

Chapter Sixteen: “Easy Ed” & “Crazy Ed” Have Left the Building *From “Jr. College” toward “the real thing”—Still mistake-prone*

I was always adamantly opposed to attending Long Beach City College. Even after I was taken out of the college preparatory program at SAHS, I considered myself college, not junior college, material. However, if I wanted to graduate from college, I had to successfully attend LBCC for at least three semesters. The only way I could afford college was to go to Long Beach State and since I had not applied there as a freshman, I was forced to use the junior-college-transfer route for admission. Regardless of my negative feelings about LBCC, I’d have to succeed there.

Luckily, the Killdee St. house was within easy biking distance from the school that I had not ever wanted to attend. After Christmas, I returned to Reno, completed the semester, paid about half of my gambling debts (the card-shark on the hall graciously forgave the rest) and packed for the trip home—figurative tail between my legs. Dad drove up to fetch me: The long ride home was ominously quiet.

Not long after my return to Long Beach, I was presented with what I took to be a wonderful surprise. Ann Raney was making college visits during her search for the right school the following fall. Jack, Ruth, and Ann decided to visit Mills College and Stanford in the San Francisco area; Ann convinced them to add UCLA and the Claremont Colleges, near Los Angeles, to the mix. The college visit gave us a chance to get our parents together as, even at this early stage in a very nebulous long-distance relationship, we had hinted to each other about possible longer-term commitments in the future. Besides, Mom had lived in Keokuk so knew lots of people the Raney’s knew. It would be fun. Turned out, maybe not so much; at least partially **mistake # 22.**

Mom had reacted to my relationship with Ann with mixed feelings. Beyond the terrible damage done by my lying about Thanksgiving, Evangeline was uneasy over my involvement with the daughter of a wealthy business owner from Keokuk. I found this somewhat strange but I later came to understand that I had not yet developed the proper historical context to appreciate her concerns. We had always enjoyed our visits to Keokuk; Mom never seemed ill-at ease; we were always with Veronica and Jim and family. The closest we got to Keokuk's upper crust was when we went to dinner at the Country Club. I did not understand why Mom sometimes skipped those outings. When she spoke about her concerns over Ann, she couched them in phrases that led me to interpret wealth and class as the issues: We weren't in the Raney's league financially. I countered that concern with my overall respect for the down-to-earth way that Ann seemed to handle her financial circumstances. I simply didn't appreciate the broader issues.

In fact, Evangeline harbored a wide-ranging set of negative beliefs about the kind of divided town Keokuk was: a place where wealthy owners lived virtually separate lives from their employees. The Raneys represented the rich owners while we were clearly more like the middle-class-to-poor workers. Nice people though they were, Evangeline was extremely gun-shy over the whole affair. Not to mention the fact that I was doing a lot of really dumb stuff at this point in my life and some of it circulated around my budding relationship with Ann.

Nevertheless, Ann's visit to Southern California produced memorable times that cemented our resolve to continue and deepen our relationship. Borrowing mom's car (recall **mistake #10**—I'd wrecked the Dodge) I managed to get Ann away from her folks for the well-tested trip to Solvang (one day) and a quick visit to the Magic Kingdom (the next).

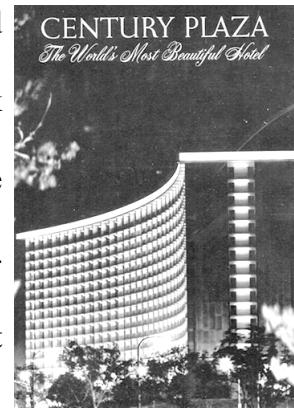
After the Disneyland trip we drove to Los Angeles for dinner with her folks at a fancy French restaurant, "Papa Shoes." Never having driven to that restaurant, I nearly got lost looking for 1925 W. Olympic Blvd. in downtown LA. Although Ann had studied French and sported a basic grasp of the grammar, she forgot to connect the fact that we were looking for a French restaurant. Looking for "Papa Shoes" we must have driven right past the "Papa Choux" sign at least three times. Although we both got a good laugh out of the gaff, her parents were not pleased about our late arrival; they were genuinely worried about us.



The next night, the three Raneys came to dinner at the house. Mom put on her best culinary effort, preparing Cornish-game-hens and artichokes. Judging by her flat expression when the food hit the table, Ruth Raney appeared un-impressed.

The parents played bridge and made every effort to get along amicably. Ann and I were pleased and thought that the evening went better than we'd expected. However, it was pretty clear that if we ever married, the in-laws would never be close.

The final evening of their visit, I drove to Los Angeles and joined the Raneys in their suite at the *Century Plaza Hotel* in Los Angeles. Jack took Ann, Ruth, and myself out for a dinner and a show downstairs at the fabled *Coconut Grove*. Frank Sinatra Jr. was the opening act. Young, red-hot superstar Dionne Warwick was the headliner and put on a knock-out performance.



One would think that the lavish aspects of this visit would have convinced me to heed my mother's cautions about class differences between the families. Instead, the events played into

my long-standing sense of over-importance. I (in my mind, rightly) aspired to live life as did the Ranseys. This gave me additional motivation to graduate from college and be successful. Pitching my tent with Ann would help me self-actualize. I wasn't about to shy away from this opportunity; I wanted to embrace it. Our correspondences continued and deepened after the visit.

Early in the spring semester, I re-connected with many high school friends, especially Ramon Estape and Danny Ponchak. Friday night poker games and many of the things we'd done in high school—playing pool, going to local night spots to hear music, and hitting the beach—reminded me why I loved LA (well, Long Beach). I also joined the boys in an activity that I'd previously foresworn: smoking pot. I had carefully avoided that pitfall while in high school. But I didn't need to study very much for classes at LBCC; my grades were crappy but I was passing. I was no longer an active athlete; a little tennis while chasing young females and riding my bike a couple miles to-and-from classes and work was about as much exercise as I got. Smoking a little dope did not seem even a potential, let alone actual, problem.

I started playing a lot of tennis, largely because I knew that Ann was still playing on her high school team and I wanted to be able to play a match with her the next time we met. I took a tennis class as the required PE course at school and soon discovered that the tennis court was a great place to meet scantily clad college-aged women. I even managed to latch onto a short-term girlfriend, a *really* cute classmate who appeared, for a short time, to be strong potential competition for my long-distance relationship. Alas, she and her family were dedicated fans of opera and I was expected to join them every mid-Saturday for the radio broadcast from the Met. I have always detested opera. After sitting through one Saturday's worth, I managed to make excuses for a couple weeks, then dropped the girl like a hot potato.

February 2, 1972 presented itself in the form reminiscent of Dickens: the day was the worst and best of times. On the good side, I was not drafted into the military and shipped off to die in Vietnam. On the bad side, Evangeline demonstrated her lack of sensitivity to my situation, perhaps suggesting that my folks were even more upset with me than I suspected.

I was terrified of being sent off to a war that I opposed. During my high school years, entry into college earned draft-aged young men an automatic draft deferment. However, Tricky Dick Nixon changed the policy in September of 1971 such that male college students were no longer spared. My classmates and I were depending on that deferral and so were left with little time to plan alternative actions before the first draft that included us. Given Roger's history in the Navy, I could not be a successful draft dodger and remain a favored son. I had been removed from the college-prep program half-way through high school and I entered the draft as a second semester junior-college freshman after leaving a 4-year university: Annapolis was out of the question. Mom had family in BC/Canada, but I did not know them well. I had not saved significant amounts of money and didn't have a car so had little hope of getting to Canada anyway. All-in-all, it looked as though I would have to go into the military, probably by enlisting in the Navy, if drafted. That brought back an old terror and everyday reality: I still did not know how to swim well enough to qualify for the Navy. I could not imagine being in the Marines or Army. I was at wit's-end thinking about the draft's peril.

The day that my draft lottery number was selected Evangeline decided that we needed groceries so packed me in the car and headed for *Los Alamitos Naval Air Station*. Over the years she did most of her shopping at the much larger *Terminal Island* commissary across town. But when we needed short fill-in's she would go to the smaller, yet closer, PX at *Los Alamitos*. Mom

was fully aware that I was fearfully anticipating the announcement of the lottery. Nevertheless, she left me sitting in the car, in a military base parking lot, watching military men and women and their families mill about, listening to the numbers announced on the radio, figuring I was cooked.

And then it was over before it (really) began: my number was 334 out of 362. There was absolutely no way, short of Armageddon, that I would be drafted. In fact, no men born in 1953 were drafted for the Vietnam War. This was good. However, the day indicated that things with my folks were not.

Life with the folks was very uneasy. Their anger and disappointment combined with a lack of trust so I soon started looking for alternative living arrangements. One of my classmates in a theatre class was a guy, Tim, who graduated one year ahead of me at SAHS. Although we had not been friends in high school, we recognized each other in the theatre class and Tim soon confided that he was looking for a roommate to share the rent for an apartment right across the street from LBCC. Since I was riding a bike to school and struggling at home, moving out seemed like a blessing. As it turned out, not so much: Freshman year **mistake #23**.

Just before I moved out, Dad and Mom put an additional constraint on continuing to live with them: They sold the house on Killdee and moved three miles to the south to a larger and newer home three blocks from northeast corner of California State University, Long Beach, a good 4.5 miles away from LBCC. It was bad enough that I'd been peddling 3.5 miles, a lot of it uphill, to reach the job at the *Signal Companies* in addition to almost a couple more getting to LBCC. If I moved across town with the folks, I'd add at least 6 miles a day to my leg-work. I was not training for competitive biking so I decided to move into the apartment with Tim.

I worked at the *Signal Companies* gig as many nights as I could over the previous Christmas break so that I could pay off my gambling debts. That also enabled me to return to the job when I got back I town in early February. But the janitor gig did not provide enough income for my new living situation so I needed an additional part time job. This led to a short run at—wait for it—*McDonalds*. The location was about 1.5 miles from the apartment. I worked at *McDonalds* long enough to learn how to prepare hamburger buns, work the burger grill, and wait on customers at the front. During my time there, the outfit rolled out a new item: the Egg McMuffin. This was before they figured out how to keep the fresh egg from escaping the rings they used for cooking it into a little rounded, congealed, mound. Managers struggled mightily with cooking those eggs to fit the toasted muffins.

My time at Micky-Ds was gratefully short: Buzz lined-up a large number of side jobs and allowed me to drive the wagon (the “Buzz-mobile”) that we used when cleaning the *Signal* out-buildings. I started making enough money, at the *Signal Companies* and the side jobs, that I was able to leave my fast-food career in the rear-view mirror, never again to work in such a place (although non-fast-food restaurant service was in my future).

The living situation, in the apartment with Tim, was tenuous at best. The apartment was small but adequate, the location across the street from school was perfect, although the cost stretched me to the limit. Worse, living with Tim, while ok at first, gradually became untenable. Tim was suffering through a series of personal crises. At first, it simply appeared that he was lamenting a difficult break-up from his steady high school girlfriend. That quickly morphed into frequent substance abuse, occasional depression, and once, talk of suicide. Then he decided that he was experiencing a coming-out transition, followed closely by two unsuccessful and aborted

attempts at relationships with men who he claimed to love dearly, climaxed by an additional suicide threat. It was clear that I needed to get free from living with Tim and the drama/chaos at the apartment.

After the spring 1972 term at LBCC, I asked the folks if I could move home. I'd ride the bike back and forth to school and work. Each ride was over 4.5 miles one way: substantially further than I'd ever intended. But I was making pretty good money and figured that I could soon afford the down payment for a car. I promised to behave myself. Gratefully, they agreed so I moved "home" and into my new room at 6530 E. Driscoll St. Gradually, our relationship recovered, moving toward an acceptable new normal that resembled our previous close and positive feelings. My time on Driscoll was generally happy. I spent the better part of three years at that address. Although happy, those years were intense and complicated. Still, I made *fewer* serious mistakes in my next phase than I had piled up across 1971-1972. Therefore, the tally stops at 23. As life usually goes, stopping the tally did *not* stop me from making dumb mistakes.

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