever again.

I was in shock and scared to death for my mom; I don't why or how this happened, but Sara and Holmes Davis took me into their home (with Michael and Stanley) to live with them until my mom got out of the hospital several months later. Remember me telling you earlier they were excellent people? They were. It was in their house that I heard the first album of the Beatles (Meet the Beatles). They treated me as though I was their third son; it seemed natural and loving during my months there. Why I went there, instead of staying with my grandparents, I don't know. I just felt supremely blessed to be cared for by these two gracious, loving, wonderful people.