

Chapter Fourteen: Not so Easy Ed—Seven Months; Too Many Mistakes *So little time, so many mistakes—Name change and The Road comes into view*

The Road Trip

Young people often make bad choices. Regrettably, rash and snap decisions can lead to tragic accidents and terrible outcomes. Long-planned courses of action without the benefit of serious analysis give way to teen-aged reasoning ruined by fixation.

Three family summer vacation trips from Long Beach to Iowa, taken over a decade, fostered, in Easy Ed, an urgent post-high school goal as graduation gift: A solitary cross-country drive to visit family. My graduation announcements produced significant monetary returns as many uncles, aunts, and older cousins sent cash or checks with their congratulations. The janitor gig enabled some savings; Mom and Dad threw in a couple hundred dollars. Soon enough, the stage was set for a run of mostly bad decisions with dramatic and life-altering outcomes. Gratefully, some good things wedged their way into the equation, barely.

Having accepted a baseball scholarship at the University of Nevada, Reno, foregoing summer ball between high school and college was an atypical choice. Normally, one would use the summer to hone skills and improve shortcomings. However, I had not fully recovered from the ankle sprain even months after my high school senior-season ended; I was not eager to pound, all summer, on my right leg. This convenient excuse, and “the trip,” ruled out committing to Frenchy’s summer-league team. Probably **mistake #1**.

In order to make the trip, I needed a car that I didn’t share with Dad or Mom. When I first starting driving, I shared a red-VW hatchback with Mom. To get out from under that co-ownership situation, Rog and I drove to Bakersfield and retrieved uncle Joe’s semi-restored

Edsel. The vehicle was classic and worked well enough around town but was clearly not up to a cross-country trip. Plus, Rog wanted to sell it while it was still running. The icky-green Studebaker that I drove for a short time was thrown into the Edsel sale. Luckily, the elderly woman who rented the duplex in Belmont Shore below aunt Lucille had a 1956 Dodge for sale. The car was, mostly, parked in the garage: the matron drove it to church and the supermarket—neither often. I paid her \$350.00. Dad put in new spark plugs, tuned it up, and changed the oil and filters.

I packed my bags and camping gear. Since nightly hotels were out of my price range I planned to (mostly) camp until I reached relatives in the Midwest. I set out on my adventure by, first, heading in the wrong direction. I thought that I'd better go north to UNR and check out the situation now that Coach Jackie Jensen, who had signed me, was no longer there; fired or retired, I was unsure which.

This leg of the trip became the first time that I drove a car over 100 mph. Toward the end of the first day of the two-day drive to Reno, somewhere in the mountains between Northern California and Southern Nevada, I decided that I should find out if the Dodge was capable of making the trip east. I had no plan in the case of a breakdown in the Sierra Nevada Range, but I figured I'd be better off trying to get home from Northern California than someplace between Reno and Keokuk, Iowa. So I put the pedal to the metal until seeing 103, held it there for about 90 seconds (seemed like 20 minutes given the adrenaline rush), then cruised back down to the speed limit, confident that the old buggy would make the trip. **Mistake #2:** short-term high-speed “tests” do not equal long-term performance. Gratefully, the Dodge made the trip with ease,

although one tire gave way just outside of Baker, California on the way back. I camped overnight in the Sierra Nevada Mountains the night between Long Beach and Reno.

The quick stop in Reno convinced me that I was still wanted, although the program was in disarray. The school named Keith Roper, the head wrestling coach and an assistant football coach, as Jackie Jensen's replacement. A few recent baseball alums entered the UNR graduate school or took jobs in town so they could stay and serve as assistant coaches. One of those former players, Gary Powers, later served as the Wolf Pack's head coach for thirty-one years from 1983-2013.

Gary met me and showed me around during my visit. I was overly cocky and so sure that I'd be a baseball star and eventually a professional player, that I didn't carefully consider the implications of the upheaval. I assured my host that I was ok with the situation.

A more carefully considered analysis about baseball and UNR might have led to a vastly different decision. Many athletes, recruited by a coach who left the school/position, ask for a release from their commitment in order to pick a better match. In that Coach Jensen was one of the primary reasons I'd wanted to go to UNR, asking for a release, turning the car around and returning to Long Beach, playing summer ball, and trying out for the Long Beach City College team would have been a much wiser course of action. Headstrong bravado precluded that better decision: I was determined to accept the offer and head-off on a major college baseball scholarship because its mystique shone favorable light my way. Additionally, I had long-before decided against *ever* attending LBCC; junior college just wasn't for me. So UNR it was, chaos and all: **mistake #3**. My summer visit in Reno lasted one short day and one night in a dorm. The

next morning, I headed east with a return to campus still planned for the coming fall semester of the 1971-72 school year.

The early leg of the trip was unexpectedly wonderful. Trips with the folks had taken either the middle (Las Vegas to Salt Lake City to Denver) or southern (Las Vegas to Phoenix to OKC) route. The first leg of both of those routes is mostly desert. The northern route, Reno to Salt Lake City, features majestic mountains and rivers and wonderful camping opportunities. However, things turned a bit less euphoric just east of Salt Lake as boredom and loneliness set in.

I had neither the money nor the time to mount an 8-track tape player in the Dodge prior to the trip. Radio reception during most of a cross-county trip in 1971 was very sketchy. I quickly succumbed to the temptations of “multi-tasking” (long before that was a word/phrase). I don’t believe that anyone in their right mind would not rank reading a printed newspaper while driving at high speed to be anything less than outrageously stupid and careless. Nevertheless, I found ways to fold the paper (having never commuted to work in a subway and learned the proper technique, I was on my own) so that I could (sort of) control the car while glancing up and down to read and drive at the same time: **mistake #4**. A couple hundred miles later, I had caught-up on the news and broken-up the drive’s boredom. The thought that I’d endangered my life and the lives of others never crossed my immature little brain.

Not long after the newspaper incident, I came upon a new way to dispel the boredom and make serious mistakes. The 70s were, after all, a “trippy” time before everything got scary and dangerous. Regardless of whether one was in the city or out in the country, the roadways frequently included hitchhiking wayfarers. I’d long been convinced that picking up hitchhikers was dangerous and to be avoided at all costs.

However, the opportunity, this time, struck me as a reasonable way to solve multiple problems. The two females I passed at high speed appeared to be harmless enough. Better yet, they were young women. At this point in life, the sorry state of my high school dating experiences left me with a large number of unfulfilled social goals: having an initial sexual experience topped that list. Apparently, fate and good luck was presenting me with a ready-made opportunity and (better yet) two candidates at once. I quickly pulled over, they introduced themselves and piled in, and we established that I could take them as far as Omaha, Nebraska.

Picking up hitch-hikers: double-barreled **mistake #5**.

The girls appeared to be 3 or 4 years older than me; one was tall and thin while the other was short and round-ish. They were happy conversationalists and the three of us chatted our way down the road such that getting to know each other quickly gave way to deeper levels of self-disclosure. Shared stories made it clear that the girls were not lesbian partners while laughter and furtive glances suggested that the impending evening's camp might prove to be more interesting than usual (or in my case, ever). The joint trip to Omaha gave me a night of camping on the way to twin goals of reaching the Midwest without going insane from loneliness and boredom and losing my virginity as quickly as possible. Needless to say, things did not work out as I'd planned.

Our camp was not far from Summit Park, Utah. Although making an intimate connection with someone I had just met that day seemed a very tall order, especially given my lack of experience in such things, circumstances generally developed in my favor. A quick stop for fresh groceries (I was living out of an ice chest that needed frequent refills of ice and foodstuffs) before setting up camp included the girls' purchase of a 6-pack of beer. Although I had not yet

acquired a taste for beer, and I was well under the legal drinking age, the idea that we'd all drink a couple of beers and thereby relax and "loosen up" added to my anticipation.

We set up at a small but adequate camp-ground with running water, a fire pit, and picnic table; restroom facilities were a few hundred yards down the trail. We cooked food on an open fire that threw off unnecessary heat before the day turned dark. The evening was warm so we decided to sleep in the open rather than fussing with my small tent. The structure was a small, two-person affair and the potential uneasiness over who would sleep in it was avoided with a quick joint decision to organize our sleeping bags around the fire pit. This, of course, presented something of a disappointment: Not being able to move one of the girls into the tent with me meant that joining either of them in their sleeping bag quickly became impossible. We were up with the sun the next morning and back on the road after a quick (and cold) morning snack.

The next day proved daunting. Although we'd gotten an early start, Omaha was twelve or thirteen-hours in the distance. I had refused to allow either of the girls to drive the car the previous day and I fully intended to uphold that decision. However, by late morning it was clear that driving so far on my own presented a challenge, and perhaps a level of danger, as I felt the urgent need for a nap after lunch. Reluctantly, I gave way behind the wheel to our taller fellow traveler; she was the only one of the two who could produce a valid driver's license. Her buddy joined her in the front seat as I sprawled out across the back for a quick nap. This turn of events quickly turned for the worst as **mistake #6** quickly rolled into **mistake #7**.

I'd been sleeping for less than a half-hour when I was aroused by the car pulling off to the side of the rode. As I came to and sat up, a shocking fact stared me straight in the eye from just outside the right rear-passenger window: the girls had pulled over to pick up another

hitchhiker. Before he opened the door, I let out a yelp and said something to the effect of “what the hell, I didn’t say anything about picking up another rider”! Both girls chimed in along the lines of “well you picked us up so we figured that you wouldn’t care and it’s really hot and he looks like he really needs a ride.” I jumped out of the car and stared at the guy as the girls got out and invited him to take a seat in the back. The shortest girl sat in the back with our new passenger while the taller girl joined me in the front seat as I took back the wheel. The girls led the introductory chatter and soon established that our new friend would be happy to ride to Omaha with us. His appearance suggested that we had given a ride to a bizarre and potentially dangerous person.

Almost immediately, our new traveling companion lit up a joint in the back seat; while the girls eagerly joined in, I declined. I had resisted pot during high school and had yet to succumb to that temptation, so passed. Soon, his rambling conversation turned somewhat dark and wild such that my two female companions began rolling their eyes and shooting each other, and me, worried glances. We stopped for gas around 3 p.m. and when our male passenger headed off to the men’s room, the girls descended on me like flies on shit, wide-eyed and resolute: “We’ve got to dump this creep before we end up having him tag along with us to Omaha!” Unfortunately, we could not unload his backpack and race off; he returned to the back seat before I completed refueling. When I got back in the car, I looked at the girls and said “I need to find a grocery store so that I can get some fresh ice and a little more food for tonight.” The girls picked up the nuance in my suggestion and quickly agreed.

We drove a few blocks and pulled into the parking lot of a food mart; the girls got out and invited our friend to go in with them to buy some beer. I stayed behind for a minute and made a

big display of draining the water from the ice chest “before I join you inside.” As the three headed for the store, I unloaded our friend’s backpack onto the parking lot, praying that the girls would figure out a way to ditch the guy in the store and get back to the car without him. Sure enough, out they came, running across the parking lot, jumping in the car, and hollering, “Get the fuck out of here before he sees us!” That is exactly what we did.

Our arrival in Omaha was still so many hours ahead that I considered stopping along the way. However, the possibility that our former passenger would somehow catch up and do something awful to us for dumping him spurred me on, non-stop (except for quick gas and fast-food stops along the way). Just before sunset, we approached Omaha in the distance. I had not told the girls that I was continuing on toward Iowa; I led them to believe that Omaha was the end of the line for me. So just before we hit the city limits we said our goodbyes, I unloaded the girls and their gear on the side of the road and went onward. In anticipation of reaching relatives the next day and not wanting to smell as badly as I did after two nights of roughing it with only cold, quick, rinse-offs to thin the long days’ sweat, I located a cheap hotel with a cool swimming pool and a warm shower. I treated myself to an inexpensive steak dinner at a local diner before settling down for what I took to be a well-deserved night indoors. However, I parked the car on the “other” side of the hotel lot, away from my room, just in case any of the three fellow-travelers caught up with me. I kept the hotel door locked.

Early the next afternoon, I pulled into the long dusty driveway of uncle Paul and aunt Alice’s farm in northwest Iowa, not far from where the Lamoureux family was raised, outside Sioux City. The farm had always been the first stop on our family summer trips to the Midwest. I planned to spend the evening there, hanging out with my like-aged cousins Bette and Ellen (both

also adoptees), before heading for Cedar Falls. I looked forward to seeing my many cousins during Midwest summer visits and Bette and Ellen are close to my age, Bette being slightly older and Ellen only a year younger. Uncle Paul had always been Dad's favorite; it was easy to see why. Uncle Paul shared Roger's dry wit and his eyes seemed to sparkle even brighter than did those of his baby brother. I too really enjoyed uncle Paul's company. Aunt Alice always whipped up a mean country dinner featuring fresh food from their massively successful farm operation. Anyone who has not tasted fresh-picked Iowa corn and just-selected chicken prepared by the hands of the woman who raised the hens and whose husband grew the corn has not experienced the best food that America has to offer.

Not long after dinner, my cousins and I set out for a "night on the town." Well, to put that another way, we hopped three-across into the pick-up truck so that Bette could drive us up and down country roads looking for something to do. Fortunately, there was a planned gathering of local teen-agers, but the event did not start until after 10 pm, so we drove around looking at the countryside and drinking cans of beer from a cooler until the appointed hour. By the time we reached the party, the fact that I seldom drank combined with the rough ride and the previous days' fatigue left me thoroughly hammered after a lone beer. **Mistake #8** pushed me very near to #9.

I had mentioned to Ellen that I was interested in meeting girls while I was visiting and she had suggested that the party would be a good place for that. On arrival, I found wine that I liked to drink and started in on that in earnest. Before long I plopped down next to a local girl with, I would later discover, a rather sordid small-town reputation. Given my quest, I suspect that I would not have cared even had I been sober and/or properly informed. Half-drunk, I cared even

less and went straight for the bait. Alas, the outcome was predictably similar to all previous such encounters and ended with her being sick from too much alcohol and me not being able to get away from the party fast or early enough. Mistake #9 averted, for the time being.

I slept in (a little) the next morning, then doused a horrendous headache with coffee and tried to stare down a country breakfast with over-easy eggs (that breakfast might have been responsible for my unwillingness to face runny eggs during the rest of my adult life). I was grateful for stomach-settling hash browns and toast. Bette and Ellen enjoyed a good giggle, aunt Alice graciously ignored the opportunity to inquire as to the night's activities, and uncle Paul was already out on the tractor. I ate quickly, packed up, hugged my aunt and cousins, and slunk out the door for a quick wave goodbye to my uncle before turning my car to the east toward my next, hopefully less raucous, family destination at the home of my cousin Dr. Ed Ceilley.

I always enjoyed visiting the families in Cedar Falls: Dad's sister, my aunt Bertha—uncle Walt passed away in 1963—and the families of their adult children Dr. Ed (and his wife Yvonne) and Bernie (and his first wife Nancy).

I opened the visit by spending the night with aunt Bertha; we had lived with Walt and Bertha for a short time before finding the rental house in Waterloo in the late 50s. The next day I transitioned over to Dr. Ed and Yvonne's big house with eight children. Angie, the oldest daughter, is only a year younger than me. Paul, the oldest son was only a year younger than Angie and was particularly skilled at sports such that our age difference didn't much matter. The four remaining siblings are younger but we played well together anyway. We included Dr. Ed's younger brother, cousin Bernie's, children in most of our outings. His oldest daughter, Lori, was Angie's age and their next daughter, Karen, is two years younger. Karen and Lori also had two

younger siblings, Mark and June. This was the first summer visit that I was able to put the kids in the car and drive to the park, along the river, to a store, to a drive-in movie, or out for ice cream treats; we did them all with great fervor and huge smiles on our young faces.

The visit to Cedar Falls also added sports spice to the trip. 1971 was the second summer that the Kansas City Royals held try-outs for their Florida “Baseball Academy.” Royals’ owner Ewing Kauffman spent a couple million dollars, between 1969 and 1974, developing a way to augment their minor league system and avoid waiting for players to graduate from colleges. Academy attendees were selected from try-outs around the country. Players still in college were not eligible for the try-outs or the Academy, but recent high school and or college graduates (who had not been drafted in the MLB system) were welcome. If selected, high school-aged Academy attendees went to Junior College classes in the morning, then trained on the Academy’s fields. Of the one hundred or so boys who participated in the Academy over its (almost) five years, fourteen players were eventually called up to the Major Leagues. During the summer of 1971, a try-out was scheduled on the fields at the University of Northern Iowa, right there in Cedar Falls. I had planned on spending a week in town anyway, so I signed up for the try-outs and spent four days working out with my cousins. By the time the appointed Saturday morning rolled around, I felt about as good as a player who hadn’t played in 2 months could feel. My ankle was pretty close to normal although my timing, both in the field and at bat, was largely off.

All infielders at the try-out took ground balls at shortstop that day. Although I was a second baseman and didn’t have an adequate arm to play on the left side of the infield, I ranged widely and threw well that morning. When we did the timed running trials from plate to 1st base, I registered the fastest time of all the players there. My speed stood out—The recruiting

principles behind the Academy dictated that some players would be chosen for development, even if their baseball skills were deficient, as long as they showed strong athletic prowess. Being the fastest person at the try-out put me squarely on the scouts' radar. Then, during batting practice, I hit line-drive after line-drive and bunted with my usual proficiency. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the scouts struggling with how to spell my name on their sheets (L-A-M-E-R-O?). My mind raced as I began to feel as though this thing might just prove to be my long-sought-after ticket to the "Bigs."

Well, except for two things. First, **mistake #9**: I'd lied at the start of the session. Athletes who had accepted college scholarships for the fall weren't eligible for either the try-outs or the Baseball Academy. I had not raised my hand when they asked, before the start of the day's activities, whether anyone present was a current college athlete or on a college scholarship. I "reasoned" (more like "hoped that") since school had not started and I had neither yet played nor received any money/benefit, I wasn't in either excluded category. Having accepted an athletic scholarship, technically, I was probably ineligible. But I figured that if they selected me, I'd call Reno and ask for my release (remember the fired coach) although I worried that might not wash with the nice KC Royals Academy folks.

Second, and more importantly, about the time that the scouts figured out how to spell my name, the just-graduated catcher from UNI started pounding balls off and over the outfield walls of his home ballpark. All the scouts turned and rushed in his direction, pens and clipboards in hand: that was the end of my spotlight. They'd found their man that day and it definitely wasn't the little guy from Southern California.

Soon thereafter, I headed for the third Iowa stop on my adventure—Keokuk (K³)—the south-eastern-most town in Iowa where my mother and father met, in 1948, and married in 1949. The eastward momentum of our summer Midwest trips always ended in Keokuk. After we moved to California, the three summer trips to Iowa began with Dad's siblings and their mates and families in and around Sioux City (brothers Leo, Reno, and Paul; sisters Rachel and Georgette) and in Cedar Falls (sister Bertha), but our eastward progress ended in Keokuk with Mom's only sister, my aunt Veronica and her husband uncle Jim O'Brien (with kids, Jean, Maureen, and Patrick Michael). Since Roger could only take two-weeks of vacation a year, the trip was carefully planned. The cross-country drive took three, eight-to-ten-hour, days each way; one day was spent in each of Sioux City and Cedar Falls, leaving a day to reach Keokuk and a two-day visit there before we had to high-tail it west.

Those experiences made it pretty natural for me to include Keokuk on my trip and I just adored the relatives that lived there. Keokuk had been Mom's refuge after leaving North Dakota. Evangeline returned to Devils Lake, North Dakota after working, in the final three years of WWII, at the North American Aviation manufacturing plant in Los Angeles. On her return to Devils Lake, she got engaged to Roman Pung, a man she had known there before the war. She broke up with him and cancelled the wedding, mere days prior to the ceremony. A few months later, she left her North Dakota home, heading toward her beloved sister and family in Keokuk. Evangeline worked and helped look after Jean, Maureen, and baby Patrick O'Brien during the years she lived in Keokuk before she married Roger.

By the time I visited in 1971, eldest O'Brien off-spring, Jean, had married Tony Nash and was raising a family in Quincy Illinois; youngest daughter, Maureen, had married Bob Creswick

and moved to Florida; the youngest, only son Patrick, stayed in Keokuk, married a local gal, Rita Ralya, and began raising a family not far from both O'Brien and Ralya family homes.



While in Keokuk, I played golf at the Keokuk

Rita, Pat, and kids, circa late 1970s

Country Club with Howie Sutlive, a local boy my age. I had tried to play a round or two with uncle Jim, cousin Patrick, and Dad during previous visits but the course was very difficult and I wasn't really up to playing it until the visit in 1971. Going out to the club was extra special as I'd only played public links at home. The Keokuk Country Club course was always in great shape, and the food at the Club (often enjoyed after a round with the adults), was nothing short of spectacular. Uncle Jim had been Mayor of Keokuk in the early 1960s, so club membership was important to the O'Briens.

Beginning of the Road that Leads Me Back

Although I enjoyed the time I spent with Patrick and other relatives, I was beginning to regret one aspect of the trip: By this time, I was more than happy to downgrade my goals from "getting lucky" to "just going out with a girl" as I had not yet been on a date during the trip. I was young, good looking enough, and a college-bound scholarship-holding athlete; surely there was at least one girl in the Midwest who'd consent to spend a few hours in my company? The trip was half over with no dates in sight. Being on the trip was starting to seem just like being at home; I was mostly alone and without romantic female companionship.

Cousin Patrick Michael O'Brien was a hero to me. Elven-like-Irish handsome with a twinkle in his eye and a bounce in his early-30s step, Patrick had been a ladies' man deluxe and

high school basketball player, the town Mayor's son, and always quite the young man around Keokuk. I had admired him all along; he'd been nice enough to humor me, play with me, and take me along with him despite the eight-year difference in our ages. I always wanted to be like Patrick. Oh, and he was a little "wild": drinking, smoking, and coming home from dates with girls' panties in the glove box. Patrick was also a heralded and awarded Vietnam veteran, said to be the best sharp-shooter in his outfit. Yep—greatly admired by his younger cousin.

By this time, Pat had married a well-heeled local girl whose father worked for a diamond mining company. Rita Ralya O'Brien and Pat were settling in for a long run at family life. I inquired if Patrick would please check with Rita's little sister, Tressa, to see if she knew of any girls in town who might like to go out on a date with a bold new flavor from California? The 4th of July was coming up. Certainly, fireworks were in order.

Truth be told, I would have been happy for a chance to go out with Tressa. Attractive, talented, and bouncy, she would have fit the bill. Alas, there was a steady boyfriend named Neville Crenshaw. Sigh. Who the hell names a kid Neville in Keokuk, Iowa? With Tressa spoken-for, she told Patrick that she'd check with her friends. In fact, she had someone in particular in mind, since Ann Raney was having another disagreement and cooling-off period with her boyfriend, Jeff. Maybe Ann did not yet have plans for the evening of the 4th of July. This is how "The Road Ahead That Leads Me Back"—to Ann Raney—began.

Sure enough, Ann was angry enough with Jeff that she rather enjoyed being seen around town with a wild card. So off we went, in Neville's car, headed to the local *Dairy Queen* where Ann introduced me to my first hot fudge milkshake (I'd always thought that a plain chocolate shake was good enough; never again thereafter). The double date then moved to Keokuk's

Skylark Drive-In. The feature was *The Cheyenne Social Club*, an innocuous and only semi-entertaining movie that had been released the year before to neither fanfare nor critical (nor box office) acclaim. Not the sort of movie that teenagers would normally enjoy, although the fact that the film was set in a brothel and featured lots of supposedly funny double-entendres threatened to spice things up a time or two. The promise was not fulfilled.



After the movie the *Skylark* provided the only fireworks show in town so *The Cheyenne Social Club* it was. We watched the movie. No drinking, no carousing, no hand-holding or kissing, although Tressa and Neville had been going steady long enough to put on their own show if they had been so inclined. Instead, they were very polite and the evening was characterized mostly by the straight-backed, slightly uncomfortable, pairing of two adolescent strangers in the backseat. We were all impressed by the fireworks display after the movie, although truth be known, a display shot over the river would have been a lot more interesting than one held above the local drive-in just off the highway at the north edge of town.

Now, before the story goes any further, let's be clear about this: Ann and Tressa were *younger*. They seemed SO much younger. I mean, it was like robbing the cradle! I'm heading off to college in a couple months; they had just finished their *junior* year in high school for god's sake! Forget that I had only recently graduated and had yet to step a foot inside a college classroom and that they were entering their senior high school year. In my self-focused little head, I was a college boy and they were high schoolers—it might as well have been pedophilia from my warped perspective. It took me decades to get over the fact that there are months on the

calendar when Ann and I report the same number of years on the earth; at other times, I can claim to be a year older. But back then, at first, that “headed for college” swagger had me stiff in its grip.

At the time, I had no idea that due to family wealth, both Ann and Tressa had traveled the country and some of the world, while I had only gone back and forth mostly along the same paths between Long Beach and three small Iowa towns and farms (my Navy-family parents dragging me around the country before the age of 7 hardly counted and Hawaii, at age three, had not provided worldly experiences). Ann played tennis, guitar and piano, served as a guitar teacher to young children, and was on the debate team; both girls were in the summer musical (*West Side Story*); Tressa with the lead female role (Maria). In short, I was probably well over-matched. But no one could tell me that at the time.

We talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other’s company. After the fireworks, the four of us went to Ann’s house; a beautiful home overlooking the Mississippi River on the end/bend of Grand Ave. at 11



Hillcrest Drive, then, one of Keokuk’s most expensive and majestic properties. We sat on the floor in the living room, telling stories and playing board games. Something seemed to click, but I was not precisely sure what “it” was or who was responsible for it. Perhaps I still preferred Tressa (Neville notwithstanding); but I was a lot less sure.

The day after the big date, I was off to Peoria, Illinois. I had planned three additional legs for the Midwest-end of my trek. First, I was going to Peoria to see another of Roger’s sisters, my

aunt Corinne (and uncle Dave Davidson, the man who answered to the nickname “Iron Duke” before my Dad acquired it). Corrine and Dave had played a central role in pairing my mom and dad, twenty years before, in Keokuk. Many years later, after uncle Dave passed away, aunt Corinne moved to California and lived with aunt Lucille in the same Belmont Shore duplex that my folks and I lived in when we first moved to California in 1960. Two and a half decades after that, Cheryl and I rented Corinne and Dave’s house on Biltmore, in Peoria, from my cousin Tim. The house I visited in 1971 was that very house: the first home we would live in, for 6 years, after moving to Peoria. Our first two children arrived while we lived in that house. Eventually, Corinne moved back to Peoria from Long Beach, lived with Tim and family, passed away, and was buried next to uncle Dave in the Catholic mausoleum Peoria.

After a brief stop in Peoria, I took aunt Corinne to Chicago for a weekend (to see her daughter, my cousin, Mary Victoria—we called her Vicki), followed by a quick visit to Crystal Lake IL to see the youngest Lamoureux sibling, my aunt Bernadette. Finally, on the way home, I was going to stop in Sioux City so that I could give aunt Rachel and her son, Richie, a ride to California.

While in Peoria, I played a round of golf with the family’s first “Iron Duke.” Dave Davidson had been a master golfer throughout his life; at one time, he was the club champion at the Country Club of Keokuk, where he had lived and played for decades before Corrine and Dave moved from Keokuk to Peoria. Although he was always more than adequate off the tee, his iron and short games were so good that, over time, he acquired the nickname, “The Iron Duke.” By the time we played our round, he was in his late 70s. We played on Peoria’s oldest course,

Madison Park, a par 68, 18-hole course of reduced distance but narrow fairways and many mature trees.

I've always been an impetuous golfer; impatient with my poor play and for not meeting my potential. I was particularly weak on shorter courses that required better chipping and putting than driving. Dave hit the ball down the middle almost every shot, played with a calm demeanor, and really loved the game and valued its rich nuances. I'm sure that I enjoyed his company more than he tolerated mine, that day: As was often the case, I played poorly and displayed a lot of frustration. 15 years later, after we'd moved into the Davidson house on Biltmore, Jim Bielenberg, the next-door-neighbor, told stories of the days that long-retired Dave Davidson pinned his daily scorecard on the clothes line in still-8-to-5-working-Jim's patio, touting the low score that the Iron Duke had recorded that day. Luckily, uncle Dave didn't similarly taunt me after playing much better than I did during our round together.

We now live a half-block down the street from the 12th fairway at Madison. I walk over and hit a few shag balls, pitch and putt, or play 5 or 7 holes from time-to-time. The many men in my family who played and loved golf are always heavy on my mind when I am there on a quiet evening, trying to learn to play calmly and within myself. Uncles Paul Lamoureux, RL (Dave) Davidson, Don Bechtel, and Jim O'Brien; cousins Jim Grobaty, Neil Anderson, and Richard Hauck all played on earth, and most likely now regularly line-up with Rog for outings on the better courses beyond. I seldom swing a stick without thinking of them all, fondly, especially when I'm practicing just before dark on a course that's mostly empty, except for me and my familial shadows. This also reminds me of my time climbing the *Skylinks* fence with the second

Iron Duke (my father); only now, I go to the Madison Park clubhouse, once a week, and pay for the holes that I've played without checking in.

After two days in Peoria, I loaded Corinne into the Dodge and headed for Chicago. I'd not previously been to the Windy City: The folks never went north from Keokuk with me in tow; they headed west to California from Keokuk instead.

After a quick visit with Mary (then called Vicki), we drove out to Crystal Lake, IL to see the youngest Lamoureux family sibling, my aunt Bernadette Shaedel. As the family baby, Bern was everyone's favorite. She was a knockout dark-haired beauty despite the fact that she'd been in a life-threatening car accident that compromised her beauty with medically-necessary plastic surgery. My father absolutely adored her and when she died (in 1982) of cancer in early middle age, the family was devastated, especially, I think, her closest-in-age-brother, Roger. The visit in 1971 was the last time I would see her. When I later met, courted, and married my beautiful wife Cheryl, my father was tickled pink and loved her to death; partially, I think, because Cheryl reminded him of his sister Bernadette. My father was never senile, the heart attack at 69 years of age saw to that, and he never confused the two women. But Cheryl got into his heart a little faster than I would have expected and I think her resemblance to Bern played a major role in that.

Following the weekend in Chicago-Land, I returned Corinne to Peoria. 1971 was the summer that Reggie Jackson hit a prodigious home run onto the Tiger Stadium roof at the All-Star game. The morning after we'd watched the game together, I said my goodbyes to Corinne and Dave, and headed for Sioux City pick up aunt Rachel and cousin Richie for the return trip west.

Except, I didn't.

Go west from Peoria to Sioux City, that is.

Instead, I followed a feeling and turned the Dodge south, back toward Keokuk. I wasn't really sure why. I knew that that it was for either Tressa or Ann but I was having a really difficult time deciding which. You may recall that I wasn't very good at picking the right girl. By the time I knocked on the door at 11 Hillcrest and asked a surprised Ruth Raney if her daughter Ann could come to out for chat, I'd made up my mind.

I stayed four extra days; Veronica and Jim didn't mind putting me up. Pat and Rita rolled their eyes when they heard, wondering exactly what I was up to. They had not ruled out my interest in Tressa and they were worried that I would upset Neville and peace in the family. I assured them that I'd lost all interest in Pat's sister-in-law and mentioned Ann Raney's name for good measure.

Ann and I spent as much time together as we could muster, mostly talking, a lot, especially about religion. She had a strong, Protestant, faith background

and I'd gone to 12 years of Catholic school yet had developed some very "independent" theological ideas. Talking about religion seemed (to me) to make me appear smart (or at least deep). Recall that I'd used that dodge on Debbie Lafayette in grade school. Ann didn't need the crutch; she was both smart and deep. But my willingness to talk earnestly about things that mattered helped her create a "he's a serious guy for a ballplayer" assessment. And so, we talked for hours on end.



*Easy Ed and Ann Raney,
Keokuk Iowa, summer 1971*

We also took turns playing, and singing to, my 12-string guitar. I thought that I played and sang well; actually, I just played and sang with enthusiasm. Ann went on to sing in the St. Olaf Choir—one of the most important college music ensembles in the country. Nevertheless, Ann was always willing to listen to my music-making, to encourage me, and to sing along. I'm sure there were times when she wondered why I never improved very much.

We played a little tennis, even though Keokuk is miserable in the heat of the summer. Ann was on the high school tennis team; I was an almost-total novice (although I improved, somewhat, over the next few years). I viewed their *West Side Story* rehearsals a couple nights in a row and went to their final dress rehearsal. Seeing Tressa with Neville night-after-night further clarified the situation, validated my choice and encouraged Neville to banish competitive concerns; Jeff, on the other hand, not so much. My presence had the effect that Ann was looking for: the one time he saw us together he fumed in a big way. From July 4, 1971 through the end of 1977, Ann Raney and I carried on a long-distance love-affair with many twists and turns. And—meeting Ann Raney was **not** mistake #10. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I eventually returned to Sioux City as planned and added aunt Rachael Redmond and her youngest child, Richard, to the Dodge. I had spent precious little time with aunt Rachael; in fact, I think that there had even been years when we didn't visit her during our one-day stays in Sioux City. Rachael had a great sense of humor and Ricky was only a couple years younger than me; Ricky and I shared musical tastes. The trip home was great fun, though largely uneventful. We sang, joked, and told stories all the way to California. We even camped out as planned, Rachel included. Rather than accept rough accommodations, I stopped at KOA campgrounds so that we had running water, clean restrooms, hot showers, picnic tables, and electric outlets. We set up the

tent each night for Rachael while Ricky and I slept on the ground. We got a big bang out of roughing it and saving lots of money. Good thing—we'd soon need the savings.

On the hill overlooking Baker, CA, just coming into town, we heard a loud explosion and I felt the steering wheel jerk hard to one side. The rear right tire had blown at 65 miles-per-hour. Gratefully, I controlled the car and brought it to stop off the right shoulder. Before too long, a trucker came by and offered to take us into town. A gas station provided a quick tow but the tire was beyond repair: we had to purchase a replacement. Luckily the place was a high-volume outlet that sold a lot of tires so maintained a stock of used but functional tires for sale. We found a tire that fit the car and our available cash, most of the money we'd saved by camping (no credit cards in view), went into the tire purchase. We arrived in Long Beach without further incident. Rachael's daughter Susan, a cousin raising a family near San Diego, drove to Long Beach for the two Midwesterners.

I spent the remaining month of the summer shopping for school clothes and gear and putting in as much time working with Buzz and Tom at the *Signal Companies* as I could manage. The trip had depleted my savings: As always, I was happy to have the janitor job to fall back on for a few dollars more. Ann and I started writing letters to each other; eventually, we added long-distance phone calls (expensive) and recorded audiocassettes (to off-set the expense). We quickly discovered that we shared many interests and brain-stormed ways we could see each other again.

One exchange of audiocassettes produced a *very* unexpected outcome. Earlier in his career in Keokuk, Ann's father, Jack Raney, had been a corporate lawyer for the Keokuk-based *Hoerner Boxes Inc.* Jack was one of the principle architects of *Hoerner's* 1966 merger with *The Waldorf Paper Company*, resulting in the creation of *Hoerner-Waldorf* (as well as a significant

payday for Jack). Eventually, leaving *Hoerner-Waldorf*—but wanting to remain in Keokuk—Jack became the owner and operator of a long-time Keokuk stalwart manufacturing outfit, *Thomas Truck and Caster Company*. *Thomas Truck* was the first place that my aunt Veronica worked when she and Jim O'Brien moved to Keokuk not long after WWII.

Ann made occasional visits to the *Thomas Truck* office. During one, she put a cassette tape headed for me in California into the office's US mail "out-basket." Jack's administrative secretary, a woman named Annie Cahill, was processing the postage for outgoing mail when she noticed the address on the wrapping of the audiocassette.

"Jack. Who is this Ed Lamoureux that Ann is sending mail to?"

"He's a boy from California that Ann met over the summer when he visited here."

"Jack, I used to know a Lamoureux; Evangeline Bechtel and I worked together in Judge Concannon and Bob Walker's law office. She married a man named Lamoureux. I wonder this Ed is related to Evangeline?"

Jack recounted that he thought that the boy had some connection to the O'Brien family; Annie exclaimed

"well of course: Veronica O'Brien is Evangeline Bechtel Lamoureux's sister! That's the same family! I worked with his mother just after the war!"

Between the time I'd returned from the Midwest adventure and fall entry at UNR, I experienced my first real car accident. Fortunately, I was not injured. Unfortunately, the Dodge was a total wreck and could not be repaired. I was heading into work at the *Signal Companies* one evening, set to take a left-hand turn from Spring Street onto the access road (that is now called Airport Lane), between Redondo and Temple, into the building. Paused in the left-hand

turn lane, I waited for a car that was coming toward me in the distance. That car decelerated significantly so I began my turn—at which point the driver sped up—apparently not seeing me. I turned hard to the left so that we would not hit head on; his car tore into the Dodge’s passenger door and folded the right side of the Dodge almost to my position on the driver’s side. Given that I had “turned in front of oncoming traffic” (**mistake #10**) I was ticketed. However, the other driver was cited for speeding and for failing to be aware of an intersection hazard. In the end, neither received an insurance settlement (we were both at fault) and so I found myself without a car or the money to acquire a replacement. I was not planning to take an auto to Nevada anyway so was not concerned at the time. The loss of the Dodge would soon enough turn into a major problem.

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