

# BOOK TWO: ECHOS



*Evangeline, Eddie, and Roger at  
Aunt Lucille's, 215A Termino, Long  
Beach, CA, fall, 1961*

“Our names are labels,  
plainly printed on the bottled  
essence of our past behavior”

Logan P. Smith “Afterthoughts”

## Chapter Twelve: Eddie's 1<sup>st</sup> Long Beach Trail

*New roots and a hidden loss*

### ***Welcome to Belmont Shore, fall 1961***

Just to be clear right from the start—*no one gets to call me Eddie*. Well, I should say almost no one gets to call me Eddie. Relatives and friends who have known me since childhood often still call me Eddie; my wife, Cheryl, gets to call me anything she wants, including Eddie. However, when she uses that name I say “ok Cheri.” Cheryl detests being called by the version her family used when she was little. Our children throw an “Eddie” at me when they are trying to get under my skin; it usually works. Nevertheless, I quickly sanction them.

It is a fact, however, that I went by Eddie through grade school and the early part of high school. No one gets to call me Eddie now. No one except relatives and old friends from days long gone by and sometimes my wife and our kids and . . . well . . . you get the picture.

Long Beach in the early 1960s offered many advantages over life in Waterloo, Iowa in the late 1950s. Roger and Evangeline had family throughout Southern California. Roger's eldest sister, Lucille and three of her four children (and their numerous kids), middle sister Georgette and two of her children and their kids, as well as four of Evangeline's siblings, brother Don and his large brood, bachelor brother Richard, Jerry with wife and children (Evangeline helped raise Jerry, Dick, and Don—her three younger siblings) and older brother, Joe and his wife and family, all lived within the triangle encompassed by Bakersfield, eastern Orange County, and Long Beach. Over the decades, both sides of the family shared many meals, laughter, heartaches, holidays, births, and deaths.

Family ties notwithstanding, life in Long Beach in 1961 did not get off to a smooth start. We moved in with Aunt Lucille on the second floor of her duplex, with a distant view of the

ocean from the front entry porch. This arrangement offered a quick way to move from the Midwest but almost immediately seemed less than ideal for everyone involved.

Aunt Lucille was the second oldest of dad's siblings and a devout, strict, Catholic. She believed that children should be exposed to no more than two hours of television per week. My parents, of course, insisted that since we were living with Lucille we had to follow her rules. Watching a couple of Saturday morning cartoons left me with precious little TV time for the rest of the week, excepting, of course, watching the evening news with the family.

Another major difficulty in living at Aunt Lucille's house was that there weren't other children in the neighborhood. I had been used to many neighborhood friends in Waterloo; the Frosts and Howards alone provided up to eleven playmates at any given moment. In Belmont Shore, I had only one neighborhood friend—Jimmy Atwood—a little boy who lived across the street and down a few houses. Jimmy and I were the same age and in the same grade but attended different schools so we saw very little of each other. It was not long before the boredom wrought by the TV restriction combined with loneliness over the lack of neighborhood playmates produced a somewhat unhappy little guy.

Things did not get better when I went to school in the fall. I started 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at St. Matthew's in Aunt Lucille's Catholic parish. Little children can be standoffish with strangers. In fact, sometimes little children can be downright mean. The second-graders at St. Matthew's treated me as though I was a leper who had failed to benefit from Father Damien's treatments. I made exactly one friend at St. Matthew's during the semester that I attended school there. After the first couple of weeks, a little girl named Bridget sat next to me during lunch on the playground. She had noticed that I was alone and she was kind enough to join me while we ate

our lunches from sacks or lunch pails. After a time, I told my mother about Bridget and we learned that she sometimes needed a ride home from school. We often provided that a ride transportation and I was happy to have at least one pal at school. Bridget and I became fast friends.

I was not the only one struggling with the adjustments to life in Long Beach. A central strategy in Roger's preparation for life-after-the-Navy was his completion of training and testing for, and acquisition of, a real estate sales license. He completed the training and testing before leaving Iowa and was able to sell real estate in California by working for a sponsoring realty broker. While starting to sell property, he could study for and take the California certification test and then would be well on his way into the lucrative land-sale business in Southern California. McGrath & Shank, a top-notch firm since 1939 in Belmont Shore, took him aboard as a sales associate and, in general, the future looked bright. Cash flow, however, was negligible.

Taking early retirement from the Navy found Roger without pension funds for nearly a decade. Worse, the hasty retirement combined with self-paid relocation costs (costs that had previously been covered by the Navy) found my middle-aged parents desperately short of spending money and quickly running through their reserves. I was placed in a Catholic school that charged tuition; Lucille provided a place to live and Roger and Evangeline pitched in by doing a lot of grocery shopping. Further, financial tensions were not the only irritants.

My parents never intended to live with Lucille for long; we went house shopping almost every weekend after arriving in Long Beach. Although Roger loved his sister, Lucille was a stern senior citizen with a Republican bent and a very strong will. Evangeline and Roger were life-long Democrats and, of course, no wife and mother enjoys being the "2<sup>nd</sup> woman in charge" in

her own abode, especially not an independent child of the depression and former Navy wife like Evangeline. The tensions at Termino mounted daily. Roger moved to fix the situation the best way he knew: a job with the U.S. Government. Soon, he was sorting mail part time, overnight, at the main post office in downtown Long Beach.

Although the real estate business in Southern California in the early 1960s was active and prosperous, and Roger was a quick learner and hard worker, the situation presented challenges that would not have been in place had we stayed in Iowa after his retirement. During his twenty-four-year Navy career Roger had often visited Lucille and/or traveled through Long Beach and San Diego on the way to or from this Navy duty. However, he had never lived in Long Beach. Keeping the first three rules of real estate in mind—location, location, location—there's a corollary for real estate salespeople: **know** your locations, locations, locations. Even as a newcomer to the area Roger's way-finding skills were excellent. However, Roger's familiarity with the pros and cons of various neighborhoods was weak-to-non-existent. He worked long hours learning the city and meeting potential clients, then spent much of the overnight lugging heavy bags at the post office. At a point, something had to give.

And then it happened—the big break: Roger sold a house! We were all *so excited*. He made plans to quit the post office job; mom and dad talked about how they could now afford the down payment for that little house they had found on the east side of town, just the other side of the Long Beach Airport.

Across our shared thirty years, I only saw my father cry once. Not long after the big sale, I got up from bed around 10pm, headed for the bathroom in the hall off the kitchen. Evangeline and Roger were sitting at the very small, square, kitchen table and Roger was balling like a baby,

tears running down both cheeks, with a terribly weary look on his face. He looked, for the moment and for perhaps the only time in his life, a beaten man.

“The deal fell through Evangeline. They didn’t get the loan so the house isn’t going to clear escrow. I just can’t keep working two jobs like this. I’m just too tired. I can’t do either one of them justice and I just don’t think that I can go on this way.”

I did not hear my mother’s reply; the scene was too upsetting for me and I knew that dad did not want me to see him that way. I snuck back to bed without them knowing that I’d been up. The next morning, Evangeline announced that Roger would not be selling real estate any longer and that he’d be working full-time at the post office and would try to move to a day shift as quickly as possible. That change to day work was more than two years in the making. But the real estate job stopped immediately and full-time post office work began.

### ***New House and St. Cornelius***

After a few months of dad working full-time, overnight, we moved into a two-bedroom, one-bath ranch/bungalow at 5231 Killdee Street on Long Beach’s east side so that I could start the spring semester at St. Cornelius Grade School. We had a house in California that was perfect for, and new to, us.



*5231 Killdee St., Long Beach CA 90808*

I got another chance to convince a batch of little kids they should like me and take me in. Instead, my first day at St. Cornelius featured a classmate, tough as nails Patty “What’s her

name?” threatening to beat me up right there in the classroom during my first lunch period. Yeah, a girl to beat me up, not take me in. Ah, the sweet joys of youth!

The house included an enclosed front patio. We had many a bar-b-q on that patio and I often used it as a sun porch for building an awesome California tan (my dark olive complexion didn’t require much sun before turning very tanned-brown). The back yard was fenced on the east and north where we shared property lines with neighbors and the west was blocked by the garage.

Before long, Roger put up a small, gated, wooden picket fence across the twenty-five feet or so between the back edge of the house and front edge of the garage so that we could acquire a dog. Duke was a coal black mutt with, perhaps, just a hint of cocker spaniel somewhere in his deep familial past. He was young, great fun, and a rambunctious jumper and therein lies the tale of the end of dogs at the Lamoureux’s. We had to part with Duke for fear that he would impale himself on the picket fence; we just could not get him to stop trying to jump the barrier.



*Duke. The only  
dog we/I ever  
owned*

It wasn’t long into my time at St. Cornelius before my parents’ investment in Catholic education rewarded me profusely. Having left Bridget behind at St. Matthew’s I was thrilled to discover her in attendance at the annual St. Cornelius Carnival held every fall on our parish grounds. Although it was not uncommon for people from other parishes to attend the event I had not expected to see her there and since the fall Festival during my third-grade-year was my first carnival experience at St. Cornelius it seemed that perhaps my time at the school would not be without joy. While I am sure that there were other fun events during third grade I most remember

how happy I was to see Bridget at the carnival and how eager I was to see her again the next year at our celebration.

Unfortunately, my joy turned to despair, as I was unable to find her during the Carnival in my fourth-grade-year or any year thereafter. My little friend had disappeared from view. She no longer attended St. Matthew's school and I could not find a trace of her. Eventually, when I began playing organized basketball against teams from other Catholic grade schools in Long Beach, I asked players from St. Matthew's if they knew where she had gone: no one knew anything about her. This tragedy foretold what would soon become a pattern in my relationships with young women: no luck at all and lots of self-inflicted heartache. But those are stories better left for later. Gratefully, we haven't heard the last of Bridget.

The Irish Sisters of Charity taught at St. Cornelius. There were a few lay teachers at the school; I learned from three over the course of my 6 and ½ year stay through 8<sup>th</sup> grade: Mrs.



*Sister Mary Rita, top row, far left. Principal—Mother Mary Breed, front center, Sister Margaret Mary the tallest (and almost most famous) nun.*

Burns, Mrs. Merrill, and Miss Eshman. Otherwise, the nuns were in charge of classes as well as of the school's operation.



The nuns were generally good teachers, although some of them were inadequately adjusted to life in the United States. I suffered significant psychological trauma when, in my third-grade-year, one of the nuns ran over eighth-grader Stan Wycoff on the playground (that also held the garage for the parish cars and therefore served as the thoroughfare accessing the street). The young nun was an inexperienced driver and didn't realize that she'd hit a person, so after hearing a 'thud' and stopping the car, she reversed course and ran back over the injured and prone young boy a second time. Most of the children were on the yard at lunchtime recess and many witnessed the affair in horror. We screamed at her but her windows were rolled up and she didn't hear us.

Stan was a personal favorite; I looked up to him as a sports star. He was never the same as an athlete after the accident. In our later youthful lives we shot basketballs together at the local park and Stan's damaged leg produced a significant limp and limited his jumping ability. Yet, he remained one of my local heroes for his calm resolve and kind disposition. I later learned that his injury bothered me a lot more than it did him.

One day after lunch, the second woman who served as principal during my time at St. Cornelius, Sister Margaret Mary, marched the students in the upper grades (7 & 8) into the social hall/gym and sat us down to watch a movie. This was an unusual occurrence and it seemed especially strange that she did not provide introduction to the movie or a reason why we were watching it. The material was not well connected to our curricula; it was an English historical drama of one sort or another and we didn't spend much time studying Victorian England in our classes. It seemed really long, and, did I mention that it was in black and white?

Toward the end of the film, “the old battle ax” (that’s what we sometimes called her; in reality, although stern, she was very fair, very kind, and only paddled the clothed backsides of those who truly deserved punishment) went to the front of hall, pointed to the flickering image of the leading lady in the movie and said “That is my sister!” I don’t think that I ever saw Sister Margaret Mary Fitzgerald smile quite so broadly and with such pride as at the moment that she revealed to the children that her sister was Irish (then Irish-American) stage and screen star Maureen O’Hara. Many of our mothers knew about this but Evangeline had not told me. My classmates and I, thereafter, saw Sister Margaret Mary in a slightly different light. However, she never again spoke to us about the connection.

5231 Killdee offered almost idyllic conditions in the 1960s. Of course, one had to put aside three significant features in order to fully realize that state of virtual nirvana.

First, although we didn’t know about the secret installation at the time, we lived within three blocks of an underground nuclear defense monitoring station situated behind the 16<sup>th</sup> green of Skylinks Golf Course at the corner of Clark Ave. and Spring Street. Years of air raid/nuclear bomb safety drills at St. Cornelius (huddled under the tops of our desk, curled up in a kneeling fetal position with our hands clasped over our head—yeah—that’s going to protect us from the bombs dropped on the command and control site, at the McDonnell Douglas plant by the airport ten blocks away, on the Terminal Island Naval Base across town to the north and west, or the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station a few miles to south and east) did little to reduce the cold war tensions that little kids didn’t understand but were forced to deal with anyway.

Second, the 1960s served as the low point in the Los Angeles basin’s struggle with air pollution. There were days when the air quality was very poor and reminded one that urban life

was, perhaps, not all sunshine, lollypops, and rainbows. I soon developed severe sinusitis, a condition made worse when I combined terrible personal habits (smoking) with the sometimes-almost-toxic Los Angeles air.

Third, the Kennedy assassination touched many Americans deeply. Little kids in Catholic grade school, all the more.

Still, most days found me ignoring any and all negative features. Social troubles and losing track of my first California friend did not ruin this child's life. In fact, in so many ways, growing up in Long Beach in the 1960s was just about as good as life could get, even for a lower-middle class, overly short, only moderately talented boy like me. For the most part, I spent my time at play and in sports, supported by numerous family members in activities and sound schooling that tried to prepare me for life's challenges; I only sometimes paid attention to and benefitted from the educational opportunities. Most of all, I played. I played—a lot.

The house was a mere eight blocks away from St. Cornelius; for six and one-half years, I either walked or rode a bicycle back and forth from school. During the part of the trek that went east and west on Wardlow Road between Charlemagne and my destination at Wardlow and Bellflower, featured snowy foothills gleaming to the north and east. A couple of the blocks on the route passed Wardlow Park, the public stomping grounds for uncounted numbers of neighborhood kids young and old throughout the entire time we lived on Killdee Street.

Wardlow Park was a heavily utilized and valuable haunt for me. “Wardlow” (as we called it) featured a modern, spacious indoor recreation center building where kids of all ages made crafts and played table games. The table games were in a large room complete with raised stage at one end; later in this story, I'll appear on that stage in a rock and roll band. Clean bathrooms

and fresh water fountains were supplemented with vending machines for treats. We checked-out sports equipment for play and the park provided adult supervision, coaching, and sometimes organized public-league play. There were outdoor basketball courts, two baseball/softball fields, two playgrounds with sand and age-appropriate jungle gyms and swings, as well as acres of open green space for pick-up games of football, hide and seek (lots of trees and shrubs and landscaping) and for spending time outdoors with family and friends.

I cannot imagine the total number of hours I spent in play at Wardlow, even before it served as the home field for my Saint Anthony High School varsity baseball practices and games. Every summer I spent most of the day at the park. During the school year, I often headed back to the park after walking or riding home, changing clothes, and eating a quick snack; returning home for dinner just before or just after dark. I was usually pretty tired by the time I sat down to homework. In the end, this proved a major part of my undoing.

However, Wardlow Park was not the principle site for my play and activities during the St. Cornelius years. Nor was school, although, many a night I stayed after school playing pick-up games of basketball on the schoolyard. And of course, when on one of the St. Cornelius boys' basketball teams from 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, many an after-school afternoon was spent practicing on the school yard, under the tutelage of Walter "Spud" O'Neal, a young parishioner just getting his start at what would become a fifty-plus-year high school coaching career in the Long Beach area.

Gratefully, unlike my unhappy semester on Termino Ave., we played (a lot) in our yards at home as well as a few blocks away at Wardlow. On Killdee, I was blessed with a sufficient

number of neighbor kids to keep a boy busy and happy. There were many kids in the neighborhood and St. Cornelius chums came to the house and Park for play and games.

Play at the Lamoureux house featured the 3 major American professional and college sports of the 1960s: baseball, basketball, and football. I exhibited many of the anal-retentive, high control issues that would later distinguish me (not always in a positive light) and insisted that sports should only be played “in season.” So, although we played a lot of all three sports, I was unwilling to play any of them at the wrong time of the year. Nice kid at “free play” eh?

Basketball was the sport that gave me the most joy. I spent hour-upon-hour on the court in the driveway. We went through numerous configurations of basketball backboards and goals. We could never afford a real backboard and goal. Instead, Roger bought plywood, cut a backboard, purchased a basic rim and net, then installed the thing on the garage roof, with 2X4 frames, just over the opening for the car. My hoop was never fancy but I always had a court with a working goal. We rigged a variety of floodlights from the kitchen window or the garage so that I could play after dark. Total hours spent? In the thousands, I’m sure. I played nearly every day during basketball season, two or three hours a day or night, for seven or eight years straight.

One problem though: In my mind and on the court (embodied by the actions I implemented) I copied Elgin Baylor, the 6’5” All-Star, future Hall-of-Famer playing small forward for our beloved Los Angeles Lakers. You see, when I worked out by myself without larger opponents, taking the ball inside to score and rebound like Baylor was great stuff. In fact, those skills translated to an awesome school-yard/pick-up-game persona, even against larger opponents. Right through my sophomore year of high school, when I stopped playing

competitive basketball on a team, I was almost always the best player on the driveway or outdoor court.

Unfortunately, these preferences and habits did not match the fact that I was short. I was only “as tall as the boys who weren’t the tallest guys in the class” one year (between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade) when I grew four inches and had to go on crutches because I developed Osgood-Schlatter disease. Otherwise, I was always one of the shorter players on the court. While being Elgin Baylor on the schoolyard and in the driveway was great fun, those skills did not translate well when playing five- on-five among nine much taller players. I’d also failed to develop outside shooting skills. I could dribble, run, defend, pass and drive to the basket like a maniac, but I couldn’t hit an open 15-foot jump shot to save my butt. These tendencies put an early end to my basketball career.



*When I went from 5’1” to almost 5’5” in one year, it sure seemed like I was very tall. Grew 1/2” taller. No more, Evermore*

My experiences with football continued this general theme. I can say without hesitation that for four or five years, I was the single best football player of any age at Wardlow Park. Although the park sponsored a flag-football team, I never played on the team or any organized football. I was not interested in flag football and we could not afford the entry fee and equipment required for Pop Warner youth football. Instead, I played in pick-up games at Wardlow and nearby Whaley Park almost every afternoon/evening/weekend during football season. These games usually consisted of five or six boys to a side. The games were very rough and tumble. We were orderly and we played fair, but we played tackle football without equipment. I usually played quarterback or running back on offense and in the defensive backfield. I was fast, shifty, and very tough to tackle. In fact, I didn’t get tackled very often

though I got hit a lot. I simply didn't go down easily. At the parks, my small, wiry, stature complimented above average speed and elusive running ability. I played tough and was seldom tackled. I didn't throw many passes as we usually called plays that found me running through, around, or over the opposing players. It didn't matter whether the others were bigger, faster, stronger, or older. I simply was a force of nature running with a football. Later we'll note that these abilities did not translate to organized high school football.

That brings us to our sports epoch. Very soon after moving to Long Beach, Dad and I began focusing on the feature that served to cement our relationship through thick and thin and everything in-between for the rest of our lives together: baseball, particularly Major League Baseball and more specifically, the Los Angeles Angels.

Although we had attended one Dodger/Giant game in the Coliseum the summer before we moved to Long Beach, there was no way in hell that Roger was going to be a Dodger fan and if he wasn't on board with the L.A. team, I wasn't going to join that parade either. Instead, I simultaneously reinforced my love of reading and baseball by consuming every youth-focused book sports biography I could get my hands on at the local branch of the Long Beach Public Library and strictly avoided books about Dodger players. I specialized in reading books about Milwaukee Braves players Aaron, Mathews, and Spahn although I also sampled more general fare featuring Babe Ruth and two Dodger exceptions Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella (they were, after all, extraordinary men).

Then, in time for the 1961 season, Los Angeles Angels joined the Lamoureuxs (and other American League baseball fans) in Southern California. With great rejoicing, father drove off with son for the Los Angeles version of Wrigley Field (named such, a year before the Chicago

version got its name) to see the new American League entry. There, a veteran relief pitcher in his last year in major league baseball, Tom Morgan, tossed a baseball over the left-field side rail to the most excited seven-year-old in Southern California and cemented a life-long love affair among father, son, and a baseball franchise.

A couple years of agony followed as the Angels took their home games to (I can hardly write this) Dodger Stadium—a place that we Angel fans referred to via its more generic name: Chavez Ravine. Roger detested driving the L.A. freeways and the trip to Chavez Ravine was significantly further from Long Beach and more difficult than the drive to Wrigley Field had been.



*Wrigley Field, Los Angeles  
First home of the LA Angels*

Nevertheless, we took in a few Angel games during those dark days in Dodgerville. Happily, once the Angels moved to Anaheim, the twenty-four-minute trip, back-door to stadium-seat, made following the Halos (California Angels, Anaheim Angels, long after I'd left Long Beach—the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim—and finally, the Los Angeles Angels) an oft-occurring ritual. Although we enjoyed following the Lakers and Rams as well as playing and practicing football, basketball, golf, and boxing, baseball provided the tie that binds.

Although he'd played high school football and boxed while in the Navy, baseball was Roger's favorite spectator sport and we developed a strongly-shared love of the game. In fact, we played catch together every single day during baseball season for well over a decade. From the first days at Killdee St., Roger threw baseballs in my direction, either to catch and throw back, as pop-ups and short flies to chase down, or as ground balls to lunge at. At the start, when I was little and learning the basics, he called a non-stop "play-by-play" with our catch. This both



entertained and motivated me. Later, after I'd mastered the basics, grown larger and no longer needed fly balls and ground balls, Dad bought a catcher's glove and served as my battery-mate as I developed pitching skills. At that point, the "play-by-play" resumed and focused on balls and strikes and the count on the batter and whether I'd laid in a "fat one." In short, Roger and I spent more time playing baseball than anything else we did together.

I played organized Little League from a year on a "farm" team, the Tigers (summer of 1964), through a year in the "minors" on the 7-UP "all stars" ("all stars" was just a team name; we were not automatically "All Stars") coached by Mr. Phillips who later became the only soldier I knew killed in Vietnam. Finally, I spent two years in the "majors" on the Dodgers (that was an oxymoronic uniform for me to put on!).



*Kinda lost, first day of farm league practice with the Tigers*

I was so small that, on the farm and minor league teams, I was immediately cast as a 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman (the position for the smallest player with the weakest arm and without expectation for powerful offensive accomplishments). Baseball did



*Minor league, summer 1963*

not come easily to me; I was not excessively coordinated and didn't stand out from the other players other than being very small compared to most of the other boys my age. My September 11 birthday would not have allowed entry into kindergarten in California as it had in Iowa; In California, I would have waited another year. So I was always young and small around other boys in my class.

After the year in minors, Frank Mott, manager of the ELBLL majors-division Dodgers, said that he saw something special (that word again) in me so drafted me for his team;

he ended up pretty happy that he did. The first year with the Dodgers I became their starting 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman.

The second year I played in the majors, I played on the same Dodger team but for Mr. Ellis who followed Mr. Mott. That season I was the starting 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman, the team's best hitter, and its best starting pitcher. My last summer in Little



*Frank Mott's Dodgers won 1<sup>st</sup> place trophies that year*

League followed the year of my growth spurt; I made the All-Star team and looked to have real potential. Of course, I would not have made that All-Star team as starting third baseman if my best friend and classmate, Craig Loe, wasn't 6-months older so aged-out of Little League before that season. Craig was always much the better player.

Still, none of this describes the baseball activity I played the most. I played most of my baseball alone. Just me, a glove, a rubber ball, a wall, and my version of Buddy Blattner (the first radio voice of the Angels) or Dick Enberg (my favorite Halos' radio voice). I spent hour-after-hour throwing a rubber ball at a wall—usually the wall of our garage facing/in the backyard, fielding the return, while narrating the game as though each throw represented a pitch or play in a real game.

I always wanted Dad to buy a pitch-back screen (sometimes called a “pitch-and-catch”) but he either couldn't afford one or figured we'd play less catch together if he provided one. So instead, I beat the be-jesus out of our garage wall with cheap rubber baseballs. Hours on end; sometimes most of a summer's day, with breaks for liquids, snacks, or meals. I forced myself to reach for grounders that were way out of my range, forehand and especially backhand. I drew

targets of all shapes and sizes with chalk and practiced pitch after pitch; first serving as pitcher, then as his defensive infield as opposing batters bashed strikes that got too much of the plate.

Even better, I took my glove and ball to Grandpa Cy and Grandma Anne's trailer park when we went to visit them at Rancho La Paz in Buena Park. There, the laundry room that was just behind their trailer, across a narrow street, provided a wide wall laid out next to an even wider patch of cement with asphalt street behind. After an hour or so of working up a good sweat, the laundry room soda vending machine offered sweet relief that I never got at home (Mom only purchased sodas for the adults to use as mixers; never pop to drink). And to top it off, Grandma Annie provided the world's best chocolate chip cookies: fresh, hot, soft, gooey, out-of-this-world. Perhaps the greatest tragedy in the collective lives of my family is that the late Grandma Anne Bechtel took her chocolate chip cookie recipe with her to the great-beyond as no one had the good sense to copy or save it. Sigh.

As much as I enjoyed baseball (I did love the game) and as good a player as I'd become (there was a load of real potential, and some actual, there), I was worn out with baseball by the age of 13. Further, I simply did not think of myself as a baseball player. I wanted to play basketball and I planned to go out for freshman football a year down the road after entering high school in the fall, 1967. At the end of my last season in the "Majors" with the "Dodgers," Mr. Ellis asked me to stay with him and play on the Pony League team that he was taking his son to and managing. This point became one of the watershed moments in my youth. I thanked him but I told him that I was not going to play any more baseball: I was tired of it.

Now, what the dickens was I thinking? Most players had to try out for Pony League teams; some players didn't make it. I was being recruited and promised a spot on the team and

yet, I wasn't interested? In my crazy little self-absorbed head, I felt burned out over baseball. By that time, I had played a lot of baseball. I was, what, twelve going on thirteen? Burned out? Really? That seems incredibly self-absorbed and unrealistic for a pre-teenager, even if I had "played, a lot." So, I turned my back on Pony League, which was a de-facto-opt-out of the next stop—Colt League—and a virtual lock that I'd never play in the top youth league, American Legion ball. In short, I put what appeared to be an end to my hardly budded baseball career. I did not play baseball during my first two years at St. Anthony High School.

While baseball was Roger's favorite spectator sport he preferred spending time on a golf course than sitting in the stands or in front of a television set watching sports. The Chief was never a proficient golfer. Rog played in the 90s; he seldom shot lower than 89 or over 100. But he always played the full eighteen holes—he did not like quitters and he'd paid for a full round of golf. Roger walked the course pulling a rolling cart with clubs-in-bag behind. He did not wear fancy or flashy golfing attire: he always wore appropriate golf slacks, tops, and good quality golf shoes. Roger never cheated when playing golf; he hit the ball from wherever it stopped rolling, counted all strokes and penalties, and never took more than the one mulligan per 18-hole round that he and his mates allowed. He loved the outdoors, enjoyed chatting with the people he played the round with, and he especially adored the camaraderie of the 19<sup>th</sup> hole around a table in or just outside of the clubhouse after the round.

I had been given a set of plastic golf clubs, in Hawaii, for my 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and when I was old enough to behave myself with a level of decorum, Roger provided a starter set soon followed by a junior set. None of these clubs were top-notch; we didn't have the budget for high-end sports equipment. Dad played golf with two sets of clubs in forty years, only changing his oldest

set for new once. Still, I always had sticks that fit my height and relative strength and all the slightly used golf balls I needed for practice shots. We often went to one of the local driving ranges to hit a bucket of balls; sometimes we'd stop at a course we encountered along our way and spend thirty minutes in putting contests on the practice green.

My father seldom, if ever, broke the law; his years of government service, his military training, and his strong commitment to strict Catholicism simply didn't allow cutting corners on taxes, speed limits, or righteous and polite speech. For Roger, laws were in place for good reasons and should therefore be followed. Golf provided the single exception to those life-guiding principles. On the one hand, the Chief felt no sense of entitlement; he was not motivated by false arguments such as "I pay my taxes and it's a public course" or "I pay for lots of rounds so they owe me a freebee once in a while." Yet, for one reason or the other, he simply did not see any harm in walking to the end of the block, crossing Clark Ave., and climbing over the chain-link fence to play a hole or two just before sundown. Many nights, he took me along; to the extent that I ever "learned to play golf," the learning curve began, across the street, on the par 5, 11th hole, at *Skylinks Public Golf Course* (now called *Skylinks at Long Beach*) in East Long Beach California.

As much as he enjoyed the social side of golf, and in direct contradiction to his relaxed and measured approach to every other activity, Roger was not able to detach negative emotions from his golf game. He often gripped the club too tight, pursed his lips and distorted his facial expressions unnaturally, and in general, simply could not keep himself from the tension and pressure that blocked his natural coordination. He seldom cursed, never threw a club, and always

finished even a bad round. Yet, Dad simply did not play well enough to create a safe space enabling him to improve his score and lower his blood pressure.

Unfortunately, I acquired some of his negative emotional habits although I've never felt that he forced them on me. I simply experience many of the same sensations and negative outcomes. I've always been able to cut ten strokes off Roger's game and finish about as close to 85 as 90. However, given my overall athleticism, I always thought that playing better golf was just around the corner, next round, or next season. And like the Chief, control over the game resulting in significantly lower scores never happened.

Sports were not the only extra-curricular activities drawing attention during the grade school years. I was also busy working on life as a small-time punk. Well, ok, that was a bit overstated. After all, and at the bottom of it, I was a very well-behaved young person who hardly ever got caught in misbehavior. Still, there was that "special" tag hanging over me, somewhat unrealized. I suppose like everyone else, I just wanted to belong. But when one wants to belong specially, well, then one has to aspire to achievements of greater-than-average dimension. I took to tobacco, the gang, and music; Boy Scouts, girls, and church activities came in weak also-rans.

First, I took the decision that smoking would help me look and be cool. Let's ignore the fact that I was a 4'8" 5<sup>th</sup> grader and looked absolutely stupid with a cigarette hanging out of my mouth. Celebrities smoked, and better yet, both parents smoked so that I could easily steal a pack from them, now and then, without the risk of being caught procuring smokes (which I could not have done at retail outlets given that I could barely pass for a 10-year-old). Sneaking the occasional Winston in the bushes at Wardlow Park hardly left a "cool" impression on anyone, yet, I had a pack in my pocket or bag in case a friend lit up, so I could join them and start fitting

right in. Never mind that the combination of cigarette smoke and LA smog led directly to chronic and severe sinusitis to the point that I would have accepted beheading as well-deserved justice. I was *so cool*.

Now, I was never in an actual gang and there weren't enough of us to qualify as a "club." Even in the 1960s, a real gang in Long Beach, California could find one ending up in loads of trouble. However, I wanted to run with the "in" crowd and at all-white Saint Cornelius grade school, that generally just meant being able to hang out with a group of well-thought-of guys. To my chagrin, the really "in" guys were so much bigger and more popular, that, while they were my friends and teammates, they never encouraged me to hang out with them.

Further, merely smoking did not get me into a gang. Joining with 4 of my classmates by acquiring like-designed Levi jackets, wearing "pixie boots" (black leather shoes with pointed toes), walking to, and hanging out together in Jerry Pettit or WruX Willey's garage qualified us. Walking four across to-and-from our appointed destinations seemed, to us, a special sign of our—well—gang-ness. The good news is that we did not get involved in any criminal activity. About our worst activities were smoking and wasting time we should have spent on schoolwork. In fact, the gang didn't last long as two of its members, Jerry and I, quickly got diverted to a more productive group activity.

Jerry played the drums; he laid down a heavy beat with peppy accents and a solid rhythmic sense. Every once in a while, Jerry would go a little crazy and bang out a riff so intense that it scared the hell out of us. I sang at every opportunity; most often, at home in front of a mirror while pretending to be (and lip-synching along with, especially) Smokey Robinson, Levi Stubbs, or other favorite Motown vocalists. Heck, I even did a mean Diana Ross set, as my

childhood 1<sup>st</sup> tenor didn't change until after sophomore year in high school. I eventually led the singing (from the front, of course) at mass and I was one of the stronger voices in the kids' choir. Danny Day, one of the guys who didn't join the gang, but who wanted to, was limited by two things: he had a lower-body disability that often found him wheelchair bound (so he wasn't able to walk around with us, four or five across) and he took piano lessons and had to practice in the afternoons, so wasn't available for our kind of sitting around. But Danny played both keyboards and guitar and had electric equipment. So, Jerry and I, and at first, WruX, sought Danny out and started a band. Now who the heck needs a club/gang in Southern California in the 60s if one can be in a band? And what better way to stand out than to stand out than to be the lead singer, in front?!

I had wanted to play the guitar and my folks had provided a starter acoustic instrument and some lessons. I quickly stopped taking lessons so didn't play very well and I didn't have electric equipment to add to what Danny initially brought to the group. But after the band got going, I started saving the money that I made from mowing lawns and began looking for an electric guitar to purchase.

Dad set me up in the lawn mowing business so that he would not have to issue a weekly allowance. He bought a high-quality gas mower and edger with the following terms:

“Eddie, you can use these as often as you want; cut any yard you can walk to; I'll pay for the gas and keep them running. In return, you will cut our yard once a week, just the way I would, no charge. Do a good job and don't miss a week and you can use the equipment.”



Our yard was always done on time, properly (the way Roger would have done it), and I worked my way up to as many as eight yards a week without as much as going around the block. I might have been the only kid at St. Cornelius, without a paper route, earning \$20.00 a week.

Eventually, I added an electric guitar to our little group. Danny provided keyboard, lead guitar and amps, Jerry played drums. Eventually, we dumped WruX because he couldn't play or sing a lick, and went on as a threesome calling the band *the Guilds* (the brand-name of Danny's fancy electric guitar). I sang lead, Danny chimed in with harmony, and we mostly just sucked at it. However, we worked up two or three songs that we played pretty well and once opened the weekly dance/show for teenagers at the Wardlow Park social hall. We considered entering a battle of the bands there but knew that we didn't quite have the chops for it.

However, the music didn't end there. Playing in the band developed my rhythm guitar skills (a little) and before long, and by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and at the end of *the Guilds*, I was performing in a folk group with two female classmates, Sadie Dietch and Karol Zentgraf. Karol had a wonderful soprano voice; a Karen Carpenter-like sound before the Carpenters made their names in Long Beach at the state college. Sadie ranged between mezzo and contralto with a very strong ear for harmony. The two made wonderful sounds together. I was still a full-out little boy tenor but without a good ear for pitch. As a result, when Karol wasn't singing the lead, I sang it, mostly because I couldn't hold a harmony note to save my soul. The girls could, so once again, I was out front most often. We practiced together, played at church, played in the school hall, even played a few paid wedding gigs. We never named the group and we were always held back by the fact that I wasn't able to play guitar well enough to fashion an authentic folk background for our voices. But we had a blast singing with each other and the group kept me connected to music

in much the same way that I would remain the rest of my life: playing and singing a little and always wishing/wanting for a little bit more, but never willing or able to really work hard enough at it to learn and/or conquer the mysteries. What came, came easy, or it didn't come at all. Very much like my social life. Sigh.

My social efforts with girls were hindered by similar shortcomings and preferences as those that plagued my musical and athletic activities: my self-image, way too often, did not match the facts on the ground. Nevertheless, I persevered as though I could have, and be, whatever I wanted. I was, after all, special. For now, let's just note that I mooned after a long list of girls/young women, from grade school through high school, who fit my fancy without a hint of interest on their part in return.

I should, I suppose, also mention the Boy Scouts affair. Mom took a real enthusiastic liking to being a Cub Scout leader. In those days in Long Beach, Moms were in charge of Cub Scouts; the Dads took over for Boy Scouts. Evangeline was good at crafts, organizing games in the yard or living room, baking cookies and treats, keeping the kids in line while piling on the fun. She really loved having little boys around; I think it reminded her of the many years that she cared for her younger brothers Jerry, and especially, Dick and Donald in North Dakota. I loved the fact that my Mom was in charge; that made me seem special in the group. When it came time to transition to Boy Scouts, I was all for it. That faded pretty quickly.

Roger really enjoyed the Boy Scouts but for far different reasons than Mom's love for tending the younger Cubs. The Chief wanted no part of leading in scouts. Rog led men during war and spent a lifetime in military service: leading Boy Scouts didn't strike him either as a substitute or as a gateway to any higher calling. However, Roger adored camping; he was, after

all, a country/farm boy stuck in the big city. While I was a Scout, my Dad simply couldn't wait to go on the next scheduled camp out. We took them about once a month in fall and spring. Dad didn't miss many. As part of the camping experience, Dad hung out with the men. Well, not all of the men. My father never hung out with the leaders. In our case, the Boy Scout leaders seemed pretty full of themselves as they acted out para-military and authoritarian personae around boys of 10, 11, and 12. Dad wanted no part of that nonsense. At most campouts, I'd see him sitting at a picnic table, coffee or beer and cigarette in his hands, talking with one of the other, non-leader-fathers. That person was often of either Latino or Philippine decent. I don't know if they told stories about the military and war or if they talked about their upbringing. But my Dad almost always sought out a man with an interesting life and stories to tell. And he loved talking around the campfire.

Me, on the other hand, not so much. I never liked being dirty, detested the grime left by a campfire, didn't like sleeping in a bag or tent, hated out-houses, and wanted no part of being on a team for activities that weren't one of my primary sports (and we never played baseball, basketball, or football during scouting). I had a terrible time earning badges, largely because I refused to study non-school material. Further, not insignificantly, there was always a swimming requirement down the road and I was a lousy swimmer who probably wasn't going to get passed that point anyway, so why bother with the rest? At home, as an only child, I had my own room and control over my belongings and life. In the Scouts, I was under someone else's control and their idea of a good time. Generally, I did not enjoy my time in service. Later, these factors contributed to my sense of dread over the military draft.

My lack of respect for the Scouts came to a head late in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Our spring camp-out was notorious for the six-mile march into the Valley Forge campground in the Mount Wilson foothills. Although I was athletic, I never much like hiking. Six miles, with packs, struck me as obsessive and bordering on child abuse. I decided that if we were going to hike six miles, we might as well be rewarded at the end of the long trail; so, I brought along a six-pack of beer and a pack of cigarettes for after-the-hike. If I had to haul a heavy pack it was going to contain stuff I really wanted to bring along. Yep, had to heist them from the folks—gradually, over time, leading up to the camp. Of course, I couldn't keep the beers cold in my backpack. No such a thing as gel cold packs in the Lamoureux house in 1965. Regardless, I shared the bounty with a few of the guys, around an outlying, slightly darkened, fire pit, the evening after our hike. Warm beer never tasted quite so good even to one who had not yet acquired a taste for beer. And, even in the dark, I looked *so* cool with a cigarette. [Flash forward 10 years or so: When I finally quit smoking, a major motivation was that I discovered I did not enjoy smoking in the dark. As a somewhat mature adult, it dawned on me that enjoying watching myself “blow smoke” was not particularly honorable, and certainly didn't mark me as “cool.”]

As we could have predicted (and should have taken action against—since we sort of expected it) the son of the one of the adult leaders “finked” on us as soon as he got home. We hadn't invited him to share in our bounty: He was unpopular, largely because he of his dad's ham-handed “iron fist,” and the boy acted like a total ass around us. Not inviting him left him eager to get even.

The Monday night after our Sunday return, two of the leaders showed up at the Killdee St. front door and accused me of the heinous crimes. I lied at first, but by morning I fessed up.

And there it was: I was supposed to go apologize to the troop and especially the leaders. Having none of that, I resigned, well, quit, the Boy Scouts post-haste. Soon thereafter, Dad and Mom decided that they would both quit smoking and by the time that I graduated from grade school, my days as a smoker were few-and-far-between as my local source dried up. It was a couple of years before I could start up again when my high school buddies were big enough to buy cigarettes at retail or from machines.

The Boy Scout affair represents the most trouble I got into during grade school. Generally, I had a reputation as a “good boy”—just short of angelic, but trustworthy and well-behaved. Some of that was mere appearance; after all, I was stealing cigarettes and smoking, aspiring to hang out with the rough crowd, and exceedingly eager to find out more about girls than the virtually nothing that I knew. Once, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was caught red-handed, cheating in Math class. Miss Eshman gave a daily quiz; we wrote down our answers and then got out of our desks, walked around the room, gave the sheet to another student to grade, graded theirs, then returned the papers to the original owner. I decided that since I was starting to have a lot of trouble with math, my grades would be better if I graded my own quizzes—after changing a few of the wrong answers of course. So, I got up, walked around, came back with my own paper, made some of my wrong answers into correct ones while “grading” the quiz, then repeated the fake handoff, returning to my seat and turning in a pretty darned good quiz. A couple weeks into the drill, Miss Eshman caught on, I was busted, and my math scores were never as high thereafter.

It was, in fact, in Miss Eshman’s class that my math skills went totally downhill. Even though almost everyone—students, teachers, and especially parents—alike were confused by

“the new math,” (rolled out when we were in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade), by the time 7<sup>th</sup> grade came around, we were starting to get the hang of it. I was doing so well that I was one of a small number from my class selected to go downtown to St. Anthony High School’s annual “Math Day Celebration.”

There was a long-lasting down side to my progress in 7<sup>th</sup> grade math. As part of “new math advancements,” Miss Eshman put us into two-person teams and allowed us to work with a buddy. I was very good at conceptualizing math problems. Roger had tutored me along the way and one of his real strengths was breaking down a problem to see how it fit together before solving the various parts. I had learned the skill and was able to apply the problem-solving technique to almost any math challenge. Good friend and classmate, Randy Borquez, was really talented at calculations. He had mastered basic and new math and was a very quick “computer.” Together, we qualified for the St. Anthony Math Day as a team. I conceptualized the problems, Randy worked them out quickly, and we always beat the clock and most always got the problems correct. But by the time I hit 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I could no longer calculate math problems on my own. Things went downhill from there. I was able to pass grade school math but struggled with high school geometry and did not pass high school algebra in two tries. Inability to do math eventually contributed to my removal from our high school’s “college prep” curricula. And the real kicker to that sad story comes *much* later, in statistics classes I took during the Ph.D. program I would complete.

Over the grade school years, many of my “exploits” stayed under the radar such that my positive reputation generally held. I was tapped for leadership positions such as making announcements in the morning over the PA system, raising the flag in front of school (although I was forced out of that honor after the Boy Scout incident), and policing the orderliness of

morning line-up for prayers on the yard. However, lack of math ability and a propensity to quit rather than toughing things out eventually took a back seat to the most troublesome aspect of my developing personality and life-course.

While Evangeline and Roger were never able to “spoil” me in a technical sense, we just didn’t have the resources for it, being an adopted only child provided me with a world largely constructed around, well, me. Being a little cute, then a little handsome, a little talented, and then a little bit accomplished—these all contributed to a burgeoning sense of self-importance that rushed right up to the edge of what Roger called “a very big head on somewhat narrow shoulders.” Roger’s solution was to tease me a lot. He felt that a solid dose of regular verbal abuse helped remind me of my place while being acceptable because I knew that he was just kidding. And the man was really good with the verbal spar. I managed to pick up a trick or two from the old man.

As I grew up, I became increasingly argumentative and I was good at it. I was smart and articulate. By the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, my bookshelf included a paperback copy of *So You Want to Be a Lawyer* and I had every intention of following through in law school. The need to argue, in and of itself, wasn’t the immediate problem. The first problematic outcome circulated around a fundamental feature: faith (or more specifically, its fading influence in my life).

I spent loads of time in church during grade school. I became an altar boy and often rode my bike to serve at 6:30 mass before school. By 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I was one of the servers sometimes chosen for funerals or weddings, events at which servers earned small gratuities after the services. I regularly led prayers and songs from the lectern in the front, at the side of the altar, at

both weekday and Sunday masses. During high school, I became a Sunday mass usher at the parish.

However, late in our 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, I also began skipping some Sunday masses by riding my bike over to Wardlow Park after making a brief appearance at the start of mass, then returning toward the end so that I'd again be seen mingling in the crowd. I'd pick up a Sunday bulletin to bring home and have a quick look at the day's readings in the missal so that I could recount something interesting from the service. I was beginning to doubt the Catholic Church and some of its teachings as it seemed the more I learned about church history and dogma, the less believable I found it to be.

Instruction prior to the sacrament of Confirmation increased both my anxiety and raised the level of my doubts. Church teachings often didn't "add up" to me; many simply defied normal logic. Worse, the diocese was promoting an anti-substance abuse program as part of the Confirmation process. Students were asked to "Take the Pledge," which meant that everyone was expected to sign a document promising to abstain from using alcohol until we turned 21 and to avoid all drug use. I had no problem with the latter; I went through high school without ever touching pot let alone stronger drugs. But I did not see the wisdom in signing a pledge against drinking when every single one of us knew that we'd try a few drinks, or more, during high school. How hypocritical!

Worse, Confirmation was presented to us as our first opportunity for making adult choices about religion. Arguer that I'd become, Confirmation did not appear to me to be much of a choice at all. No one was asked if they wanted to opt out. The thought of such rebellion was



abhorrent among all teachers, nuns, priests, and parents as well as most of the students. No one was allowed to skip the extra religion study sessions.

Flash forward twenty-five years or so: We faced the same nonsense in St. Marks parish in Peoria when oldest daughter, Samantha, wanted to opt-out of Confirmation. While she was allowed to decide to not be Confirmed, she was required to attend all of the instruction and practices. Like that wasn't coercive and mean-spirited! Samantha is also, now, a former Catholic.

In addition to not being able to choose to opt-out, we were all expected to sign “the pledge,” a document that was little more than a poorly thought-out, prematurely-told lie. I refused to sign. I did my best to keep my explanation and justification focused on my unwillingness to blindly bind myself, at age twelve/thirteen, to behavior at sixteen through twenty. But deep inside, I knew that there was more to it; I knew that I was questioning church authority and my Catholic faith and I knew, even then, that my devotion to and connection with the Catholic Church would never again reach the depths I had earlier experienced. I was, in effect, done being a faithful Catholic even before entering four years of Catholic high school at the only place I'd ever wanted to go to high school: St. Anthony High School in Long Beach, California.

Between Confirmation and grade school graduation, prior to going to high school, I entered another unsuccessful relationship marring my otherwise happy early adolescence. As eighth-graders-to-be, we were allowed to attend one Catholic Youth Organization—CYO/Chi Rho—dance in the summer between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. This event served as a promotional teaser that mostly worked as planned: After graduation, many of us joined the CYO associated with our parish. I became our Chi Rho president after two years. I delivered my first “formal” speech in

support of the vote for that office; no one else speech-i-fied for this job—I was eloquent and damn silly.

The group sometimes took field trips, for example, to the beach, Disneyland (replacing the annual St. Patrick's Day grade school trip) or to watch prominent new movies at destination theaters around Southern California. Chi Rho's regular meetings were held monthly in the school gym/social hall (constructed in the original church after a new house-of-worship was built in the mid-60s). We danced to records—well, I should say, we attempted to move in ways that reminded us of the dancing that we saw watching teen dance shows on television. And of course, the girls danced better than the boys—and usually with each other—as the two genders were still not often talking to each other let alone dancing together. We ate snacks and downed massive amounts of soft drinks. This all amounted to a series of mostly awkward attempts at mixing the boys and girls who St. Cornelius' priests, nuns, and teachers had worked so feverishly, for the seven previous years, to keep apart. Generally, the educators could be proud: the mixing was exceedingly tentative.



*Debbie Lafayette in 1968. To me, the prettiest 15-year- old girl on the planet*

There wasn't much for the adults to worry about in my case as I continued the penchant for crushes on girls who did not return my interest: Debbie Lafayette came next. Debbie and I met at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Chi Rho preview event. Deb was in public schools and was headed for Millikan High School (rather than St. Anthony Girls High School). Chi Rho was one of the few places that Catholic boys and girls who did not attend the same schools mixed socially. Although we had neighborhood friends who did not attend our school and we occasionally hung around and/or played with people at the

local park who, likewise, did not share school affiliation, most of my friends were classmates at St. Cornelius. Further, in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade I didn't spend much time with females (classmates or otherwise). Many of the same-age public school Catholic kids, within the parish boundaries, attended CCD (Confirmation of Christian Doctrine) classes at St. Cornelius in order to go through the sacrament of Confirmation during 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Some of the students had attended CCD throughout grade school as a substitute for the religion classes they did not get in public grade schools. Those public-school-CCD students were also invited to the Chi Rho dance party at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Conveniently, Deb and her family lived in a house that was relatively close to mine; perhaps six blocks away. I still did a lot of bike riding in those days—to-and-from St. Cornelius, to-and-from Wardlow Park, and to-and-from the shopping center just a few blocks further than Deb's house, right across the street from the US Postal station at Bellflower and Spring where my dad worked—her house was (sort of) between mine and St. Cornelius, if I rode home via a less-than-direct route. After we met, I visited her home as often as I could.

I rode over to Debbie's house hoping that we could spend time together; often we did. We sometimes met in the living room or kitchen; other times we stood just outside the front door on the sidewalk or in the yard, usually carrying on a long conversation. I was quite the chatterbox in those days while Debbie was a semi-willing participant and a very good listener. I do not believe that she was as enthused with, or impressed by, our conversations as I was. For a couple of youthful decades, I tended to dominate conversations by pontificating about religion and/or politics. I think she humored me more than deeply sharing my interests. She has always been exceedingly polite. Regardless, she gave every impression of enjoying my company and she was

usually willing to come out for a chat or to invite me in for a soft drink and some time with her family.

One of the things I most looked forward to after 8<sup>th</sup> grade was the chance to pursue a deeper relationship with Debbie; I assumed that our joint membership in Chi Rho would facilitate this. By the second year of our membership in the club, I became president of the organization and she was the secretary on our board.

Regardless of my enthusiasm, Debbie and I did not go out on dates, as such. At the start, neither of us had a driver's license nor ready access to a car. Once I obtained both, I embarked on a campaign for her heart by taking her on day trips (rather than traditional dates at night) that demonstrated both my good taste and willingness to go the extra mile to win her hand. Before she cut me loose, we had memorable day outings at a couple of the most romantic locations Southern California has to offer: Santa Barbara/Solvang and Laguna Beach.

Santa Barbara/Solvang eventually became one of my go-to outings when demonstrating romantic fervor. Next to Friday or Saturday nights at Disneyland (much quicker and less expensive and yet a lot of fun), Santa Barbara/Solvang served as my ace-in-the-hole toward a hoped for "get." I took Debbie on my initial Santa Barbara/Solvang foray. "Got" nothing but had a wonderful day.

On a weekend morning, the drive from Long Beach to Santa Barbara took just under 2 ½ hours; quite a bit further than most outings, but an easy drive without the weekday freeway traffic. Long talks with just the right traveling music in the background set the stage for a



*Solvang, CA*

memorable day. Santa Barbara offered the best morning cup-a-joe and pastry money could buy, with the Pacific in view and the crisp morning air turning toward a sunny California afternoon.

After a walk along the beach and pier, a short 45-minute drive up into the foothills brought Solvang into view. Dutch charm and California weather combined to produce a hidden treasure, tucked into the hillside, for me to share with my special someone of the day. A walk around the village helped make room for Dutch culinary delights at lunch, followed by another brisk walk through shops and tourist-laden streets. As 2 o'clock wound its way toward 3, I headed the car for home long before dark, in time for dinner, with heads—and hopefully hearts—filled with good thoughts and love. Well, at least it should have worked that way. Debbie and I certainly enjoyed that first adventure; it did, after all, set my template for future such efforts. Alas, the end of the day was not met with the long, languid, kiss that I longed for. The usual quick hug and peck on the cheek was just enough to spur me to further efforts yet limited enough to enable Debbie to continue keeping her distance.

Our other major outing featured (what is now the annual) *Sawdust Art Festival* in Laguna Beach. Sawdust, at this point, in its second year, was everyman's alternative to the long-standing, expensive, and professional Laguna Arts Fair. Sawdust was artsy, trendy, cool, outdoors, and best of all, free! Laguna Beach is fun, exotic, and romantic as sun, food, and fresh air mingle in a heady brew of artistic expression and trend-setting style. Sawdust provided the perfect walk-around setting for hand holding and artistic-lite aesthetic excitation of the senses (and passions?).

Unfortunately, by the time that we attended Sawdust, the dye had been pretty much cast against our relationship. All through this period, my folk-singing partner, Karol Zentgraf, showed continued and increasing interest in me to the point that we ended up going to a Chi Rho beach

trip together, arm in arm, with stolen kisses on the bus on the way home. Alas, I was too taken with Debbie to stay with Karol, a decision I regretted once Karol took up with other boys at St. Anthony High School and Debbie left me behind for good. Still, the idea that maybe I shouldn't wait much longer for Debbie to come around was beginning to set in.

By the end of the summer after our freshman year in high school, Deb and I spent the year separated by schools and activities and were involved in our first boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. I was busy, during the better part of freshman year, trying to work around Janet Lester's braces and Debbie was well on her way to finding her first real boy-friend, a big, football-playing, very handsome and kind young man. Life went on, albeit more sadly and lonely than I wanted.

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