

Before you get started I wanted to say a few words. First of all, I want to tell you the reason for writing this, but as I try to think of one thing really concrete comes to mind. I guess I really don't know why. I just had to write it down. This is the story of my life starting from when I left my hometown of Marshall, TX and moved to New Boston, TX. What I've tried to do here is keep an open mind and show the events as they truly happened, not changing anything to suit myself. Even though I've tried to maintain this attitude through out the whole book, it is still written from my point of view and others who were there may not agree with the description of some of the events. If that is the case I hope these individuals will understand that I may have seen things in a different way from them.

I also wanted to point out that I am by no means a professional writer. I've tried to do the best I could and I'm sure there are plenty of run on sentences, misplaced commas, and misspelled words. I ask you to please bear with these if you can. With that said I'll now let you get to the book. I hope you enjoy it.

SOPHOMORE

It was a bright and shiny day that day we left Marshall for New Boston. My sister, Shannon, was taking one last picture of the house I had spent the better part of fifteen years in. The station wagon was loaded down with our clothes and necessities. My mom and Shannon piled into the station wagon and dad and I got into the old green truck.

We stopped at a little restaurant named Gables. I had been there many times before, but this would be the last. We sat down and ordered breakfast. My mom looked over at my scowled face and said, "Just look at this as an adventure. It will be a new chapter in your life."

New chapter all right, it was going to be a whole new book! I had grown up and lived all my life right here in Marshall. All my friends were here. All my relatives lived here. I had resented this move ever since I had heard about it. I had even threatened to run away but didn't have the courage to do it. But this resentment would soon be forgotten and replaced by some of the best times I've ever had.

About two hours later we rolled into Texarkana. This is a bigger town about 30 miles east of New Boston. We planned to stay in the Holidome here because it was a fancy hotel and the government was paying for it until we could find a house. We were pretty impressed by the indoor pool, table tennis, and miniature golf course. We unpacked our clothes and went to a restaurant to eat, then we drove out to Red River Army Depot. This is where my dad's new job was. We spent an hour or so there while dad talked to his boss then we went to our new town, New Boston. We were going to the schools to get Shannon and I enrolled. Fear swelled up in my throat as we walked up the steps of my new school. It was about two weeks until school started but the teachers were already there. We went in and headed for the principal's office. The interior of the school was pretty old looking, especially compared to the school I was coming from. We found the office and went in. Sitting at a desk in front of us was Mrs. Vira Jo Ackinson, the school secretary.

"We'd like to get our son enrolled in school. We just moved here," my mom said to Vira Jo.

"O.K. Wait just one minute," Vira Jo replied and got up and poked her head into an adjoining room. "Mr. Westfall, we have a new kid here that needs to be enrolled," I heard her say.

"All right. Send them in," said the voice.

We walked into the office and Mr. Westfall asked us to sit down. Mr. Westfall was a tall man who had light brown hair and a little dark mustache. When he talked you could hear a distinct southern accent.

"Who's going to be at the high school this year?" he asked.

"Our son, Lee," my mom answered.

"And what grade will you be in this year, son?"

"I'll be in the tenth," I replied.

"Do you have any records?"

"The school records are being sent, but I do have report cards," said my mom as she handed him my ninth grade report card.

He looked the report card over muttering "hums" every now and then. I knew what was coming next.

"Had a little trouble in Algebra didn't you, son?"

"Yes sir," I said flushing red from embarrassment. I had screwed around the last semester and made an F in Algebra.

“Well, I just wanted to tell you a few things,” he said handing me a booklet. “You’ll find all our rules and regulations in this book. They’re not too strict but you’re expected to abide by them. We don’t have much trouble from kids around here, but when we do I just take care of it with my board of education.” He pointed to the wall and I followed his gaze. Hung on the wall was a large paddle with the words **BOARD OF EDUCATION** burned into it.

“Yes sir,” I gulped.

I don’t think you’ll have any trouble fitting in here. Take these report cards and show them to our counselor across the hall. She’ll fix you up with a schedule.”

I took the cards and thanked him. We walked across the hall to the counselor’s office. It was almost identical to the principal’s office. Mrs. Nix, a middle aged colored lady, was the counselor.

“O.K. Lee, let me get my class schedules,” she said. She produced a laminated sheet of paper with a table of classes and class periods on them. “English II, World History, P.E., and Geometry are your required courses.”

“But won’t the F in Algebra keep him from taking Geometry?” my mom asked. I could have shot her for that.

“Let me see. Our grading scale is different from Marshall’s, so let me convert. She pulled up her adding machine and calculated some figures. When she was finished she said, “The F converts to a low C on our scale, which is passing, but barely. I think it should be up to Lee to decide what to take. Would you rather take Algebra again or go ahead with Geometry?”

There was no way in the world I was taking Algebra again if I didn’t have too. “I’ll take Geometry,” I said with confidence.

“All right. Now you have two electives to choose.” She handed me the paper and I looked it over. I decided on Biology and Choir. “We’ll fix up your schedule and you can pick it up on Friday. Here is our course description book. You can read it to get a description of the courses you’re taking.” She handed me the booklet and we thanked her. We walked out of the counselor’s office and down the hall.

“Do you want to look around your new school, Lee?” my mom asked me.

“No thank you.” I just wanted to get out of there.

Our next stop was the Junior High School. As we turned the corner that led to the school I saw a half burned building and what was left of a gym. I later found out that a janitor named Jesse had tried to burn down the school a week before. We went to the office and went through the same ritual as I went through at the High School. After Shannon was taken care of we got back in the car and headed for the hotel. After we got there we changed clothes and went to eat at the Western Sizzlin. It was expensive, but why shouldn’t it be? The government was paying for it.

When we got back to the hotel, Shannon and I decided to try out the facilities. We changed into our bathing suits and headed for the pool. An indoor swimming pool must be warm, right? Splash. Wrong! The water was freezing. Enough swimming for today, I was cruising toward the sauna. Talk about from one extreme to the other. It must have been 300 degrees in there. I only lasted for about three minutes. I finally found my happy medium in the hot tub. After a while in there I decided to call it a night.

Shannon and I had a separate room to ourselves, although it was joined to our parent’s room. I was just about to drift off to sleep when my dad came to the door.

“The real estate lady called and we are going to look at houses tomorrow. We want you two to come so don’t make any plans.” With that he said good night and shut the door. Great! I couldn’t think of anything better to do than look at houses all day.

And that’s exactly what we did, all day long. And not one house was right. There was always one little thing that was wrong out of place. Finally we gave up the search and went

back to the hotel. Later that evening the phone rang and Shannon answered it. "Hello? Yes ma'am. Thirteen. He's fifteen. Sure, we'd be glad to. Thank you. Good bye."

"What was that all about?" I asked her.

"That was the real estate lady. She goes to the church that we are going to and she said that they are having a youth rally Saturday from ages thirteen to college. She wanted to know if we wanted to come."

"And you said yes?"

"What did you expect me to say?" She went next door to tell my mom and dad the news. They thought it was just great. I hated the idea. I didn't want to meet anybody. Sounds like I'm stuck up, doesn't it? Well, I'm not. I'm just terrified of meeting new people. I never know what to say and I get a lump in my throat. I guess I'd just have to grin and bear it. I went to bed trying to forget the whole thing.

The next morning I had to go to New Boston to get my schedule. I also found out that school started next Friday. Friday? Who ever heard of starting school on a Friday? This hick town sure did things strange. Anyway, here's how my schedule looked:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1. Choir	Nicholes
2. World History	Mattingly
3. Geometry	Patton
4. P.E.	Dooley
5. English II	Starett
6. Biology	Dempsey

Everything looked all right to me so we drove back to Texarkana. When we got there I found that my grandparents and my aunt had come up from Marshall to see us. Let me explain something about my aunt. Her name is Penny and we are the same age. To be truthful, I'm actually three weeks older than her. My mom and my grandmother were pregnant at the same time. How did this happen? Well, my grandparents decided not to have anymore kids after their fourth but nature didn't agree and a week after my mom found out she was pregnant with me my grandmother found out she was pregnant also. Penny and I are just like real good cousins to each other, and that's usually what we tell most people so we don't have to explain the whole story.

We spent the rest of that day just relaxing by the pool and talking. Later that night my grandparents and Penny left and I got ready for bed.

"Don't forget about tomorrow," my sister said to me.

"What about it?"

"The youth rally. Remember?"

"Oh yea. Thanks for reminding me," I said with a hint of sarcasm in my voice. I had forgotten all about it until now. I slid under the covers and tried to fall asleep as fast as I could.

The next day I slept as long as I could, hoping that if I stayed in bed long enough I wouldn't have to go. That idea was shot down when my mother came in and dragged me out of bed by my hair.

The drive down there didn't seem to last as long as it usually did and we were there in no time at all. We drove up into the parking lot and saw a lot of people. My mom spotted the real estate lady and we walked over there to meet her. "Hello," she said with that real estate lady smile. "Let me introduce you to a girl who will show you around."

She disappeared into the crowd and emerged a few minutes later with a girl following her. The girl was about half my height, light blonde hair, and a nice figure. "This is Cheryl Shelton. She'll introduce you to the other teenagers," said the real estate lady.

"Hi," Cheryl said.

“Hello,” Shannon and I responded.

“We’re going to look at houses now, so yall have fun. We’ll be back to pick you up later,” my mom said. They got in their car and drove off.

“Come on. I’ll introduce you to the teenagers that go to this church,” Cheryl said and started off into the crowd. Shannon and I followed. She went over to a group of girls who were talking. “I’d like you to meet Lisa Murray.”

“Hello,” a girl with long blonde hair said.

“Shauna Murphy.”

“Hello,” said another girl with a medium build and short hair.

“Wendy Williams.”

“Hi,” said the last girl. She was about medium height with brown hair.

“This is...what did you say your name was again?” Cheryl asked us.

“That’s Lee and I’m Shannon,” my sister said. I couldn’t say a thing. That familiar lump was in my throat again and I just stood there like a dummy.

“Let me introduce you to some guys, Lee,” Cheryl suggested. She walked over to some guys standing by a torn down basketball goal. “this is Lindsey Freeman, Marty Watkins, and Vince Hardage.” She pointed to them respectively. They all said hello and I managed to choke out a weak “hi”.

The rest of the girls, including my sister, started walking off. Should I stay here with the guys or go with my sister? Well, you know how chicken I was, so without a backward glance I started after the girls.

The rest of the day was pretty much routine. We had hot dogs outside, then we listened to a sermon, and then we went to the skating rink. Mom and Dad got back about 5:00 and we went back to the hotel. I finally managed to calm down and get the lump out of my throat.

The next morning was Sunday, so we got ready for church and headed off for New Boston again. As we neared the church building I could feel the lump rising. We walked in the front door and were greeted by many people. Shannon had to go to a different Sunday school class so I was on my own.

I opened the door to the High School class and all the talking suddenly went dead. I took a seat next to the wall by myself. I looked around and saw some people I already knew. There was Lindsey and Cheryl. Wendy and Shauna must have been younger and were in Shannon’s class. As the next few minutes passed more people came in then class started.

The teacher was a tall, rather thin man, with dark hair and a chewer’s jaw. “We have a visitor with us today. I’d like to start by having everyone introduce themselves starting over there,” he pointed to a girl.

“My name is Marie Shelton,” she said. This must be Cheryl’s sister.

Just then the door opened and a girl walked in. It was Lisa, one of the girls I met yesterday.

“This is Miss Lisa always late,” the teacher said.

“Well, my alarm didn’t go off,” she replied. She went over and took a seat by Marie.

The introductions continued down the line. The people I hadn’t already met were Kim Williams (Wendy’s older sister), Jan Collins, Vallerie Martin, Tanya Murray (Lisa’s older sister), and Andrea Taylor.

“My name is L.A. Wright,” said the teacher, “Now you are?”

The lump now swelled to maximum capacity. I choked out a cough and then started. “My n-n-name is Lee L-L-Lovelace. My family m-m-moved here from M-M-Marshall.” My face was red as a rose.

“Well, we’re glad to have you here,” L.A. said. The rest of the class went O.K. I sat with my parents for the sermon and then we went back to the hotel.

The rest of the week was a mixture of swimming, eating out, and just plain laziness. But that day had finally come. Tomorrow would be Friday and I'd have to go to school. I went to bed that night with an awful pain in my stomach and bad nightmares about school.

I got up early the next morning and got ready for school. It reminded me of getting ready for school in Marshall. Except I wasn't in Marshall and I wasn't going to see my friends. We ate breakfast at Denny's by the hotel and then drove to New Boston.

I'll never forget the first day I started the tenth grade at New Boston High School. I was so scared I couldn't talk straight. My mother drove up in the parking lot and dropped me off.

"Have a good one," she said.

"Yea, sure." She didn't have to go and I did. Who is she to tell me to have a good one? A brief urge to crawl back in the car and slam the door shut and then cry like a baby came over me. But I quickly pushed it away. I wouldn't want to get a bad reputation on the first day would I?

I closed the door with me on the other side and watched as the big yellow station wagon pulled around the curve. I pulled out my schedule, although I already had it memorized, just in case. Yep. It still said choir for first hour and in the band hall.

I scanned the area for anything resembling a band hall. Nothing. Great, I was going to be late on the first day. I looked again and there was a small sign which read BAND HALL. Attached to this sign was a little red building about to fall apart.

I mustered my courage and entered the building. That had to be the smallest band hall I had ever seen in my life. Chairs were jammed together, music stands were all over the place, I could hardly walk through the place.

There were a couple of groups of people around talking to each other. I chose a chair in the corner and sat down. I just sat there for a while and counted music stands. I noticed a girl in a group of people waving in my direction. Surely she wasn't waving at me. I looked behind me and nobody was there so I turned back around and waved back. She smiled and then started talking to her group again.

A bell rang somewhere and people in the band hall started leaving little by little. When they were all gone I looked up and there was only two people left. Me and some other guy. So this was the choir? A duet? There wasn't any teacher in sight. We both sat there for about fifteen minutes when we heard a crash come from a little room that must have been the band office. The door to that room opened and a lady with burnt orange hair came out.

"My name is Charla Nicholes. I am the assistant band director which means I have to teach this class." It sounded like she really cared. "Since we only have two people today we'll wait till Monday when the kids from the junior high get here to start." She said this and then turned around and went back in the office.

I could tell this was going to be a great choir. A little later, after several more crashes from the office, the bell rang.

Time sure did fly fast. I looked at my watch and it was only about thirty minutes since the first bell. Then I remembered that the first day was a short day.

My next class was World History. I crossed the street and went into the main building. The halls were jammed with people and I had to wedge my way along. I reached the classroom with fifteen seconds to spare and plopped down in a desk. The bell rang and a few late stragglers came in.

Sitting behind the desk was the teacher. He was on the large side with a light complexion and black hair that didn't look quite right. He got up and faced the class.

"My name is Mr. Mattingly, but you can call me Mr. Matt. I'm going to teach you World History. Let's see, we need some books I guess. You two over there," he pointed at the two guys in front of me, "You go get the books from the book room."

The two guys left the room and I was the only one on my row. For some strange reason I felt like everybody was staring at me.

“While we wait for the books we’ll talk about this course. What is history?”

Time passed and when people realized he wasn’t going to answer for us a few hands started going up. A couple of people gave short answers that he wasn’t quite happy with.

“Anybody else?” he said, “Come on people.”

“History, specifically World History, is a study of the life, politics, and social patterns of human beings that lived before us and after the pre-history age.” This came from a girl up front. She had a medium build, blonde hair, and she wore glasses. I had her pegged, she was the school brain.

“That is just about it in a nutshell,” Mr. Matt said, “What is your name?”

“Serena Metcalf,” she said with an air of confidence.

“Well there is one more thing. Does anyone else know what it is?”

He looked straight at me and was just about to call on me when the door banged open and the guys with the books came in.

“You and you,” he pointed to two girls, “take down the names of everybody on a sheet of paper and pass out the books.”

We all got in line in front of one girl or another to get a book. When it was my turn I walked up to the girl. She was skinny and had short black hair that was cut in a bowl shape around her head. In the middle of her chin was a small dimple. She wasn’t all that attractive, but there was something about her I liked. I gave her my name and she looked up at me and smiled. I smiled back the best that I could and took my book.

For the rest of the class Mr. Matt outlined the course. The bell rang and everybody headed for the door. I pulled out my schedule and noticed ten extra minutes between second and third period. Then I recalled two girls talking about something called activity period between second and third. What do you do in activity period? I didn’t know but my next class was Geometry and I didn’t mind ten more minutes before that class. I started wondering if I had made a mistake when I decided to take Geometry. Well, too late now. Geometry was in the same room as World History so I sat there and worried about it for ten minutes until the bell rang and people started filing in.

I noticed Lindsey from church coming in and gave him a half hearted wave. He looked at me for a minute then remembered who I was. He waved back and sat down to talk to some other guys. Class started and the teacher introduced himself as Mr. Patton.

“Let’s see, we need books.” Evidently we would have to do this in every class. “You two guys over there look pretty strong, why don’t you run to the book room and get 30 Geometry books.” He pointed straight at me and another guy.

I didn’t know where the book room was, this was my first time here, didn’t he know that? The other guy left the room and I followed.

He turned around and asked, “You know where the book room is?”

“No,” I squeaked.

“Well we’ll just have to look for it.” I shook my head and we searched the halls for ten minutes before we asked a lady in the hall. It turned out to be a cubby hole right across the hall from the Geometry class. Once inside we asked where the Geometry books were and started stacking them. The other guy had to climb up high to get some more books. He grabbed a stack of books to get a hold and the whole pile came down on my head.

It might of hurt if I had stopped to think about it, but I was too embarrassed to care. The other guy said he was sorry but looked as embarrassed as me. We carried the books back to the room. The rest of the class was just the same as history, outlining the course.

When the bell rang I went out the door and started for my next class. I heard a noise and discovered it was my stomach. I had forgotten all about lunch. I saw Lindsey in the hall and grabbed him by the arm.

“When is lunch?” I asked.

“Right now,” he said.

“Where is the lunch room?”

“Come on I’ll show you.”

We went outside and joined a crowd of people standing across the street from another small building. There were three lines for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Standing in front of the lines were Mrs. Nicholes and some other guy who I figured was the band director. We got in line and waited to cross the street. We stood in line for about ten minutes. After getting our trays we went over to a round table and joined a group of people.

Lindsey spoke up and said, “This is a new guy, his name is Lee Lovelace.” I said hi and then he introduced the people at the table. Anthony Meads, a skinny guy about my height, he was also the guy who dropped the books on my head, Clint Jordan, a medium built guy with white hair and a red face, Mark Mosely, muscle built with a scrub of beard that only grew on his chin and a few spots on his cheek, and Chase McMichael, a short guy with blondish brown hair and braces.

Mark turned to me and said, “Chase has kind of a nickname so just call him Chaz.”

“All right,” I said and began to eat.

“What class do you have next?” Chaz asked me.

“P.E.,” I replied.

“I’ve got that too. I’ll show you where it is.”

We finished eating and went outside to mill around. After a while the bell rang and everybody went their separate ways. Chaz and I stuck together. I still hadn’t figured out where my locker was so I was still carrying my books. Chaz didn’t have any and said we wouldn’t need any in P.E., so we went straight to the gym.

The gym, which was actually a cross between an auditorium and a basketball court, was burning hot. There was a group of guys sitting up in the stands so we went up and sat down next to one guy.

“This is Robert Pierce,” Chaz said pointing to the guy next to us. “And this is Lee Lovelace,” he said to Robert.

A door to an office across the court opened and the coach came out. He walked across the court and came over to where we were sitting.

“My name is Coach Dooley. I don’t know how P.E. was before this year but it won’t be an easy ride in here. We’re going to work and I mean hard. Exercises every day.” there were a couple of groans but a look from the coach silenced them. “Now there are a few things you’re going to need so get out a piece of paper and a pencil and write this down.”

I reached into my notebook and got out some paper. I felt a nudge in my ribs.

“Give me some paper. I didn’t bring any.” It was Chaz.

“I thought we didn’t need any books or paper,” I said sarcastically. He just looked at me and I got the impression that this sort of thing happened often with him. I handed him a couple of sheets.

This is what you’ll need,” Coach Dooley yelled and called out a whole list of gym supplies. Just as he got finished with the list the bell rang.

I looked at my schedule. “Do any of you guys have English next?”

“I don’t,” Chaz said, “I gotta go, see ya later.”

“Neither do I,” Robert said.

“Well I’ll see you later.”

After a few minutes of searching the halls I found the English classroom and went in. I sat in the middle row right behind a girl with a slender figure and quite attractive. Her name was Becky Stewart. The tardy bell rang and the teacher began to speak.

“This is English II and my name is Mrs. Starett. In here we’re going to learn things like nouns and verbs and stuff like that. Does anybody know what a noun is?”

“It is a person, place, or thing,” said a voice behind me. I knew that voice. I turned around and there sat Serena, the school brain.

“That’s right and every Friday we take a test. And what is today?”

What was today? It was Friday. Oh no, I hoped she wasn’t going to do what I thought she would. She went over to her desk and picked up a stack of papers. Yep, she was going to do it. A test on the first day of school? I got my papers and looked at them, it was just a diagnostic test and it didn’t look to hard.

“Don’t worry these test won’t be graded. I just want to see what we’ll need to concentrate our studies on.”

I finished my test and turned it in. It wasn’t that hard after all. The bell rang and I started for my next class, Biology.

I found the room which was more like a lab. Instead of desks to sit in it had tables and stools. the room was pretty full when I walked in and I started looking for a seat when a girl with long black hair at a lab table started talking to me.

“You can sit at this table with us,” she told me. I walked over and sat down across from her and another girl. “You’re new aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“My name is Angela Barton and this,” she pointed to a red hair girl sitting next to her, “is Kim Garton.”

I said hello and introduced myself. The teacher came in after that. He was a typical teacher type. He was wearing a lab coat and beneath that a shirt and a tie that didn’t match, and he had a big bald spot on his head. He introduced himself as Mr. Dempsey and then started outlining the class. Every now and then he would crack a joke and people would actually laugh. I could tell I was going to like this guy. He let us talk for the rest of the period until the bell rang.

I decided that I would find my locker, now that I had time, and deposit some of my books there. I found my locker and there was somebody in it.

“Hey! How did you get in my locker?” I said to the guy.

“It’s my locker too. We have to share” he said to me and then took off.

I opened the locker and saw only one shelf and his books were on it. I breathed deep and shoved my books into the bottom of the locker and then closed the lock. I’ll have to do something about that. I walked outside and immediately saw the big yellow station wagon. I ran over and got in.

“How was it?” my mom asked.

“It was all right I guess.”

“Well how about a coke and a hamburger from Billy Bob’s?”

“Yea!”

I spent most of that weekend in the hotel either swimming, eating, or reading. When Monday morning rolled around I had that same sinking feeling in my stomach. I knew it would be a while before I got used to the routine.

The first full week of school went O.K. I was starting to get the hang of it. I mostly hung around Chaz and his friends. On Friday during P.E. after the exercises I got through with my shower and went to sit in the stands to wait for the bell. Chaz was still taking a shower and I saw Robert sitting alone so I went and sat down next to him.

“Man, those exercises are killing me. How about you?” I said to him.

“Yea. Especially running up and down the stands.”

“Have you taken the English test yet? I have it next period.”

“Yes. It’s not too hard if you studied.”

“I studied, but I don’t know what good it’ll do me. It’s hard to study when your living in a hotel room.”

“Are you still living in Texarkana?”

No we moved to the Bostonian on Wednesday.” The Bostonian was the only hotel in New Boston, if you could call it that.

“Man I feel sorry for you.”

“Tell me about it. It doesn’t even have a swimming pool.”

“You came from Marshall didn’t you?”

“Yea. How did you know that?”

“I have an aunt and uncle who know you. Their names are Doris and Hugh Mcguire. They told me you would be coming.”

“Yea, Doris used to be my Sunday School teacher in church.” Just then the bell rang.

“Well, I gotta go see ya later.”

“O.K. Good luck on your test.”

“Thanks.”

That afternoon after school I was sitting in the hotel room drinking a coke and watching T.V. when the phone rang. I picked it up and said hello.

“Is Lee there?”

“This is him.”

“Hi. This is Robert. My church youth is going to play Putt-Putt in Texarkana and I was wondering if you wanted to go?”

“Wait just a minute, I’ll ask my parents.” I put my hand over the phone. Did I want to go? It would mean meeting new people. I was scared but I couldn’t say no. I asked my mom, “It’s a guy from school and he wants to know if I can go with him and his church youth to play Putt-Putt in Texarkana?”

“I guess so, it’s Friday night,” she said.

I took my hand off the phone. “I can. What time is it going to be?”

“We’ll pick you up at 6:45.”

“O.K. How did you know my phone number?”

“I called the front desk and asked.”

“You mean they give that information out to anybody?”

“This is New Boston and everybody knows everything.”

“Well, all right see you tonight.”

Around 6:45 that night there was a knock on the door. I opened it and it was Robert. I said good bye to my parents and followed Robert to his car. I opened the door to the back and got in. Robert got in on the other side. Sitting next to me was a young girl who I assumed was Robert’s sister. Sitting up front was Robert’s mother and another girl I had seen before in one of my classes at school. I thought that Robert must have picked her up on the way over here.

“Don’t forget to pick up Mike,” Robert said to his mother.

“Who is Mike?” I asked.

“He’s another guy from school.”

By the time we got to Mike’s house I was totally lost. I still didn’t know my way around this town. Robert’s mom honked the horn. A guy about my height and my build came out of the house. He squeezed in the front seat beside the other girl and Robert introduced me.

Next, we drove to their church building. The thing was huge. It looked bigger than our school building. We got out of the car and Robert pointed to a bus. The bus was almost as big as

the church building. I guessed that they did everything big here. We went over to the door of the bus and Robert introduced me to their youth leader.

“We’re glad to have you here. My name is Byron Kirkpatrick,” he said to me.

Robert and I got on the bus and sat down in a seat about halfway back. After awhile the bus was loaded and we were on our way to Texarkana. It was very quiet between Robert and I so I tried to make some conversation.

“Does your family ever go to Marshall?” I asked Robert.

“Every now and then. Do you know the Hamils? We stayed with them a couple of times.”

“Yea, I know Greg Hamil”

“Rhonda always likes to go down there so she can see him. I think she had a crush on him.”

“Who is Rhonda?”

“Remember the girl sitting in the front seat next to my mom?”

“Yea, are you cousins or something?”

“No, she’s my sister.”

“Wait a minute. How can she be your sister when she’s in the same grade as us?”

“We’re twins.”

“Oh.” Of course, why didn’t I think of that before? This could be very interesting.

We got to Texarkana and went to the Putt-Putt place. Robert and I played together on all three courses and were on the 16th hole of the last course when I saw a ball whiz past my head and over the fence. A girl came running across the course and jumped over the fence to get her ball. I recognized her as the girl who took my name down in History the first day of school. On her way back she came over to us.

“Hi,” she said to us.

“Hello,” we both replied.

“Lee this is Stacie Spradlin. Stacie this is Lee Lovelace,” Robert said.

“You’re in my History class aren’t you?” I asked her.

“Yes. Well, I gotta go, maybe I’ll see you around sometime.” She ran back over to the group she was playing with.

“She’s kind of hyper isn’t she?” I asked Robert.

“You better believe it.”

We finished our game and then boarded the bus for home. When I got home I thanked Robert and his mom for taking me and then went inside my hotel room.

The next week of school came and went and on Friday we had our first football game. On Fridays that we had games, afternoon classes were cut short so we could have a pep rally at the end of the day. On my way to the gym I saw Chase and Robert so I joined them. We went into the gym and sat in the section of the stands that was for Sophomores. The pep rally started and people really seemed to care about football here. They had a contest to see who could yell the loudest and the Sophomores won. A spirit stick was awarded to the class and our class president, Reiner Harper, whom we had elected during the week, went to get it.

I felt a nudge in my ribs and turned around to see who it was.

“Give me a sheet of paper and I’ll show you something.” It was Chaz.

I reached into my notebook and handed him a piece.

“What are you going to do?” Robert asked.

Chaz ignored the question and began folding the paper. After a few folds the piece of paper was transformed into a paper airplane. “Watch this.” He put the airplane at eye level like he was aiming it then threw it. It took off sailing down the stands when an updraft caught it and sent it straight up. It leveled off and was heading toward the other side of the basketball court

where the cheerleaders were doing a cheer when suddenly it took a nose dive. The plane shot straight down and stuck in a black girl's afro who was leaning back in a folding chair on the court. The girl screamed and fell over in her chair!

We were laughing so hard that we were crying. We saw her get up and dust herself off. She took the plane and crumpled it up then looked straight at us.

"We're in trouble now," I said.

The girl got up and went over to the principal who was standing against the wall. She said something to him and he looked up at us. He started walking over to the stands. Meanwhile the pep rally had just come to an end and the football boys were going out the door.

Chase stood up and said, "Follow me." We went up to the highest part of the stands and then crossed over. The principal had already come up to where we were sitting before. Chase went about halfway down the stands and then jumped over the railing into the crowd of football boys who were leaving the gym. Robert and I looked at each other and shrugged then we both jumped. We landed in the crowd and were hustled along with it.

Once outside we ran to the building and down the hall to my locker. "That was close," I said.

"But worth it," Chaz said.

We went to all three of our lockers and then went outside. None of our parents were here yet so we sat down on the steps outside.

We talked for a little bit and after a while Rhonda came out. "Robert, if grandpa comes tell him I had to talk to one of my teachers for a minute."

"O.K."

She went back in but before the door closed she turned around and gave me a smile. "Robert, is your sister in the pep squad? I thought I saw her out there today."

"Yes"

"Man, she don't look too bad. Why don't you tell her I like her." I said that in a joking manner.

"O.K. but she doesn't like guys that much."

Just then my mom drove up and I had to go. I ran across the yard and got into the car forgetting all about what I had said to Robert.

"We're going to go look at a house before we go home," my mom said to me.

"Where is the real estate lady?"

"Oh I just heard about this house she didn't tell me."

"Where is it?"

"It's in a place called the Duffer Edition. It's a new house they just finished."

We drove around town until we found it. It was a one story house with wood shingles on it. It had a garage and a pretty big back yard. We got out of the car and looked in the windows. From what I saw, I liked it. My sister said she liked it too. My mom said that we could get the key and come back and look at it the next day.

The next day, Saturday, we called the real estate lady and arranged to see the house. Inside the house looked just as good as the outside. When you walked in the front door the kitchen was on your left and the living room was straight ahead. To the right was another hall which had bedrooms on both ends. The bedrooms were smaller than the ones that we had in Marshall but they were better than a hotel room. In the kitchen there was a bar and bay windows. The living room was huge. There were two bathrooms one of which was in the master bedroom. There was also something that I had always wanted, a fireplace. I loved it! The same went for the rest of my family. By later that evening we had pretty much bought the house. The workers still had a couple of things to do in the house so we couldn't move in until the day after Labor Day, which couldn't be too soon for me.

The following Monday, Robert, Chaz, and I were sitting in the stands after P.E. exercises.

“Oh by the way, I told Rhonda that you liked her,” Robert said to me.

“What? I didn’t want you to really tell her! Man, I bet she thinks I’m a fool doesn’t she?”

“No. She likes you too.”

I thought I had misunderstood. “Say that again?”

“She likes you too. She told me it was about time you said something she’s been smiling at you the whole week. I couldn’t believe it myself.”

“Man, you’re lucky,” Chaz joined in.

The bell rang and we broke up. Things were starting to look up I thought. What am I going to do? She was very pretty and from what I heard she was nice too. What could I lose? I decided to go for it. Little did I know how much I would lose in a short time.

Rhonda was in my third period Geometry class and I decided to make the encounter the next day. After History I waited for her to walk in. She smiled at me and I said hi. She put her books down and started for the door when she turned around and came over to me.

“Are you going to stay in here during activity period?” she asked me.

“What else is there to do?”

“Well I usually stand out on the back steps with some of my friends. Do you want to come along?”

“Sure.”

We walked down the hall and out to the back steps. We saw Stacie and walked over to where she was sitting on the banister. We made small talk until the bell rang and then Rhonda and I walked back to class.

After class was over I walked over to Rhonda. “Do you mind if I go to lunch with you?” I asked her.

“No. If you don’t mind waiting for Stacie. She’s not on the early bell.”

“That would be fine.”

We waited another five minutes for the late bell to ring and then joined Stacie and went to lunch. We got our trays and joined Robert and Chase at a table.

When lunch was over we went over to the back steps again. This seemed to be a popular spot among the Sophomores. I saw Mark, Clint, and Mike standing in a group talking. Chase pulled me off to one side and said in a low voice, “The homecoming is coming up pretty soon. I’d ask Rhonda out if I were you.”

“I think I’ll do that.” I walked over to Rhonda and did the best I could asking. “Well, uhhh the homecoming’s coming up pretty soon isn’t it?”

“Yes,” she said flatly.

“Well uhhhh, I was wondering maybe if uhhhh-”

“What?”

“Well I was wondering if you wanted to go with me?” My face turned blood red and she sat there a minute letting me stew.

“Yes, I would love...”

“That’s great,” Stacie broke in, “We can make it a foursome. I’m going with Robert. We can go to Pizza Hut afterwards.”

“Yea. that would be great.” I was so happy that I couldn’t concentrate the rest of the day. Moving wasn’t turning out to be as bad as I expected.

The weather for the homecoming was perfect. The temperature was just right and there was a steady breeze. We were playing our arch rivals, the Hooks Hornets. It promised to be an interesting evening.

Earlier that morning I had bought a mum for Rhonda and had taken it over to her house. It was a double mum with the school colors, a football, the whole works. I had wanted to get something like LEE -N- RHONDA on it, but she didn't want that on there. I kinda thought that was a little weird, but maybe it was because it wasn't official, some girls are like that. So instead I got our names put on different streamers.

Rhonda was in the pep squad so she had to sit in a special section of the stands. I didn't like that too much because I couldn't sit with her. Chase had asked my sister to the homecoming earlier in the week and she had said yes. Stacie and my sister were both in the band so Robert and Chase were in the same boat as me. At least I had some company.

Robert, Chase, and I sat through the first half of the game. We were losing 7-14, but I hadn't paid much attention to the game. I was watching Rhonda cheer her heart out in the pep squad. The band went out and marched. They looked pretty good.

During third quarter the band and pep squad got a break. So we went down to talk to the girls. We found them together by the concession stand.

Stacie was the first to speak. "Hi guys. What did we look like? Tell the truth."

"You looked good," I said.

"You aren't just saying that are you?"

"No, I mean it."

"You were great, I watched you with binoculars," Robert told Stacie.

"Well, there was someone in the third row who..." Chase started to say.

I punched him. "Shut up!"

There was a little bit of laughter at this. "Do you want a coke?" I asked Rhonda.

"Sure," she said in a timid voice. She hadn't been very talkative but I hoped that would change.

We bought cokes for the girls and talked till the end of the third quarter. We went back up in the stands and watched the rest of the game. We made a comeback and won 21-14.

After the game we met the girls, and Rhonda and Robert's mom dropped us off at Pizza Hut. We went in and sat in a booth. We ordered two large pizzas. We talked a while and everybody began to loosen up. Now a funny thing happened that night. Now that I look back on it, it really doesn't seem that funny. But it was back then. It all had to do with a dairy product called cheese.

Chase was getting pretty rowdy and managed to knock a shaker of Parmesan cheese over sending grains of cheese flying all over everybody. We busted up laughing and then I yelled, "Cheese on your head!"

Robert, Rhonda, Stacie, and Chase stopped laughing and just stared at me. Where me and my sister come from this saying was meant as a cut down or a statement to show you had been cut down. Evidently they had never heard of it. Well, I thought I'd blown it, they thought I was weird.

"What? You've never heard that before?" my sister asked them. They continued to stare.

"It means you've been cut down," I said.

"Cheese on your head?" Stacie asked.

"Yea."

They still stared. I was just about to give up when they all busted out laughing. We laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. Pretty soon we went into hysterics and people started staring. For months after nobody could even mention cheese or we would bust up.

Stacie had to be in by 11:30 so she called her brother, who was home on leave from the Air Force, to pick us up. While we were waiting in the parking lot Chase pulled me over to the side.

"Don't plan on kissing Rhonda good night," he said to me.

“What are you talking about?”

“She’s not that kind of girl.”

“What do you mean ‘that kind of girl’?”

“I’m telling you man. I know what I’m talking about.”

“Yea? Well I think you’re crazy. We’ll see.”

Stacie’s brother came and picked us up. He dropped Rhonda and Robert off first. I got out to say good night to Rhonda.

“Well, I had a good time tonight,” I said.

“Me too,” she replied.

What now? I thought about what Chaz had said. Then I rejected it and let my instincts take over. I leaned my head over close to her’s and started to kiss her. She jerked her head back and ran inside. “Good night,” she said as she slammed the door behind her. So Chaz had been right. I had never encountered a girl like this before. It part fascinated me and part frustrated me. In the years to follow I made my life’s quest to kiss this girl. And as of the date of this writing it is a quest I’ve yet to fulfill. But I’ll work on it.

I walked back to the car with a blank expression on my face.

“What did I tell you?” Chase said.

I was to dumbfounded to answer. Stacie’s brother dropped us off last and Stacie didn’t say anything, as if she knew what I was thinking. I went to bed that night still trying to figure Rhonda out. Well, that was the first big date I had in New Boston.

In the weeks to follow I stuck close to Rhonda at school. Well I thought about it and thought about it and I decided enough time had passed. I was going to pop the question. One day after school I was lying on my parents bed talking to Rhonda on the phone. I thought that this was the perfect opportunity to approach the subject.

“Rhonda, I want to ask you something,” I said, “I really like you and I was kind of wondering if you would go with me?” There was a pause. I’d expected that. There was always a pause while the question sinks in. The silence continued. Something was wrong. This had never happened to me before. I’m not saying that women are dying to go with me, but every one I had asked before had said yes. I had to do something so I said, “Well, you can think about it and tell me later.”

There was another short pause and then she said, “Uh, O.K. Well, talk to you later.” She hung up the phone without listening to my good bye. I felt so stupid and embarrassed. What was she thinking? Maybe she did need a little time to think about it. She would probably give me the good news tomorrow. But she didn’t say anything about it the next day or the next two weeks for that matter.

I still hung around her at school and we still talked. Well, one day while Robert and I were sitting in P.E. (I had begun to see less and less of Chase. He was hanging around with a new guy. I kinda got the impression that he liked to break in the new guys.) As I was saying, Robert and I were talking and I told him that I asked Rhonda to go with me and what happened. I hadn’t told anyone yet, I was still a little embarrassed about it.

“Oh. The reminds me,” he said and pulled out a note from his back pocket, “This is from Rhonda.” He handed it to me and started to leave.

“Where are you going?”

“I think you’ll want to read that in private.”

I watched him walk down the stands and then looked at the note. It was folded into a plain square, not any fancy designs, like notes Rhonda had given to me before, it was just a plain square. Printed on the front was my name. This is probably what I’ve been waiting for. She was just too shy to tell me in person. But I wasn’t very convincing, even to myself. I opened the note

and read it. My fear was confirmed. I don't remember exactly what it said but it went something like this.

Lee, (not dear Lee, but just Lee)

I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but I've been thinking. Things aren't working out between us. I think you're a real nice guy but you've been hanging around me where ever I go and I really wish you wouldn't anymore. I hope we can still be friends.

There were other words to smooth over the punch but I can't remember them. It doesn't matter anyway, the basic message was there. Hit the road Jack! Robert was right. I did want to be alone. At that time I felt hurt and wished I'd never moved to New Boston. But as I look back upon it now, I guess I never would have known one of the best friends I ever had, if I hadn't received this note.

I didn't talk to anybody the rest of the day and went home in a sour mood. My mother, like most mothers probably do, could tell what happened without asking. She delivered that famous line that she tells me on these occasions.

"There's more fish in the sea," she said.

As stupid as this sounded, it was true, and the next fish I would catch was on somebody else's line. But that's another story for later.

I didn't eat much supper, but just went to my room to watch some T.V. Later on the telephone rang.

"Lee, it's for you," my mom yelled from the living room.

I went to the telephone and picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi," it was Robert, "Are you going to the pep rally tonight?" This was Thursday night and there was going to be a bonfire and pep rally on the practice field. I was going to go but I hadn't felt like it after school.

"I don't know man. I don't really feel like doing anything."

"Come on. You need to get out and I don't want to go by myself."

"What about Stacie?"

"She has to play in the band."

"All right," I said reluctantly.

"Good we'll be by to pick you up around seven."

I thought about riding in the same car as Rhonda. "I'll get my parents to take me. They have to take Shannon up there anyway."

"Oh. Yea. I guess so," Robert said as if remembering something obvious. "See ya later."

When my parents dropped my sister and I off at the field the fire was burning brightly. The band was warming up and the cheerleaders and pep squad were practicing. I saw Rhonda in the pep squad but she didn't see me. I looked away determined to forget about her.

I found Robert and we moved closer to the fire and watched the band and cheerleaders. About halfway through Robert saw Mr. Patton, the Geometry teacher, and said he had to ask him something about his homework. He disappeared into the crowd and I stood there alone. I wanted to look in the pep squad and find Rhonda but I fought the urge. Instead I moved around the fire so it would block my view of her.

I ended up standing next to Mike Cutsinger. He was the guy we picked up when I went to play miniature golf with Robert back at the first of school. "How's it going?" he asked me.

"All right I guess," I said.

"How are you liking New Boston so far?"

"It has it's good points," and as an after thought I added, "And it's bad."

Mike gave me a questioning look. For some unknown reason I felt like I could trust this guy. I wanted to spill my guts to him, so I reached in my back pocket and fished out the note from Rhonda and handed it to him. He read it then folded it up and handed it back to me. "It happens to the best of us. You can't live with 'em but you can't live without 'em."

I started laughing and the ice was broken. We talked a while about the strange things the opposite sex do. I felt a little better and actually began to forget about this afternoon. When the pep rally was over Robert and Stacie came over to talk to us.

I looked at Stacie and could tell she knew what happened. I took a quick glance to where Rhonda was standing with some girls in the pep squad. She was looking straight at me. I jerked my head back and looked at Stacie.

"Hi, guys," she said to us.

"Hi," Mike and I said together.

"How are you doing?" she asked me.

"O.K. I guess."

"Rhonda is my best friend but I want to tell you that I don't think what she did to you was very nice."

"Thank you."

"Well, I have to go, see you tomorrow at school."

We all said good bye to her and then my parents came to get me and my sister and we left.

The next day at school Robert and I were eating at a table by ourselves. Rhonda and Stacie didn't sit with us for some reason we could all guess. Mike came in and got his tray, then joined us. We said our hellos and broke into lunch room conversation.

"Robert, my dad bought me a Commodore 64 computer last night while we were at the pep rally," Robert and I were both big on computers and we thought Commodores were the best around, "It really surprised me," I said.

"Aw man your lucky. Can I come over and take a look at it?" Robert asked.

"Sure."

"How did you get your parents to get you one?" Mike asked.

"I think Mr. Dempsey had something to do with it." Mr. Dempsey was my Biology teacher but was also the computer teacher. He was really big on Commodores. "I think he talked to them at the last football game." Just then the bell rang and Robert and I went to P.E. Mike had another class.

Later that afternoon Robert and I were sitting in my living room hooking up the computer when the doorbell rang. I went to answer it and it was Mike.

"Do you mind if I come in and take a look at your computer?"

"No. Come on in. How did you know where I lived?"

"I called information," he said and walked into the living room.

Oh. Pretty resourceful I thought.

"It's almost ready," Robert reported.

We finished hooking up the connections and were ready for the trial run. "Here it goes," I said and flipped the switch.

The display screen came up on the T.V. We just looked at it for a while. Boy, this was great. "I played around with my uncle's 64 before so I know how to do a few things," I told them. I set about making colors flow across the screen. "You hold down this button and press..." The screen went blank. "Who cut off the power?"

"Nobody," Mike replied. A sick feeling began to develop in my stomach. We went over all the connections again and again and we couldn't find what was wrong with it. Finally, I picked it up and shook it a little. A tiny screw fell out of a port in the back.

Mike picked it up and examined it. "This must have caused a short. I wonder how it got in there?"

A short? Must've been. I couldn't think of anything else. Besides, that's what they always said in the movies. Man, I was mad! I had waited all day for this. I decided to tell my dad when he got home.

"Well, I've got to get home," Mike said.

"You can use my phone to call your mom."

"Oh, I've got a bike."

We went outside and I expected to see Mike hop on his ten speed. Well, it wasn't quite a ten speed. It was a little more than a mopehead but not big as a motorcycle. It was more than I had in the department of transportation, so I was impressed.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"My mom bought it for me. She has one just like it."

"Why don't you let me try it out sometime?"

"O.K. I will. Well, I better be moving on." He got on the bike and turned the key. He pressed a little button and the bike started up. Then he was going down the street waving good bye.

Robert's mom came and got him later. I told my dad about the computer when he got home from work and we went and exchanged it for another one. That weekend Robert, Mike and I got back together and had a great time. Mike liked my computer so much that he bought one. We were all going to be good friends, but not just yet. Remember the fish on another line? Well, here's the story.

The next week at school I was sitting in History with Stacie. We were suppose to be filling out study sheets, but no one ever did them. We usually just talked.

"Our Church is having this big haunted house for Halloween and then a hay ride after it. Robert and Mike are working in it. Do you want to come?" Stacie asked me.

"Is Rhonda going to be there?" This was a question I asked often when I was asked to go somewhere.

"You have to stop planning your movements around where Rhonda is going to be. It's ruining your social life."

I thought about it. I did love hay rides. "O.K. But only if you stick close to me. I don't know many people from your church."

"You got a deal. It's this Saturday night. Why don't you ask your sister to come too?"

"O.K."

Saturday night rolled around and I found myself standing in a church parking lot full of strange people. I had seen some of them at school, but I didn't really know them. My sister and I stood there not knowing what to do. Finally Stacie's mom drove up and let her out. She came over to us and we got on that big bus of theirs. It took us to a field on the edge of some woods outside of town.

It was dark now and they had a fire burning. Stacie, Shannon, and I sat down around some trees to wait for the haunted house to open. We talked for awhile and for some reason, don't ask me why, I started to feel attracted to Stacie. I knew this was no good. She was going with Robert, and I had never stolen a girl from any other guy, much less my best friend. I tried to push the thought away but I couldn't help the feeling.

Well, we talked so long that we were the last ones to go through the haunted house, it was more like haunted woods but it still had all the things a house did. Eyeballs in a dish, dismembered body parts, and somebody came at us with a chain saw. Stacie screamed and grabbed my arm. She held on tight the whole way through. What would Robert say if he saw us now?

When everybody had went through Mike and Robert came over to join us. So did Rhonda. Robert walked over to stand close to Stacie. I felt a pang of jealousy in my stomach. Why was I feeling like this? I had no right to, but I couldn't help it.

"How'd you like the chain saw? Mike asked.

"That was you?" I asked.

Stacie punched him in the arm. "You scared me to death!"

"Yea, I could see that." Mike gave me a weird look as if accusing me of something.

Mike, Shannon, Stacie, Robert, Rhonda, a guy from school named Marty Watkins, and I piled into the back of a wagon. I noticed that people started to pair off and sit together. Mike and, surprisingly, my sister sat together, Robert and Stacie, and although they weren't together Rhonda was sitting with Marty. I felt another wave of jealousy about this, but that was normal. Well, as you might have guessed by now, I was by myself. I really felt stupid so I moved over and sat with Robert and Stacie. I knew I was invading their privacy but I didn't want to be alone.

The hay ride was one of the best times I've ever had. We drove slowly down back roads for about three hours. During that time hay fights broke out, people fell off the wagon, and other things I'll leave to your imagination. I mostly talked to Stacie and had a great time doing it.

As all good things do, the hay ride came to an end. I really had a great time. Shannon mentioned that Mike was a nice guy and I wondered if something might be blossoming between them.

When Monday morning came I couldn't wait to go to school. I wanted to see Stacie. I came into History class and saw her. We talked for a while about the hay ride and how Mike might have the hots for my sister, then class began. Today, Mr. Matt was going to lecture so we couldn't talk. I felt real disappointed about that. I wanted to talk to Stacie longer. I was half-heartedly listening to the lecture when a note sailed over my shoulder and landed on the desk. On the front it said:

To: Lee

From: Stacie

I opened it up and read it:

Lee,

I have a problem. Can you help me solve it?

A problem? This was interesting, so I wrote:

Sure. What is it?

I folded the note back up and tossed it over my shoulder. A few minutes later it came back.

As you know Robert and I are going together. I like him a lot, but I kinda like this other guy too. What should I do?

Oh no! Could this be leading where I think it was? No, it couldn't be. She was probably in love with some Senior. What should I say? I thought for a minute and then wrote:

What does your heart say?

This time she kept the note for a long time and I was wondering if she was going to answer when the note came back.

Lee, I've never been this forward with anybody before but I have to tell you the truth. The other guy is you and my heart is telling me to go for it.

I couldn't believe what I was reading. I had no idea that she felt the same about me. What was I going to do? I thought about it for a while and decided to take my own advice. I listened to my heart.

I'm glad that you feel this way because I feel the same. I don't know what to say or just what to do about this. I really felt something special Saturday night when we were talking.

I couldn't think of anything else to say so I gave the note back to her. She wrote for a few seconds then gave it back.

I felt the same way Saturday night. Let's talk about this during activity period.

I sat through the rest of class anticipating activity period. When the time finally came Stacie and I stayed in the classroom. We went over in the corner to talk.

"What are we going to do?" I asked her.

"I don't know. I don't want to hurt Robert's feelings."

"Neither do I, but I can't deny my feelings for you."

"I'll write Robert a note, he'll understand."

I wondered if that note was going to sound like the one Rhonda gave to me. I was condemning Robert to the same hurt I had just experienced! I almost called the whole thing off but something inside me overrode that decision and instead I said, "I hope he will understand. I'll call you after school to see how things went."

"O.K.," she said and went back to her desk and wrote the note. I wanted to know what she said but I didn't ask.

When she was finished we walked out to the back steps where we usually hung around during activity period. Mike, Robert, and Rhonda were standing there talking. We joined them and I had the strange feeling that they could see right through me, but there was no way they could know.

There was only a few minutes left to activity period and the bell soon rang. Stacie handed Robert the note and quickly went to her next class. I didn't waste anytime getting out of there either.

I couldn't concentrate during Geometry. I had so many different feelings in me. Glad about Stacie liking me and worried about what I was doing to my best friend. The two feelings were opposing each other and tearing me up in the process.

When it was time for lunch I hurried to the cafeteria to eat and get out before Robert had a chance to see me. As luck would have it the line was pretty long and I had to wait a while before I got a tray. I went to an empty table and ate with my head down. I didn't want to see if he was standing in line. Somebody sat their tray down beside me and I assumed it was Mike. I looked up and saw that it was Robert. I half expected him to slam his fist in my face or at least threaten to kill me. That's what I would have done, but he just said hi and started to eat. Mike joined us later and he and Robert broke into casual conversation. Robert acted like nothing had happened. I couldn't take it anymore, I butted in and said, "Robert, didn't you read the note from Stacie?"

“Yes.”

“And we’re still friends?”

“Yes.”

“Aren’t you mad?”

“I’m not sure what I feel right now.” He got up and left. I couldn’t believe this. Of all the reactions I had foreseen this was definitely not one of them. I have to say that it really takes a special kind of person to take a stab in the back by someone he trusted and still want to be friends. Although we would never be as close as we were for a very long time, we still hung around together.

“What’s going on?” Mike asked me.

I told him the story and for once he didn’t have anything to say about it. He was surprised things had developed this far. I looked over to where Stacie was sitting with Rhonda. She was looking at me with a questioning look and I gave her a thumbs up. She smiled at me then turned and explained things to Rhonda. She didn’t look too happy when Stacie finished talking. She got up and started for the door. On her way out she gave me a look that could kill. I couldn’t tell if she was mad about what I did to Robert or if she was mad because I was interested in her best friend. If it was the latter, I didn’t know why she would feel that way. She was the one who had cut the strings between us.

Well, things were in a mess but in a few weeks things started to smooth over. I tried to forget about being burned by Rhonda and Robert never mentioned getting burned by Stacie. During this time I got to know Stacie better. I had really fallen for her. Once I was riding my bike around town and I heard a horn honk. I looked around and it was Stacie and her Dad in their car. I wave at Stacie and wasn’t looking where I was going and slipped off in a ditch. My quick reflexes kept me from crashing and I managed to get the bike back on the road. I looked behind me to see if Stacie was watching and there she was smiling at me. BOOM! The next thing I knew I was wrapped around a stop sign. Stacie’s dad pulled the car over. I could see him laughing. This was embarrassing! Stacie rolled the window down and asked if I was all right.

“Yea, I’m O.K.,” I told her, “I’ll call you tonight.” her dad drove on.

Mike was also taking the time to get to know Shannon better and we double dated a couple of times. Mike and I really became good friends. Where you saw one, you saw the other. Every weekend one of us would spend the night with the other. As time went on something that I call “The Group” formed. Five friends; Rhonda, Robert, Stacie, Mike, and I; who did everything together. I began to think in terms of what the group would do. I never would even consider doing anything unless a majority of the group was doing it. This is how things were and I still have plenty of tales to tell about this group.

One such tale bears a resemblance to a period in American History called the Boston Tea Party. Well, this is the story of the New Boston Tea Party.

One day the group was sitting at the table at lunch time. There was also a girl named Lisa Cambell sitting with us. She had started to hang around us at school. Her dad was really strict so she never got to do anything with us when we weren’t at school. So I guess you could call her a part time member in our little social club.

Anyway, we were eating lunch when Stacie said, “Hey, watch this.” She took a hold of her tea glass, which was half filled, and suddenly flipped it over so fast that the tea stayed in the glass. Now the glass was sitting there half full of tea, but upside down. “Byron taught me. There’s no way to get the glass with out spilling the tea. That is, unless you turn the whole table over.”

We all busted up laughing. Lisa grabbed her glass and tried to flip it over. She was too slow and tea went every where. That just made us laugh all the harder. I didn’t have a glass (I hated their tea) or I would have tried it myself.

The next day at lunch we all got tea and tried our hand at flipping, with the exception of Robert, he didn't think it was a very good idea. He probably knew something all of us weren't thinking of. We all had varied degrees of success, but by the middle of next week we had gotten pretty good at it. I actually looked forward to flipping my tea at lunch and went without my milk so I could do it. We dubbed ourselves the New Boston Tea Party.

One day, for the first time, everybody managed to get their glasses over without spilling any tea. It was a work of art. Five glasses in a circle, all upside down with tea in them. Nobody even thought of how the people that cleaned up were taking this. Believe me, we didn't go unnoticed.

That day in P.E. Robert and I were playing basketball when Coach Dooley came over to us and said, "The Principal wants to see you two in his office."

When we walked into the office we saw Mike, Stacie, Rhonda, and Lisa standing there. I knew immediately why we were here. Rhonda and Lisa looked like they were going to cry.

Mr. Westfall came out of his personal office. He had a grim look on his face. "Good. You're all here, come in."

We all crowded in to his small office.

"It looks like we have a small problem here. It seems that someone is going around turning full tea glasses over and making it pretty hard to clean up. Before we talk this thing through I want to know if all of you were involved in this. I have witnesses, so think about it."

"Robert wasn't," the other five of us said together.

"Robert, go on back to class." Robert turned and left. As he was closing the door behind him he gave us a good luck look.

Mr. Westfall turned back to the remaining culprits. "Now, what should we do about this?" The fair thing to do is make all of you clean the cafeteria for the rest of the year."

Oh this was great! I could hardly stand eating that slop much less cleaning it up.

He continued, "But your primary reason for coming to school is to learn and that would interfere with your learning time. I've never had trouble out of any of you before and I've had to deal with much worse, so I think three days of detention will suffice. But I don't want to see any of you in here again unless it's on a more positive note."

We got off easy I thought. Detention was nothing but staying 30 minutes after school in a room and doing your homework. Lisa looked like she would have rather cleaned the cafeteria. I later found out why. Her father would kill her if he knew about it. Mr. Westfall wrote out the slips and handed one to each of us. He told us to report tomorrow and then ushered us out of his office.

The detention was no sweat. It actually helped me get more homework done. Lisa managed to evade her father's wrath by serving her detention at lunch time for people who rode busses. She didn't ride a bus, but I think a few strings were pulled.

So the New Boston Tea Party was disbanded, but ever now and then when enough of us get together and we're in a crazy mood, we'll perform the sacred ritual for the good ole times.

Stacie and I had been going together for a while now and everything seemed to be going fine. But, as I've said before, all good things must come to an end. My relationship with Stacie could be compared to a roller coaster. All ups and downs. So far we had been going up that first big hill but now we were at the top and about to plunge straight down.

The first trouble started when Stacie asked me if I wanted to go with her church to College Day at East Texas Baptist College in Marshall. The rest of the group was going and I would have a chance to visit my hometown, so I said sure.

On the bus trip down there we sat together and had a pretty good time. When we got there we listened to all the lectures and then we had free time to go where we wanted to. Of course, Robert, Mike, and I wanted to check out the computers. Stacie and Rhonda didn't find

them that interesting so we decided just to meet at the basketball game that the college was having later.

We spent a couple of hours in the computer room and had a blast! Today was working out pretty good and there wasn't a better way to top it off than watching a basketball game with my girl. Needless to say I was in very high spirits when we went to meet the girls. They were waiting outside with Byron, their youth leader.

"Hi," I said to Stacie.

"Hi," she said back to me in a tone that made me suspect something was wrong. I passed it off determined to have a good time.

We all went up in the stands to watch the game. The game started and I got real excited (I love basketball games.) Stacie didn't seem to be having a good time. She would usually be yelling and screaming right along with me.

"What's wrong?" I asked her.

"Nothing," she replied, but a few minutes later she whispered something in Rhonda's ear and they both got up and went to the top of the stands.

I thought maybe they had something private to talk about and would be back down in a minute. But they didn't come back down and I started to wonder if I was going to go through the same thing all over again.

Well I wasn't giving up without a fight. When the game was over we started to get back on the bus for the trip home. I intended to talk to Stacie on the way back and find out what the deal was, but as I started to sit down next to her she said, "Lee, I'd rather sit by Rhonda."

I was dumbfounded. I couldn't even reply. I just stared at her for a few minutes and then moved back to sit with Mike, Robert, and Clint Jordan. So I was getting burned again. I couldn't believe it. Two times in less than two months!

I put my head in my hands and tried to sort things out. Anger started welling up inside me and when I couldn't take it anymore I started pounding the seat in front of me with my fist.

Mike grabbed my hand. "Cool it, man."

I looked up and saw that everybody was looking at me. Everybody except Stacie, she knew what was wrong.

"What did I do wrong?" I said to nobody in particular. "Do I look like someone who wants to be burned? Are all women in New Boston like this?" I was saying these things pretty loud and I'm sure Stacie could hear me. She didn't offer me any answers so I turned to Mike and asked, "What's the deal with her, man?"

"I don't know. She just gets in these kinds of moods every now and then."

"So just because she gets in a bad mood it's adios Lee?"

"I can't explain her. It's like she's unstable when it comes to relationships with men."

"That's the understatement of the year," I said sarcastically.

I rode the rest of the way in silence and when we got home Stacie didn't say a word to me. She just got in her mother's car and rode away.

Next Monday I went to school not knowing what to expect. As I was walking to first period I saw Stacie walking past me.

"Hi," she said to me in a cheerful voice.

"Uh, hi," I said shocked.

"See you in History."

I watched her walk down the hallway and I wondered how a person could change moods so fast. That was all I could think of in Typing and my timed writings were terrible.

I got into History as fast as I could so I'd have a chance to talk to Stacie.

"Hi," she said, "First of all I want to apologize for the way I acted Saturday. You didn't do anything to upset me. I can't explain it I was just in a weird mood."

"Couldn't you talk to me? Nothing hurts more than being shut out."

“I know I should have talked to you about it, but I just didn’t. How about from now on we promise to talk to each other when we have a problem? We can forget Saturday ever happened.”

I sat there wondering what to say when Mr. Matt came in and told us to turn around and shut up. Stacie turned around. While I was sitting there hashing things out in my mind she tossed a note onto my desk. I opened it up and then smiled. In big red bold letters were the words:

I LOVE YOU!

That did it! I loved her too. I was sure of that. Saturday was forgotten and things got back to normal, at least for about a week.

The next burn came when Stacie got jealous. You may be wondering what’s so unusual about this. Girls get jealous of other girls all the time, right? Well, Stacie wasn’t jealous of another girl, she happened to be jealous of my computer.

I’ll admit that I spent a lot of time working on my computer, but no more time than she spent at band.

The strange thing about this is I had no idea that she thought this way. She just erupted like a volcano one day after school. We were walking down the hall toward her locker when she said, “Are we going to walk home?” One of our favorite pastimes had been walking home together.

“No, me and Mike are going to copy some programs from Mr. Dempsey,” I told her.

She just stopped and gave me a sad puppy look.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

Tears welled up in her eyes and she screamed at me, “You love that computer more than you love me! We might as well just forget it!”

Before I could say anything she ran out the door. I was blown away! What was this girl’s problem? Well, I guess this was it and I’m not too sure it’s such a bad thing. I didn’t need this kind of jerking around. About two days later Stacie came back to me saying she was sorry and that we could work things out. I fell prey to her charm again and we got back together.

There were other break-ups and get back togethers. I can’t remember them all but I do remember the last one.

There’s nothing really interesting about it. She just walked up to me one day and said that she wanted to break up. I had gotten used to this so I just said O.K. I later found out from Rhonda that she liked some Senior. Rhonda had been my ear to bend and my shoulder to cry on during my affairs with Stacie and we had gotten to be close friends. I guess I still felt something for her deep down inside but I didn’t realize it. Anyway, when I heard this I was pissed. Well, I knew how to fix her, just wait till she came crawling back to me this time.

A couple of weeks passed and I began to think she really meant it this time. But one day she wrote me a note saying that she was lonely and she wanted me back. I could feel the charm in the note but I stuck to my guns. I wrote her back and told her I didn’t think it was such a good idea. She wasn’t expecting this and she never wrote back. Instead she waited until after class and confronted me personally.

“Don’t you think we could work it out?” she asked me.

“No I don’t. That’s what you always say.”

“But it’s different this time.”

“Sure it is.”

“But I love you.”

I couldn't take anymore of this. I had to end it. "You may love me now but what about tomorrow? You change moods faster than a chameleon changes color. I've got your number. It's love 'em and leave 'em and I can't take it anymore!"

By the time I'd finished I was yelling at her. I could see it hurt her but I couldn't help it. She burst out in tears and ran away. That was the end of Stacie and I, except for one other time, but that's further down the line and I'll get to it in due time.

Incidentally, my sister broke up with Mike not too long after. I don't know, it must have been the time of year for burns.

In a few weeks the whole thing blew over. Stacie and I began acting civil to each other again and we had an understanding that we would just be friends.

Nothing really interesting happened in the month to follow. We went to school, we went to the movies, and we went to football games. Our football team didn't get into the playoffs but did have a winning season, so we were satisfied. Everything we did, we did as a group. They were some great times.

Thanksgiving rolled around and my family went to Marshall for our family get together. We went out to my father's parent's house for the feast. There were all kinds of food. Turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes, corn, and chocolate pies for dessert. As much as I loved Thanksgiving dinner at my grandparents, all I really wanted to do was to get back to New Boston and my friends. I'd really had a change of attitude since we first left for New Boston.

Well, we finally came back and I felt more at ease. New Boston really had a hold on me. The next few weeks passed and that day that everybody was waiting for finally came. It was the last day before Christmas vacation. Actually, it wasn't the last day for everybody. The school had a system that said if you hadn't missed too much school and your grades were good, you only had to take one semester exam and didn't have to go the extra day for tests. You also got to choose which exam to take, as long as it wasn't P.E. or Homemaking or something of that nature.

I had managed to keep my grades up and not miss too much school so I only had to take one. I chose Biology because it was my best subject. Mike and Stacie chose Algebra II and Rhonda chose Geometry. I thought they were crazy to choose math but they thought it was easy. Robert chose Biology also, at least there was on other sensible person in this group.

That morning we were all hanging around before class started. We were all feeling pretty nervous. The bell finally rang and we all went to our classes. All my nervousness about this test was gone as soon as I looked at it. It was all multiple choice. This was going to be a breeze. I had a kind of talent for Biology. We had two hours to finish the test but I did it in 45 minutes. We had to stay the whole time so I spent the rest talking computers with Mr. Dempsey and he gave me some programs.

When the two hours were up they released us to go home. I met Stacie and Rhonda in the hall.

"How'd you do?" I asked them.

"It was easy," Stacie said.

"Not as good as I wanted to, but I know I passed," Rhonda said, "How'd you do?"

"I blew it away!"

Robert walked up and reported that he did good on his test also.

"Hey, where's Mike?" I asked.

"He had to go to the counselors office," Stacie said.

"Oh no. I hope he didn't flunk his test."

We walked to the counselor's office and saw Mike coming out of the door.

"What's the deal?" I asked him.

"Guess what?"

"What?"

“I got my schedule changed for next semester. I have P.E. and Biology with you now.”
“All right!” I yelled and we promptly executed a high five and got the Christmas vacation off to a start.

I spend the rest of the day at home trying out those programs Mr. Dempsey gave me. When my sister got home from school I couldn't resist teasing her.

“Ah ha. You have to go to school tomorrow and I don't,” I chanted at her.

“Shut up!” she yelled back at me. I continued to taunt her until we got physical and then my mom put a stop to it. This may sound mean, but my sister and I were happier when we were fighting.

I stayed up late that night and watched some movies on HBO. When I finally went to bed I laid there thinking of how long I would sleep tomorrow. With that thought I drifted off to sleep.

The next thing I knew I was being rudely shaken awake. When I got my eyes open I saw a hideous creature hovering over me, OH NO!, wait, it was only my sister (I must have still been dreaming.) I glanced at the clock and saw that it was 7:00 in the morning.

“Ah ha! I don't have to go to school today!” my sister was yelling at me.

“What are you talking about?”

“Why don't you take a look out the window.”

I got up and pulled the curtains back. It looked like God had dropped a big white blanket on the world. There was at least 3 inches of snow on the ground and it was still coming down.

“School's been canceled today,” my sister said.

“You little scum bucket,” I said, “You lucked out!” I threw my pillow at her and she ran out of the room.

Now snow in Texas is a rare thing. It snows maybe once in every three winters and when it does it's usually not very much. This was a literal blizzard in Texas standards. It was hard to be in a bad mood and I soon forgot all about my sister not having school. After all, I didn't have it either and I planned on making the most out of it.

I took a shower and ate some breakfast, then I got all dressed up to go outside. I heard the doorbell ring and I went to answer it. When I opened the door I was pelted with a million snowballs. When I recovered from the assault I looked up and saw Stacie, Rhonda, and some other girl standing there. In the back of my mind I knew I had seen her before. Then it came to me, she was Stacie's little sister. I had seen her briefly before when I had picked Stacie up for a date. Her name was Shannon, the same as my sister's. This can tend to get confusing so from now on when I say Shannon I'm referring to Stacie's sister and I'll just refer to my sister by saying sister.

I invited them in, watching Shannon as she walked into my living room. She was a year younger than my sister was, so that put her in the seventh grade. But I'm telling you she looked older than any of the other girls here.

“I don't know if you've met before but if not this is my sister, Shannon,” Stacie said to me.

“Hi,” I said to Shannon.

“Hi,” she replied.

“What are you guys up to?” I asked.

“I spent the night with Stacie last night and we're going to build a snowman. We thought you and your sister might want to help us,” Rhonda told me.

“Sure. I'll ask my mom.”

I asked and she said all right so we walked back down to Stacie's house. I couldn't keep my eyes off Shannon and I think she knew it. When we got to her house we were so cold that we decided to go inside and drink some hot chocolate. When we thawed out we went back out to build the snowman.

We went outside and Stacie started rolling up snow for the head. I couldn't resist. I silently packed a snowball and then said, "Hey, Stacie!"

"What?" she said and turned around. The snowball hit her dead in the face. Soon we were all throwing snowballs at each other.

"Stop!" Stacie yelled. We ceased our assaults. "I know what we can do. We can go into the field next to my house and have a war with teams."

"O.K." Shannon said, "Me and Lee can be on a team. We'll go hide and you try to find us." She took off toward the field. Stacie shot me a questioning look but didn't say anything so I went after her.

When I caught up with her I said, "Where are we going to hide?"

"I know the perfect place in some bushes by that pond over there." We came up on the pond and tried to cross it, but when I put my foot on the ice it fell through.

"We better go around," I said. She led me around the other side to this grove of bushes. In the middle was a little clear area where two people could fit nicely.

I retraced our steps from the pond trying to cover them up as good as I could and then we climbed in.

"They'll never find us in here," she said.

"Good!" I said not thinking about what I was saying. She just laughed and looked at me. I looked back and we just stared at each other for a while. Then there it was. That signal that goes off in my head when I'm really attracted to someone. And I was definitely attracted to Shannon. I know what you're thinking. I was in tenth grade and she was in seventh. I was three years older than she was. I knew this in the back of my head but I really didn't care at the moment. It had been quite a while since Stacie and I had been an item and during that time I had hit a dry spell. It was nice to have that feeling again and I didn't care how old she was.

While I was contemplating this I heard my sister yell, "I found them!" And soon we were under attack. We defended our fortress quite well but in the end we were surrounded. We changed places several times playing hide and seek war style until we got tired. On our way back to the house Shannon scooped up a hat full of snow and poured it down the back of my shirt.

"Ahhhhhh!" I yelled, "I'll get you!" I grabbed her around the waist and spun her around until we were both rolling in the snow. We were covered from head to toe and I was laughing so hard that I was crying. I looked up and saw Stacie standing there with the biggest snowball I'd ever seen. She had a look on her face that could kill. Before I could do anything she let that nuclear bomb fly and it smacked me right in the face. Stacie still won't admit to this, but I think she put a big rock in the middle of that snowball. I was wearing my glasses that day because I was afraid I might lose a contact and when that sucker hit me it broke my glasses right down the middle.

"Look what you did!" I yelled at her.

"Oh I'm sorry, are you O.K.?" she asked, but there was a satisfied look on her face.

"I'm all right, but I can't see."

"That's all right," Shannon said, "I'll be your eyes." She took my arm and led me inside.

We watched some TV for awhile and drank more hot chocolate. Stacie, Rhonda, and my sister decided that they were going back out to build the snowman and asked us if we wanted to go.

"No," I said, "I think we'll stay in here where it's warm."

Stacie didn't like this a bit. "You panny waste!" She had been calling me this a lot lately. Don't ask me what it means.

They went out to build the snowman and we stayed inside talking and doing crazy things like daring each other to run out in the snow bare footed, which we did. It was one of the best times I'd ever had. And to this day whenever I see a snowfall I'll always think of the day that Shannon and I met.

I didn't want to go home but my mom had said not to be late, so around 5:00 me and my sister started for home.

"Good bye," I said to Shannon.

"Hey, I'm going to the skating rink tomorrow night. Why don't you meet me there?" she asked me.

"All right!"

On the way back home my sister spoke up. "What's the deal with Shannon?"

"No deal"

"Are you kidding me? Anybody could tell that you two were flirting with each other."

"So?"

"She's in the seventh grade!"

"I know, but I don't care."

"Stacie doesn't like this at all."

"I don't care if she does or doesn't. It doesn't have anything to do with her." I felt good knowing that Stacie was jealous but I want you to know that I was not using Shannon to get back at Stacie.

Later that night I was watching TV when the phone rang. I picked it up and said hello.

"What do you think you're doing?" It was Stacie.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the advances you're making on my little sister."

"I'm not making any advances. We just enjoy each other's company."

"Sure. Rolling around in the snow with her is enjoying her company?"

"I guess you could say it is."

"You panny waste!"

"Why are you so worried about it?"

"I'm just trying to protect my little sister."

"Your little sister ain't so little. She can take care of herself. Besides she seems a lot more mature than some people I know." I said this in an accusing tone and I heard a click on the other end. Well, that was fine with me, I didn't want to talk to her anyway. On my way back to my room I passed my sister's room and saw her lying in the bed.

"What are you doing in bed at 7:00 at night?" I asked her.

"I don't feel good."

"You wimp!"

"Get out of here," she yelled, so I did.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of a conversation between my mom and sister.

"What's wrong with you?" my mom was asking.

"My head hurts and I feel hot," my sister said.

"What's this on your face. Let me see that... Oh my gosh! You have chicken pox!"

Chicken pox? No way, I must have still been dreaming. I jumped out of bed and ran to her room. She was sitting on the bed with her shirt pulled up enough to expose her belly. All over her midsection were little red sores. I started laughing at her.

"Ah ha! You've got chicken pox during Christmas vacation!"

"You better shut up," my mom said, "You've never had them either and you'll probably catch them now."

Oh. I hadn't thought of that. I made a crucifix sign with my fingers and backed out of the room. I didn't want the chicken pox and I decided then and there that I wasn't going to get them. I thought if I persuaded myself hard enough that I wouldn't get them. Mind over matter. Did it work? You'll find out later.

I turned my thoughts to more pleasant things. Mainly going to the skating rink tonight and seeing Shannon.

When I got there I saw her out on the floor skating. She was absolutely beautiful, moving around the floor, skating backwards, spinning around. She was an excellent skater and I was a little embarrassed. I was doing good just to stay up and be heading in the right direction. She came over to me while I was putting on my skates.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi, you’re a great skater,” I replied.

“Do you want to go skate?”

“I guess so, but I’ll make a fool out of myself.”

“Oh no you won’t. Come on!” She took my hand and led me out onto the floor. I managed to get going and soon we were both flying around the rink. I noticed that sitting at a table were Stacie, Rhonda, Mike, and Robert. After a couple of songs we went over to join them. I told them about my sister having chicken pox and they were as surprised as I was. Stacie didn’t have much to say at all.

“Mike, conference time!” I said. We got up and went over by the video games.

“What’s up?” he asked me.

“I think I like Shannon.” Mike and I often had these conferences and I always asked his advice before I made a major decision.

I noticed that something was going on between you two. What’s the story?”

I told him all about yesterday. “What do you think?”

“Are you using her to get back at Stacie?”

“I know that’s what it looks like, but I’m not.”

“Then I don’t see any problem. I think you should go for it. Shannon is a nice girl.”

“Stacie’s not taking this too well.”

“Yea, she told us you were hitting on her little sister.”

“Look at her man. Does she look like a little seventh grader to you?” She was back on the floor skating her heart out.

“No she doesn’t. Stacie will probably get over it.”

She’ll have to, I thought as I joined Shannon on the floor. We skated on into the night and had a great time. I went home feeling really good and as I slept that night my dreams were filled with fantasies about Shannon and I.

I didn’t see Shannon for the next few days and every time I called, Stacie answered and said she couldn’t come to the phone. I suspected something suspicious but what could I do? She couldn’t keep us apart forever.

That Tuesday was my sixteenth birthday and when I got up that morning my mom had fixed me a big birthday breakfast. After we ate she brought out a chocolate birthday cake and we pigged out on that for a while. Then I opened my present. It was a gold chain and I liked it a lot.

Now a sixteenth birthday is special. It means you’re growing up but it also means your old enough to drive, if you take the test. I was so nervous that I didn’t know if I wanted to take it or not today.

“Are you going to take the test today?” my mom asked me.

“I don’t know. Do you think they’ll give it with the snow and all?” Actually it hadn’t snowed in two days but there was still ice everywhere.

“There’s one way to find out.” Before I could protest she picked up the phone and dialed the driver license office. She spoke for a few minutes then hung up.

“He said he would give it to you if you come before 12:00.”

It was almost 11:00 now. That didn’t give me any time to decide. It was now or never. “All right,” I said reluctantly. I got dressed and my dad drove me down there in our big yellow station wagon. What a car to take the test in! But it was better than the old stick shift truck we had. We pulled up to the courthouse and got out and went to the office. I could feel my stomach knotting up.

Inside there was a lady clerk and a state trooper. The state trooper was a big man and he looked meaner than a bear. I was scared to death.

“Do you have your driver’s ed certificate?” the clerk asked me.

“Uh... Y-yes,” I said handing her the slip of paper. My hand was obviously shaking.

“O.K.,” the state trooper said, “Let’s go.”

I didn’t want to go but I made my feet move. We went out to the car.

“O.K. Get in the car and roll down your window, then do everything I say,” he said.

I got in and rolled down the window.

“Left turn signal.”

Left turn signal? What was that? I couldn’t think, my mind was blank. Then I delved into the vast knowledge I received while in driver’s education. Oh, left turn signal. I managed to get it turned on.

“Right.”

I got that one right too. We proceeded through the rest of the checks and everything went all right. Then he got in the car.

“Start up the car.”

I started to turn the key but I thought I was forgetting something. Then I had it, the seat belt. I reached up and pulled it across me then buckled it. I looked over at him and he just stared back. I pushed down on the gas a little and turned the key. The car started up.

“Back up and go left.”

I put her in reverse and slowly backed up, then I shifted to drive and went to the left. There was a stop sign up ahead and I started to slow down.

“Go right here.”

I stopped ever so slightly and put on my right turn signal, then proceeded to the right. We went all though these roads and I was doing pretty good. I started to calm down and thought that maybe he wouldn’t make me parallel park. But as fate would have it, that didn’t happen. We turned down a road and there was the monster. Two yellow poles that I was suppose to get my car between.

“Parallel park between the poles,” he said.

Oh my God. How was I going to get this big thing in there? I pulled up beside the poles and put the car in reverse. I slowly maneuvered the car between the poles until I thought it was in there pretty good. Then I remembered that my cousin had told me she failed the parallel parking because she didn’t back up far enough. So I let off the brake a little to back up. BOOM! I hit the back pole and knocked it over. I almost died. That was it, I had blown it now.

“Just pull out,” he said to me. I put the car in drive and pulled out. We circled the courthouse then parked. I looked in the mirror and saw that my face looked like death warmed over. How would I face my friends now that I had failed the driver’s test?

“You passed,” he said to me.

“What?” I asked surprised.

“Yes. You only messed up on parallel parking and that’s not enough to fail you.”

All right! I couldn’t believe it. We went inside and I got my picture taken. I signed all the forms and the clerk wrote me out a temporary license until my permanent one came in the mail.

My dad let me drive home but I had done that before. Now I could drive myself and I wanted to. I convinced my dad to let me have the car and I drove over to Mike’s and picked him up. We drove around all night cruising the main route which started at the Triple T parking lot, down by Wal-Mart, up and around Pizza Hut, and back again with occasional stops at the Triple T parking lot to talk to someone.

Later that night I tried to call Shannon but Stacie answered. “May I speak to Shannon please?” I asked.

“She’s taking a shower,” Stacie said.

Sure I thought and then I thought of something I could say to her.

“Guess what? I got my license today.” I said this in a mocking tone because Stacie had turned 16 in November and she still hadn’t got her license. I was always teasing her about it saying she was scared.

“That’s nice,” she said sarcastically.

“Well, tell Shannon I called.”

“Bye,” she said and hung up.

The next day we packed our clothes and headed for Marshall. I told you that we spent Thanksgiving with my dad’s parents, well we spend Christmas with my mother’s parents. It had always been a time I looked forward to and I enjoyed it this time, but as before at Thanksgiving, all I wanted to do was get back to New Boston. Christmas dinner was good as usual and I got a lot of clothes and stuff. We stayed for a week and then came home.

We had a week left before Christmas vacation was up and I spent most of it at Mike’s. He had gotten a disk drive for Christmas. This is a very useful tool to a computer and I envied him very much.

Time slipped away and as much as we tried to stop it, that dreaded Monday morning rolled around and it was back to school. My sister had gone through the worst of the chicken pox and now was better so she didn’t have to miss school. We all gathered around the school building waiting for classes to start. Everybody was showing off their new clothes and other assorted items that they got for Christmas. Finally, the bell rang and I was off to first period typing. Mrs. Vinson, the typing teacher, put us right to work on a homework package. About halfway through the class I started to get a headache. Typing usually does that to me anyway so I didn’t think much of it. But by third period I still had it and my head felt hot. I got an itch on my head and my hand involuntarily went up to scratch it. Then my hand stopped dead in its tracks. I thought I felt a little bump on my head. Could it be what I was thinking? No way. I decided to chalk it up to my imagination and ignore it.

By the end of the day my head was really splitting but Mr. Dempsey was going to give me and Mike some programs after school so I tried to shrug it off. We stayed a couple of hours and when we finished we started walking over to Mike’s house.

“Man, my head’s splitting,” I told Mike as we were walking. “I hope it’s not what I’m thinking.”

“You don’t think you’ve got it do you?”

“I don’t know. My back’s itching and I think there is a bump on my head.”

“Why don’t you check your back and see?”

“I’m too scared.”

We walked the rest of the way to his house and when we got there Mike told his mom what I said. She promptly turned me around and lifted up the back of my shirt. My fear was confirmed when I heard her gasp.

“How bad is it?” I asked Mike.

“Pretty bad. Take a look in the mirror.”

I went into the bathroom and lifted up my shirt. Scattered randomly across my back were red sores. Well, so much for mind over matter, I had the chicken pox.

Mike’s mother drove me home. Mike didn’t come because he had never had them before either. I walked into the house and my mom immediately knew something was wrong.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

To answer her question I simply lifted up my shirt. She started to laugh and then she called my sister in so she could join in the fun too. When they couldn’t laugh anymore my mom put me to bed, which is where I wanted to be because I was feeling pretty bad.

The next morning I woke up and took a look at myself. It was worse than the day before. I was covered from head to toe with sores. They were on every part of my body, even places I would prefer not to mention. My mom had to take me to the doctor to confirm that I had the chicken pox. Like I couldn't tell myself, but the school needed to have a note from the doctor so they could put me on home bound. The doctor ordered me to stay out of school two weeks. I had just got off Christmas vacation for two weeks and now I was going to be gone another two. Four weeks off from school. Sound great, doesn't it? Well, let me tell you, it wasn't all that fun. I'll admit that not going to school was all right but when that itching started I couldn't stand it. Especially at night, the itching was so bad I couldn't sleep.

Something I forgot to mention before was about two months ago my mom got a job as a teacher's aide at school. She handled paper work and things like that. I was shocked when she told me and I was initially against it. But having your mother at school can work to your advantage. Like knowing grades you make on tests before the teacher tells you and things of that nature. In this particular situation it also helped out. While I was on home bound there was suppose to be a special teacher coming to my house for a couple of hours. My mom had a little talk with her and got her to agree that she could do the job just as well. So I was free of that burden.

The afternoon after I went to the doctor I was lying on the couch when I heard the doorbell ring. I went to answer it and it was Mike. He took one look at me, and started laughing.

"Shut up." I said.

I let him in and I noticed that he was carrying his disk drive under his arm.

"What the heck are you doing here?"

"Well, they always say that you should get the chicken pox when you're young so I'm trying to get them."

"Sure. You just want to get out of school."

"That too," he agreed and we both laughed.

"Why did you bring your disk drive?"

"Since you have to stay here all day with nothing to do, I decided to let you borrow it."

"Aw man. You don't have to do that."

"I want to. Besides, I'm going to be over here as much as I can so I'll still be able to use it too."

He didn't have to twist my arm. We went to my room and hooked up the drive to my computer and proceeded to have fun. Mike came over everyday during my two weeks and he stayed overnight and on the weekends.

My sister had loads of fun getting back at me for all the teasing I gave her when she was sick. One afternoon I was feeling bad and I was taking a nap in my bed. I came awake when I felt the covers being dragged back and I saw my sister standing there with a camera. I didn't have anything on but my underwear and before I could react she snapped the picture. She ran out the door laughing and I just went back to sleep. I saw the picture later and I have to admit that it was pretty funny.

I told you that Stacie and I got back together one more time. This is where she made her last bid for me. One afternoon after school Mike came over for his daily visit and gave me a note from Stacie. I opened it and read it. She said she missed me at school and asked how I was doing. And at the bottom was:

P.S. Stacie still loves Lee.

Does Lee still love Stacie?

I couldn't believe it. I showed it to Mike and he couldn't believe it either. I decided not to write back and a few days later Mike came in with another note. This one just said in big colored

letters:

STACIE LOVE LEE!

I didn't answer this one either and she kept sending more.

The two weeks finally came to an end and I was glad to be going back to school. Mike never did catch the chicken pox, which is kind of ironic when he wanted them and didn't get them and I didn't want them but got them anyway. Other people did get them though. It seems that I had infected somebody the day I was at school and it spread from there.

Everybody was glad to see me and I was glad to see them. Stacie was especially glad to see me.

"Why didn't you answer my notes?" she inquired of me.

"I think you know why," I said.

"It'll be different this time. I promise."

"That's what you say, but how do I know?"

"Why don't you try me and see."

I didn't answer her but walked away. I could feel the strength of her charm and I was starting to give in. When she kept pressing the issue I decided to have a conference between Stacie and I with Mike as the mediator.

That Friday night I stayed with Mike, and Stacie was supposed to call at seven. At seven o'clock on the dot the phone rang. Mike answered it then handed it to me.

"Hello," I said.

"Hi," she said back.

"Well..."

"Well..."

I covered the receiver with my hand. "This isn't getting off to a good start," I told Mike.

"Why don't you let her tell you why she wants to get back together and then you tell her what you think," he said. I relayed this to Stacie and she agreed.

She started, "I think that I made a mistake when I broke up with you. We were meant for each other. I've never felt like this before with any other guy. I know it'll work out this time. I love you."

Man! What a web she was weaving around me, but it was my turn. "This all sounds great," and indeed it did, "But I can't be sure you'll think this way a week from now. You change moods daily."

"I'm different now. You can trust me."

I decided to see how bad she wanted this. "I'm not the kind of person you think I am."

"What do you mean?"

"I like to do things that you don't like to do." Stacie was similar to Rhonda in that she didn't have the urge to show much display of affection, if you catch my meaning. Well, let her chew on that. There was silence on the other end. "Do you understand what I'm saying?" I asked her.

"I understand perfectly."

"So?"

"So, why don't you try me?"

Wait a minute. She wasn't supposed to say that. Maybe she was serious this time. I started to fall. "Are you sure about yourself?"

"One hundred percent."

"Well, I guess we could try it again."

"Great," she said, "I love you." She hung up like she was worried I would change my mind. I had fell for it again. How many times does a man get his hand burned before he stops

putting it in the fire? Mine was scorched and I was going for more.

The first couple of weeks went all right, although I had a feeling that I had been pushed into something I didn't really want to do. I tried to make the best of the situation but it didn't take long before the trouble began. Stacie started changing moods again and she was impossible to get along with. It all came to a head one night when Mike and I were playing tennis. We had joined the tennis team a couple of weeks ago and we practiced every night. We hadn't been playing very long when Stacie drove up (she had finally gotten her license.) She got out of the car and came over to the courts.

"Hi, what are you doing?" she asked.

"Practicing," I replied.

"Do you care if I play with you?"

"No, come on."

Mike went over to play with some other girls on the team and Stacie and I had the court to ourselves. I gave her a racquet and she looked at it like she didn't know what to do with it.

"You'll have to teach me, I don't know how."

Oh great! Tennis wasn't a game you learn in one night but I decided to be patient with her. I explained the rules to her and we tried to hit a few. I spent more time running after the balls that she slammed over the fence than playing. She started getting upset and I could see her changing moods right before my very eyes. Once I served a rather fast ball and it smacked her right in the leg. She screamed and clutched at her leg, then she looked at me like I'd done it on purpose. She threw her racquet down and started for her car.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Home!" she screamed then got in the car and peeled out of the parking lot.

Man, I had had enough. I went over to Mike, "Did you see that?"

"What happened?"

"She got all bent out of shape because she couldn't play tennis and then she blamed it on me. She gets mad at every little thing. I can't take it anymore, man. This relationship ain't working out."

I went home and called Rhonda and told her what happened. The next day in History Stacie didn't say anything to me she just handed me a note.

I unfolded the note and read it during class:

Lee,

I heard it through the grapevine that you're upset with me. Why didn't you tell me that? You told Rhonda and Mike and God knows whom else. They didn't have anything to do with it. I thought we agreed to talk to each other about our problems. You always make a big deal whenever I won't tell you what's bothering me, and now you're doing the same thing. You're just a big hypocrite! I don't think it's going to work. I don't know what to think.

A hypocrite! She called me a hypocrite? She seems to have forgotten who ran off last night. She was trying to blame everything on me. She doesn't know what to think. Well, I know what to think. I'd had enough of this bull. I pulled out a piece of paper and wrote.

Stacie,

Don't try to blame this on me! I've had enough of your roller coaster moods. I agree, I don't think this relationship is going to work. It would be best if we were just friends.

I gave her the note and watched her face wrinkle with anger. She wrote back and said just one thing. *FINE!* I hoped she didn't think she was hurting me because now I knew how stupid I was to go back with her. I knew a girl who was much more mature than Stacie and very nice. Namely her sister, Shannon, and she wasn't going to stop me from seeing her this time.

She tried to stop me at first but as I persisted she finally gave up and I got in touch with Shannon. We talked on the phone a lot and got quite close. We met whenever we could, which wasn't often because she was only 13 and her mother didn't let her "date" yet. But we had a good time when we were together.

Stacie didn't try anymore attempts to get back together. She turned her attention to somebody else. This somebody was a guy named Sidney Woodard. He was a Senior that Mike and I had been hanging around with.

One night Mike, Sidney, and I were at a basketball game and Stacie was also there but she wasn't sitting with us. I love basketball with a purple passion and I was having a great time screaming and yelling. Our team hadn't lost a game yet and they were creaming the team they were playing now.

During half-time Stacie got up and came over to join us. "Mike, I need to talk to you." They both moved down the stands. I watched them as they talked and I prayed that she wasn't asking him to ask me to go back with her. My prayers were answered. When Mike came back over he sat down and said, "Sidney, Stacie likes you."

He almost choked, "What?"

"She likes you."

"I don't believe this. I hardly even know her."

"Get to know her."

"I don't know man."

"Come on," I said, "Please take her off my back, you just have to go over there and talk to her."

"All right," he said and walked over to where she was sitting. They talked for quite awhile and finally came over to sit with us. I assumed that they were going to have a try at it. This pleased me just fine because now there was no chance that she would try to get back with me. Secretly I feared the worst for Sidney, but I wasn't telling him that. The weeks passed and Sidney and Stacie became an item. They looked like a perfect couple but little did they know that trouble lay over that first big hill.

It all started when Rhonda confessed that she liked Sidney also. She confronted Stacie and told her that she liked him first and that Stacie had cut in on her. Stacie didn't take this too well and tried to forget Rhonda had ever said anything. But one day Sidney gave Stacie his senior ring and when Rhonda saw it she hit the roof. She gave Stacie an ultimatum. It was either her or Sidney, she couldn't have both. Stacie and Rhonda had been friends ever since grade school and this hit her pretty hard. She finally ended up giving the ring back.

Now Sidney didn't like this too much and told Stacie so. Soon everything was in an uproar. Rhonda and Stacie were still not speaking to each other, even though Rhonda got her way, and Sidney and Stacie were constantly fighting. After a few weeks Mike and I had had enough of this. We had a conference and decided to come to the rescue. Next Friday was February 14, Valentines Day, and also Mikes birthday. We decided to have a party at Mike's house. Everybody loves a party and we thought this might cool everybody down.

We made up the invitations and sent them out. The guest list was Rhonda, Stacie, Sidney, Robert, Shannon, and a girl that Mike liked named Paula Sanderson. Everything was going to be perfect. Mike's parents were going to be out of town and we were going to grill hamburgers and just have a great time. It was a disaster.

We ended up causing more trouble than there was already. Things started off fine. We

cooked hamburgers and ate, then Mike opened his presents. I gave him a computer game and I think Rhonda and Robert gave him a shirt. Stacie gave him a huge pack of tracers. Tracers are round little discs that you shoot out of a tracer gun. Why would Mike want these? I'll tell you later but let me get back to the subject. Things got steadily worse from there on out and here's why. Rhonda liked Sidney but Sidney didn't like Rhonda, he liked Stacie. Stacie really liked Sidney but tried not to show it because of Rhonda. Mike liked Paula but Paula didn't like Mike. I liked Shannon but for some strange reason I wasn't paying attention to her that night. I was flirting with Rhonda and Paula, which made Robert mad at me because I was messing with his sister, and Mike was mad at me because I was messing with Paula.

Now that you know the line up we'll get on with the game. We played computer games for a while until we got bored and I suggested spin the bottle. We started off doing the dumb things and then I said you had to kiss whomever the bottle landed on.

Stacie jumped up and said, "I'm not doing that!"

I got pissed and said, "What's your problem?"

"I don't have a problem. I just don't want to play this." She looked at Sidney and then over to Rhonda.

Rhonda took the hint and got mad. She got up and left. Mike quickly thought of something. "Why don't we go outside and play some Nerf football," he said. Everybody agreed and we went outside. We divided up into teams and started playing. Rhonda was on the team against me and I started making sure that I tackled her even if she didn't have the ball. Pretty soon we were wrestling in the grass and it was obvious that I was enjoying it. We finally pulled ourselves apart and continued to play. On the next play I had the ball and Robert slammed me in the dirt rather hard. By the look on his face he wasn't too happy. I decided that I had enough football and was feeling guilty about flirting with Rhonda, so I went to talk to Shannon. She wasn't blind, she saw everything that happened and she didn't like it to well. She wouldn't talk to me and that pissed me off.

We all went back in the house and just sat around talking. Mike persuaded Paula to go into his room with him and as she was leaving she gave me a look that had "HELP ME!" written all over it. Well, I couldn't leave a damsel in distress, could I? So after a few minutes I got up and went in Mike's room. They were lying on the bed talking.

"What's up?" I said.

"Nothing," Mike said and gave me a warning look.

"In that case. Bombs away!" I took a flying leap and jumped into bed with them. All three of us lay there talking and then I started joking around with Paula. She started tickling me and I pinned her down on the bed and started tickling her. Mike got up and burst out of the room. I laid back and sighed. "I think he's mad at me."

"I'm glad you came in here," Paula said, "I like Mike for a friend but that's all. Thank you." She leaned over on top of me and our lips met in a passionate kiss. What was I doing? Paula was a pretty girl and nice but I only liked her for a friend. Besides, I was with Shannon. I broke the kiss and said, "We better go back out."

We fixed ourselves up and went back out. Everybody was leaving. "What's up?" I asked Mike.

"Party's over."

"What? It's only ten thirty and..."

"The party is over!" he said sternly.

"Fine." The more I thought about it the more it sounded like a good idea. I tried to talk to Shannon one more time but she just ignored me.

So everybody ended up mad at each other for one reason or another. See what happens when you stick your nose into other people's affairs? Well I learned my lesson well. I wasn't playing Sigmund Freud anymore. Eventually the whole thing was forgotten and things got back

to normal. Stacie and Rhonda must've worked out their differences, because she and Sidney started dating again. I apologized to Shannon and she started talking to me again.

Was I supposed to explain something? Oh yes, tracers. This is the story of the Great Tracer Wars. One day at school I was walking down the hall when I heard whizzing noises around my head. I caught several glimpses of something flying in the air. I looked around to find the source of the projectiles and I saw Chase and Mark Mosely shooting at each other with what appeared to be guns.

"Hey," I yelled at them, "What's up?"

They both saw me and turned their guns on me. They fired several times and I felt some impacts on my chest and arms. I bent down and picked up one of the things that hit me. It was a small plastic disk with a hole in the middle. Chase and Mark walked over to where I was bent down. "What's this?" I asked them.

"It's a tracer," Chase said, "And this is a tracer gun." He handed me the gun and I turned it over in my hands examining it. It was a plastic gun that had a spring-loaded chamber that you put the tracers in. In the barrel was a track that the tracers traveled down when the gun was fired. I brought the gun up and aimed it at a lock on a locker about 20 feet away and pulled the trigger. One tracer flew out and hit about two inches away from the lock. These things were pretty accurate. I handed the tracer gun back to Chase.

"Chaz, Clint, Lindsey, and I were kind of having a battle with them," Mark said.

"They're pretty cool. Where'd you get them?" I asked.

"At Wal-Mart. It comes with a gun and about a hundred tracers. But those don't last long so there are packages with 500 tracers in them."

Mark and Chase said they had to go and left. For some strange reason I felt the need to have one of these tracer guns. I felt unprotected without one. So after school I ran by Wal-Mart and picked one up. I also got a refill pack just in case I ran out of tracers. I felt kinda embarrassed when I handed it to the lady at the checkout stand. She looked at the gun then at me but she didn't say anything.

On the way home in the car I loaded the gun with as much tracers as it would hold. When I walked in the house I saw my mom standing in the hall and thought that she was a perfect target to test my gun out on. I aimed the gun at her and fired a few times. She was showered with tracers. She didn't know what hit her and she started screaming. I laughed so hard that I was rolling on the ground. She didn't think it was so funny though.

"What do you think you are doing?" she asked me.

"Shooting you."

"That's not funny. You could have put one of my eyes out."

"It's just a plastic toy."

"If you shoot me again I'll beat your butt. Why do you have a toy gun anyway?"

"A couple of guys at school have them and we're having a battle."

"When will you ever grow up?" she said and went into the kitchen.

Never, I thought and went into the living room to watch some TV.

I sat there for a few minutes when I heard "Meowww". It was my cat coming into the living room. I had a brilliant idea.

"Come here kitty," I said.

"Mrooowww?"

"Come her kitty kitty."

"Prrrrrr," he purred and started toward me with thoughts of a back rub on his mind.

I brought out my gun and opened fire. I scored several times and he just looked at me not understanding what was going on, so I fired again. He caught on this time and took off. All right a moving target. I didn't hit him at all this time and he went under a chair. Why did I miss?

I thought for a few minutes and then brought ballistics into play. When firing at a moving target if you aimed right at the target it would be gone by the time the tracer got there. In order to correct for this you had to shoot in front of the target or lead the target as it was technically called. I decided to try this out on kitty.

“Kitty?”

No reply, he wasn't falling for that trick again. He thought he was safe under that chair. Wrong. I fired the gun at the bottom of the chair and out he came flying across the floor. I aimed a little bit in front of him and fired. Whap whap whap! I hit him every time. He rolled across the floor and then ran into my sister's room under the bed. I ran in there and started to flush him out.

“What are you doing to kitty?” my sister asked me.

“Nothing.”

“You're trying to shoot him. Get out of here!”

I ignored her and looked under the bed to see if I could find the cat. Wham! She hit me with a pillow. That was a mistake. I shot at her and pegged her in the head.

“Mom!” she yelled.

I was in trouble now. My mom came in the room and gave me the third degree about aiming guns at people. I was lucky that she didn't take it from me and throw it away. There were also tracers lying all over the floor and she didn't like that too well. So I set about picking them up. I thought I had them all but when I put them back in the gun I noticed several were missing. They had a way of disappearing.

The next day at school Mike and I were sitting on the back steps at activity period when Chaz walked out. I thought that this was a perfect time to get him back for shooting me yesterday. I reached into the inside pocket in my jacket and brought out my tracer gun. He saw it coming but it was too late. I blew him away. He whirled around and had his gun in his hand. I jumped over the banister and off the steps as tracers flew over my head harmlessly. We shot at each other until our guns ran out then stopped to try and recover as many tracers as we could.

“What the heck is that?” Mike asked me.

I explained to him about the battle and the tracer guns. The next day Mike came up to me and said, “Look.” He pulled open his jacket and I could see a tracer gun in his pocket. I guess things grew from there. Before I knew it almost everybody had a tracer gun. Stacie, Rhonda, Robert, Sidney, everybody. It's weird how something like this could catch on and grow in such a short time.

The Sophomores big rivals were the Juniors. Everything we did we always opposed the Juniors. This was no exception. The main leader of the Juniors was their class president, Todd Davis. We met with him and a few of his followers and arranged a war. Next Saturday in a section of woods over by the park the Sophomores would meet the Juniors and do battle.

Saturday rolled around and we had a pretty good turnout. We made the rules. The boundaries were the woods and if you got hit you were dead until one team was eradicated. Then you could start again. We played all day and the Sophomores won the most battles. The Juniors accused us of cheating of course. We would have done the same if we had lost.

Unplanned wars started breaking out all over town. For example, say Mike and I would be cruising along and see a Junior hanging around. We'd pull the car around and jump out an open fire on him. Another Junior would pass by and join in. Then the word would spread and before you know it there would be a group of Sophomores and Juniors fighting each other.

I got pretty good at it. I even had my own system. Tracers were different colors. Green yellow, and red. Sometimes you could find a white tracer in a package. For some reason Robert liked those and he would collect them. He would trade like ten tracers for one white one. Anyway, I had a system set up to where I could tell the status of the chamber in my gun. My gun would hold 26 tracers at one time so I loaded the first five with red tracers, then with eight

yellow tracers, then with thirteen green tracers. This way, as long as I was firing green tracers I knew I was over half full. As soon as I saw yellow tracers I knew I was half full, and when I saw red I knew I had five shots left. I could always tell when I needed to reload and I was ready. I found several pill bottles that were just the size to put tracers in. I put them into the bottles so they would come out in the order I described. So when I needed to reload I just reached in my pocket, pulled out the bottle, and started loading the gun without worrying about picking out the colors. It worked good and saved a lot of reloading time. You can see I took this pretty seriously.

I guess about the best fun I ever had with tracer guns is when we hunted unsuspecting prey. We would pile about seven people in Mark's car and go riding around town. When we stopped at a red light if the person next to us had their window rolled down we all brought out our guns and fired into the other car. You should see the expressions on the face of some of the people we hit. Sometimes they chased us but we always got away. We would also ride around until we saw someone walking. Mark would slowly pull up beside a person and we would shower them with tracers. It must have been pretty scary to see all of us pull out guns, point them at you, and then get shot. But it was great loads of fun from my point of view.

As you've probably thought of by now, things like this don't go unnoticed. The police started getting calls and soon they were upset. They called the principal and told him to put a stop to it. So the principal passed the word, no more tracer guns. He backed up his words by taking any guns he saw and assigning detention to people who were caught with them. Us hard core tracer warriors still secretly carried our guns out of habit for a while. But when we couldn't openly do battle anymore the trend died out and I retired my tracer gun to a drawer in my closet.

If I ever had a chance to change something that I did in my past this would be it. It was, and still is the only time I ever burned a girl in my life. The unfortunate victim was Shannon and this is how it happened.

As I've mentioned before our basketball team was doing real good. They were undefeated and now were in the playoffs. They won the first two games and now they had to travel to Denton, a city in the Dallas area, to play two games. One was on Friday night and the other on Saturday afternoon. The First Baptist church was taking a bus down there for anybody who wanted to go and of course I was going. It was about a four hour trip both ways and if we won the first game they would take the bus again on Saturday. I loved trips with my friends and I also loved basketball. It was going to be a great time, at least that's what I thought.

I was in History that Friday and decided to see if Sidney and Stacie were together this week. They had been off and on for a while just like we had been. I wrote her a note:

Are you and Sidney going to the basketball game together?

Yes. We're riding the bus down there. Here's the sitting arrangement: Me and Sidney, you and Shannon, Mike and Rhonda.

What's this sitting arrangement?

When I signed us all up I had to write our names in seating charts. I assumed that you would be sitting with my sister. You are, aren't you?

Of course, I was just wondering. We're going to have a great time.

After school we all went to Max's for a burger. Then we went to get on the bus. We got on and Shannon and I went nearly to the back and took two seats. Sidney and Stacie sat besides

us across the row and Rhonda and Mike in front of them. The bus filled up and soon we were on the road. Man, this was great. For the first hour everything went all right. We had a great time joking around and Shannon and I were really enjoying each other's company. Then SHE showed up.

The she I'm referring to is a girl named Sarah Cooper. I had seen her before at school and had talked to her a couple of times, but I really didn't know her that well. She was sitting in front of us. I had brought my walkman and I was listening to a tape when she turned around and said something to me.

"What?" I said taking off the earphones so I could hear.

"What are you listening to?" she said.

"STYX. Do you like them?"

"Yea. Can I listen?"

"Sure." I handed her the headphones.

She took them and popped one side off and handed it back to me. "We can both listen."

I looked over at Shannon and she tried to look like she wasn't paying attention, but I knew she didn't like this at all. We listened to the rest of the tape and then she said, "I have some tapes up here. Do you want to listen to them?"

"Sure."

She moved over and left an empty seat next to her like she wanted me to sit with her. I got up and sat down next to her without even looking back at Shannon. Why did I do this? I've asked myself that question a lot. I still don't have an answer. There was no reason to do this to Shannon. We were a perfect couple and I had no reason to want someone else. I guess I can blame it on lust. Sarah had a pretty good looking body and she was using it to the fullest extent.

I rode the rest of the way with her. We joked around and messed around if you catch my meaning, and not once did I stop to think how bad I was hurting Shannon. When we got to Denton I sat with Sarah instead of my friends for the game. It was a great game. It was close all the way until the very last when we won by a point in the last seconds of the game. I was on the edge of my seat the whole game.

When it was over I started looking forward to the bus trip back. It was going to be very dark in the back and me and Sarah could get very cozy. We went all the way to the back and sat down. After a little bit Stacie came back there.

"Lee, can I talk to you?" she said. I got up and went with her to an empty seat. "What are you doing?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You and Sarah sure have become good friends."

"So?"

"Don't you know how much you've hurt Shannon? Look." She pointed to a seat up near the middle of the bus. Shannon was curled up in it by herself.

This is when I realized what I had done and I got mad at Stacie for showing it to me.

"You're one to be talking. Your track record ain't so great either. Why aren't you sitting with Sidney?" I had noticed earlier that they weren't sitting together.

"That doesn't have anything to do with this. I'm trying to protect my sister."

"Yea? Well, maybe you better take care of your own problems before you start worrying about mine."

She sighed heavily and then got up and left. I just sat there thinking. I knew what I had done to Shannon was wrong, but I was trying to justify it in my own mind. When I thought I had a good reason I decided to tell Shannon about it so everything would be all right. I slowly made my way up to where she was sitting and sat down beside her.

"Shannon?" I whispered. She didn't respond. Oh, the silent treatment. She was pretending to be asleep but I could tell she wasn't. "I know you can hear me. I wanted to talk to

you about us. You know that I'm in the tenth grade and you're in the seventh. That's a pretty big age difference and I think it's causing problems," if I had only known how stupid this sounded when I was saying it, "Well, I think we ought to stop seeing each other. O.K.?" No response. I took that as a yes and left. That was about the poorest excuse I'd ever given in my life. I went back and sat down beside Sarah. I didn't feel to good right then, so I just went to sleep for the rest of the trip.

That night before I went to sleep, I decided to cut my losses. I still had Sarah and I was going to the basketball game tomorrow with her. Early in the morning the next day I drove up to the church parking lot where the bus was. I boarded and saw Sidney and Mike in the back, so I walked up to where they were sitting.

"What's up?" I said.

They both said hi and wanted to know what happened yesterday. I told them and they didn't have much to say.

"What happened with you and Stacie?" I asked Sidney?

"You know how she is. She got all upset for nothing. I was yelling and screaming during the game and she said I was getting too rowdy. When I didn't stop she got up and left. Then she wouldn't sit by me on the way home. I don't think she or Shannon is coming to day. That's fine with me. I've learned my lesson."

Sure, I thought, until next time. A few minutes passed and I saw Sarah get on the bus. I moved over to make room for her but she sat down by another girl up front. What was this? I got up and went up to her.

"Hi," I said to her.

"Oh, hi," she said coldly and started talking to the other girl.

So she was one of those kind of girls, one night affairs. I turned around without another word and headed back for my seat. I had really blown it. I lost Shannon for a one night stand and now I was high and dry. Served me right. This is just what I deserved.

"Sorry," Mike said understanding what happened without me saying a word.

"That's O.K.," I said, "We'll just make this a day for us guys."

And that's what we did. We managed to have a blast in spite of all that had happened. We got as rowdy as we wanted to and didn't have any girls to worry about. It was another great game and we won it. We only had two games left and they would be played in Austin. If we won those we would be state champions.

Well, now I was without a girlfriend and this was the start of a long dry period when I wasn't seeing anybody.

Time passed and nothing really exciting happened. Stacie and Sidney got back together as I predicted. The basketball team went to Austin but I couldn't go because they wouldn't take the bus that far. It didn't matter anyway. The first game they played was on a Friday and we didn't do anything at school. It was like a holiday. In the last two periods of school we listened to the game on the radio. It was another great game. The score was close all the way and we won in the last minutes again. The whole school went crazy. People were running through the halls yelling and screaming. Then next day Mike and I were helping Sidney and his dad cut some trees down and we listened to the game on the truck radio. This one wasn't even close we blew the other team away. We were the undefeated state champions. There were all kinds of ceremonies when the team got back. They had the mayor present a trophy to them and then they played the tape of the game in the gym. The city counsel hired a painter to paint AAA STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS 1983-84 on our water tower. You can see this town was proud of its basketball team.

One day the group was sitting on the back steps at activity period and I was talking to Rhonda.

“Our youth group is having a retreat this weekend. Do you want to come?” she asked me.

“Sure, I’ll ask my parents. Who all is going?”

“Me, Robert, Stacie, Sidney, and Mike.”

I asked my parents and they said it was all right. So that Friday after school I packed my bags and Mike came over to pick me up. We drove up to the parking lot and boarded the bus. Sidney and Stacie sat together on the way down there and looked like they were having a good time. As a matter of fact nobody got in a fight with anybody.

I had a great time the whole weekend. I mostly hung around with Robert and Mike. I saw Stacie and Sidney a couple of times and it looked like they were having trouble again. I wondered how much longer it would take Sidney to catch on to her game. Sunday evening came and we had to leave. As I was standing around waiting to put my baggage on the bus Sidney came up to me.

“She did it to me again man!” he said.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Everything was going fine and then all of a sudden she just wouldn’t talk to me.”

“What was her reason this time?”

“No reason. She said she was in a bad mood.”

“When are you go to realize she’s just a sizzler?”

“What do you mean?”

“She likes to burn people. She’s playing a game.”

“Well, I ain’t playing anymore.”

I sat with Robert on the way back and Sidney and Mike were sitting in front of us. It looked like they were in a hot discussion of Stacie, and Mike was playing the psychiatrist. About 30 minutes later Sidney turned around and handed me a slip of paper.

“Take a look at what me and Mike came up with,” he said.

I looked at the paper. It said *Sizzle, Sizzle, easy to burn quick to fizzle.*

“What’s this?” I asked.

“It’s about Stacie,” Mike said.

I laughed. “Describes her perfectly,” I said and then I got an idea. The story about Stacie needed to be told to warn other people and I thought I knew how to do it. “I’ve got an idea.”

“What?” they said.

“Let me work on it and I’ll show you later.”

I scraped up a piece of paper and went to work. I spent the rest of the trip writing and when I finished I had written a poem. This is how it went:

SIZZLER

*Sizzle, sizzle.
Easy to burn,
Quick to fizzle.*

*I was entranced,
When our eyes first met.
I knew she would get me,
That I could bet.*

*She cast her spell on me,
And soon I found.*

*Not to long after,
We were bound.*

*We started off fine,
It was great from the start.
I never thought,
We'd be apart.*

*It dropped like a bomb,
She told me good bye.
I couldn't believe it,
I wanted to die.*

*She's playing a game,
It's called get and let go.
And after my experience,
This I truly know.*

*I'm not the first,
And I'm not the last.
To be sizzled,
By her sharp blast.*

*To the one who will try her,
I'll say he is bold.
But this I can assure you,
You'll be out in the cold.*

I didn't know it then but this poem was destined to become famous. I showed it to Mike, Robert, and Sidney. They loved it! I didn't think it was too bad myself. I wrote this poem to warn other people of Stacie's game, but I never intended for her to see it. This, however, is not quite what happened.

Monday morning before school I showed some people the poem and everybody liked it. So in first period typing instead of doing my homework package, I typed up the poem. I fixed it up all neat and pretty and I continued to show it to other people all day.

After school we had been taking Stacie home because her car had broken down. Today she got in the car and asked me a question. "Andrea told me that you wrote a poem about me. What is it?"

I almost choked. I should have known she would find out. I looked at her and she didn't look like she was mad. In fact she looked like I wrote something good about her. Andrea must've not told her what it said.

"Oh it's nothing," I said trying to play it off.

"Come on, let me see it."

"No."

She didn't say anything for the next few minutes but when I wasn't looking she got my notebook and opened it up. There was the poem lying on top. I realized what she was doing and snatched it out of her hand. "Give me that!" I said, but I knew she had a glimpse of it and her curiosity was peaked. I folded up the poem and held it in my hand so she wouldn't get it. As we were pulling in her driveway she goosed me in the side and I dropped the poem on the floorboard. She quickly picked it up and before I could stop her she was out of the car and

headed into her house.

I told my mom to hurry up and get out of there before she had a chance to read it. My mom didn't know what I was talking about but she pulled out anyway and went home. 30 minutes later I was sitting in the living room watching TV when the phone rang. I picked it up and all I heard was "I hate you!" and then a dial tone. I knew perfectly well who it was. I thought about it and the more I thought about it the more I got mad. I was glad she read the poem. It was about time that she knew the facts.

Later that night was a big band concert at the school and Stacie was playing in it. I was also going because my sister was in it. When I got there I saw Mike and Sidney so I went to sit with them. I told them that Stacie got the poem and it didn't seem to bother them either. They were glad just like me. We saw Stacie sitting in the band and she also saw us. She kept giving us looks that could kill. Every time she looked we just started laughing and mouthed the word *Sizzler*. During the concert Stacie continued to glimpse at us. She was having problems playing and it even looked like she was crying. We were enjoying this immensely. This may sound cruel, but it was about time that she got some of her own medicine. After the concert was over she tore out of the gym.

The next day at school I walked into History and saw Stacie sitting there. Her face was hard as stone and she didn't even look up. I walked over and sat in my desk behind her. Mr. Matt began his lecture and not long after I was starting to drift off to sleep when a note landed on my desk. It was from Stacie of course, this is how we talked when Mr. Matt was lecturing. I opened the note:

Why did you write that poem about me?

I wrote back:

Because it is the truth and you know it!

I saw her face wrinkle in anger as she read it. She crushed the note up and turned around. World War III was about to take place.

"I hate you! How can you be so cruel?" she said in a loud voice, "What did I ever do to you?"

"You know what you did to me!" I yelled back at her, "You're one to be talking about cruel. You thrive on turning someone on and then crushing his heart!"

By this time Mr. Matt had stopped trying to teach. He had simply stopped class and now everybody was listening to us.

"I'm not like that! You're lying!"

"How blind can you be? Just ask anybody, they know your game. Love 'em and leave 'em Stacie. You're a sizzler!"

She couldn't take it anymore. She burst out into tears and ran out of the room. Nobody said a word and Mr. Matt continued his lecture until the end of the period. I didn't see Stacie at all during activity period. And when I asked Rhonda next period she didn't know where Stacie was either.

At lunch I was standing in the line by myself waiting to get a tray when I felt someone tap my shoulder. It was Stacie. She handed me a note and went to stand in the back of the line. I unfolded the note and read it:

Lee, I'm sorry I said I hate you. I don't want to fight with you anymore. Why don't we just forget the past and start all over again as friends? What do you say?

I looked up and saw her staring right at me. I was feeling pretty bad myself and didn't want to fight with her anymore. Besides, I thought that she had finally seen the truth. For an answer to her note I took out the piece of paper I had written *Sizzler* on and ripped it up in front of her eyes. She smiled and came over and gave me a hug. I think good did come out of this, because from that time on Stacie never sizzled another person in her life.

Well, I had been cruising along here for a while without someone of my own. That was about to change. Mike, Robert, and I were part of this organization called the Leos. This is a group of high school students who meet and figured out ways to raise money to help out around the town. Like building new park benches and passing out toys to needy children on Christmas. This may sound boring, but when we got together we had a great time among ourselves and a lot of good came out of it too.

Today we had a meeting after school and we were supposed to come up with a big fund raiser because our bank account was getting low. Mike picked up Robert and I and drove us to the hospital. That's where we had the meetings. We got there a little early because Mike and Robert had to go over some things. Mike was the president and Robert was the vice president. They met with a man named Danny Terrel. He was our charter leader for a Lions club that sponsored the Leo club. He was the one who brought up the projects for us to do and oversaw them.

After about ten minutes the regulars started pouring in. I was looking down at some papers when I heard a voice.

"Hi, Lee," she said.

I knew the voice. It was Barbara Pool, a girl I knew from school. I looked up to say hi and my chin nearly dropped to the floor. Standing next to her was a girl who had never been here before. I had seen her around school and knew her name. It was Rhonda Hanson. She mostly hung around with another group at school and I had never talked to her. I just gazed at her. She was tall like me and had strawberry blonde hair. She also had a great figure. In other words, she was beautiful.

I broke my gaze and uttered, "Uh... Hi, Barbara."

"This is Rhonda Hanson. She is going to join up."

"Hi," I said to her.

"Hi," she said back. Oh, she had a beautiful voice.

They sat down at the end of the table and then the meeting got underway. Mike got up and rung his bell. "The meeting of the Leos of New Boston, Texas will now come to order. Any old business?"

Barbara pulled out some papers. She was the secretary. "We got a thank you card for the people at the nursing home for sending flowers and we also got a letter from the child we are sponsoring in India." She passed both of them around. "That's all."

"O.K.," Mike said, "Danny has something to talk to us about, so I'll turn it over to him."

Danny spoke up, "We need to get a new fund raiser going. It's been a while since we raised any money and we're low. Amy, how much do we have?"

Amy Roseberry, our treasurer, pulled out her bankbook. "After paying for the flowers and sending our contribution to the child in India, we now have \$15.32 left."

"That isn't too good," Danny continued, "Now we need some suggestions."

"The floor is open," Mike said.

"How about a bake sale?" Barbara suggested.

"No," Robert said, "We tried that last year and it didn't work out too good. We need something that will appeal to everybody."

Several more suggestions were thrown up and shot down until Amy came up with something. "We can have a dance. Everybody likes a dance, don't they?"

Everybody liked the idea and we took a vote on it. We voted unanimously for it. The rest of the evening was spent planning the dance. We decided to have it out at a rodeo stadium where they had a dance hall. We were going to DJ it ourselves and we set up special meetings to work on advertisements and decorations. Near time for the meeting to be over Danny said that he needed to see the officers in private so the rest of us who weren't officers went out in the lobby.

I was standing there talking to a couple of people I knew and Rhonda was standing by herself. I wanted to go over and talk to her but I was kind of shy and couldn't bring myself to do it.

We were standing there for a few minutes when a lady came in to the hospital and went to the reception desk. No one was there and she looked upset. She looked around and saw me. "Excuse me young man, but could you tell me what room Arnold Brayer is in?"

"I don't work here but I can try and find out," I told her. I went over to the reception desk and tried to find something that would tell me. I couldn't find a thing.

"Let me help," Rhonda said and came over. She reached into one of the drawers and pulled out a list of patients. "He's in room 113."

"Thank you," the lady said to Rhonda and walked away.

"How'd you know where to look?" I asked Rhonda.

"I'm a candy striper here sometimes."

"Oh," I said and then started laughing.

"Why are you laughing?"

"I don't know. I just can't picture you in that red and white striped uniform."

"It's true." We both started laughing and the ice was broken.

I looked forward to the times when we were working on the dance. I always found myself doing the same things she was. I obviously felt attracted to her but I hadn't yet expressed that to her. As I said, I'm kind of shy.

The night before the dance we were all out at the dance hall making last minute preparations. We ran out of create paper so Mike, Robert, a girl named Monica Cauffman, Rhonda, and I piled into Mike's old beat up truck that we had used to haul stuff out here and cruised to Wal-Mart. We took our own sweet time and rode around enjoying ourselves. We finally got to Wal-Mart and bought the create paper. We piled back into the truck and Mike started it up and began to pull out.

"Oh, oh, Mike, Mike, stop!" I heard Robert say. I looked over at him to see what he was talking about. He had his arms out the window pushing on the car next to us like we were a boat and he was pushing us away from the shore. Then I heard the crunch. Mike had cut the corner too sharp and we had slammed into the car next to us.

I could see Mike turn red with embarrassment and anger. Mike got out of the car and looked at the wreck. He started to walk toward the store when some guy got out of his car and came running up.

"Hey you! Come back here!" he yelled at Mike.

"What?" Mike said.

"Don't try leaving the scene of an accident."

"I'm not! I'm going to call the police..."

The man started arguing with him and that just made him madder. I knew this was a serious situation but I started laughing. I couldn't help it, I wasn't in a serious mood. I looked at Rhonda, Robert, and Monica and they all cracked up too. I was glad Mike couldn't hear us or we might have ended up walking home.

The police came and Mike's father came and the owner of the car came and the whole thing took about an hour to straighten up. By that time Rhonda and Monica had to be home so we took Mike's mother's car and dropped them off. Mike, Robert, and I went back out to the

dance hall to finish it up.

The next day was the day of the dance. I was standing at Mike's locker talking to him when Rhonda came up.

"Mike, my mother was wondering if you could give me a ride to the dance tonight?" she said. Evidently her mother knew Mike.

"Sure," he said.

"O.K. I'll see yall tonight." She left.

I felt jealous. I wished she had asked me to pick her up. What was I talking about? She didn't know how I felt about her. Anyway, if she did she would probably laugh. So I decided to forget about trying for her.

Mike and I were sitting in last period Biology talking when Amy came in. "Mike, that coke man in DeKalb said he couldn't bring the coke machine because his truck broke down."

"I guess I'll have to run out there and pick it up after school," Mike said.

"What about Rhonda?" I added.

"You'll have to pick her up."

All right, what a break! "Sure, no problem," I said.

After school I found Rhonda and told her that I would have to pick her up.

"That's fine," she said and then gave me a smile. What was that for? Nah, it couldn't mean anything.

That night before I went to pick her up I put on my best clothes and poured a ton of cologne on. Then I got my dad to let me borrow the car and I went to pick her up. I drove up to her house then got out and knocked on the door.

In a few minutes she opened it. "Hi," she said.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, but my parents want to meet you."

I felt a brick drop in my stomach. "Why do they want to meet me?"

"They just do, come on." She grabbed my hand and pulled me in.

"O.K., but I'm not too good with parents." She just laughed. I went in and met her parents. They were nice. We spent a few minutes talking about what every guy and girl talks about when one is meeting the other's parents. The parents ask you whom your parents are, where you live, and what you're doing after school. You tell them that you plan on going to some expensive college and become rich and then you politely say that you have to go now.

I opened the car door for Rhonda. "Ohhh, such a gentleman," she said. I laughed.

I got in and started up the car then pulled out.

"Oh, I want to tell you something," she said.

"What?"

"Well, I just broke up with my boyfriend and he called me and asked me if I wanted to go to the dance. I told him I was going with you. You don't mind, do you?"

Wham! I couldn't believe it. "Mind? Why would I mind?" so maybe she did feel the same about me, "I am glad."

We got out to the dance hall a little early just to make sure everything was all right. Mike was there setting up the coke machine so I helped him finish it. After a while people started pouring in. Before long we had a full house and the music began.

"Come on, let's dance," Rhonda said to me.

"I have two left feet," I told her.

"Oh nonsense! Let's go!" She pulled me out on the dance floor. I truly was a terrible dancer but when I got out there with her I just let myself go and had a great time.

Rhonda's old boyfriend showed up sometime later. But when he saw me with Rhonda he never said a thing. Then Robert and Rhonda Pierce showed up and I remembered something. I had kind of been trying to start something up with Rhonda Pierce again but she just wanted to

be friends. I had managed, against her protests, to get her to come to the dance and there she was and here I was with Rhonda Hanson. I knew I should ask her to dance but I was having so much fun with Rhonda H. that I never did. Later on, I saw Rhonda P. dancing with Rhonda H.'s old boyfriend. At first I was jealous and then I thought that maybe he was dancing with her because he thought we had something together and he wanted to make me jealous so he could have Rhonda H. back. Well, that wasn't going to work. I decided not to even pay attention to them.

All the guys in the club took turns at being the DJ and we had a blast. Whenever I wasn't playing records I was dancing with Rhonda. Once, Sarah Cooper cut in when me and Rhonda were dancing. Rhonda didn't know anything had happened between us so she went and sat down. I danced with her for a few minutes and then told her that I was sorry but I wanted to dance with Rhonda. I left her there and went and got Rhonda. We danced the rest of the night away and I was sorry when it was over. Rhonda and I cruised around for a while after the dance and we talked. I could tell we had a lot in common and I felt something growing between us. She had to be home by midnight so we used every minute of the time we had and I got her there at 11:59.

Now here came the dilemma. Should I kiss her good night? I wanted to bad, but I didn't quite know where we stood yet.

"Well, I had a good time," she said and stood there.

"Me too," I said. She looked like she was expecting something. Why not? No, my track record for good night kisses hadn't been to great since I moved here. Finally I stood there too long thinking about it and she opened the door.

"Good night, I'll see you at school." She went in and closed the door. I felt so stupid. But, give me a break, I'm a shy kind of guy.

Rhonda and I kept seeing a lot of each other at school and we started dating. We had a really good thing going and I was very happy with her, and I think she was the same with me. But now I think it's time to discuss my views on sex. My previous girlfriends in New Boston had never been overly affectionate when it came to that sore of thing, not so with Rhonda.

I had been brought up all my life in the church and it taught that sex outside of marriage was wrong. And back then that's what I believed. Then the hormones started flowing when I was around 13 years old and my body didn't necessarily agree with my mind's views. When it came down to a steamy situation with a girl my body tended to overpower my mind. With Rhonda it was a constant battle between what I wanted to do and what I knew was right for me.

We had gone out about three times so far and we were going out this Friday night to see a movie. She was talking to me at lunch that day. "I want to show you something after the movie tonight," she said.

"What?" I asked.

"It's a surprise"

"Come on, give me a little hint."

"O.K. It's a place to go."

"You mean like a party or something?"

"No. We'll be all alone."

This was peaking my curiosity. "Where is it?"

"I'm not telling you, but you might want to borrow your parent's station wagon tonight."

Oh, I was getting the idea. I wondered where she was taking me? That night before I picked her up, I got my parents to let me borrow the station wagon. Not even thinking about what I was doing I got a couple of blankets and put them in the back of the car. Then I went to pick her up and we went to the movies. We watched a horror flick that was pretty good. I liked taking her to these kind of movies because she always held on tight to me during the whole thing.

After the movie we went to Pizza Hut for a bite to eat. During the whole time we were

there I tried to get her to tell me where we were going. Nothing doing, she wasn't going to tell me. Finally after we had finished she said we could go there.

"Where to?" I asked her.

"Just start driving. I'll tell you when to turn."

I started the car up and took off. We drove through town until we passed my house and started going out in the country. We ended up on this dirt road that went way back in the woods and it was kind of scary but I liked it.

"Slow down. It's right around this corner."

I slowly pulled around this sharp curve and she pointed to a little dirt path just big enough for a car. I gave her a questioning look but she told me to go on so I did. I pulled the car onto the path and slowly drove through the woods that it wove around. It came out in a little clearing.

"Park here," she said.

I stopped the car and turned it off. Then I clicked the key back once so the radio would play and I put on some soft music. "How did you know about this..."

She stopped my question with a kiss and I gladly returned it. We carried on with this for a while and I started to get really aroused. I wanted her bad. Now the battle started. My mind told me to stop before it was too late but my body said full speed ahead! I wanted to get in the back seat with her but I didn't quite know how to ask her. What was she thinking? Would she ask me to go home if I suggested it? Again, my mind told me not to do it, but it was too late, my body had won.

"Uh, do you want to get in the back?" I said softly.

"Sure," she replied.

Oh boy, here we go. She started to crawl into the back seat. "Wait," I said, "Watch this." I reached back and released a small lever. The two seats in the back folded down into a bed. I pulled out the blankets and spread them out. "O.K."

"This is nice," she said and climbed over the front seat. I watched her beautiful body moving and I quickly scrambled after her. I grabbed her tight and started kissing her passionately. She returned the act just as aggressively. I felt my self coming alive and I wanted more. I ran my hands over her breasts and she began to moan softly which excited me even more. I unbuttoned her shirt and she slid out of it. Then I went to work on her bra. I felt in the back for the snaps but I couldn't find any. She started to laugh and I was getting embarrassed. Then I remember that some bras had front snaps. No, I don't go around looking at bras but I had seen one of my sister's like that. I felt in the front for the hooks and I gave it a little twist. It popped apart and slid off. It was night time and pretty dark in the car but there was some moon light and I could see the outline of Rhonda's figure. I could barely stand it. I pulled her tight again and began to kiss her. Then I ran my hands all over her body and I pressed my lips softly on her breasts. I felt her hand go down and start working on my pants. Yes! I was ready for her. I wanted to be in her now!

Suddenly night was turned into day as two headlights appeared on the path behind us. Startled, we both sat up. "Evidently you're not the only one who knows about this place," I said to her.

"I guess not," she said.

Whoever it was in the car behind us realized that we were there and pulled out and left. The momentum I had was broken and my mind had a chance to bring me to my senses. I stopped and thought about what I was about to do and realized that I hadn't even taken precautions against pregnancy. I didn't know if she had either and I wasn't about to ask her.

"I think we better go," I said.

"Uh. All right," she said and began to put her clothes on. I couldn't tell for sure, but she sounded disappointed.

We got back in the front seat and I rearranged the car, then I started it up and pulled out. I took Rhonda home and got out of the car to walk her to the door. We didn't discuss what had happened. I just said good night and kissed her. She said good night and went in her house.

We carried on this way all the time we were going together. Coming to the very brink of doing it and then I managed to fight it off. I could tell that it bothered her but I couldn't help the way I was. Anyway she never mentioned it to me so we continued on. We really had a good relationship despite this problem. We could always communicate very well and that's what helped us stay together for as long as we did. I made it official one night by asking her to go with me and she accepted of course. Once the school had this big carnival and they had a marriage booth. Rhonda and I got the deluxe deal with the bridal veil and all. We even got a license to show our marital state. It really was a good time in my life and I wished it could have gone on forever.

Well, school continued on through all this and soon that great time came. The end of school and the start of summer vacation. The last day of school was final exam day and I was exempt from all classes so I had to pick one to take. Of course I chose Biology and almost aced it. I missed one question, but I finished off my straight A average in that class. Unfortunately Geometry wasn't the same story. I had barely managed to keep a low B average and it slipped to a C one time. But I passed and that's what counts. I did all right in the rest of my classes also. When I was finished with the test I went around saying good bye to everyone and promising to keep in touch with them over the summer. I knew that I probably wouldn't keep in touch with most of them, but there were some I surely would and that was the group. We couldn't be separated.

My family usually went camping as soon as school was out and this year was no exception. A few days later we were packed and ready to go. We pulled out and headed for the lake. We always stayed at this place called Rocky Point. It was a beautiful place set right on the lake. We paid for a spot and set our camper up right on the shore. My sister and I spent time swimming and exploring all the trails in the woods but the main objective here was to catch fish. Not just any fish, but catfish. All my relatives loved catfish and we always competed to see who could catch the most. We usually had a big fish fry when we caught enough. I got my dad to let me drive back to New Boston and get Rhonda so she could stay a few days with us. While I was there I also called Mike and told him to come along. We had a great time, especially Rhonda and I.

We camped out for about three weeks and then came home. I had really enjoyed it but I was glad to be home again with my friends. The group hung around together doing everything. We went to the movies, to eat at Pizza Hut, and to the skating rink. We were doing something everyday.

Around the first of July my sister and I left for a church summer camp for two weeks and when we got back my dad told us that we had to move to El Paso for the rest of the summer so he could go to a school. I didn't like this idea very much but there was nothing I could do about it, so we packed up and left the day after we got back from camp. I won't dwell on the time that I spent there, because this is about my life in New Boston. I'll say that even though I had a good time while I was in El Paso, I just wanted to get back to New Boston.

Well, I had spent one year in New Boston and my attitude had changed drastically from when I had first left Marshall. Moving was the best thing that ever happened to me and if I hadn't, I never would have met the best friends I've ever had. It was the best year of my entire life and if I had a chance to do it all over again I probably wouldn't change a thing.

Lee Lovelace