

# Forward

## *Thanksgiving Breakfast*

In northeastern Pennsylvania about a hundred miles north of Philadelphia is the small community of Clarks Summit. Nestled on top of one of the Blue Ridge Mountains, it's a picturesque little village with narrow streets shaded by large maple and oak trees. It was founded by William Clark, a veteran of the Revolutionary War. He fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill and spent a winter at Valley Forge with General Washington. For his service he was granted eight hundred acres in the Abington wilderness. He built a log cabin there in 1799; one hundred years later a school was built. In 1911 the borough of Clarks Summit was incorporated.

For thousands of years, the Indians roamed this area; but in the late 1800s, the major influences were coal mining, farming and the railroad. In 1913 Clarks Summit was scarred by what was known as the "big cut." A deep ravine was dug through the town to accommodate the construction of the largest concrete structure in the world at the time: the magnificent Nicholson Bridge. Like so many other changes in Clarks Summit, the ravine still has a subtle but powerful effect on the community that an outsider may not notice.

The natural barrier of the mountains separated Clarks Summit and the Abington area from Scranton, the major city in the area. This environment also set Clarks Summit apart and isolated from the adjoining coal-mining towns of Dunmore, Moosic, Throop, Olyphant, Old Forge and Dickson City as well as the farming communities of Chinchilla, Newton, Dalton and Waverly.

Before Interstate 81 was built in the 1960s, State Route 6/11 was the major highway, feeding a steady stream of cars and trucks with a variety of state license plates through the heart of town. It was fascinating to watch the large tractor-trailers hauling loads up and down the Clarks Summit hill on their journey to customers throughout the country. At night, while lying in bed, you could hear the straining of the lonesome diesel locomotives as they pulled the long trail of freight cars to mysterious destinations. The movement of commerce through our little town amplified the sense of adventure to a young fertile mind.

Clarks Summit was a wonderful place to grow up. It was like Mayberry; although we

didn't have Andy Griffith, we did have a few Barney Fifes. On State Street we had a pharmacy, a movie theater, a variety of shops, a few bars and the Summit Diner.

Everyone knew everyone. It wasn't until later in life that I realized I had grown up with Irish, Italians, Polish, Germans, Welsh, Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Jews, and various kinds of Protestants. As kids we didn't notice any difference; they were our friends and neighbors. Our fathers all had jobs of seemingly equal importance although some were paid more. We knew the shop owners and employees of each business. We knew every schoolteacher and policeman, the people who worked at the gas stations, and even the town drunk, although some of those positions would change with the times. Respect for others was the unspoken community code we adhered to. We may not have liked everybody, but we respected everyone. To our innocent minds, all the girls and women were virgins . . . including our mothers.

Growing up we didn't have much money; for us kids there weren't any jobs except cutting grass in the summer, raking leaves in the fall, and shoveling snow in the winter. But we didn't need much money. Back in the 1950s, movies were twenty-five cents, candy bars a nickel and a Coke was six cents. My parents' cigarettes were seventeen cents a pack.

Though we may not have had much money, we did have a lot of freedom. We could explore the surrounding fields, mountains, streams, and lakes, and investigate the boundaries of life. In the summer we would sleep outside, talking and dreaming under the distant stars. We were able to build lifelong friendships that remain as genuine today as they were more than fifty years ago—providing some of those old friends don't read this book.

Growing up in this area was a beautiful, enjoyable experience. It was a fun time to be born and a fun place to grow up. There have been so many fascinating characters in our town, with so many entertaining episodes. I chose to share just a glimpse of our life with some of these stories. The setting is real, many of the incidents are real, and the characters are combinations of the unique cast of characters I grew up with. Some of these people are more recognizable than others, and all were enchanting.

# Chapter One

## 1963

This would be an out-of-the-ordinary Thanksgiving weekend, and the festivities would begin the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. In the home at 513 Highland Avenue, you could hear the TV blaring with Walter Cronkite on *The CBS Evening News* at 6:30 p.m., followed by *Leave It to Beaver* and the popular *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Life was changing in this little community and the world.

Alex Flynn was home from college and preparing himself for a reunion of sorts. Standing in his bedroom as he finished dressing for the evening, he offhandedly asked the image in the mirror. So here I am taking a personal inventory of myself, he thought. *I'm a freshman in college, and I really don't know who I am.* Who is Alex Flynn? He took into consideration all of his physical features as stated on his driver's license: six foot one, one hundred and sixty pounds, with blue eyes and dark blond hair. *Not bad to look at, but not considered attractive by most girls,* he thought to himself. Perhaps it was his long face or the fact that he was not as funny as most of his close friends. Because of his poor eyesight, Alex was required to wear glasses; therefore he couldn't play sports and didn't have an athletic body. Without any scholastic achievements, teachers considered him not too smart, but he did have a curious mind and a deep interest in people, all kinds of people.

*If I were born in a different family, how different would I be?* Alex pondered for a moment. *Even my name would be different.* His mother had named him after a cat. As a small child, Alex remembered that strange-looking cat, his mom's favorite pet. She loved that cat so much, but one day it went out and never returned. The loss of that strange cat changed his mother's whole outlook on life. She became distant, cooler, and seemed to lose her interest in life. Alex wondered if she often thought what her life would have been like with a different husband and different children.

"What difference did it make? I'm me," Alex said as he dressed. He was growing aware of the changes in life that lie ahead. He was in college now and starting on his life journey to who knows where. If only he could make that journey together with his dear friends, all on one

team. But he knew they must each travel their own trail. Even so he hoped they could somehow stay connected. However, they had already begun the separation process and were each going their own way. It was like looking at the road map out of St. Louis, knowing they all were traveling on different highways, heading in various directions. Only God knew where they'd end up. Tonight at O'Connor's Alex was going to ask them for a commitment to strengthen their friendship, and hopefully they could remain connected no matter what lay ahead.

The night was cold with a light drizzle. Alex had to park his car a few blocks from Grove Street High School. He joined the other people walking toward the school parking lot where a pep rally and bonfire were already in progress. Alex was surprised by the size of the jubilant crowd, celebrating the annual community ritual. It was a euphoric occasion, like a homecoming for many of the former high school friends. The purpose of the rally was to unite the community and school in sending the high school football team off to the game with thunderous support.

Alex looked around the mass of people as he searched for friendly faces without much luck. The crowd was much larger than he expected, considering the rain and cold. In the center of the parking lot, the large bonfire was ablaze. The heat could be felt at a long distance. Alex recognized some faces in the crowd and acknowledged those he knew, but he decided to remain alone in the crowd and kept his spot until the right people presented themselves. He could hear the high school band marching up Grove Street. As it drew closer, it got louder. Everyone started moving to the center of the parking lot as the triumphal band marched in, playing the school's alma mater. The crowd cheered and applauded loudly.

The cheerleaders led the parade into the parking lot, followed by the band, fire trucks, floats, and local politicians in convertibles. The grand marshal of the parade was Bob DeAngelo, the head football coach. The procession marched from the volunteer firehouse on State Street through the small village, turned up Grove Street, and then continued for a half mile to the high school parking lot.

More than a thousand people assembled in a large circle around the raging, twenty-foot-high bonfire. They backed away as a green tractor slowly made its way, pulling an empty hay wagon, and stopped in front of the powerful fire. Principal Graham, wearing a long, dark parka, emerged from the crowd and stepped on the wagon to address the fans.

With a megaphone in hand, he yelled, "I want to thank you all for coming out tonight. This night is special. Tomorrow's game is special. We all have just gone through a difficult time,

but tonight we're not going to dwell on what happened last week. However, I ask you now to please bow your heads for a moment and say a prayer for the family of President Kennedy and say another prayer for our country." Everyone bowed in silence.

After a minute Principal Graham lifted his head, looked over the audience, put the megaphone to his mouth, and yelled again, "We are here tonight to support this fine football team. So now let's talk football." The crowd went wild with cheers and revelry. The band started playing the Notre Dame fight song. It was an enthusiastic, festive atmosphere. No one was quiet, and after a few minutes, the principal continued.

"When it comes to football, there's no one more qualified to talk about it, and there's no one more qualified to coach it, than our own head coach, Bob DeAngelo. Who wants to hear from our coach?"

Principal Graham had the timing and skill of a vaudeville performer. Everyone was yelling and cheering, and the band was applauding. Coach DeAngelo waited out of view behind the wagon. When the roar and applause was pitched just right, he made his way up onto the wagon. He was dressed in a dark overcoat, with a white shirt and tie exposed as if he were dressed for business. He walked across the wagon toward Principal Graham. With both hands high in the air, fists closed, the coach wore a smile of determination.

The men shook hands, turned, and faced the crowd. Principal Graham handed the megaphone to the coach, smiled, and pointed toward the cheering multitude. It was quite a sight. The large fire roared in the background, reflecting a reddish glow on both men as they stood out on the cold, dark night. After a few moments, the principal left the wagon, and the coach stood alone, basking in the adulation of his supporters.

Coach DeAngelo was small in stature, only five feet four, but he was a dynamic speaker and motivator. He understood destiny, hard work, and planning. The school board paid a lot of money to recruit him and gave him whatever he wanted. Standing alone on the wagon, he looked like Napoleon addressing his troops before the Battle of the Pyramids. Everyone quieted down. As the coach was about to speak, he discarded the megaphone.

Holding his head high and looking over the heads of those he was addressing, Coach DeAngelo extended his right arm and pointed to the sky. "I'm here tonight to tell you that these are the best young men and this is the finest team I have ever coached," he yelled out. The cheers and yells were instantaneous and thunderous. He looked all around, taking in the spectacle.

“Tomorrow we play the game of the year,” he continued. “We will be representing this school district and this community. When we go on the field of play tomorrow, we will be thinking of the tradition of this great event. We will look up at the stands, and we will see your faces, we will hear your voices, and we will know we have your support. With our effort and your support, we will win tomorrow.” The crowd went wild. “We will represent you well.” The roar again erupted, and the coach began to introduce the players.

Alex moved along with the crowd toward the blazing fire. As he walked along, he spotted Johnny Thompson. Alex could pick Johnny out of a crowd of a thousand people. They had been friends since third grade, and they lived in the same neighborhood. They camped out in their backyards as small children; they shared ghost stories and family secrets, and discussed everything from girls and frogs to God and religion. Each was aware of the other’s strengths and weaknesses. They had a special understanding with each other. In their own way, they were closer to each other than to any of their family members.

Johnny stood six feet tall with wide shoulders, a thin waist, and muscular arms. He walked with a special stride, chest puffed out and head cocked; some would say he walked around as if he owned the place. His large shoulders were the result of hard work as a child and dedicated training as a star athlete in high school football and wrestling. He wore his sandy-colored hair in an odd flattop manner, up and to the side. The hairstyle resulted in his nickname, “Wedge Head.” It was a secret name and rarely, if ever, used in his presence. Johnny had one physical problem he was sensitive about: his complexion. As a child, Johnny developed skin problems that resulted in a teenage embossment. He had deep pits in his face and large pimples that seemed constant.

Nothing he tried—including trips to the doctor, home remedies, and using a scrub brush on his face for hours—had much success. Nothing relieved the pain or the shame of his blotched complexion. Although he went through high school with a quick wit and sarcastic attitude, as though nothing troubled him, Alex knew how ashamed Johnny was of his face.

Johnny came from a strict Protestant family. They were God-fearing people who worked hard and didn’t drink alcohol in front of others. They went to church on Sundays, praying for the sinners, the sick, and the shut-ins. The Thompsons were proud of their church affiliation but had contempt for Catholics with all those kids and Jews with all that money. They expected their children to go to school, work around the house, and hold a part-time job. Johnny and his brother

cut lawns in the summer, raked leaves in the fall, and shoveled snow in the winter. Johnny's dad worked for the A&P food stores. The job didn't pay much, but it was a job with security. Money was so tight that the Thompsons didn't have enough income to justify operating a car. Mr. Thompson walked to work every day in rain, sleet, or snow, a mile and a half each way. He also walked home for lunch. As a family they walked to church. In poor weather, Mrs. Thompson's sister would drive the family. Because Mr. Thompson walked so much, he kept his tall, lean physique, and his white hair gave off an air of dignity. Mrs. Thompson baked pies to help with the family income. It took long hours and hard work to make what little money she could.

Johnny strolled across the parking lot hand in hand with his girlfriend, Melody Brown. He was dressed in a stylish, yellow rain parka, and Melody was dressed in a matching green parka with the hood up due to the light mist. They were a handsome couple and obviously very much in love.

Melody was a well-proportioned girl, almost as tall as Johnny. Her brown hair was puffed up in a fashion that made her face appear smaller. Large brown eyes and an innocent warm smile were her most attractive features. She was shy and meek, like a quiet, slow-flowing mountain stream; but below the water's surface, she was as hard as a rock.

She came from a hardworking family. Her father had a small, struggling construction company, and her mother, Mrs. Brown, worked part-time to help with the strained income. They were strict Southern Baptists. There was no drinking or swearing and no working on Sundays. For Melody and her sister, there was no dating until they were sixteen and then only on special occasions with a proper chaperone. In the presence of her parents, Melody was a perfectly behaved daughter who smiled sweetly and was considerate of others. In the presence of others, she was independent, quite open, and enjoyable to be around. Although she gave the impression of holding dear to her church values, the only values she adhered to were not working on Sundays and being absolutely devoted to Johnny.

Melody and Johnny had been secretly dating for years. Her parents had no idea that when she spent the night at a girlfriend's house she was actually sneaking out with Johnny. Over a period of time, Mr. and Mrs. Brown eventually allowed Melody to go out officially on a date with Johnny, partly because of his close association with his church. However, they kept a keen eye on the couple's activities with many restrictions to ensure that nothing sinful happened. Through deception and ruse they were more involved than her parents ever suspected.

Alex waved his arms high in the air to get the attention of Johnny across the parking lot. Melody spotted Alex first, waved back, and alerted Johnny. The three ran through the crowd toward each other.

“Hey, Johnny,” Alex said, shaking Johnny’s hand, then reaching out and smiling at Melody. “Never shake hands with a pretty girl; you must always kiss her.” He then embraced Melody and kissed her on the cheek.

“Nice to see you too, Alex, but remember I’m the jealous type. I’m watching to see how tightly you squeeze her,” Johnny said jokingly.

“How is college, Alex?” Melody asked as she looked directly into his eyes.

“It’s different, a lot harder than I thought,” Alex said with a concerned voice. Almost as an afterthought, he asked, “How does your father like having Johnny working for him?”

Before she could answer, Johnny blurted out, “I’m the best worker he has. If he works with me, I’ll build that business into something big.”

Melody smiled and said in a joking tone, “Right now I have two very strong men in my life, each trying to keep me from the dominance of the other.”

“But I’m winning, Alex, even though both parents are against me. Oh yeah, her mother likes me even less than her father. But that’s okay; soon I’ll have all the family’s women loving me and the father respecting me,” Johnny said confidently.

“Sounds like the two of you have your future planned out,” Alex said.

“We know what we are doing, and we’re trying to keep everyone else in the dark,” Johnny replied.

“Speaking of the dark, where is everyone? Have you heard from anybody? I was hoping to see some of the A-team tonight at O’Connor’s,” Alex said.

Johnny was quick to answer as usual. “I saw Nancy Bishop at the gas station, and she said she had some things to do but would see us at O’Connor’s tonight. I called Phil Whitman too, and he said he was going to try to make it to the rally tonight. If not he would see us at the bar later.”

“How about Danny Fredrick?” Alex asked meekly.

“I don’t think anyone has talked to him recently, at least I haven’t,” Melody said, glancing toward Johnny for comment.

“I haven’t either, Alex. I’m sure he’ll be around tonight. They say the Wednesday before

Thanksgiving is the busiest night of the year at the bar. There will be drinking and a crowd, so he'll be there," Johnny added with a smirk.

"Has anyone heard from Jerry Weaver? I hope he can make it in this weekend," Alex said in a serious tone.

"Nancy said he was at Fort Benning, Georgia, finishing up jump school. He is now a genuine Army paratrooper," Johnny said.

"The hoopla here is about over. I'm getting cold and wet, so let's get to O'Connor's. This could be a fun night," Alex said, shivering.

"You just want to get to the bar to have a few drinks," Johnny said and laughed.

Alex looked over at the fire and yelled to the loving couple, "Okay, Johnny, I'll see you and Melody in a few minutes at O'Connor's."

"We'll be there in a little while; I have to run over to Doc Stones for a few minutes," Johnny said as he squeezed Melody. She looked into his eyes and smiled.

Alex knew that Doc Stones was an old dirt road that led to nowhere but was a great isolated spot for young lovers. Alex said with a chuckle in his voice, "I understand John; I guess something just popped up."

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O'Connor's Bar was located next to the Summit Diner on State Street. Viewed from the street, it looked like a white farmhouse with an extended porch. It was a picturesque scene with large oak trees towering over the house, which sat back fifty yards from the street on an elevated parcel of land with a stone wall in front. There was a small parking area in the back with a side entrance. The hidden parking was convenient for those who preferred their cars to remain out of sight, away from the scrutiny of the good citizens. The rear entrance was also convenient for illegal Sunday liquor sales and the flock of underage drinkers who were afraid to use the front door.

The interior of O'Connor's Bar was as unique as the ownership. Upon entering the place, customers were impressed by how clean and comfortable it looked. It seemed like a large

recreation room at a friend's house. The long, dark red mahogany bar had eleven wooden barstools, and the walls consisted of yellow, knotty pine planks from floor to ceiling. On the wall attached to the house, a large square window was installed so Frances O'Connor and her sister could peek through to monitor Frances' husband, Eddy's drinking. Illuminated beer signs furnished the only glow in the dimly lit room. Behind the bar were three shelves displaying whiskey bottles. Above the shelves was a long, wide mirror. There were a few side windows for light, and on the walls hung old black-and-white pictures and some framed billboards. One picture was of "the greatest fighter of them all, Jack Dempsey," according to Eddy. In addition to the bar there were six small tables, each with four classic barroom chairs.

Frances kept the place immaculate. In the restrooms she placed newspapers on the floor near the toilets to catch any inadvertent spray and put out scented candles near the sinks to clear the air. Eddy was the bartender, but when he was out Frances took over. This gave her the opportunity to add water to the whiskey bottles when no one was looking. When they were together, it was a battlefield of insults. Eddy usually had the upper hand until his sister-in-law, Liz, appeared and added verbal support to Frances. Even Eddy couldn't fight the two of them. Insults were not limited to O'Connor family members. Both Eddy and Frances had a reputation of insulting whomever they chose. That was one of the reasons the place was so easy to keep clean; many potential patrons didn't like being insulted, so there weren't too many customers. Eddy and Frances were fussy about the clientele but not too finicky about the fact that most of their satisfactory customers were underage drinkers. No cursing was allowed, and if anyone disagreed with the management, he was subject to ridicule and expulsion. The real lure of O'Connor's was not the ambience or the service but the fact they would serve almost anyone with any type of ID.

The only food available was pickled eggs. And there was no jukebox or any other type of music. The only entertainment was Eddy and a large black-and-white TV set high above the bar. Eddy was in sole control of the TV. Before the development of the remote control, changing channels was done manually. Watching Eddy change a channel was an amusement in itself. Climbing up on a stepladder, he extended himself as far as possible to change to one of the three networks. As the evening progressed, Eddy's intoxication would make the channel-changing process even more precarious and humorous.

From a barstool, you could sit and gaze out the large picture window on the right side of

the bar and witness the changing of seasons. In the summer you could spot local townsfolk walking uptown to the movie theater on a warm, starlit evening. In the autumn you could witness the turning of the leaves, watching them change color and fall from the large trees. They would start floating and spinning as the wind directed them to their place for the winter to be covered with layers of snow. The cold, harsh winter nights were perhaps the ideal time to sit at the bar. Perched on a stool, you could sip a shot of whiskey while watching a winter storm, as trucks with snowplows made slow progress up State Street. The few pedestrians brave enough to be out at night walked by quickly, all bundled up. The high winds blew the snow back and forth, swirling into drifts. Many nights Alex would sit and sip a shot of Rock & Rye whiskey, enjoying the warmth of the bar and staring out at winter's magical display.

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Eddy O'Connor's unique personality was known throughout the area and had made him kind of a folk hero. His black hair was streaked with gray. He stood five foot six, weighed ninety-six pounds, and had a humped back. Eddy had fought in World War I; he was wounded at Cantigny, France in 1918, when he was struck with shrapnel from an artillery shell. When the shrapnel was removed, the field doctors gave a piece of it to Eddy. Upon returning to the States, he had it dipped in gold and made into a beautiful tiepin. At times he was kidded about being shot with a tiepin gun.

Out in public he always wore a three-piece suit bought in the 1920s. In the summer months, he wore a white Irish linen suit with a white panama hat. He looked as if he just stepped out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, perhaps a neighbor of *The Great Gatsby*. While bartending he wore a white waiter's jacket that exposed his oversized tie and gold tiepin. Eddy had a glass eye, and while sitting behind the bar, he would take it out and polish it to the horror of first-time customers. When he spoke in heated conversations, he would cock his head and stare intensely with his good eye for effect. Eddy had a keen wit and strong opinions, and he expressed them openly. He felt Roosevelt should be canonized; this Democrat was the savior of the workingman. Eddy lived through the tough times of the Depression, Prohibition, and war. Although now in his mid-seventies, he was quick on his feet, retaining the agility of his younger years as a boxer. He

never looked back with regret; his wit was contagious, and he was quite lovable.

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Alex parked his car behind O'Connor's. Walking in alone he knew this would be an exceptional night. This might be the last time the A-team, our high school clique, would all be together. A lot had happened since graduation. In just five months since receiving their high school diplomas, everyone had started on their own path of life. But tonight they would be together again to enjoy each other's company.

As he entered the crowded barroom, Alex could see many familiar faces in the crowd; his attention was focused on a table in the center of the room. Sitting there was Danny Fredrick with his apparent date. Alex didn't know the girl, but she had long dark hair and strange, eccentric-looking clothes. For Danny, though, this look would be desirable.

Of all the people in the close-knit group, Danny was the most independent. He seemed to walk to the beat of a different drummer. He was tall and lean; his hair was always cut short but always looked unkempt. Jeans, sandals and a buckskin jacket were one aspect of his style of dress. Soft-spoken and strongly opinionated, he was the voice of conscience for the group. He was not a member of any sports team nor did he participate in school activities. His passion was music; the guitar was his instrument of choice.

Like Samson's long hair, music was Danny's strength. Danny was popular and respected mostly for his musical talents although he had his share of critics. Alex was fond of him and appreciated his sense of independence and refreshing viewpoints. Alex and Nancy Bishop would often smooth over many of the misunderstandings he created with his outspoken and marginal views.

Danny had one younger sister who was his total opposite, very shy. Their father worked for the state in some nondescript job. Their mother was sort of a recluse; no one ever saw her out in public. She would answer the phone and the door when friends called though. Danny was now attending the University of Scranton, a local Jesuit college.

"Over here, Alex," Danny yelled and waved his right hand high in the air.

Alex made his way through the crowd, shaking hands with some of his old friends and acquaintances. Some he hadn't seen for quite a while. Finally arriving at the table, Alex extended his hand and with a large smile said, "Hello, Danny, you are looking good." Then looking directly at the girl with the long hair, he added, "You're looking good too."

"Easy, Alex. This is my newest love; her name is Ida Freeman. I met her at college."

"I thought the university didn't allow girls on campus," Alex said.

"Times are changing, Alex. There are girls at the U, and soon there will be guys at Marywood College," Danny said with a musical tone in his voice. "I can see big changes coming because we need big changes in our society."

"Yes, we'll discuss that later, but for tonight we are supposed to have fun. We may not see each other for some time, so let's enjoy the night and let Atlas carry the world on his shoulders for a while," Alex said. He then took the initiative to talk to Ida.

"Welcome to O'Connor's, Ida. I hope you enjoy the evening. I can promise you it will be interesting if nothing else," Alex said as he took a better look at her. She was very pretty, with her black hair hanging beyond her shoulders. She wore glasses and a very serious look on her face, which gave her an intellectual appearance. Alex had seen pictures of this beatnik type of girl in magazines, but this was the first time he met one face-to-face. She was intriguing to say the least.

Danny yelled out, "Over here, Phil!"

Alex turned his attention from Ida to the door; he could see Phil Whitman talking with a few friends as he made his way to join Alex and company.

Phil was built like a fireplug: short, stocky legs; powerful shoulders; and a large head. He started on the varsity football team as a tough lineman. He was physically strong with a poker face that seemed to hide all his emotions. He possessed a strong image of integrity, which was the center force that held the A-team together. He had the ability to see both sides of an issue, and with his warm and pleasant personality, he was able to develop close friendships with various factions in the class of 1963. Phil was popular with a congenial sense of humor. Although he dated often, there was no one special. His father drove a milk truck at a time when home delivery was as common as cable TV is today. His mother worked as an assistant to the school administrator; she was well informed about her son's school activities. Phil worked hard for the grades he received although he was rarely on the honor roll. His mom persisted in

directing Phil to attend college. Her desire was to have her son return to his alma mater as a respected teacher. Although Phil was attending a state teacher's college, his heart was not in teaching. He was more interested in exploring the world.

Phil made his way to the table, and Alex and Danny were on their feet when he arrived. There was the usual backslapping and greetings along with the introduction of Ida. Phil realized there was a shortage of drinks at the table, so he excused himself to make a beer run.

"Phil is quite a character, isn't he?" Alex said, looking over at Phil as he brought some beer from the bar.

"Yeah, he's okay. He's one of the few people I know who lets you express your own opinion without expressing his opinion in a better light," Danny said as he looked over at Ida who remained motionless.

"Here's beer for my men," Phil said in a hardy voice as he returned to the table with four glasses of beer on a small tray. "And ale for the fair maiden," he added in a joyful voice as he handed a beer to Ida.

They all sat down, toasting to the good times. Alex sat a little uneasy knowing he had to bring up a subject that might raise some suspicion, but he felt he had to. "I wonder where Nancy is? I thought she was going to be here tonight."

The words barely were out of his mouth when Phil smiled and said, "There's your answer Alex; she just walked through the back door."

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Nancy Bishop was a very pretty girl with short, dark, cola-colored hair, always styled in the latest fashion. She was blessed with bright turquoise-blue eyes and a very light, smooth complexion with some scattered freckles. She had a friendly smile and a pleasant personality. When she had a conversation with anyone, she looked directly into his or her eyes. Almost everyone liked Nancy. She came from a well-to-do family. Her dad was vice president of a rather large manufacturing company. He showered his daughter with an abundance of worldly goods, and they shared a close father-daughter relationship. She possessed an air of decorum. Her wardrobe consisted of prestigious brand-name clothes. Although she dressed smartly, she was

always quick to notice and compliment classmates when they dressed in something snappy.

Nancy was a cheerleader full of enthusiasm, a writer for the school newspaper, and usually played a major part in the school productions. She was very popular with the faculty and her classmates. She dated many different boys; however, there was no chemistry with anyone in particular. Her favorite person was Alex Flynn. They were close friends but for some reason didn't date each other. Although she participated in most of the high school activities, she also devoted a lot of spare time to church commitments. She went to Sunday school and sang in the choir. If she were Catholic, the convent would be her aspiration. However, being raised a Methodist, her secret dream was to become a missionary or at least work with the poor and less fortunate of the world.

Life had been good to Nancy, but she didn't take it for granted. She was sensitive toward those less fortunate, never mentioning her parents' club memberships nor the various vacations to appealing sites of the world. She told Alex that her father's favorite brother, William, was killed on Christmas day in 1944 at Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge. Each Christmas her father would toast his brother with tears in his eyes as he thought of that horrible winter. He once confided in her that he was in one of the lead troops that entered the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, Germany. Of all the terrible things he saw during the war, nothing was as frightening as what he saw at the exterminating facility. Nancy shared some of her father's trepidations about this world.

College life was a new experience for Nancy. Even though she chose a Christian college for girls, her social life was more traumatic than expected. For Nancy living in a dormitory of girls from different backgrounds and aspirations was an education in itself. She soon discovered that life in the dormitory and the exposure to different ideals opened up a whole new world—a new kind of freedom, a new independence, an environment of unchecked opinion, and a new cosmos opening up the opportunity for learning and growing. She had changed a great deal in the five months since high school.

Nancy quickly made her way over to the table. She was so excited. This was the first time she had seen everyone since graduation. She hugged everybody at the table except for Ida. She felt Ida was intruding into her territory. With a forced smile, she extended her hand and said, "Nice to meet you, Ida. How do you like the Abingtons?"

Ida responded in a cool manner. "Danny told me so much about all of you. I now get to

meet you in the flesh.”

They all sat down, talking profusely. Alex’s eyes and attention were focused on one person now. “What would you like to drink, Nancy?”

“A bottle of Budweiser,” Nancy answered as if automatic.

Alex was shocked. Did she really mean a bottle of Budweiser beer? “A bottle of Budweiser beer, Nancy?” he asked for confirmation.

Nancy looked at Alex with a large smile and said matter-of-factly, “Yes, Alex, a bottle of Budweiser beer, with a glass.”

Alex sheepishly walked to the bar to retrieve the beer for Nancy, even though he was in shock. He wondered just how much college had changed Nancy. On his way back to the table, he was joined by Johnny and Melody who had just arrived.

“A bottle of Budweiser for Nancy and the company of Johnny and Melody for the rest of you,” Alex said laughingly. There were greetings and the usual frolicking as they all sat down at the crowded table.

“Melody, I see you and Johnny are still together. I guess that makes your mother very happy, doesn’t it?” Phil asked half-jokingly. Phil and the rest of the A-team knew the real truth.

“Phil, you need to find someone so you can be as lucky as Johnny,” Melody joked.

“Yeah, Phil. When you grow a little taller, you may find out there are a lot of women out there,” Johnny quickly added.

“One thing’s for sure. Knowing you’re not out on the prowl, I may have a better chance finding one,” Phil said, not wanting to verbally duel with Johnny.

“Do your parents disapprove of your relationship with Johnny?” Ida asked.

Everyone laughed out loud, joking and snickering. Ida was a little embarrassed, not realizing the humor of her question. Johnny and Melody just quietly smiled. Johnny was thinking of something to say as they all waited for his reply.

Johnny looked at Ida and remarked quickly, “When we first started going out, her mother didn’t like me. After we’d been dating a while, this acne problem I have had all my life started clearing up. Well now she thinks she knows what cured it.”

They all started laughing, except for an embarrassed Melody, who said, “Now, Johnny, you don’t know for sure if that’s the reason.”

“You’re right, Melody, but your mother sure thinks it is.” Over the laughter Johnny

added, "And that's why she's so suspicious, and that's why she hates me now."

Sitting on the table was a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes. Nancy picked up the pack, took one out, and lit it up. Alex's eyes opened wider. He asked Nancy, "So now you drink beer and smoke? What else has college life taught you?"

"They taught her to smoke free. Those are my smokes!" Danny yelled out.

"For heaven's sake, they're a quarter a pack," Nancy said as she lit up, taking a deep breath and inhaling the smoke. "Don't worry, I'll give you a penny for the cigarette later," she said as she exhaled.

"I remember when a pack of cancer sticks was only seventeen cents," Johnny blurted out. "That was when I started. Of course I was only in the fifth grade."

"Things certainly are going up. In some places gas is thirty cents a gallon," Phil said. "But that's on the turnpike, which is always a little higher."

"The high cost of living doesn't affect Nancy," Alex said as he glanced over at her. "She drinks bottled Budweiser at forty cents instead of draft beer at fifteen cents."

They all started to chuckle and shouting jeers at Nancy. She looked somewhat embarrassed. Smiling as she lifted her glass of beer, she said, "There's a reason for ordering bottled Budweiser. I discovered if you go into a bar and order a draft beer, the first thing they do is card you. When I walk into a bar, I go right up to the bartender, look him square in the eye, and order a bottle of Budweiser, no questions."

Phil jumped in quickly with a comment. "It's a good thing you didn't try that with Eddy; he'd take an eye out and polish it." They all broke into laughter, except Ida, who didn't get the local humor.

"Well, Nancy, college life seems to have a corrupting effect on you," Alex said in a condescending manner.

Phil chimed in, "Remember what Mae West said, 'It takes two to corrupt one.'"

"I think it has a liberating effect on me. If I were the only one here smoking and drinking, I would agree college corrupted me, but you are all smoking and drinking. Let's face it, we're not in high school anymore. We're adults, and we can make our own decisions about what our world is going to be like," Nancy said in her defense.

"To free speech," Danny yelled out, lifting his glass of beer in a toast.

They all toasted with their glasses raised high. "Vive la France," Phil yelled, and the

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