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The short stories in this collection are memoirs of my life. I wrote most of them in an adult education writing class after I realized that there was more to writing than composing technical papers and patents. I have written about my own life because that’s what I know best.

I’ve divided the stories of my life into parts that are analogous to the flight of an airplane.

by Karl J. Belser, early 1930’s
GROWING UP – THE TAKEOFF:  During my formative years, from birth to just prior to my marriage, my mother tries to influence me to become like her rich and famous brother, Arnold Beckman.

DOING WHAT I SHOULD – THE FLIGHT PLAN:  I follow my script until I have a total meltdown. During this period I join IBM and design IBM’s first automatic teller machine (ATM) of which I am most proud.

FOLLOWING MY HEART – THE MIDCOURSE CORRECTION:  I embark on an exciting single life after my divorce. This period ends when I find my life partner, Jackie Daemion. I loose most of my vision during this period. I compensate by becoming a prolific inventor (more than 63 US patents by 2005) and disk drive expert (Quoted in the May 2000 issue of Scientific American).

PREPARING TO RETIRE – MAKING THE APPROACH:  I adjust to my new life partner and to the realization that my career is coming to an end. I retire from IBM and join a start-up company in order to make adequate resources to retire.

RETIREMENT – THE LANDING:  This section discusses where I am today. I have ended the autobiographical
stories with the deaths of my Uncle Arnie, who my mother wanted me to emulate, and the deaths of several of my close friends.

POSTSCRIPT: My Seven Steps to Personal Development, describes what I learned from my life experience.

Please consider that each chapter was written as a separate essay. In some chapters my voice talks directly to the reader. In others I show what happened by a reconstructed story.¹

Lastly, I’ve added several appendices with miscellaneous information that I want to preserve.

Appendix A gives a brief family tree for the people that I talk about in the stories. I have included photographs for these people if I have them.

Appendix B is a snapshot of my total family tree as of 2005. In many cases I need more information.

Appendix C gives an autobiographical article I published in the Spring 2003 issue of Dialogue Magazine. This was my first published article about my personal life.

¹ Blank pages have been used so that certain sections begin on an odd-numbered page to allow for normal double-sided printing.
Appendix D gives my work history up to 2005 in which are listed the titles and numbers of the US patents I held at that time.

Appendix E is my travel history, which I’ve included mostly for my own recollection.

by Karl A. Belser 1961

Karl Arnold Belser
16 January 2006
GROWING UP – THE TAKEOFF

1940 – My Genesis

I guess my parents conceived me in the usual way, but I think my existence is a miracle because both of my parents were shy, introverted people, and because as far as I know they had little experience with the opposite sex.
before they met in their late 30s. It’s amazing that they ever found each other.

I asked my parents about their experiences before marriage when I was a teenager in the late 1950s. Mom, a six-foot tall, large boned woman with short gray-blond hair in her late ‘50s, blushed and said nothing. Dad, a portly, slightly balding, studious man with prominent gray-black moustache and spectacles, answered with a laugh, “Let’s put it this way. I had three kids before I realized what caused them."

My parents talked little of their history, but I learned enough for the following sketches. Let me begin by telling you about my mother, Wilma Blanch Beckman, about her unpleasant childhood, and about how she met my father.

Mom was 10 when she found her mother dead in bed, frozen, windows open, frost caked on the blankets, father absent. From that time forward Mom’s stepmother and father treated her poorly.

Mom’s stepmother, a ‘loose woman’ who cheated on her traveling salesman husband, destroyed Mom’s favorite dolls and berated her. Mom’s older brother Arnold, a boy genius, didn’t protect her because he was occupied with his own
music and chemistry interests and later because he commuted every day to college in a neighboring town. Mom hid in her studies, played the piano for recreation, and tried to avoid her unhappy home life. Ultimately she escaped to college at Illinois Wesleyan in Bloomington, Illinois.

At Illinois Wesleyan Mom met Esther Siefert, who was 3 years older than Mom and Dad’s cousin. They became best friends. Esther appears to have been a kind of mother figure. Esther influenced Mom to join the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority and to get a BS degree in nutrition.

“I was painfully shy when I started college,” Mom told me. “The Alpha Gamm’s got me out of my shell, and Esther showed me that I was capable of having a career in science.”

As an aside, the first half of the 20th century was the first time in history when women could study science. Of course it started out as the science of good nutrition, the science of efficient housekeeping described in the book *Cheaper by the Dozen*, and the science of strict child upbringing per John Watson.

Mom continued to follow Esther’s example by getting a Masters Degree at University of Chicago and working for
several years as a hospital nutritionist in both Chicago and Boston.

She told me, “I became bored with planning meals after a few years, and vitamin research was the hot topic. So I saved my money and went to Cornell to do vitamin research and get a doctorate.”

Mom never told me why she stopped her doctoral studies, but I suspect that she tried unsuccessfully to mimic her brother Arnold, who was a professor at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California.

She apparently confided her troubles to her best friend Esther, and Esther introduced Mom to her cousin Karl. My parents married in 1938.

Next let me tell you about my father, Karl Jacob Belser. Dad grew up in a strict German Lutheran family in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He had a nervous breakdown at 9 and his physician father, Martin Luther Belser, died when he was 14.

Dad excelled at the Universities of Michigan and Harvard where he studied architecture. By the end of the 1930s, Dad was a relatively famous architect having won the 1928 Booth Fellowship and having photographed the Indian
architecture of the Southwest. At the time of my birth in 1940 he was a professor at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia, which is now Virginia Tech.

Dad was a slender bearded, bespectacled, man in those days, who walked to classes in a tweed jacket, bow tie, and beret. He told me that he used to march his black Scotty dog twice a day through the neighborhood of brick and white, steeply gabled, houses. By contrast his newly built, tan, flat-roofed, art deco style home stood out like a sore thumb. I found his house in the late 1990’s by driving up and down the streets within walking distance of the Virginia Tech campus. However, Dad was going nowhere as a poorly paid professor.

The house that Karl J. Belser designed and built in Blacksburg, VA
After Mom and Dad married, Mom started managing the house and pushing for Dad to make more money to support a family. Mom became the perfect housewife, cooking nutritious meals, canning cherries and peaches, making strawberry jam, buying blond dressers and tables from the furniture mills in South Carolina, importing teak and rattan Danish modern chairs, and then bringing me into the world. My parents named me Karl Arnold Belser after Dad and after Mom’s brother Arnold.

At this point I want to tell you about Uncle Arnie because he was literally the shadow presence in my life, to whose standard I would be expected to attain.

Arnold Beckman

In 1940 my uncle, Arnold Orville Beckman, was a professor of chemistry at the California Institute of Technology and had recently formed Beckman Instruments to
build acidity meters for the citrus industry in Southern California. He subsequently invented a precision electronic component called a Helipot, like a tuning knob on a radio, which could accurately adjust the pointer of a meter to zero before making an acidity measurement. The military used the Helipot in World War II in radar systems. Uncle Arnold built a Helipot factory and became rich.

The Helipot invented by Arnold Orville Beckman

I was born in 1940 into this era of exploding technological change after the end of the Great Depression. The explosion started with the inventions of television, radar, the automatic automobile transmission, the Jeep, and of course the Helipot.

The United States was also on the brink of war in 1940. The Germans had bombed England and were already putting Jews into concentration camps. The needs of this
war would spur technological growth, and I would grow up to become a part of this technology development engine.

A photograph (not the one below) from those early days tells the whole story.² Mom is standing next to Dad in front of our strange little art deco house. Mom is holding me up like a prize for my Uncle Arnie to inspect.

² Karl J. Belser took, developed and printed the photograph of Karl A. Belser using an early color process. Note the yellow, red and blue color layers at the edges of the print. I couldn’t find the black and white photo that I refer to in the text.
I can imagine Mom saying, “Look at him. He’s going to grow up to be a famous scientist just like you.”

I remember nothing of this time, but I know by what happened later that Mom tried to make me into the image of her brother Arnold as fast as possible. Mom strictly followed the child rearing philosophy of John Watson per this quote: ‘The Watsonian’s regarded the turn of the century child as a little machine that should be oiled and greased regularly, and otherwise left alone.’ Mom programmed me to read and calculate so that I could begin first grade early.

These societal and parental factors foreshadowed my career as an engineer. They also foreshadowed a deep resentment of my mother that took many years to resolve.
1944 – Early Memories

Growing up with Mommy’s expectations to be like her favorite brother wasn’t easy. I broke my front baby teeth falling from the toilet when I had a tantrum. I bashed my brother Steve with a tomato juice can. I punched my fist through our garage window, leaving me with a huge right-arm scar that should have been stitched but wasn’t. I started life as an angry child, dominated by Mommy’s expectations.

We moved to Eagle Rock near Los Angeles from Detroit in 1944. Our house stood on the side of an arid hill, a twisty, dead-end street running in front of it. Fields of brown grass with a grove of eucalyptus trees stood on the slopes. I loved the fresh smelling air and warm days of rural Southern California.

Mommy tutored me every day to make me smart: puzzles, cutting paper, building castles with round oatmeal boxes with rock salt walls, reading simple stories. I responded by making life miserable for my brothers, so Mommy made my brothers and me learn this poem to make us be good:
Ki Eye Key Eye Kus,
No body like us,
We are the Belser boys you see,
Always a-winning,
Always a-grinning,
Always a-feeling fine,
Yeah!

My brothers and I fought anyway. No silly song was going to change that. Mommy finally gave up and sent me to first grade when I was only 5.

I imagine that she told Daddy, “Little Karl is smart enough. He’ll benefit from formal schooling.” She apparently didn’t realize that I was still a baby.

Our bungalow perched on the side of a hill with a small front yard banked by a cement wall next to the curvy street, a garage built into the hillside, and a long upward-sloping backyard. At the top of the backyard was another street, and there were wooden stairs leading up to it from our house through blue spiked cactus and Palo Verde trees. The street above led to the school on the other side of the hill. I don’t think it was more than three
blocks away, but it seemed like miles when Mommy and I walked there on my first day of school.

Mommy said, “I’ll come back when class is over and we’ll walk home.”

She left me at the school that first day, and I remember sitting in a circle with a bunch of older kids. I felt overwhelmed, I cried for a while, and then I ran home.

That afternoon Mommy enrolled me in another school where Joanie, a 6-year old neighbor girl went. The new
school was many blocks away, across a busy street. Mommy didn’t drive me to school even though we had a car because she said we couldn’t get gas during wartime.

A Neighbor’s House painted by Karl J. Belser, 1944
Mommy asked Joanie’s mother, “Could Karl walk with Joanie when she goes to school.”

The answer was “yes,” and I liked walking with Joanie. I also liked buying milk with my own money and taking a bag lunch.

From then on Joanie and I played together every day after school until one day we both got undressed under the eucalyptus trees in the vacant lot across the street. Joanie’s mother saw us, and a few minutes later Mommy held me up so that I could look across the fence where Joanie and her mother stood.

Mommy looked at me, then at Joanie and said, “We will never do ‘that’ again, will we?”

I said “No,” and Joanie said nothing but held my gaze. I knew then that Joanie and I were friends. I felt independent of Mommy for the first time.

Joanie and I continued to hike in the ravines near our house, help our daddies burn rubbish in a steel oil drum at the end of the street, and eat Cracker Jacks on the picnic table in our shady back patio while talking about any secrets that we wanted to keep.
Then one day Mommy said, “Daddy doesn’t like his job in Los Angeles and is going to become a teacher again. We are going to move to Eugene, Oregon.”

I said goodbye to Joanie in the fall of 1945 just after the end of World War II. I never again had a friend who was a girl until I was a teenager.
1945 – The Trip to Eugene Oregon

The rain poured down on us in the mountains north of Redding, California when we moved from Los Angeles. My brother Steve and I were screaming and kicking each other in the back seat. Mommy, who was driving, looked back, yelled at us, and accidentally jerked the steering wheel. Our little black 1939 Chevy coupe with its teardrop headlights started sliding, and our green canvas covered trailer twisted. We almost went over a steep cliff into the canyon below. I was terrified.

Daddy said, “This road is pretty slippery. We’ll have to be more careful so that we don’t slip again,” but the nagging fear stayed with me for the rest of the trip.

Our family dragged all our worldly possessions behind us like depression era westward immigrants and we arrived safely in Eugene, Oregon in the summer of 1945. The new house at 1636 Fairmont Boulevard lay next to the tree covered hills in the east of Eugene. It initially had no lawn, spotty gray paint and a rotten porch. Daddy rebuilt the porch and converted the furnace to oil to make the house livable in the cold climate. He also nailed the
front yard coal chute shut so that my brothers and I wouldn’t play in it and get hurt.

My brothers Steve and Larry and I had beds in deep triangular pockets under the eves. I was afraid of the dark, especially when I heard sounds outside and felt the cold roof above me. I hid under my covers to muffle the sounds and to keep warm.

I guess Daddy sensed my fear because he said, “Lumberjacks once owned this house, and they built this sleeping room in the attic for 4 workers. You just have to be careful not to bump your head.”

I felt more grown up then because I was sleeping where lumberjacks once slept.

All during that first winter I heard the rain pounding on the roof above me as I played with my favorite toy, a 3-rail electric train. I also listened to an old radio in its painted-green cabinet with its round pointer-dial. I heard scary stories: the creaking door of Inner Sanctum and the echoing voice of The Shadow asking ‘Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?’ The airwaves sent a chill down my spine, talking of dangerous people and terrible things like murder. I had nightmares about people coming
into my room at night, especially when the noises outside were loud.

Then the worst thing happened. My parents took me to see a movie in which a barn caught on fire with horses trapped inside, and I became obsessed with burning up. For months I carefully packed up my electric train every night in preparation to flee my bedroom if the house caught on fire.

By the summer of 1946 I wasn’t listening to murder mysteries on the radio or seeing scary movies. Instead I spent hours playing in my new sandbox, the one that Daddy had built under the trellis behind the garage, the trellis that had purple wisteria flowers in spring, the trellis that was surrounded by pink hollyhocks in summer. The sand we hauled back from the beach foamed, smelled like fishy seaweed and attracted flies when I made a lake with water from the garden hose. I built cities of sand, and my back got brown despite the overcast sky. I had no more thoughts of death or fire.

The trellis was next to our back yard, which had a giant weeping willow tree at its center. My brothers and I used to climb to the very top of this tree, that is, until
Steve fell and cracked his head. I saw how Steve lay there like a red stained rag doll.

I asked Daddy, “Is Steve dead?” because I still wasn’t sure about death.

Daddy finally said, “Don’t worry. He’s only knocked out and bleeding a little. You boys have to be more careful when you play in this tree.”

My curiosity and worries about death were rekindled. But Steve recovered and we had many adventures, exploring the woods above our house in the summer of 1947 and sliding down Birch Lane on our sled right across Fairmont Boulevard in the winter of 1948. I was 8 by then.

Daddy saw us sledding like this and screamed, “Stay out of the street, it’s dangerous. Why can’t you kids be more careful?” and he shook his head in disbelief.

One day Steve yelled, “Look at that car.”

I turned my head and saw a large sedan careen down Birch Lane, smash into a little tan car, and crush it against a telephone pole. Glass shattered, metal ripped, and the little car hissed. I smelled gasoline and watched a trickle of red liquid mixed with the steamy water from the engine melt the ice and flow into the sewer. The
driver of the sedan got out and, seeing that he could do nothing, sat on the curb and cried.

The police came and told us that the white-faced man slumped over the steering wheel was dead and that we should go home. This was the first time I saw a dead person, and I had dreams about it for weeks.

I imagined Daddy saying, “Be Careful.” I knew that this death was caused by carelessness, and I became less afraid because I knew that I could be really careful.
1947 – The Little Perfectionist

My first grade teacher discovered that I was near-sighted when I couldn’t read the blackboard in the front row. I got glasses, but Mom insisted that I go to a doctor who could cure near-sightedness with exercise. The exercises didn’t work, and I knew that I had displeased Mom. I just had bad eyes.

Luckily, Mom didn’t care about sports because I was one year younger than my classmates and I couldn’t compete. I remember how inferior I felt when I couldn’t catch a fly ball.

I became obsessed with being perfect in school to please Mom as illustrated by the following story.

I was about 8 and in 4th grade when my parents decided to make a car trip to San Francisco. I was a Cub Scout and Mom was the den mother. I was good friends with Bobby, one of the boys in my troupe.

“Wouldn’t you like to stay with Bobby so you don’t miss too much school?” Mom said.
I agreed after Mom pointed out that I had a perfect attendance record up to this point.

As an aside, we still had our 2-door 1939 Chevy coupe with two sidewise jump seats in back with a stool in the middle. It was really convenient that I should stay home because my brothers were too young to stay alone.

On the second night at Bobby’s house I was terrifically unhappy, and I blew up. I felt abandoned. I was an outsider in a loving family. I started beating on Bobby. I spent the rest of the stay sleeping on the sofa.

I remember how I cried when I heard about all the cool things I missed, the redwood forests, the house inside a tree, the cable cars, Chinatown, and the sailboats on the bay. I even lost my best friend Bobby.

My attitude changed after that experience, and I remember the spankings that the school principle gave me for my bad behavior. I returned to being a good student in 8th grade when I finally realized that I could get good grades to please myself.
1950 – The Bully

My neighbor Scott, who was a high school student, ran out of Mr. Keene’s corner store near Condon Elementary School in Eugene, Oregon and knocked me down.

Scott said with a laugh, “Sorry twerp. I didn’t see you.”

“Like fun,” I thought as I brushed the dust off my jeans. I picked up my lunch box and saw Scott sucking on a Sugar Daddy. “You redheaded bully. If I were bigger I’d knock you down for a change.”

I continued walking home, but Scott stayed beside me slurping and glancing sidewise until I licked my lips. Then Scott laughed.

My dad was a poorly paid university professor in the late 1940s, so our family had no extra money for luxuries such as comic books and candy. Hence I didn’t know what a Sugar Daddy tasted like.

Finally I asked, “Did you use your milk money to buy that candy?”

Scott regarded me with disgust and said, “Don’t be stupid. I get paid when I get good grades.” Then Scott
pulled both my ears with his sticky fingers and stuck his sucker out like a mocking tongue. I ran home crying.

Mom was baking oatmeal cookies, so I slammed my lunch box on the counter with a bang and blurted out, “Mom, can I get paid for good grades like Scott does?”

Mom didn’t notice my wet eyes. Instead she smiled and said, “I’m sorry, but your father and I don’t believe in paying for good grades. You’ll have to decide for yourself if grades are important.”

She pulled me to her powdery apron, gave me a hug, and the cookies smelled so good that I grabbed one behind her back. Then I ran to my room with my hand in front of me out of sight of Mom. As I sat on my bed eating the oatmeal cookie I thought that a Sugar Daddy must taste better.

That afternoon, my friend Mike and I were working on our tree house. Mike, dark haired and a year older then me, had built a tree house before with his brother, Jim, when they lived near San Francisco.

I whacked a nail as hard as I could and burst out laughing when I realized that if I could snatch a cookie from mom, I could steal a Sugar Daddy.
Mike laughed and began hammering hard too. He said, “It’s fun hitting nails, isn’t it.” I nodded and I made a plan.

The next day after school I looked at a comic book in the corner store. When Mr. Keene turned to help a lady, I stuck a Sugar Daddy in my pocket and took the same reading pose as before.

When I came out, there stood Scott, and he had seen everything, but he didn’t call Mr. Keene. He caught me by the arm, squeezed it until it hurt and said, “Tomorrow you’ll give me your milk money or I’ll tell.”

I broke loose and ran. I figured that Mr. Keene wouldn’t believe Scott, so my milk money was safe.

But later that afternoon Mom grabbed me, and she was carrying her willow switch. She said that Scott’s mother told her that Scott saw me take candy from the store.

Mom asked, “Why are your hands so sticky if you didn’t have a Sugar Daddy.”

I finally had to admit my guilt and take the consequences, and I took more consequences for lying when I told her that Scott wanted me to give him my milk money for not telling. Then Mom and I went back to the store to pay
for the candy. Scott thumbed his nose at me as we passed his house. I knew then that Scott had heard everything from his bedroom window.

A month later it was summer, and I decided to earn money to buy more candy. I was done with stealing. Many lawns in our neighborhood had high grass, so I convinced Mike, who was bigger and stronger than me, to help me mow lawns. I had never mowed a lawn before, but it looked easy when Dad made the grass fly. We knocked on several doors, and one old man said he’d pay us 25 cents.

Scott eyed me as we pushed the mower past his house. I saw the glance and it made me shiver, so I dragged Mike forward as I pushed faster.

The lawn was thick with moist green grass because it had just stopped raining. I made a good cut next to the sidewalk. The grass smelled delicious. Mike needed to help me make the second cut. We struggled together half way through the third pass when the lawnmower started sliding over the long slippery blades of grass.

The old man came out, and just then Scott appeared. Scott said, “I’ll finish that lawn for 50 cents.”
The man looked at the lawn and then at Mike and me. He laughed and replied, “I can’t leave my lawn half mowed, can I?”

Mike and I were so humiliated that we ran back to my house, dragging the clicking mower behind us. This was the last straw.

Now Mike and I wanted revenge, and we took long hikes in the hills near Mike’s house to discuss the possibilities. Finally Mike’s teenaged brother, Jim, who was close to Scott’s age, helped us make a nasty plan, that he had to explain to us because at first we didn’t get it. However, Jim wanted money before he would help us. Jim said that he was saving up to buy a car. We needed some way to get cash.

One day near the end of summer we spotted an old 1940 round-backed Ford sedan parked on a dusty side road. We saw no one, but we snuck up to it pretending it was a tank, Mike on one side and me on the other. We popped our heads up to peek in the windows. A woman screamed and a man reached into the front seat and honked the horn. Both people were naked, and it was in the middle of the afternoon.
We came back a few minutes later to try to identify the woman after Mike had explained how we could make money out of this situation. Mike recognized the guy as a fellow who sold hot dogs at the university football games, and he thought the woman was a teacher at Condon. But when we came back, only a cloud of dust remained.

Mike grumped at the lost opportunity and stamped his foot on an empty Lucky Strike pack where the car had been. He twisted his foot on the paper for good luck and yelled “lucky strike.” Then he added, “If that was a Camel, that woman would get a hump in front in 9 months.”

I got it because Dad had recently explained the facts of life to me, and I forced a laugh.

Then Mike had a brilliant idea. We could collect empty bottles to make money.

He said, “I go to games at the university stadium all the time with my dad and Jim, and people drop empty Coke, Pepsi and RC bottles under the bleachers.”

Mike and I began singing the radio commercial, “RC, RC, Royal Crown Cola is the drink for me,” as we hiked back down the hill.
The next Sunday, after the previous day’s game, Mike and I pulled my rusty red wagon down to the stadium. The gate was open, and we got to work. The wagon was half full of empty bottles when we heard, “What do you think you’re doing?” coming from behind us.

The man said he was the stadium guard, but he was also the man in the Ford sedan, and Mike negotiated a long-term agreement.

By the end of football season, Mike and I had amassed the enormous sum of $16.72, and neither of us had spent a nickel on candy or comics. We had to give Mike’s brother Jim $15 to buy the naked lady playing cards that Jim had purchased two years ago in San Francisco’s China town, and Jim agreed to plant the deck. We told him to act on Friday night when Scott’s family went to see the movies in downtown Eugene.

I told Jim that Scott usually had his window ajar and that dad’s ladder was lying at the side of our house.

Mike jumped in, “Just make the cards look well-used. You know how, and hide them under Scott’s mattress.”
I added, “Scott’s mother will find them on Saturday when she changes his sheets. Scott’s mother is religious and strict. She’ll explode.”

Sure enough just after lunch on Saturday Scott’s mother screamed for her husband. Scott was outside shooting baskets, and came running.

Scott’s father’s voice boomed, “What are you doing spending your money on this kind of smut?” He didn’t even wait for Scott to answer and continued, “Your payment for grades is stopped.”

The next day Mike and I sat in our sandbox, each sucking on a Sugar Daddy. I told Mike, “You know, the only thing sweeter than a Sugar Daddy is revenge.”
1951 – The Country Experience

Mom broke the news. “We are going to spend next year in California during your father’s sabbatical from the University of Oregon. He has a job with the Santa Clara County planning department, and I want us to have a farm experience. We have rented a 25 acre ranch in the Santa Cruz Mountains.”

Mom had grown up in the second decade of the 20th century in Cullom, a farm town in Illinois, and told my brothers and me about how wonderful rural life was.

I complained, “But Mom, all my friends are here. I don’t want to go.”

“You’ll like it. Wait and see,” Mom replied.

A month later we wended our way through the green hills south of San Francisco to our new home in Los Gatos. My parents had purchased a brand new gray 1950 Ford with a grill like a jet engine for the trip.

We entered our driveway through a forest of giant redwood stumps standing among second growth trees at Route 2 Box 54 B on Black Road. Steep rubble-strewn hillsides
skirted each side of the road, and a small creek flowed on the right.

The drive turned sharply up where the gorge narrowed, bumped across a rotten wooden bridge, climbed a hill and burst out of the forest onto a sloping pasture. The old Victorian farmhouse squatted on the pasture’s upper edge: gray, flaking paint, loose shingles, grass gone to seed, a large shady oak. The backside gazed out over the sharp valley below like a wizened old man.

Mom told my brothers Larry, Steve and I, “This place is really beautiful,” and I began to think that this country experience was going to be fun, that is if there were other kids to play with.

The front of the Victorian faced uphill onto a flat dirt circle that was the end of the driveway. A small paddock and a crumbling brown barn also faced onto this dusty ring. The barn contained two stalls, but the old cider press and picker’s boxes told more.

Mom said, “The pasture below the house used to be an apple orchard.” She pointed to the few remaining trees, untended for years, barely alive and covered with fungus.
She exclaimed, “Look at the Old bronze faucets and irrigation pipes poking up through the grass.

The irrigation reservoir and drinking water tank stood behind the barn and up the slope at the edge of the forest. A spring fed the drinking water tank. The excess water dribbled into the reservoir and apparently escaped into the ancient irrigation pipes. Only a shallow layer of stagnant green water remained that sang of frogs and smelled of algae.

My brothers and I explored the interesting outcroppings of rock on the open field and the source of water for our spring in the forest above our house. I vividly remember the landslide of boulders from the slope along our driveway that my brother Larry accidentally caused. I lost one front tooth, and Larry ran back home to the protection of Mom until I cooled down.

I broke into pack-rat nests to find old standing liberty silver dimes, marbles, string and keys. I even saw one of these rats in my bedroom when I heard a noise and turned on the light.

Mom said, “Don’t worry. They’re harmless,” but I slept lightly from then on.
I was depressed that summer of 1951. My skin was covered with poison oak, my teeth bashed-in, and no other kids. I pined for Oregon, our cozy little home there, and my longtime friends.

Mom became upset when she found out that the local public school was Lakeside Elementary School, a one-room schoolhouse. She decided that Steve, Larry and I should go instead the Montezuma School for Boys. We would go as day students because Dad didn’t make enough money to have us live there. This also meant that we were different, so I made no close friends.

Mom drove us to school every day in our gray Ford, down Black Road, over the Santa Cruz highway, and up the twisty Bear Creek Road. Them Mom drove Dad to work in downtown San Jose. There wasn’t a lot of traffic, but the driving killed our new Ford as well as much of Mom’s free time.

My brother’s and I received an education in many things at Montezuma other than academics. I lost all of my marbles to a kid named Jerry who had one glass eye. I learned how to cinch a horse’s saddle so that I wouldn’t end up riding on the horse’s stomach. I learned to like
the smell of horse manure when cleaning stalls and the exhilarating sensation of stake riding on a horse foamy with sweat. I learned how students who lived in the dorm cut trap doors in the floor so that they could sneak out at night. I saw outrageous things like an unpopular kid getting his pants hoisted up the flagpole, and I got bitten on the toe by a snapping turtle in the lake next to the amphitheatre in the redwood grove where I graduated from 7th grade.

I saw Mom’s happy disposition disappear when the vicious winter storms came. The roof leaked, the wind blew through the cracks in the walls, and the large oak next to our house blew over, crushing the porch, taking out our phone, and blocking our driveway. We were trapped for two days until Dad had a car passage cut through the trunk. Shortly after, Mom frantically turned the steering wheel right and left as we slid on ice when she took us to school. The car rotated in slow motion, turned sidewise, and at last sloshed into a ditch so that the right front tire spun loose in the cold muddy water of the ditch. This was the first time I ever saw Mom cry.
By the end of that first school year I wanted more than ever to return to Eugene, Oregon and my old way of life. However, Dad became the planning director, and my hopes were shattered.

Mom broke the news, “Boys, we are going to stay in California. Your father got the job as planning director.”

Then I saw joy return to Mom’s face when she added, “We are going to move out of the mountains.”

She paused and grinned, “We just bought a comfortable house on Dry Creek Road in Campbell where there are good public schools, many social activities, all kinds of churches, and no natural hazards.”

Looking back, I think that my country experience was a good one, but I never have had any desire to move back to the mountains.
1952 - Reverence for Life


I lay on my stomach in the bottom of the Kirk Ditch, a dry irrigation channel that ran behind our house at 660 (later change to 960) Dry Creek Road in the farm town of Campbell in the summer of 1952. I pressed my birthday present, a Stevens 22-rifle, against my shoulder, pushed back my glasses to squint through the sites, squeezed the trigger, and made a tin can fly, all hidden from view in what I thought was a safe place. I ached to kill vermin, but I needed practice.

Our walnut grove bordered one side of the ditch and the Stejanovich’s cherry orchard the other. There were handfuls of dark red, juicy cherries that jumped into my lunch bag as I came home from school through the orchard and that gave me the runs when I ate too many.

“What the Hell do you think you’re doing’,” boomed a voice above me.

I looked up, and there on either side of the ditch were men in jeans and T-shirts, angry faces, kicking up
dust in the rush to get to me, fists clenched. I felt my heart jump.

Another man said, “Your bullets have been raining down on my yard. Are you a fool? How old are you anyway?”

I stood up, unwilling to make eye contact, my skinny body exposed, and said, “I’m 12.” How was I to know that there was cement under a layer of silt at the bottom of the ditch?

“Give me the gun,” the man continued. “Where do you live?”

The men took me to face Mom who apologized profusely. She took the rifle, looked at me like I certainly was a fool, and promised the men that it would never happen again.

After the men left she said, “I told your father that you were too young to get a rifle, and now look at what you’ve done. You’re lucky that no one got hurt.”

“But Mom, I was only trying to learn to aim well so that I could hit a gopher or one of those black birds in your garden.”

“It’s too dangerous,” Mom said.
“But dad shoots at squirrels and gophers and birds. Why can’t I?”

Mom glared and didn’t answer. I knew better than to push further.

That evening my parents had a long talk, raised voices behind their bedroom door, dinner late, my brothers wondering.

Finally Mom started preparing dinner. I stood beside her, helping her peel vegetables, and tried to get back on her good side.

She finally looked at me and said, “You’ve seen too much killing. You need to develop a reverence for life. Your father and I have decided that you should start raising chickens. It can be a 4-H project, and it’ll be good for you.”

I expected to be grounded so that I couldn’t go to the Saturday morning movies at the Campbell Theater, but this was not too bad. I liked chickens.

That weekend Dad and I went to Nelson Feed and Grain and bought 20 newly hatched chickens, little balls of yellow fluff that peeped and scratched, and made my heart feel happy. We took the chicks home in a cardboard box
along with chicken feed and a water bowl. We also bought lumber, nails and chicken wire to build a coop and a bail of wood chips to cover the ground.

The chicks initially lived in the shed beside our warm lath house where Mom raised begonias the color of oranges. This was a lovely place, and I cared for the little creatures with delight.

Dad and I built the chicken coop, a 15-foot square box of chicken wire with a hen house in back. Then we covered the ground with a thick layer of wood chips that became stinky during the week, ready for the fertilizer pile for Mom’s vegetable garden. The chicks quickly grew to egg-laying hens and crowing roosters.

Mom said, “These roosters are eating too much grain. They’re only good for the stew pot. We need to thin the flock.”

Thin the flock, I pondered? This had never occurred to me.

“We need to catch and kill the roosters,” Mom said. “I’ll teach you.”

She made a loop on the end of a stick, one end attached to the end and the other going back through an
eyelet so that the loop could be pulled tight. She showed me how to hook the loop around one of the rooster’s feet and grab it. She then hung it upside down by the legs from the branch of one of our walnut trees, the rooster jumping and clucking, trying to get free.

She said, “Take this knife, grab the chicken’s head and pull it down, and saw through the neck.”

I almost fainted.

“Me?” I said. “You do it.”

Mom said, “No. There is a time for killing and this is it. You need to learn what it feels like.”

I sawed off a head. What else could I do, and my stomach churned as the blood dripped from the neck of the still twitching chicken.

One after another the roosters vanished, Mom putting the dead bodies in a large pan of scalding water so that the feathers could be pulled, then cleaning them and preparing them to be put into the freezer in our garage. At least I did not have to take out the guts.

I still kept tending the remaining hens, eggs every morning, filling the feed and water bowls, changing the wood chips on weekends. However, the delight I once felt
about raising chickens had vanished, along with my desire to get back my 22-rifle and kill.
1953 – Picking a Career

I was about to enter high school when Mom asked, “What do you want to do for a living.”

I was caught off guard. I knew that Dad, who was then the Director of Planning for Santa Clara County, wanted me to be an architect like he was and that Mom wanted me to be like Uncle Arnie who was an industrialist, whatever that was.

I stutter, “Why. I don’t know.”

I was 13 and only had jobs cutting apricots and delivering papers in the rural town of Campbell, California.
Mom said, “You’ll need to decide soon because you’ll need to take the right courses in high school to get into college.”

My family and I were going to take a road trip that summer to visit our relatives in the Mid West, so I said, “I think I’ll ask my uncles what they recommend when we see them.”

The main focus of this trip was to visit Dad’s brother, Uncle Walter, who Dad hadn’t seen for 10 years. Uncle Walter lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan, was a doctor and ran a large medical clinic.

I was anxious to meet my relatives, because I never met any of them except Mom’s brother, Uncle Arnie, and his family.

We still had our gray 1950 Ford. It was only four years old and should have been up to the trip, but I learned that ignorance could ruin even the most robust vehicle.

We sweated through the first part of the trip, and somewhere early on, maybe in Salt Lake City, we stopped and purchased a gray evaporative window cooler. This cooler was a cylinder that hung on the passenger door window,
scooped in air, directing the air through a maze of wet cloth, and squirted the cooled air out into the car.

I sat in the passenger seat and had to pull the cloth to keep the cool air coming, and I asked Mom, who was driving, how the cooler worked. Dad was sitting between Steve and Larry in the back seat so that they wouldn’t fight.

Mom apparently didn’t know how the cooler worked, so Dad answered, “The cloth works like a drying towel in restrooms works, except in this case the cloth dips into water to keep it wet instead of taking the water from your hands. The water from the cloth evaporates and takes the heat out of the air. A lot of clever engineering went into that cooler.”

This was the first time I was aware that engineering was a thing to do.

The trip was long and I became irritable. One night we were all stacked into a small motel room on cots. It was hot, and I was next to the wall. A baby was crying in the next room.

I banged on the wall with my fists and yelled, “Make that damned baby shut up.”
Mom got mad, made me put on my pants and go outside until I cooled down. Dad apparently couldn’t sleep either and came out to join me.

Lightning bugs were everywhere. I had never seen them before, so I asked Dad what made them glow.

He said, “The light happens because of a chemical reaction. Someday a clever engineer is going to figure out how to make lights for people using chemicals.”

I heard that word engineer again. I thought that it would be fun to do engineering work.

Uncle Walter’s house was a magnificent colonial two-story building set off by a deep lush front lawn on a street lined with enormous elm trees. A four-foot high figure of a black man in a red coat, red hat, and blue pants stood next to the driveway holding a large gold ring to which someone, maybe my cousin Amy who was horse crazy, was supposed to tie a horse.

The house took my breath away. My cousin Marty even had a portable TV and a Chevy fastback, newer that our car, and we didn’t even have a TV.

Uncle Walter was rich. Maybe I should be a doctor.
“After your father and I got married,” Mom told me, “he and I visited Ann Arbor. Grandma Emma liked to talk about gory operations at the dinner table. I almost got sick. You have to open people up when you’re a doctor. Think about it.”

Those bloody roosters that I had to kill when I raised chickens popped into my mind, and I shuddered.

We left Ann Arbor and went to visit Uncle Fred and Aunt Minnie Hagaman on their farm in Ohio. I remember sleeping in a feather bed, getting up very early to eat a breakfast of mashed potatoes and steak, and driving Uncle Fred’s John Deere tractor as I helped Uncle Fred with his daily chores.

Mom said, “Farm life is the most difficult way to make a living. Uncle Fred has to work seven days a week. He’s a slave to his land and animals.”

I already knew what rural life was like because of my country experience. I definitely wasn’t going to be a farmer.

From there we went to Chicago to visit Mom’s half brother, Roland Beckman, who was called ‘Doc’. Doc told me what I think Mom was trying to tell me.
“You should be an engineer,” he said. “Arnie is a chemist, but he made his millions making electronic equipment.”

Doc then told me stories about Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, which motivated me to think about engineering as a career.

On the way home we passed through Cullom, Illinois where Mom grew up. We visited two of Grandma Lizzie’s brothers, Charlie and Fred Jewkes. The two strange old men lived in a Victorian farmhouse with no modern conveniences. I pumped water from a back yard well and used an outhouse for the first time. However, they were rich because the barn and corn silos were new, and they owned thousands of acres of cornfields. They had to be crazy to live like they did. I’d fix up that cool old house if it were mine, I thought.

We headed home with our car cooler whistling, across the Great Plains and into the Rocky Mountains. Our car started steaming and we stopped somewhere near Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Some young men stopped to help, said that we had vapor lock, and told Dad to pack snow on the gas lines to condense the gas vapor. Dad got carried away and put a thick layer of snow on the engine after the men left.
I loudly asserted, “Dad, that’s not what those guys told you to do. They said to put the snow around the gas lines.”

Dad said, “What’s the difference.”

The car started, but now the motor ran poorly and water leaked into the oil.

At Steamboat Springs Dad bought a wall hanging for me, a yellow oval slice of a branch with bark around the edges. It said, “Why be disagreeable when with a little effort you could be a real stinker.”

Dad winked and said, “Be a bigger stinker next time when I’m about to do something stupid,” but I knew that he was also telling me that my behavior could be improved.

We limped home and sold our Ford as junk because it had a cracked block. We purchased a used dark green 1953 Chevy 4-door sedan, which Mom liked. She had it painted canary yellow with a white top, but within two years it’s engine also failed. I thought that we would have been better off fixing our cool old ‘50 Ford, which had been a reliable workhorse.

I now could respond to Mom’s questions about my career, so the trip was a success.
After my first week in High School, I told her, “I’m going to be an engineer. I’m writing a paper on chemical engineering in my orientation class.”

I imagined making light with chemicals like those lightning bugs did.

Mom smiled in agreement, but I suspected that she still saw in me what she always wanted, a budding industrialist like her brother Arnie.
1955 – Playing with Matches

Campbell was still rural in the summer of 1955, and I was unsophisticated. My next-door neighbor, Chuck, bought firecrackers in San Francisco’s China town and resold them to the neighborhood kids. Chuck seemed worldly, and I considered him a fireworks expert.

“Let me show you how to make a rocket,” Chuck said after the novelty of blowing up tin cans and anthills with firecrackers got boring.

He wrapped a circle of aluminum foil around a strike-anywhere kitchen match, folded the sheet to make three triangular fins, and poked the stick into the ground at a slight angle. The angle was just enough so that the flame from a second match could heat the shrouded match head.
I leaned over beside Chuck, pushing my glasses tight against my nose, while Chuck roasted the tip of the aluminum foil.

“Pssst,” the rocket sounded, and it sailed past my face and high into the air, leaving behind the smell of sulfur.

I jumped, Chuck laughed, and I made a rocket too.

“Now let me show you my popper,” Chuck said with a confident know-it-all air, and he smoothed back his hair like he was a movie star.

He showed me what looked like a hot-dog-sized bolt with coarse threads with a six-sided head. A nail stuck out from a hole in the center of the head. He removed the nail whose point had been filed flat and stuck a cut-off match head into the hole and pushed it in with the nail. Then he grabbed the bolt, head down, banged the nail on a big rock, and a loud pop resulted.

I realized then and there that matches had possibilities. I went home immediately and asked Dad to help make a popper.

Dad said, “The easiest way to make the hole is to use my lathe.”
He had never let me use his lathe before, and I was excited. We chucked up a large bolt, bored a perfectly centered hole, and made the popper. However, he later told me that it had been a big mistake to let me use his shop tools as will become apparent.

I built a real cannon, this time without Dad’s help. After all, the popper was a simple cannon that didn’t shoot bullets. I squeezed together the end of an aluminum tube with a vice and bent the squeezed end so that it wouldn’t come apart. This time I bored a small ignition hole near the squeezed end so that I could light the pile of match heads inside directly. I pushed and crushed the heads tight with a wad of paper and added a screw as the bullet. It worked great.

I played with this toy until one day, as I was packing match heads into my cannon in the back seat of our car on the way to the beach, I pushed too hard, and the matches exploded with a loud bang.

“Damn it anyway,” Dad said as he gave me a half-hearted safety lecture. “Don’t load that canon with match heads. It’s not safe, and you might have made Mom drive off the road.”
I said, “Yes sir,” and decided then and there to make gunpowder with my chemistry set.

The gunpowder I made never worked well, but I discovered that magnesium powder mixed with potassium nitrate, sometimes called flash powder, made a wonderful explosion in my cannon, and it never went off accidentally.

A pirate pistol, a bigger cannon on a wooden grip, was my next project. I bored a one-inch diameter hexagonal brass rod using Dad’s lathe and then drilled a firing hole on the back edge that I had filed flat. This time I used a rubber band propelled hammer to light the match head like a cap gun works. I cast cylindrical lead bullets that exactly fit the barrel using a wooden mold bored with the same drill bit with which I bored the barrel. The gun worked great, but unfortunately these bullets made a loud buzz on their way to the target on the dilapidated barn door in a neighbor’s field. I knew the bullets were spinning end over end because sometimes they hit sideways.

I finally went to Chuck for an answer to this tumbling problem and he said, “Dummy, that’s why the old cannons used balls.” Then he found the end of a sawed-off 22 rifle in his garage and continued, “Look at this. It has
twisted grooves inside the barrel that keep cylindrical bullets flying straight.”

He gave me the old barrel, and I made a better pistol by boring out one end to accept a 22 cartridge. I attached a brass cap with a firing pin over the bullet end of the barrel and put it on my old pirate pistol handle. This gun worked much better with the bullets hitting the old barn door squarely.

Dad heard about my zip gun from my brothers, but before he could take it away I traded the gun to a kid at school for a switchblade knife with a baby blue handle. The knife had a 6-inch blade and was probably more dangerous than the zip gun because I took it to school every day.

Dad, after he confiscated the knife, tried to constructively motivate me by giving me a model airplane powered by a Jet-Ex engine, which burned a tan fuel pellet lit by a fuse that stuck out of the jet hole.

“Why don’t you build this airplane?” he said. “It’s safer than zip guns or switch blade knifes.”
I did, and unfortunately I decided to make a bigger jet engine using a spent CO2 cartridge. I lit the Jet-Ex fuse stuck into the cylinder filled with flash powder.

“Wham.”

I felt a piece of shrapnel hit my earlobe, and then I couldn't hear. I lay there stunned, and Dad came to take away my chemistry set. My experiments with explosives were over.

What else could I do but make a crossbow, a powerful crossbow using a cut down automobile spring, a steel cable for the bowstring, and pointed half-inch dowels for arrows. I got the plans from Popular Mechanics.

I shot arrows through our wooden backyard fence with splinters flying everywhere. Then the fun was over because I was afraid that the cable would slip and hit me in the face.

After that I lost interest in weapons, even though I loved to build them. My interests shifted to girls, and I wanted a car. Both girlfriends and cars I later found out were dangerous in different ways, but that’s another story.
1956 – Guys, Gals and Cars

I knocked on a homeowner’s door near where I lived, and the man who answered wielded a shotgun. He said, “Don’t you fool around with my wife. Come back and you’re a dead man.”

I beat it.

How could he think that his wife would be attracted to me, a skinny, bicycle-riding, 17-year old with a blond crew cut? None of the cute girls at Campbell High would give me the time of day. I was working because I needed a cool car to attract women. Mr. Gill, the Fuller Brush man, paid me well for making product demonstration appointments and for warning him about dangerous houses like this one.
It took me 6 months to earn enough to buy the car of my dreams, a dark blue 1946 Ford convertible with a white
top that stood waiting for me at Mac’s used car lot in Cambrian Park.

When Dad allowed me to buy the car, I joined a hot rod club, the Sidewinders of Campbell, for which I designed and had sand-cast the plate below to hang on my rear bumper. My new friends liked to drag race and later try to meet the girl’s we had impressed at Mel’s Drive-In on weeknights in downtown San Jose. On weekends we escaped to Boulder Creek in the Santa Cruz Mountains where we shot our guns in Gobbler’s Gorge and played poker and drank in a friend’s cabin by night. I usually came back on Sunday nights zonked out in the back seat of my own car while one of my friends drove.
I thought that I had an excellent life, that is, until I met Carol, the sister of another hot rod friend. She had long blonde hair, a cute pug nose, and big boobs. I thought that my car would help me seduce Carol, but I made the mistake of letting Carol meet my bowling friend Don.

Don lived in the wealthy community of Cupertino also near San Jose and went to Fremont High School. I met Don on a submarine trip for top physics students, which was a veiled attempt by an ex-Navy physics teacher to recruit good students. Don and I discovered that we both liked bowling and didn’t like the Navy.

Don, who was a good talker, immediately asked Carol out. I was mad, and told Don to back off. I thought that Don looked like a disheveled cowboy: curly brown hair, oblong face with large features, lanky build, blue jeans and a shirt with shiny snap buttons, and cowboy boots. I thought that I was better looking and certainly a better choice because I had a cool car and Don didn’t.

Don stared at me with squinty eyes, and after a few minutes he invited me to the beach at Santa Cruz the next weekend. I needed a change, so I went.
Don was a martial arts student and stayed in excellent shape working out with a medicine ball at the beach with his buddies. The martial arts guys dug a pit in the sand. One person would get in the pit and try to knock over some person at the top with the medicine ball. If the person at the top fell, he had to get into the pit.

The person in the pit had to throw the heavy medicine ball up hill. In addition, the person on top who caught the ball hammered it back at the person in the pit. Needless to say the weakest person ended up in the pit, and that weakest person was me. I got the pulp pounded out of me before it dawned on me that Don was no longer my friend.

I gave up bowling and devoted myself to street racing. I built an A-frame out of rusty angle iron beside our house and pulled the engine with a chain hoist rented from Grand Auto Supply. Then I rebuilt the motor: bored, stroked, full-race cam, dual carbs.

The changes took three months to complete, and Dad often stood by the door into the garage wringing his hands and whining, “Why? Why? You’ll never get it back together.” Dad knew nothing about cars, and wouldn’t have known what to do if he had offered to help.
But I did get it back together, and then I gave the car the correct look: a rake with the front bumper a cigarette pack height from the street, which was just street-legal, and the back-end high with two loud exhaust pipes sticking straight out.

I then cruised with the top down up First Street and down Second Street in a big loop every night. I raced when I could, and I hoped that I would impress some cool girl with my machine. But the only girl I wanted to know was Carol who sat next to Don in Don’s father’s almost new 1955 Chevy hardtop.

Don and I raced sometimes, and I could only beat Don off the light because Don’s car had an automatic. His overhead valve Chevy V8 could ultimately out-crank my 11-year old flat-head Ford, so I rarely went too fast.

One night I had a close race with a bright red ’40 Ford with a chopped top. The tires sang, the exhaust pipes rapped and echoed, and the pavement steamed of blue smoke from burning rubber. We raced neck-in-neck to higher than usual speeds right into a police trap: five black and whites, dozens of policemen, a paddy wagon with spotlights.
They arrested both the other driver and me while Don, Carol and a bunch of my hot rod club friends watched.

My self-anger matched my humiliation, but my anger cooled as the days passed. Then in one swoop my wonderful life ended. The judge suspended my driver’s license for three months and Mom made me sell my car. That made me a school bus rider again. I still had my bike and my job, but no need for money.

To my surprise, there was a plus to my misfortunes. Carol took the same school bus. In fact, I soon found out that the dramatic way I got arrested impressed Carol, and she felt sympathy because I had to sell my cool car. We sat together and talked every day about our friends, classes and hopes for the future with no competition from Don.

The court reinstated my driver’s license at the beginning of the summer. I convinced Mom to let me use our family car to take Carol to the drive-in movies and then to Mel’s Drive-In to eat and socialize.

I told Mom, “There is no way that our dumb-looking, yellow and white, 1953 Chevy sedan could be used in street racing.” This was not strictly true, but Mom bought the
argument. My use of the family car and my dating life ended when I blew a transmission while drag racing.
1957 – Mentors

I assumed that I was going to go to the California Institute of Technology even though I had only moderate grades in high school. After all my Uncle Arnie was the chairman of the board. I took the wrong math advanced placement portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and got rejected.

“Maybe Karl should go the junior college to better prepare himself,” Uncle Arnie told Mom. Mom had apparently tried to use her influence to get me admitted without consulting me.

I was upset with my Mom’s interference, and I was certain that Uncle Arnie thought that I was dumb. I resolved to never again try to get into Cal Tech. The net is that neither my mother nor my uncle was my mentor. I scrambled to get admitted to San Jose State College, which was not yet a university. My father’s actions were different.

“Remind me,” Dad said. “What are you taking in school?”
Dad, my first mentor, was driving me to San Jose State in the fall of 1957 because, as punishment for drag racing, I had to sell my car. Dad, partially bald and dressed in a dark business suit with a bow tie, spent most of his time working on Santa Clara County business as the Director of Planning, so I appreciated this little window into his busy schedule.

I replied, “Analytic geometry, physics, engineering chemistry and English.”

“What’s your favorite subject?” he continued.
“I like mathematics the best because of my math professor, Dr. Werner Hogat. He spent two weeks deriving Kepler’s laws of satellite motion after Sputnik went up.”

Dad loved the stars, so he found his old homebuilt 6-inch reflector telescope in a box in the attic. We looked at the moons of Jupiter, the crescent of Venus and the craters of the moon. We even saw Sputnik with our naked eyes as it raced across the night sky.

Dad advised me one night when we were trying to see Sputnik, “The United States is behind in space. We need more engineers. Maybe you should consider engineering.”

I told Dad that I had already decided to be an engineer like Uncle Arnie, and we had a long discussion. I was surprised when he told me that Uncle Arnie had studied chemistry and was now a businessman. However, at this point my mind was made up.

I told Dr. Hogat, my second mentor, that I wanted to be an engineer.

Dr. Hogat said in a thick German accent, “Well, you might consider electrical engineering. It uses a lot of applied mathematics.”
Dr. Hogat lent me books on mathematics after he found out that I learned trigonometry on my own when I flunked the math placement exam. I suspected that he wanted me to be a mathematician, but he encouraged me to pursue engineering.

I completed my sophomore year by Christmas of 1958 and took a 9-month co-op student job at IBM Research in South San Jose starting in February and ending in October of 1959. My father lent me money to buy a pretty burnt orange and white 1951 Chevy hard top convertible for the commute.

My third mentor was my manager at IBM, Robert Treseder, always neatly dressed in slacks with wingtip shoes and a long sleeve white shirt with a plastic pocket protector full of pens. He had me calculate the optimal placement of the data tracks on a disk in a hard disk drive using calculus after I told him about my interests in mathematics. However, as my main job I plumbed hydraulics
in which oil pushed out of one cylinder in order to move another, the way automobile brakes work. The hydraulic machine (called Walnut) I worked on evolved into an electric motor run device (Called Cypress), which was the first trillion-byte memory. Lawrence Livermore laboratory and the CIA used Cypress for decades to automatically store and retrieve picture information.

In the first prototype, giant hydraulic actuators moved a bin of foot-long cartridges full of 35 mm microfilm strips in two directions below an access station. The hydraulic pistons periodically leaked, squirting oil everywhere. The oil ruined many pairs of my Hush Puppy shoes.

As a possible replacement for hydraulic pistons Bob had me design and build a voice coil motor, a big version of a loudspeaker coil. The contraption looked like the cylinder of a small steam engine, a foot long, 12-inch diameter iron pipe that contained electromagnets and a 6-inch Slinky-like moving coil. The voice coil motor project was successful, and I wrote a report that later convinced IBM to use voice coil motors in disk drives to replace the
hydraulics. This experience solidified my interest in electrical engineering.

I met Doug Greene, my fourth mentor, at IBM. Doug, with premature gray hair at 19, hippie T-shirt and cigarette hanging from his mouth, had attended Stanford the year before. He now supported his wife and twins. I watched Doug cope with his job, a wife, two babies, and night school at San Jose State. Doug’s experience foreshadowed and prepared me for my marriage and baby three years later.

Doug was an amateur radio operator, so we built a keying device, which made the dots and dashes properly spaced. This was my first experience with electronics.

Doug lived in Palo Alto near the Stanford campus. He told me that Stanford was the best place to study electrical engineering and convinced me to apply there. Stanford accepted me for the fall of 1959, after my co-op assignment ended.
I visited Doug often during my first quarter at Stanford because I lived alone in a rented room. I didn’t like being alone, and I couldn’t keep up with the reading or get A’s because of the intense competition. I did poorly in Western Civilization and Freshman English, even though I had gotten A’s in those same courses at San Jose State.

Doug advised, “If you can’t keep up, go to Kepler’s bookstore and buy the course notes. Reading those notes isn’t cheating. It’s smart.”

Doug also let me read his class journal to show me how he got A’s in Freshman English. He and his professor had
conversed weekly on the printed-page about subjects strange to me like eroticism, morality, political corruption and the strategy of war.

Doug advised, "Be yourself. There’s nothing to be ashamed of. Let go when you write or you’ll never pass those English courses."

Even with Doug’s help I felt like I was going to have a nervous breakdown, so I moved to a dormitory the next quarter. I had to for my own sanity even though it cost more, and I had used up my IBM co-op savings.

Dad told me, “I don’t make enough money to put you and your brothers through college at the same time. You’ll have to work.”

I sold my newly paid-off IBM commuter car to pay for tuition. I found a job working as a server in the dormitory cafeteria.

I gradually made new friends and adapted to the increased competition, getting notes and previews from my dorm mates for the difficult courses.

Few of my peers were country bumpkins like me. Many had rich parents and had come to Stanford from Eastern prep schools or from excellent, university town high schools.
They had cars, 10-speed bicycles and knew Latin. However, the experience with my four mentors, as opposed to wealth and advantage, successfully prepared me for my life’s career as an engineer.
1958 – The Grand Canyon Hike

Mom said, “No. I’m never going on another camping trip. I do all the work, and it’s no fun.”

Dad said, “You boys are getting older, and I want to show you the Grand Canyon. I spent a year in the Southwest in the 1930s. It’s beautiful.”

I was 17 and starting my sophomore year. My brothers Steve and Larry were still in high school. I thought that this would probably be our last family trip.

Our standard family vacation through the middle 1950s was camping with lots of junk, a big green, oily-smelling, Army tent, canvas folding chairs, boxes of food, collapsible tables for our Coleman stove and for eating. When we lived in Oregon in the ‘40s we camped near the Three Sisters, setting up housekeeping at Scott Lake with its dusty roads, shady pines and warm, marshy water. Dad painted and mom cooked. The routine continued in California, but at Yosemite.

I remember the spectacle of red, smoldering bark pushed off Glacier Point that was called The Fire Falls, the joy of floating milk carton sailboats down the Merced
River, and the excitement of hiking in the mist from waterfalls. I loved these times, but thinking back Mom was always working.

I said, “This sounds fantastic, but we sold our old camping trailer.”

Dad explained, “We’ll travel light. It’s August and we will only need a pup tent and sleeping bags, and we won’t do any cooking.” This sounded OK to me, but I think that dad forgot about the monsoon season in which the desert gets most of its rain.

We left Campbell, California early, passed through Bakersfield toward Barstow and crossed the desert. Towering cumulous clouds with white tops floated in the sky like phantom boats with black bottoms casting dark shadows on the desert floor. Below some were columns of diagonal streaks of rain. Sometimes one of those thunderheads emitted a bolt of lightning with an echoing boom.

I vividly remember the sun going down as we approached the Grand Canyon. The clouds, reddish on one side and black on the other, gradually melted into blackness as the sun set behind the distant mountains.
We put up the two-person pup tent in the dark. Steve and Larry wanted to sleep in the open, so dad and I got the tent.

The night was beautiful and balmy until about 2 AM when the rain began. Steve hid under our 1953 Chevy, and Larry took refuge in the back seat. However, by morning the rain had past, and the air was clear, breezy and warm.

We started early, and after a short look at the canyon, I said, “There is nothing to do here. Why don’t we hike to the bottom? The trail is only 7 miles long.”

I failed to appreciate that the trail also dropped 1 mile straight down.

Dad said, “I don’t know. I haven’t felt much like hiking since my heart attack last year.”

He should have told us that the trail was too strenuous for a one day hike, and dangerous without canteens. But he didn’t, and we took off in our shorts, T-shirts and tennis shoes, skipping down the trail with enthusiasm, threading that narrow trail along cliff edges, the mule trains passing us, the sun casting cool shadows over the trail. The changing colors hypnotized me, and I gave no thought to the trip back up.
We got to the bottom well before noon, a fast seven-mile walk. The weather started changing at the Colorado River, humidity high and temperature rising. We looked around and dipped our feet in the water, but again there was nothing to do.

I thought about the song in which the bear went over the mountain to see what he could see only to find that the other side of the mountain was all that he could see.
I glanced overhead, and my heart leaped when I realized what a mile up looked like.

I told my brothers, “Look up. You can’t see the people on the canyon rim, not even the buildings. We’d better start back.”

The trip was miserable. We climbed the first 1000 feet from the river to a long flat trail that led to the canyon wall. It was getting hot. Sweat stung my eyes and trickled off my naked back. I wanted rest and water, and we finally found a spring just before the trail started up again.

“We’d better drink as much as we can,” I said. I now realized we had a serious problem.

I can still see the trail up the cliff in my mind’s eye: a thin line zigzagging in an out among the cliffs. Those cliffs looked like folds of colored cloth that finally swallowed the trail when I couldn’t see it anymore. The cliffs were luminous, shadows gone and sunlight bouncing off the cliff walls, an oven. There were millions of shades of pink and orange and purple, beautiful in a horrible sort of way.
As we continued the climb I became a slave driver. Steve and Larry often wanted to rest, and I knew that if they stopped too long they wouldn’t want to start again.

I ordered, “We will walk for 5 minutes and rest for 2 in a shady place. It’s still a long way up.”

The trip up was a living hell, aching legs, blistering feet, unquenchable thirst, and the desire to sleep.

I blamed Dad, “Dad should have warned us,” I said, but when we at last reached the top he was patiently and calmly waiting like it was no big deal. I tried to explain how difficult the climb had been and finally gave up.

We went back to camp, ate an uncooked meal, and crashed on the hard ground. Thank God it didn’t rain that night.

I don’t remember the trip home, but I had digested the lesson. Camping trips require organization, and Mom had always been the planner.

Mom asked, “How was the trip?”

I bragged, “It was fun. We hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.”

She raised her eyebrows, gave me a knowing look, and I blushed. Then I told her what really happened.
1959 – The Visitor

I stood next to my friend Dale expecting to see the illustrious man. We waited in the corridor of the education building at IBM’s plant site, a then-modern complex of flat top industrial buildings made of glass and exposed, brightly colored, iron beams that was located South of San Jose, California.
I trembled with excitement. I also trembled with fear because I believed that this man, a war hero and butcher of millions, could annihilate the United States in a nuclear holocaust with a snap of his fingers.

“We will bury you,” he had threatened the year before, and now the Soviet Premiere, Nikita Khrushchev, was down the hall, being shown a computer that I had been told could translate from Russian into English and back.

I was a 19-year old co-op student from San Jose State College in September 1959. In those days I had a skinny body topped with a World War II crew cut, and I wore wire rim glasses. I had enthusiastically responded to the Sputnik challenge two years before by deciding to study engineering. I wanted to help America regain its technical superiority over the Russians.

“They just installed that new IBM 705 computer,” Dale said. “I believe it’s like the one at the Pentagon where they developed the translation program.” Dale was another nerdy type with thick glasses, black high top tennis shoes, and pant legs so short that you could sometimes see his white socks.
“I’ve used the older IBM 650,” I replied over the din of other studious-looking young men talking in the corridor, “and after a week of instruction I could only add two numbers. I can’t imagine how anyone could use such a crude machine to do language translation.”

“Shush, they’re coming,” Dale said as the noise of talking subsided. I then saw some men with bulgy suit jackets push the observers in front of us against the birch-paneled wall as they passed. Dale and I jumped back.

Then Khrushchev came, a short plump man in a gray business suit framed by two more huge men. His Pillsbury Doughboy face smiled, and the edges of his lips pushed a prominent, blueberry-sized wart up his left cheek. He passed my chest so close that I felt the breeze from his passing and smelled his cologne. Then he exited the building and disappeared into a waiting limousine.

I couldn’t wait to tell my family about seeing Khrushchev, and several weeks later when my mother’s rich brother came to visit I was still excited. Uncle Arnie, bald and distinguished in his crisply pressed white shirt and black pants, sat at our piano and played ragtime tunes. I stood beside him, watching and trying to figure out how
to copy his piano-playing style and, of course, to talk. I finally got around to bragging about IBM’s translation computer and about seeing Premier Khrushchev.

Uncle Arnie stopped playing, turned to show an unsmiling face, let his glasses slide down his nose and said, “That whole visit backfired. Khrushchev told the press that everything he saw from the supermarkets brimming with goods to fantastic computers was fake, put on by the US government for his benefit.”

I flashed on how Dale and I had been selected. We were intellectual types, with close-cropped hair and spectacles. I had wondered at the time how we got so lucky. Maybe we were part of a show. Maybe the guide had told Khrushchev in Russian that we were young, brilliant scientists.

“That whole mess reminds me of a story,” Uncle Arnie continued. He was always telling anecdotes to make his points, especially with kids like me. “Some scientists fed ‘out of sight, out of mind’ into a translation computer, and to check the translation they fed the Russian back. The computer burped out ‘Blind and insane’.”
“Blind and insane,” I questioned. I didn’t exactly get the relevance of the story.

“Yes.” Uncle Arnie continued, “We fed supermarkets and computers into Khrushchev’s computer-like mind, and he mistranslated what we showed him, calling them lies because he wasn’t convinced. Dick should have taken a bigger risk with the visit.”

Dick, of course, was Vice President Nixon who was in charge of the Khrushchev visit, and he was a personal friend of Uncle Arnie, as both were members of the ultra conservative Lincoln Club in Southern California. I think that Uncle Arnie might even have been the founding president of the club. I already knew this connection, so I listened to Uncle Arnie like the RCA dog listens to his master’s voice.

“Dick should have let Khrushchev go to Disneyland like he wanted to. No one could have faked Disneyland, and who knows, Khrushchev being convinced, may have changed the course of history. Well, what’s done is done.”

Uncle Arnie turned back to the piano, his face softening as his fingers glided over the keys.
DOING WHAT I SHOULD – PARENTAL FLIGHT PLAN

Karl and Anne-Marie’s wedding at the First Unitarian Church on 3rd Street in San Jose
(Photo by Jim Hoagland)

1961 – Love and Marriage

The pornographic movies flickered on the side of the dormitory, projected from the balcony of my dorm, named after the Naturalist John Muir, and drawing a crowd of
young men in the courtyard below. The spring evening was hot, and the men were hot, but a rain of water balloons cast from the roof by the men of Muir cooled their ardor.

“In the spring,” Tennyson explains, “a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” Well, at Stanford in the spring of 1961 my thoughts were a little more explicit. I was ripe for love.\(^3\)

Jim Hoagland, my old hot rod buddy, called and said, “My girlfriend, Sue, has a Swedish exchange student staying with her. How would you like to go on a double date?”

Her name was Ann-Marie, long blonde hair, smiling face, Rubinesque figure. I was smitten, and my baby blue and white 1956 Chevy convertible made many trips to Los Gatos during the summer and fall of 1961. I had fallen in love.

I had already decided to live at Stanford that summer because I had a job tending an electron microscope in the material science department. Had I known I was going to meet Anne-Marie, I would have chosen to work for IBM and live at home.

\(^3\) I started wearing contact lenses and had abandoned my crew cut (a WW II military haircut) by the time I entered Stanford. I wanted to attract a girlfriend.
Dad had never given me any advice about sex but for some reason he volunteered, “You know where babies come from, don’t you? Be careful.”

My face flushed and I ran my fingers through my hair and replied, “Come on Dad. I’ll be careful,” but even though I was 21, I knew little about preventative sex except abstinence.

Abstinence worked OK until the guys in my dorm organized a Santa Cruz beach weekend in the fall. My roommate Dale and I shared one motel room and Anne-Marie and Dale’s girlfriend another. We all got pretty wasted on beer, and Dale swapped rooms with Anne-Marie so that we both could be with our girlfriends.

I asked Anne-Marie to marry me just before she returned to Sweden. I gave her a diamond ring set with a large stone that grandma Emma purchased before the Great Depression, a family heirloom.

I expected to follow Anne-Marie to Sweden in the spring and get married there after I had my BS degree, but that was not to be. Anne-Marie visited with an aunt in Phoenix, Arizona on her trip home. A rabbit test confirmed that she was pregnant.
I pulled at my hair every time I thought about marrying a pregnant woman. I believed the old ditty, “first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes junior in a baby carriage.” Order was important, and my friends chided me constantly by calling me ‘daddy’.

I tried to convince Anne-Marie to terminate the pregnancy. Abortion was legal in Sweden, but she said, “I won’t do it. I’ll just have the baby here.”

I should have realized that her stubborn position of rejecting me and keeping the baby might foreshadow future problems, but I was oblivious. I loved Anne-Marie and decided to marry her in Sweden to facilitate a speedy wedding.

Anne-Marie was two months pregnant by the time I went to the draft board in San Jose to get permission to leave the country. The Vietnam War needed cannon fodder.

The clerk laughed, “Guess what sonny, you’re going to be drafted in just two weeks.”

My nervousness became panic, and I raced around for the next two weeks to get a student deferment until March when I was supposed to graduate.
Anne-Marie finally agreed to return to the United States about the time she was three months pregnant. She calmly stated, “It will take a month for the bans to be posted so that I can get permission from the church to get married.”

I sweated out every minute until she arrived, four months pregnant. I kept thinking that I really didn’t know this woman very well. How can she be so calm?

Anne-Marie looked beautiful, not too bulgy either, and my old feelings of love rekindled. I did want to marry Anne-Marie, but I was in a state of shock to the point of inaction. Mom took over, and we got married in the Unitarian Church in San Jose.

My friend Jim took the wedding pictures and chided me with, “Fast work, eh.”

I could only gulp, “Yup.”

The photos showed Anne-Marie in a lacy dress with a tiara, both in white, and me in a dark suit accenting my short blond hair blue eyes. We were being showered with rice cast over us from the crowd on either side of the stained glass and metal church doors.
Karl and Anne-Marie Belser  The couple’s 1956 Chevy
(All photos by Jim Hoagland)

4Karl and Anne-Marie were married on February 17, 1962. Norman McCann, who has been a life-long friend, was my best man, and Jim Hoagland’s girlfriend, Susan Quist, was the brides maid.
I said goodbye to my dormitory friends at Stanford, rented an apartment, and started working 2 days a week for IBM to support my pregnant wife. I liked married life, but missed my friends.

I took Anne-Marie to all my favorite places like Pinnacles National Monument. An old photo shows Anne-Marie with her bulgy stomach standing in front of the cave at Pinnacles. Married life agreed with me.

I immediately applied for and received a family draft deferment so that I could continue on to graduate school. I received my BS degree in Electrical Engineering in March 1962 and attended the graduation ceremony in June.

A month later Anne-Marie woke me at 4 AM and said, “My water has broken,” but my Chevy convertible wouldn’t start.

I played with the car for a half hour and cursed while Anne-Marie encouraged me by crying, “Let’s go, Let’s hurry. The baby is coming.”

The starter was broken, and I called Dad for help. He made the 30-mile trip from Campbell to Palo Alto in record time, and took us to the Stanford Hospital. David was born only a half-hour after we arrived.
To my amazement Anne-Marie had David by natural childbirth. She told me, “I don’t even use an anesthetic at the dentist. I just turn pain off.”

I again realized how little I knew about my new wife from across the ocean.

Dad admired our new baby boy with his chubby bawling face, perfect little fingers and toes, and kicking legs. He joked, “I think that you should call the kid Weather-Strip. After all he kept you out of the draft.”

He laughed, and I glared at him in disbelief. How could he joke at a time like this?

Then Dad, apparently seeing that I was stressed, said, “Anne-Marie is one of the nicest young people I know. You’re very lucky. This will all work out fine. It has so far.”

I replied, “Really?” and I conceded that my marriage had gotten off to a reasonable, but somewhat bumpy start.

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David Allen Belser was born at the Stanford Hospital on July 28, 1962.
1964 – The College Years

I enjoyed the first years of my marriage to Anne-Marie, but a hint of trouble came on my second trip to the East Coast where I had to report on my ballistic missile defense research at MIT’s Lincoln Laboratories. After the presentation I looked forward to flying to Mexico for 10 days with my colleagues, Mike and Gil. In those days Delta Airlines allowed triangle fares on East Coast flights from San Francisco, so the transportation to Mexico was free, and the other cost would be minimal. The three of us shared one room. We had gone to the Bahamas the prior year, and a pattern apparently emerged.

Anne-Marie told me, “It’s not fair. I love to travel and have always wanted to visit Mexico.”

“But we don’t have enough money,” I said, “And besides you have to take care of David.”

I knew that my mother refused to take care of David, and I felt justified because I was both working full time and going to school. As a compromise I agreed to take the family to Sweden to see Anne-Marie’s parents after I graduated.
At the beginning of the Mexico trip, Gil warned me, “Be careful of the water in Mexico.” “The porous clay sewer pipes going out of the city transmit microbes to the clay water pipes coming in.”

I followed the advice without realizing how serious the consequences could be. However, I craved greens and finally ate a salad in a restaurant in Mexico City.

The waiter told me after I asked, “The water, she is treated here. No worry.”

I got sick anyway, and I stayed in Mexico City in near delirium under a doctor’s care while my friends went to Acapulco. I was still sick when I returned home, having to pour little vials of a milky liquid into my drinking water twice a day to control the diarrhea. The diarrhea vanished but about a week later I noticed a small dark spot in the center of my right eye when I blinked. It was like the afterimage from a photoflash. The next day the spot was bigger.

An ophthalmologist stuck a microscope lens to my right eyeball, looked inside, and said, “It looks like you have a common Mid Western fungus called Histoplasmosis.”
I tested negative to all known fungi, so the doctor prescribed massive doses of cortisone, which initially slowed the expansion of the spot. After two months the doctor stopped the cortisone treatment, and the disease immediately flared up, destroying the central vision in my right eye.

I got panicked when I started getting vision distortion in my other eye.

I told Anne-Marie, “You’ll have to go to school so that you can get a job as soon as possible.”

She said, “OK, I want to become a nurse.”

I said, “You should be a teacher because you have to take care of David, and we may have more kids. Teachers have summers off and a short workday. It’s a perfect job for a mother.”

She finally conceded, but I could feel her resistance.

I went to Jamaica the summer of 1965 with no complaint from Anne-Marie, again as part of my yearly trip to report my research. Anne-Marie had just had our second son, Charlie, in the spring, and had started studying at San
Jose State to be a teacher.⁶ I thought that my first marriage crisis had been avoided.

⁶ Charles Evan Belser was born at the Stanford Hospital on March 10, 1965.
1965 – The Art Lesson

Shortly before I graduated my friend Mike, a tall and dark Stanford graduate student, came into our office at the Electronics Research Laboratory and said, “Give me a hand. I want to sand the rust off these bumper brackets.”

I looked up from my IBM electric typewriter on which I was writing my dissertation and saw Mike carrying what appeared to be a couple of Y-shaped pieces of junk.

I knew that Mike had an old Volkswagen the color of coffee, real old I guessed because it had two back windows that looked like welder’s goggles. I bet that the rust matched the paint pretty well. Why bother, I thought, but I got up to help.

We sat on the flattop gravel roof beside the catwalk next to our office window and sanded. The heat and arm exercise soaked me in sweat, which smelled acrid when mixed with the sanding dust.

I moved back onto the catwalk under a shady roof overhang while Mike laid out easel paper, the kind without lines on which we drew our research presentations. Mike placed the splotchy-looking brown and silver brackets on
the paper and shook the can of spray paint until the little ball clicked and clacked. I leaned on the catwalk rail and watched, letting my shirt dry.

“You’d better put some wood under the brackets so the paint doesn’t pool,” I advised.

Mike pursed his lips and made a kiss-my-ass sound. I thought that his response was a pretty rude, but typical, thank you.

The spray can emitted a pssst, pssst sound with a foul scent as Mike guided the little cloud of paint up and down the metal, dusting the pieces with dull black primer. Mike applied several coats, so the paint didn’t pool, and then he turned and gave me a See-I-know-what-I’m-doing smile.

Several other students had gathered on the catwalk to watch, one of them being our other office mate, Dave, whose wife was an art major. Dave scratched the top of his mostly-bald head and said, “You have some pretty interesting patterns there. Why don’t you enter them in the contest that the art department is sponsoring for non-art students?”

Everyone laughed, but Mike used a clean sheet of paper when he sprayed the other side of the brackets.
I thought no more about this joke, but Dave and Mike apparently framed that last easel chart paper after cutting off the holes at the top. It looked good hanging in the gallery next to the other strange and amateurish works. It looked incredibly good because it had a little flash of blue in the lower right corner, the first prize ribbon.

“You told them, didn’t you,” I questioned with disbelief, “that the pictures were accidents?”

“Yes,” Mike said, “but only after I had the check for $500 in my hand.”

“What did they say?” I asked.

“Everyone at the presentation laughed, and the department chairman flushed, but after a couple of seconds, which seemed like minutes to me, said that their purpose was to encourage art awareness in other disciplines, and that how the art got created wasn’t important.”

I couldn’t help it. I shook Mike’s hand because I was so impressed. Then Dave, Mike and I invented The-Emperor’s-New-Clothes theory of art. If a guru says that a work is good, then everyone says it’s good, and some darned fool will buy it. We concluded that engineers, who are
intrinsically skeptical, probably wouldn’t get caught up in this kind of con. I sure as heck knew I wouldn’t.
1967 – The Trip To Sweden

I received my PhD degree in Electrical Engineering from Stanford in the spring of 1967, and it wasn’t without stress, which aggravated an old bicycle accident back injury. I wore a back brace all spring while I watched the leaves come out on the trees and waited for my advisor to approve my thesis. My professor was on sabbatical leave in Europe, and I only graduated that spring after my Uncle Arnie talked to the Stanford president.

“Damn, damn, damn,” I said to myself after being told about what happened. “Why did Uncle Arnie have to interfere?”

I found out later from my brother Larry that professors are notorious for unethical practices such as holding back students as labor for their projects.

I told Anne-Marie, “I’m in too much pain to attend my graduation. We’ll have to postpone our trip to Sweden until I get better.”

In addition, my eye disease had flared up again, which I didn’t talk about to anyone. Today I think that my primary source of stress was that I might lose my vision
entirely. I know that I consciously chose to work for IBM because of job security and because it was close to my parents home in Campbell, California. I wanted my parent’s support if this worst of all events happened.

We lived in my parent’s house because my father had started a post-retirement job, a 2-year United Nations assignment in Taiwan, six months before my graduation. We sold our little Ford Falcon Futura that was too small for a family of four and were driving my parent’s powerful air conditioned, white 1964 Olds Cutlass 2-door hardtop.

Anne-Marie and I planned to drive the Olds to Boston and meet Larry, who was attending Harvard. Larry was supposed to drive us to New York where we had a cheap Icelandic flight to Gothenburg, Sweden where we would accept factory delivery of a new Volvo 4-door sedan. We intended to drive the Volvo through Europe and ship it back to San Francisco.

I installed seatbelts in the back seat to keep my two boys from fighting on the trip, and we took off. We phoned Larry when we got to Boston, and his phone had been disconnected. We traveled to Larry’s apartment, and he

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7 Jim Hoagland took care of my parent’s house while we were in Sweden.
wasn’t there and hadn’t left a note. We waited an extra
day before driving to New York and putting our car in long-
term parking.

Luckily, I called Larry before our flight left. He
had been in the hospital with ulcerative colitis, which is
severe bleeding from the rectum. We left our parking
receipt and keys with the Icelandic Airline desk, and Larry
reclaimed the car the next day. If he hadn’t been there,
it would have cost us fully 10% of the price of the new
Volvo to park for the summer, money that we didn’t have.

“My advisor at Harvard has forced me out of the
biophysics program,” Larry told me. “I’ve been literally
buggered.”

Larry explained that he had criticized his advisor’s
research, and that as a result no students would work for
him, but it was hard to imagine those comments being
sufficient grounds for being blackballed. Larry had
apparently responded with colitis and nearly died from the
loss of blood. I thought that he should have called Uncle
Arnie to get the professor fired.

I expected that my advisor might be equally upset at
being encouraged to speedily sign my dissertation by the
Stanford president. I had already decided not to work in my field of research, and I never saw the man again. I observed that both Larry and I manifested our stress with physical illnesses.

The “Stats Hus” (State House) in Stockholm Sweden
Painted by Karl J. Belser in the early 1930s

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8 This painting was given to Ingrid and Carl-Gustaf Perntz (Anne-Marie’s parents in 1965 when they visited the United States. I hung in the Perntz home until the death of Ingrid in 2005, at which time it was returned to Karl A. Belser.
The trip to Sweden became the high point for my marriage to Anne-Marie. For one thing she agreed to speak Swedish with me, which she refused to do at home even though I had studied Swedish in night school at UC Berkeley for the previous year. Next we left our kids with Anne-Marie’s parents for a month while we camped our way down to Italy and back. This trip was like the honeymoon that we never had. My back pain and eye problems disappeared.

We returned to the United States just in time to see the fall colors on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We took the northern route through Yellowstone on the way out and the southern route through New Mexico and Arizona on the way back. Neither Anne-Marie nor I had seen the US like this before.

“The trip across the United States,” Anne-Marie said, “has been almost as interesting as our tour of Europe.” I could see the contentment in her face, sparkling eyes and smile cradled in a nest of long blond hair.

We arrived home refreshed and with what I felt was a rejuvenated marriage. The only hitch was that I had a different job when I started work at IBM. I was assigned
to work on a character generator for a TV-type of computer terminal. I dove into the project with enthusiasm.

“Your ability and willingness to accept new and different assignments,” my new manager said, “bodes well for your IBM career.”

I felt on top of the world, both at work and at home.
1969 – The Automatic Teller

Don Wetzel and two other engineers patented the first Automatic Teller Machine for the Docutel Corporation in 1973 (US3761682: CREDIT CARD AUTOMATIC CURRENCY DISPENSER). However, the machine used a rewritable card and dispensed cash as a stand-alone device.

Banks wanted more function, and IBM decided to develop a prototype in 1969. It would communicate directly with the customer’s bank over a telephone line, dispense cash in various amounts, accept deposits, and do other banking transactions a human teller might do.

Reynold B. Johnson, the director of IBM’s Advanced Systems Development Division, assigned five people to the project. The marketing person gave us the functional requirements, and I was the system architect, responsible for implementing the desired functions. We gave birth to a multi-million dollar business in only one year, and I learned several valuable lessons from the experience.

Let me begin by describing a few aspects of the problem. We didn’t know in what sequence the machine should operate, so I wanted it to be programmable. Today
at the beginning of the 21st century, more than 30 years later, one would use a cheap, single-chip computer, but in 1969 the smallest computer was the size of a desk, and the user and the computer communicated using a typewriter. There was no TV-like computer display or voice command capability. Further, the newly invented and still expensive solid-state memory contained only 64 bytes, one millionth of the main memory in an ordinary personal computer in 2003. Hence, I defined a sequencer that received its instructions from a Mylar tape. The prototype worked perfectly, and I had a summer student write a computer program to convert the acronyms representing the different machine instructions into punch tape codes to allow easy experimentation with the procedures.

I took my wife Anne-Marie to see the prototype ATM after it was operational.
The refrigerator-sized cabinet sat behind a brick wall mockup, its 2 by 2 foot black and silver front panel poking through the wall. The panel displayed ANY NATIONAL BANK across the top and had an array of backlit messages down the right side. The keyboard was on the left bottom side with the cash delivery tray and card reader directly above it.
When we approached the automatic teller, it was displaying its top message, "Please insert your credit card," so Anne-Marie inserted one of the magnetic stripe credit cards our lab had recently developed.

The machine burped loudly, and the message in the next row down lit up saying, "Please key in your 4-digit secret number."

"Oh, that scared me," I remember Anne-Marie saying as she jumped back.

"Yeh," I said "that's the tape reader executing instructions. We're going to replace it with a totally
silent electronic memory after we’ve decided on the operational procedures.”

The machine went burp, burp, burp, burp when Anne-Marie keyed in the 4-digit secret number. The message then jumped down one row to display “Please select a transaction type.” She pressed the cash withdrawal key, and the message jumped down to, “Select 1 to 10 $20 bills by keying a number.” She keyed 6.

There were bursts of burps, sounds of printing, a clunk when the credit card dropped into the tray, and the smooth whir of the bill dispenser. After about 20 seconds the delivery tray rotated down over the keyboard delivering the 6 bank notes with a receipt on top and with the credit card along side.

“Wow. It works great.” I remember Anne-Marie saying. She picked up the items and the delivery tray closed. I then opened the machine up and showed her all of the components including a 2-foot cube of logic whose printed circuit boards were mounted on two rotating gates. This logic could be implemented by a thumbnail-sized integrated circuit in 2000.
Based on this prototype Lloyd’s bank in London ordered the machines to be delivered when England stopped doing Saturday banking in the early 1970s. IBM’s Custom Systems Division redesigned the prototype for manufacturability. The redesign included replacing the burping tape reader with the newly invented read-only memory.

The other issue worth mentioning is that there were no international standards for paper money in 1969. For example, the bills from Spain stuck together so much that a sheet paper feeder couldn’t separate them. So for the prototype money was hand fed one bill at a time into a wide Mylar roll to which the bill would not stick. The roll was held in a cartridge for easy replacement by a bank teller. I designed relay electronics to control the loading of this
It took about 5 seconds to load each bill, which would make this loading method prohibitively expensive. Better money standards were imperative so that automatic paper handling could be used.

We used out of date Brazilian bills in the prototype because the United States Mint had printed them, and because they had no monetary value.

I and other members of our team received Outstanding Contribution Awards for this work. The award was equivalent to about one-month’s salary, about one-millionth of the income IBM received over the time they marketed the product.

I also knew little about intellectual property. I had received one patent when I was an IBM co-op student a decade before, but my manager drove the invention process.9

The full-function banking machine should have been a gold mine for patents, and none were filed. I made several

9 My first patent was titled Scanning Apparatus, filed in 1963 and issued as US Patent 03328523 in 07/67. The apparatus focused the light from a long straight lamp filament onto a rear projection screen. A rotating mirror scanning mechanism between the lamp and the screen caused the image of the filament to scan first from top to bottom, and then from left to right. Photocells at the edge of the screen and in a light pen pressed against the screen detected the sweeping beam. Pulses from an encoder disk (magnetic in the model, but it could have been a glass photo-patterned disk) were counted between the edge of the screen and the light pen to give the coordinates of the pen. A static image from a microfilm strip was also projected onto the screen. The system was built as a Teaching Machine for a Stanford professor.
inventions including the cash delivery tray and the overall system design. Neither my management nor I had patent consciousness, even though the lab director held over 100 patents.

When IBM sold the ATM business in the late 1980’s I wrote a letter to the then IBM president, Jack Kuehler, that pointed out that none of the original product developers had received what I considered adequate compensation relative to the amount of profit IBM had made. I failed to wring more money out of IBM, because Jack said, “You don’t have any ATM patents,” even though I had sent Jack the final report for the project. Apparently my colleagues and I were only implementers, ordinary engineers, who hadn’t contributed anything beyond the scope of our responsibilities.

This event, among others, raised my patent consciousness, which in turn helped me obtain the more than 63 patents I now hold. Further, the later patents rewarded me because they were filed with a startup company in which I held stock options.
Despite the lack of recognition and monetary reward, I consider my work on the first full-function Automatic Teller Machine to be a lifetime achievement.
1970 – The Thanksgiving Guest

I met him on Thanksgiving in 1970, a wisp of a man with smooth black hair, skin creamy as silk, and squinting black eyes. Those eyes met mine, and he shook my hand firmly.

“This is Richard,” Dad said. “I’m sponsoring him for citizenship.”

Dad, who had just returned home from a UN assignment in Taiwan, raved about what a good office manager Richard had been. Richard had arrived only a few days before Thanksgiving, and this was his first visit to my parent’s spacious ranch house in Campbell, California.

Richard, Dad, and I talked next to the dining table in the warmth of the fireplace in the country kitchen. The table behind us was decorated for Thanksgiving, a green and yellow ceramic cornucopia in the center from which flowed an assortment of gourds, nuts and Indian corn. Next to each place setting stood a small ceramic green and black turkey and a little Pilgrim with a pinecone body, pipe cleaner arms and legs, and a white marble head with a stovepipe hat. Mom and Anne-Marie joined the conversation
from the kitchen where Mom was preparing creamed onions, one of our family’s favorite dishes.

My curiosity bubbled because, at 30 I knew nothing about the orient, so I pumped Richard for his life story.

Richard first told us that his real name was Yen-Shih, and that he had taken an American name to better fit in. Then he bragged that he was the youngest son of a prominent mainland-Chinese family, and that he had escaped to Taiwan along with his mother, who he had to provide for, from what he called ‘Communist oppression.’ He also told us he had a pregnant wife. Both wife and mother remained in Taipei.

“I work night as janitor,” he told me, “so I can send money to wife. I study accounting at San Jose State. I graduate in two year, get job, bring family here and put wife through school. I so lucky.”

I was astounded at the load Richard bore with no complaint and with high confidence. I didn’t think I would be brave enough to move to another country.

“House smell good.” Richard said. The house smelled faintly of turkey and creamed onions.

“That’s turkey and onions,” I responded, and I had to explain that a turkey is a large flightless bird, and that
the New England settlers, called Pilgrims, shared their first thanksgiving meal with the Iroquois Indians.

“Thanksgiving,” I continued, “is a celebration of abundance,” and I pointed to the table decorations.

“Why don’t you show Richard the turkey,” Mom said.

I took Richard around the table to the oven, opened it, and the moist aroma of turkey whooshed out.

“Look like big duck, but no head,” Richard exclaimed and looked at me intently. We all laughed. I couldn’t imagine the head being on the turkey.

“Most famous Chinese food Peking duck.” Richard continued, “You like eat skin with raw onion?”

Dad clarified, “No, we just eat the meat and stuffing. The turkey is stuffed with bread chunks to soak up the juice. Most people don’t eat the skin.”

Richard looked shocked and said, “but skin look good.”

Sure enough Richard ate some of the skin at the dinner and pronounced it excellent, so I tried some.

“Richard,” I said, “this skin is delicious!” and we all tasted the crispy, oily sheets.
Richard glanced at our faces one by one and said, “You learn about Peking duck. I learn about Thanksgiving. We not so different. Both thankful.”
Looking back I see that I started my career in 1967 being afraid and hence conservative to a fault. My recently completed doctoral dissertation from Stanford, which showed how to take the very least risk in any statistical decision, foreshadowed an unavoidable crisis.\(^\text{10}\)

For example, I saved half the price of a house in the year and a half that I lived in my parent’s home. Initially I wanted to buy a duplex, but Anne-Marie didn’t agree. Anne-Marie’s parents owned and managed rental property in Sweden, and I figured she might feel confident in this line of work, which would give me some security against my failing eyesight.

Instead, I purchased a modest single-family residence when my parent’s returned from Taiwan and slavishly paid

\(^{10}\) The dissertation title was *Linear Decision Rules that Minimize the Worst-Case Probability of Error*. The main idea is to estimate the second order statistics (mean vector and covariance matrix) and use the Tchebyshev Inequality to determine the worst-case probability of error. Dirac delta probability density functions (pdf’s) can realize equality for the Tchebyshev Inequality. I chose linear decision rules based on these delta function pdf’s. The error in my thinking (and in my life philosophy) is that the measurements, from which the statistics were estimated, will not be in most cases delta functions. This fact will be obvious, but not accounted for in the statistics. Hence the decision rules are (and my life-time behavior has been) too pessimistic.
off the loan over the next two and a half years. Even with this security, I wanted Anne-Marie to work. Stubbornness on both of our parts continued to pose a problem in our marriage.

Despite my limitations and my obsession with security my work went well. By 1971 I had already designed a key part of a TV-like computer graphics system and had been the principle designer of IBM’s first Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) as part of a line of banking business products.

As a reward I became the manager of a new computer graphic display project, the one that ultimately became the personal computer screen. The display was an array of dots called pixels, and a newly invented solid-state memory bit (a 0 or a 1) controlled whether the pixel was off or on.

My department members were chosen by IBM’s affirmative action policy, that is, they were minority people. I had no say in the selection. I had never been a people oriented person, and was too naïve to recognize trouble ahead.

My technician was a Latino garbage man who I was going to have to train. My lead engineer alternated between coming to work by auto or by horseback from his home in the
Santa Cruz Mountains. A gigantic Buick squashed his little Volkswagen and killed him on the way to work one day. Another good engineer was in marital crisis because of problems with a retarded child. A third smart engineer was a black man transferred to San Jose from the East Coast because Stanford was treating his wife for what turned out to be terminal cancer. He thought I was a racist because he said I looked like a blond and blue-eyed Nazi. He ultimately had a nervous breakdown. All of these ugly matters I had to handle, and I hated every minute of it.

As a reward for handling the troubles with my employees, the lab director promoted me to middle management, where I immediately had the unpleasant task of terminating several unsuccessful projects.

I guess my assignments were trial by fire and I went down in flames after my father, who was my closest confidant, unexpectedly died. I initially had an acute anxiety attack in which I could not speak and my heart rate stayed at about 150 beats per minute for two days. There were several other incidents like this until one day I started to cry uncontrollably at work.

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11 Karl Jacob Belser was born on May 1, 1903 and died on January 24, 1973, the later date being the birthday of his wife Wilma.
I thought my career was over, but chose not to kill myself for failing to live up to the script my mother had set out for me, to be a rich industrialist like her brother Arnold Beckman. I can’t put into words the hopelessness and despair that I felt when contemplating death by my own hand.

Ultimately I chose the more painful path. I resigned my management job and undergo psychotherapy. I interviewed several therapists and chose a young man with neat, black hair, glasses and a winning smile, who had only recently started his practice. I liked him.

I expected the man to ‘fix me’ with pills or advice or something, but all I heard in the expensive twice-a-week sessions was my voice.

I became angry when I wasn’t immediately cured. I felt I was being swindled, so I turned my anger toward my psychiatrist, and I started having other symptoms that made me wonder about my sanity. I heard my mother’s voice telling me what to do and saw her using her willow switch to drive the message home. Then I started dreaming that I had murdered my mother and buried her under our house. Of course, she was alive and well, but I couldn’t distinguish
between dream and reality. On the other hand I sometimes got shooting pains in my head accompanied by a white flash when I talked about my father. I began to think that I was insane. I can only write these words now, some 30 years later, because my history shows that I am sane.

About a year into my psychotherapy my therapist said, “I forgot the keys to my office and my receptionist will not be in until later. Let’s go to the coffee shop down the street and talk.”

I expected a normal session, but this time the psychiatrist told me about himself. He told me that he had been a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War and that he was married and about to have his first child. A really nice person unfolded. This reality shocked me. I had projected evil on this man, and he wasn’t evil. I saw that I had been projecting responsibility for my problems onto him.

I said nothing about my realization at the time, but it was the crucial breakthrough in my therapy. I realized that I was going to have to cure myself, and I began to make rapid progress. I learned to listen to my mother’s controlling comments and then thank her for her
suggestions, but I never told her what I would or wouldn’t do. I accepted that she cared for me in her own way and was not going to change.

A couple of years later I got divorced over my mother’s angry protests. Shortly thereafter I stopped psychotherapy. I felt that I was cured enough to continue with my life.

I thanked my therapist and finally told him about the breakthrough. I asked him directly, “Did you really forget your keys those many years ago, or did you do it on purpose to facilitate my breakthrough?”

He smiled knowingly but refused to admit anything. I thought I saw a “yes, I did” in his eyes, so I shook his hand and thanked him again.
(Intentionally blank)
FOLLOWING MY HEART - MIDCOURSE CORRECTION

1976 – End of a Marriage

I like to think that I’m immune to group psychology, but I’m not.

In 1976 I separated from my wife amidst the sexual freedom that resulted from birth control and the then-popular personal growth seminars such as the Erhardt Seminars Training (EST).

I estimate that at least a quarter of my work colleagues divorced. They constantly talked about their exciting single lives at the coffee machine. For many the temptation was irresistible, and the epidemic took off.

“IT took over 10,000 years,” one friend of mine said, “for the sexual revolution to happen. I almost missed it by being too old.”

This social mania came to an abrupt end a decade later because of rampant venereal disease including AIDS, but by then the damage had been done.
In truth I had been discussing my marriage in psychotherapy for several years, and I just didn’t have enough guts to separate. I feared losing my vision totally, and at some level I still loved my wife, Anne-Marie.

Anne-Marie and I took the EST training in the summer of 1975, and I began to see that there was more to life than my immersion in work. I realized that being divorced might not be all that scary.

Anne-Marie got her teaching credential in the fall of 1976. She had promised to work, and we celebrated with a trip to Hawaii. The celebration was short lived.

Anne-Marie was immediately offered a job as a special education teacher, her specialty. Instead of accepting the job she decided to go to Sweden for a month. This angered her advisor who had gotten her the job, and when Anne-Marie returned she had no job and no recommendations. She then wanted to vacation in Mexico, and by this time I was getting upset. She had made an agreement with me to work, and she was refusing in a passive-aggressive way that I couldn’t cope with. The result was a fight involving blows
before we were to leave for Mexico. Anne-Marie left, and I stayed behind.

“I love this woman,” I said to myself, “and I almost lost control. I love her too much to hurt her. I have to leave, like it or not.”

I rented an apartment and moved during that vacation week.12

I don’t think that Anne-Marie thought I would leave, because she got so angry that she broke many dishes in our kitchen, slamming them one by one on the floor.

“I had an affair,” she said, “with the ferryboat captain between Cabo San Lucas and San Blas. So there.”

I suspect she told me to emphasize her anger, but that was the break in which I decided to get a girlfriend.

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There was no returning to my marriage after I met Joy, a short woman about my age with long black hair and a sweater girl figure. Joy educated me about sex and exposed me to the single life style. She lived in a condo with low maintenance such that she could party every weekend. I was hooked and a year later bought a condo.

My affair with Joy, and it was an affair even though I didn’t know it, lasted less than a year. I guess I became boring because she found another man to date without telling me she was looking. I was upset and had recurrent nightmares about a woman in white, my wife I suppose, fighting with a woman in black, my girlfriend.
I debated about going back to Anne-Marie, but her lawyer had crucified me in court, and she was not receptive after the good financial settlement in which she had received our home.

It was then, in 1979, that I finalized the divorce and purchased my condo, a 3-bedroom unit in a park-like setting in the upscale neighborhood of Los Gatos. I lived there alone for four months before Anne-Marie approached me to ask me to take custody of our two children, David almost 17 and Charlie just 14.

Charlie (left) and David (right)
“I can’t control the boys,” she said. “I’ll give up alimony and child support if you take them. I’m going crazy.”

I accepted this challenge even though I wasn’t sure that I would be any better parent than Anne-Marie.

I found out that Anne-Marie was not as interested in our children as I had thought. She rarely saw the kids, and it was at this point that I accepted that our marriage had really ended.
1977 – The Prodigal Son

My father died unexpectedly in 1972, and even though I expressed sadness about his death at the time and discussed his death in psychotherapy, I wasn’t complete with the issue. However, I didn’t know it.

In the later 1970s, after I had gotten divorced, I started going to Mendel Lieberman’s Sunday Suppers at the Center for Human Communications in Los Gatos near where I lived. My intention was to find a girlfriend, and it was there that I encountered flyers for the major singles activities in the area, Trellis, Parents without Partners, Sierra Singles. This was my entrance into the single world of dating.

Mendel often called this dinner a Sunday sipper because so many men brought wine instead of food to the potluck dinner. After the potluck, Mendel led a discussion on a topic he chose.

A year later in 1977, I had just broken up with my first girlfriend, and I was back to recruiting, so I started going to the Sunday suppers again. That first Sunday happened to be Father’s day, and Mendel opened his
discussion by reading The Parable of the Prodigal Son. He talked a little about completing relationships and asked if anyone had an incomplete relationship with their father. My hand went up without my knowing it.

“Pick a man in the room who looks like your father, Mendel said. “And tell him what you want to say.”

The words came gushing out. I said, “I know that I have been a difficult son,” and I thanked him for letting me find my own career. I knew that he wanted me to be an architect like he was, but he didn’t push me like my mother was pushing for me to be like her brother, Arnold. I also thanked him for being there when I was so unsure about my new bride and son.

“I love you Dad,” and I began to cry.

My head felt like it had exploded, worse than any of the flashes that I had had when discussing my father in psychotherapy. I hugged that stranger who had become my father. Mendel let me cry until I stopped, and then moved to another person. I sat there stunned, letting the waves of relaxation travel through my body.

Several weeks later I met Mendel again at a ballroom dancing class at the Los Gatos Recreation Center. I
thanked Mendel for facilitating a completion with my Father, and Mendel suggested that I join his Monday support group.

“You may want to discuss other aspects of your family and upbringing,” he said.

I agreed, but I really felt as if I were adopting a surrogate father. In addition I made new friends in my group like Sandy Spring and Barbara Herrick, nonsexual friends that I badly needed now that I was single.

Two years later I lost the vision in my one good eye. I needed support. I couldn’t drive, and one of the other members picked me up every week. Finally, my friend Sandy, who had never driven because she had epilepsy, got properly medicated and learned to drive, and she started taking me to the sessions.

When my mother died, my friend Barbara, who was a minister in the Universal Life Church, conducted the memorial service with reading from The Profit. Then my brother Steve died, and after discussing my feeling with the group I let Steve’s friends conduct his memorial service. Steve had been angry with me ever since my
mother’s death, and I didn’t feel capable of coordinating his funeral.

Steve Belser in Santa Cruz in the 1970s

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13 Stephen George Belser was born on August 30, 1941 and died on March 25, 1985. He had Marfan’s disease, which caused him to be 7 feet tall and which caused his cartilage to be weak. He was a champion basketball player in high school and attended UC Berkeley on a basketball scholarship. After graduating he worked two years in the Peace Corp during which time he grew two inches and was diagnosed with Marfan’s and told he wouldn’t live to 40. Later a group of high school kids in Santa Cruz, where he worked as a janitor, beat him up. His injuries disabled him both physically and emotionally. He suffered a burst spleen shortly after his mother died, got a anti-biotic resistant blood infection during the spleen surgery, and died in open heart surgery several months later.
I remained with the group until Mendel was too ill to continue. Mendel had Parkinson’s disease, and the medications ultimately affected his thinking. My friend Sandy and I were the last people to leave the group. Sandy and I visited Mendel in the full-time care facility just before he died.

This time I expressed my appreciation in advance of death. I no longer felt like a prodigal son.
1978 – Courting Sylvia

I was lonely, divorced, and always hanging out at single’s bars after my divorce in order to find a girlfriend. I tried to chat up one woman or another, but with little success. The women were too drunk and dull, and I was inept, a nerd if you will, not good at small talk.

One night I got lucky, like the persistent fisherman casting his hook in the ocean over and over again who finally got a bite.

“Hi, I’m Sylvia.”

A British accent tugged on my line. She gazed at me from the bar, a cowgirl, long brown hair, white boots, leather skirt and a western top with fringe across the front that accentuated her breasts. I wondered what an English woman was doing in this disco dressed like that?

I pushed my glasses up, smiled and walked from the shadows, determined to reel in this fish.

“Hi, I’m Karl. Want to dance?”

I liked the way Sylvia looked at me, the way she wiggled and swung her hair as we boogied. Her blue eyes
sparkled despite the lack of eye shadow, and her skin was smooth as cream and smelled fresh, not scented. I guessed that she was in her late 30s, a few years younger than me.

After some superficial conversation Sylvia blurted, “I love animals, and I’m too isolated on the ranch where I live. The only guys there are dumb cowboys, so I came here to meet someone smart. Do you like horses?”

I scratched the back of my head, a nervous habit of mine when I want time to think.

“I like horses,” I finally replied. “I learned to ride at boarding school when I was a kid.”

Sylvia’s face glowed, wide eyes gazing intensely. “You must be rich if you went to a boarding school.”

“Not really. I went there for a year as a day student when I first came to California. We lived in the country and my mother didn’t want me to attend a one-room schoolhouse.”

“Oh,” Sylvia said looking down as if she were contemplating my wealth. Then she looked up and bubbled, “Let’s go riding this weekend? I have two horses.”

I almost expected her to give me a hug because she seemed so happy. I liked her already, and I accepted the
offer. However, I thought that this was too good to be true, and in retrospect it was.

The next afternoon, my car bumped down the ranch driveway, sycamores on the right next to the creek and a fenced field, barn and farmhouse on the left. Sylvia’s trailer stood across from the barn and under a shady oak with a board sidewalk from the ancient road to her door. The door looked onto a chicken yard, and a horny rooster raced after one of the hens as I approached the trailer.

Sylvia’s large dog barked and her little dog jumped at the screen. She grabbed the collar of the larger dog and said, “These are my babies. Hold out the back of your hand so Jack can smell it.”

I kneeled, extended my hand, and Jack sniffed and wagged his tail. The little dog named Lucy jumped and
licked my face. Sylvia hugged me as if we were longtime friends.

“What do you think of my place?” she asked.

“I like it,” I said, and I also liked the feel of Sylvia’s body. “I want to see your horses.”

“They’re in the paddock behind the barn. We’ll have to get a halter from the tack room and catch them.”

I imagined Sylvia swinging a rope, but the little mare and larger Arabian came when she whistled and Sylvia slipped on their halters. We walked back to a hitching rail across the drive from the trailer and in front of a tack room to saddle up.

Sylvia took me on a long ride and I proved that I could ride. I soon discovered that I was out of shape because I walked like a drunken sailor when we dismounted several hours later.
Sylvia and I relaxed with wine and chips at a picnic bench under the oak tree and continued talking about our lives. Later she fixed a light meal when the afternoon sky reddened. Both of us had drunk a little too much to go out.

There was a broken cement mixer shell across from the trailer, next to the tack room and an elderly man dressed like a farm hand started putting wood into it. I pointed at it and said, “What’s he doing?”

“Some of the cowboy types like Old Al over there,” Sylvia replied, “build a fire on weekend nights. They have a few drinks and tell stories. You’ll love it.”

Sylvia and I crossed the drive and helped Old Al move benches as the fire started to cast shadows. We cuddled by the fire, and I thought I was in heaven.

The romance blossomed, and I spent every weekend with Sylvia.

Sylvia worked as a labor and delivery nurse four days a week. She explained that she made up the lost day’s pay by working swing shift. Then she could spend more daylight hours with her horses. She had to work every other
weekend, so I learned to enjoy riding by moonlight after she came home.

One day Sylvia said in her delicious British voice, “It kills me every day when I see those new born babies. I want one of my own, and I’ll soon be too old to be a mother.”

I already had two children from my previous marriage, and had long ago decided to have no more kids, so I had had a vasectomy. Now I thought that I might want a family with Sylvia. My feelings confused me, and my heart raced. I took both of Sylvia’s hands, looked at her tenderly and told her, “I love you and I’ll consider having a vasectomy reversal, but let’s see how things go for a while.”

My feelings deepened, except that Sylvia only wanted to do activities that involved her horses, which bothered me. I worried. Her pets might be more important than I was.

By midsummer Sylvia wanted to take me to England so that I could meet her parents. The overseas trip excited me. This would be our first activity without pets.

On the night before we left Sylvia said, “What are we going to tell my parents?”
“What do you mean, ‘tell your parents’?” I questioned.

“I mean that we are going to get married,” she asserted.

I was stunned by the surprise proposal, caught without words. I felt my face flush. I might have considered marrying Sylvia, but not like this. And it wasn’t even a proposal of marriage. It was ‘What are we going to tell my parents?’

“Nothing,” I choked out. “We’ll say nothing,” but I felt conflicted. I loved Sylvia, and I didn’t know how to put a friendlier spin on my feelings.

The trip to England and Sylvia’s parents charmed me, but the charm disappeared soon after our return.

Sylvia and I were driving along a country road on the return from a horse-camping trip when she screamed, “Stop. There’s a dog back there.”

I thought I must have hit the dog even though I didn’t feel it, so I screeched to a stop.

“Careful. The horses,” Sylvia yelled, and she ran from the truck and returned with a sleek red bird dog of some sort.
“He’s lost,” she said. “See? There’s no collar. I want to keep him.”

“No!” I gazed in astonishment. “He probably belongs to someone in those cabins in the trees over there.” I pointed back up the road. “Let’s go back and ask. You can’t just take someone’s dog.”

The fight was a nasty thing in which there was no reasoning with Sylvia. I felt that she acted like she was protecting her own baby. I trembled, and gave in, but I now suspected that she might behave this way with our kids, if we ever had some.

I needed to digest the dog incident, so I traveled to New Zealand to talk to my brother Larry. Before I left, I told Sylvia, “I think we both need time to let this dog issue pass.”

She glared at me and said, “OK. Go.”

When I came back Sylvia seemed even more confused and angry. “That dog chased my horses,” she said, “so I gave him to a neighbor, and it killed one of his ducks. I finally found a home for him in the country, and what’s more I’m really upset at you for not taking me to meet your brother.”
I couldn’t say ‘it serves you right,’ so I said nothing, which made Sylvia cry. We tried taking a long ride in the hills, but she became critical of my horsemanship.

“You’re riding him too hard,” she yelled, and later after the ride, “You have to brush him out better. He’ll get a chill if you leave him wet like that.”

Finally Sylvia said, “I’ve no time left. I want to get married and have a baby. I’m almost 40. I’m advertising in the newspaper for a husband, smart or not.” And she glared at me like I had jilted her.

“If that’s your decision,” I said. I didn’t feel motivated to argue with her anymore.

“Yes it is,” Sylvia said with her hands on her hips and a determined look. “Goodbye Karl.”

After that she sent me her Christmas letters for a few years. Maybe she was trying to show me what a big mistake I had made. She got married, had a child, bought a small ranch south of San Jose, and ultimately moved to Oregon where her husband died. After that death I never heard from Sylvia again.
1979 – A Visit to San Quentin

Just after my divorce and after I received custody of my sons Charlie 14 and David 17, I decided to sponsor an inmate at San Quentin. I heard a convincing talk by the M2 Sponsors, a Christian organization in San Jose, California, at an Active 20-30 club meeting. As club president I wanted to show leadership in community service, and sponsorship interested me even though a part of me thought that I was diverting energy away from my sons. This decision apparently had a profound effect on Charlie.

I visited Rick, my assigned inmate, without receiving any instruction on what to do or what to say.

My contact said, “There is no agenda. Just be a friend to this guy.”

I liked Rick immediately. He was young, maybe 25, with short tan hair, a slim hollow chest covered by a neat white long sleeved shirt that was tucked into his jeans. I expected a hardened criminal, and he looked and talked more like an accountant.

“Why are you here?” I asked.
“I got into a bar fight,” he said in a monotone. “I was living in a hick town in the northern mountains of California. I took out the sheriff’s son with my numchuks (two heavy oak dowels connected together by a chain). They consider numchuks a lethal weapon like a pistol. I got sentenced to prison because it was my second offence.”

My son Charlie with long blond hair and short but muscular stature had recently made numchuks in my woodshop. He used them daily as part of his martial arts training.

“I don’t look too tough,” Rick said, “but I have a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. I mean, another inmate only messes with me once.”

I jumped a little because Charlie was also studying Tae Kwon Do. I recalled Charlie telling me that he needed to protect himself because he was smaller than the other kids. I remembered that Charlie had already hurt one of David’s friends and that there had been an incident with a bus driver.

Then, Rick and I moved on to other subjects, Rick sitting squarely in his chair in the visiting room, holding my gaze with no shiftiness, and speaking in a whisper.
“I tried to escape a violent upbringing by hiding out in the mountains,” Rick breathed, and he showed no emotion as he related event after event. The lack of compassion made me nervous.

I thought about Charlie as I drove home to San Jose.

A week later I took Charlie with me to San Quentin. I pointed out the austere prison on the right as we crossed the Richmond, San Rafael Bridge. The buildings perched on the edge of the San Francisco Bay and showed no life. I can still see the image because I was narrating to Charlie.

We entered a gray visitors building where the guards searched us and made us put on khaki pants. Charlie and I both had worn jeans.

“We can identify the prisoners by their blue denim trousers,” the guard had said.

Charlie looked at everything, the chain link fences topped with razor wire, the guard towers, the guns the guards held, the stark ugliness.

Rick greeted us in the visitor’s room, which had a stale smell. It looked like a dining room with heavy metal tables and heavy metal chairs. We sat at one of the tables, and Charlie looked from table to table.
“Don’t look around too much,” Rick said to Charlie. “Some of these guys and their women guests may do things that could offend you. The guards are quite liberal here. If you stare, someone might get angry. So be careful.”

Charlie jerked his head back and listened to Rick. Rick knew a lot about eastern religions, which interested Charlie. We talked for a long time about India, and gurus like Baba Ram Das.

As we were about to leave, Rick said, “I don’t think it is a good idea to bring Charlie here again. It’s pretty rough for a kid.”

On the trip home I told Charlie how Rick had gotten into prison. We had not talked about it before. Charlie listened, and I said nothing about Charlie’s behavior. I figured he’d get the point.

Two weeks later I called to arrange another visit with Rick, but the clerk said that Rick had been transferred to Atascadero Prison for the criminally insane. Rick had become uncontrollably violent, almost killing several prisoners.

I told Charlie what had happened and gave him a copy of One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest by Ken Kesey.
“This book,” I said, “illustrates what can happen when a state institution takes charge. It can change a person and even make him insane. It’s worse than Hell.”

Charlie never again had a violent incident. I can’t say that Charlie’s visit to San Quentin was a decisive factor in his upbringing, but I like to think it was.
1980 - The Sheltered Child

In the 1980s I had a Chinese friend at IBM named Li, who dated only Caucasian women. In fact at the start of this story he had a stunningly pretty girlfriend named Amy with a svelte, curvy figure, long black hair and a creamy complexion, and to top it all she was a well-paid nurse. I considered Li’s position ideal.

“I’ve been offered a vice president job with a disk drive company in Pinang, Malaysia.” Li told me one day. “I can bank four times my IBM salary in two years.”

“But what about Amy,” I said.

“Oh don’t worry,” he said. “She’ll visit me often. I’ll be back in only two years.”

But when Li returned Amy was aloof, and Li was quite unhappy.

“All I can do,” Li said, “is to treat Amy really well and hope that she would regain interest.”

Amy didn’t because she had another man friend. And in the end Li couldn’t get a high-paying job like he had had at IBM. He was wealthier, however.
Li quickly recruited another woman, who was about 20 years younger than Li. I considered her damaged goods because she was rebelling from a strict Mormon upbringing. She was sampling life and was not really interested in a long-term relationship with him.

The woman, let’s call her Lisa, met a Turkish man who was, I suppose, more exciting than Lih. He was also much older than Lisa. He said he was wealthy and wanted to show her the world. At this point Li lost track of Lisa until one day he received a letter.

The letter said that Lisa and the Turk toured a few places in Europe, including Rome and Amsterdam, and then went to Turkey because the Turk supposedly had a small manufacturing business there. The Turk put Lisa to work carrying goods from Istanbul to Amsterdam via Rome while he was occupied with business. She said that she was happy to do it because she was bored, and because the Turk said that they would travel again shortly.

She made three trips with no problems, but on the fourth trip through Rome, Italian customs found heroine in a false bottom of the merchandise suitcase. She was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to a 10-year term
in a women’s prison. Now Lisa wanted to know if Li could somehow help her. After all they had been friends, hadn’t they.

“What a mess,” Li grimaced. “Lisa is learning about the real world the hard way. What good is a religious education if the student doesn’t learn the real facts of life? I wonder if she would have been this naive incredulous if she had not been so sheltered”
I hadn’t thought about Doug, my old IBM friend and Stanford mentor for many years, so when I passed through his hometown on vacation in 1982, I looked up his mother, and she gave me his phone number.

The directions to Doug’s place were: Go to Casadero, an isolated town in the coastal mountains near California’s Russian River. Take the Fort Ross road toward the Ocean until a large rock appears on the right. Just after this rock turn right onto the first dirt driveway, and follow it to the creek. Ford the creek, watching out for the deep pools, and then climb the hill while keeping to the left, until a small house can be seen in a natural hillside cutout.

Two weeks after I called Doug, I entered a world different from my row of condos surrounded by manicured lawns and colorful flowers. Doug’s house looked like a playhouse dwarfed by the towering redwood trees that surrounded it. It had dark rough walls and a slanted tarpapered roof. The forest floor surrounding it was lush
with ferns and redwood sorrel, sorrel that looked like shamrocks.

I parked beside a dusty pickup truck in front of a busted piano whose keyboard was at an angle and whose cracked cabinet exposed the rusting strings.

Doug and a slender woman with long dark hair greeted me.

“Well, I’ll be damned.” Doug said. “You haven’t changed much. Blond hair, thick glasses, but a little fatter, I’d guess. Oh, this is Sidney.” He put his hand around Sidney’s waist and smiled. A cigarette hung off the edge of his lips.

Doug with his pure white hair and beard, and his purple, red and orange tie-dye T-shirt looked short compared to Sidney. A dark sundress hung loosely on her slender body. The dress didn’t reach her knees, and she wore no shoes.

I already knew from our phone conversation that Doug and his wife Dianne had divorced, that he had dropped out of Stanford’s PhD program, that he had taught Physics for a couple of years at a junior college in Santa Rosa, that he and a few folks got student loan money, bought and
subdivided a ranch in the mountains, started growing pot and magic mushrooms, and disappeared. This good life lasted until the National Guard invaded and shut them down, Doug being able to buy a good lawyer with a stash of mushrooms. The lawyer kept Doug out of jail. Now he did contract programming at home with a computer powered by an inverter in his truck that generated 110-volt electricity from the battery.

He hadn’t told me about Sidney, and I was dying to hear the story.

Doug and Sidney showed me around. There was an outhouse and a geodesic dome made of PVC pipe and covered with clear plastic. Another woman and Doug had lived in this dome while they built the house. The house did have a potbelly stove and water supplied by an electric pump that sucked water up from a creek.

“I fell in love with this place when I first came here,” Sidney said. She appeared to beam with delight, but then looked at Doug as if for approval.

“Yeah,” Doug said. “She came with another guy and never left. We’ve been together ever since.”
“What happened to the other woman,” I asked, “the one who helped build the house?”

“Oh Elaine, she wanted to move near a school because of our son,” Doug said. “She works in Santa Rosa.”

We ended up lounging around the stove, smoking a little pot, and talking. Sidney read her own poetry, Doug talked philosophy, and I absorbed. I spent the weekend with Doug, so we talked about many things, but what stuck with me was my experience with the Tarot.

Doug is one of the brightest people I know, so I didn’t say, “You’ve got to be kidding,” when the subject of the Tarot came up. I listened like Plato at the side of Socrates.

“The Tarot is a vehicle for a person to communicate with their subconscious,” Doug said. “There’s no magic, no mystical fortune being told, when done correctly. It’s like an ink blot test where the person sees what is in his subconscious mind.”

Doug lectured like a professor about the Tree of Life and the Tarot and about how the cards are laid out one at a time, first to explore aspects of the problem and then to illuminate facets of the solution. The details of his
discussion could be an essay by itself, but sometimes the Tarot deck has instructions that give a message for each card whose significance the person should discuss relative to his problem.

Sidney volunteered to show how the process worked with one of her issues. I think the issue might have been about what she was going to do with her life since she was at least 20 years younger than Doug.

Sidney interpreted the cards. All I remember is that the main solution card was the six of cups and that she lowered her head and closed her eyes after she saw it. Then tears squeezed forth without a sound and she let them run without covering her face.

The Tarot deck has four major suits called Arcana in addition to the well-known face cards like Death or The Wheel of Fortune. The Arcana are pentacles (a five sided star) that represent the five senses, swords that demonstrate the aggressive masculine principle, cups that symbolize the receptive feminine principle, and finally rods that show integrated knowledge.

Each of the cards in the Arcana has a picture, and the picture apparently triggered Sidney’s reaction.
“They’re not making eye contact,” she finally said after she had dried her eyes and could speak without emotion.

I looked at the six of cups. There was a man dressed like a page, and he was offering a bunch of golden flowers to a maiden in front of him. The symbol of love was there, but the man was not looking into the woman’s eyes, as one would expect.

Sidney didn’t say any more than that, but I suspected that she had not received many flowers in her life, so when I returned two weeks later I brought her a pot of yellow chrysanthemums.

“Here is a thank you for your Tarot reading,” I said making sure to make eye contact with her. “I will never forget the six of cups.”

She took the flowers, held my gaze, and gave me a knowing smile. Then she planted the flowers outside the front door next to the busted piano’s carcass.

“I loved playing that piano,” she said. “It’s the one I learned on. It fell off the back of the pickup when we brought it here, so I guess my piano playing days are over.”
As a postscript, let me tell you how Doug and Sidney married a couple of years later (1985). Yes, Doug and Sidney married, and the circumstances are unique enough to mention. I had kept in contact with Doug by phone and by attending the Fort Ross Volunteer Fire Department benefits concerts.

“I want you to come to my wedding,” Doug said when he called me.

“Yes,” I said, “but you know that I lost my central vision and can’t drive.” I had just lost my vision in 1984 and had not yet told Doug.

“Don’t worry.” Doug replied. “I have a friend that can bring you.”

Two weeks later I arrived at Casadero. I believe it was June because the wedding spot was a newly planted grassy circle surrounded by primroses in different colors with an isolated redwood tree in the center. Doug and Sydney sat on the grass, Doug still in a tie-dye T-shirt and Sydney in a white frilly dress. The sun shone, and they both glowed.
The significant thing I remember about the wedding was that Elaine gave Doug away, and I think that she might have even cried.

In the end, Sidney joined an exciting extended family, but with a life style totally different than mine. So in reality the piano wasn’t busted after all.
1983 – Finding Religion

I discovered by 1983 that making men friends and finding a life partner was not easy. Most of the single women I met had experienced messy divorces, were raising difficult children, or had some peculiarity that made them undesirable.

I finally advertised in the Trellis single’s newsletter. I tried to articulate who I was and what I wanted in a woman, and I met Joan, a handsome, wealthy woman who was as tall as I am. Further she had no children. I thought I had found a perfect mate. Joan encouraged me to join her choir at the First Church of Religious Science in San Jose, and religion sneaked in by the back door.

My parents had belonged to the Unitarian Church, and I often went to services there. I was married in the church, but I received a minimal religious education. I suppose that in 1983 I considered myself an atheist.

I liked the Religious Science minister, Dr. Robert Scott, a gentle gray haired man who reminded me a lot of my father. I also liked the New Thought philosophy, which
embraced all religions. It taught that each of us is on Earth for a reason that we are supposed to actualize, and that the actualization depends upon attitude.

“Thoughts are the seed of action,” Dr. Scott would say. “If you plant turnips, you get turnips. If you plant roses, you get roses.”

I took the Science of Mind Workshop starting in 1983, which transformed my life and prepared me for my central vision loss a year later.

Joan and I were not compatible as mates, but remained good friends. This was a first, and I made many new, wholesome friends through the church activities.

One of these friends was Ron Blewitt, who stood next to me in the bass section of the choir. We connected a year later after he started dating a woman I knew from IBM named Julie who was also a member of the church. Ron is sill my friend today after more than 20 years.

The people I met in First Church were not transitory as were the people I met at activities for singles.

Maybe religion means friendship and the realization that I am part of a bigger whole. If this belonging to
something larger than myself is a sign of God, then I’m a believer.
1984 – The Year from Hell

In the fall of 1983 the Advance Systems Development Division, where I had worked my whole career, was disbanded, so IBM management transferred me to the disk drive division. In those days IBM didn’t lay people off. However, I wasn’t an expert in this new field, so I had to become a manager. I knew the risks.

The good news was that I controlled my staffing, and I had an excellent human resources person named Marge working with me. Marge was tall and pretty with a Japanese-looking pageboy haircut. She had a Japanese last name, but she was Irish, born and raised in San Jose. Her Japanese husband worked as a forklift truck driver in the IBM factory. I was immediately attracted to her but I didn’t want to fool around with a married woman even though I didn’t have a girlfriend at the time.

My only 1983 Christmas present was a fold in the retina in my good eye. A horizontal line now looked like the letter S with long horizontal tails. I was terrified, and the doctors didn’t know what to do except wait.
I started frantically looking for a girlfriend, even buying a new car for bait, but by the summer of 1984 I had no luck. However, I now knew Marge much better because we had several long personal talks.

Marge told me confidentially that her childhood was awful. Her father died when she was about 10, and her mother survived by running a boarding house that catered to transients. She told me of many erotic experiences, which made me wonder if she had been molested or even raped by one of the tenants.

Marge ran away from home after high school with the Japanese friend. They got married, and I guess they loved each other because they were still married after 25 years. However, Marge clearly stated that she and her husband had never had sexual relations. In fact they had separate houses and did very little together.

“He is like my brother,” she had said. “He is my only family.”

I believed her because I wanted to, but this strange story should have been a warning. Instead I took it as a veiled invitation.
“I would like to go out with you,” I said, “but it’s only fair to tell you that I’m having serious eye problems. I may go blind.”

“I want to date you,” she replied, “and don’t worry about your eyes. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

I heard sincerity in her voice and saw caring in her eyes. I was smitten, and we started dating.

Two months later in August my retina ripped to the point I couldn’t drive while Marge and I were on a weekend trip to Yosemite. The doctors tried to stop the ripping with laser treatment, but that only aggravated the condition. This was the beginning of the year from hell.

Thanks to Marge I had a relatively smooth transition to low vision. I couldn’t drive, and there was a bus line going directly past my condo to the IBM plant site. I hired a part-time assistant to read my mail to me and help me with my office work. Marge put me in contact with a visual aid specialist, the Library for the Blind, a mobile veterinarian for my little Pekingese, and organizational consultants for the visually impaired. She was a fantastic resource.
Then my mother died, and Marge was by my side, driving me to the Oak Hill Mortuary for the burial arrangements and organizing the reception after the funeral. I couldn’t have handled it without her.

I had two months to move my mother’s possessions from her retirement home, The Los Gatos Meadows. During that time I only saw Marge a couple of times a week. My brother Steve came down from San Francisco to live with me while we sorted through her things. Steve was disabled because he periodically had mini-strokes caused by an open-heart surgery two years before. The pig valves that he had received shed blood clots. Steve still drove, even though he probably shouldn’t have.

Steve became anxious, almost crazy, as we went through my mother’s possessions. He didn’t want to throw anything away.

Steve’s spleen ruptured, probably due to the stress, in the first week in December, and he had to be hospitalized. He had a genetic disorder called Marfan’s Syndrome, which caused heart problems and aneurisms among other things. The doctors removed the spleen.
Steve required a lot of blood, and in those days the blood screening was poor. Hence, he acquired a serious blood infection that didn’t respond well to antibiotics. As a result he had to take intravenous penicillin for two months after being released from the hospital. He never recovered from the infection and was hospitalized again. Steve died in open-heart surgery in March of 1985.

Again Marge was there to support me during Steve’s last days. I think that Steve knew that he was dying, and he was angry, especially with me. He disinherited both Larry and me, so I let my ex-wife Anne-Marie, who was a beneficiary, probate his will, and I let his friends, who were also beneficiaries, set up his funeral.

After Steve died I still only saw Marge a couple of times a week, and she was secretive about what she did on the other days. I found out what she was doing, however, when I got a case of genital warts from her. She had apparently received them from someone else. The wart removal was painful, and I was pissed. I expected Marge to be monogamous. Even though Marge tried to get rid of the warts they would always return. I never knew if they just reoccurred or if she got infected again. From then on when
Marge knew that she had the warts she wouldn’t sleep with me. We continued to date in this haphazard manner for several months. I was confused because I really liked her. I wanted more of a commitment from Marge than she was willing to give.

The relationship issue came to a head when Marge and I traveled to South East Alaska. We had an argument and Marge went into the bathroom where she cut her wrists.

I knew nothing about suicide, and I didn’t expect what she did. There was a lot of blood, but Marge had cut across the veins, not along them, so the bleeding could be readily stopped. I became dizzy and almost passed out. I felt like I was in a living nightmare.

I saw that there were many scars on Marge’s wrists from previous attempts, probably with other men. We continued our trip but I knew then and there that Marge and I were through.

Marge then told me more about her history, which confirmed my worst fears.

“When I first came to work at IBM,” she said, “I wore plain dresses with flat shoes and horn-rimmed glasses. I was smart and soon became an executive administrative
assistant to an IBM vice president.” She actually used the man’s name here. “This vice president convinced me to dress sexier, short skirts, tight blouses, high heel shoes. I was soon his lover, and I like this life style, love without commitment.”

After this executive was transferred to another location, Marge had affairs with other married men. In fact, she told me that she often dated more than one man at a time.

I knew nothing of her history or habits, and I suspected that this double dating was going on all the time we had been together. Marge and I never dated again after that Alaska trip.

By the fall of 1985, I had adjusted well to my low vision, both at work and at home. I wanted another girlfriend, so I decided to learn to square dance. My technician at IBM and my friend Ron recommended it.

I took a taxi to the first class meeting of The Bachelors and Bachelorettes singles square dance club and made an announcement that I needed a ride. I got a ride immediately.

The year from Hell had ended.
1985 – Inheritance from a Rich Uncle

I sorted through Mom’s belongings in her neat retirement home apartment in Los Gatos, California. There were Chinese brush paintings on the walls, a black and gold-trimmed hutch full of Asian figurines, Persian carpets, and leather chairs the color of teak. The living room still smelled of incense, and I stared disconsolately at the view out the picture window overlooking Santa Clara Valley. Mom would never see this view again, dead at 82 in the fall of 1984.14

Wilma Belser at the Los Gatos Meadows, 1976

14 Wilma Blanch Beckman was born on January 24, 1903 and died on October 22, 1974.
There were bags of letters, most of them from people I didn’t know. I read only the ones that seemed interesting, and one letter astounded me.

Uncle Arnie wrote, “I’m enclosing the check for Karl’s tuition and dorm expenses for his second year at Stanford. I again ask you to please never mention my assistance to Karl. I want him to receive the satisfaction that I got when I was young and making my way.”

I thought back 27 years when I hadn’t been admitted to the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech) even though Uncle Arnie was the chairman of the board of directors. I was so confident then that I didn’t apply anywhere else. I ended up going to San Jose State College, which was not even a university then. A year later I got admitted to Stanford with a high SAT score.

When I told Dad that I was going to Stanford I said, “I don’t want to go to Cal Tech anymore. I don’t even want any money from Uncle Arnie. I’m working as a co-op at IBM and I’ll use the money I earn to pay the expenses.”

Dad replied, “That won’t be enough, and I don’t make enough money to put you and your brothers through college. You’ll have to work part time.”
I worked as a food server in the dorm cafeteria, and Dad paid the remaining expenses. I continued to work for IBM in the summers and then two days a week after I got married. I obtained an Air Force contract in graduate school, which paid for my tuition and gave me enough money to support my family. I remember how proud I felt.

I joined IBM after graduation and didn’t consider applying to Beckman Instruments because one day my friend Pat, who was acting for my advisor during my advisor’s absence, rushed into my office and said, “The Stanford president just called and said that your dissertation has been signed. I didn’t know your uncle was Arnold Beckman.”

I remembered complaining that I couldn’t get my thesis advisor, who was on a sabbatical in Europe, to read my dissertation, so I asked Mom. “How did Uncle Arnie know about my situation?”

She answered, “I periodically talk to Uncle Arnie about you boys.”

“What?” I had replied, “Uncle Arnie? Interested in me? He’s never once talked to me about work or school.”
Years later I mustered up enough courage to ask Uncle Arnie for advice. I was nervous about leaving IBM to join a start-up company.

Uncle Arnie, bald with a gray fringe, crisp wire rimmed glasses, shirt with tie, sitting at the kitchen table overlooking the ocean, told me, “You shouldn’t quit IBM unless you get more stock options.” And then he added. “I’ve just set up a foundation to fund scientific education. Of course, I have trusts for Pat and Arnold.”

I interpreted these words to mean that my brothers and I would inherit nothing, so I decided to continue working for IBM where I was guaranteed employment and a good retirement, and I didn’t have much interaction with Uncle Arnie until Mom died.

Uncle Arnie gave an outstanding and moving eulogy at the memorial service. After his talk, Uncle Arnie sat next to me, and I was crying.
He consoled me saying, “You’re mother had a full life. Eighty-two years is a long time. Everyone has to die, and your mother died quickly and painlessly. I hope that I die as easily.”

Uncle Arnie was the last person of my parent’s generation, and we talked for a long time after the funeral. I knew then that he cared for me.

Now the pieces all fell into place. Uncle Arnie apparently had always acted in my best interests. No wonder he talked to the Stanford president those many years
ago. I concluded that he must have been insuring that I get my inheritance, a good education.
1986 – Turtle Soup

“Look at that. It’s outrageous,” Mickey said, pointing her finger toward the flat-bottom riverboat that plowed through the water ahead of us on the Li River a little north of Guilin, China. China had just opened to tourism in 1986, and I quickly signed up for a tour.

I peered through my binoculars and saw one of the kitchen crew peeing over the right side of the boat. He wore light blue bell-bottom trousers and a loose white shirt, and he was pushing his hips forward to obtain a long arching stream. What horrified Mickey was that the back of the boat was the kitchen, and another worker was simultaneously scooping river water from the other side into a large cooking pot.

“Oh well,” I said, “that’s China for you. No health standards.”

Mickey, a gray haired, pleasant faced, grandmother type and her skinny bodied daughter Nancy, sat next to me in boat-top deck chairs. Nancy had long hair the color of sweet Dutch chocolate, a turned up nose, and inviting puppy dog eyes. I had been hopefully chatting her up. After
all, I was a single man, alone on this tour, and she had never been married.

Mickey and Nancy, both conservative southern women, didn’t change their horrified facial expressions. I realized that my seduction effort had evaporated for the time being. However, the tour was only half over, and I was a patient man.

After that I quietly gazed at the magical landscape that passed slowly by. The river twisted through a fairyland of round-topped hillocks that poked out of the adjacent green-carpeted rice patties, like giant tan oval melons. Little blackish trees hung out of cracks in the sandstone, and some had a spiral trail, a faint whitish line, leading to the top. Wispy clouds that looked like watercolor brushstrokes flowed horizontally through the azure sky and around the little hills. I had seen Chinese scrolls with scenes like this, but I had always thought that they were fantasies, created by some romantic-minded artist.

I tried to engage the women in conversation about the scenery, but they both seemed preoccupied. So I relaxed after rubbing on suntan lotion and adjusting my African
explorer hat so my face wouldn’t get sunburned. I think I even dozed. I periodically surveyed the ship ahead of us for more action.

Finally, a little skiff loaded with twitching, black and green turtles rowed along side of the boat in front of us. I got Mickey and Nancy’s attention, and we watched the oarsman toss the turtles, each the size of a man’s head, onto the deck where one of the kitchen crew chopped them up with a cleaver, shells and all. Another worker sorted through the mess, tossing the meaty parts into the steaming cauldron, after which he swept the guts and shells over the side.

“Bet you won’t order turtle soup for lunch,” Nancy chided.

I rolled my eyes behind my glasses, and gave her an innocent look. I could recognize opportunity when I saw it, but Nancy broke my gaze and changed the subject by pointing out fishermen next to the bamboo groves along the side of the river.

Lunch came around an hour or so later, and sure enough turtle soup was on the menu. I made sure that both Mickey and Nancy heard me order it. I also ordered bread and one
of those large bottles of Chinese beer to discretely cut
the taste if it was necessary.

“I wouldn’t have the guts to order that soup after
what we saw,” Nancy said.

I nodded confidently, but I knew that I wouldn’t have
ordered the soup either except for my desire to score
bravery points. Actually, I figured that any disease would
be killed in that pot of boiling water, and who knows,
maybe this boat had a clean kitchen.

The soup came, and it wasn’t the typical water left
over after boiling some leafy plant like bok choy. Instead
there were chunks of meat and colorful vegetables with
little puddles of oil floating around them. I closed my
eyes and smelled the soup for effect while stirring it with
my spoon.

Then Nancy shrieked, and I looked up.

“There’s an eyeball floating in there,” she said. Her
pale face and wide eyes made me believe that She might pass
out any second.

I found the peering globe and fished it out, after
which I sent it over the railing with a two-handed catapult
flick of my spoon. It sailed in a high arc, all eyes
following its path, until in made a faint plunk in the gray water.

I then took my first, point scoring, sip of the soup and pronounced it excellent. Nancy made a little gasping sound.

“Do you want a taste?” I asked.

And both mother and daughter said, “No,” in unison.

My lips curled up victoriously, but was it a victory? Maybe Nancy would think that I was foolish and not brave. I knew, however, that I would soon find out, and my heart throbbed in anticipation.
1988 – The Bull Fight

Laura, a curvy, petite woman with curly black hair and intense dark eyes, was my girlfriend of several years after my trip to China produced no romantic results. Laura and I made a curious couple because I am quiet while Laura buzzed around like a bumblebee, sometimes dripping honey and sometimes stinging. Our rocky relationship was now on an upswing after many months of strife.

“Let’s go to Spain,” I proposed. “Ron and Julie want to go. It’ll be lots of fun.”

However, my friend Ron from the First Church of Religious Science, unexpectedly broke up with his girlfriend just prior to the beginning of the trip. Ron still wanted to go, and I didn’t see how to say no even though Laura was very unhappy with the change.

Laura, Ron and I arrived in Madrid having crossed the dusty Plaines of La Mancha by bus from our arrival point at Alicante. Our hotel, the Alcala, a yellowish box sandwiched between dark brick buildings, faced onto a park across from which the Museo Del Prado stood. The trees were changing color. It was hot, and we were told that we
had the afternoon off. However, the Del Prado was closed on Monday. So we had a problem. With budget tours you always had to do some of the planning yourself.

The three of us met in the lobby to have a drink after unpacking. I had a beer and Laura and Ron had tea. We discussed how to fill the evening.

Finally Ron said, “We have a city tour tomorrow. Why don’t we go to the bull fights?”

“Let’s go,” I said. “I’ve never seen a bull fight.”

I remember that Laura winced, but she was always wincing at something, so I didn’t really pay attention. The concierge, looking too dressed up for the heat in his nutcracker-like uniform told us that there was a corrida, which is the Spanish name for a bullfight, in the late afternoon, and we decided to go.

The cab let us off in front of the Plaza del Toros, a big circular building at the outskirts of the town. There were few trees and a lot of brown buildings in which I presumed people lived, although we saw no one until we arrived at the Plaza de Toros.
My Spanish was poor, so we ended up with cheap seats, costing about one quarter of my hotel beer for all of us, and found ourselves on the sunny side of the arena. There was no one else there, and it was hot. So we went to the very top where there was a little shade from the triangular overhanging roof, which made for poor visibility but less heat. Little cooling gusts of wind even came down off the roof.

“We can move down closer after the sun gets lower,” I said. I had poor vision and it was acceptable so it would be OK with Ron and Laura.
In fact, there were few spectators, and they were sitting in the shade across from us near the red and yellow walls surrounding the field.

Ron had brought his field glasses and told us that the people on the other side were judges or something. Then someone opened the gates for the bull, and the first fight began.

I had no idea what to expect, so I’ll tell you what I saw.

Two horsemen with spears, dressed in yellow with sparkling gold trim, rode next to the bull. The horses had thick quilts of padding to protect them. The riders, I believe they are called picadors, poked the bull with graceful thrusts and the infuriated bull responded by goring the horses. One rider got knocked over, and some clowns on foot came out to capture the attention of the bull. These foils jumped the inner yellow wall as the bull crashed into it.

After this attack the bull ripped around, throwing up dust from the ring’s dirt floor. Then some other fellows came in, called banderilleros, and ran by the bull and launched arrows with long colored streamers into the bull’s
shouleqers to apparently get the bull even more upset. I thought that now every move must be painful for that bull.

Laura started sobbing against my shoulder. We turned and sat with our backs to the action, but I couldn’t console her.

“There’s no sound up here,” I said. “You don’t have to watch.”

I stroked back strands of curly hair blown around by the little puffs of wind rolling off the roof.

Ron apparently heard my comment and said, with field glasses glued to his eyes, “I want to see what happens.”

Actually I wasn’t that upset. The figures were very small, I have low vision, and I don’t think the intense cruelty that was happening registered. The matador played with the bull, luring him with a small red cape at the end of a stick behind which the man held a thick, long sword.

‘Matar’ means ‘to kill’ in Spanish and that’s what the matador was, a killer, finely dressed in a tight black suit with a colorful sash. He killed the bull skillfully and presented an ear to the judges. The sound of cheering echoed across the amphitheater. I was stunned.

“Let’s go,” Laura said.
And Ron replied, “Let’s watch one more.”

I agreed with Ron, and Laura lit into me with the vengeance of one of those picadors spearing the bull. I held her wrists so as not to get hurt, and she told me she hated me. I was a beast for having subjected her to this massacre.

“Let’s go after the next corrida,” I said to Ron, and he agreed.

We should have left earlier because in addition to badly goring the horses, that second tortured bull caught the matador with one horn and tossed him high in the air over and over again like a cat playing with a mouse. The clowns couldn’t distract that bull. Finally the matador lay limply on the blood muddy earth, and another matador killed the bull. No one cheered this time.

We all left. I was hot, sweaty and most of all unhappy, being sick inside because of the gruesome fight and being afraid because Laura would neither look at me nor talk.

In the hotel room, away from Ron’s ears, Laura became the matador. She told me, “We’re through. Something broke
in me today. We’ll finish this trip, but I know now that that’s it.”
1989 – My Tiger

When I first saw my life partner, she wore a tiger suit, a skintight orange and black striped leotard exposing a plumpish, voluptuous body accentuated by an hourglass waist. Her whiskered face with pointy ears turned toward me, and she displayed an enigmatic smile. Then her tail twitched, and her eyes met mine.

I, wearing a kingly purple robe topped with a gold crown, strode over to the refreshment table where she stood. She looked away and nibbled on a pumpkin-shaped sugar cookie, so I grabbed one and took a bite.

“Deliciously spicy,” I said, trying to break the ice without looking too goofy.

“Yes, deliciously spicy” she replied, and our eyes met again. I felt goose bumps because she repeated my words with apparent delight.

“I’m Karl.” I said, gazing deeply into her green, feline eyes. “You’re from the class, aren’t you?”

“Yes, just graduated,” she replied. “I’m Jackie.”

That 1988 Halloween party was the first club square dance I had attended since breaking up with my old
girlfriend, whose black eyes now glanced at me from across the room, giving me ‘ha-ha I have another man’ looks from beneath her pointy witch’s cap.

Our club, the Bachelors and Bachelorettes in San Jose, California, met every Tuesday night in a grammar school cafeteria, an austere place whose only warmth came from the dancer’s body heat. I had felt a little cold, so I immediately asked Jackie to dance the next tip, a tip being what a single square dance is called.

We maneuvered the Ala-man-lefts and Right-and-left-grands until the caller finally said Stack-the-wood, which is the cue to hug your partner. I remember that embrace as being warm and soft with a faint smell of gardenia and a cat’s whisker tickle.

After that tip we talked, and among other things I told her that I was 12 years divorced with two grown sons, that I had low vision, central vision loss like macular degeneration in both eyes, and that my neighbor brought me because I couldn’t see well enough to drive. The conversation didn’t last long. I had promised the next tip to another person.
When we parted, Jackie jerked her head and flicked her tail. I saw a clear image of an upset pussycat, so a little later I asked her to dance again. I wanted to show that I wasn’t rejecting her.

Two days later, Jackie called and invited me to a hoedown on Saturday night. On the way home from that dance we stopped and ate steamy, apple pie and ice cream at an all night diner after which we went back to my condo and got to know each other a whole lot better on the sofa. Well, we did talk some too, and I found out that we had a lot in common. I was in a support group with Jackie’s therapist’s husband, I had previously dated Jackie’s sister’s husband’s ex-wife, and I had gone to school with one of the founders of her company. These signs clearly showed that we were meant for each other.

After that I spent weekends at Jackie’s house, a cute little bungalow shaded by birch trees, located up the San Francisco peninsula from San Jose. I would have liked to spend more time there except that I couldn’t drive, and we lived about 20 miles apart.

I even liked Jackie’s two kids who still lived with her, a teenaged boy named Mike and a teenaged girl named
Heather. Her other son Steve, who I also liked, attended university in another city, but I didn’t meet him until much later. Liking them was a big deal since my previous girlfriend’s children had scratched my eyes out in photographs and locked the piano cover in clear disapproval. I had started to think that I preferred women without kids.

Instead I began to like domestic life, the smell of newly cut grass, the rustle of leaves while raking, the crinkly feel of old painting clothes, the cooperation of washing and drying dishes, the sound of children playing. I even banged out ‘Happy Days are Here Again’ on the piano before dinner with approval. This life seemed ideal, but I had no plans to commit myself. In fact, I downright resisted the thought, so much so that when Valentine’s Day came I forgot.

I awoke with a pink Valentine’s card sitting on the covers in front of me. Jackie leaned over, kissed me and said, “Happy first Valentine’s Day.”

“Oh,” I muttered and read the card. I felt terrible. I almost cried. I had no card. I had done nothing.
It is in times like these, I guess, when real feelings come forth because I jumped out of bed, took a piece of computer printer paper to the kitchen table, folded it like a card, drew a red heart pierced by an arrow on the cover, and created what Jackie says is her most prized possession, a declaration of love from a man who rarely declares.

I wrote:

Dear Jackie,

I done forgot this day of love
But do declare by stars above
You are my friend, you are my mate,
My feelings do not hesitate.

Happy Valentine’s Day
Love, Karl

Jackie snuggled next to me and purred, her head resting on my shoulder. I stroked her hair and thought, “My pretty tiger. I do love you.”
A stream of sunlight heated the covers and illuminated the card in Jackie’s hand. It glowed. I glowed. I felt warm and secure.

I thought how wonderful it was to have a partner who accepted me and loved me as I was, low vision and all. I thought about this miracle, about how Jackie and I met. Deliciously feline she was, hooked I was, and I didn’t even know it.
PREPARING TO RETIRE – MAKING THE APPROACH

Jim Belleson welcoming Karl into the IBM Quarter Century Club in 1992.

Quarter Century at IBM (Charlie, Jackie, Karl and David)
Karl’s Retirement from IBM 1996
(Jackie, Julia, Karen and Karl A.)
1990 – Transitions

“I want to announce that the Advanced Servo Technology Department is disbanded,” my manager Jim Belleson told my department. “Karl will work with each of you to get new positions in the company. IBM is also offering an early retirement bridge.”

My career was shattered. Jim had not even had the courtesy to follow his own “no surprises” philosophy by telling me in advance of the change. To add insult to injury Jim moved me from my large 15 by 15 foot office to a small storage room just behind Jim’s office, where he left me alone to define my own job.

The message seemed clear. Jim wanted me to retire, and I applied for the bridge. However, my application was denied based on my supposed “critical skills.” Was I not allowed to retire because I had low vision and IBM was afraid of legal action? I guessed that this was the case.

I hunkered down and used this opportunity to study every aspect of disk drive design, and these studies prepared me for joining a start-up company six years later.
At the same time Jackie and I started living together. This caused me further stress because Jackie was in bankruptcy and I was insecure about my future.

Jackie and I signed a ‘keep it separate’ living together agreement so that it was clear that I was not taking Jackie on as a liability. I did help Jackie remodel and sell her house to get out of bankruptcy.

“We need a bigger place,” Jackie said immediately after we had moved into my little condo. “Let’s buy a house.”

The condo was big enough to raise my sons David and Charlie, but Jackie wanted a place big enough to entertain her sisters and their kids. I felt pushed.

I had chosen to live in a condo because I could manage living there with low vision. If I bought a house, then I would be more dependent on Jackie. I decided to take a risk because I preferred to live in a house.

We made several low-ball offers on houses near my Los Gatos condo, and we finally bought one on Drysdale Drive for 15% below the asking price. I say ‘we’ because I lent Jackie one-third of the price. I wanted Jackie to have a vested interest in the house since I couldn’t manage the
house by myself. The title was 1/3 and 2/3 tenants in common, and Jackie paid monthly payments to me on the loan. Within a year the house was livable with new furniture and all of the repairs completed, which I had paid for.

“I can’t afford the loan payment,” Jackie complained. Actually I think that she could, but she apparently wanted to spend the money on her children. So I sold my condo that I was renting and bought her out.

Jackie’s spending priorities made me uncomfortable, but there was no problem, because we weren’t married. She was responsible for her bills, and I didn’t interfere with her parenting. Kids and money, they say, are the source of most domestic strife.

I was stable again, both at work and at home.
1993 – The Significant Other Challenge

I became a technical advisor to optical disk drive projects in Tucson Arizona which meant that I had to travel two or three times a month. I worried that Jackie would be destitute if I died in a plane crash.

In addition I felt like I had no decent heirs. David was a drug addict who lived on the streets. Charlie was a part-time waiter in a five star restaurant, and played with his friends the rest of the time. Neither child had graduated from college. I felt estranged from both of my children.

The issue crystallized when I took a tour of France in 1993 without Jackie. Jackie didn’t want to spend the money, and I was irritated because Jackie constantly pushed me to spend more. She would go if I paid for it.

Everyone on the tour was paired up, except for an 82-year-old English lady named Jean and me. Jean and I became friends.

“Poor Jackie,” Jean would say when I tried to explain why I was on the trip alone.
I guess Jean knew first hand about loneliness because she married a 50 year old dairy farmer when she was 20, raised three girls essentially alone, and then ran the farm as her husband aged. Jean’s words softened my heart and heightened my concerns about Jackie’s welfare in the event that something might happen to me.

I read about common law marriage. In the case of Marvin versus Marvin, Lee Marvin and his girl friend were considered married because they mixed their assets and acted like partners. I felt that the California community property marriage law invited abuse. One partner, usually the one who didn’t work, could double-cross the other and take half of the community assets. I felt that my ex-wife had robbed me, and I had learned my lesson.

Jackie and I had scrupulously kept our money separate. I could leave Jackie at any time because of our living-together agreement. I liked it that way. It kept temptation out of reach.

I consulted an attorney to see what could be done to satisfy my emotions and still not give away the store. He advised that I could achieve my purpose by setting up a revocable living trust with Jackie as one of the
beneficiaries. I could also give Jackie a durable power of health attorney to act for me in place of my flaky sons.

I implemented the trust and power of attorney in 1993. It divided my estate equally among Jackie and my two sons David and Charlie. These documents were a unilateral move, and Jackie didn’t choose to implement similar documents until more than a decade later. Her lack of action reinforced my belief that I had made the correct decision to avoid marriage.

I believed that I had laid the foundation for a durable, long-term relationship, and I softened a little relative to Jackie. I was ready to travel with Jackie even if I had to pay.
1994 - The Trip To Colombia

BY 1994 Jackie’s kids were mostly gone. Steve had graduated from college and moved to Boston. Mike was busy with Boy Scouts and High School. Heather had met and later married a Colombian named Hans and moved to Medellin where she studied psychology at the local university. We were experiencing an empty house.

However, the problem was solved because Jackie’s sister, Patricia, divorced her husband and moved back to the Bay Area. The newly opened I-85 connected Patricia’s home in Cupertino with ours in San Jose.

Jackie, Mike and I had already visited Steve in Boston with no extra ordinary events except that Jackie ended up in the hospital with dehydration from the flu, and Mike and I discovered Boston Chicken, that later became the nationwide chain called Boston Market. Jackie and I now wanted to visit Heather in Colombia. The problem was money.

Patricia’s house, an adobe style, flat roofed house, needed painting. Jackie and I offered to paint it after work for the price of two round trip tickets to Colombia.
The stucco house had not been painted for over 20 years, and we used a high pressure water spray to strip off the old paint, leaving the ground around the house covered with tan flakes which were a pain to clean up. Painting the stucco was easy and fast. The bad part was painting the trim. It took a week of summer evenings to complete the project, and we made our reservations.

Hans worked for Proctor and Gamble in Medellin, and the company helped us with changing planes in Bogotá. We luckily connected with Heather and Hans perfectly. Recall that Colombia was the center for world cocaine production at that time, and very dangerous.

"It’s not safe to stop at stop signs here," Hans said as he sped through the city and up the mountainside to the family finca. Then Hans pointed at a motorcyclist without a helmet. "Cyclists commit many drive by assassinations here, and the law allows no helmets so that the driver can be recognized." And then Hans pointed out the roadside bars. "You can even get a rum and coke on the way home. What do you think of this country?"

Hans had a terrific sense of humor and I liked him. He was a short, dark man who had the neck and shoulders of
an American football player. It fact, he was an active rugby player. He learned rugby in a US boarding school and had started the leagues in Colombia.

The finca was in a gated and guarded compound in the high Andes about 2000 feet above the slums of Medellin. Medellin has about the same altitude as Denver, and the finca the same altitude as the alpine meadows of the Rocky Mountain National Park. However, the weather is temperate year around because it is close to the equator, and Medellin is called the land of eternal spring.

We passed indigenous workers walking home along the eucalyptus-lined road to the ornate front gate. The finca was a huge stone, tile roofed building on the top of a hill in front of us. There were dozens of hanging baskets of purple begonias on the eves, and the house was surrounded by acres of lawn, punctuated by a duck pond on one side of the drive, the caretakers house and greenhouse on the other, and a barn, garden and cows in back. We drove up the hill and unpacked. The caretaker’s wife made us a nice meal, but Han’s parents were not there.

“My parents live in the El Poblado district of Medellin,” Hans explained. “We’ll see them tomorrow.”
Hans showed us around the house with the majestic views and the ballroom on the second floor. It had everything but central heating. It was supposedly a cool 68 inside all year, and there were no insects because of the high altitude.

The living room looked out onto another finca in the distance. It was an enormous multi-story house that reminded me of the Biltmore mansion in Ashville with a full sized bullring at one side.

"Who owns that mansion," I asked?

"Oh, that’s the house of the Ochoas, who used to be the head of the Medellin drug cartel," Hans replied. “They gave the business to Carlos Escobar, and the brothers chose to go to prison for a couple of years to get out of the business.”

“Oh,” I said. I began to wonder exactly what Hans’ father did that allowed him to live with the richest of the rich.

“My dad is a retired bank president. He now owns a banana plantation in northern Colombia near the border with Panama.” Han’s answered. I learned later that the DEA had frozen the bank account Hans used when he was in US.
boarding school because of money laundering. But Hans insisted that his father was ultimately cleared of all charges.

Hans’ father was a German immigrant who had worked his way to the top in a bank in Medellin and now owned tens of millions of dollars in real estate.

“He must be pretty bright,” I thought, “to make so much money in a country where the average monthly income is less than one hundred dollars.”

“I can hardly wait to meet him,” I said.

The next day we visited Han’s parents. They lived in a multi-story building in a beautifully landscaped neighborhood. Of course, the beauty was marred by the 15-foot high wall with rolls of razor wire along the top that surrounded the building. We entered through a steel gate whose open port faced onto a prison like guard station. The guards verified who we were and allowed us to enter. They were armed with large-caliber weapons that could stop even a car that tried a forced entry.

The bottom of the building was a parking garage, and each of the six or seven stories was a single 4000 square foot residence. The grounds inside were immaculate. We
walked up the central stairway instead of taking the elevator. A maid greeted us and we entered an even more splendid residence than the finca. It had marble floors in green and tan, dark wooden walls, spacious rooms with picture windows on at least two sides and sculptures and large paintings of the other walls. The floor plan was a big plus sign with flowering balconies at each corner with good views over the razor wire topped wall.

We ate the mid-day meal with all of Han’s brothers and sisters, which is the tradition. Everyone had two or more hours for a noon meal. Hans' father, brothers and sisters spoke good English. His mother just spoke Spanish. I knew only a little Spanish in those days, and she was happy to try communication. Hans’ 90-year-old great aunt also lived there with her full time nurse.

In the afternoon we toured the shopping district in El Poblado. It was similar to the most expensive stores in a rich town like West Palm Beach or Beverly Hills. You could buy anything there and the streets were full of BMWs, Mercedes, and Volvos. The down side was that every store had numerous guards with those large caliber rifles that could take out the transmission of a car.
“This neighborhood is very safe,” Hans said, and I could see why. Everyone was well dressed and manicured.

“How about the slums?” I asked.

Hans told me, “A blond person like you would be dead in ten minutes if you tried to go there.”

After several days of exploring the area around Medellin, Hans decided that we should drive to Colveñas on the Caribbean coast.

“That’s crazy,” Han’s father said. “It’s too dangerous. There are guerillas in the mountains.”

But we went anyway, and I found out that Hans, and probably all rugby players, fear nothing. At over 10,000 feet Hans was driving flat out in his little Renault 4, along windy roads that were veiled in clouds, and around huge truck and trailer rigs on curves.

“It’s OK to pass on curves here,” Hans explained. “Three cars can fit onto the road and the truck and the approaching car will let you squeeze by.”

I wondered what would happen if the approaching car were a truck with a car trying to pass it. What then? I said nothing. I just sat in the back seat with Jackie and prayed.
We got through the worst of the road, but at the very top a man in army fatigues carrying a machine gun stopped us. Hans told Jackie and me to keep our head down like we were sleeping. Then he rolled down the window.

“Give us your petrol,” the guerilla said. Hans ducked the question and engaged the man in a humorous conversation in which he said he had a job in one of the Caribbean towns.

“I look and talk like one of the local Indians,” Hans said, “and luckily they didn’t make us get out of the car or you guys would have been toast.”

I told Hans as we left that I really had to pee. He let me out, put out a reflecting triangle 100 yards behind us so we wouldn’t get hit.

Hans kept saying, “Hurry up. Hurry up. Do you want to get killed by the guerillas?” I had terrific difficulty.

No tourists were at the beach in Colveñas. There were lots of friendly black people in the local stores, and lots of soldiers guarding the oil pipeline that came ashore from the offshore oilrigs. We swam, and hiked and ate with no competition. At El Gordo’s (the fat man’s) you could buy a
huge freshly caught and roasted fish so large that it
draped over both ends of the 12-inch wide plate. Jackie
and I shared one fish, but Hans was so hungry that he ate
the whole thing. It was a tropical paradise.

The trip back was uneventful and after three weeks of
touring we headed home. I felt an immediate sense of
relaxation when I was safely on the airplane, and I knew I
would never return to Colombia.
1995 – A New Zealand Story

“Let’s go boating on Lake Rotoriti today,” Larry said. Jackie and I were visiting New Zealand in March of 1995, which because of the reversed seasons is fall. The weather was still good, but the millions of tourists had returned home.

My brother Larry\(^{15}\) had a 20-foot powerboat on a trailer in his side yard with which we had already explored the north coast of Able Tasman National Park. Now it was time to investigate one of the large inland lakes.

We headed south through apple orchards and newly planted vineyards into the mountains and spent the day walking through the native bush at the edge of the lake.

Larry got a flat tire on his trailer on the return trip, and we discovered that he didn’t have either a spare tire or the tools to change one. I was inwardly horrified,

\(^{15}\) Larry and his wife Mary emigrated to Nelson, New Zealand in 1976 where Larry worked as a microbiologist, his area of expertise. In 1985, the year after his mother died, New Zealand devalued its currency and Larry obtained his inheritance and invested in rental property, which made him independently wealthy. He quit his research job and began teaching computer science at a local technical school. He became an Oracle data base expert and started a consulting business.
but Larry apparently had never had a flat tire before. We were stuck in a rural and sparsely populated countryside.

No cars came, but finally we saw a large flock of sheep rolling like a low flying carpet over one of the nearby hills. We got the middle-aged shepherd’s attention while his sheep ate and explained our situation.

“No problem, mate,” the shepherd said. “I have a place about five miles from here and you can use my tools.”

He drew us a map and continued driving his sheep.

Larry unhooked the trailer and propped the tongue on a rock, and he and I went to the farmhouse to get the tools.

We drove up past a woman who I supposed was the guy’s wife because she was looking after several young children. We parked in front of the barn. I expected the guy’s wife to come rushing over and to challenge us, but she ignored us. We got out, went into a tool shed beside the barn where the tools were supposed to be. There was a fine set of mechanics tools in a toolbox along with all sorts of other farm tools. We took the tool box and drove back to the boat.

“Are all New Zealanders so trusting?” I asked Larry.
“Sure,” Larry said. “No one’s going to steal a farmer’s tools.”

“Right,” I said. “Do you thing anyone in California would let a stranger have total access to all his belongings?”

Larry raised his eyebrows like I was some sort of paranoid fool. “Actually we’ve just started locking our house when we’re not there – not that we really need to, you know.”

We quickly removed the flat tire, and Larry drove all the way back into Nelson and got the tire repaired. Jackie, Mary and I sat by the edge of the road and waited.

About two hours later, and after only one or two cars had passed, Larry returned.

We returned the tools on our way back to Nelson. We didn’t even see the guy’s wife on the second visit.

“It’s going to be interesting to tell my friends,” I said, “that the high point of our visit to New Zealand was a flat tire.”
1997 – The Car Called Sweet Rosy

Jackie, my curvy girlfriend with eyes like emeralds, asymmetrical, business-like haircut, contagious smile, saw it in a used car lot, a 1996 Ford Taurus station wagon, one year old and the color of her favorite purple roses. It was spring in San Jose, plum trees blooming, sweet new leaves shimmering, crisp cool air caressing our faces. It was the time to buy a new car.

I regarded my partner with interest when she jumped with delight, making her short blue dress puff out and showing her legs. Even after many years of living together, I still found her attractive.
I said, “I don’t like that color. It’s too feminine,” and I worried that she had already made up her mind, so I gently grabbed Jackie’s arm and continued, “Don’t get excited. We will only buy the car if we can get a good price.”

However, I did like the accessories: gray leather seats, a sunroof, power locks with a keypad on the driver’s door, stylish chrome rims, a CD player, and even a two person jump seat for our grandkids in the wagon’s bed.

I added, “I do like the car. It’s well equipped.”

A portly salesman walked up, popped the door locks with a remote and looked directly at Jackie like I wasn’t even there.

He said, “Hi, I’m Hank. We just bought this car at auction yesterday, so I can give you a great price. Do you want to drive it?”

Jackie said, “Yes,” without consulting me. Hank offered her the keys with his chubby hand, and she got in and sank into the soft leather seat. She smiled with satisfaction and looked at Hank with wide green eyes. Hank apparently caught her glance, and his pudgy cheeks pulled up in a friendly, knowing grin.
I thought the salesman was moving too fast, so I said, “Wait. I’m coming with you.” I walked around the car, and got in.

Jackie cranked over the engine and the smooth purr of the powerful 24-valve V6 erupted. I thought, this feminine vehicle has a decent, manly engine, and my heart jumped a little. This car might be acceptable despite the color.

The car smelled of leather and plastic, and I whispered to Jackie, “They’ve sprayed in that new car smell.”

Jackie quietly answered, “Yes. It’s overpowering,” and pushed the buttons to open the windows and sunroof letting in the sweet spring air.

Hank commanded with a loud voice, “Drive her. You can get out over there,” pointing to an exit between two poles across which a chain usually hung.

Jackie drove slowly through the streets that were lined with the purple plum trees but didn’t test the power or maneuverability of the machine. Finally I said, “Drive it hard for a few miles.”

She pulled the seatbelt tight in anticipation and applied full power. The vehicle jumped and rounded the
first corner fast enough that I said, “You’re scaring me.” She slowed a little, turned onto the freeway and pushed the pedal to the floor to zoom up the on-ramp.

I told Jackie, “This car’s solid at 80,” and she guided the car off at the next exit and went back to the lot.

Hank had told us that the car was a lease return, that the new-car sticker was for reference, and that it had only 15,000 miles. I had researched the price of used cars, so I offered two-thirds of the price shown on the sticker.

Hank’s face showed no emotion now, and he said, “Let’s go inside and talk.” It was clear that Hank thought that the hook was set, and that it was time to reel the fish in.

I whispered to Jackie, “I know you love this car, but don’t say anything that shows you’re excited. We may not buy it unless we can get the low price I offered.”

After what seemed like an hour of talk with no agreement, I said, “We are not even close.” I stood up, and Hank just sat there with his arms folded across his protruding stomach, so we left that sterile cubicle, stagnant smelling from too much talk.
Jackie and I walked sullenly to her old yellow car, Jackie walking slowly, hands folded in front, looking at the ground.

I had my hand on the door handle to open it for Jackie when Hank ran up and exclaimed, “Would you really buy the car for the two-thirds price?”

Jackie lifted her head and smiled.

I turned to face Hank, looked him over, being in no mood to answer quickly, and finally said, “Yes. That was my offer.”

Hank said, “Done. Let’s go inside. You know I can still offer a 100,000-mile warranty for a little extra. The car is essentially brand new.”

I knew that this was a ploy to get a few extra bucks. But I also knew that the Taurus had a poor repair rating from Consumer Reports, so we bought the warrantee.

As we were about to say goodbye, Jackie chirped, “Thanks for helping me. I love this car, and I’m going to name it Sweet Rosy.”

The wind had blown a few pink blossoms from the purple plumb trees onto the car. I watched Jackie caress the
smooth curves from front to back, knocking the peddles to the ground.

I thought, such a simple thing, and it gives her so much pleasure.
1998 – The Stubbed Toe

Jackie and I have had disagreements over the years, and the issue about wearing sandals stands out.

I like tennis shoes; an off-white that goes with everything, gummy soles that go anywhere, thick sock comfortable. The open air appeals to Jackie, and she tells me that it’s cruel to keep feet caged.

A few years ago I got off the plane in Orlando, Florida and realized that long pants and tennis shoes were too much. Jackie laughed and said, “You’re finally coming to your senses. Let’s get you some real vacation clothes.”

I cringed, and we drove to Wal-Mart on the way to the motel. There I took off my shoes and socks, and tried on a pair of flashy blue, fake Tivas with Velcro straps.

I shuddered when I saw my feet. I always take my glasses off in the shower, so I rarely see them. I muttered under my breath, “All I need now is toenail polish.”

Jackie looked at me and said, “What?” but didn’t wait for my answer. She dragged me off to find a couple of pairs of shorts.
I looked in the mirror and saw the real me, an older man with legs the color of bathroom porcelain and a glint of blue at the bottom.

I told Jackie, “The air does feel good on my feet,” and I wiggled my toes.

By the time the sun went down at Disney World the next day, I realized I forgot to protect my skin from the sun. Of course, Jackie’s feet and legs were the color of toast, and she never used suntan lotion. I looked at my rosy, pulsing feet and said, “Look at my feet. I’ll have to keep wearing sandals for a while.”

I bought some suntan lotion, which Jackie carried for me in her purse. I applied it religiously at Epcot, at Cape Canaveral and on our trip north to St. Augustine where Jackie’s sister lived, and my feet healed.

We went to the beach there, and I exclaimed, “It’s really great having sandals. I can walk right into the surf.” And then I felt a sharp sting on the arch of my right foot.

I was squishing a small jellyfish with every step and it was protesting. I removed my sandal with one quick flip of the Velcro, and freed the critter.
Jackie laughed and said, “I’ve heard that you’re supposed to pee on stings,” and I winced. Then she took a bottle of After Bite from her purse and applied it to my foot. She said, “It contains ammonia like urine does.”

“How did you know I was going to get stung?” I said with amazement.

“We sandal wearers are always prepared,” she said, “But I thought that the After Bite was for mosquitoes.”

We went back to Wal-Mart, bought some surfing shoes that covered the entire foot, and continued enjoying the beach. Jackie volunteered to carry my surfing shoes in her purse.

Next, Jackie and I headed up to the Okefenokee Swamp. The airboat skimmed across the water, around the cypress trees and swamp grass, stopping periodically to view the alligators and birds. Inch-long deerflies swarmed over the boat every time we stopped, and since we hadn’t thought to apply bug repellent, the deerflies preferred us to the better-prepared passengers.

My arm muscles were sore from shooing flies by the time we returned, and I had several large bites on my legs.
and feet. I muttered, “Long pants and tennis shoes
would’ve saved the day.”

Jackie looked at me and said, “What?” but didn’t wait
for my answer. Jackie trotted off to the park store where
she bought two tubes of a combination sunscreen and bug-
repellant lotion. She stuck them in her purse and pulled
out the After Bite.

As we again headed north on our tour of AAA Gem
Attractions, I felt confident that Jackie was prepared for
every eventuality. Well, not exactly. One of the straps
broke, but Jackie knew to take the broken sandals back to
Wal-Mart and get a replacement pair for free.

We passed Savannah, Charleston, Myrtle Beach,
Wilmington, and finally Winston-Salem, North Carolina,
where we saw the docents at Old Salem do early American
crafts. I was especially interested in how pewter spoons
were cast. I watched a man pour a steamy, silvery liquid
into a mold, fill it to the top, and splash little sparkly
bubbles all over the floor.

Then I felt a burning sensation between two toes. I
was on the floor in an instant, pushing people aside. I
flicked the Velcro, removed my sandal like a pro, and dug
out a little metal ball. I smelled the burning flesh, but I now knew that no great harm was done.

Jackie and I rented a motel room in Raleigh the night before our return. There was not much room to move with all the suitcases and souvenirs, and I stubbed my little toe on the bedpost.

“Oooh that hurts,” I complained, and I took off the sandal and rubbed my toe.

Jackie looked at me and said, “What?” and then added, “Poor sweet baby.”

The next morning the toe was red and swollen. The only thing I could do was to squeeze it into a tennis shoe and fly home.

At home the doctor took an X-ray, and sure enough the toe was broken.

The doctor said, “I see that you know enough to protect your feet with sturdy foot ware like your tennis shoes.”

The doctor taped the little toe to its neighbor. Then the doctor stopped and bent forward. “What’s this, this large sore between your toes? How did this happen?”
“You really don’t want to know,” I replied, “Believe me.” I was worried about what I was going to tell Jackie, who was waiting outside to go shopping for leather sandals that I could wear in the city.
1999 – The Binky Boo Man

I was sitting on my built-in bed under the attic eves of our house in Eugene, Oregon in the late 1940s. My father knelt in front of me, holding one of my feet, and showing me how to tie the laces. All of a sudden he looked up, smiled and started pounding on the bottom of my shoe, saying: “Shoemacker Labou schlack der nail in der shoe, binky, binky, binky boo,” and he marched his index and middle fingers up my leg like his fingers were a little man until he tickled my stomach.

My father was German and a professor of architecture at the University of Oregon. He was then in his middle forties, a little fat and balding. I liked his face whose most prominent features were dark eyes, bushy black eyebrows and a black mustache, which he called a ‘cookie duster’ when he rubbed it against my cheek to make me laugh. The mustache did look like the end of a broom, too. The binky-boo man became the symbol of his love, and I imagined that my grandfather, who I never knew must have done the same thing with my father as a child.
I unconsciously introduced the Binky-Boo Man to my two boys because I liked the little guy a lot. Then came some other creatures like the Binky Boo Spider, which consisted of all five fingers hanging over an unsuspecting stomach. My kids loved these creatures, but that was also a long time ago when my kids were little.

![Julia Marie Belser](image)

The Binky-Boo Man unexpectedly reappeared for my first grandchild, Julia. He would always walk from some distance away toward her, and walk to a hand that she held out for him. I sang, “Binky, binky, binky, binky, binky, binky boo” as he walked slowly but directly toward her. The Binky-Boo Man was very clean, wiping his feet on Julia’s
hand. She looked at the man, then at me with big blue eyes and squirmed. Then the Binky-Boo Man walked up her arm until she laughed and ran away.

A major change happened several weeks later that surprised me. As the Binky Boo Man was walking toward Julia she raised her hand and swatted him, and he said, “Ooooh,” and pretended that she had stopped the binky boo man. She laughed and looked into my eyes with delight. The little man twitched and started again, and she gave him another swat.

I wondered what caused this change, and I thought back to earlier in the day when Julia and I had been on the back deck smelling the pungent scent from the yellow and white spring lilies. I like to garden in pots and grow many types of flowers. A big spider shot from under one of the pots directly toward me. It scared me, so I stomped on it with my shoe. Julia copied me and gave the dead spider a couple of stomps. I realized that I had shown her how to deal with that pesky Binky Boo Man.

Of course, the swat became a tradition with Julia. Julia’s cousins wanted to play this game too, and they all learned to swat that persistent Binky Boo Man. They looked
at me with big round eyes and a smile when I said a loud “Ooooh.” I suspected that they didn’t know for sure if I was hurt or not.

I soon got reports from the mothers, four of them, that their kids were talking about the Binky Boo Man at home as they played. Sometimes they would even ask their parents to play Binky-Boo.

I felt wonderful when I saw my son Charlie playing Binky-Boo with Julia. She, of course, swatted his hand, laughed and looked at him with the same delight that must have been in my eyes when my father played Binky-Boo with me. I realized then that somehow my father, even though long gone, was present with his great grand children.

Julia’s parents, Karen and Charlie
2000 – The Confession

I flinch inside when I recollect Samir, a totally likable fellow who, at one point, I thought was my friend, but who dragged me into a horrible situation the same way a drug addict gets hooked. In the end there was no way out, no way to avoid culpability.

It started when I got divorced in the late 1970’s. An epidemic of marriage disharmony, a kind of lynch mob hysteria, swept the San Francisco Bay Area, apparently spurred by the women’s liberation movement, the birth control pill, and personal growth seminars that were the rage at that time. The disease grabbed me, and I changed the course of my life.

I became friends with Magdi, a man from Lebanon, a handsome fellow, a good talker, a womanizer par excellence. He taught me the ways of the single world, and I grew to like him like a brother.

Then the world of sexual freedom came to an end with AIDS, and Magdi told me he was terrified and would have to change his lifestyle. He quickly settled down with a voluptuous belly dancer named Gerry, who was a Bible
banging Baptist. Magdi facilitated her conversion to hedonism. He exposed Gerry to group sex, introduced her to an exotic lifestyle including travel to countries like Greece, and encouraged her to study computer science to make more money. I marveled at Magdi’s persuasive ability. I wished I had his charisma, not so much for seduction, but for being successful.

Our friendship ended in the middle 1980s when I refused to sign Gerry’s unsatisfactory master’s dissertation. Magdi cast me aside and had another friend sign the dissertation.

I cried when I confronted Magdi. I felt betrayed. How could he expect me to do something that was not right just because we were friends?

I soon became close to Samir, another man from Lebanon. In those days I apparently liked mid-Eastern people the way some white men only like Asian or black women. Samir appeared to be a typical family man, married, three kids, a Lutheran deacon. We lunched together regularly, and I attended many of his parties and church functions. Our friendship blossomed until I felt strong kinship with Samir, like I had once enjoyed with Magdi.
One day, after I had known Samir for several years, Samir entered my office, shut the door and said, “I know that you’re trustworthy.” He stared at me until I understood that his statement was really a question.

I kicked my feet onto my desk. “Sure I am. I’ve been your friend for years.”

Samir leaned forward and advised, “I don’t mean friendship. In my country a man’s word is everything. If a person doesn’t keep his agreements no one will do business with him. I don’t think there is this kind of ethic in the United States.”

I took my feet off the desk, faced Samir and replied, “Sure, you want me to keep some sort of secret. What is it?”
Samir told me that he aspired to be a manager like I was, and he was getting nowhere. He wanted my help. Even though Samir didn’t report to me, I went out of my way to give him a positive recommendation. I exaggerated his capabilities, and he obtained a management position in IBM’s disk drive factory. “Helping a friend get ahead isn’t lying. It’s just doing what friends do,” I rationalized.

Samir’s transformation astounded me. He started making showy presentations, initiated expensive capital projects, and hired gaggles of employees. He also started sleeping with a woman he supervised.

Samir confided in me as his life became complicated. Our social life continued, and I decided that we could continue to be friends. I wanted his companionship as a single man, and Samir apparently enjoyed our conversations.

A year later Samir was divorced and, like Magdi had been, was looking for good sex. I didn’t view Samir, short with his potbelly and waddling gate, as handsome, but his infectious smile and repertoire of jokes apparently saved him, and I heard many stories about his adventures.
Samir’s expensive capital projects turned into costly business mistakes, so Samir’s management moved him to another department, which he also mismanaged. Finally his bosses refused to give him another management position. Samir, arrogant and upset, went over his manager’s head and discovered the company was going to lay him off. I tactfully refused to take him into my department, which would have saved him.

Samir grumped, “I’ve left too many dead bodies in my wake. I can’t even get a job with another company in our line of business because many of the managers started here, and they know me.”

I realized that the Mid-Eastern practice of ostracism was alive and well in the United States, but I said nothing. I now worried that my reputation might be blackened through association, but I decided not to abandon Samir in his time of crisis.

About a month later Samir entered my office, shut the door, and said, “I have something to tell you.”

I was expecting another sexual story. Instead he said, “I have arranged for a relative to change my birth date. I’m now old enough to retire.”
“What gall,” I thought, and guilt welled up. I, as a manager, should report this fraud, but I had no proof, and Lebanon was at war. I would only make a fool of myself, and I had given Samir my word.

I should have told Samir that our friendship was over, but I did nothing because he had not attacked me directly. Instead I rationalized, “Retirement is a relatively cheap severance cost.”

After Samir’s forced retirement in the middle 1990s we periodically had lunch together. No one saw us, so there would be no reputation damage, and I could behave like any friend would.

Samir kept saying, “You are my only friend from our company after all these years,” but our conversations were now technical, aimed at helping Samir obtain another job. Samir also appealed for sympathy by saying that he had heart problems due to the stress in finding employment. I didn’t believe him because I suspected that I had been seduced, like Samir’s woman employee had been, becoming a tool for his benefit.

My suspicion crystallized after he asked me directly for company confidential documents, which I refused to give
him. I imagined Samir’s name as the author of papers that I and other people had written.

I distanced myself from Samir. It was easier to avoid rather than confront, and I hoped he would drift away.

Five years passed until Samir phoned me again. He related an exciting employment history. To my surprise, he had just accepted a position with Seagate, IBM’s main competitor where I now worked after my retirement. Samir was located in another city, and I learned that I had to work directly with him.

One of my colleagues warned me, “This guy is dangerous. I worked with him in his last company, and he single-handedly drove the business into bankruptcy.”

Samir immediately made a trip to see me and said, “I received a PhD last fall.” He paused and looked at me intensely.

Then he continued to tell me that the degree was from Stanford, my alma mater and one of the best engineering universities in the United States. I had slaved for 6 years to obtain my engineering PhD.

“How is that possible?” I asked incredulously.
He replied, “I attended night classes for the last two years.” Samir’s stare reminded me of my old agreement to keep secrets.

“If that’s true,” I thought, “no wonder the other company went bankrupt. He would’ve had to spend all of his waking hours doing research.” Samir had to be lying.

My outrage surprised me. I cared about my professional standing and my Stanford PhD. My hard won education was part of me, and Samir was degrading all Stanford PhDs by pretending to be one.

What could I tell Samir? I had to act, but Samir might retaliate if I called him a barefaced liar. I swore under my breath, and forced myself to remain calm. I thought, “I won’t get mad, but I’ll get this son of a bitch.”

Samir regarded me closely, sitting on the edge of his chair. I asked, “What was your thesis topic? Who was your thesis advisor?”

He responded without hesitation and then leaned back in his chair with a deep breath, finally breaking eye contact. Samir apparently believed he had fooled me, or was he really begging me to keep my mouth shut, believing
that I would. I knew that Samir needed the degree to get his new position.

Later, I called his thesis advisor. He didn’t know Samir. I called the Stanford registrar. Samir received no degree. In fact, he had never been a student at the university. My heart raced.

I told my colleague who knew Samir, and he didn’t believe anyone could be that audacious. He said, “Do you mean that Samir is the great pretender?” and he dismissed me with laughter as did several other people I told.

I finally decided to make an anonymous call to the human resources department at Seagate, but first I called Samir’s manager to find out how Samir was doing.

Samir’s manager said, “Samir is botching his department’s activity. Getting rid of him is going to reflect badly on me because I hired him.”

“Why don’t you check out Samir’s degrees?” I suggested. “I knew him at IBM, and I don’t think he has a PhD. And please don’t mention that I talked to you.”

Several months after Samir got fired from Seagate my colleague gave me his obituary, a column of flattering text with a face grinning like a used car salesman above it. It
mentioned that Samir had suffered several heart attacks over the last few years and that the stress of trying to find employment had apparently contributed to his death.

“Good riddance,” my colleague said, and I confess that I did feel relieved.
2000 – Always Fight Back

A motel worker, Cary Stayner, entered the Mariposa, California Cedar Lodge motel room of Carole Sund, 42, her daughter Julie, 15, and Silvina Pelosso, 16. He had a gun.

The women allowed Stayner to bind them with duct tape and put them in the trunk of his car without a fight. Stayner killed the mother, and then raped and killed the two girls.

In retrospect it would have been better if they had fought Stayner while yelling and screaming, so I was prepared when I experienced a similar attack less than a year later.

I had joined Quinta, an optical disk drive startup company in 1997 after retiring from IBM. Two years later Quinta was integrated into Seagate, and I was part of a newly formed west coast branch of Seagate Research. I had initiated three projects based on my Quinta patents. Since these activities were the only benefit Seagate received from the optical disk drive work, I was promoted, given an outstanding contribution award, and allowed to represent
Seagate in the May 2000 Scientific American issue on the future of disk drives. I was flying high.

Then, the VP of Research brought in a new director to manage the west coast operation who turned out to be a tyrant. I adamantly opposed the appointment, which I believe irritated the Research VP considerably considering the actions he later took against me.

Many ex-Quinta people resigned because of the tyrant’s mismanagement, and I finally blew up in a Friday manager’s meeting. I wanted to protect my projects.

The tyrant asked, “What am I doing wrong?”

I told him in apparently too forceful of terms because he had to make an emergency trip to the restroom. When he returned he was livid with embarrassment.

I thought, “I’m about to get wrapped in duct tape, stuffed in a trunk, and killed.”

Luckily, it was Friday afternoon and I was going to travel east to Seagate’s quarterly Technology Review on Monday. To avoid getting ‘killed’ I immediately talked to Seagate’s Chief Technical Officer (CTO).

“I want to be assigned to a different manager,” I said, and I explained what had happened. “Further, I’ll
lose my stock options if I leave before the company goes private.”

“Done,” the CTO said. “You’ll report to Paul from now on,” and he and I went to talk to my new boss.

When I returned to the lab a week later, the tyrant was waiting for me backed by a security guard and the personnel manager. “You’re fired,” he said. No one had talked to him about my reassignment.

“No I’m not,” I replied with a smirk. “I now work for Paul.” Then I told him about my talk with the Seagate CTO.

“We’ll see,” he said, “and get out of my building.”

“This guard will stay here to make sure you’re out by noon.”

I phoned Paul and told him what had happened.

“Amazing,” he said. “It’s exactly what you predicted.”

Then I called the tyrant’s boss, The Vice President of Research because the tyrant said that he and the human resources manager had received permission to get rid of me.

“I didn’t tell him to fire you,” he said emphatically. “I don’t know what’s gotten into him. He’s a wild man, and I just can’t control him.”
“Can’t control him,” I thought. “No way. The tyrant is his hatchet man, and he’s trying to slip out of the mess he’s made.”

I fired off another e-mail to the CTO saying, “I’ll be glad to return to the building when the tyrant is removed.”

I pointed out that removing me from my work environment was ‘constructive discharge,’ especially for a visually impaired person. I couldn’t do much of my work from home because I interacted with other people.

“The tyrant’s action,” I said, “is a clear violation of California State law.”

I immediately received a polite response from the CTO saying that The Research VP wouldn’t remove the tyrant, but that I should go back to work anyway.

“Why go back into the lion’s mouth?” I thought. “It’s get you now or get you later. I prefer later.”

I sent another e-mail telling the CTO that I had hired an attorney to represent me in a constructive discharge case under the Americans with Disabilities Act. I explained the apparent culpability of the VP of Research, and why it was dangerous for me to return.
This time the VP of Human Resources visited me at home. She gave me a battery of tests, interviewed me for hours and finally asked me if I thought I had been insubordinate. I told her the Terry Stayner story.

“I think your assessment is correct,” she said. “Your potential lawsuit had the Seagate management really upset, so I had to investigate.”

She had apparently talked to the tyrant as part of this process because the tyrant was removed from his position the next day, and I returned to work.

I still had aspirations to become the manager of one of the projects I initiated. I got no interest, and I finally realized that once I had threatened to sue Seagate, I had burned all my bridges, so I left Seagate when I received payment for my stock options at the end of 2000.

A half a year later I heard that the tyrant had become embroiled in another mess and had left the company.

“Maybe my fighting back has done everyone some good,” I thought. “Seagate didn’t need that kind of manager.”
2001 - Reflections on My Son

“That guy is after us,” Jackie blurted out, and she pointed behind us. A man was coming: a bum from the tunnel, unshaven, dirty, and waving his arms. We started running.

The guy shot past us with Nikes flashing. He jumped in front, and shouted, “Give me the film.” His body odor and alcoholic breath made me choke, and my heart raced.

Jackie moved behind me for protection. I glanced around. There was nobody at the bus stop to help us, and my hands reflexively moved up in readiness. “I don’t have a camera,” I panted, and the guy reached for the strap around my neck.

I knocked his hand aside, and Jackie screamed, “It’s only a telescope. Get out of here.”

I riveted my eyes on his face: his blond hair, reddish stubble, and piercing blue eyes. He was taller and heavier than me. He reminded me of my son David, a cocaine addict, who often lived on the street, but not in this city.

The bum gave no ground, with his hands on his hips and feet spread apart, ready to fight. He slowly scanned my
face, met my gaze, and said, “Your glasses are cracked.” He spoke slowly with loud and clear articulation that intimidated me.

“Special glasses,” I stammered, “I am visually impaired.” He broke his gaze when I took out the telescope to show him.

Jackie had driven me to the train early, so we had investigated the tunnel where a creek passed under the freeway, because Jackie said that she saw a person enter the tunnel. I had peered inside with my telescope and saw men and women leaning against the walls and squatting next to the creek. They looked like a nest of large, black vultures.

My throat and temples were pounding now. The fall colors in the pistachio trees looked like the red, dripping blood from yellow ripped flesh. I was prepared to fight.

“Sorry man,” the bum said, “Thought you were a reporter.” He abruptly backed up, turned and walked away. I reached back, took Jackie’s shaking hand, and we hurried from the bus stop up to the light rail platform.

I told the transit guard, a big black woman in a uniform with a radio on her hip, what had just happened.
She shrugged her shoulders and said, “Yeah. There’s not much I can do ‘bout it.”

“This guard must know you,” Jackie said, “because she sees you here every day going to work.”

I nodded.

“Why doesn’t she call the police?”

The train came, and I thought again about my son David. He wouldn’t work, and I had saved him far too many times, a co-dependent I guess, but how could a father let his son live on the street? David and I finally became estranged after many years of effort: A lesson learned; I gave up.

“These street people,” I thought, “where would they go if I called the police?” The economy was bad in San Jose, so it was likely that some of these people were stranded and out of work. On the other hand I thought, “What if I were a reporter with a camera? I could have been hurt. Didn’t I have a responsibility to report this incident?”

That evening I asked Jackie what she would do. She was silent, looking down and hiding her face. She finally said, “You decide, but he threatened us, and I think that the guy should be punished.”
I thought, “I had better let this incident go.”

Jackie was my significant other, a second wife if you want, several years my junior. She had met David several times and observed. “He’s too flip, always making a joke out of his situation.” She couldn’t understand my decades of pain with David, the once brilliant student.

I vacillated all the next day during work, and my feelings diminished. The man from the tunnel became my son, trying to protect the only place that he had to live. I guessed I would be equally protective if I were in his shoes. I was glad that I had controlled my anger.

The following day the guard approached me as I waited for the train. She looked pleased and said, “You’ll be happy to know that I told the cops ‘n the bums got kicked out last night.”

I felt guilty, but other people must have complained too. Hadn’t the guard said that these people were panhandling and that the creek was getting polluted?

I could not help thinking about my son David. Was he being evicted from under a bridge, from a cardboard box, or from behind a dumpster? I shuddered, and resolved to find
out were my son was and to see if I could help him. Tough love was not abandonment.

“I have low vision,” I thought, “and yet I have survived and prospered. I am a good example for my son. If I talk to him and he sees my attitude of perseverance and optimism, I will certainly influence him.”

I called my ex-wife who told me that David was in a halfway house in Denver. She had the phone number, so I called.

“Hello David, I have been thinking about you, and I love you. I want to tell you about what happened to me in the last week.”

I guess there is always hope for a new beginning.
RETIREMENT YEARS - THE LANDING

Seagate Award Conference in Feb. 2000 in West Palm Beach, FLA just prior to retirement.
2002 – Flumin’ Da Ditch

I usually never get a chance to be the leader on adventure trips because I have vision so low that I can’t see my feet if I look directly at them. However, I cope well using visual aides. A trip to Hawaii over Thanksgiving of 2002 gave me a rare chance to lead.

Our friends Connie and Christine escaped the San Francisco Bay Area to Hawaii’s Big Island. Jackie, my significant other, and I visited them.

The high point of our visit was a trip down an old irrigation ditch, built about 100 years ago on the north side of the Kohala Volcano by the civil engineer who later built the Hetch Hetchy aqueduct for San Francisco. This aqueduct used to supply water to the Kolala sugar cane plantation located on the dry side of the volcano. The cane fields are now gone.

The Flumin’ Da Ditch Company gives adventure tours of the ditch. The tour starts near the town of Hawi in a rambling old barn with a small office on one side and lots of orange rain jackets, yellow life preservers and black miner’s headlamps along the barn walls.
We put on the required equipment.

“Look how I’ve attached the miner’s lamp,” I said. I had put the lamp around the band of my floppy wide-brimmed hat.

“You look a sight,” Jackie said, and all the women laughed because we all looked overdressed.

The rain poured down profusely, which I guess only the palm trees and the blue flowered tropical vines enjoyed. We boarded several four-wheel drive trucks that also carried some narrow yellow rubber boats. The trucks sloshed and skidded through muddy hills, up impossibly steep slopes, across creeks, and through heavy vegetation, all of us screaming like it was a roller coaster ride, until we reached the headwaters of the flume.

“Each boat needs a captain,” the guide said. “The captain sits up front and keeps the boat from crashing into the sides of the flume.”
The person has to be strong enough to push with an oar and move four people. The three women pointed at me because I was the only man in our group.

“But I can’t see very well,” I said.

The guide explained that the edge of the flume would be no more than 3 feet away.

“You can see that far, can’t you?” she asked.

The guide was a petite curvy Hawaiian girl, and my pride wouldn’t let me decline.

The guide jumped into the flume behind our raft, the water coming up to her chest, and held the boat for us as we entered. I got in front.

I had the kayak oar that had paddles on both ends, and the guide launched our boat down the flume.
Sure enough guiding the boat across the first water bridge was easy, and Connie said, “See, you can do it. No problem.”

Again everyone laughed when I said, “Maybe I will see.”

The flume was a spectacular water bridge across a wide canyon full of dark foliage and flowers that perfumed the air. At the end of this bridge was a tunnel, but more importantly the tunnel entrance was where the water collected by the hillside cascaded in a huge waterfall into the flume.

I went through the chilly cascade and immediately into the tunnel. The miner’s light was on but I couldn’t see a thing. I was soaked and my glasses were covered with water. I should have been able to see something if the light were pointing in the correct place. I guessed that it wasn’t, but I had both hands on the oar that had paddles on both ends.

Jackie yelled, “The tunnel’s turning. Push on the left.”
I pushed vigorously and the boat crashed into the right side of the tunnel with a crunch. Connie, Christine, and Jackie screamed.

I wiped my glasses with my sleeve and found that the brim of my hat blocked both eyes. No wonder I couldn’t see. I managed with great difficulty to push my hat brim back and adjust the headlight between the push left and push right instructions the people behind me yelled. I could now barely see, and I breathed a sigh of relief just as the boat left the tunnel onto the next flume bridge.

Of course, there was another cascade of water at the tunnel’s exit. My glasses got wet again, and my hat brim slapped my face. I still couldn’t see well enough to steer, and my passengers continued giving me ‘push left’ and ‘push right’ instructions, which I admit that I needed, especially in the tunnels. My boat mates screamed with glee every time I came close to crashing.

We went flume-tunneling down the mountain like this for several miles to the disembarkation point. I surrendered to the commands from behind and steered flawlessly. I felt delighted at the teamwork.
This unconditional trust was a new experience. For the first time I thought that I knew how a completely blind person must feel. The adventure, which initially terrified me, ended up being fun once I had let go of being totally in control.
2003 – The Pretty Tour Guide

The desk clerk pointed her out, a Sophia Loren type, tight pants like a bullfighter’s, orange form-fitting sweater, long, black hair with scarlet streaks, stiletto heels. She was the guide for our Italian Highlights tour, and I felt my face get warm.

I was looking for our guide so that I could chew her out. She hadn’t told Jackie and me that there was an optional tour to Tivoli in the afternoon, and we missed it. Instead we got an early start and took the metro for a once over lightly visit to Rome.

When I confronted her she moved her arms and torso in broad, sweeping gestures like that of a Siamese dancer, cocking her head when she spoke. She wiggled and waggled and said, “I’m sorry, but I posted a schedule at 9 yesterday morning. You should have read it. Oh, by the way my name is Fedricka, but everyone calls me Feddy.” I was mesmerized and lost my desire to argue with her.

Feddy, as it turned out, was an excellent guide. Well almost. I minded that she kept calling our bus driver
'little Umberto' because she towered over him by a foot. Maybe I felt a little intimidated by her too.

Feddy had jokes, anecdotes, and history that made the time fly as the bus rolled for hours through the vineyards and hilltop villages of Umbria and Tuscany.

Feddy always led our group of senior citizens with long strides, and I found myself following close behind, enjoying Feddy’s provocative motion. I thought that having a sexy tour guide was a plus. But she kept putting me in my place by asking if I needed a cab to a cathedral or if I wanted a shuttle bus up some steep hill. I always said, "No," but she got her point across.

I chatted with Feddy, and she told me, "I live with my mother in Rome because I am gone most the time. I’m saving my money to buy a new car."

I asked, "Don’t you want to have a family?" Feddy was about 30 and had been a tour guide for over 10 years.

She said, "Yes. I have a Jewish boyfriend in Rome." And then added as almost a contradiction, "I’m Catholic."

I wondered how she expected to meet anyone when she traveled all the time.
I took several pictures of Feddy, like the ones in Venice when she galloped along to our water taxi with her red striped mane flying. She wore a silk blouse and tight pants, one leg black, the other a barber pole of pink, black and chartreuse stripes.

Jackie, my girlfriend, watched me take the pictures and said, “It looks like you are enjoying Feddy as much as the tour.”

I laughed and said, “Yup, she is outrageous, and I want proof.”
We had to leave the tour early, missing the Rome city tour, which we had already done on our own, so that we could go on a tour of Tivoli, which we had previously missed. I gave Feddy a generous tip. So what if she had forgotten us on the first day. I never expected to see Feddy again, but thought that maybe she would remember me as a nice guy that liked her.

However, the next morning I asked Feddy if her tour bus could give us a lift to the metro station. She coldly said, "No," turned, and got on the bus. I was crestfallen.

At home I looked at several close-up portraits of Feddy to try to rekindle some of the good feelings I had had. I was astounded that, simply put, she was not pretty.

I muttered to myself, "I must be blind. How easily I could have been seduced."
2004 – Preparing Myself for Death

Jackie’s sister Patricia, Uncle Arnie, and my good friend Doug Green died recently. Of course, I’m at the age where many of my acquaintances are dying, but each of these people was significant to me. I am ending this memoir with a discussion about death.

Patricia’s Death

Patricia was one of Jackie’s three sisters. They shared a room together as children and were always the closest of friends.

Patricia lived in Southern California when the doctors detected breast cancer. She had a mastectomy, but not radiation because she wanted to have reconstructive breast surgery. I think that she was unhappily married and wanted to remain buxom to attract another man. I suspect that not getting radiation was a fatal mistake.

As an aside, my mother had breast cancer, a double mastectomy and radiation in her early fifties, and she lived beyond eighty.
Patricia’s cancer reappeared more than 10 years later in her left arm and caused her great pain over several years as the cancer grew. None of the new chemotherapies were effective, but they did prolong her life by many years.

Patricia set an example for me of how to die. She made herself comfortable, traveled to the places she had always wanted to visit, connected with all of her friends, and continued the work she love as a middle school math teacher.

Finally she was housebound and her sisters, Margie, Marilyn and Jackie, stayed with her in shifts. Hospice was called in, and Patricia took strong medications for anxiety, bowel function and pain.

“So this is how it is to die,” Patricia told me. Tears trickled down her cheeks. “What I’ll miss the most is seeing my grand children grow up.”

A week later, on Thanksgiving eve, we received a call from Patricia’s son. “She’s violent. She’s biting and screaming. I need help. I can’t control her.”

Patricia sat on the edge of her hospital bed and glared at me when we arrived. Jackie and her sister
Marilyn calmed her, but Patricia ordered me out of the room.

“You’re not on my side,” she yelled like a person possessed.

Patricia apparently thought that men were against her. I left and let her sisters calm her by getting her to take a lot of morphine.

Jackie said that Patricia told her, “You’ve won. Damn it. You’ve won.”

I knew that Patricia was a keenly competitive person, and I guess she was unhappy that Jackie would help raise not only her own grandchildren, but also Patricia’s grandchildren.

Patricia died early Thanksgiving morning. She was only 61.

Uncle Arnie’s Death

Arnold Orville Beckman lived in his Corona Del Mar home until a year before his death. He died in 2004 at the age of 104. His home overlooked the entrance to Newport Harbor with Catalina Island faintly visible in the
distance. This was a wonderful place to live with the salt air smell and the sound of the surf.

Arnold Beckman at 100 years old

Pat, Uncle Arnie’s daughter, dedicated over 15 years of her life to caring for Uncle Arnie at home. She not only ran his house but also represented him on the Board of Directors of the Beckman Foundation and assisted him with the many social functions he was expected to attend.

The beginning of the end came when Uncle Arnie got pneumonia and was admitted to Scripts Hospital in La Jolla. Pat lost control of his care giving and couldn’t get him released even after he was free of pneumonia.

Uncle Arnie caused this problem because he gave Pat and his lawyer joint powers of health attorney. Pat had to
fire the lawyer for financially exploiting her father. But the power of attorney was still valid.

Pat claimed that the hospital and the attending physician had a conflict of interest. They were receiving more that a half million dollars a year for Uncle Arnie’s care. Medicare verified that he actually wasn’t ill because it refused to pay, and Scripts is not a custodial care facility.

Pat sued the hospital several times, and her suits were divisive because Pat’s brother Arnold testified on the side of the hospital, the greedy doctor, and the fired attorney. After she lost the second suit, the hospital put Uncle Arnie in the care of hospice, which meant the administration of morphine. Uncle Arnie died within days in May of 2004 at the age of 104.

Doug Green’s Death

Recall that Doug Green was one of my mentors and that I visited him in his Casadero home many times in the 1980s and 90s. I stopped visiting every year after the Fort Ross Fire Department benefits were stopped because of the cost
of liability insurance. From then on I only talked to Doug by phone at Christmas.

Sidney, Doug’s young wife, called me in July of 2004 to tell me of Doug’s death. He had been treated for a couple of years for arthritis in his lower spine, and only when he insisted that the hospital do an MRI scan was it discovered that he had advanced cancer in his lower body. I don’t know the details of Doug’s death, but it was very quick after his diagnosis.

Sidney told me that Doug had been out of work and that he was somewhat depressed because of being unemployed. I thought back to the deaths of Pat and Uncle Arnie and wondered if he might have been getting morphine from a hospice organization.

I cried when Sidney told me the news. I considered Doug to be a brother even though I talked to him infrequently. How can I explain how important Doug had been in my formative years? I agreed to attend his memorial service in early August, and I wrote an essay trying to explain my feelings.

Jackie and I packed our camping equipment and headed north to the Russian River. Doug’s tranquil home site deep
in the redwoods was the same as I remembered. We arrived early and were able to get a campsite in what used to be the paddock for Sidney’s horse.

I hugged Sidney and tried to remind her of the Tarot reading that Doug and she had done when we first reunited back in the early 1980s (1982 - The Busted Piano). She remembered nothing of the incident. I thought about the page giving the maiden a bunch of golden flowers shown on the six of cups and of the flowers that I gave her a week later. I was devastated when she didn’t remember, but said nothing.

Lots of people arrived, and the chef for a big electronics company put out a magnificent spread of food including delicious smelling grilled salmon and crunchy salads of various sorts. I tried to find anyone that was about my age. Out of over 50 people there was only one, a retired physicist from the Stanford Linear Accelerator, who I learned had been responsible for introducing Doug to recreational drugs when he was a physics PhD student at Stanford.

The memorial service was outside in the dark. I couldn’t read the essay that I had prepared. Everyone made
a big circle and a few people made superficial comments. None of them, not even Sidney, knew Doug like I did. It was clear that these people were mostly young, psychedelic drug loving followers of a local Grateful Dead like band that Doug liked. Doug had always been an avid user of magic mushrooms. I just observed, felt disappointed, and said nothing.

Doug’s children seemed to have turned out OK so I privately told them what I had written about Doug. I wished that Doug’s ex-wife Diane had been there. She knew the Doug I had known best of all. I gave Sidney the typed copy of my manuscript, but never heard a word about it.

That night it rained torrentially for about an hour. I awoke and lay on my back in the tent feeling the tears coming out of the sky. It hadn’t rained for three months prior to this, and it didn’t rain again for another month.

A part of me died with Doug, but I felt much better prepared for my own death after this experience.
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POSTSCRIPT – My 7 Steps to Personal Development

Figure 1 summarizes my self-development process. It shows that development never ends unless one gives up.

Figure 1. The Personal Development Diagram

The first step in my personal development process is that of taking a risk. Two states may then occur: Awareness if I know what I'm doing and ignorance if I don't. I know that ignorance is a necessary part of personal development because only by overcoming my mistakes do I learn.

The right loop then is the learning process. It consists of the states of ignorance, denial and confusion.
These three states are traversed by trying something new, discovering the truth when unwanted consequences occur, accepting this truth, and then deciding to have results.

The left loop is the producing process. It consists of the states of awareness, activity and satisfaction. These three states are traversed by trying something new, picking a task and taking action, completing what's started, and deciding to have results again.

I may be in several of these learning or producing states for different situations.

Lastly, I know that I can become confused if I don’t write about my experience. I believe that the language of my subconscious mind is emotion and that my conscious mind is the interpreter of my experience.

The Personal Development Diagram in Figure 1 is my guide, and a poster of it has hung on the wall of my office since 1983 when I first drew it in a New Thought religion workshop. The chart also incorporates ideas from Vern Black’s book The Integrity Tone Scale and The Erhardt Seminar Training (EST).
The seven steps are:

1) TAKE A RISK by trying something new.
2) OVERCOME IGNORANCE by discovering the truth.
3) AVOID DENIAL by accepting the truth.
4) ESCAPE CONFUSION by deciding to have results.
5) GAIN AWARENESS by seeing what needs to be done and doing it.
6) IMMERSE IN ACTIVITY by being productive.
7) HAVE SATISFACTION by completing what's started, and then go back to step 1.

The following sections expand upon these steps using incidents from my life as examples.
1. **TAKE A RISK**

   Central to my process is a personal journal, and I began by listing 3 "wins" per day to change my attitude. The wins were as simple as: I made my bed, I invited a friend to lunch, or I completed my income taxes. As I listed more wins, my attitude improved, and I became willing to take risks.

   My imperative to move forward is: "Try Something New".

2. **OVERCOME IGNORANCE**

   I define ignorance as the lack of knowledge or comprehension of the thing specified. I know that I'm ignorant when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as fearfulness, depression or hopelessness.

   I was a manager at IBM when I lost my central vision in both eyes. I hated my job, and one day I started crying at work. I contemplated suicide, because I liked technical work, not management.

   There were many situations associated with my feelings, severe stage fright when I had to speak at work, depression with an unhappy home life, hopelessness because
nothing excited me. I wrote in my personal journal about what I felt until I uncovered the truth.

My imperative to overcome ignorance is: "Discover The Truth."

3. AVOID DENIAL

I define denial as the refusal to admit the truth. I know that I'm in denial when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as outrage, righteousness, and anger.

My ex-wife angered me because she refused to work when I was losing my vision. I felt insecure, and I was sure that I was going to lose my job. Finally I accepted the fact that I could only change myself, not my wife.

As with ignorance, I wrote in my journal about each situation, outrage that my managers promoted me too quickly, righteousness because my wife wouldn't go to work, anger at myself for not being tough enough. At some point I saw that beating my head against the wall was futile. I already knew the truth, and I didn't want to accept it.

My imperative to avoid denial is: "Accept The Truth."
4. ESCAPE CONFUSION

I define confusion as the quality or state of being disordered or mixed up. I know that I'm confused when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as reluctance, self-consciousness, or guilt.

After I lost my central vision, my doctors told me that I was permanently disabled. I still wanted to work, but I couldn't work in the lab, and I didn't want to be a manager. I was confused. Should I give up and take disability, or should I try to find another way to make a living?

Acceptance of the truth was a freeing experience because I knew that I could choose a new course of action, even though there might be a loss. At some point, as I wrote in my journal, I had an idea. I could redefine my job so that I was not limited by my low vision. IBM didn't fire me, and I wanted to meaningfully contribute to its disk drive business without being a manager.

My imperative to escape confusion is: "Decide To Have Results."
5. GAIN AWARENESS

I define awareness, the opposite of ignorance, as having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge. I know that I'm aware when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as curiosity, freedom, challenge, hope, or anticipation.

I developed several ways to function normally with my central vision loss, but I couldn't work in the lab. I was an experienced disk drive engineer, so I studied the disk drive operation and then wrote working papers and patents about improvements to the system.

I knew that taking on an unrealistic task would put me back in the state of ignorance. Again the journal writing process, writing working papers, was useful in clearly presenting the possibilities. So I started with simple improvements to the disk drive head positioning system on which I had previously worked.

My imperative to gain awareness is: "Pick A Task And Take Action."
6. **IMMERSE IN ACTIVITY**

I define activity as a pursuit that produces results. I know that I'm engaged in meaningful activity when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as purpose, motivation, or enthusiasm.

I was now an expert in disk drive system architecture, so I quit IBM and joined a start-up company named Quinta. Seagate Technologies purchased Quinta, and I adapted our new technology to Seagate's products.

I wrote many working papers but periodically raised my head, looked around, and made sure that the goal was clearly in sight. The result was several new projects.

My imperative to move from the state of activity is: "Complete What's Started."

7. **HAVE SATISFACTION**

I define satisfaction as the happiness that comes with a successful conclusion. I know that I'm satisfied when I'm experiencing sustained feelings such as contentment, benevolence, and gratefulness.

I felt satisfied because I earned enough money from the start-up company to retire.
The imperative to move from having satisfaction back to take a risk (Step 1) is: "Decide To Have More Results."

I have now decided to take a new risk, to write about my experiences. I still keep a journal to list my embryonic ideas and to keep my thinking clear.

In conclusion, the seven imperatives from my infinite personal growth loop are:

· Try something new,
· Discover the truth,
· Accept the truth,
· Decide to have results,
· Pick a task and take action,
· Complete what's started, and then
· Decide to have more results again.

The 7-step personal development process characterizes what I call aliveness, and my aliveness won't end if I never give up.
APPENDIX A – SIMPLE FAMILY TREE FOR STORIES

Belser, Herman Fredrick
(1829-1900)
Born Möessingen, Germany
Married 1857
Kocher, Mary
(1837-1887)
Born Indiana
Belser, Martin Luther
(1869-1915)
Born Ohio
Married 1901
Sheetz, Emma L
(1875–1957)
Born Ohio

Sheetz, Jacob
(1843-1922)
Born New Washington, Ohio
Married 1867
Guiss, Anna Elizabeth
(1845-1919)
Daughter of Abraham Guiss of Colombiana, Ohio

Beckmann, Rolf Claus
(1821-1899)
Born Hoordorf, Amt. Aurich, Germany
Married 1846
Uphoff, Agte
(1817-1908)
Born Victorburg, Amt. Aurich, Germany
Married ?

Jewkes, John
(1821-1903)
Born Isle of Man
Kingdon, Mary
(1841-1919)
Born North Moulton, England

Beckman, George
(1861-1947)
Born Fairbury, Livingston Co., Illinois
Married 1898

Jewkes, Elizabeth
(1873-1912)
Born Chillicothe, Illinois
Married Fred Hagaman (Farmers that the Belsers visited in 1953 in Cullom Illinois)

Jewkes, John
(1821-1903)
Born Isle of Man
Kingdon, Mary
(1841-1919)
Born North Moulton, England

Beckman, George
(1861-1947)
Born Fairbury, Livingston Co., Illinois
Married 1898

Jewkes, Elizabeth
(1873-1912)
Born Chillicothe, Illinois
Married Fred Hagaman (Farmers that the Belsers visited in 1953 in Cullom Illinois)

Belser, Karl Jacob
(1902-1972)
Born Ann Arbor, Michigan
Married 1938

Sheetz, Jacob
(1843-1922)
Born New Washington, Ohio
Married 1867
Guiss, Anna Elizabeth
(1845-1919)
Daughter of Abraham Guiss of Colombiana, Ohio

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Married 1898

Jewkes, Elizabeth
(1873-1912)
Born Chillicothe, Illinois
Married Fred Hagaman (Farmers that the Belsers visited in 1953 in Cullom Illinois)

Belser, Karl Arnold
(1940- )
Born Roanoke, Virginia
Married 1962
Anne-Marie Sofia Perntz
(1943- )
Born Eskilstuna, Sweden
Divorced 1979
Life Partner, Jackie Mumma Daemion
(1945- )
Have lived together since 1989

Belser, Karl Arnold
(1940- )
Born Roanoke, Virginia
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David Allen Belser (1962- )
Born Stanford, California
Married Jennifer Taylor (1969 - )

Belser, Karl Arnold
(1940- )
Born Roanoke, Virginia
Married 1962
Anne-Marie Sofia Perntz
(1943- )
Born Eskilstuna, Sweden
Divorced 1979
Life Partner, Jackie Mumma Daemion
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Have lived together since 1989

David Allen Belser (1962- )
Born Stanford, California
Married Jennifer Taylor (1969 - )

David Allen Belser (1962- )
Born Stanford, California
Married Jennifer Taylor (1969 - )

(See Photos of these people below)
Karl Arnold Belser & Anne-Marie Sofia Perntz (Wedding picture), left photo
Karl Jacob Belser & Wilma Blanch Beckman (wedding Picture), right photo

Karl, Emma (Sheetz), Martin and Walter Belser, left photo
Walter Belser and Marjory Fisk (Wedding Picture), right photo
George and Elizabeth (Jewkes) Beckman, left photo
George Beckman, right Photo
APPENDIX B – FULL FAMILY TREE OF KARL A. BELSER

KINGDON

5.0 ? K. ( - ) b. England
   m. ( ) ? Westicott ( - ) b. England

5.1 Harry K. ( - ) b. N. Moulton, England
   m. (1864) Charity Thorne (1841- ) b. Heasley Mills, England

5.2 John K. ( - ) b. N. Moulton, England
   m. (1868) Mary Thorne (1847- ) b. N. Moulton, England

5.3 Mary K. (1841-1919) b. N. Moulton, England ----------------------------+
JEWKES

4.0 William Jewkes (1794- )
   m. ( ) Mary Elizabeth ??? ( - 6/2/1842)

4.1 John Jewkes (1821-8/11/1903) b. Isle of Man, England
   m. Mary Kingdon (1841-1919) b. N. Moulton, England

4.1.1 William J. (1864-1942) b. Chillicothe, IL

4.1.2 Charles J. (1867-1957) b. Chillicothe, IL

4.1.3 John J. Jr. (1870-1910) b. Chillicothe, IL

4.1.4 Elizabeth J. (1873-1912) b. Chillicothe, IL

4.1.5 Minnie J. (1876-1967) b. Cullom, IL
   m. (1904) Fred Hagaman (1880-1967) b. Chesapeake, Ohio
      (parents Hiram H. and Caroline Langdon)

4.1.5.1 Harold Delmar H. (1904-1915) b. Edwardsburg, Mich

4.1.5.2 Lois H. (1909-1910) b. Edwardsburg, Mich

4.1.5.3 Elva Fern H. (1917- ) b. Edwardsburg, Mich
   m. (1950) John Ripstra (1911-1968) b. Grand Rapids, MI
   m. (1971) Maurice Prince (1914- ) b. Grand Rapids, MI

4.1.6 Fred J. (1881-1962) b. Cullom, IL

4.1.7 Myrtle J. (1883-1949) b. Cullom, IL
   m. (1906) Everett Miller (1880- ) b. Ottowa, IL
      (parents Thomas M. and Georgana Watts)

4.1.7.1 Lowell M. (1914-1961) b. Pulaski, Iowa
   m. (1955) Lois Armstrong ( -1989)
BECKMAN

3.0 Rolph K. Classen B. (2/21/1821-1899) b. Hoordorf, Amt. Aurich, Germany
   m. (1846) Agusta (Agte) Uphoff (2/4/1817-1908) b. Victorburg, Amt. Aurich
   both of Ost Friesland, Germany

3.1 Lena B. (1847-1917) b. Victorburg, Germany
   m. ( ) Hiram Johnson ( - )

3.2 Elisa (1848- ) b. Victorburg, Germany
   m. ( ) John Ommen ( - )

   3.2.1 Lena O. ( - )
       m. ( ) ? Mackinson ( - )

   3.2.2 Albert O. ( - )

   3.2.3 Ralph O. ( - )

   3.2.4 Esther O. ( - )

   3.2.5 Otto O. ( - )

3.3 Claus B. (1850-1910) b. Victorburg, Germany
   m. (1878) Anna Beckman (1860-1920) b. McCook, Nebraska
   (Anna was daughter of Rolph's brother)

   3.3.1 Mimi Lulu B. (1880-1881) b. McCook, Nebraska

   3.3.2 Charles Lewis B. (1884-1949) b. McCook, Nebraska
       m. (1921) Esther Iverson (1898-1995) b. Chicago, IL
       The original name Oslo, Norway name Eoeverson was change to Iverson during immigration

       3.3.2.1 Charles Jr. B. (1923-1925) b. Chicago, IL

       3.3.2.2 William Russel B. (1928- ) b. Chicago, IL
           m. (1957) Sandra Ralston (1934- ) b. Cleveland, OH

           3.3.2.2.1 Stephanie (1959- ) b. Ft. Worth, TX

       3.3.2.3 Kenneth Wayne B. (1930- ) b. Evanston, IL

       3.3.2.4 Lois Anne B. (1935-1995) b. Elkhart, Indiana
           m. ( ) Edward Allen

           3.3.2.4.1 Lynnete A.

           3.3.2.4.2 Laurene A.
               m. ( ) Robert Conner
3.3.2.4.3  Dianna C. (1964, )
m. ( ) Steve Heathcock

3.3.2.4.3.1  Conner H. (1999, )

3.3.2.4.4  Patrick. C. (1966, )

3.3.3  Lois B. (1900-1946) b. Chatsworth, IL

3.4  Folkert B. (1853- ) b. Victorburg, Bermany
m. ( ) Theresa

3.4.1  William B. ( - )
3.4.2  Robert B. ( - )

3.5  Ella B. (1855-1857) b. Victorburg, Germany

Immigrated to America in 1857

3.6  John Clarance B. (1858- ) b. Livingston Co (Tazewell), Ill
m. ( ) Anna Georgia Barner (1864-) b. Livingston Co (Cullom), Ill

3.6.1  Delbert B. (1884- ) b. Livingston Co. (Chatsworth), Ill
3.6.2  James B.

3.7  George B. (7/16/1861-11/5/1947) b. Livingston Co. (Fairbury), Ill
m. ( ) ? Stephens
(first wife was close friend of second wife Elizabeth)

3.7.1  Roland (Doc) B. (1895-1972) b. Clinton, Mo
m. ( ) Audrey ? ( - )

3.7.1.1  Gladys B. (1925- ).
m. ( ) Carl Robert Soderburg ( - )

3.7.1.1.1  Shirley S. (1948- )
3.7.1.1.2  Jim S. (1950- )
3.7.1.1.3  Ricky S. (1952- ).
3.7.1.1.4  Linda S. ( - )
3.7.1.1.5  Stephen S. ( - ).

3.7.1.2  Shirley B. (1927-1998)
m. ( ) Carl Philip Johnson ( - ).
3.7.1.2.1 Jo Ellen J. (1947- )  
3.7.1.2.2 Jennifer J. (1951- )  

3.7.1.3 Beverly B. (1932- )  
m. ( ) John P. Kiely ( - )  

3.7.1.3.1 Kathy K. ( - )  
3.7.1.3.2 Colleen K. ( - )  
3.7.1.3.3 Jack K. ( - )  
3.7.1.3.4 Carol K. ( - )  
3.7.1.3.5 Jimmy K. ( - )  

3.7.2 Fred Ferdinand B. (1896-1930) b. Clinton, Mo  
m. ( ) Bernadine C. Beulow ( - )  

3.7.2.1 Fred (Sonny) F.B. Jr ( - )  
m. Marilyn ? ( - )  

3.7.2.1.1 Casey B. ( - )  
3.7.2.1.2 Clansey B. ( - )  

3.7.2.2 Janice B. ( - )  
m. Frank Cadwell ( - )  

3.7.2.2.1 Daughter ( - )  

(3.7 continued George Beckman)  
m. (1898) Elizabeth Ellen Jewkes <-----------------------------+ 

3.7.3 Arnold Orville B. (1900- 2004) b. Cullom, Ill  
m. (1925) Mabel Stone Meinzer (1900-1989) b. Brooklyn, NY  
(parents William M. and Alice Stone)  

3.7.3.1 Patricia Gloria B. (adopted) (1933- ) b. Chicago, Ill  
3.7.3.2 Arnold Stone B. (adopted) (1937- ) b. Chicago, Ill  

3.7.4 Wilma Blanch B. (1/24/1903-10/22/1984) b. Cullom, Ill <---------------+ 
m. (1938) Karl Jacob Belser (1902-1972) b. Ann Arbor, Mi
SHEETZ

2.0  John Andrew S. (9/6/1809 - 12/7/1889) b. Wurtenberg, Germany
    Immigrated to Columbiana, Ohio in 1830
    m. (1836) Margaret Weisenbacher (  -1836)
    m. (1837) Margaret Weaver (  -1838)

2.1  Catherine Agetta S. (1838-    ) b. New Washington, Ohio
    m. (2/1/1866) William H. Donnenwirth (    -    ) of Stark Co.

(2.0 John Andrew S. continued)                          
    m.  (1842) Margaret Donnenwirth (11/30/1813-9/4/1892)
    born Alsace, Germany, daughter of George Donnenwirth
    Margaret was the widdow of postmaster Ehregott Hesse
    and had one daughter by this former marriage.

2.2  Jacob A. S. (9/26/1843-1922) b. New Washington, OH
    m. (10/17/1867) Anna Elizabeth Guiss (2/16/1845-3/31/1918) whose
    father was Abraham Guiss (3/1/1815 –2/17/1882 ) Columbiana Co. OHl
    the son of Jacob Guiss and Eva Spaeth, Crawford County OH

2.2.1  Ada M. S. (2/28/1869-1949)
    m. (    ) John Seifert (7/26/1866-Mar 1941)
    John was a seed merchant in New Washington OH
    He was the son of Michael and Christine (Hoffsas) Seifert

    2.2.1.1  Christine E. Seifert (1893-1963)
    2.2.1.2  Esther M. Seifert (1903-  )
        Two sons Carl F. and Ernst G. Seifert ?

2.2.2  George W. S. (10/2/1871-1939) b. New Washington
    m.  6/2/1895  Clara Seifert

    2.2.2.1  Mary S. married Clyde Merrilees
    2.2.2.2  Margaret S. married Charles Norton
    2.2.2.3  Jacob  S.
    2.2.2.4  Martin   S.
        m.  12/2/33  Charlotte Shaw

2.2.3  Emma Louise S. (10/15/1875 – 11/28/1957)  -------------------+  
    m. Martin Luther Belser

300 of 316
2.3 Caroline S. (1850- )
   m. (   ) John L. Assenheimer ( - )

   2.3.1 Minnie A. ( - )

2.4 John H. S. b. (1852- )
   m. 10/2/1889 Theresa Margraff (1851 - 4/19/36)

   2.4.1 John A. S.
   2.4.2 Walter F. S.

2.5 Louise Pauline S. b. (1854- )
   m. (10/10/1877) John M. Guiss ( - )

   2.5.1 Clara Guiss S. (1871- )
BELSER

Joseph B. and Anna R. Schaffer

Johann Georg B. (1778- ) Wertenberg, Germany
m. (1800) Anna Barbara Weiss ( - )

1.0 Joseph Belser (1802-1851) b. Moessingen, Germany
m. (1826) (Carolyn?) Louise Kegelen (Regele?) (1808- )
Guslinen German

1.1 Marie B. (1827- ) Died 2 years before Herman’s autobiography
m. ( ) Karl Ehrhart ( - )

1.2 Herman Fredericn B. (3/13/1829-1900) b. Noessingen, Germany
m. (1857) Mary Kocher (1837-) b. Huntington, Indiana
Mary died 6 years before Herman’s autobiography
Pastor of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in
New Wasington OH from 1859 to 1875

1.2.1 Frederich H. B.
m. (1882) Emily C. Essik
1.2.2 Carl. W. B. ( -1898)
m. Susan m. ?? B. Boulder CO
The family is based in Colorado

1.2.2.1 Hilda Louise B.
1.2.2.2 Lois Gertrude B.
1.2.2.3 Carl B.
1.2.2.4 Ernestine B.

1.2.3 Louisa M. B. (1864-1897)
1.2.4 Paul A. B. (1861-1890)
1.2.5 Martin Luther Belser (5/16/1869 - 12/14/1915 )
b. New Washington OH
m. (1901) Emma Louise Sheetz (1875-1957 )
Fought in the Spanish American War 1898 in Cuba as 2nd Lieutenant
Martin became Major and surgeon of the nationa guard 1891-7.
He was inducted in 1898 as a Lieutenant and was presented with
a beautiful dress sword at the end of the Spanish-American war.
Lawrence W. Belser has the sword and his uniforms.
1.2.5.1 Karl Jacob B. (5/1/1902 - 1/24/1972) b. Ann Arbor, Mi
   m. (7/2/1938) Wilma Blanch Beckman (1903-1984)

1.2.5.1.1 Karl Arnold B. (1/27/1940) b. Roanoke, Va
   m. (2/17/1962) Anne-Marie Sofia Perntz (6/23/1943)
   Eskilstuna, Sweden
   (parents Carl-Gustaf Perntz and Ingrid Johnson)

1.2.5.1.1.1 David Allen B. (7/28/1962) b. Palo Alto, Ca
   m. (1996 ?) Jennifer Taylor (1945, )

1.2.5.1.1.2 Charles Evan B. (3/10/1965) b. Palo Alto, Ca
   m. (1994) Karen O'Hara (1966 , )
   (parents Terry O'hara and Jackie ?)

1.2.5.1.1.2.1 Julia Marie B. (2/18/1995) b. San Jose, CA
1.2.5.1.1.2.2 Charles Agustin B. (3/14/2003) b. San Jose, CA

(1.2.5.1.1 continued: Karl Arnold Belser)
   d. domestic partner (1988) Jackie Muma Daemion (8/22/1945)

1.2.5.1.2 Stephen George B. (8/30/1941 – 3/25/1985) b. Ann Arbor, Mi
1.2.5.1.3 Lawerence Walter B. (May/14/1943) b. Detroit, MI
   m. (1971) Mary Schwab (11/2/1945) b. Monte Vernon, NY

1.2.5.1.3.1 Janine Deborah B. (adopted) (8/23/1981)
   Nelson New Zealand
1.2.5.1.3.2 Michael Thomas B. (11/22/1983)
   Nelson, New Zealand

1.2.5.2 Walter B. (10/16/1903-1978) b. Ann Arbor, MI
   m. (6/28/1933) Marjory F. Fisk (1904-1957) b. Ypsilanti, MI
   Marjory was the daughter of Minnie (1872 - 5/27/36)
   Minnie was the daughter of Samual P. and Sara Dolittle Bray

1.2.5.2.1 Martin Fisk B. (1935- ) b. Ann Arbor, MI
   m. ( ) Ann-Marie Birkholm ( )
   b. Copenhagen, Denmark

1.2.5.2.1.1 Douglas B. (1966- )
1.2.5.2.1.2 Deborah B. (1969- )

1.2.5.2.2 Amy Lou B. (7/30/1938)
(1.2.5.2 Walter B. continued)
m. (2/4/1961) Helen Edison

1.2.6 Anna M. B. (1870-1892)
1.2.7 Emma B. (1874-1878)
1.2.8 Amanda M. B. (1876-1926)
1.2.9 Ernest J. B. (1879-1904)

1.3 Gustave B. (1832- )
1.4 Paul B. (1837- )
I was 24 when I started losing my vision. I was terrified, and at one point almost committed suicide, because I believed that engineers had to see.

It started when I was driving back to school with my wife and baby. I noticed a small dark spot against the sky when I blinked. The spot was like the after image from a photoflash. It turned out that I had a fungus infection similar to ocular histoplasmosis. The doctor could not kill the fungus. So I lost the vision in my right eye, and the fungus remained as a latent threat in my blood. I continued with my education, hoping that I would not lose the vision in both eyes.

I joined IBM after graduation and I worked for a time with a blind engineer named Noel. I recorded textbooks for him on tape and discussed circuit diagrams using magnetic squares, circles and lines stuck to a smooth white board. Noel even invented a language by which circuit diagrams
could be read to him. He used a sighted technician to be his eyes when he could not do the job himself.

I told Noel about my eye disease and how afraid I was of losing my vision. I also confess my fears that I could not be an engineer if I were blind.

Noel told me the following story: A young fellow went into the boss’s office to discuss a new idea. He stated the problem, and the boss said that he had looked at this problem and a solution was impossible. But the young man had prepared a demonstration, so he got a few more minutes of the busy bosses time. The boss raised his eyebrows and said, “I guess if you do it that way, it is possible.” Noel emphasized that serious disability of any kind can break the strongest person when he thinks an alternate way of functioning is impossible. He told me that he was living proof that it is possible to successfully cope with blindness.

I started loosing the vision in my good eye when I was 44, and I was treated with the newly invented laser eye surgery. The treatment left me with central vision loss in both eyes, which meant that I couldn’t see a person’s head if I looked directly at him from 4 feet away.
I lost my vision and within six months my mother died, my brother died, and even my little Pekinese dog died. I was divorced and estranged from my children. My doctor even told me that I was permanently disabled and that I should start collecting Social Security Disability benefits. I was depressed, thought my life had come to an end, and considered suicide. But IBM did not fire me, and I remembered how well my friend Noel functioned. If he could cope with vision loss, so could I.

My only support was a woman from human resources at IBM. With her guidance I consulted with a low vision specialist, and in the next year I experimented with many types of visual aids. These included TV magnifiers and scanners with text-to-speech converters, many of which were expensive and not portable. I ended up choosing a telescope and a special pair of glasses containing a bifocal magnifier. With these two visual aids I adapted myself to almost every situation.

I could not use my special glasses to read a computer screen because I needed to twist my head too much. A text-to-speech conversion program solved this computer usage problem. The program allowed me to highlight any text
using the cursor and click “copy” to tell the program to speak. The program I use now is ReadPlease2003, which is free on the Internet.

Even with these visual aids there were things that I could not do well enough in competition with the other workers at IBM. Pay and promotion were at stake. I realized that I had to find a job that I could do well with low vision.

I was a disk drive engineer, and I started looking at the “big picture”. I collected papers on the technical aspects of the disk drive business. When I could not find papers that were appropriate I wrote them. I became a disk drive expert.

Armed with my knowledge I retired from IBM at 56 and joined a disk drive start-up company. I invented and patented new technology for this company, which was soon purchased by another big disk drive company like IBM. I retired a second time a few years later after the technology transfer was completed.
New technology can be measured by the number of patents issued, and 47 of my 52 patents\textsuperscript{16} were written after I lost my vision. My vision loss turned out to be a blessing in disguise because I was forced to become more valuable to the companies that I worked for.

My personal life also turned out better than I could have expected. I focused on activities that I could do with low vision. I learned to square dance, speak Spanish, play the piano, and garden. I met people who accepted me as I am, and after a few failed relationships I met Jackie, the woman who I have happily lived with for the last 15 years.

I consider myself an example, like that of my friend Noel, of what can be done despite disability. The tricks are to creatively compensate for the disability, figure out what can be done with the limitations, and never give up.

\textsuperscript{16} I have more than 63 patents as of 2005. The 52 patents refer to the number I had when the article was published.
APPENDIX D – WORK HISTORY (RESUMÉ)

KARL ARNOLD BELSER, PhD
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Kbelser@ix.netcom.com
Phone: 408-723-0315

OBJECTIVE

System architecture consultant: Hard disk drive; Optical telecommunications; Specification writer

EXPERIENCE

VMEDIA RESEARCH: 2005 Writing Consultant. Wrote the company’s 32 mm, blue laser, optical disk specification
CAPELLA PHOTONICS: 2001-2002 Architecture consultant. Wrote 80 technical working papers and patented the central add-drop multiplexer micro-mirror control system
SEAGATE TECH: 2000 Storage Technologist. Wrote 300 system working papers (including those at Quinta) on hard disk drives and optical switch technology
• Received Seagate Award for inventing servo patterned media
• Quoted in 4/00 Scientific American on thermal assisted recording
QUINTA: 1997-1999 Servo architect. Seagate purchased this optical disk drive start-up
• Designed and wrote specification for optical, servo patterned media
IBM: 1996 Manager. Advanced magnetic disk drive servo technology department
1995 Manager. Advanced optical disk drive servo technology department
1993-1994 Engineer. Wrote 35 architecture and 5 ISO optical media working papers. System architect for IBM’s 2.6 GB optical disk drive
1991-1992 Engineer. Patented a pulse width modulation optical recording process
1987-1990 Manager. Optical servo development department
1982-1986 Manager. Advanced disk drive position sensing department
1976-1981 Engineer. Magnetic bubble memory used as a hard drive cache
1975 Engineer. IBM 3279 color display terminal
1974 Manager. Digital graphics generator department. Became an graphics authority after discovering a fatal error in a IEEE Transaction on Computers paper describing a quadratic curve generation algorithm
1972-1973 Engineer. Digital graphics terminal. This system was a pioneer system similar to the one in every personal computer
1970-1971 Engineer. Chain printer terminal
1968-1969 Engineer. First IBM Automatic Teller Machine. This system was built in limited production in England and became a standard IBM product
1967-1968 Engineer. Character generator for a TV display. This system was delivered to the RAND Corporation and used for 10 years.
1962-1963 Cooperative Student. Worked summers and 2 days per week at IBM. Received a patent for a pointing system on a rear projection screen
1959 Cooperative Student. Built and documented the first disk drive voice coil motor.
EDUCATION

1963-1967      PhD in Electrical Engineering at Stanford
1962-1963      MS in Electrical Engineering at Stanford
1959-1962      BS in Electrical Engineering at Stanford
1957-1958      San Jose State

PATENTS – 64 issued US patents

06898031  05/05  Method for replicating magnetic patterns on hard disk media
06868048  03/05  Data storage system having thermally activated readout
06798594  09/04  Position sensing system for a disc drive using micro-servo sectors and side-by-side R/W
               recording elements
06788641  09/04  Method for providing track position and identification information for data storage
               devices
06785075  08/04  Self-writing servo and clock fields on a recording medium
06781785  08/04  Method and system for utilizing circular marks in position error signal patterns
06775100  08/04  Laser assisted track width definition and radial control with magnetic recording
06771443  08/04  Circumferential positioning of servo sectors for servo track writing
06754032  06/04  Method and system for radial and circumferential alignment of data tracks on patterned
               media
06751046  06/04  Writing servo data patterns on a data storage disk to account for repeatable and non-
               repeatable disturbances and thereby provide concentric data tracks
06751035  06/04  Method and system for initializing patterned media
06738207  05/04  Method for synchronizing the write current for magnetic recording with the bit islands on
               discrete bit patterned media
06724558  04/04  Servo writing in a disc drive with substantially identical heads having read and write
               elements in a radial offset position
06706358  03/04  Storage disk comprising depressions and /or raised features
06703099  03/04  Perpendicular magnetic recording media with patterned soft magnetic underlayer
06643082  11/03  Servo sector format for a patterned media
06631046  10/03  Servo track writing using extended copying with head offset
06614608  09/03  Buried servo patterned media
06604223  08/03  System and method for correcting interference errors in data encoded on storage media
06549699  04/04  Reconfigurable all-optical multiplexers with simultaneous add-drop capability
06529460  03/03  Detection of pulse peak instance and amplitude in a storage drive
06510015  01/03  Magnetic disc having physical servo patterns with a magnetic carrier, and method of
               making and using the same
06496943  12/02  Apparatus and method for efficient defect management in a magneto-optical data storage
               system
06469465  10/02  Precision micro-motor position controller
06456449  09/02  Disk drive with wide servo burst pattern and wide servo sensing element
06421313  07/02  System and method for encoding read-only information on storage media
06411459  06/02  Advanced servo writing method for hard disc drives
06373792  04/02  Reduction of a temperature in a lubricant interface
06349079  02/02  System and method for detecting a head positioning error within a computer memory
               device
06345021  02/02  System and method of efficient servo sector encoding
06331968  12/01  System and method to compensate for data defects within a magneto-optical computer
               memory device
06330279 12/01  System and method of correcting gain and offset error in a signal amplifier for a position sensitive detector
06278667 08/01  System and method for light power control in a magneto-optical drive
06275455 08/01  System and method for generating position error signals within a computer memory device
06264848 07/01  Method for providing track position and identification information for data storage devices
06253010 06/01  System and method for efficient coupling between optical elements
06204989 03/01  Controlling a media master writing machine to produce curvilinear servo sector patterns
06188472 02/01  System and method for direct measurement of alignment error in a fiber coupler
06185174 02/01  Disk drive system having hybrid analog/digital pulse peak instance/amplitude data detection channels
06081397 06/00  Method and apparatus for SID-to-SID period estimation
06052348 04/00  System and method for write location defect compensation in computer storage media
06049442 04/00  Multiply-written servo burst patterns for minimizing position error in servo disk drives
06021463 02/00  Method and means for efficiently managing update writes and fault tolerance in redundancy groups of addressable ECC-coded sectors in a DASD storage subsystem
06018512 01/00  System and method of encoding for identifying a given surface among several identically patterned disk surfaces
06008960 12/99  Split table generator and method for format data compression in disk drives
06002541 12/99  Method and apparatus for providing a linear position error sensing (PES) signal
05974019 10/99  Optical system for two-dimensional positioning of light beams
05966264 10/99  Two frequency servo PES pattern
05892745 04/99  System and method to compensate for data defects within a magneto-optical computer memory device
05889641 03/99  Magneto-resistive magneto-optical head
05793555 08/98  Seek optimization for disk files with side-by-side head
05737344 04/98  Digital data storage with increased robustness against data loss
05615205 03/97  Bi-level optical media having embossed header format
05418773 05/95  Zoned record carrier (2X ISO Optical Disk Format)
05400313 03/95  Optical data storage system and method with reduced heat buildup
05327408 07/94  Optical disk with sector servo patterns compensating for variations in pattern size and/or radial velocity
05103362 04/92  Method of electrostatically sensing track position information for magnetic recording medium
04914725 04/90  Transducer positioning servo mechanisms employing digital and analog circuits
04912585 03/90  Discrete track thin film magnetic recording disk with embedded servo information
04168535 09/79  Non-volatile bubble domain memory system
04074254 02/78  XY Addressable and updateable compressed video refresh buffer for digital TV display
03973245 08/76  Method and apparatus for point plotting of graphical data from a coded source into a buffer and for rearranging that data for supply to a raster responsive device
03734013 05/73  Multiple hammer magnetic pole piece block
03328523 07/67  Scanning apparatus
APPENDIX E – TRAVEL HISTORY

Karl Arnold Belser took the following trips:

(1940) I was born in Roanoke VA on January 27
(1941) My family moved to Ann Arbor MI where my brother Steve was born
(1942) We moved to Detroit MI where my brother Larry was born
(1944) We moved to Los Angeles CA
(1945) We moved to Eugene OR
(1946-50) we took many camping vacations on the MacKensi River, Scott Lake, Crater Lake, and Yosemite

(1951) We moved to Los Gatos CA
(1952) We moved to Campbell CA
(1953) We took trip to Ann Arbor MI
(1954-56) We took several camping vacations in Yosemite
(1958) Dad, Steve, Larry and I went to the Grand Canyon

(1961) I moved to Palo Alto CA after I married Anne-Marie Pernitz
(1963) I visited Boston in conjunction with The Bahamas as part of my research assistant work at Stanford with my colleagues Gil Masters and Dave Peterson
(1964) I visited Boston in conjunction with Mexico as part of my research assistant work at Stanford with my colleagues Gil Masters and Dave Peterson
(1965) I visited Boston in conjunction with Jamaica as part of my research assistant work at Stanford with my colleague Calvin Teague
(1967) We moved to my parent’s house in Campbell CA while my parents were in Taiwan and Jim Hoagland took care of the house while we were in Sweden
(1967) Anne-Marie, David, Charlie and I took a trip across the United States to New York via a northern route through Yellowstone, visited Sweden for 2 months, traveled in Europe to Italy for 1 month, and returned home via a southern route
(1968) Traveled to Gathersburg MD to demonstrate my stroke character generator that I developed for the RAND video scan converter TV terminal
(1969) We moved to San Jose CA when we bought our first house on Cirone Way
(1969) We vacationed in Yosemite, the last year they had the firs falls
(1969-70) I traveled to New York and Raleigh on three IBM business trips involved with the transfer of the automatic teller machine (ATM) project
(1971) We traveled to MN to visit Zane and Marys Lilliskov, my friends from my 1966 Swedish class, and then went to the north shore of Lake Superior
(1972) We vacationed in Seattle via the west coast
(1974-5) I went to England twice on IBM business relating to IBM first color computer display terminal and I saw Paris over one weekend
(1975) I took Anne-Marie to Hawaii for her graduation
(1975) I was offered an IBM assignment in England that I couldn’t take because of
marital problems

(1976) I travelled along the south shore of Lake Superior to MI from St. Paul MN with
Larry and Mary Belser on the way home from a business trip to Boca Raton FL
(1976) I moved to the French Quarter Appaartments neary Bascom and Hamilton in
Campbell CA
(1976) I went to San Diego for New Years with first girlfriend Joy Barrett
(1978) I went to Dave Van Voorhis’ wedding in Tampa FL
(1978) I visited Dave VV in Boca Raton and this time drove to Key West FL
(2978) I went to Greece for 3 weeks with and IBM friend Bob Orfali
(1979) I moved to my condo at 15780 Los Gatos – Almaden Road in Los Gatos CA
(1979) I traveled to England with Sylvia Bailey
(1979-80) I visited Larry and Mary Belser in New Zealand, lwho had migrated to New
Zealand in 1976, and took a south island tour

(1980) I went to the IBM Systems Research Institute in NY for six weeks
(1981) I went to four of the Hawaiian Islands over Christmas with Joan Kincheloe, who
introduced me to the New Thought religion at the 1st Church of Religious Science
in SJ on Clark Street
(1962) I went to IBM management school in New York
(1962) Charlie and I traveled to Canada via Idaho and the Okanogan Valley to Jasper,
Banff, Calgary, met Joan Kinchloe, and drove back via Montana and Salt Lake
City
(1982) I vacationed to Washington, San Juan Islands and British Columbia with Judy
Donnelson
(1983) I went to Boston, Bar Harbor, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and back
through New Brunswick with Dorothy Coltran
(1984) Larry Belser came from New Zealand for our mother’s funeral and Steve moved
in with me while we sorted through lmy mother’s belongings
(1985) I took an IBM business trip to the UK with Tarek Makansi
(1985) I travelled to Seattle with Marge Hayashi
(1985) I travelled to Jamaica with Marge Hayashi
(1985) I travelled to Southeast Alaska with Marge Hayashi
(1986) I visited Larry and Mary Belser in New Zealand and took a north island tour
(1986) I traveled to Japan, China and Hong Kong on a tour
(1987) I toured Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Brazil with Laura Nystrom
(1987) I traveled to Toronto, Montreal an dQuebec with Laura Nystrom
(1988) I traveled to Memphis via Mobil and New Orleans with Laura Nystrom and saw
the pilgrimage at Natchez for the first time
(1988) I traveled in New Mexico, Utah and Colorado with Ron Blewitt
(1988) I toured Spain, Portugal and Morocco with Laura and Ron
(1988) David, Charlie and I traveled to La Vern for Christmas to visit Jackie Daemion’s sister Patricia and her husband Terry Farber with Jackie’s kids Steve, Heather and Mike
(1989) We went on a Batchelors & Batchelorettes square dance club mystery trip to McLeod
(1989) I toured Russia, Poland, Finland, and Sweden
(1989) We toured New York, Washinton DC and the American heritgage sights
(1989) I went to Corona Del Mar CA for Aunt Mable’s memorial service (Uncle Arnie’s wife) at the request of Pat Beckman
(1990) We went to Hearst Castle when McKeod square dance trip got snowed out
(1990) We went to Uncle Arnie’s 90th birthday party in Corona Del Mar CA
(1990) I went to the Yosemite highcountry camp with Ron Blewitt
(1990) Larry, Mary, Janine and Michael Belser visit from New Zealand
(1990) We traveled to Hawaii with a week stopover to see Arizona, Utah and New Mexico
(1991) We went to San Diego via Patricia and Terry Farber’s for a one day cruise to Encinada Mexico with Marge and Dave Fetter
(1991) We went to the Mumma family reunion at 10 Killer Lake in eastern Oaklahoma with Mike and Heather
(1991) We went Patricia and Terry’s for New Years
(1992) We went to San Jose Family Camp
(1992) I went to Philips in Eindhoven The Netherlands on IBM business and then toured Ireland on the way back
(1992) We went to Boston with Jackie’s kids to Visit her son Steve
(1993) We went to Springfield OH, Washington DC and to Jackie’s sister Marilyn’s house in Radford VA which is when I found Dad’s art deco house in Blacksburg VA
(1993) We went to San Jose Family Camp and Yosemite
(1993) I toured France (Loire Valley to Paris)
(1994) We went to the National Square Dance Convention in Portland via Norm McCann’s place in Chico and visited Ashland
(1994) I Went to Holland for IBM with a side trip to Amsterdam and I was going to go to Japan via India except that I didn’t have the correct visa
(1994) I traveled to Japan for IBM and went to Thailand for three days
(1994) We went to Medellin Colombia to visit Jackie’s daughter Heather
(1994) We went to Hurst Castle with Jackie’s sister Marilyn
(1995) I traveled to New Zealand with Jackie
(1995) We went to Uncle Arnie’s 95th birthday party in Corona Del Mar CA
(1995) I went ib a Yosemite Association hike with some Logical Guys
(1995) We went to Orlando, Cape Canaveral, St. Agustine (Marge and Dave Fetter), Savanna, Charleston, Wilmington and Greensboro NC
(1996) I went to South Shore Lake Tahoe for an NSIC conference
(1996) I went to Holland for IBM and traveled to Luxembourg and Amsterdam with David Chang
(1996) We went to San Jose Family Camp
(1997) We went to San Jose Family Camp
(1997) We went to Chico to visit Jackie’s son Mike and Norm and Julie McCann
(1997) We went to New Orleans, Natchez, through KY, AL, MS to Atlanta GA
(1998) We toured Egypt and Isreal
(1998) David, Jennifer and Taylor came to visit for Thanksgiving
(1999) Went to Uncle Arnie’s 99th birthday party at Corona Del Mar CA
(1999) Larry and Mary came to visit
(1999) We spent Thanksgiving in Oxacca

(2000) We went to a Seagate recognition function in W. Palm Beach and went to Key West afterwards
(2000) We spent Thanksgiving trip in Peurto Rico
(2001) We tour of southern England
(2001) We travelled to the Mumma Famil Reunion in Winter Park CO
(2001) We spent Thanksgiving trip in San Diego
(2002) We traveled to Paris with Marilyn
(2002) We traveled to Oregon to visit John Nicols
(2002) Marge and Dave Fetter visit and we toke a trip to the wine country
(2002) We spent Thanksgiving with Connie and Chris on the Big Island of Hawaii
(2003) We went to Bill Troth’s wedding in Greensboro NC via Chicago, WI, MI, OH
(2003) We went to Vancoover BC to visit with Larry and Mary Belser
(2003) We toured of Italy
(2003) Marge and Dave Fetter and Marilyn Grahm here to help Patricia whowas dying
(2003) We spent Thanksgiving at home because of Patricia’s eminent death
(2004) We traveled to Death Valley
(2004) We went to LA to support Pat Beckman’s suit agains Scripts to get Uncle Arnie released
(2004) We went to Corona Del Mar CA to attend two memorial services for Uncle Arnies between which we went to Tucson AZ to see Bob and Kay Beck
(2004) We travelled to East Texas to visit Jim Pead and Betsy Wait
(2004) We took a 2-month trip to Australia and New Zealand and visited Larry and Mary
(2005) We went to Kauai Hawaii for Marilyn and Bob Bruger’s wedding
2005) We went to visit Jackie’s sisters Marilyn Bruger and Marge Fetter via Atlanta, Wilmington, St. Augustine, Pensacola, and back to Atlanta
(2005) We traveled to South Shore Tahoe for Charlie’s surprise 40th birthday party
(2005) Larry and Mary Belser came to visit and we went to Vegas and Yosemite

The End