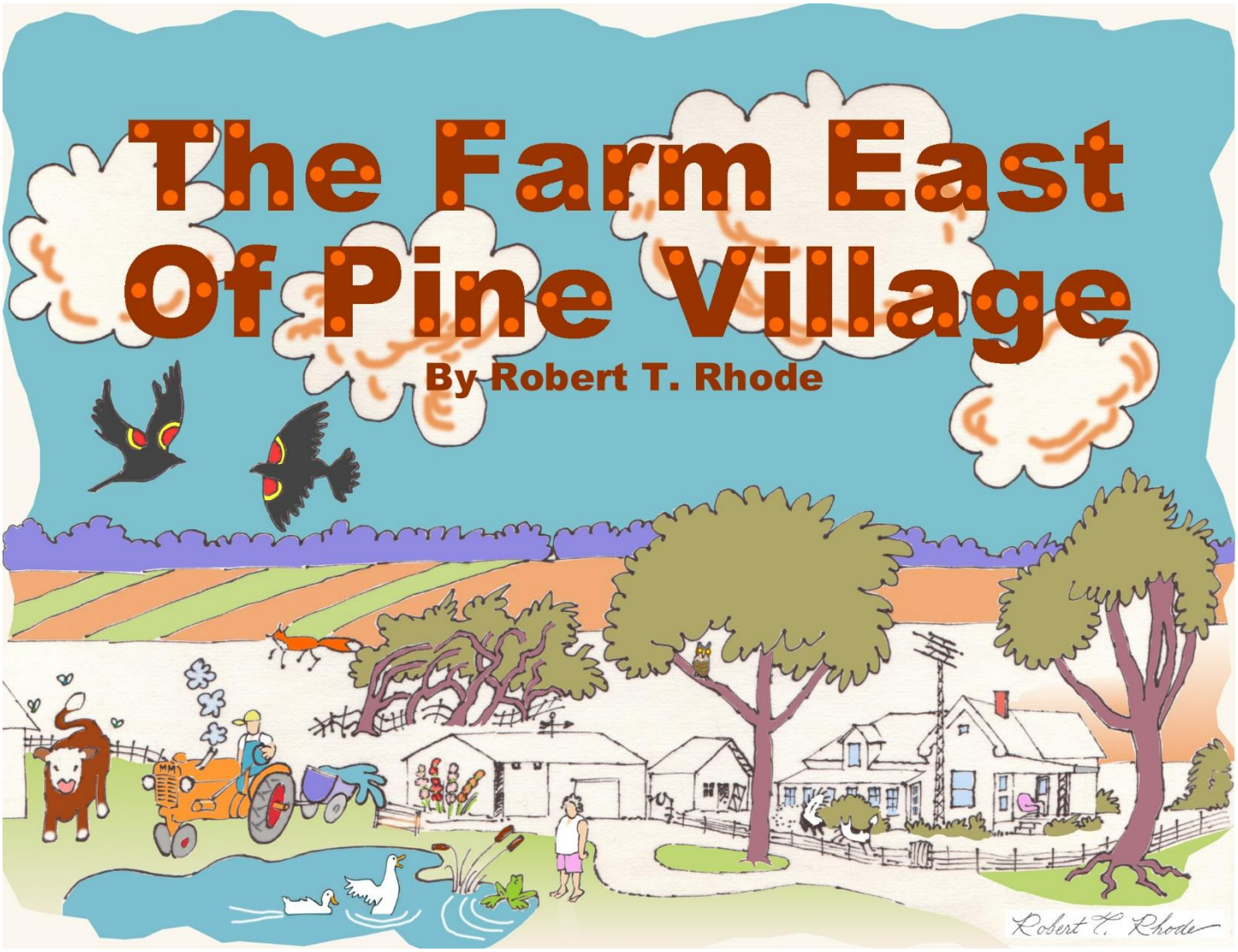

Continue tracing Robert's upbringing in the sequel titled *The Farm East of Pine Village*, which offers stories that stir the memories and the heart.

Chapter 1: The Fifth Grade

This sequel to The Farm in Pine Village *is also dedicated to my dear friend Eleanor Yeager Stewart, who helped me realize that the worlds of our childhood were never somewhere else but always right within us. Here is the rest of my childhood world—almost exactly the way it was!*

The stars were aligning in a new configuration. Robert's classmate Dennis had crowded among the 30,000 screaming fans in the Coliseum at the Indiana State Fair on Thursday the 3rd of September to hear the Beatles live on stage. Robert was not envious because the thought that his parents would have allowed *him*—under any circumstances—to attend a concert by long-haired musicians from England was so remote that he could not for a moment entertain such a wild notion. Joe and Ida *had* (however) permitted him to buy his first 45 RPM records, one of which featured "I Want to Hold Your Hand" on one side and "I Saw Her Standing There" on the flip side. Robert played the record over and over on his parents' Victrola.

Leaving behind the steadiness of the unflappable Mrs. Winegardner's classroom, Robert entered the topsy-turvy world of the mercurial Mrs. Leighty's fifth grade. Mrs. Leighty was nothing if not passionate. Shorter than Mrs. Hail, Mrs. Arvin, Mrs. Moyers, and even Mrs. Winegardner, Mrs. Leighty had light hair that curled like comets away from her forehead and down the back of her head. Her eyes, from which tears could so easily spring, peered like suns behind fleeting clouds. Even more than Mrs. Moyers, Mrs. Leighty could not bear to paddle a student. She would catch a culprit disturbing the decorum of her class and have him stand beside his desk. Reaching her hands up to his shoulders, she would begin to cry. "Why do you make me discipline you?" she would ask with a meek, melancholy voice. Looking down at his feet and blushing from embarrassment, the student would mumble, "I don't know." "If you do that again," Mrs. Leighty would say, tears streaming as her eyes roamed, searching his face, "I will have to punish you. Will you promise me that you will never do that again?" Still staring at his feet, he would say—almost inaudibly—"I promise." "That's good," Mrs. Leighty would say, removing her hands from his shoulders, taking out a hanky, and wiping her eyes. "You may be seated." Her method would work every time. What student could be so callous as not to be ashamed to have made such a sweet lady cry?

Robert absorbed Mrs. Leighty's enthusiasm for learning. Like her, he valued education so highly that he deplored distractions.

One day after school, Robert came running down the driveway, through the white-board gate, through the side porch, and into the kitchen.

"We get to make the floats!" he exclaimed to his mother, Ida.

"Sit down here and tell me which states you have," Ida said, while she stuffed "porcupines," which were green peppers—she called them "mangoes"—filled with hamburger and other ingredients.

"I picked Wisconsin!" Robert said, swinging his knee up on a bent-wood chair and leaning his elbows on the table.

"You *chose* Wisconsin," Ida corrected him. "You can pick a flower, but you can't pick a state. Wisconsin is a good choice. I took summer courses at the University of Wisconsin after I earned my undergraduate degree at the Indiana State Teachers College. What's your second state?"

"We don't have a second state," Robert said, resting his chin in the palm of his right hand and swinging his free leg. "Mrs. Leighty said our class is so big that each person can have only one state."

"Charles had two states when he was in Mrs. Leighty's class," Ida said, spooning hamburger mixture into yet another hollowed-out mango.

"His class was only half as large as mine," Robert said.

"Only half as *numerous*," Ida corrected him again. "When your brother was in Mrs. Leighty's class, the students were just as tall or as big as the students in your class."

Attrition and the possibility of flunking out had done nothing to reduce the numbers in Robert's class, which had presented Mrs. Hail, Mrs. Arvin, Mrs. Moyers, Mrs. Winegardner, and now Mrs. Leighty with the head-scratching problem of what to do with a room filled with too many students.

"You'll be needing a shoebox," Robert's mother continued, pouring ketchup over the stuffed mangoes. "I think I have one. After supper, we'll read about Wisconsin in the encyclopedia, and you can decide which industries to put on your float."

"We have a long time before the floats are due," Robert said.

"And there's no time like the present to get started," Ida said in her cautionary voice. "The early bird—"

"—catches the worm!" Robert shouted.

Ida's face sank in a fake frown. "I ought to box your ears, interrupting your mother like that," she said, holding up a fist, but bursting into a big smile.

"Do the fifty boxes parade around the room?" Ida asked, returning to the task of making supper.

"Mrs. Leighty said we line them up on tables and take turns talking about each one. I want my shoebox to look like a float in the Rose Bowl Parade."

"You'll be wanting bright colors then and maybe something that can move," Ida commented.

After researching the State of Wisconsin on various occasions for the next few weeks, Robert narrowed down the choices of what he wanted to display on his shoebox miniature float for Mrs. Leighty's class: the date when the thirtieth state was formed (May 29, 1848), a badger and a porcupine (animals not often seen in Indiana), a robin (the official bird of the state), a wood violet (the official flower), a sugar maple (the official tree), the Dells (rock formations cut by the Wisconsin River), the Port of Superior (loading ships with iron ore and coal), the Ringling Brothers Circus (Baraboo), the state's eight thousand lakes, cranberries, and the dairy industry (especially cheese).

Robert's mother provided supplies, including the shoebox, which she suggested he cover in eye-catching red foil to represent the University of Wisconsin. She taught him to fold the foil carefully into pleats to surround the bottom of the box.

"What can I do for the violet?" Robert asked, as he washed the Elmer's glue from his sticky fingers.

"I have just the thing," Ida said, disappearing into her closet and returning with a bunch of plastic violets protruding from a small white pedestal vase. Removing the violets revealed an air freshener within the vase.

Using his mother's sharpest scissors, Robert carefully snipped purple violets, which he glued around the edge of the shoebox.

"What can I do for the Dells and the lake?" Robert asked.

"I have a round mirror that pops out of the compact case," Ida replied. "You can attach it toward the front and let it be the lake. You can use a drop of Elmer's to glue one of your plastic ducks to the mirror, and you can glue

your plastic cow that has its head down so that it looks as if the cow is drinking from the water."

"What about the Dells?" Robert shouted over his shoulder as he went to get his duck and his cow.

"You can cut the cliffs from corrugated cardboard stacked in layers, and they can go around the mirror. Why don't you draw the badger and the porcupine on paper that you can glue along the sides of the float? You're a good enough artist to draw those animals!" Ida said encouragingly.

"To have enough for both sides, I'll draw the robin and the maple tree, too," Robert said.

"Do you still have that sponge that was made to look like a wedge of cheese?" Ida asked.

"Yes!" Robert exclaimed happily. "I never put it in water, so it still looks like Swiss cheese."

"We can put it on a skewer and stick it down through the cardboard cliffs," Ida said. "That way, it can float above everything else and make a statement. Do you know what these are?"

Robert was setting his plastic cow and plastic duck on the table near the shoebox. He glanced over at his mother, who was holding a strand of red wooden beads in her hands.

"They're beads," Robert replied.

"Right now, they are, but, when we take them off the string, they're cranberries."

A huge smile lit up Robert's face.

A yellow, blue, and red plastic freighter that had bobbed in the bathwater in the 1950s completed the float; when Robert flipped it over to see how best to glue it to the float later, he noticed the company name "Renwal" on the bottom.

"Instead of gluing it," Ida suggested, "let's tie a string around it. The string will go through a groove in the top of the box and will wrap around a spool hidden inside the box. Your father can use heavy wire to make a crank that

sticks outside the box. When you turn the crank, the ship will move from one end of the box to the other."

Timothy Q. Mouse, Dumbo the Elephant, and the Ringmaster (spelled as two words "Ring Master" on the lid) from Robert's box of Disneykins represented the circus.

Robert devoted several evenings to the project of making drawings of fauna and flora and cutting cliffs from cardboard. He topped the cliffs with wooden pine trees from a toy collection he had outgrown.

All too soon, the day arrived when he was to take his float to school. To look upon the wonderful products of the creativity and the industry of his classmates confirmed Robert's belief that he was a member of a great class. Mrs. Leighty was obviously pleased. She clapped her hands as each float took its place on the tables.

Before lunch, half of the students described their projects. Robert ran home for the noon meal and breathlessly told his mother how glorious the floats were and how he would have his turn to talk about Wisconsin after the lunch period.

Later that day, his ship cooperated when Robert cranked it forward, and he remembered everything he wanted to say about the thirtieth state. Throughout the two hours dedicated to the floats, Robert listened attentively to his classmates' presentations about the various states, and he felt he learned a great deal in the process. The shoeboxes remained on display for a week, so that the other teachers would have an opportunity to view the students' artistry. The experience was exhilarating and destined to be remembered for years to come.

Chapter 2: The Cows and the Clarinet

"Let's visit the Nesbitt Farm," Robert's father, Joe, suggested on a bright winter morning. Robert and his brother, Charles, got bundled up for the drive north into Benton County, Indiana. Joe had been talking about buying two purebred Polled Herefords, so that each boy would have one to show at the county fair and so that each could start his own line of pedigreed Herefords to help pay for college tuition years later.

Mr. Nesbitt stood tall beside the door to his kitchen. He wore a pleasant smile. Stretching as far as the eye could see, Mr. Nesbitt's flat land resembled a tan tablecloth set with blue willow ware plates, which were islands of snow with sapphire shadows. A herd of white-faced, cinnamon-colored calves that had been weaned stood facing the same direction in a fenced enclosure just beyond a clean, well-appointed barn. A child's coloring book featuring life on the farm would have done well to depict Mr. Nesbitt as the ideal farmer.

"We might be in the market for a couple of heifers," Joe began, as he shook hands with Mr. Nesbitt.

"Well, you've come to the right place," Mr. Nesbitt replied agreeably. "I have plenty of heifers for you to choose from."

Mr. Nesbitt guided Joe, Charles, and Robert toward the pasture.

"Are the heifers for your boys here?" Mr. Nesbitt asked.

"Yes, sir," Joe answered. "They're in 4-H Club."

"I would have guessed that," Mr. Nesbitt said, chuckling. "Well, these are young heifers that would make good 4-H entries." Wearing a yellow glove, Mr. Nesbitt waved his large hand in a sweeping gesture to indicate the calves, all of which were peering at the newcomers and blinking their long-lashed eyes.

In his mind, Robert had already selected one, and he hoped his choice would be one of his father's top picks. The heifer had a happy expression, almost as if she shared Mr. Nesbitt's jovial smile.

"Could we buy her?" Robert asked his father while pointing toward the merry calf.

Mr. Nesbitt said, “You have a good eye, son. She’s a blue-ribbon heifer if I ever saw one.”

“With your recommendation, we can’t go wrong,” Joe said. Turning to Robert, Joe asked, “Do you have a name for her?”

“I think she looks like Vicky!” Robert replied enthusiastically.

“Vicky?” Mr. Nesbitt chuckled. “Well now, that’s a good name for a cow!”

“We’ll be back to get her on a warm day. Do you need to mark her?” Joe wondered.

“No,” Mr. Nesbitt responded. “I’ll remember which one she is. She has buttons where horns want to form. That sometimes happens with polled Herefords. I’ll take care of the buttons so she looks true to breed. Which calf does your other boy want?”

Charles could not decide. Finally, he pointed at one.

“Now, that’s a good heifer,” Mr. Nesbitt said.

Robert felt uncertain about the choice, but he kept his opinion to himself. Skittishly hurrying to hide behind other calves and nervously changing direction, the heifer had a wary look in its eye.

“Do you have a name for her?” Joe asked Charles.

“No. I’ll think of one later,” Charles said.

Mr. Nesbitt invited Joe, Charles, and Robert into his kitchen, so that Joe could sign the paperwork.

On a table was a clarinet in a tan case. Robert stared at it as if mesmerized. For some time, he had wanted to learn to play the clarinet. When the members of the Pine Village High School Band performed in their blue uniforms with white braids, white stripes, and silver buttons, the clarinetists sat toward the front to the director’s left. Robert enjoyed watching them work the silver keys of their instruments. His cousin Connie was the first chair, and he wished he could grow up to take her place one day.

“Say,” Mr. Nesbitt said, reading Robert’s mind, “you wouldn’t know of anybody in the market for a clarinet, would you? My daughter wants to sell hers.”

Robert thought it was too much of a good thing to be gaining a lovely heifer, already a pet in his mind, and a clarinet—all in the same day! Robert said nothing, but Joe understood how powerfully he wanted a clarinet. One look at Robert's not-daring-to-hope face told Joe all he needed to know.

"I guess we could consider the clarinet, too," said Robert's father. "How much do you want for it?"

"Fifty dollars," replied Mr. Nesbitt.

All the way home, Robert carried the precious clarinet in his lap. His heart was racing. He could hardly believe his good fortune. He needed no further proof that he had the greatest dad in the world!

Back at home, Robert figured out how to slide the sections of the clarinet together. As he had no way of knowing how to arrange a reed on the mouthpiece, he could not play a note, but he considered the clarinet to be a glorious instrument.

Learning to play the clarinet, though, was a struggle. Robert's parents enrolled him in lessons at Mahara's Music Center in Lafayette's Market Square. For the first several weeks, Robert's teacher, a young man named Mr. Baker, kept trying to help him make a note on the instrument. Robert's breath escaped around the mouthpiece. The only sound was puff-puff-puff. Robert had that tingling in the cheeks that one gets from blowing up too many balloons. Finally, on a glorious afternoon, the clarinet emitted an enormous squawk! What a thrill! Mr. Baker breathed a sigh of relief, and Robert smiled from ear to ear.

From that day forward, Robert's abilities rapidly progressed. That summer, Mr. Lee Davis, nicknamed "Weird Beard" because of his goatee that was similar to that of Skitch Henderson or Mitch Miller, began adding younger musicians to the high school band he directed so as to make it as large as possible for the competition at the Indiana State Fair. He accepted Robert into the ranks. Robert was going to get to wear the blue uniform with the silver buttons and white braids long before he was old enough to attend high school!

All summer, the augmented band rehearsed on a parade ground that had been marked off with lime stripes on the west edge of the school playground. The competition consisted of parade shows, not football field shows. The parade strip had been measured to conform precisely to the judging area the band would encounter at the grandstand in Indianapolis

during the fair. From the moment when the front rank of the band crossed the starting line until the back rank stepped over the finish line, a stop watch counted the seconds. Going overtime would cost precious points. Mr. Davis had built an observation platform accessible by a ladder. From the platform, he looked down on the band to see if the lines were straight and to make sure that everyone was in step. Mr. Davis combined the best attributes of a disciplinarian, a musician, and a friend. He knew exactly when to crack the proverbial whip and when to sit back and laugh good-naturedly. Eager to please Mr. Davis, the band, over the weeks of practice, pounded the grass into powder. The white stripes that were formed with lime disappeared into the dust and more had to be laid down.

At one point in the music, the band members had to stand in place and slowly revolve until they were crouching; then they had to spring back up and begin marching again. The 360-degree spin was practiced over and over, until everyone's hamstrings were sore.

The day for the bus trip to Indianapolis arrived. In the pre-dawn hours, band members arrived in the school parking lot. Clusters of students talked excitedly while parents milled about their cars.

Robert felt that the trip to Indianapolis was a dream come true—except when he gagged on the girls' hairspray as they tried to force their big hair under their blue band caps with the white bills. Robert disembarked as quickly as he could and stood breathing the fresh air until his lungs cleared. He made sure that the decorative braided cords around the shoulder of his uniform were in the right place.

The long wait began. The line of bands wove like an anaconda among the buses parked all the way to the horizon. In those years, over a hundred bands of smaller schools competed on the day that the Pine Village band took part. Ranks and files of uniforms of every hue filled the vision.

The bands crept forward and waited, crept forward and waited. Ultimately, there were no more bands in front of the Pine Village High School Band. The track passed before a towering grandstand filled with spectators. Robert took a deep breath. Mr. Davis smiled encouragement to his musicians. Suddenly, the parade show started. Robert performed the notes and steps like a machine with no need to think about what he was doing. The instant the show was finished, Mr. Davis came running. "We didn't go over!" he shouted, tapping his stop watch.

Later that day, the band learned that Pine Village was ranked in the top third, coming in ahead of far larger bands at far larger schools.

Chapter 3: Palm Sunday

Earlier that spring—before the exciting trip to Indianapolis for the band competition—the weather suddenly turned hot. It was the morning of the 11th of April—Palm Sunday—and Ida had an idea! Why not take advantage of the warm weather and invite Don and Mary to have a wiener roast in the yard? Don and Mary were Joe and Ida's close friends. Don and his father had been members of the same threshing ring that included Joe and his grandfather, and Mary Ann and Ida never lacked for conversation.

As Joe and Ida had no telephone, Joe drove to Don and Mary's house to ask them to come over in the afternoon. They readily consented. It would be three more years before a phone would appear in the Rhode home. Both Ida and Joe considered phones to be expensive nuisances. Whenever they needed to receive a call, they asked (with Beulah's permission, of course) that it be placed to the phone of Beulah Jones across the street, and Beulah dutifully walked across the highway to deliver a message that she had taken on her phone. Whenever Joe and Ida had to place a call, they asked Beulah if they could borrow her phone. The rest of the time, Robert's parents got along just fine without a telephone.

In those days, almost every town with a population of a few thousand had everything a person could want; for example, Attica, a town of 4,300 people, boasted several blocks of thriving businesses and professional offices both upstairs and down. There was no need to phone ahead to see if a store carried a certain product. If such a product could not be found in Attica, nobody needed it. Even the smaller villages had plenty of business activity from hardware stores, through blacksmith shops, through lumber yards, through elevators, through feed stores, through electrical supply shops, through grocery stores, to clothing stores.

Before Don and Mary arrived with their family, Robert and Charles picked up limbs and piled them in the ash-covered, brick-lined area of the yard that was dedicated to roasting hot dogs. Soon, the boys had a tall pile of sticks.

"That's plenty!" Ida said, wiping her hands on her apron as she came through the screen door. "We wouldn't be able to get near the fire if you would pile another twig on it."

Don and Mary's car pulled into the half circle drive by the front gate. With her big smile, Mary flung open the passenger door, jumped out, and turned to reach a casserole dish in the middle of the seat. By the time she stood with the dish in her hands, Joe and Ida had come down the sidewalk to open

the gate. Mary arched her left eyebrow and said to Ida, "You've been helping Joe in the fields, haven't you? I can tell by your healthy tan."

"I could say the same about you," Ida retorted.

Mary looked shocked. "*I* haven't been helping Joe!" she remonstrated.

"I meant Don," Ida said, laughing.

"I know," Mary reassured her. "I was just kidding, but I can tell you who's going to be married this summer. Wayne Whitlow, and, no, I'm not kidding! He's marrying Peggy Thomas."

From somewhere in the shadow cast by the brim of his cap, Don winked at Joe. "I believe they've already started gossiping, Joe. We may be in for a long evening."

Meanwhile, Don and Mary's boys, Matt and Lon, had joined Charles and Robert for a game they had invented that might be described as "hide-and-seek meets *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*." Matt and Lon brought their own cap guns, and Robert and Charles had toy guns resembling a pair of pearl-handled pistols. Wearing cowboy hats, the boys formed two teams that hid far apart among the farm buildings and sought one another while hoping to be the first to fire. Anyone fired at was "dead," fair and square. About ready to enter the eighth grade, Charles was becoming too old for the game, but he played along just to be neighborly.

The temperature had soared into the eighties. By late afternoon, dark clouds were rolling overhead.

"I think it's going to rain," Ida said, after she had stepped into the yard to get a feel for the weather.

Mary said, "We probably should cook the wieners on the stove."

Joe said, "We could get the fire going in a hurry. It doesn't take long to cook a hot dog over a fire."

Ida looked concerned. "We don't want a wind to come up and blow the embers around. What would you do, Don?"

"I think you should cook the wieners on the stove." He glanced at Joe. "That was the right answer, wasn't it?"

"Joe, call the boys," Ida said.

Joe strode through the gate into the chicken yard and found Robert and Lon hiding near the east chicken house. "We're ready to eat, so come in and wash your hands," Joe said. The smiling heads of the second team popped out from concealment behind the twin oak trees.

"Were you there all along?" Robert asked, with every tone of disappointment.

"I knew they were hiding there," Lon said in a stage whisper. "I was just getting ready to tell you."

"Sure you were!" Matt said.

The boys filed to the bathroom sink to slip the heavy bar of lye soap over their hands.

While everyone was eating, Ida said, "As bad as it looks outside, I think I ought to turn on the television to see if anybody is saying anything about the weather."

Ida excused herself from the kitchen table and walked over to the Zenith, which stood high on a green "crushed ice" Formica table with metal legs. She switched on the set just in time for everyone to hear a tornado forecast that had interrupted the regularly scheduled program. The announcer reading the bulletin said there were many reports of tornadoes in northern Indiana.

Mary's face wore a look of concentration. Then her brows arched up, she sighed, and she said, "Well, maybe we should go home—after dessert, that is."

Everyone laughed. Joe made the "black cows" with generous scoops of vanilla ice cream covered in Coke, which foamed up and dripped temptingly down the sides of the thumbprint pattern jelly jar tumblers.

The evening ended too early, but, sometimes, the most memories are made when the fun is interrupted at its peak.

Unfortunately, the memories of that evening included the news that came in sad doses the following day. In one of the worst outbreaks of the kind, forty-seven tornadoes had touched down in Indiana and nearby states. Hundreds of people had lost their lives. The closest destruction was around the town of

Mulberry. The skies above Pine Village had looked threatening, but no funnels had formed there.

Later, Mary said to Ida, “I feel bad that we were having such a good time.”

Ida said, “News like that makes you want to put your arms around your family—”

“—and hold them tight,” Mary completed Ida’s thought.

Chapter 4: The Fair

With her placid nature and good outlook, Vicky, the polled Hereford heifer, was easy to train for the 4-H show ring. Robert had merely to touch a hind hoof with the long pole made for the purpose, and she adjusted her leg to present her form in the best position. Diane, the name Charles had finally chosen for his heifer, was another story. She fought the halter, she held her head down as if she would prefer to butt anyone who came near her, and she kept spinning sideways while planning her getaway. Poor Charles! Diane stepped on his boots again and again.

When the Warren County 4-H Fair in Williamsport rolled around, Diane was no calmer. Joe had to take her in tow to lead her to her stall in the north end of the coliseum building. Once she found that she was tied next to Vicky, Diane felt a little better, but she continually watched over her shoulder and mistrusted the movements of the fairgoers who strolled behind the cattle. On the day when Charles led her into the ring for judging, she bucked and reared. The farmers who volunteered to help with the beef competition had to take charge of Diane—but not before she had stepped on Charles' toes! She earned a red ribbon for her pains.

Vicky, though, peacefully joined in the fun of the contest. Each time that Robert brought her to a stop in the ring, she needed no prodding from him to place her hooves in exactly the right places. Robert could take the precious seconds when he might have been working with her feet to brush up the curried horizontal rows of fur along her thigh and across the back part of her barrel, making her appear just that much more rectangular. When the judge handed Robert not only a blue ribbon but also a reserve champion purple ribbon, he was proud as punch and happy for Vicky!

At the fair, each township took a turn running the cafeteria. Adams Township had Wednesday evening, one of the busiest suppers of the week. Joe and Don finished watering their pigs just in time to wash up and ready themselves for many hours of shucking sweet corn outside the back door of the cafeteria building. Ida joined Mary in doing dishes and keeping the food line supplied. Ida assigned Charles the task of assisting the men, usually by carrying trays of buns to the grillers or by bringing pans of cooked sweet corn to the line. Ida considered Robert old enough (and responsible enough) to help out; he was assigned a gray rubber tub to collect dishes, and, like Tom Sawyer's friends, he found collecting dishes a wonderful activity! Long before, he had learned a lesson about which he would remind himself for the rest of his life. Work can be fun, but fun can never be work. Most of the farmers shared a great sense of humor. Some contributed to the general

amusement by performing as comics, although not on a stage and not for a salary.

Among the happy farmers was Fred Sundqvist, Sr. Smiles emanated from his face like rays of sunlight while his eyes sparkled behind his glasses. In the 4-H cafeteria building, he was ubiquitous, bringing sunshine wherever he went. Here he was wearing his broad white apron and flipping hamburgers on the big grill. Yet here he was razzing Don and Joe about their shucking of the corn. But here he was bringing laughter to a long table full of friends, some of whom he had just met for the first time. Now here he was by the door, discussing swine culture with a foremost hog breeder. He was everywhere!

And Fred even stood before little Robert. "Need a hand with those dishes?" he asked, gesturing with a thumb toward the pile of plates in Robert's gray tub.

"No, I think I can carry them," Robert replied.

"They're not too heavy?"

"No, sir."

"Are they getting heavier while I stand here asking you questions?"

Robert didn't know what to say. Fred laughed, and Robert laughed, too.

While Robert was unloading his tub, he saw Fred cutting pies. "How did he get over there that fast?" Robert silently wondered.

Earlier in the day, Fred had been similarly everywhere at once. During the hog judging, he could have been seen leaning on a panel beside the ring with one brown work shoe up on the bottom board. Then he had been back by the pens, persuading pigs to move peacefully down the aisle to be exhibited. Soon, he had been joking with Charlie Coffman about hamming it up at the keyboard of the organ that Charlie played on the platform of the coliseum.

There was no harder worker than Fred Sundqvist, who understood that work can be fun.

… but fun can never be work. Those who had to work at having fun or being funny seldom had fun and were definitely not funny. Confronting the exigencies of daily living began with a sense of humor originating in the

heart. Well acquainted with the caprice of the weather—which could make or break farm profits—farmers had to love long hours and hard work that most often took place outdoors in all kinds of weather, and they were most successful when they learned to accept loss with wit, if not a smile.

While Robert picked up dishes in the 4-H cafeteria, he encountered men and women who had spent seven, eight, or nine decades on farms. No matter how self-reliant, they respected the importance of the collaboration that placed rural communities on firm foundations. They were genuinely grateful when Robert cleared a place for them at one of the tables that were arranged in long parallel lines down the length of the building. With keen glances from faces that revealed their years in sun and wind, they politely thanked him with a "much obliged, young man." Robert felt that, in the simple act of lifting plates into a tub, he had helped make the evening more pleasant for others who had spent decades helping shape and form the good world that he was enjoying.

On Thursday evening, Ida and Charles made a quick trip from the fairgrounds to Pine Village to feed Spot and the ducks while Joe and Robert took care of the family's livestock exhibited at the fair. Joe and Robert finished early, so Robert's father suggested that they take a look at the new farm machinery on display.

They walked up and down rows of shiny tractors and various implements exuding the indefinable fragrance of new equipment. As dealers in farm machinery were enjoying a huge increase in sales over the year before, they brought plenty of exhibits to the fair. The newest tractors were more rugged in appearance with heavier gearing.

Joe glanced over to the Ferris wheel. "Want to go for a ride?" he asked Robert, who had to ponder the offer.

Robert was deathly afraid of heights. Once, on a trip to visit Andy and Emmajeanette, the family had scaled the limestone Observation Tower—seventy feet tall—at Washington Park in Michigan City, and Robert had just about passed out from fear when he reached the top. At the farm in Pine Village, a sugar maple in the hog lot had a tempting lateral branch about six feet off the ground, and, time and time again, Robert climbed the trunk so as to sit on the limb but lost all resolve to climb back down. Patiently, he waited for his father to appear in the chicken lot or the barnyard, and, when Robert saw him, he yelled for Joe to come rescue him. Joe had to bring a stepladder to retrieve his son; somehow, Joe never lost his temper at the repeated instances when Robert became stuck on the limb.

Reluctantly and meekly, Robert said, "Yes." Joe paid the attendant the price of the tickets, and Joe and Robert strapped themselves into one of the Ferris wheel's seats. Up and up they went. When they were exactly at the top, the wheel stopped.

After several seconds, the attendant shouted up that the ride was not getting electricity and that he would run up to the main electrical box to see if he could determine the cause.

Robert was ready to panic, but his father spoke reassuringly, "There's nothing wrong where we are. We're safe. He'll get the motor going again, and we'll be on our way."

Hushed breezes passed by while the seat rocked lightly. Robert and Joe looked down on tractors that they had looked up to only a few minutes earlier. They could see the roof of the coliseum. The conversations of fairgoers seemed strangely nearby for as small as the people appeared from high atop the wheel. Robert and Joe gazed up at fluffy white clouds that were almost immobile, only now and then taking a step forward, and Robert and Joe gazed down on the life of the fairgrounds.

Robert marveled that his father was calm, but Joe understood and trusted the machinery. Taking a deep breath, Robert relaxed and waited for the wheel to roll on.

Shortly, the attendant returned. He shouted, "It was a breaker in one of those new circuit breaker boxes!" The motor hummed back to life. The wheel creaked and began to orbit again.

Before long, Robert and his father were back on terra firma, their Ferris wheel ride enshrined in their memories.

Chapter 5: The Old Barn

On a warm summer's evening, Joe brought Robert along in the 1951 GMC pickup through the barnyard and through the pasture to the edge of the cornfield. Robert opened and closed the gates for his father. Joe then began using a machete to cut cornstalks, which were still green but had well-formed ears. Robert lifted the piles of cornstalks in the back of the pickup, which had the tailgate down. The Holsteins in the pasture could foresee the treat that was coming, and they gathered near the gate that the truck would pass through when it exited the cornfield. With the stalks about three feet deep, Joe climbed back behind the steering wheel, and Robert stood by the gate. Joe drove into the pasture, and the cows strode over to mill about the back of the truck. Robert jumped onto the running board, balanced his knee on the hot metal of the rear fender, steadied himself, and climbed over the short side panel into the truck bed.

"Ready?" Joe asked through the open window.

"Yep," Robert replied.

The GMC crept forward, and Robert slid three cornstalks over the edge of the tailgate. No sooner had the corn fallen to the ground than the lead Holsteins were standing over it, finding the sweet green ears. Meanwhile, Robert shoved a few more cornstalks onto the ground in front, and cows of lesser status in the pecking order came around to take their turn to feast on the corn. The GMC kept inching along until all the corn had been shoved out. The herd would keep working on the corn until only traces of it remained.

Next, Joe and Robert drove through town to feed the Hereford herd at the Old Barn. Joe's farm on the east side of Pine Village was really two farms joined catty-corner. The smaller farm bordered State Route 55 and could be accessed from the farm that bordered State Route 26 by driving along dusty farm lanes, through many gates, and across the corner that joined the two farms, but driving through the town meant having to pass through only two gates.

Before Joe was born, the Gady brothers ran a butcher shop just north of the intersection of the two main highways in Pine Village. Elmer Gady bought the stock and Bill Gady prepared the meat, which the Ogborns sold in their grocery. The Gadys had a large barn on their farm just south of town. Elmer always thought "big." He shipped in western lambs that were fed in the barn, which boasted nearly 6,500 square feet under roof on the first floor alone. To accommodate more and more sheep, Elmer added wing after wing

to the barn, making a large barn a huge barn. He and Bill were earning handsome profits.

Elmer decided he could afford to mortgage his farm and speculate on the Board of Trade. Elmer lost his farm and the butcher shop. He became a day laborer. Bill, meanwhile, moved to Chicago to work for a big farm, but Bill fell from a streetcar and broke his back. He returned to Pine Village. He walked stooped over. Frank Ogborn's department store and grocery hired Bill to take orders and make deliveries.

The Old Barn, as Joe referred to it, was still standing, although it had not seen paint in so long that the boards were silvery gray, the roof rusty red.

Just outside the barn on the east side was a stock tank that once featured a windmill to pump the water. Now the pump was electric. Joe kept a long stick, which he used to push up the curled rod on the side of the switch box that started the motor. The box was affixed high on a pole, so that cattle could not accidentally start the motor by rubbing the box. The pipe that delivered the water to the tank was rusted through in several places. By covering the end of the pipe with his left hand, Robert made a water fountain through a quarter-sized hole in the top of the pipe. He drank the clear water that came from so deep down that it was icy cold.

South of Pine Village stood a large building that housed a rest home for elderly patients. Despite its size, the building was only the small remnant of what earlier generations had known as a vast spa named Mudlavia: nearly all of it long gone by the time that Robert's family visited. Joe and Robert often stopped by Pig Gady's room. Ernest Alvin Gady, a 1910 graduate of Pine Village High School, had acquired the nickname "Pig," and it was just too good not to stick. Everyone knew him as Pig, and many had forgotten that his real name was Ernest. Pig was Elmer Gady's son and had played in the Old Barn when he was a lad. For a brief time, Pig had taught lower grades, but his father's downfall prompted him to seek independence. In 1913, when he celebrated his twentieth birthday, he decided upon the life of a transient laborer and lit out for the West.

When Robert and Joe visited him, the 74-year-old Pig wore brown plaid flannel shirts and jeans. Whenever he saw Robert, his eyes lit up.

"Say, what do you know?" Pig asked, grinning and slapping his knee. Then came the best part. Pig would lean forward and begin telling stories of his train-hopping days as an itinerant thresherman. The walls of Pig's room in Mudlavia faded away, replaced in Robert's imagination by the broad expanse of Kansas wheat fields and Kansas skies.

Pig was running for his life down an alley in Burlington, Kansas. He clutched a broad-brimmed straw hat in one hand and seemed to be swatting at hornets, he was sprinting so fast! He kept glancing over his shoulder, until he was sure he had lost the Industrial Workers of the World members who were chasing him. Pig slowed to a walk, his sides aching, his heart pounding. The nest that Pig had accidentally run into was not a nest of hornets but a nest of I.W.W. men, otherwise known as Wobblies. They had made vague threats to try to force Pig to join their socialist order. Pig wanted nothing to do with the I.W.W. because he would not hide shrapnel inside wheat bundles to wreck threshing machines and bring work to a halt. "Why would anybody want to bust up a separator?" Pig wondered, shaking his head in consternation. Higher wages for workers was one thing, but sabotage was another—and sabotage was criminal!

"What am I gonna do?" Pig mumbled, sauntering along. A colorful poster for the Barnum & Bailey Circus caught his eye. It was plastered to a tall fence made of rough-cut boards. With his pocketknife, Pig cut a small red rectangle from the poster. He slipped the card into the pocket of his shirt. He smiled and strode confidently along. Heading north on Third Street to find work as a thresherman, he encountered two men he thought might be Wobblies. He flashed the corner of the red rectangle and winked. One of the men produced an I.W.W. red membership card from his pocket and nodded. The Wobblies paid Pig no further notice. He strode past them and began whistling a merry tune.

Pig was fortunate enough to find employment as a spike pitcher for threshing rings in eastern Kansas. "Much of the wheat out in Kansas was winter wheat," he told Robert. "It was spiky and tough, but it sure did grow well there." He fondly recalled the steam engines belted to the threshing machines in the barnyards, but, in western Kansas and in states farther north, he came to know threshing on a vast scale with fields of wheat shocks stretching toward the horizon and with half a dozen columns of smoke indicating the locations of various steam engines and crews under the command of custom threshermen. Pig slept beneath the stars. He slept the sleep of a young man who has done hard work, honest work.

Pig's stories often led back to 1913, and, in his mind, Robert was there, too, jumping down from the boxcar and looking for work. A custom thresherman, scrutinizing the hopeful unemployed men who had gathered near the train station in some Kansas town, chose Pig (and Robert) to pitch bundles. Pig (and Robert) climbed into a wagon and was hauled to where the work was to be done. Pig (and Robert) was doing what he loved best: lifting sheaves high

above his head and expertly dropping them for the bundle loader perched atop the wagon.

When Joe and Robert would leave Mudlavia after visiting with Pig, Robert left with his vision expanded. Walking past the goldfish ponds of the once lavish resort, Robert peered at the flashing orange fish beneath the rippling surface that reflected the clouds. He thought of Pig flashing the red card and grinning. To Robert, the past appeared to be separated from the present only by a rippling film.

Robert thought of Pig while helping Joe load the pickup with freshly cut corn stalks for the herd of Herefords that had gathered in the pasture beside the Old Barn. Then Robert repeated the process of scattering the stalks while Joe drove the GMC slowly forward.

Chapter 6: The Cousins of Willowwood

Joe's cousins Vera Fenton and her older sister, Pearl Fenton Clark, who was married to Arthur Clark, spent much of their adult lifetimes living and working in Chicago. Vera, Pearl, and Arthur were in Joe's mother's generation. In her youth, Pearl had been considered beautiful, and, now, as a white-haired, older woman, she was regal. Vera had a wonderful sense of humor, which living in the Windy City had refined. Vera was as elegant as Pearl was royal. Arthur typified a Chicago businessman; he was urbane and confident. When they retired, the three returned to Pine Village to live in the house that Pearl and Vera's father had owned. The sisters' father was Thomas Eleazer Fenton, the blacksmith who designed the special shoe that transformed the horse Dan Patch into a legendary pacer. Pearl, Vera, and Arthur lived just to the west of the blacksmith shop. In his spare time, Arthur, a skilled artist, liked to paint. His canvas depicting deer in a forest adorned a wall of the living room.

With their earnings from Chicago, the three purchased Willowwood, which was a glorified cabin in the hills and woods near Kramer, only a few miles north of Williamsport, the county seat. Arthur, Pearl, and Vera repaired to Willowwood for several days at a time during the hot summer months. What Willowwood, the small house, lacked in refinement the landscape around it more than compensated in magnificence.

To the north arose a high cliff of crumbly sandstone. The sunshine lit the nearly vertical escarpment a bright yellow with hints of coral pink. Between the crag and the cabin, cottonwoods fluttered their leaves like oversized coins on both sides of a tiny gully that could become a raging rivulet when it rained. Immediately adjacent to the cottonwoods was a bevy of weeping willows, for which the cabin had been named. They draped their long, lithe branches almost to the ground. Strolling among the lime and lemon leaves felt like walking through graceful streamers at a Japanese festival. Surrounding the cabin stood towering pines that kept the cottage in perpetual shade.

Willowwood was close to where the school bus had parked on the 24th of September in 1963 when the fourth and fifth grades had taken a special field trip to see the beaver dam on Big Pine Creek. That day in late autumn had been gray and cold. Robert and his classmates had hiked through a forest and arrived atop a hill commanding an excellent view of the pond the beavers had created. Robert had felt a twinge of disappointment because he had expected to see beavers, resembling the animated versions in Saturday morning cartoons. There had been no beavers that day because they work at night. Even with no animals in sight, Robert had appreciated the

opportunity to take a close look at what the animals had built. Constructed of mud mixed with twigs, their dam had crossed the creek and had reached a height of six feet or more. On the dry slope of the dam, hundreds of branches and numerous trunks of trees as big around as stovepipes had been piled. Robert had been impressed with the orderliness, for the branches and trees had been aligned vertically—not strewn haphazardly. In the middle of the pond, the beavers' lodge could be seen: a mound of sticks protruding above the deep reservoir. When Robert had played in the mud near the barn after a spring storm, he had used a small shovel to dig a channel no wider than three or four inches where the water was the deepest, needing little encouragement to form a small stream headed toward the meadow. Then he had attempted to build a dam across the channel. The water kept tearing away his preliminary work. When he finally resorted to dropping a large shovelful of soil squarely over the stream and had stepped on the dirt to make it stay put, the water immediately went around one end. Beavers were experts, Robert had decided when the field trip had ended and everyone was climbing aboard the bus for the return trip to school.

On a sunny June day—the exact opposite of the overcast day when Robert had studied the beaver dam—Joe and Ida took the boys to visit Arthur, Pearl, and Vera at Willowwood. The three greeted the family at the door to the little house.

Ida said, "Charles and Robert, you may entertain yourselves by the cliff, and we'll call you when it's time to eat."

Charles and Robert were happy to be excused, although they would not have minded listening to the adults' conversation, which was sure to roam through stories about the olden days. The boys lingered in the cool shade of the pines, examining cones that left a sticky tar on their fingers. Charles showed Robert how the cone protected the seeds. Next, they passed through the grove of willows with its spongy, sun-dappled floor. As no water was running through the rill, they found tufts of dried sedge where they could place their feet and cross the muddy streamlet. Now they stood before the cliff. They looked up, admiring its height. They wanted to climb the sheer face, but to scale more than eight or ten feet upward was impossible. They balanced like goats on small projections as high as they could go without losing their footing.

Robert was amazed to find tiny snail shells, which seemed to him to be so foreign as to belong in a different part of the world. Each was perfectly formed. They were empty, and he found—quite by accident—that some of the smallest ones could be crushed with very little pressure between the

thumb and forefinger. As he wanted to take them home, he tried not to flatten them into minuscule shards.

When the brothers returned to the level ground, Robert searched for a chunk of sandstone that he could pocket for his collection. At home, he had a shoebox with stones lining the bottom. He had found them wherever the family went, and they reminded him of the places Joe, Ida, Charles, and he had visited. Robert crouched down to lift a triangular piece of sandstone from the sandy, pebbly soil near the rivulet. He liked the granular feel of the rock, which he put in the pocket of his tan shorts—first making certain that his shells were in the opposite pocket!

Just then, Ida called for the boys to come to "dinner," the midday meal.

When the boys entered through the screen door, Arthur and Joe were discussing the Battle of Kickapoo, which had been fought on the 1st of June in 1791. The battlefield was between Williamsport and Independence.

"The battle took place not too far from the falls on Kickapoo Creek," Arthur said.

Robert knew where Kickapoo Falls was. Joe had taken the boys to see it, even though the site was on private property. The somber cliff stood in a dense forest. The rocky cleft loomed up from the shadows and impressed Robert's young imagination as ancient and elemental, as if Titans had fought there. Joe had warned the boys not to circle around to the top of the falls, as Charles had suggested. With his fear of heights, Robert had felt considerable relief.

"Warrenton, which had been planned as the county seat, was near there," Arthur added.

"Is there anything left of Warrenton?" Joe asked.

"Not that I know of," Arthur said.

"Doubtlessly, you are aware that another Indian battle took place in 1822," Joe offered.

"Refresh my memory," Arthur said.

"After the Battle of Tippecanoe, unrest persisted, and the government conducted what might be called 'clean-up operations' in Indiana, even after statehood," Joe explained. "Groups of Kickapoo and Potawatomie Indians

lost a battle in 1822. As I understand, it took place near Warrenton. That was only four years before my ancestors began felling trees for their farm south of Pine Village."

"We're going to eat now," Ida suggested.

Ida had helped Pearl and Vera prepare chicken salad sandwiches and lemonade.

Vera, who always took an interest in what the boys did, asked Charles and Robert, "Were you having fun while we were talking about battles?"

"I found snail shells," Robert said. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful to show Vera.

"Those are lovely!" she exclaimed.

"And I found a rock," Robert said, while he carefully replaced the shells and transferred his hand to his other pocket, pulling out the sandstone.

"I find the color almost pink, don't you?" Vera said.

"Yes," Robert said, "especially when the sun shines on the rock."

"My, it's a hot day!" Ida said.

"We can better appreciate the shade of the pines on a day like this," Pearl said.

"I would rather be a little too warm than to be freezing in air conditioning," Vera said.

Robert hadn't even noticed that it was hot out. He wondered why the adults thought it was such a hot day.

Chapter 7: The Sixth Grade

Charles' teacher in the sixth grade was Mrs. Downy, but Mrs. Russell had taken her place by the time Robert was ready to begin his last year in the grade school of Pine Village. (Robert perceived the seventh and eighth grades as radically different because the students in those grades changed rooms to be taught different subjects.) Mrs. Elma Russell had been a classmate of Charles and Robert's father.

Although her stature was slight, Mrs. Russell exerted an influence that was gigantic. She was one of the teachers that shaped the yielding clay of Robert's perceptions. Mrs. Russell's businesslike approach brooked no nonsense. Her smile meant she was pleased with the progress of the class. She smiled throughout the weeks that Robert's class built a medieval castle.

A long table such as those in the cafeteria was placed by the east wall of the classroom, and the students were given the assignment to research and construct a castle resembling those of Europe in the Middle Ages. Mrs. Russell divided the class into teams, with each team responsible for completing one facet of the project. The team of which Robert was a member was to complete a backdrop. Wallpaper with the white side out was taped to the wall behind the table, and Robert's team created a landscape in the appropriate scale for the cardboard castle buildings, which stood some two feet tall. The backdrop measured five feet tall by eight feet wide.

While his classmates laid out baileys and built walls and battlements, crenellated towers, and a rectangular keep, Robert sketched serfs working in fields and knights on horseback. Measurements were all there was of mathematics, but other subjects were fully incorporated in the project. Students gave oral reports on the history of medieval Europe, and they wrote papers about life in the Middle Ages. As the castle took shape day by day, the class' sense of accomplishment grew.

During Robert's time in Mrs. Russell's class, his great uncle Marshall C. Rhode passed away. Robert's father and his father's first cousin Jay helped Marshall's brother Charlie (Jay's father) to prepare for an auction. On a cold day that threatened rain, the auctioneer's repetitive tenor voice echoed down the valley from Marshall's large house on the hill. While it wasn't a castle, Marshall's house was palatial for a farming community. It was a plain, two-story L-shaped home with fourteen rooms.

Joe was standing beside Ida when she said in an undertone, "I'm going to bid on the clock."

Joe's mouth fell open, and he stared at Ida. "What do we want with an old clock like that?" he asked.

"I like it," Ida replied.

Joe closed his mouth. Ida stood determined in her boots, long blue winter coat with the big buttons, scarf tied over her hair, and pointy glasses: the picture of a farm wife in the 1960s.

The bidding turned to the so-called "mantel clock." It was an old one: a Seth Thomas built in the early 1840s. The rectangular wooden box stood some two feet tall. The top glass over the face was intact, as was the bottom reverse-painted glass depicting a bouquet of flowers. The mechanism had to be wound each day and was powered by heavy weights that the act of winding caused to be lifted along the sides of the box on the inside. Gravity pulling on the weights did the rest, and a pendulum kept everything moving.

"Let's start the bidding at fifty dollars," cried the auctioneer. "Who will give me fifty dollars for the mantel clock?"

Catching an almost invisible gesture in the crowd, one of the auctioneer's assistants yelped.

"Fifty, fifty, fifty, I have fifty, fifty, fifty," the auctioneer began trilling. "Fifty-five, who will give me fifty-five, fifty-five, fifty-five?"

Ida nodded while Joe stared resolutely forward. A cold wind blew.

"Now sixty, now sixty," the auctioneer warbled, warming to the contest. He pushed his cowboy hat back farther and leaned forward.

The auctioneer's helper yelped again.

Eyes in the crowd went roaming in all directions to identify who was bidding.

Ida nodded, bringing the bid to sixty-five.

Joe whispered, "That's a high price for an old clock."

"It's not polite to whisper," Ida calmly explained.

"Now seventy, seventy, seventy," sang the auctioneer, whose helper yelped almost immediately.

Ida recognized the dealer in antiques that she was bidding against. Joe was hoping she wouldn't nod, but she did.

"Now eighty, now eighty, now eighty," chirped the auctioneer. Within seconds, the assistant yelped again.

"I believe it's time to stop," Joe mumbled.

"I believe it's time to bid again," Ida said with the undaunted gallantry of a knight in the lists during a joust.

Exasperated, Joe muttered, "Oh, what do we want such an old clock for?"

"Try not to end on a preposition," Ida said, nodding.

"Eighty-five, eighty-five, eighty-five, I have eighty-five, who will give me ninety, ninety, ninety?" the auctioneer yodeled. All eyes were on the antiques dealer, who finally shook his head.

"I have eighty-five, ninety? ninety? ninety? going once, going twice, SOLD to the little lady in the blue coat!"

"Let's put the clock in the car, and I'll show you why I like it," Ida said to Joe, who tagged along after her as if he were a whipped puppy.

Once the clock was resting in the back seat, Ida carefully opened the glass door, reached into the bottom of the clock, and lifted a sheaf of papers.

"Here's why I like the clock," Ida said, smiling at Joe.

From 1806 until 1827, Joe's Quaker ancestors had farmed along Caesar's Creek, where their Quaker meetinghouse stood, and had attended "monthly meeting" in Waynesville, Ohio. In 1826 and 1827, they migrated to Indiana. The clock had been purchased only a decade and a half after the move. A family story told that Jonathan Rhode, who tried farming in Arkansas before returning to Indiana, had brought a mantel clock back to Indiana with him. The bundle of papers in the bottom of the Seth Thomas that Ida had bought for the exorbitant sum of eighty-five dollars included the handwritten tax receipts from Caesar's Creek.

"This is your family's history right here," Ida beamed. "Nobody knew that these papers were in the bottom of the clock."

"Well," Joe grinned sheepishly, "I guess you knew what you were doing."

"Oh, Joe, I always know what I'm doing," Ida said in mock indignation.

At the end of the auction, a sleety drizzle began. People took the last of their prizes to their cars and trucks, and, soon, the grounds were largely deserted. The windows of the big house seemed to stare mournfully upon the emptiness.

Robert was staring at a broken dressing table that nobody wanted. It had been painted white, but the paint was chipping off. The heavy mirror had splintered the back of one of the supports and was detached, lying on top of the table with its single drawer. The legs were loose and wobbly. Tiny beads of rain covered the mirror and were reflected in it.

Joe read Robert's mind. "Do you want that old table?" he asked Robert.

"I could refinish it, fix it up, and use it as my desk," Robert said with a big smile.

Joe looked at Ida.

She said, "If that's what he wants to do, let him take it."

Joe lifted the dressing table and made room for it in the back of the GMC pickup.

Later, with advice from Aunt Margaret, who routinely restored furniture, Robert removed all traces of the white paint, sanded all the surfaces until they were smooth as glass, stained the piece a dark walnut, tightened the legs, and glued the splintered area. The day when he hung the mirror again was a victory. Many years later, it would bring a high price at another auction. Meanwhile, Robert sat at the desk every day and dreamed of becoming a writer.

That spring, a senior accomplished a dream of his. The Lafayette *Journal and Courier* for March the 26th in 1966 reported, "Central Catholic High School and Pine Village boys won the two top awards in the 14th Lafayette Regional Science Fair at Purdue University Saturday. Thomas Eberts, 16, a Central Catholic High School junior, won a trip to the International Science Fair at Dallas in May with his exhibit on 'The Role of Testosterone in Red Cell Formation.' Also winning an expense-paid trip to the International was Ted M. Willer, 17, a Pine Village junior, with his work on 'Plasma Jet Studies of Re-entry Materials.' In addition, Willer was named to receive a Navy Science Cruiser award. Sometime next summer, Willer will be a guest of the Navy on

a tour of naval facilities, probably at Norfolk, Va." The newspaper erred; Ted was a senior. Robert had stood in awe before Ted's display at the local science fair. Ted went on to place third internationally.

From medieval castles to space exploration, the sixth-grade year impressed itself deeply in Robert's memory.

Chapter 8: The News and the Visit

While Robert was in Mrs. Russell's class, the televised evening news on ABC, CBS, and NBC was spoken by a small fraternity of newscasters whose careers (for the most part) had started in radio. Headed by the most-watched Chet Huntley and David Brinkley (David not having worked in radio first) at NBC, the up-and-coming Walter Cronkite at CBS, and the least-watched Peter Jennings (who took over from Ron Cochran in mid-year) at ABC, the networks gave brief but effective summaries of world and national news. NBC and CBS devoted a half hour (6:30 until 7:00 on weekdays) to news, and ABC tried to compete with fifteen minutes. Chet Huntley and Walter Cronkite were recognized for their perfect command of language. In tones honed through experience in radio after World War II and sharpened by tough competition, they told of upheaval in Cuba, Pakistan, and Rhodesia. They described the suffering of refugees. They reported on President Lyndon Johnson's repeated warnings about keeping troops in Vietnam until Communist threats were eliminated there. They covered the election of a woman named Indira Gandhi in troubled India (She would visit the United States in March.) and Leonid Brezhnev's rise to the powerful position of General Secretary of the Soviet Union and Leader of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R.

Robert's perceptions of the news probably were shaped by the fact that, at age 11, he was beginning to understand much of what Huntley, Cronkite, and others said. He felt increasingly weighed down by news. People older than he likely took the news in stride, for many of them had lived through such traumatic events as the Great Depression, world wars, and, more recently, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis. Yet, from Robert's perspective, the news was becoming more and more unsettling. In the fall and spring of 1965 and 1966, there were massive protests against the Vietnam War. There was racial unrest. The more the rock stars sang about love, the less attainable love became.

On December 9th, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* aired. Robert and his father were great fans of the Peanuts cartoon strip, and they and the whole family stayed glued to the TV set for the half hour of animated entertainment. Characters such as Lucy, Linus, and Snoopy moved and turned in ways that brought Charles Schulz's two-dimensional newsprint cartoon drawings to life, and the voices sounded just right! The music was instantly memorable. When Linus stood on the stage and recited the Christmas story, it was a magical moment in television. Linus seemed to be trying to reassure a frightened, distressed, agitated nation that "tidings of great joy" were not fictional but real.

Ida announced that her friend Emmajeanette and Emmajeanette's husband, Andy, were going to visit from their home in Westville. Such good news eclipsed the evening news, and Robert eagerly looked forward to seeing Andy and Emmajeanette.

When they parked their blue 1964 Chevrolet Bel Air under the sheltering arms of the giant catalpa tree, Andy hopped from the driver's seat, strode around the front of the car, and opened the passenger door for Emmajeanette. She was wearing a long coat while Andy wore a jacket. With her half-clear glasses frames with darker tops that imitated the arch of her eyebrows and with her dark hair pulled in fashionable waves at least three inches up and around her face, Emmajeanette looked as if she had just stepped from a glossy advertisement in *McCall's*.

Andy wore a pure white shirt beneath his jacket. A gold Speidel Twist-O-Flex watchband gleamed on Andy's wrist. The tall and elegant Emmajeanette, who had worked as an office secretary, always smiled; the short and wiry Andy, who had worked in the post office, was always *about* to smile—as soon as he knew whether anyone had caught his joke! He had a squinting yet penetrating gaze from behind his glasses, as if he were sizing up his audience. Andy meant great fun!

With his hand lightly on Emmajeanette's arm, Andy guided the love of his life through the front gate and up to the door of the house.

While Emmajeanette and Ida clasped hands and exchanged fond hellos, Joe greeted Andy with "That's a good-looking car!"

"Luckily, it runs well, too!" Andy responded. "How are you, Joe?"

"I'm well," Joe answered. "I've been thinking of buying a Bel Air. The Dowden family here in town wants to sell a 1963."

"What color is it?" Andy inquired, turning to his wife. "I'm sorry," he said to Emmajeanette. "I asked before you could."

Emmajeanette smiled and said nothing.

"It's white," Joe replied.

Milton L. "Milt" Dowden could hang wallpaper better than anyone! Milt's wife, Elsie, had given Ida a recipe for sour milk drop cookies that Robert's mother included among her favorite desserts. Joe and Ida respected—and liked—the

Dowdens very much. Robert sensed that his father had already decided to buy the car.

"A Chevrolet is a dependable car," Emmajeanette offered.

"Joe, what do you call a Ford at the top of a hill?" Andy wanted to know.

Joe grinned and shook his head.

"A miracle," Andy said, eyes twinkling.

Joe laughed.

"Ninety-nine out of a hundred Fords are still on the road," Andy stated, eyes sparkling narrowly. "Only one could still be driven to the service station."

Joe laughed even more loudly.

"And I haven't even said hello to Charles and Robert," Andy commented, turning to the boys. "Hello, Charles and Robert!" Taking everyone in a glance, Andy said, "Remember when we were at Brookfield Zoo? Robert, you were too little to remember. Charles was pulling Robert in a little wagon, and Charles started up too fast. Robert took a tumble out the back onto the sidewalk, and Charles turned around, saw what he had done, and said, 'Oh! Pardon me, Robert!' Charles was ever so polite after dumping Robert on the ground. 'Oh! Pardon me, Robert!'" Andy chuckled.

Joe, Ida, and the boys followed Andy and Emmajeanette into the house.

The conversation flowed effortlessly for hours. In those days, most people did not lack for topics to talk about, and they had well-developed personalities shining through their sentences.

Ida stood to prepare the dinner.

"May I help you?" Emmajeanette asked, as she stood and followed Ida into the kitchen. Ida handed Emmajeanette a freshly ironed apron.

"Why don't you make the rolls?" Ida suggested. "I was going to have your toffee dessert, but I ran out of chocolate and forgot to buy more. So we're having sugar cream pie instead."

Emmajeanette's toffee recipe, which Ida's family called "Emmajeanette's dessert," was a sweet concoction featuring crushed vanilla wafers, a rich

mousse-like layer of chocolate that began as uncooked separated eggs, and whipping cream on top.

"I can make the toffee dessert at home," Emmajeanette said, "and you make the best sugar cream pie I've ever tasted! I, for one, am delighted we're having the pie!"

After a big dinner with everything except the iced tea having been grown on the farm, Andy and Emmajeanette had to leave to make what was then considered a fairly long drive back to Westville, the town where Ida held her first teaching position after graduating from Indiana State Teachers College and where her surrogate father, the Reverend Lowell Everett Morris, had served the Methodist Church. In those years before Ida had met Joe, she and Emmajeanette had struck up a lasting friendship. Later, when Emmajeanette had married Andy, she had simply iced the friendship cake with a husband having a wonderful sense of humor.

The house seemed unusually quiet without Andy and Emmajeanette, but it was a clean house! For several days before the visit, Ida had enlisted the help of Charles and Robert in scrubbing the house thoroughly. Joe needed to drive into town to place an order at the feed store, and Robert rode along. Whenever Joe's pickup was about to pass an approaching vehicle, Joe raised his right hand and waved at the occupants of the car or truck. They waved in turn. When Joe pulled into the alley beside the feed store with its checkerboard paint scheme, Robert thought the news couldn't be too menacing with such courteous motorists and amusing friends.

Chapter 9: The Game

Mrs. Russell introduced a playground game that she had known when she was a child. Children from all the grades could participate. The group was divided into two teams of perhaps twenty each. One team formed a line along the sidewalk on the south side of the gymnasium; the second team, along the sidewalk on the north side of the school building. A designated student stood in the middle of the parking lot between the two sidewalks. He or she was "it." At a signal given by Mrs. Russell, the two teams ran toward each other, passing one another to gain the opposite sidewalk. Meanwhile, "it" was tagging as many students as possible before they could gain the safety of the sidewalk. Once students were standing with both feet on the sidewalk, they could no longer be tagged. Those that had been tagged had to remain with "it" and tag more students when the two lines ran toward—and through—each other the next time. When only one runner had not been tagged, that runner's team was declared the winner, and that runner became "it" for the next round.

Robert couldn't play the game often enough! He loved racing pall-mall for the safety of the opposite sidewalk—all the while dodging students who were trying to tag him. From his peripheral vision, the sprinting students seemed like clashing armies in the movie *Khartoum*. Whenever the two teams ran, the pounding of feet echoed between the gym and the school.

The game was the last that Robert would recall from his grade school years. When he would enter the seventh grade and move from classroom to classroom, there would be no more recesses on a playground. Mrs. Thrush, who taught music and art, would no longer push her upright piano into the classroom to lead the students in singing such rounds as this one that enshrined the cries of a mender of chairs, a fishmonger, a ragpicker, and a skinner in the streets or marketplaces of Old England:

Chairs to mend! old chairs to mend!
Rush or cane bottom,
Old chairs to mend! old chairs to mend!
New mackerel! new mackerel!
Old rags! any old rags!
Take money for your old rags!
Any hare skins or rabbit skins!

… or this one, sung by carolers at Christmas time in England as long ago as the 1500s:

Hey, ho, nobody home;

Meat nor drink nor money have I none,
Yet will I be merry.

Robert vaguely sensed the transition that was approaching. In small increments, his childhood was receding into the past. Like swans, the years were slowly slipping away.

On the Fourth of July, Joe gently nosed the car into the weeds along a gravel road just south of the park in Fowler where the fireworks were displayed. Ida spread blankets on the ground, and everyone sat together as a family. Other cars came to line the road, and other families sat on blankets. Joe poured a cup of coffee from a thermos and handed the cup to Ida. Robert said, "Coffee always smells so good!"

Ida asked Joe, "Are you going to let Robert taste yours?"

"I don't know. Am I?" Joe asked in return.

"I think he's old enough," Ida replied.

Joe poured a small amount into his clean cup and handed it to Robert, and Robert sipped the nutty liquid. He was hooked on coffee then and there.

As darkness fell, the family watched for pink lights, which were the wands the volunteer firemen carried to light the fireworks. In the gathering haze of a hot summer's night, the pink lights began to fan out mysteriously. Then, with the sound of the air being punched, a nearly invisible rocket slithered up and up. Suddenly, a giant flower of light bloomed overhead!

Everyone *ooh*ed and *ah*ed, comparing colors and effects to choose favorites. At their distance from the park and from their vantage point *behind* the show, Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert could not always discern what the displays on the ground were intended to be, but the waterfall was always obvious and always appreciated for its dazzling white, its smoke drifting to one side, and its noise not unlike a cascade.

The finale was grand enough with several bursts of brilliant color occurring in rapid succession in the night sky.

That same summer, a brash Barred Rock rooster had assumed leadership of Joe's flock. Whenever Charles or Robert entered the chicken yard, the rooster ran toward the boy, leaped in the air, thrust its legs forward, and raked the youngster's legs with its talons while flapping its wings against his knees. "Ow! Oh, ow!" Robert exclaimed on many occasions. For some

reason, the attacks of the rooster made him forget the option of escape, and he stayed rooted in one spot while the Barred Rock flapped him again and again, leaving wicked scratches in the seasons when shorts could be worn. Only Joe's intervention could save the boy. Every time the rooster got Charles, Charles merely scowled while running away. Both boys appealed to their mother.

"He's mean!" Robert emphasized.

Ida laughed.

"That rooster's becoming a nuisance," Charles said.

Ida chuckled.

"You wouldn't laugh, if he flapped you," Robert said, brows lowered.

"I wouldn't let him!" Ida said, holding her sides and wearing the biggest grin! "You have legs! Use them! Run away from the rooster! You're faster than he is!"

"He's *mean*!" Robert repeated, but he could see that he wasn't getting anywhere with his mother. Charles had already given up and had gone to his room to work on some project.

So the attacks of the rooster continued. Robert would enter the chicken yard with extreme caution. He would look left. He would look right. When he thought the coast was clear, he would begin walking through the yard to the gate that led to the barn. Suddenly, from nowhere, the rooster would come running, lurching from side to side as he raced. Robert would freeze. Whoosh! The rooster would kick, rake, scratch, and flap Robert's legs.

"Ow! Oh, ow!"

Joe would appear in the barn door. He would size up the situation and would stride toward the rooster, eventually shooing it away. The rooster would strut arrogantly, its beak forward as if he had been declared the champion fighter. Then it would take a pose, lean its head back, wag its wings, and crow noisily.

"He's so mean!" Robert would say.

"Don't go near him," Joe suggested.

"Don't think for a minute that I want to go near him!" Robert said, almost pouting. "He hides until he sees me, then he comes running at me!"

"I doubt that he's hiding from you," Joe said.

"Yes, he is!" Robert said, before he was aware that he was contradicting his father—which he had been taught never to do. "I mean, he surely seems to hide because I look for him before I come through the gate. Can't you sell him?"

"No, he's a good rooster. Your hens earn blue ribbons at the county fair because we have good stock, and that rooster is good stock," Joe answered. "I guess you'll have to try to run faster to get away from him."

Almost every time that Robert entered the chicken yard, whoosh! "Ow! Oh, ow!"

Robert began searching for other pathways. He hacked a meandering trail through the giant ragweed and gypsum south of the chicken houses, but the trail ended in an open stretch of some thirty feet before he could reach the gate leading to the barn. While still hidden among the weeds, he would peer out. "No sign of him," Robert would whisper, to reassure himself. Then he would leap to his feet and make a mad dash for the gate.

Whoosh! "Ow! Oh, ow!"

One day, Charles said to Robert, "Look! We have to go the barn to help Dad. That means going through the chicken lot, and that means the rooster will flap you."

"He could flap *you*," Robert said.

"That's what I was about to suggest," Charles continued. "I'll go first. You stay right behind me. When the rooster flaps me, you run around me and through the gate into the barnyard."

"Alright!" Robert agreed, smiling. Then his smile faded. "But do you really want to get flapped just so that I don't have to be flapped?"

"I'll take the flapping this time, and you can do the same for me the next time," Charles said.

The boys entered the chicken lot and walked about half of its length. Robert stayed close to Charles. Then the rooster ran up behind Robert.

Whoosh! “Ow! Oh, ow!”

On another day, Ida took the egg basket on her arm. She sang softly to herself:

I come to the garden alone
while the dew is still on the roses,
and the voice I hear falling on my ear
the Son of God discloses.

And (Ida paused, holding the note.) he walks with me
and he talks with me,
and he tells me I am his own;
and the joy we share as we tarry there,
none other has ever known.

Repeating the song, she gathered the eggs. Just as she stepped outside the chicken house, here came the rooster!

Whoosh!

The egg basket, which was nearly full, went flying. After the rooster had his fill of flapping, he strutted to the side, leaned back, and crowed.

The next day, while Joe was reading the newspaper and Ida was ironing, Joe turned to her and gently opened a topic of conversation: “I happened to notice that the rooster didn’t crow this morning.”

Ida set the iron on its heel, sprinkled water from her yellow bottle onto the sheet she was preparing, and resumed Ironing. “No?”

Joe hesitated, thrown off by her one-word response. “No, no crowing today. I wonder if he might be ill.”

“Ask Mrs. Bowen,” Ida said.

Joe stared at the newspaper and read the same sentence three times while he tried to second-guess why he should ask Mrs. Bowen. He cleared his throat. “If I were to ask Mrs. Bowen, what do you suppose she would tell me?”

Smoothing the sheet while tiny clouds of steam rose around the iron, Ida replied, “Mrs. Bowen would tell you that Mr. Rooster is alive and well and taking good care of her flock.”

Joe let the paper fall on his knee. “Do you mean to tell me that you gave Mrs. Bowen our rooster?”

Ida glanced at Joe. “It was mean,” she said.

“Will Mrs. Bowen still be speaking to you tomorrow?” Joe wanted to know.

“Oh, I told her it was mean,” Ida explained, “and she said, ‘The meaner the better! The mean ones can fight off the skunks.’”

Chapter 10: The Blacksmith and the Veterinarian

Sometimes, wires get crossed, and a person carries a memory that is really two or three memories that don't belong together.

So it was with Robert, who always conflated a poem and two verses. The first was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Village Blacksmith," which begins

Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands …

The second was George Orwell's twisted snippet of verse in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which Robert read in high school and which goes

Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me:
There lie they, and here lie we
Under the spreading chestnut tree.

In grade school, Mrs. Thrush had taught Robert's class a song based on a nursery rhyme that called upon the students to use rhythmic gestures with the verses. The song was repeated but, during each repetition, a line was no longer sung and was replaced with the gestures only, until, on the final repetition, there was no singing whatsoever and only the gesturing in place of the melody. The song went

Under the spreading chestnut tree
Where we sit both you and me,
Oh how happy we will be,
Under the spreading chestnut tree.

By putting the three together, Robert always remembered that one of the two people under the chestnut tree was a happy blacksmith. Whenever Robert thought of the happy blacksmith, he pictured Tony Arrigo, the blacksmith in Pine Village when Robert was growing up.

If Joe needed welding, he turned to Tony, whose good nature never failed to impress Robert. In his grimy welder's cap and his heavy apron, Tony would greet Joe, Charles, and Robert with a smile that looked all the brighter for the smudgy dust that often necessarily accumulated on Tony's face. The blacksmith shop had belonged to Joe's relative Thomas "Tommy" Eleazer

Fenton, who had passed away in 1929. When he was in the early grades, Robert played with the lengths of filler rod lying in the dust in front of Tony's shop. Robert poked them in the ground to make palisades around imaginary forts.

Years earlier, Glen J. Brutus had driven to Rockville, Indiana, to see a 23–90 Baker steam traction engine that had been built in 1923. It was parked beside a jailhouse to act as an emergency heating plant. Glen had returned to Pine Village and had told T. S. "Windy" Stingle about the engine, which Windy had bought. The original flywheel had been replaced with a Reeves flywheel. Windy had stored the engine alongside Tony's shop, where Windy had planned to put new tubes in the boiler. The engine had rested there for years, until Alvin Kline of Millersburg, Ohio, acquired it.

Tony didn't seem to mind having the Baker become a permanent exhibit. He was always a happy blacksmith!

On a cold morning in the dead of winter, Joe drove to Doc Cullop's home, and Doctor Richard H. Cullop, the veterinarian, followed Joe back to Joe's barn. A cow was having trouble delivering her first calf. She was standing in the barnyard to the south of the barn. Doc was hurrying. The Holstein had been trying to deliver the calf for over two hours.

Doc lifted the calf jack from his pickup and handed it to Joe. Then Doc removed his winter coat and hat, placing them in the front seat of his truck. Robert wondered why Doc had taken off his coat. Next, Doc took off his flannel shirt. He was wearing only a T-shirt. He hauled out of his truck a bucket of sudsy water and washed his hands and arms repeatedly in the steaming liquid. He dipped a new sponge in a second bucket and swabbed the area where the calf should have appeared.

Robert could hardly believe his eyes as Doc then thrust his arm deep within the cow—all the way up to Doc's shoulder. The way he struggled made Robert believe that Doc wished his arm were longer.

"Its hind legs are trying to come out first," Doc said to Joe.

Doc struggled for several minutes. He had to push the hind legs back from the canal, find the front legs alongside the hind legs, and pull the front legs forward before spinning the calf into an upright position.

"Let's see what she'll do now," Doc said, standing back.

To his experienced eye, the cow appeared to be unable to deliver the calf.

“Alright,” Doc said. “We’ll have to pull it.”

The hoop was lifted into place and suspended across the back end of the cow. Doc reached the small chains within the cow and attached them to the calf’s front legs.

“Joe, you start,” Doc said, watching carefully.

Robert’s father ratcheted the first chain.

“Wait,” Doc said, reaching in. “Alright. Another!”

Joe ratcheted the second chain.

“Wait,” Doc said, again reaching in. “Alright. Another!”

Robert’s father ratcheted the first chain.

“Keep going!” Doc said.

Joe ratcheted the second chain.

In this way, first one leg of the calf came into view, followed by the other leg. Joe later explained to Robert that the calf’s shoulders are the widest part and can become wedged in the mother’s pelvis, unless one shoulder comes through ahead of the other shoulder.

The nose of the calf was showing.

“Alright, I’ll take over,” Doc said, trading places with Joe.

Doc ratcheted the jack a little faster, a little faster, and a little faster. Here came the calf!

“Joe, get ready to break its fall,” Doc said.

Just then, the cow groaned and sank onto her front knees.

“It’s alright, Joe. They sometimes do that. It’ll just be a little harder for me. That’s all,” Doc said.

The cow’s back legs buckled, and the cow dropped the rest of the way to the ground.

Doc touched the frozen earth with his end of the calf jack rod and ratcheted again.

"I wish I could get a little more angle," Doc said. "Joe, tug lightly on the calf's front shoulders. That's good!"

Doc lifted the rod a little and ratcheted quickly. He lowered it again, still ratcheting.

He lifted and lowered, lifted and lowered, until, quite suddenly, the calf slithered all the way out. Joe was kneeling and caught the calf's hind quarters, guiding them gently down.

"She's a girl!" Doc said.

Robert marveled at how bright the white and black fur of the calf looked. The white was as pure as new snow.

Doc ensured that the calf and cow were in good condition all around before washing his hands and arms, drying off, and putting on his shirt and coat and hat. Joe, meanwhile, scattered a bale of straw around the calf as a temporary measure.

"I've seen calves in worse positions," Doc said, when he had loaded his truck and was ready to return to his clinic. "If they're going to be presenting wrong, I'd prefer they be like this one. Still, it's a job to push those hind legs and that butt back over without losing hold of the front legs, which are crisscrossed with the back ones." While he was talking, Doc was gesturing to demonstrate the effort that he had made deep within the cow. "Getting the calf to come on around isn't as difficult. It looks like you have a good calf there."

Robert asked, "Will that cow always have trouble having a calf?"

Doc smiled. "That's a good question," he said. "Most likely, she'll have easy deliveries after this one. She's just young and a little small. That's a nice big calf!" Doc turned toward Joe. "If she does have trouble the next time, can we make it a warm day, Joe?"

Robert's father laughed and shook his head. "I'm sorry she was due this early," Joe said. "I usually get their dates worked out so the bitterly cold days are over before calving begins."

"I'm only razzing you," Doc said. "Let me know if you have any more trouble."

After Doc's truck pulled away, Joe said to Robert, "Help me encourage her to get up." As the two of them walked toward the cow, she stood of her own accord, turned around, and began licking her calf. Within a few minutes, the calf stood on its own!

"Now that the calf's standing, I'd like to get them in the barn," Joe said. "You stand back and encourage the cow a little if necessary."

Then Joe slowly approached the cow while talking gently to her. He bent over, putting his arms around the calf's chest and hind quarters. In this way, he helped guide the calf ten feet to the barn door. The mother muttered but did not become belligerent. She followed along, her nose inches from her newborn. In no time, Joe had both within the stall. He and Robert put in extra straw bedding to help ward off the cold.

Watching Doc at work had deepened Robert's appreciation for expertise gained through long study and broad experience.

Chapter 11: The Perm

As Robert had foreseen, Joe bought the Chevrolet Bel Air from the Dowdens. To Robert's way of thinking, everything about the car was cheap. The aqua ceiling fabric felt like plastic, and it had a pattern of tiny circular holes. After experiencing the interior of the 57 Chevrolet, the 63 seemed cheap inside. The seat covers were not luxurious. Even the exterior lines of the vehicle made Robert feel that Chevrolet had lowered its standards. Robert felt that he was riding in a thin horizontal cardboard box. The lack of chrome and the plain round taillights proclaimed that everything about the car had been cheapened to the lowest denominator, yet the car was dependable. It did not languish for long periods of time in Glen Bisel's shop; rather, it ran and ran in its bland, undistinguished way. Joe's family rode in its cheapness from place to place for many years.

Ida drove the Bel Air to Bessie Eberly's house when it was time for Bessie to give Ida a perm. While Bessie was transforming Ida's straight hair into tight curls, Ida said, "I think we're going to move."

Bessie fumbled her comb, she was so surprised!

"Move! Where to?" Bessie managed to blurt out, fixing a concerned gaze on Ida in the mirror that both faced.

"Well, that's just it," Ida said. "We probably will move to Lizzie Williams' house."

"Here, in town?" Bessie questioned, her look becoming stern.

"No," Ida laughed. "Her house out east of town."

Bessie said, "You mean where the Davises lived."

"That's right," Ida confirmed.

"I'm sure it's a nice house, but why would you want to move there?" Bessie asked.

"Because we can't move to Uncle Marshall's house, which is falling in—" Ida began to explain.

Bessie interrupted, "—Anna and Marshall Rhode's place?"

"That's right," Ida said again. "That's a nice big house, but the roof has leaked so much that Joe thinks it would cost a fortune to fix everything. He says it should be bulldozed."

"That's a shame!" Bessie commented. "Such a big house! But why do you want to move at all?"

"Oh, I see what you were asking," Ida remarked. "Well, the town has wanted additional revenue, and, at that meeting last week, somebody suggested annexing land around the town to increase the tax base."

"Yes," Bessie said encouragingly, once again busy with her comb.

"Joe said that he doesn't want to pay the high taxes that would be assessed on his hundred and twenty-five acres. He thinks we should move right away."

"But the town hasn't annexed his farm, has it?"

"Oh, no!" Ida exclaimed. "That probably couldn't happen for a year or two, even if the town managed to approve it, and there's no proof that the town would want to annex good farm land anywhere around the perimeter."

"But Joe is worried that the town might make that decision someday," Bessie concluded.

"You know something?" Ida asked.

"What?" Bessie asked.

"I think it will be hard for Joe to move."

"Why do you say that?"

"He has lived his whole life here. He grew up in the house where Cecil Gray lives, and he has raised his family in the house where we live now, which was part of his grandfather Tom Cobb's land. I think Joe will feel homesick."

Bessie laughed! "But Lizzie's farm is only two miles east of here! It's not like Joe would be moving to Canada!"

Ida laughed. "You're right, but Joe is like his mother. They have to follow a routine, and they can't endure change. I think when Joe is out there two miles away, he'll feel as if he were in another country."

Lizzie wanted Joe's family to farm the old Williams place, so she sold the land to Joe.

When Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert first pulled into the driveway of what would eventually become their new home, they hardly knew what to think. Charles appeared apathetic, Joe uneasy, Ida confident, Robert thrilled! Out there on the flat land that had once been marsh, the ancient trees around the house formed an oasis in the midst of a desert of black loam stretching toward the horizon in all directions. The maples were gnarled and bent from the constant wind that could roar from west to east during blizzards. A scraggly group of Osage orange trees huddled near a rusty wire fence. Outbuildings of gray, splintery wood leaned in crazy directions. While the others explored the house, Robert walked through the tall weeds to the west until he came to a slough, wet with cattails. The scent of tadpole water arose from the sedge grass. He could see so far away, and, everywhere he looked, the sky was filled with dark gray clouds reflecting the even darker earth, which was wild and lonely.

Robert pushed on through the tangled weeds catching at his feet. He came to a weathered shed where, in his father's boyhood, Joe Williams had stored his Reeves steam engine, threshing machine, and water wagon. Robert's great uncle Charley Cobb had worked as the Williamses' engineer. Charley had died long before Robert was born. While Robert stood near the fallen doors of the shed, he thought how his grandmother's brother had stood in the same place, oilcan in hand. Robert thought how closely the past pressed in upon him.

Robert joined the others at the house. A long enclosed porch with a sloping floor ran the length of the structure. It was homey. Ida was saying that she would move the kitchen into a large room that could double as a family room and wall off part of the old kitchen to make a bathroom. Robert and Charles would have bedrooms to the southeast of what would be the new kitchen, and Joe and Ida would have the room to the northeast. The empty house felt forlorn. Robert found a blue glass medicine bottle from the 1800s that someone had set on a windowsill.

"Could I have it?" he asked his mother.

"Yes, you may have it," she said.

For Robert, the bottle came to symbolize the home east of Pine Village.

Nearly two years would elapse before Joe's family could move to Lizzie Williams' farm. During that time, Robert would pass from classroom to classroom as a member of the seventh grade class and matriculate to the eighth grade. Every evening, he looked at the dark blue bottle and thought of the murky pools, the wild winds, the twisted tree trunks, the statuesque herons, the mysterious great horned owls, the scurrying quail, the gliding pheasants, and the cantering foxes that he felt were tugging him away from the security of the village into the unknown countryside, as if leprechauns were working an enchantment to lure him there. He pictured the move as an exciting adventure awaiting him just beyond a theatrical scrim through which, for the time being, he could see but which would not be lifted for him to see clearly for some time to come.

Chapter 12: The Fly

Robert was The Fly.

Not the unfortunate fly in the 1958 movie with Vincent Price.

Robert was a hero such as Batman and Robin, who appeared in a series that had recently aired on television. Joe's cousin Jay had given Joe his Navy Peacoat from World War II, which Jay had outgrown, and Joe passed it along to Robert. At the auction of Flora Farden's belongings, Robert had acquired a pair of amber dark glasses that were big and round with ivory-colored Bakelite frames. Wearing the black coat and the round glasses with the deep amber lenses, Robert was The Fly.

When Robert helped his father with the evening chores, he flew over gates. Well, he had to scale the gates' horizontal panels and hop down on the other side, but he did it really fast, as if he were flying! On the other side of the gates, Robert fought crime. Often, he did so by cracking ears of corn in two or by spreading hay in the mangers of the barn.

Even though he missed games on the playground, Robert was enjoying his time in the seventh grade. He enjoyed jumping up when the bell rang and scurrying to his next class in another room. He enjoyed the lessons and the teachers and his classmates. He enjoyed having a locker instead of a desk.

And he enjoyed becoming The Fly after school.

For many generations, students from Rainsville had transferred to Pine Village for their final years of schooling. When Robert entered the seventh grade, a reorganizing brought Rainsville students into his class. A few of the teachers who had devoted their careers to Rainsville's classes permanently transferred to Pine Village. One of them was the beloved Mr. Charles Lloyd Cavanaugh.

He stepped from a story by Washington Irving. A thin gentleman, he parted his gray hair in the middle. His reading glasses slid down his long nose. To see him on a windy day striding between the school building and the gymnasium was to see a scholar of skin and bones barely able to keep his footing while his trousers and coat flapped as if they might lift him into the sky.

Mr. Cavanaugh was named the sponsor of Robert's class, and Mr. Cavanaugh remained the class sponsor all the way through the class' senior year.

He taught English and mathematics. While Mr. Cavanaugh was of the old school that memorized everything and seldom (if ever) erred about a fact, he occasionally lapsed into an extraordinary pronunciation.

Once, Robert's class was learning a mathematical principle when Mr. Cavanaugh thought an example might prove helpful.

"Let us say you have four cassaws," Mr. Cavanaugh said. He went on to describe a mathematical equation involving the four "cassaws." Then he called on one of the sharpest students—probably because he wanted the class to hear the correct answer—but the student blushed and apologized, saying, "I'm sorry, but I don't know." Mr. Cavanaugh said, "That's quite alright," and he called on another student good at math. Fidgeting, the student said, "I don't know, either." Now Mr. Cavanaugh wondered what to do. He had hoped to demonstrate the mathematical principle so clearly that the class would see how very simple it was, but he had called on two students who should have known the answer and they had been unable to respond.

Meanwhile, Alan, with knitted brows, had been staring at his desktop. Suddenly, a smile flashed across his face, and he raised his hand.

"Yes, Alan," Mr. Cavanaugh acknowledged.

"Mr. Cavanaugh," Alan began, clearing his throat, "by your word 'cassaws,' might you mean *cashews*?"

"I mean those delightful nuts that can be found along with peanuts in a can of mixed nuts," Mr. Cavanaugh replied innocently, not taking any offense at Alan's question. The idea of taking offense at anything never could cross Mr. Cavanaugh's wonderful mind.

At that moment, the student on whom Mr. Cavanaugh had first called, raised a hand, was acknowledged, and said, "Now that I know we are dealing with cashews, I can give the answer." And the answer was correct! Mr. Cavanaugh beamed, and he went on to say how simple the principle was, after all.

From that day forward, Robert always thought of cashews as "cassaws."

Robert liked every one of his classmates—and had since first grade. He was delighted that he liked all the new classmates that came from the Rainsville School, too. Among them was his cousin Pam. They were complementary in

many ways. Pam's hair was as dark as Robert's was blond. Her complexion was olive, but Robert's was pale. When Robert was serious, Pam would laugh, and, when Pam was serious, Robert would laugh. They initiated a mutually pleasant academic rivalry that, six years later, would bring Robert to be the Valedictorian and Pam to be the Salutatorian—with the two separated by hardly a difference.

In seventh grade, Robert relied upon Pam's customary response to any of his ideas that she considered outrageous; "Now, Robert!" she would admonish him with her genuine smile. He continuously amused her, and, as she was so intellectual herself, she always kept him on his intellectual toes.

For Mr. Cavanaugh's English class, Robert drafted a letter to Aunt Della in Georgia: "Several events have been happening on the farm. Pigs have been coming, chickens hatched, young calves have been born, and a zillion other creatures have entered into our life. I enjoy it all except for one thing—work! It takes energy to feed a mess of squealing pigs and squawking chickens. It's work to get clean again; although I suppose it's worth it."

To Robert, the year felt as if a long-awaited future had arrived to pay homage to the past. The fall was distinguished by a futuristic television series named *Star Trek* that acknowledged its roots in Old World myth and fable. The hallmark of the spring was the CBS telecast of Hal Holbrook's stunning performance as Mark Twain. (In the distant future, Robert would meet Hal Holbrook and would tour the eastern half of the United States as Edgar A. Poe for over two hundred performances, and Robert would spend two days with—and sketch—Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek*.)

Meanwhile, Joe called out, "Robert, it's time to do the chores."

"Robert?" Robert called back. "Who's Robert? Don't you mean The Fly?"

Chapter 13: The Celebration

The snow began early, with a deep accumulation just after Halloween of 1966. Inaugurating January of 1967 was Chicago's largest blizzard on record. While the storm missed Pine Village, additional snow fell on the farm a week and a half later. Although Robert generally liked snow, he was having too much of a good thing. He wondered what it would be like to ride a bus after the move from the town to the country. He would have wondered what it would be like to eat lunch in the school cafeteria, but Ida had decided that Charles, now a student in high school, should have lunch with his classmates and had persuaded Joe to purchase lunch tickets for both of his sons. Even though Charles and Robert were only across the road from a home-cooked meal, they ate in the cafeteria. For Robert, lunch offered an opportunity to socialize with his classmates—and he loved socializing!

Mrs. Miles directed an effective cafeteria staff having four great cooks whose meals included fried chicken, chipped beef on biscuits, creamed turkey on biscuits, beef and noodles, chicken and noodles, beefaroni, ham and beans with cornbread, hot dogs with pickle relish, Coneys, hamburgers, meat loaf, tuna casserole, Salisbury steak, salmon, spaghetti Creole, chili, potato soup and crackers, vegetable beef soup, baked beans, mashed potatoes, green beans, buttered corn, buttered peas, buttered spinach, strawberry Jell-O, peach halves, seasonal fruit, beef sandwiches, grilled cheese sandwiches, ham salad sandwiches, pork sandwiches, pork fritter sandwiches, Sloppy Joes, submarine sandwiches, jellied vegetable salad, cream slaw, applesauce, bananas in red Jell-O, fruit salad, chocolate pudding, graham cracker pudding, cherry cobbler, pineapple crème, and sweet rolls. Most of the ingredients were grown nearby.

Leo Synesael gave himself permission to lean against a doorsill or a stairway railing for a few seconds each day; otherwise, he kept cleaning. Leo was the school custodian. He was skinny as a rail—most likely because he seldom stopped moving! In a jiffy, he mopped up spilled milk in the cafeteria. In the wink of an eye, he dusted the floor of the gymnasium. With time to spare, he spread his magic sand over an oil leak in the parking lot and swept it all up, leaving no trace that anything had been amiss.

Each year, Robert's hometown—like hometowns across America—celebrated Lincoln's Birthday on the 12th of February and Washington's Birthday on the 22nd of the same month. (In 1971, the Uniform Monday Holiday Act established three-day weekends for all major holidays and annual commemorations. In many states, Presidents Day became associated with one of the weekends.) On Washington's Birthday, grocery stores would offer sale prices on canned cherries, and items that usually cost a quarter would

be reduced to twenty-two cents, in honor of the 22nd of February. The art teacher always invited the junior high and high school students to make portraits of Lincoln that were judged, with the announcement of the winner during the Republican Lincoln Day Dinner in the gymnasium. Several of the older students were blessed with artistic talent and skill, and their portraits of Lincoln were exceptional. The best of the best were displayed in the cafeteria, and Robert admired them.

Robert became determined to create a portrait that could compete with those of the high school students. Choosing pastel as his medium, Robert devoted hours and hours over the course of many evenings to the formation of Lincoln's face. Robert compared several images of Lincoln in books that he had checked out from the school library. His portrait was not a direct copy of any one of them but a compilation of features he observed in several of them.

"You have captured him," Ida said. "You can enter your picture in the competition without doubting whether your work is good enough."

His mother's compliment reassured Robert.

He was shocked through and through when the art teacher confided in him that his art had won the competition, although the fact had to be kept secret until Lincoln's Birthday!

Robert wore a suit and tie to the dinner. Blushing, he stood before the applauding audience while his portrait was proclaimed the contest winner.

Back in grade school, Robert and his classmates had used crayons to color purple-dittoed American flags while listening to their teachers read to them about Washington and Lincoln. For Mrs. Winegardner, the students prepared scrapbooks commemorating Indiana history, and, for Mrs. Leighty, the class' shoebox floats celebrated the fifty states; such activities further instilled patriotism. Robert's heart was stirred when the red, white, and blue month of Lincoln and Washington rolled around. Now in his suit and tie, he stood talking with various townspeople who stepped up to congratulate him on winning the Lincoln Art Contest when he was only in the seventh grade.

On Washington's Birthday, Spot the Fox Terrier (his formal name) decided upon a patriotic excursion of his own. While Robert was bringing home his portrait of Lincoln with the winning ribbon fluttering in the corner of the large frame, he miscalculated how far the front gate would swing, and, with no free hand to hold the gate open just enough to slip through, Robert saw

the gate open all the way—and Spot dashing through and running lickety-split for town!

Robert set down his painting by the gate and shouted toward his father, who was taking his boots off by the back door, "Spot's out!"

Joe and Robert jumped into the front seat of the Bel Air and took off after the dog. They soon detected him racing behind "Peanut" Neal's house. Robert was surprised that Spot, panting excitedly, let him scoop him up so easily. Then Robert noticed the gash in his side.

"Spot's hurt!" Robert said, when, holding the terrier, he slid onto the seat of the car.

"I wonder how that happened," Joe said, as he drove straight to Doc Cullup's house and veterinary clinic.

Spot's cut required several stitches, but the dog wasn't fazed. His eyes remained as bright as ever, and he indicated that he was ready for another sprint while Joe handed him to Robert for the drive back home.

"Hold onto him!" Joe exclaimed.

"I have him," Robert said.

That evening, the family cuddled Spot even more closely than usual. He had to wear his harness to hold gauze padding against the stitched wound. Ida added a small swatch of red-white-and-blue fabric over the gauze.

"I can't imagine how he was cut in that way," Joe said. "We were right behind him. He wasn't out of our sight more than a couple of minutes."

Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert considered Spot so much a part of their family that they expected the dog to speak up and tell them how it occurred, but Spot remained silent on the point.

Robert set his Lincoln portrait on the top edge of his bed's headboard, put Spot on the foot of the bed, and took a flash photo to preserve the memory.

Chapter 14: The Disking and the Camp

Ever since Robert had celebrated his ninth birthday, Joe had let him steer the Minneapolis–Moline Z tractor while Joe stood carefully between the seat and the fender on the right side. Now that the summer of Robert's thirteenth birthday was approaching, Joe began showing Robert how to run the International 560 by himself. When spring planting began, Robert spent weekends helping disk ground that Joe and Charles plowed.

Robert had already lifted some of the farming burden from his father's shoulders by tending livestock and caring for chickens and ducks, but now Robert began assisting Joe in the fields during the spring months, when farmers were in a near frenzy to plant corn and soybeans while the good weather lasted.

One morning, Joe deployed Robert and the 560 in a recently plowed field close to State Route 55 and near the Old Barn. Before Robert's father strode across the land to an adjoining field where he would be plowing, Joe reminded Robert, "Don't turn too short at the edge of the field!" Robert was pulling an ancient harrow behind the relatively new disk. The harrow was in two heavy sections of rusty iron with a two-by-four running across the front to hold the two sections side by side. A fairly wide turning radius was required, so that the two-by-four did not catch on the plow.

Robert made many passes the length of the field. He enjoyed disking because he could go a little faster than was possible with plowing, and he enjoyed plowing less because leaning in the seat as one of the driver wheels ran in the furrow was less comfortable and turning to keep constant watch on the plow was more demanding. The soil that day was perfect for disking. The black loam lay smooth and fine. Robert had coined a word for well-disked ground: "chuffy," a combination of "churned" and "fluffy." The soil behind Robert's disk and harrow was chuffy. Robert set his mind free to imagine stories.

He was in the midst of telling himself a story about a UFO like the ones that had been seen by so many people in Michigan in 1966, when suddenly he heard a snap.

Robert had been making a turn. He wisely stopped the tractor. Before he looked behind him, he knew what he would see: a broken two-by-four. Sure enough! he had turned too short, and the plow had snapped the board as it jammed up against it.

Robert shut off the tractor and walked across the fields to tell his father what he had done.

Joe backed off on the throttle but still could not hear Robert, so Joe switched off his tractor. He smiled and said, "Now, say that again."

"I broke the two-by-four," Robert confessed.

"You turned too short, didn't you?" Joe commented, still smiling.

"Yes," Robert said meekly.

"I was afraid that might happen," Joe continued. "When you're working a short field like that one, you have the tendency to try to work closer to the fence line than you would in a larger field, and, when you do that, you also have the tendency to try to make too short a turn. We'll go to the elevator right now and have Let Crane saw a new two-by-four, so that you can keep on disking today."

It was not the first time that Robert was amazed at his father's patience and equanimity, nor would it be the last.

Later that spring, Mr. Charlie Coffman loaded the school bus bound for 4-H Camp at Shakamak, a park southeast of Terre Haute. (Teachers and others in authority were addressed with a title, such as Mister.) Besides being 4-H advisor, FFA advisor, agriculture teacher, and principal, Mr. Coffman was a bus driver. He was ever and always in a cheerful mood, and the trip to Shakamak was no exception.

Charles and Robert threw their Army surplus duffel bags in the back of the bus, took their seats, and enjoyed the drive to Shakamak. Sitting in the sunny window of the bus and watching the small towns drift by, Robert felt as if he might be Charlie Brown or Linus. Compared to Tippecanoe River State Park, where the Adams Township 4-H Club occasionally repaired and where raccoons kept Robert awake all night, Shakamak seemed like a spa. On the first afternoon, Mr. John McKee, the county extension agent, pitched the softball game. His windup was something to see! Squinting and biting his lower lip, he lifted a knee high in the air while he contorted his body like a pretzel, then he tossed the ball in a graceful arc. In the outfield, Mike would comment, "Oh, honestly!" If anyone could keep from laughing long enough and could get a hit, Mr. McKee would exclaim, "Very fine! Very fine!"

Mr. Coffman was all for getting in the water as soon as possible. Robert and Charles lined up with the other 4-Hers, and Mr. Coffman led them on the

trail to the lake. Even though Charles and Robert had gone barefoot around the farm, their bare feet were cut by the exposed shale that formed much of the path. The next day, every step was painful. For the time being, though, it was fun to watch Mr. Coffman disporting in Lake Shakamak. He was like a smiling duck, splashing and cavorting in utter glee.

Robert despised water and barely put up with the swimming. Back when he was in the third grade, Ida had enrolled him and Charles in swimming lessons at the indoor pool of the YMCA in Lafayette. At the first lesson, the children had turned right to gather around the instructor, who was standing at the shallow end. Shy, Robert had turned left, and the instructor had not seen him. The instructor had said, "Jump in," and Robert had obeyed. Down he went in a pale green world. Breathing water instead of air had been a new experience; bubbles had gone up as he had gone down. Later, he had learned that parents, who were watching their children through a window, had pounded on the glass to get the instructor's attention, and that the instructor had finally understood that a child had leapt into the deep end of the pool. The next thing that Robert knew was that the instructor had rescued him and was reviving him at the side of the pool. After that experience, Robert had feared the water so much that, every Friday after school, when the swimming lesson was approaching, he had felt sick to his stomach. After several weeks, Ida had given up and had canceled the lessons. Robert had gone cheerfully forward in life as a non-swimmer. So, at Shakamak, he was content to stand on the sharp shale in the shallow water and watch Mr. Coffman having fun.

At the end of a pier stood a tall structure supporting several diving boards with the uppermost one seemingly among the clouds. Mr. Coffman warned against using the diving boards—especially the top one. At dinner, Alan told Robert he looked at the diving boards and decided that discretion was definitely the better part of valor.

The soughing of the breezes in the oak leaves made Robert feel content, and, as a fiery sunset of scarlet, coral, and tangerine deepened into garnet and boysenberry, Robert felt that all was right with the world—except for his sore feet!

Chapter 15: The New House

Robert had thought that, when it came time to move, the family would simply transfer everything to the old Williams farm and that would be that! He soon learned that his parents had other plans.

Throughout Robert's year in the eighth grade, Joe and Ida undertook seemingly countless projects at the farm east of Pine Village. One rickety barn was demolished and hauled away. Then Robert and Charles accompanied Joe on a mission to eliminate another barn so deteriorated as to be hazardous to anyone who entered it. Joe had received permission from the volunteer fire department to be rid of the barn on that day.

Joe and the boys made a pile of straw and small pieces of wood by an interior wall of the barn. "Go outside and wait to the north of the barn," Joe said to Charles and Robert.

While Robert and Charles obeyed their father, Joe poured kerosene on the heap of tinder and lit a match. As soon as Joe saw the flames leap up, he scurried from the barn.

"Go on back!" he ordered, shooing the boys farther out into the field. "You're too close!"

The three of them stood far away from the barn and watched.

… and watched, and watched, and waited. Nothing happened.

After about ten minutes, Robert sat down on the ground, which had been fall plowed, having large lumps of earth and vegetation turned up at ragged angles. Charles agreed that sitting was preferable to standing, and he, too, chose a slab of soil for a seat. Eventually, Joe followed suit.

The three sat.

The barn gave no sign that anything was occurring inside.

A half hour elapsed.

"I guess the fire went out," Joe said, rising to his feet. He took a step toward the barn.

At that very moment, there was an explosion with tongues of fire flashing heavenward from the shingled roof, and a hot wind from the blast rushed past Joe and the boys.

Joe's mouth hung open, while Charles and Robert laughed nervously.

In only a little time, the structure had collapsed into itself and was a smoking mound of ashes.

A few weeks later, a new Morton building of nearly the same size was under construction. It would serve as a barn to house Joe's Herefords. Simultaneously, another new Morton structure was being completed near the house. It had three bays for vehicles and a shop along the east end. Many loads of white crushed stone were dumped and spread to make a circular driveway around a maple tree in front of the shop and garage.

Workers were busy putting new shingles on the roof of the house.

More workers excavated a deep hole by the new garage and shop. A large cistern was lowered into the ground, and a new well, pump, and water system appeared where none had been before.

As the pages of the calendar were turned, crews connected a hot water baseboard heating system throughout the house. As the cellar was too damp for a new furnace, it was installed in the large space that would serve as both a kitchen and a family room.

Meanwhile, as a member of the Tab Club, Robert ordered two books for a total of seventy cents: *Lost Horizon* and *Flying Saucers—Serious Business*. When they arrived, he read both avidly during spare minutes between houses and school.

The Emerson brothers put in a wall to divide the old kitchen into a bathroom and an office hallway leading to a bedroom, and workers came to run new plumbing through the bathroom and the new kitchen. As sinks, tub, and other fixtures went in, the Emersons removed the front wrap-around porch and built a smaller porch in its place. They installed shelving in one of the closets, a long row of kitchen cabinets, and an equally long countertop. They shored up the enclosed porch across the west side of the house; it had been sagging. Then they put in new combination storm windows and screens in all the windows.

During these improvements to the home, Joe was busy giving the house two coats of white paint. When they were home from school and not doing

chores at the old farm, Charles and Robert were helping Joe with their paint brushes.

Eventually, the time arrived when Milt Dowden could begin working. The house had been ordered from the Sears catalog in 1903, and it had pretty woodwork typical of the time period. Ever so patiently, Milt stripped the old shellac from the interior trim and doors and gave every inch of the woodwork new coats of glossy varnish. Ida had chosen various wallpapers for the rooms, and Milt, who was an expert at hanging paper, went to work as soon as crews had finished replacing all the electrical wiring, switches, and outlets.

The house began to smell new.

Joe tied numerous chains around a small unpainted building that was leaning directly behind the house. He connected the chains to the drawbar of his biggest tractor and slowly pulled forward. The building straightened. Joe parked the tractor, and he and Robert demolished the north end of the building and covered the back of the two-story structure with sheets of exterior plywood that they cut to fit and nailed so there were no gaps. Then the building received several coats of white paint.

More months were devoted to hauling belongings to the new home. For the purpose, the good and faithful GMC pickup was sold and a new 1967 Chevrolet pickup purchased. Robert hated to see the GMC go, but the bright red and white Chevrolet would prove to be a dependable vehicle with many sensible features. Joe carefully planned the order in which to transfer things to "the Williams place," as he still referred to his new farm.

One day, a shiny white telephone appeared in the office hallway. It was the family's first phone. The party line was shared with the Turner family that lived on the opposite side of the gravel road a mile to the west of the Williams place.

Finally, an evening arrived when Joe, Ida, Charles, Robert, and Spot went to bed in the new house. Ida established a new rule: Spot was to sleep on a dog bed in the parents' bedroom and never to occupy the bed in Robert's room. Robert was too tired to raise any objections. That night, Robert was awakened when Spot jumped up on Robert's bed and lay down at Robert's feet as Spot had always done. Ever after that night, the terrier would start out on the dog bed that he pretended to accept. As soon as he heard snoring, he would quietly leave, go to Robert's room, and jump up where he belonged. When Joe would awaken before dawn and would make a cup of instant coffee, Spot would jump down again and join Joe in the kitchen. Joe

never told Ida that Spot was spending most of each night at the foot of Robert's bed!

On the first morning in their new home, Robert awakened to find the sun just peeping above the horizon, its beams lighting the new wallpaper in Robert's room. He swung out of bed, put on his slippers, and went to the kitchen and family room. He sat cross-legged on the sofa with Spot next to him and chatted with his father. Charles was still in bed.

The rays of sunlight pouring through the windows gave Robert a hope similar to that which he would feel again on Easter morning that year, as the family drove to town to attend services at the Methodist Church. His hope felt precarious, though, as if it were built upon a shaky foundation. The televised news covered assassination after assassination. The times were becoming an age of assassination. It felt to Robert as if murder were undermining law and order.

On this first day in the new home, Robert remembered his Great Aunt Margaret, who had passed away in March of the preceding year; he regretted that she had not lived to see the new home. She had lingered only a few days in the hospital. As she loved Boston terriers, Robert had made a sketch of one on a card that his mother had taken to Aunt Margaret, who was allowed few visitors. Ida later reported that Aunt Margaret smiled when she saw it. Several years earlier, Aunt Margaret had leaned over Robert while he was working on a pastel picture, and she had laughed, "I don't know how you do that! I can't even draw a straight line." Now, in intensive care at the hospital, Aunt Margaret was unable to speak, but she could still smile. Ida had brought home the card in her pocketbook. She returned the drawing to Robert, and he kept it in his nightstand.

When Ida arose and began frying eggs on her new range, Robert felt surrounded by love and sunshine. His father and mother had provided such a pleasant new home for the family! When Charles came to the breakfast table and Joe said grace, the morning was complete.

Chapter 16: The Old House

The birthday gift that Joe presented to Ida in 1968 was a set of tickets for the family to laugh along with comedians Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara in the Edward C. Elliott Hall of Music at Purdue University on May the 11th. To Robert, one of the funniest moments occurred when Anne walked down the steps into the audience, sat in the lap of a gentleman wearing a mustache, and said, "Do you know there's a wooly worm crawling across your face?"

Before leaving the farm in Pine Village, Joe had sold the Holsteins—all but Buttercup, who had grown to quite an old age and had passed away shortly before the move. It took Joe, Charles, and Robert a long time to dig a hole that was large enough for her to receive a decent burial. Joe had decided not to spend the fortune required to build on the Williams place a dairy barn conforming to the federal regulations recently enacted to ensure cleanliness of milk: hence, the loss of his small Holstein herd. Robert still had his string tie topped by a *Cloisonné* Holstein to serve as a reminder of the family's sweet-tempered dairy cows.

Robert felt sorry to leave the old house that had sheltered his ancestors for two generations before he was born and had watched over his immediate family. He took a last look at the front porch, scene of so many conversations and so much laughter. He looked along the line of the white board fence. He took the time to say silent goodbyes to all the trees, including the giant catalpa by the road. Then he turned to see the tennis court and basketball net that the school had added a few years earlier. There, Joe, Don, Charles, Robert, Matt, and Lon had played basketball together. Joe had made his last examination inside the house and had concluded that nothing was being left behind by accident. He and Robert then slid onto the front seat of the nondescript Bel Air and drove away for the last time.

Robert's father was pensive. Joe had not slept well in the new home. He felt cut off from the town that had been his secure haven all his life. He feared he might be making unwise decisions.

Ida had been right: Joe felt homesick and scared.

Meanwhile, Robert turned the new leaf. He was eager to discover where the story led. During his free minutes, he roamed the Williams place, taking the keenest interest in every feature. He studied raccoon tracks in the mud around the pools that the spring rains had made in the driveway winding back to the fields. He explored the line of hedge apple trees between Joe's farm and the McFatridge farm to the east. He walked the perimeter of his

father's 115-acre farm that took the shape of a narrow rectangle stretching almost a mile to the north, where one corner touched that of the Brutus home place. He found gelatinous masses of frog eggs and mudpuppy eggs in the deep ditches along the gravel road.

Behind the original garage—a small open-ended building made of corrugated metal—Robert inspected a set of wooden wheels rotting away in the undergrowth not far from the slough that the Pekin ducks were enjoying. Suddenly, he discovered a large cocoon of a silkworm moth. It was hanging from a ragweed stalk. He saw nothing to suggest that the pupa inside was not viable. He carefully broke the stem and carried the cocoon to his room.

Within a few days, one of the largest luna moths that Robert would ever see emerged from the cocoon and hung suspended until its pale green wings, measuring a full five inches across, had expanded and dried. It seemed to have captured moonlight in its coloring.

The summer felt uneasy, culminating in rioting against the Vietnam War by protesters in the streets and parks of Chicago during the political convention there.

Cultural changes were occurring at a fearful rate, as could be heard in the music that young people liked, seen in the pages of glossy magazines, and witnessed in the news that the television proclaimed in dark tones each evening. Robert did not feel isolated from these events by living on a farm with the gentle breezes of sunny days and the gleaming stars of summer nights; on the contrary, he often felt that he was not isolated enough!

One of the rare bright spots was the television coverage of the moon landing. After that, Robert looked at the silvery disc in the night sky and wondered.

In the country, Robert could not spend a merry hour on his roller skates with the key dangling by a string around his neck nor squander a happy afternoon on his green Schwinn bicycle. He mused on these facts while he and Charles awaited the bus on a chilly fall morning. The only sounds were those made by Spot foraging among fallen leaves in the fenced yard behind them; otherwise, the world lay perfectly still. Robert thought back to the brief graduation ceremony acknowledging completion of eighth grade. He was now a freshman in high school, after all.

For Freshman Dress-Up Day, the senior who drew Robert's name for the initiation, wrote, " … I realized there was a need to let you know what you will be wearing. 1. Old coveralls with '69' painted in red on the front and

back part of the upper leg, 2. Workshoes, and 3. T-shirt with 'Property of Seniors' written on back. … Consider yourself lucky." Robert did. Several of his classmates had to wear outrageous getups.

Robert helped his father farm, and he spent evenings doing homework and practicing piano and clarinet. He decided he didn't mind becoming an adult—which was inevitable—but he missed his skates and his bike.

From far away to the east came the hum of the motor and the crunch of the tires on the gravel. Glen J. Brutus was driving the school bus. In anticipation, Charles and Robert edged nearer to the road.

Eventually, the bus approached but did not slow down. Just as Glen passed the boys, he put on the brakes. Charles and Robert hurried down the road to the west, where the bus had come to a halt. Glen's smile was infectious. "I can't get used to stopping back there," he said to the boys, as they took seats near the front.

Frosty gray fields stretched to either side of the byway. Glen had to make only a few more stops before reaching the school. Robert looked forward to his English class, for he loved to read and fancied himself a writer. Band rehearsal likewise captured his attention every bit as much as English inspired his imagination. Mr. Davis had moved away, and Mr. Tony Boots had taken over the baton of the Marching Pine Knots, who marched in sock feet on the basketball floor during the halfway point of the home games. The school was too small to host a football team, even though the town was known for having had a famous community football team in the early years of the sport

That team of yesteryear made national news. The legendary Olympic athlete Jim Thorpe carried the ball for Pine Village. In 1914, Pine Village beat an Indianapolis team by a score of 111 to 0. As the manager of the team, Claire Rhode, one of Joe's relatives, began hiring top athletes from Purdue University, Indiana University, Notre Dame, and the colleges of Wabash and DePauw to play a few games as members of the Pine Village team, which was undefeated from 1903 until 1916. The famous Pine Village team was an independent organization that would be called a pro team today.

On the 20th of December in 1971, Robert would publish a story in the Pine Village High School newspaper, which he would serve as editor. Entitled "Football Was Alive Here Then," his article would feature his interviews with his great uncle Charles "Charlie" J. Rhode and Eli Fenters, who played for the team. The title of Robert's article would be a quotation from Great Uncle Charlie. What must it have been like to play a game shoulder to shoulder

with Jim Thorpe? Thorpe played one game for Pine Village, which defeated the Purdue All-Stars by a score of 29 to 0. An anecdote often repeated when Robert was growing up might have been based on fact. Supposedly, Thorpe complimented Eli Fenters as the best "natural quarterback" Thorpe had ever encountered.

In Robert's time in junior high and high school, where would there have been enough boys to form a football team? So the band's halftime shows occurred noisily indoors on the basketball court.

Music filled the life of the family. On the 4th of December in 1968 in the Edward C. Elliott Hall of Music at Purdue, Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert heard the *Man of La Mancha* with David Atkinson, who replaced Richard Kiley on Broadway, performing along with the national touring company. The rousing themes inspired Robert. One of his defining characteristics, after all, was to entertain apparently impossible dreams.

On the weekend, the family drove to Lafayette for Charles and Robert's piano lessons. Miss Beegle had abandoned her studio at Allen's Dance Studio and had begun teaching from her home, where she had two grand pianos side by side. While Charles had his half-hour lesson, Robert crossed the street to the public library, an impressive building with a long flight of stairs. He passed the circulation desk and entered the open stacks in back. He walked straight to the shelf containing all the books that Hoosier author Gene Stratton–Porter had written, and he selected them one by one, until he had read most of them. He always took a seat in one of the deep window sills on the north wall of the stacks and eagerly opened his book. One of his favorites was *Moths of the Limberlost*, a nonfiction title boasting many photographic prints that Stratton–Porter had painted by hand in spectacular color. Gracing the pages were luna moths of the same moonbeam hue that Robert had witnessed. Many other large moths in dazzling tints were fully represented.

At the end of thirty minutes, Robert put the book back where it belonged, crossed the street again, and entered Miss Beegle's lovely Victorian home for his music lesson.

"We're going for Big Macs," Joe announced when he and Ida picked up Charles and Robert on the sidewalk in front of Miss Beegle's porch. Joe drove over the Brown Street Bridge and into the McDonald's parking lot. The family took a booth while Joe ordered for everyone. Soon, he came carrying a tray filled with Styrofoam boxes. Even though the new, large sandwiches caught the eye, Robert could not be sure if he preferred a simple hamburger with plenty of mustard.

Next, the family bought groceries at Smitty's. Into the cart went milk and butter because there were no more dairy cows at home. Then there came the eighteen-mile drive back to the farm. Robert liked lying down, so that he could see only the treetops. He would call out to Charles the landmarks that Robert thought the car was passing, and Charles would confirm or deny Robert's guesses. Catching the Goose Creek Bridge was easy to infer from the sound of crossing, and naming Indian Hill was simple to do from the motion of the car slowly winding around the steep slopes, but the long stretches through the flat countryside were challenging.

"Are we near the road to Otterbein?" Robert would ask.

"Nowhere near it," Charles would state matter-of-factly.

Robert would wonder where he was on the road that linked the city of pianos, libraries, Big Macs, and milk cartons to the country of moths, mudpuppies, frosty fields, and shimmering stars.

Chapter 17: The Spray

Across the gravel road from the new house were open fields, but a small group of trees broke the level line of the horizon. Robert yearned to investigate them yet felt constrained by the sense that he might be trespassing on neighbor Agnes Moore's farm. He thought, "If I were to ask her permission to walk among the trees, she would wonder why I asked." Accordingly, Robert kept denying himself the opportunity to visit the copse, until a day arrived when he could no longer resist indulging his curiosity.

Sneaking across the road, down through the shallow ditch, and over the freshly plowed surface of the field, Robert glanced from side to side. Neighbors could be seeing him, it seemed—when, in all likelihood, no one saw him. The nearest neighbors occupied farmhouses spread far apart along the road. Out of breath from the exertion of scurrying through plowed ground, Robert dashed through the verge of last year's weedy growth and plunged into the darkness of the wooded area.

It was as circular as if measured by a surveyor. It sloped ever so gently toward the middle and may have been a ten-acre sinkhole or, at least, a damp saucer-shaped depression formed by an underground spring. The trees were a mixture of willows and cottonwoods. A few of the latter variety boasted enormous trunks. The limbs formed only a partial shade, as they were just leafing out. The tiny wildflowers called "spring beauties" carpeted the ground among the roots.

Then Robert chanced upon a circle of cardinal feathers. The red tufts fairly glowed among the willows. They may have been left by a farm cat, but they formed an exact circle with every feather perfectly placed! Robert felt a sense of awe. It was as if he were seeing a symbol intended for his eyes alone. What was its meaning?

Robert quietly withdrew. Long after his moment in the woods across the road, he regarded the spot from afar and considered it an example of the Creator's attention to detail.

When disking the earth, Robert occasionally glimpsed a red fox skipping home, its fluffy tail, almost as big as its body, flying behind and its dark legs flashing like a gentleman's tall boots during Great Britain's Regency Era. The white of its cheeks and chin only emphasized the fox's slight grin, amused at its own cleverness, probably. In moments, the fox vanished amid the tangle of weeds wrapped around the trunks of the venerable hedge apple trees.

Once on an ominous night in the spring, Robert shook Spot's leash, and he came running to go for a walk beyond the fenced yard.

Spot and Robert set out toward the north past the security of the house, barn, and outbuildings. They took the well-beaten path that the tractors took beside the fields. The wind came in long exhalations that could be heard far off before it could be felt. The air was chilled but not frozen. As Robert's eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw small gray clouds scudding overhead. They appeared to be so low that he could touch them.

Now and then, Spot tugged on the leash, and Robert quickened his pace to keep up with him. Spot was having the time of his life, turning his head from side to side, sampling the smorgasbord of smells low to the ground. After a time, they reached the back of the farm. Spot wanted to explore the hedgerow, so Robert followed him as Spot trotted toward the gnarled trees.

Suddenly, they heard a growl. "Fox," Robert thought. Instinctively, he grabbed Spot around his belly and lifted him to his chest. As the moon broke from behind clouds, Robert saw the ghostly white of the fox's face staring from the underbrush. Robert backed slowly away. The fox began taking slow steps toward Robert and Spot. Just then, they heard a yipping and yelping that could only be from kits. Sure enough, four pups came tumbling out of the weeds to prance around the legs of their mother!

Robert kept backing up until he was in the center of the freshly plowed field. Keeping his balance was tricky, as the clods were tilted wherever the plowshares had left them. Growling continually, the mother fox followed Robert and Spot to a distance of perhaps thirty feet from her den. Abruptly, she whipped around and ran back among the trees, her cubs leaping and tumbling about her in what they perhaps perceived as a game.

Robert breathed a sigh of relief. Walking back to the house, he traversed a considerable distance before he thought it was safe to put Spot back on the ground.

Soon after Robert and Spot's encounter with the foxes, Ida got up from the easy chair in front of the television, opened the door to the enclosed porch, and walked to the outside door to let Spot back in from his time in the yard. The terrier came running into the house. So did Ida.

"Joe, bring me the ketchup bottles from the box on the stairway while I grab the dog."

"The new bottles?" Joe asked.

“Yes, the new ones!” Ida replied, lifting Spot from the sofa where he was rubbing himself on a blanket. She carried him into the bathroom.

Joe went to the door that stood above two stair steps at the far end of the kitchen. Behind the door were triangular stairs that turned sharply to the left to meet regular stairs leading to the second floor, half of which had been finished as a spare bedroom but which was used as an unheated storage area. Whenever Joe and Ida went grocery shopping, they stashed extra purchases on the triangular stairs behind the door. Joe reached into a cardboard box and lifted out two ketchup bottles. Having no idea why Ida wanted them but trusting her judgment when she called for them, Joe carried them toward the bathroom. He knocked on the door.

“You can come on in,” Ida said. “I’m giving Spot a bath.”

No sooner had Joe opened the bathroom door than he knew what had happened.

A skunk had sprayed Spot.

“I guess he cornered the skunk and didn’t know how skunks retaliate,” Joe said, trying to catch his breath. “What does the ketchup do?”

“I’ve always heard that, if you wash a dog in ketchup, it takes away the skunk odor,” Ida said, rinsing lather from Spot’s neck. “Either the skunk missed his eyes or Spot closed them in time.”

“I don’t think the skunk missed anything,” Joe said.

Ida twisted off the cap and, with the flat of her free hand, began smacking the neck of the first bottle held sideways with her other hand. After only a few smacks, ketchup rolled out onto Spot’s back.

“Pound and pound the ketchup bottle. First a little, then a lot’ll,” Joe said.

“When you strike the bottle on the side,” Ida explained, “the ketchup comes out faster than if you hold the bottle upside down and shake it.”

She massaged an entire bottle of ketchup into Spot’s short hair. She rinsed him off, ran the water down the drain, stopped the drain, brought up the water level again, and opened the second bottle, dispensing it and rubbing it into his fur for many minutes.

After she rinsed him, she shampooed him, rinsed again, and dried him with towels.

Joe had returned to the kitchen. Here came Spot on the run! He rubbed his head along the bottom of the sofa, jumped up, and rolled and rolled on the blanket.

"Pee-you!" Ida said, after she disposed of the towels in the galvanized washtub on the side porch.

She looked at Spot; then she looked at Joe.

"I don't think the ketchup worked well enough," she said.

"I wasn't going to say anything," Joe said.

Ida thought for a minute. "Joe, go down to the cellar and bring up a gallon of stewed tomatoes."

Joe was happy to do as he was told because, as bad as the air outdoors smelled, the skunk odor was not as strong outside as it was inside the house.

Joe lifted the cellar door, which was on an angle near the fern bed that surrounded the tank holding the oil that heated the furnace. He disappeared into the dank cellar and soon emerged again with a big glass jar cradled in his left arm.

Meanwhile, Ida was washing Spot in the bathtub. As soon as she received the open bottle of stewed tomatoes that Joe handed her, she began sloshing them over the terrier. GLUG GLUG GLUG! The tomatoes rolled out.

"I hope you won't mind my asking," Joe said, "but how will the tomatoes go down the drain afterward?"

"Not easily, Joe," Ida said. "Not easily! I'd already thought of that. I'll scoop them out with a sieve and throw them outside."

"I knew you'd have it all thought out," Joe said.

Robert had been doing his homework in his room. He had heard the initial commotion, including his mother's request for ketchup, and had paid no attention to it. Soon enough, though, he had begun to sense the sickening odor of skunk. He had hoped it was coming from outside. His hopes had

sunk. He had heard enough of the ongoing conversation between his parents to know that Spot had been the target of a skunk.

The tomatoes were not totally effective, either.

Ida tried dish soap.

Eventually, she released Spot from the bathroom again. Ida was carrying an armload of towels destined for the washtub.

"Any luck?" Joe asked.

"No," Ida sighed. "He still stinks. He's better than he was, but he still stinks. I can't wash him again without hurting his skin."

She was right about the stink.

For the next few weeks, Spot exuded a skunk odor that was just about intolerable, and, for a year, whenever Robert pet the dog, a little more of the skunk stench was released somehow.

About a month after the spraying incident, Mrs. Bowen came to visit Ida. Mrs. Bowen's name was Irene—a name Ida never used, preferring to call her "Mrs. Bowen" at all times.

Mrs. Bowen sat on the sofa.

"When did a skunk spray your dog?" Mrs. Bowen asked.

Ida blushed. "Why?" Ida asked. "Can you smell it?"

Mrs. Bowen smiled. "How could I miss it?" she laughed. "It smells like you've been raising a skunk in here."

Ida blushed a deeper shade of red.

"Let me guess," Mrs. Bowen said. "You tried to take out the smell with tomatoes."

"How did you know?" Ida asked, sinking limply into her easy chair.

"It's what everybody says to do," Mrs. Bowen answered. "It's too bad you didn't call me," Mrs. Bowen said. "I could've set you straight. Judging by the smell, I'd say your dog was sprayed about a month ago. Well, it's too late

now. You should've used cider that's turned to vinegar. That's what takes out the smell of your skunk! 'Tomatoes,' everybody says. 'Tomatoes, tomatoes!' Phooey on your ol' tomatoes! They don't do any good, unless they're pickled in vinegar. And cider that's turned to vinegar works better than regular vinegar."

"I wish I'd known," Ida said.

"I wish you had, too," Mrs. Bowen said, "'cause that skunk has sure managed to stink up your house by spraying your dog."

"May I get you a glass of iced tea?" Ida offered.

"Yes, you may, and I'll take a clothespin for my nose, too."

"Oh, my!" Ida lamented. "Is it really that bad?"

"No," Mrs. Bowen said, shaking her head and chuckling. "It's worse. Maybe we could bottle skunk spray and sell it to people who don't like the smell of hogs. Our advertising could say, 'Take a whiff of this, and the hogs won't smell so bad.'"

"Joe says hogs smell like money," Ida said.

"Beauty's in the nose of the beholder," Mrs. Bowen quipped.

"There's more truth in that than meets the eye," Ida retorted. "Let me get you that iced tea."

"And the clothespin!" Mrs. Bowen called after Ida, who had gone to the refrigerator.

A few days later, Mary Akers stopped by for a chat. When Ida saw Mary's car pull into the driveway, Ida grabbed the Glade aerosol spray and practically hosed down the sofa before stashing the spray can behind the letters on top of the dish cabinet.

"Hi!" Mary said. "I can't stay long, but I wanted to stop by to tell you about the hotdogs at Kmart."

Mary sniffed the air, while Ida tried hard not to look guilty.

"If I didn't know better," Mary said, "I'd say you just sprayed Glade to cover up—" Mary sniffed again. "To cover up skunk!"

“Mary, a skunk sprayed Spot, and I don’t know what to do,” Ida confessed.

Mary laughed so hard her sides hurt.

“I don’t think there’s enough Glade in your can to hide the skunk smell,” Mary finally said. “Did you try tomatoes?”

“Yes,” Ida said. “I wasted a perfectly good gallon of my stewed tomatoes.”

“How long ago did this happen?” Mary asked.

“A month ago,” Ida said.

“There may be nothing you can do but wait it out,” Mary suggested.

“That’s what I’ve been doing, but the smell lasts and lasts. It’s still coming out of Spot’s hide,” Ida said forlornly.

“Maybe the trick is to rub our noses with tomatoes!” Mary suddenly exclaimed brightly.

Ida laughed.

Spot was never sprayed by a skunk again. Joe wondered if Spot had encountered more skunks but had given them a wide berth.

Chapter 18: The Art Class

It was an exciting day! Ida had just bought a new pocketbook at Sears. It had plenty of room! There was even a place to stick her crossword puzzle books! Best of all, it was bright red!

Ida had purchased the masterpiece of consumer art while she was waiting for Charles and Robert to take their block printing class at the Art Museum in Lafayette. Ida had enrolled the boys in the six-week course that had begun just after school was out.

The boys' instructor was an expert at woodcuts and was slowly making a cut the size of a small table top that depicted a European cathedral. He taught the class of youngsters to make linoleum cuts. Ida had obtained the necessary supplies at the bookstore near the Purdue campus. There were slender boxes that contained wooden handles into which various knives could be inserted. Some of the knives were straight; others were curved. There were tubes of special ink in black, red, and green. There were brayers to spread the ink on a surface such as a glass pane until the ink became tacky enough to roll onto the linoleum block. Then there was the linoleum.

It had presented a problem initially. The instructor had called for the students to acquire battleship linoleum—so named because it was used on battleships. While many homes had flooring of battleship linoleum, Ida had a difficult time finding any. Ultimately, she purchased a big roll from a flooring store in Lafayette. It was dark green.

The boys looked forward to art class each week. The instructor gave just enough explanation and then let the students work at their own pace without much intervention. Robert was making a horizontal rectangular piece measuring about eight inches by six inches that he called "Four Faces." He had designed four profiles overlapping in a row, each different from the others. The faces were modern—not all the way to Picasso but getting there. For surfaces of the cheeks, chins, noses, foreheads, and necks, Robert used various knives to form lines, dashes, dots, and circles. The knives removed material from the linoleum, which was backed with a coarse burlap weave. Even though the linoleum was thick, the knives were so sharp that they could cut all the way through to the backing. The trick was to cut away enough linoleum that the ink would become applied to the "hills" and not the "valleys"—without cutting past the linoleum and into the burlap. Sometimes a "valley" was shallow, and the ink would touch ridges in the valley. The resultant print would have lines showing the tops of the ridges.

Making the prints was fun! When a student was ready to print from a finished block, he or she rolled the ink on a large glass surface with a brayer until the ink became so tacky that the brayer would hiss each time it was rolled along. Next, the brayer was rolled onto the linoleum surface to apply ink in a thin but substantial layer. The student then carefully placed a sheet of fine quality paper, cut to a size somewhat larger than the linoleum block, onto the block. The paper could not be moved, once it had touched the ink. The student then rubbed the bowl of a teaspoon around and around on the paper with just enough pressure to transfer the ink from the linoleum to the paper without damaging the paper. Ultimately, the paper was peeled off the linoleum, thereby revealing the art.

Robert was always intrigued at how different the art looked from what he had carved. The picture was backwards from the one he had been cutting with the knives! On the day that he made his first print of "Four Faces," he laughed to see them looking in the opposite direction.

The instructor came by and said, "Your faces are very good. What do they represent?"

"They are facets of one person," Robert said. "The first face is the one everyone sees. The next is the one only loved ones see. The third is the one that only the person sees, and the fourth is the one that God sees."

"Well!" the instructor said, nodding, with the thumb and forefinger of his hand on his chin. "I like your explanation! Good!" The instructor walked on.

Several prints could be made from one application of the ink, but, eventually, the ink would become patchy. More ink had to be applied to continue the print making.

The instructor taught the students to number their prints in pencil with a first number indicating the application of the ink, a slash mark, and a second number representing the print made from that application. So 2/4 would mean the fourth print taken from the second ink application.

Working in the presence of other artists gave Charles and Robert the opportunity to witness the expressions of creative minds. The works of art ranged from masterly to spontaneous.

The boys waited for their mother outside the Art Museum's new addition that held the classrooms and studios. When Ida drove into the parking lot, Charles and Robert dove into the seats for the ride home. They showed their mother that day's prints, for which she had only praise.

Once they were home, Robert took a seat at the kitchen table while Ida set her old pocketbook beside her new one and began piling the contents of the old one in a heap in the middle of the table.

"What will you do next week?" Ida asked Robert.

"I need to cut out a few of the areas a little more so the ridges don't show in the print," he replied. "Then I get to print again!"

Absent-mindedly, he was looking over the items that were rolling downhill from the mound of materials that could never have fit inside the old pocketbook! A Revlon red lipstick in a brassy gold cylinder almost cleared the edge of the table. Several Bic pens and at least one Sheaffer cartridge pen spun this way and that. There were pencils galore, most of them with no eraser left! A brown and yellow tin of "Genuine" Bayer Aspirin slid down. Three hankies, somewhat crumpled but none the worse for wear, clung to the slope of the heap. A Stratton powder compact with mirror and a rose motif slipped out. A plastic bottle of Jergens hand cream and a jar of Noxzema cold cream came out (both headfirst). A baby blue wallet with a snap clasp fell heavily forward. Two pairs of sunglasses—one hopelessly tangled with a clear plastic rain cap with pink trim—lent their bulk to the pile. A small creamy white bottle with a dark coral cap cascaded to the back of the pile: To a Wild Rose by Avon. A stack of dog-eared crossword puzzle booklets fell topsy-turvy. Creased notes in Ida's dashed-off handwriting stuck out at crazy angles from the booklets. Shopping lists and checklists caught Robert's eye. Stacks of folded Kleenex tissues, with sheets of stamps adhering to them, tumbled out. A square squeeze-type coin purse advertising a crane service in Muncie did cartwheels. It by no means held all the coins in the pocketbook because pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and half dollars rolled every which way. Most of the silver coins were silver all the way through, but some were the new "sandwich" variety with the tell-tale copper edge. There were hairpins by the handful. An opened and somewhat sticky roll of Life Savers joined the accumulation. Somehow, a silver flashlight and a pair of nail clippers were in the mix. A tin of Band-Aid bandages appeared from deep down within the old pocketbook. A spare red vinyl belt uncoiled like a snake. Robert wondered why there should be a belt. Maybe you just never knew when you might need one?

A Valentine's Day card depicting a rabbit holding a carrot fell forward. "If you carrot all for me, be my Valentine," the card proclaimed. Before Ida saw what Robert was doing, he turned the card over. In handwriting on the back were these words: "From Mr. Bunny to Mrs. Bunny, Love, Joe."

Robert stared at the words. He knew that his parents loved one another, but seeing the fact in handwriting was arresting.

Ida glanced over. “Oh,” she said. “I forgot that was in there. I meant to put that in my drawer.”

“Dad gave you a Valentine?” Robert asked.

“Yes, as he does every year,” Ida said in a tone that was not without passion but was not overly expressive either.

Robert smiled slightly. “Mr. and Mrs. Bunny?” he said.

“Our names for each other when we aren’t talking to you,” Ida said, gently taking the card from Robert and setting it to one side.

“Mr. and Mrs. Bunny!” Robert thought, trying to fit the concept within his comprehension of his parents.

“We’ve always thought bunnies are cute,” Ida said. “When he was a boy, your father raised rabbits.”

Seeing that Robert was still musing on the topic, Ida said, “If you ever had the least doubt that your father and mother love each other, you now know better: you know that they do and always will! And we love you and Charles, too. Just don’t let me catch you calling me ‘Mrs. Bunny’ or your father ‘Mr. Bunny.’” Ida burst out laughing. “I would love to see the look on your father’s face if you were to call him ‘Mr. Bunny’—but don’t you ever do that! Those are our names for each other, not your names for us.”

Robert already adored his parents, but, with the revelation of the Valentine’s Day card, he now felt a reverence for them.

Ida began stuffing the new shiny red pocketbook with all her necessities mounded so high on the table—including the card!

Chapter 19: The Fossil Hunt

A favorite family activity was fossil hunting. Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert once visited the historic railroad cut in Madison, Indiana, and brought back enough horn coral and brachiopods to weight the car down on its springs. From Pine Village to Madison and back in a day meant a long time on the road. Joe never could stay overnight because he had to feed his livestock and would not ask a neighbor to help.

One morning, Ida said, "Let's go to southeast Indiana to find fossils," and Joe agreed. A few days later, the family piled into the Pontiac Bonneville and drove and drove. Joe took State Route 52 through Rushville to Brookville, where they ate their picnic lunch before searching for fossils along the Whitewater River to the west of town. Finding little to keep them interested, Joe drove farther south and took State Route 1 along a creek that looked promising. Joe pulled onto a short stretch of country road, then onto what was little more than an abandoned farm lane that crossed a tiny bridge.

"Let's hurry before it rains," Ida said. The sky had become cloudy. Gradually, the daylight dimmed beneath the heavy cloud cover. Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert fanned out along the creek. The trilobites that they had hoped to find remained elusive.

Suddenly, raindrops began pelting the creek.

"I guess we're going to be rained out," Ida said, as everyone headed for the car. Robert had to sit in the rear seat—with Ida's promise that he could switch to the front seat in Brookville.

The mischievous storm quickly developed into a steady downpour.

"Joe, we need to get back to the highway as soon as we can," Ida said. "When I was growing up along the Ohio River, there were people that got caught in flash floods along creeks like this."

"I don't think there's any need to worry," Joe said. He put the car in gear and steered it toward the low bridge he had crossed to reach a level place to park along the creek. In just that short a time, a raging channel of yellow clay and water was surging under the bridge and, at both ends of the bridge, had already crossed the driveway.

Joe took his foot off the throttle.

"Oh, Joe! Don't stop now," Ida warned, with a note of fear in her voice.

“I don’t think we should drive through water that deep and fast,” Joe said.

“But don’t you see that the water is going to cover everything where we are? We have to get to the other side of that bridge!” Ida said, her panic escalating.

Reluctantly, Joe inched the Pontiac forward into the current at the near end of the little bridge. Robert and Charles peered through the windows at the seething stream surrounding the car.

“Hurry, Joe!” Ida said, tensely. She put her hand on the dashboard as if she were encouraging a horse to remain calm while attempting a dangerous feat.

The car gained the bridge, but as much water was crossing the other end as the Pontiac had already cleared. Leaving the bridge behind, the car nosed back into the turbulent yellow stream.

Ida began patting the dashboard nervously.

Eventually, the Pontiac climbed out of the rushing water and turned onto the country road.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“I told you there was nothing to worry about,” Joe said.

“Oh, you know you were scared back there!” Ida exclaimed.

“With a car this heavy, we weren’t going to be swept away,” Joe continued.

“Why, I could feel the car rocking from the water!” Ida said, staring at Joe. “We nearly became one of those families that you read about in the newspapers: the ones carried off by a flood.”

“We weren’t close to being ‘carried off by a flood,’” Joe persisted.

“You grew up where everything is flat,” Ida retorted. “Maybe I know a thing or two about hilly country that you don’t know.”

Joe reached over and patted Ida’s wrist. “I’m just teasing,” he said. “I think we were in some danger there. Had we waited a few more minutes, we might not have been able to drive out.”

“That’s right,” Ida said, barely placated.

At Brookville, Joe pulled over, so that Robert could trade places with Ida. Robert was already experiencing motion sickness, but it slowly abated on the way to Rushville.

Throughout the return trip, the rain fell in torrents. The drive to the Whitewater River was the family’s last fossil hunt.

Chapter 20: The Sophomore Year

The year 1969 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Warren County 4-H Club Free Fair, as the event was named in the catalog of contests. After the thrills of the week began fading away as memories, Robert anticipated his sophomore year at Pine Village High School. On the opening day, Robert met the new English teacher. As she wrote her name on the chalkboard with big letters and bold strokes, she said, loudly enough for all to hear, "My name is Miss Matthews—with two *t*'s!" She clacked the chalk beneath the two *t*'s in her name. With a freshly minted degree, Miss Matthews was teaching for the first time. She brooked no nonsense.

And Robert learned so much about literature and writing from Miss Matthews that he would eventually earn three college degrees in those subjects!

Before her, Mr. Cavanaugh, Mrs. French, and Mrs. Wilson had done their part to bring Robert forward in his understanding of English. Miss Matthews continued his education and brought him to the level of sophistication that would stand him in good stead for a long career.

On that very first day, Robert sensed that Miss Matthews was the proverbial force to be reckoned with, and, thereafter, he dotted every *i* and crossed every *t*, including both *t*'s in *Matthews*.

While Robert's class slogged through *Julius Caesar*, Robert suddenly looked up past Miss Matthews, his eyes fogged over, and he pictured Shakespeare's play as a farce. The tedium of inching forward through Elizabethan English melted away as Robert visualized comical scene after comical scene.

He enlisted Dennis' help, and, before long, a script, of sorts, had emerged. Mr. Boots readily consented to their request to use the Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder. It remained to free not only themselves but also various classmates from the study hall, so that recording could take place in the band room.

As if the cosmos had been listening, Mr. Boots, the band director, volunteered to give Dennis and Robert signed hall passes, allowing them (and others) to spend study hours in the band department filing music. Given such an unlimited supply of passes, Robert, Dennis, and their cast of aspiring actors and actresses enjoyed ample time to record *Julius Caesar*, the comedy.

One day, Robert and Dennis came to Miss Matthews' class with the large Wollensak in hand.

"Why do you have a tape recorder?" Miss Matthews asked, wondering if she should say "no" automatically or listen to whatever answer might be forthcoming.

"We have a recording that pertains to our study of *Julius Caesar*," Robert replied.

The tug-of-war in Miss Matthews' mind was visible on her face. Deciding to risk her classroom control, she said, "Alright. You can play it, but *I* decide when to shut off the machine."

The class leaned forward eagerly as the stereo tape began to play. Again and again, laughter erupted. Miss Matthews kept saying, "Shhh!" but finally gave up. She sat at her desk, and—guess what?—she smiled! To her lasting credit, she smiled and smiled. Then she laughed! As funny voice after funny voice lent itself to a fractured version of Shakespeare's tragedy, Miss Matthews laughed hysterically.

It was a triumph!

After such a success, Robert chose to set an even more preposterous goal.

Mr. John Taylor, coach and biology teacher, had a flat-top, a piercing stare, and a commanding presence, Mr. Taylor had a zero-tolerance policy regarding noise from elementary students. When grade school boys made too much of a racket in the restroom, Mr. Taylor banged open the door and stood like a gladiator ready for battle with a paddle in his hand. Had any student a pin to drop, you *knew* it would have been heard.

In grade school, Robert had feared Mr. Taylor, but having taken Mr. Taylor's freshman biology class had convinced Robert that Mr. Taylor actually had a kind heart. As a sophomore, Robert and a senior named Ted put their heads together. Mr. Taylor was now the principal. Temporarily encumbered by a cast on his leg, he spent much of his day in a wheelchair. Ted was excellent at drawing souped-up sports cars, and Robert could sketch people's portraits. So the two of them created an oil painting of Mr. Taylor in a smoking, fire-breathing hot rod of a wheelchair leaving a trail of dust taller than the gym as he zoomed around the school!

When Ted and Robert presented the painting to Mr. Taylor, Robert was fairly certain that Mr. Taylor would sentence them to hard labor; much to Robert's surprise, Mr. Taylor held the painting as if he had just won the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes! He was smiling! "You guys painted this? This

shows real talent!" When he looked up at the artists, he had the merest hint of a tear in his eye! Mission accomplished! It was true that the lion had a heart of gold!

Ted could play anything by ear on a keyboard, and he also performed on bass guitar. He played in a band named Bayou Inhabitance. Robert's class booked the band for an evening's entertainment on January 23rd, 1970, at a cost to the class treasury of fifty dollars. Ted and Robert created a poster with caricatures of the band members.

Local musicians fulfilled many significant functions in Pine Village, as they had for generations. Samuel C. Fenton, born in 1877, may have been high strung, but he was a talented musician. On hot summer evenings, residents sat on their porches and listened to his melodious playing. He performed with several bands in northwestern Indiana. Ultimately, Samuel played cornet in the well-known band led by Arthur Willard Pryor, who had served as assistant conductor of John Philip Sousa's band and who was a famous trombonist. Pryor composed "The Whistler and His Dog," a popular concert piece. Eventually, Samuel split his lip and decided to forgo the cornet. He returned to Pine Village, where he gave piano lessons.

Samuel's first cousin, Charles Albert "Charley" or "Cobbie" Cobb, born in 1883, played several instruments. Charley organized his own band, known as "Cobbie's Band." Lena (Fenton) Rhode, born in 1884, a first cousin of Samuel and Charley, studied piano at the Chicago Conservatory. She served as pianist for the Methodist Church in Pine Village. In her seventies, Lena continued to play hymns, but the minister occasionally had to awaken her.

Samuel, the trumpeter with the split lip, was married to Bessie Ogborn (1881–1967), daughter of Levi Ogborn. Samuel and Bessie had one daughter, Dorothy Fenton, who became an accomplished pianist. For graduation exercises way back in 1919, Dorothy joined Adele LaPlante in performing the "Poet and Peasant Overture" piano duet.

Charles and Robert revived the "Poet and Peasant Overture" and played it publicly several times. The brothers wore matching polyester sports coats in a lizard green and pumpkin orange plaid.

Charles was considering universities. The family had made a trip to Bloomington that Robert later recalled as hilly, wooded, and filled with limestone buildings, unlike the red brick structures on the Purdue campus. Charles selected Indiana University.

Chapter 21: The Storm and the Show

Joe, Ida, Charles, and Robert were watching a singing act on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in the kitchen that was also a family room while listening to the sleet, now like tiny shards of glass pinging against the windows, now like the tiniest brass bells sounding, and again like handfuls of sand being flung across the panes. Abruptly, the TV went dark, as did the house.

Everyone sat silently for the moments necessary to come to the realization that the electric service had stopped.

Joe summarized the now obvious fact: "Well, I guess our lights are out." He set his teaspoon beside his coffee cup, and, as he could see neither, he struck the cup a loud blow.

"Careful, Joe," said Ida.

He carefully scooted his chair back from the kitchen table and stumbled toward the Hoosier, where he opened a drawer and removed a flashlight. He went to the enclosed porch and returned with his Van Camp kerosene lantern, which he soon had lit. Charles borrowed the flashlight, went to his room, and slowly brought his Aladdin lamp with its mantle of hanging ash. The lamp made its way to the kitchen table without disturbing the delicate mantle. Charles lit the lamp, and, soon enough, the mantle was a brilliant star that nobody could look at without wincing. Charles gingerly placed the frosted glass shade over the lamp, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"No telling how long we'll be without electricity," Joe said.

Back when the family lived in town, occasional lapses in the electrical service had occurred. One time, an ice storm caused a long delay. The lights came back on in the night. The next morning, Joe discovered that the hot wire was lying on the ground and that Spot had been jumping over it again and again as the dog patrolled the corners of the yard. The instances of being without lights were more frequent and more sustained in the country.

Ida cut apples and sliced wedges of cheese for everyone; then she produced a card deck. Joe, Charles, and Robert gathered around the brightly lit kitchen table and played euchre. For a Methodist, Ida could sure play a mean hand of cards! Joe and Ida had belonged to the Euchre Club for many years. Quite often, Ida brought home the top prize while Joe earned the booby prize.

During the blackout, Charles was Joe's partner; Robert, Ida's.

“Pick them up, Robert. I’m going alone,” Ida said more than once.

From having played many times, Robert was well trained. He knew never to trump Ida’s ace, and he always led the next suit of the same color.

Ida and Robert won the first game. Joe and Charles wanted revenge. The euchre match continued in the light of the Aladdin lamp, until it was bedtime for the senior and the sophomore who had to board Glen J. Brutus’ bus the next morning.

“Well, Ida,” Joe said, smiling and touching Ida’s arm, “once again, you showed us how it’s done.”

The electricity came back on in the wee hours of the morning.

The next afternoon, Robert sat at the Yamaha piano and composed a short piece of music for the offertory. During his freshman year, Robert had become the principal pianist for the Methodist Church, and he liked scoring his own compositions for the time when the plates were passed down the pews. Ida walked into the living room. Drying her hands on a dish towel, she sat in the rocking chair that had once belonged to Grandma Rhode. “Have you decided whether to try out?” she asked Robert.

The Delta Theta Chapter of Kappa Kappa Kappa had contracted with Jerome H. Cargill Producing Company of New York City to perform a variety show on stage at the Attica High School Gymnasium on April 3rd and 4th—with proceeds donated for a new Coronary Care Unit at the Community Hospital in Williamsport. The revue would sport the name *Hello Follies!*, a rather unlikely echo of the title of the musical *Hello, Dolly!* The director, Vance Henry, moved about the United States, rapidly training local talent to present a full-length program in two acts with an intermission, each town or city coining its own title. Henry was looking for a pianist.

“I’m only a sophomore,” Robert said. “The show probably needs somebody more professional.”

“I think you should go,” Ida said. “It never hurts to try.”

“Alright,” Robert said.

Robert already had his driver’s license: a fact that annoyed Charles, whom Ida had made to wait until his seventeenth birthday. With her second son, Ida was relaxing her caution.

"You can take the Pontiac to your audition," she said.

Joe had purchased a used 1967 tan-colored Pontiac Bonneville. On Saturday morning, Robert drove from Warren County into Fountain County over the Paul Dresser Bridge crossing the Wabash River, lying peacefully in its broad floodplain, and toward the Harrison Hills Country Club in Attica, where Henry was holding a dance rehearsal in the Tudor Revival clubhouse. When Henry took a five-minute break, Robert introduced himself.

"Oh, yes!" Henry said, holding his glasses in one hand and smoothing his dark hair back with the other. "I'm looking for a pianist who can play the scores effectively. Take a seat at the piano." He opened a rehearsal binder to the chorus of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Shall We Dance?"

Robert began the song.

After only a few notes, Henry exclaimed, "No, no! The tempo is faster." He cradled a clipboard against his argyle cardigan and smacked it with a pencil like a noisy metronome. He sang, "Shall … we … *dance*, bu—bump bump, bump, on a *bright* cloud of *mu*sic shall we *fly*, bu—bump bump, bump."

"That's a little too fast," Robert thought but said nothing. He began again, holding to Henry's speed.

"Better!" Henry said, tossing the clipboard onto the piano. He commanded, "Now, jab it more! BU—BUMP BUMP, BUMP!"

Robert obeyed.

"Louder!" Henry ordered.

Robert did as he was told.

"That's great!" Henry interrupted. "You're my pianist. Kay will give you a rehearsal schedule."

With that, Henry spun on his heel and walked briskly away. Robert caught up with him.

"Do you mean that I will accompany rehearsals but someone else will play the shows?" Robert asked.

"No!" Henry exclaimed in the tone of a director with a million things on his mind. "You'll be the pianist for the shows."

Robert walked back to the piano, closed the binder, and took it with him.

For rehearsals at Attica High School on school days, Robert drove to the drive-in on South Council Street to have a quick hamburger. He felt very grown up to be eating on his own. After gulping down dinner, Robert drove on to the school. Seating in the gymnasium stood taller than what he was accustomed to in the gym at Pine Village. To Robert, the gym in Attica felt cavernous. He wondered if he would be nervous when all those seats were filled.

The performers were devoted to doing their best. One fellow, though, worried Robert. The gentleman, who had chosen to sing a solo, had an uncertain sense of rhythmic exactness. Robert could not predict what might happen.

The pit orchestra sounded professional, and the sets and costumes were all they needed to be.

The audiences were huge. For both performances, the gym was packed. Robert felt a healthy nervousness—not the fatal kind—and, the moment he began playing "Shall We Dance?" with the BU—BUMP BUMP, BUMP, his confidence banished all anxieties.

On the evenings of the shows—to Robert's great relief—the singer with ambivalence about where the beats should fall turned in creditable performances.

Talent in music ran deep in the class ahead of Robert's. Becci, Jill, Darci, Dia, Debbie, Gail, and Betsy formed a singing sensation known as "The Farmers' Daughters." By their senior year, their rendition of the 1941 hit "Chattanooga Choo Choo" was equal to the best anywhere. The Farmers' Daughters brought top-notch musical entertainment to audiences in many towns and cities of the region. Had the singers been discovered—and had they recorded an LP—they easily could have gained a national following.

Like Big Pine Creek, music flowed through Benton, Warren, and Fountain Counties. From the heartfelt singing in the churches on Sunday morning, through the school bands, to the garage ensembles, to the homegrown performers whose talents and abilities rivaled the best on television, Pine Village's fields were alive with the sound of music.

Chapter 22: The Snow and the Neighbor

A winter came with snow that would not quit. Relentlessly, layer was added to layer with no single storm that would qualify for the record books but with freezing temperatures that permitted the snow to deepen inexorably.

Joe, Charles, and Robert trudged through narrow pathways to the barn to feed the cows. Although there was still plenty of water in the tank for the cattle to drink, Joe hoped there would be a break in the weather soon, so that he could start the Minneapolis–Moline Z and haul water from the well by the house to the tank beside the barn.

School was cancelled …

… and snow kept falling. Now no pathway existed. Only a shallow depression in the snow …

A day dawned bright and cold. Joe had just entered the house from the enclosed porch, where he had removed his boots and the first of two denim coats. He was still wearing one denim coat and his cap with the earflaps down. His nose and cheeks were rosy.

"Here's something you won't see every year," Joe said to Robert while turning on the burner beneath the tea kettle and meticulously measuring instant coffee into a cup.

"What's that?" Robert asked, looking up from reading *Macbeth*.

"Just come outside with me and take a look—after I warm up with a cup of coffee."

While Joe sipped his coffee from a teaspoon, Robert wondered what was so extraordinary that his father wanted him to see it.

When Joe was ready to venture back outside, Robert donned his heaviest winter coat and his stocking cap. He put on his boots before stepping from the enclosed porch into the wintry landscape beyond the door. With an effort, Joe and Robert plodded in front of the shop building, their boots descending through only the top layers of snow and coming to rest precariously on lower layers.

"Well, what do you see?" Joe asked.

Robert squinted against the light reflected from the whitest of snows extending to an indistinct horizon of blowing glitter.

"Nothing," Robert replied. "Just snow."

Robert glanced at the maple tree and at the openings into the old garage appearing to be two small caves in a mound of snow.

"Nothing," he repeated.

"That's right!" Joe said. "Where are the fence posts?"

Robert turned toward where the road and the posts along it should have been. Nothing indicated that a road lay beneath the snow, and the posts had vanished. For a split second, Robert thought of asking where the posts had gone, but then he realized that they were under a blanket of snow. He could walk on snow above the fences!

"Wow!" was the full complement of his response.

If Robert half closed his eyes, he could detect slight waves and ridges formed by wind in the snow's surface.

"Seldom does the snow get so deep that the tops of the fence posts are hidden," Joe commented.

Several days passed. One morning, Robert looked through the picture window and saw a line of raisins through the snow. Suddenly, he realized they were not raisins but the tops of the posts along the road. The snow was melting!

Later—precisely when all that snow melted—the spring rains poured down as if the heavens were giant water bags that had burst.

School was cancelled …

… for mud! Rain kept falling, transforming the gravel roads into impassable corridors of mud. Vehicles mired and were abandoned.

During a deluge, Robert stared through the picture window. The widely spaced creeks and ditches in the flat land could not carry away the water fast enough, and the house, shop, and old garage appeared to be on an island in the middle of a lake.

The Rhode family's nearest neighbor was Agnes Moore. She was in her eighties, but she enjoyed complete mobility and was so active that she seemed much younger than her years. Every sunup, except on the coldest days of the winter, she walked briskly down the gravel road with her black Spaniel, Lady, by her side. In the stillness of daybreak, Robert heard Agnes' footsteps crunching the gravel road. "Agnes is up," thought Robert.

Along with playing piano for the Methodist Church, Robert worked with the Vacation Bible School. Agnes served as an instructor. Each morning, Robert picked her up and drove her to the church.

Agnes taught the youngsters to make churches by gluing Popsicle sticks to milk cartons. Meanwhile, she and Robert designed a more elaborate structure of their own. After a few days of diligent gluing, their Popsicle church was a veritable cathedral!

At about the same time, Agnes called Joe to ask him to use her gun to drop raccoons that Lady had treed in Agnes' apple orchard. Robert thought, "A lot of good that will do! Dad doesn't know anything about guns." Ida did not permit guns on the farm, as she was afraid of accidents involving children. Joe walked up the road to Agnes' farm. Soon, Robert heard two light reports of a gun, so he thought he might as well go to see if Dad had had any luck. Robert met Agnes and Joe at her door. She was putting her gun away.

"I heard only two shots," Robert commented.

"That's all it took," Joe said.

Seeing Robert's look of amazement, Agnes asked, "Don't you know that your father has always been a crack shot?"

Robert felt like Scout learning about Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Back when Joe was a lad, he trained himself to be an excellent marksman. Given Ida's proscription against guns, Robert had had no cause to discover Joe's skill.

Agnes provided another link to Joe's past, for she had remembered his ability with firearms. Agnes was also a link to the community's future through the lessons she taught to the children in the Vacation Bible School. Little by little, Robert came to appreciate how remarkable Agnes was and how fascinating her life had been. Robert came to learn that she and her husband, who predeceased her by many years, had built the tidy house that Robert often visited. Overlooking the kitchen on the ground level was a higher living room accessible by a few steps and bordered by a neatly turned

railing. Until Robert discovered that Agnes and her husband had planned and constructed their house, Robert thought that it might be another of the pre-packaged houses that Sears had sold in the early 1900s. The excellence of the craftsmanship and the high polish of the woodwork reminded him of Sears houses. On several winter mornings, Ida sent Robert to deliver fresh baked goods to Agnes' door. Robert enjoyed the pleasant warmth of Agnes' wood-burning stove and the coziness of the home that she had created with her own two hands.

Even during the most isolated periods when snow or mud kept Robert from driving anywhere, he had only to look to the east to feel that he and his family were not alone. There stood Agnes' comfortable house, her perfectly maintained barn with its bright red paint, and her well-designed garage nestled beside rows of apple trees.

Chapter 23: The Watchdogs

Ida was exasperated. The foxes kept taking her chickens, even though she closed the chickens in the hog farrowing house that Robert had built in Mr. Coffman's class.

"Joe, I think I'll give the last three chickens to Mrs. Bowen," Ida said over her bowl of oatmeal one morning.

Joe, who had raised chickens for a good portion of his income during much of his early adult life, said, "It would be strange not to have any chickens. We'd have to buy all our eggs."

"We're doing that now," Ida said, adding raisins and brown sugar to her oatmeal. "I'd like to try guinea hens, instead."

"I would suppose the foxes would consider guinea hens as succulent as chickens," Joe suggested, pouring milk on his cornflakes.

Robert, who had miraculously escaped having to eat oatmeal, was having cornflakes with the boys' father while Charles had oatmeal with their mother. Robert could hardly wait to discover where the conversation would lead.

"People who always have to be right can't learn anything new," Ida, the former teacher, responded, smiling.

"What are guinea hens?" Robert asked.

"Guinea fowl are birds about the size of chickens," Joe replied.

"Mrs. Bowen has some keets that she wants to give me," Ida said. "Her guinea hens hid their nests so well that she didn't find them in time, and now she has too many keets."

"I guess we should try guineas," Joe said.

"They're better than watchdogs," Ida added, encouragingly. "They'll let us know if we have prowlers."

"I doubt if we would ever have a prowler out here in the country," Joe said.

"'People who always have to be right—'" Charles began.

"Hush!" Ida interrupted. "I can talk to your father that way, but you can't." She turned toward Joe. "'—can't learn anything new, '" she finished. After a second, everyone laughed heartily.

So the Rhode family had no more chickens, but Ida, Joe, Charles, and Robert had guineas aplenty.

As the keets grew into full guineas, they were slate-colored with white dots in swirls and lines all over their feathered plumpness. Their heads were mostly white. The dark lines over their eyes could have been eyebrows, imparting to their glance an air of being perpetually indignant. Perhaps they *were* vexed most of the time! Their pale yellow and pink beaks were rather thick. Red wattles curved out to the sides like ribbon bows. Pink and yellow helmets stuck up like folded newspaper hats. The skinny legs and long toes were the same yellowish pink.

Rather than screaming whenever they saw a fox, the guineas screeched at anything that moved.

On an early spring day when impossibly dark clouds surrounded small apertures of transparently blue sky and beams of sunshine like those of spotlights made bright yellow patches along the fern-green fencerows, the guineas shrieked at each change of light and shade in the heavens and on the earth. Really, they needed no provocation to scream bloody murder. Whenever the spirit moved them, they screeched!

The guineas defined the word *flock*, epitomizing what was meant when "flock" was coined. Where one went, all went. Schools of fish on Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom* could not have changed direction in synchronized movements any more uniformly than guineas. First, they would scurry toward a hedge apple tree, but, for no apparent reason, they would veer right or left in unison, squawking the while.

Even though they had been kept for long periods inside the farrowing house to teach the guineas where home was located, they ignored the house as soon as they were permitted to roam freely. If the Williams place had not been an oasis of trees and slough in the midst of broad fields with neighbors not nearby, the guineas might well have gone vacationing down the road, sampling what each farmstead had to offer. Joe reasoned that the only factor pressuring them to stay put was the general emptiness in all directions.

The guineas preferred to roost in the hedge apple trees at night.

"How they avoid the foxes is beyond me!" Joe exclaimed to Ida, whose face broke into a big smile of satisfaction every time she gave consideration to her guinea hens.

Robert had been surprised to hear guineas in the uppermost branches of the hedge apple trees at dusk. That they made their way up that high and back down again was remarkable for such large birds.

While guinea is said to taste like pheasant, Charles and Robert never found out, as Ida would not have put one of her pet guineas in a roasting pan for love or money.

The small tan guinea eggs with their brown speckles, though, were broken and their contents fried or scrambled for breakfast.

"See?" Ida happily said to Joe. "We don't have to buy so many eggs at the grocery store now."

"People who always have to be right," Joe said, not completing the sentence but winking at Ida.

Like turkeys, the guineas formed circles around anything foreign, such as a frog. "*Chi-chi-chi-chi-chi!*" they cried in a huff, their heads ogling for a better view, their feet lifting and redeploying continually. At feeding time, they could form circles around the farmer with the feed bucket. "*Chi-chi-chi-chi-chi!*"

Robert became accustomed to the guineas' shrill outcries. To him, they sounded like an old disk—not equipped with wheels—being pulled along a gravel road. Their noise became part of the environment. It became more noticeable when they quit screaming for an extended period of time than when they screeched.

Ida could not have been happier with her decision to acquire the guineas.

Chapter 24: The Exhibits

Every year, the freshman class made a bus trip to Chicago. When Robert's class went, the group first toured the Chicago Natural History Museum, or Field Museum. Each new diorama in the Hall of Prehistoric Man captivated Robert all the more—especially the Neanderthals. He tried to imagine what it could have been like to have lived in the time of the cavemen.

The exhibits of stuffed animals were so extensive as to stretch seemingly forever down halls and around corners. The white-tailed deer appeared to be living. From the tiny antelope to the zebra of southern and eastern Africa, the animal displays kept Robert in a state of amazement. The elephants and the jungle cats were favorites. There were many animals he had never heard of and that he could scarcely imagine, even though the displays were so lifelike! There were wild donkeys, hippopotami, gorillas, and hyenas: all examples of the taxidermists' finest hour and art.

Yet his eyes really opened all the way when he encountered the Egyptian artifacts. The ushabti figures, the canopic jars, the sarcophagi, and the statues intrigued him. As a freshman, he could hardly fail to be mesmerized by the mummies! He felt a deep sense of astonishment that such rich cultures had thrived in the Nile River Valley for thousands of years. He vowed he would check out books on Egyptian history when he returned home, and he kept his promise.

The class also visited the Museum of Science and Industry. Built in 1893 as part of the World's Columbian Exposition (which failed to be finished in time for 1892, the four hundredth anniversary of 1492, the year made famous by Christopher Columbus), the vast edifice, which had been refaced in limestone, housed more displays than could be seen in weeks, let alone in a few hours! Many of the exhibits were to be operated by pushing buttons or working levers. It was great fun to discover scientific facts and mechanical principles by observation of displays that moved in response to the viewer's hand. There were airplanes, boats, cars, a stage coach, steam engines including locomotives, and streetcars. There were a gigantic Foucault pendulum and electromagnets and lightning from a surge generator. There were all manner of machines from newspaper presses to milking machines. A spectacular monument to the periodic table of the elements boasted a massive globe of the Planet Earth. Amid the museum's modernity was a nod to the Middle Ages in a medieval scriptorium, where European monks copied and illuminated holy manuscripts in brilliantly colored inks.

But the trip into the coal mine was even more exciting! It began with a safety demonstration that simulated an explosion of methane gas from a

lighted Davy lamp. The drop down the mine shaft in a black cage gave the illusion of a descent of hundreds of feet. The tram ride through the cool gloom of the mine was worthy of Disney!

Robert's favorite activity was walking through the U-*505* submarine, which was docked outside the museum. The narrow passages within the German ship made Robert feel almost claustrophobic, but he was so fascinated with everything that he successfully fought against the dread of enclosure in a tight space. Even though the halls were barely wide enough for one person, the submarine was huge. "How could it have remained hidden?" Robert wondered. Of course, as a person from a landlocked farming community, he had almost no concept of the size of the ocean. After the tour, Robert knew that he could never have lived on board a submarine without going stark raving mad! It was quite a learning experience, to say the least!

The trip to the Windy City was one of the best that Robert would ever take, and he was grateful to his school for having given his class the opportunity to see such a splendid panoply at both institutions and to the museums for making available to the public such an incredible array of the best that the world has to offer.

Ever since the threat of a tornado had interrupted the performance at Columbian Park when Robert was a youngster, he had wanted to spot a funnel cloud. With the help of her father, his classmate Susan had once built a large glass box that demonstrated a tornado by using dry ice and a fan to form a vortex that was well lighted from above. Robert never grew tired of watching the ghostly rope undulating from the bottom to the top of the tall box.

On a sunny April Saturday in between his freshman and sophomore years, Robert had been disking for his father. The International 560 tractor had needed gasoline, so Robert had driven from the fields back to the house.

He pulled alongside the elevated gas barrel, switched off the engine, spun off the gas cap, and began filling the tank from the heavy nozzle. The day was hot and still. The day seemed to be waiting for something to happen. It was as if it alone knew what was approaching. The birds had abandoned their hectic springtime schedule as if in anticipation. Only the occasional shrieks of the guineas disturbed the silence. With the tank full, Robert hung the hose on the horseshoe that served as a cradle nailed to one of the barrel's support posts. Robert thought about returning to his disking right away, but the idea of a quick nap intervened.

Joe and Charles were working with tractors in adjacent fields about as far from the house as they could be. Would they miss Robert for fifteen minutes? Robert decided they would not, so he strode to the house and stretched out on the sofa to catch a few winks. Such an action was extremely rare for Robert—so rare, in fact, that he could almost be described as never having taken a sleepy moment away from work. For years thereafter, he would wonder why he chose that time to sneak a brief nap.

Naturally, Robert lost track of the time. Suddenly, Joe and Charles burst into the room! They were talking excitedly. In Robert's half-asleep state, he worried that they might be angry with him for briefly shirking his responsibility. Robert's sense of guilt helped him awaken fully. Then he realized they were not conversing about his indolence; rather, they were discussing the funnel cloud that had just crossed near the north end of the farm.

"That's as close as I ever want to get to a tornado," Joe said.

"That was impressive!" Charles agreed.

Robert sat up and listened to their description of the funnel, which had begun to touch down but had lifted immediately. Robert glanced at the clock. He had slept for less than an hour. In just that length of time, an oddly greenish wall cloud had formed in the southwest. On its path from southwest to northeast, the cloud mass had passed on an angle a little over a mile north of the house. Acknowledging the dangers of lightning, Joe had signaled Charles to bring his tractor and plow up to the house while Joe drove his tractor and corn planter up to the barn. When they had entered the barnyard, they had witnessed the funnel's descent.

Robert had slept through the excitement and was disappointed. He would never have a better opportunity to watch a tornado. Years later, a tornado that would prove quite destructive in Rainsville would pass along much the same diagonal line over the north end of the Williams place. Winds to the side of the twister would blow Joe and Ida's pink and blue 1950s metal armchairs off the front porch and deliver them to Agnes Moore a quarter of a mile down the gravel road. Worse, the tornado would level all but one wall and the bathroom of Robert's cousin Pam's house. Pam's mother would ride out the storm in that bathroom and live to tell the tale. Pam, her father, and her siblings would not be at home, although her father and her sister would be in a car approaching the house down the mile-long driveway to the north and would witness the calamity. Viewing the wreckage afterward, Robert would change his mind about wanting to see a twister. He would decide that

he never wanted to observe—with scientific detachment—a tornado in progress. He would rather learn about such violent storms in the context of a museum or laboratory.

Chapter 25: The Ouibache Experience

As Charles had once spent a week at an experimental camp called Ouibache, a French word on which the English word Wabash was coined, Robert decided to look into it. He persuaded his cousin Pam to apply with him to become counselors, and they were accepted. They were to have training for a week at the end of May. Working with the staff, they would select any two weeks in the summer to return to the camp and to serve as leaders.

Many years earlier, the location had been a forestry station run by Purdue University. The grounds numbered some hundred acres of rugged land, heavily wooded, leading down to the Wabash River and including a small island in the stream. Purdue had built many well-appointed structures, including barracks for men, barracks for women, a cafeteria, a laboratory, and an amphitheater. At some point, the Hoosier 4-H Leadership Center had established a new purpose for the old outpost.

In that May between their sophomore and junior years, when Pam and Robert arrived at the camp, they were assigned rooms in a large A-frame fronting the west. They hardly knew what to expect. In the orientation session, the permanent staff introduced the thirty-odd counselors to one another and to their objective, which was to help children from farms, from cities, and from everywhere in between farms and cities to discover the joys of collaboration in the peaceful stewardship and preservation of nature.

It was 1970, a pivotal year. The Kent State shootings had just occurred, and it felt as if the lofty aims of the Sixties would never be attained. The staff members ranged in age from two to thirty years older than Robert and Pam, with many of them having graduated in the 1960s. Like strong ships, they had remained upright on the stormy seas of that disappointing decade. They eschewed empty platitudes; they had learned that it was wrong to promise Xanadu to brokenhearted people. They focused their attention not on the world but on the individual.

"We have one of the youngest counselors we have ever had," Mick, a thin, guitar-playing fellow, began, smiling at Robert. "Welcome!"

Robert felt a little on the spot during the light applause, but he sensed that everyone was supportive.

A friendly Purdue student named Paul and a woman nicknamed "Mouse" said a few words. In no time, people felt at home.

As twilight fell, Paul stood a flashlight on end so that its beam struck the ceiling of the A-frame high above. All other lights were extinguished. Everyone sat cross-legged on the carpet.

"What makes you vulnerable?" Paul asked. "No one has to speak, but everyone can speak, if he or she feels so moved."

Slowly, people admitted their fears. Paul thanked them and said, "Remember that the youngsters who come to the camp share your vulnerabilities but most likely are not equipped to identify them or to talk about them. Don't ask them to try. For *you* to recognize their vulnerabilities is what matters."

"What makes you invincible?" Paul asked next. Soon, people began responding.

Robert said nothing. He was fascinated by how easily others could express themselves without worrying about what someone else might think. He began to ponder what listening means: how vitally important it is to hear exactly what another person is saying and to filter the utterances through the self without using criticism as a weapon to destroy the exchange. Before long, he would begin to discover the power of expression and the grave responsibilities that accompany that power.

On the first night, as Robert and others had fallen asleep, suddenly there came a racket of fists pounding on doors while Paul's voice was heard shouting "Night hike! Night hike! Put on your oldest clothes! Night hike!"

An other-worldly experience was transpiring! Groggy and disoriented, Robert put on old jeans and a sweatshirt. He joined the other counselors outside the A-frame as Paul's flashlight raked the ground.

"Is this everybody?" he asked. "Mick, our able-bodied Night hike leader, will explain."

Mick said, "I will be the only person with a flashlight, but I won't use it, unless I have to. Everyone take the hand of the person behind you. Always remember that your duty is to help that person. Never let go of that person's hand! We will be slipping and sliding over rough terrain, and, many times, the person behind you will need your helping hand. Let's go!"

In single file with hands clasped, the group quickly entered the forested hills. Pam was three people ahead of Robert. In the deep darkness of the woods, the counselors snaked along on a trail so thin that only Mick new where it

was. Twice, they crossed ravines on logs, and no one fell! At first, everyone chatted, but, after a while, there were only occasional statements that offered assistance. Robert heard Pam say to the person behind her, "There's a muddy hole to your right, so keep to your left."

Suddenly, Robert emerged from the velvety shadows. Moonlight filtered downward and sparkled on the ripples of the Wabash River. The air itself seemed aglow from the moonbeams. No one spoke. The water murmured and whispered where it lapped the shore.

Everyone walked in beauty.

Eventually, the now silent line reentered the forest.

To the tune of shuffling feet, thoughts ran in deep channels. Robert felt increasingly responsible for the counselors behind him and, symmetrically, for the counselors before him. He was beginning to understand the paramount significance of connection to others. When the group crossed a log in the night, they were one person with hands clasped, and no pearl could fall from the necklace.

Arriving back at the A-frame, counselors were eager to talk about the experience. Many stayed up half of the night, Robert among them.

The next morning, Robert felt invigorated, not fatigued. He watched the golden sunlight bathe the breathing leaves of the trees. The staff and the counselors took part in a flag-raising ceremony before filing into the cafeteria for breakfast. Robert sat across from Pam in her peasant dress and pigtails.

"And how is Robert this morning?" Pam asked.

"I slept great," Robert replied.

"I did, too," Pam said. "After the Night Hike, I wasn't sure I could go back to sleep, but the conversation afterward was so peaceful I could feel myself drifting."

Just then, Pam's older cousin Bonnie came past the table and said hello. Bonnie was on the staff as a recreation leader in charge of the swimming pool, ball courts, and playing fields. The sun had bleached Bonnie's blonde hair almost white.

Turning to Pam, Bonnie said in her customary tone of frank good nature, "I heard you went on a Night Hike. Now you understand the expression 'easy as falling off a log.'"

Pam laughed. "What are you up to today?"

Bonnie said, "I have to drive into Lafayette for some pool supplies. Let me know if you need anything."

Pam said, "I think I have everything I need, but it's kind of you to offer."

"If you think of anything, catch me at the pool office in the next half hour," Bonnie said, moving on in her usual energetic way.

"I wonder what's in store for us this morning," Pam said to Robert.

They soon found out, as Bill, a roly-poly recreation leader in his forties, ran the counselors and staff through an hour of hilarious games. He explained that, throughout the summer, he would be keeping the campers in similar good spirits through music and fun. Packing his speech with lingo like "far out," "can you dig it," and "outa sight"—all such expressions uttered with an ironic nod to popular culture—Bill kept everybody laughing. Robert needed no encouragement to unleash his sense of humor, but he was learning from Bill to be "laid back" and not take everything so seriously.

The three hours before dinner had been set aside for socializing or quiet reflection, so Pam and Robert invited any interested counselors to visit their hometown. A group of seven, counting Robert and Pam, took bicycles from the recreation building and began the ten-mile ride to Pine Village. The others were from such places as Aurora, Anderson, and Shelbyville. Gliding between flat or gently rolling land with small corn and bean plants in neat green rows, the bicyclists coasted along like a family of barn swallows sailing on outstretched wings. Picture-perfect white clouds drifted beneath the azure dome. Cows with lowered heads grazed the meadows. Reaching the town, Pam and Robert invited the riders into the corner grocery for soft drinks. After pedaling around the town and strolling past the businesses, they walked their bikes to the Methodist Church, parked them, went up the stairs, and through the unlocked door. Everyone admired the stained glass windows while Robert played Bach on the piano. Finally, the group rode to the school and entered the gymnasium to see the diamond pattern of the ceiling beams reflected in the highly varnished floor.

"No wonder you love it here!" said a counselor named Jill. "Everything is so pretty and peaceful."

The others nodded their approval of Jill's observation.

Then the group made the ten-mile return trip. The riders were tired—but not too tired—when they rolled into the Hoosier 4-H Leadership Center. Over dinner, the excursionists talked excitedly about what they had seen in Pine Village.

Mike said, "It's exactly what you want a town to be."

On the evening of the fourth day of their training, the counselors enacted Native American stories that they had rehearsed. Carefully researched through Purdue University's extensive anthropology collections, the narratives included personified animals and cosmic myths. The light from the flickering campfire reflected on their faces as the counselors performed. Later in the summer, they would lead campers to share the same stories.

As the firelight began to die down and the stories were finished, everyone had to remain silent for the rest of the night. Communication by hand signals was permitted, but talking was prohibited.

Back at the A-frame building, the counselors fought the temptation to speak. To utter words was an incredibly powerful urge—nearly involuntary! Like most of breathing, itself, using the breath to intone words was so natural that the act of remaining silent felt unnatural—at first.

Again and again catching himself before he broke the rule, Robert began to notice his breath. He could not recall a time when he had thought about breathing, except when he was a little boy and had tripped over a wire supporting a clothesline pole, thus knocking the air out of his lungs and having to fight for the next breath.

Robert thought, "I am alive now because of each breath I take." He next thought, "This time will never come again." Then he thought, "As long as I keep breathing, my life will go on from this place and time." The subsequent thought was this: "This night will become only a memory." Then: "It is already becoming a memory." And: "Each memory is a construction of the mind because it no longer exists." Suddenly: "The past and the future are unreal." All at once: "This instant—this breath—this, alone, is real."

Robert looked around at the other counselors, all silent and trying to communicate by gestures. Abruptly, the injunction to love your neighbor popped into his mind and resonated with a sense of urgency that it had never had previously.

The next morning, when talking had resumed, Robert felt he had glimpsed the peace that surpasses all words and that cannot be contained by them.

The training sessions had reached their conclusion. Pam and Robert served as counselors together during one of their two weeks of leading, guiding, and inspiring campers. Each had a separate second week. All went well. A year later, Robert returned to Ouibache for another training week and two weeks leading campers before he began his first fall semester as a college freshman.

Ever after that, Robert readily called to mind an image of spangles of moonlight dappling the Wabash River, of a campfire lighting the faces of counselors pretending to be crows or coyotes, and of the breath entering and leaving each person’s body.

Chapter 26: The College Student

The August day arrived when the family said goodbye to Charles outside Wright Quadrangle on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington. He was excited, looking forward to his time in college. On the drive home, Joe, Ida, and Robert were not excited. Robert had a lump in his throat. Joe said nothing, and Ida made only the occasional observation about a flower in someone's yard or a bird on a fencepost. How could the sanctity of a family be broken so nonchalantly? The knowledge that the home would never be the same again weighed heavily on all three.

When the Pontiac pulled into the driveway and everyone went inside the house, the home that had seemed so full of promise only a little over two years earlier now felt vulnerable. A big change had occurred. Spot wondered where Charles was and watched for him for many days, until the terrier gave up watching.

Robert thought he should be especially kind to his parents, now that Charles' room was quiet and felt empty.

In the mornings, Robert waited for the bus alone.

Joe and Ida hoped for letters from IU, and a few came. Charles was busy, studying up to four hours a night. Ida, meanwhile, wrote and mailed many letters to Bloomington. She could be seen scrawling on a pad of lined paper while taking a moment to sit at the kitchen table with a dusting of flour up to her elbows and pies in the oven.

Ida had been to college; Joe had not. She had knowledge of what Charles was encountering; Joe had none. The move to the new house in 1968 had been one of two of the most traumatizing events in Joe's life. The second occurred when Charles moved away.

Without either of them sensing the change, the bond between Joe and Robert—already strong—was becoming stronger.

Ida and Robert kept trying to grow a vegetable garden. Their first attempt—in the first spring and summer at the new home—had been made west of the driveway, but the plants did not thrive. Next, Ida had Joe plow the area north of the house where, in Lizzie's youth, a garden had been located. As before, sprouts were few, mature plants fewer, and the quality of the produce poor at best. No one could understand why corn, soybeans, and wheat crops customarily were spectacular when grown in presumably the same soil in the fields just beyond the hedge apple trees.

Uncharacteristically, Ida gave up. She supplied the family's table with vegetables from grocery stores. Robert no longer enrolled in the gardening project for the 4-H fair.

"If we don't plant a garden, I'll have more time to dust," Ida said. In the country, the furniture and floors became dusty far faster than they had in town. Up until Joe bought a window air conditioning unit, the windows were kept open through the hot, muggy days, although a heavy green blind might be lowered by pulling on the little ring dangling from the string at the bottom of the shade.

Little by little, levity returned to the farm east of Pine Village.

Ida would turn from the kitchen sink to face Robert while suds rolled down her wrists from her upturned hands, and she would quote Lady Macbeth: "The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?—What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" Robert would laugh until he could hardly catch his breath.

Robert would squeak a pink rat made of rubber and fling it beneath the sofa. Spot would bark and jump up and down, finally resorting to twisting the front half of his body on its side and pushing with his hind legs, until he could reach the rat and pull it out. Then he would shake it, to everyone's delight! "You get that ol' rat!" Robert would say.

Naturally, events conspired to dampen Robert's good spirits. Miss Beegle retired. Robert's beloved piano teacher recommended that he continue his training with Miss Ruth Jamieson.

Such a huge change! Miss Jamieson had a small apartment above a men's clothing store near Purdue. Robert trudged up several flights of stairs that snapped as if they would break. In the gloom at the top, a dim light bulb with no shade and yellowed with grime hung at the end of a dirty cord. Robert knocked, and Miss Jamieson swung open the door with what Robert would come to discover was her characteristic impulsiveness. There she stood. Her hair was pulled back tightly in a severe bun. Her very red lipstick was applied in a hasty smear—once across the lips and done! Her stare pierced Robert's confidence. He looked down awkwardly.

"Well, I suppose you had better come in, don't you suppose?" she asked, stepping back, so that Robert could enter her tiny, tiny apartment.

Her piano was a reddish upright, nothing like the twin grand pianos that Miss Beegle owned. Miss Jamieson's reading material lay wherever it fell on the

sofa or on the carpet. French paintings in gilded frames hung at odd angles. Strings of beads separated her tiny living room from her kitchen, and, every now and then, she unexpectedly leapt up from her rocking chair, dove through the beads (which tinkled against one another), and returned with a heavily scented hand cream that she rubbed vigorously between her palms.

For the first year of lessons, Miss Jamieson found fault with every facet of Robert's playing—beginning with the way he clipped his nails. "Cut them much shorter!" she commanded. Quite often, as he stood on a windy street corner waiting for his parents to pick him up after a lesson, he thought about quitting. At the beginning of his training under Miss Jamieson's sharp tutelage, he could not have predicted that she would eventually occupy the same place in his affections as a dearly loved aunt. Slowly, Miss Jamieson built Robert back up after tearing him down, transforming his playing.

In the beginning of his studies with Miss Jamieson, Robert often stumbled. At his first recital in Duncan Hall, he became lost in a Beethoven Sonata. His fingers flailed around, striking wrong notes in all directions. Instead of feeling horror or shame, Robert smiled. In his mind's eye, Robert could just see the dramatic Miss Jamieson backstage, groaning, swooning, and falling to the floor.

When Robert walked into the wings, Miss Jamieson rushed up to him. "What happened to you, my boy?" she begged.

"I couldn't remember where I was."

"Oh," she said in a kind of guttural utterance, as if someone had hit her in the stomach. Recovering, she said, "Well, it has happened to the best of performers and is one of the best ways to learn. Recitals may appear to be about winning and losing. Competitions may present the illusion of winners and losers, but, oftentimes, the losers are the winners, my boy! When you discover that making music is not about victory and defeat, you will be a pianist!"

Several weeks later, Miss Jamieson and Robert attended a piano concert by Vladimir Ashkenazy in the Edward C. Elliott Hall of Music at Purdue. Robert knew that he was in the presence of a prodigious talent. He observed Miss Jamieson's gestures, such as pressing her hand against her heart while her lipstick formed the letter O. Suddenly, he could read her mind, which was not saying "I am in the presence of a prodigious talent." Her mind was saying "Ah! How beautiful!"

Miss Jamieson designed separate exercises for each of Robert's fingers, and she coined fascinating expressions to help him overcome difficult passages in the music. For a rapid run in another Beethoven Sonata, she said, "It's like small monkeys scurrying up trees in the jungle." Somehow, that description made it possible for Robert to play the run accurately every time. When she was young, she had studied in France for a lengthy period, and she affected a French manner, calling Robert "Ro-BAIR."

"Ro-BAIR," she said one day, "we must begin preparing for your audition at Indiana University, for you will audition there one day. We will surprise the judges by having you adopt a method of performance preferred by some in Beethoven's age but seldom practiced nowadays. I am alluding to using only the middle three fingers on the black keys. No thumbs, no pinkies!" The last word almost burst from her.

"Further," she continued, "you will sustain notes by holding the keys down, not by pedaling. Your foot will not come near the pedal." She chuckled. "The judges won't know what hit them," she mused.

"Of course, they will want to hear your range, so we will give them Bach and Chopin. Your Bach will be strict, as if played on a harpsichord, and your Chopin will be unctuously Romantic. We must get started at once!"

For months, Robert was in the piano equivalent of training for the Olympics.

There were moments of joy, when Miss Jamieson flung herself backwards in her rocking chair, clasped her hands over her heart, smiled, and exclaimed, "Formidable!"

There were moments of despair, when Miss Jamieson thrust herself forward, shooed Robert's hands away from the keys, placed her hands where his had been, and made him watch carefully as she demonstrated what he should be doing. "Voila!"

Each day, each week, *un peu de progrès*!

Then came the afternoon when Miss Jamieson rocked back and said, "I am pleased to say that you now have a good technique. Technique is essential, but you can have perfect technique and not make music."

Miss Jamieson seized a chopstick and pointed to a line in the score of the sonata. "Sing the melody!" she ordered.

"Oh, I can't do that!" Robert said.

“What do you mean?” Miss Jamieson asked, a look of shock on her face.

“My voice is not good for singing,” Robert answered.

“Rubbish!” she exclaimed. “I never heard such utter nonsense!”

“My father is a good singer,” Robert began, “but I didn’t inherit—”

“I didn’t ask your father to sing,” Miss Jamieson interrupted. “I asked you. Now sing!”

Robert sang the melody.

“Now play the same way you sang!”

His mouth open, Robert silently sang while his fingers ran up and down the keys.

Miss Jamieson laughed a deep belly guffaw. “You are making music! You hear the difference! Your technique is the body; the music is the spirit.”

From that day forward, Robert’s mouth remained open whenever he played piano. He was silently singing—sometimes, not so silently.

More importantly, from that hour—no, *moment!*—onward, his heart was open.

Chapter 27: The Novel

By the time Robert was a junior, he had reached a height of six feet, one inch. His hair was cut short because Ida preferred it that way. He liked a certain green hopsack shirt that he wore all too often in the warm months, and he liked a certain green corduroy pullover that he wore all too often in the cold months. During the fall and spring, he was most often to be seen wearing a tan, brown, and brick CPO coat—even indoors. He had a collection of turtleneck inserts in different colors, and he frequently wore them. When he wore sports coats for public piano performances, he generally wore clip-on bow ties, one of which—a dark red crushed velvet—was his favorite. He wanted a Nehru jacket, but Ida was not fond of them. She was, however, fond of the new polyester suits, and Robert received a dark blue one with a reversible vest of dark blue on one side and orange plaid on the other. It would not be long before Ida would begin to fill his closet with what came to be called "leisure suits," accompanied by polyester shirts in mod styles. Robert's favorite leisure suit was a caramel-colored one with ivory running stitches at every hem. The shirt that he most often wore with it had baby blue flowers overlapping russet flowers amid forest-green leaves.

One day at school, Robert (attired in his CPO coat and hopsack shirt) was talking with Dennis as they filed band music. They had been reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell.

"He should have named it *Nineteen Seventy*," Dennis said.

"Doublethink and thoughtcrimes are already here," Robert offered.

"Big Brother is watching us," Dennis commented.

"We're living in Oceania," Robert remarked.

"'Attention! Your attention please,'" Dennis quoted, sounding just like the school intercom.

Robert glanced up from the sheaf of musical scores in his hand. His eyes clouded over. He could see Big Brother in the school's main office, Winston Smith teaching chemistry, and Julia O'Brien teaching English. Robert turned to Dennis and …

… a satire, *1985*, was born!

Assisted by Mr. Boots' hall passes, Robert and Dennis devoted weeks to the writing and illustrating of *1985*.

But how could such an artistic work be duplicated and shared with adoring readers as an octopus releases purple ink into the sea before making its escape?

Robert approached the desk of the main office.

"Yes, Robert?" Mrs. Brutus greeted him.

"Could I have a stack of purple ditto masters (for a satire that will be distributed throughout the school)?" Robert asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Brutus smiled, returning to her desk. "Help yourself."

Robert pressed an inch of masters between his thumb and fingers and hoped to keep them together, so that it would not be obvious how many he was taking.

"Thank you," he said, as he walked nonchalantly toward the door.

"I assume those are for a school project," Mrs. Brutus spoke up while sorting papers.

"Yes, they're for a project (parodying *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and caricaturing the teachers)," Robert confirmed.

Mrs. Brutus shot him a keen look but went back to her work.

For days, Robert carefully transferred the illustrations to purple ditto masters. The front page sported disintegrating Greek columns and a pediment above a portrait of Winston Smith, the chemistry teacher. The title *1985* appeared to be carved from stone and cracking. Here and there throughout the work were portraits of additional characters, dressed as Orwell described but otherwise looking very much like other teachers. Next, Robert patiently typed every page of the lengthy satire that Dennis and he had composed. Robert had only enough masters, and he could not afford typographical errors. When he made one—which was rare, as slowly and deliberately as he was progressing—he threw away that precious master and started the page again. Finally, the book was complete.

Running the copies was all that remained.

How?

Dennis and Robert turned to Susan, who knew her way around the office.

“Now, wait!” Susan said. “You want me to run copies of a satire?”

“Yes,” Dennis said, sheepishly.

“Let me see it,” Susan said.

She hurriedly read the first few pages and looked up with beams of sunlight playing about her eyes.

“Oh, this is *good*,” she said. Then she explained that an allotment system specified how many pages could be duplicated for a student project. She said she would look into running off pages for Robert and Dennis, but, at most, only a few copies could be produced.

Later, she brought Dennis and Robert a heavy stack of pages exuding the intoxicating balm of damp purple ditto ink.

“These are all I could make,” Susan said.

“How can we ever thank you?” Dennis asked, grinning.

“Don’t thank me!” she said. “I just hope you don’t get in trouble.”

Robert and Dennis assembled and stapled thirty copies of *1985*. The next morning, they clandestinely placed them here and there in the school and in the gym. No authors’ names appeared on the booklet, thereby giving the writers plausible deniability.

In English class that afternoon, Miss Matthews said, “Alright! Who wrote *1985*?”

No one spoke.

Miss Matthews stared at Robert.

“Robert, this has your name written all over it,” she said.

“Show me where!” Robert exclaimed, as if he truly wanted to know.

Miss Matthews faced Dennis.

“Dennis, do you have something you want to tell me?” she asked.

“I can’t think of anything,” Dennis said.

“Well, I wanted to tell the authors that this is a creative send-up,” Miss Matthews commented. “The teachers have been talking about it all morning. The book shows a deep understanding of irony and a mastery of character development. Whoever wrote it can take pride in a job well done.”

Robert raised his hand.

“Yes, Robert,” Miss Matthews acknowledged.

“Are you saying that no one is upset?”

Miss Matthews smiled. “No, no one is upset,” she answered. “In fact, the response has been quite the opposite. The teachers are genuinely impressed with the talent and skill of the authors, *whoever* they may be.”

Later, in the parking lot, Robert asked Dennis, “Should we take credit for it?’

Dennis frowned and shook his head. “Are you crazy?”

So *1985* remained anonymous.

Chapter 28: The Walk

One evening in autumn after Charles had gone away to college, Robert had finished his homework and his piano practice early. He still had a few hours before he had to go to bed to get enough sleep before school the next day, so he decided to take Spot for a walk.

Spot eagerly jumped into his harness, and, leash in hand, Robert set out east along the gravel road that ran in front of the family's new home. At the intersection, Robert and Spot turned right. They covered a considerable distance to the south before coming to Mound Cemetery, which centered on crossroads meeting at right angles. In all that way, no vehicle had come down the road. The night was becoming chilly. The moon darted fretfully behind scudding clouds of smoky silver.

At the base of the tall, wide mound studded with gravestones, Robert and Spot turned to the right on the dusty road that made a complete circle around the hill. They turned right again on the road leading west. On the left, the long-abandoned Martindale house stood. The two-story structure was built of large blocks of sandstone. A cupola topped the center of its slate roof. The windows on both floors were tall. The front door featured sidelights and transom.

Robert had once asked his father why no one lived in such a splendid house, and Joe had answered that the family came to believe that the sandstone retained moisture that bred illness.

Robert and Spot walked past the shadowy hulk with towering pine trees to the north and west. The rusted windmill on the south side of the dwelling creaked. Robert found himself glancing over his shoulder at the empty windows, and he shivered from more than the cold air. At that moment, he could easily have been persuaded that ghosts exist.

"Let's hurry!" Robert said to Spot. Robert was surprised to hear how small his voice sounded in the great outdoors of fall beside the Martindale house with its staring windows.

It had been Robert's intention to traverse a large square, but, by the time he and Spot reached Great Uncle Charlie Rhode and Great Aunt Vinnie's house, Robert knew it was getting late and both he and the terrier were getting tired. He decided to knock on the door.

Carrying an open newspaper in one hand, Great Uncle Charlie answered. His eyes opened wide behind his gold-rimmed glasses when he saw Robert

standing on his porch at night. Robert explained that he had walked there but had concluded it was too late to complete the square. He wondered if he could use Charlie's telephone to call home.

Charlie said, "Sure!" and led him to a small table with a black phone. While Robert was dialing his parents' number, Great Aunt Vinnie stepped into the room. Although both she and Charlie were up in years, they still had black hair and relatively smooth skin, which made them seem younger than they truly were.

Robert felt foolish when he told his father that he and Spot were calling from Great Uncle Charlie's house, but Joe took everything in stride. Joe was becoming accustomed to the fact that Robert often did what was unexpected.

"I'll be there soon," Joe said.

"Do you like living in the country?" Vinnie asked as Robert put the receiver back in its cradle.

"Very much," Robert said. "Dad and Mom really fixed up the house before we moved in."

Great Uncle Charlie, who had played on the legendary community football team when he was young, would give Robert an excellent interview two years later, when Robert would be writing an article titled "Football Was Alive Here Then" for the high school newspaper.

On this occasion, Charlie just made small talk until Joe pulled into the driveway.

Robert and Spot waved goodbye to Charlie and Vinnie standing in the lighted doorway.

On the trip back home, Joe said, "You and Spot covered considerable ground in a fairly short time."

"He likes to run ahead," Robert said.

Spot was stretched out on the seat with his front paws hanging over its edge. Typically, he would have been at the window watching the world go by.

"I think Spot is tuckered out," Robert said.

Before long, everyone was home. Robert brushed his teeth, said goodnight, and went to bed. Before he turned out the light, he thought about leaving it on until morning. The cheerful lamp kept the cemetery and the haunted house from encroaching on Robert's thoughts, but he was also afraid that his parents would see the light streaming across the yard through the window of his room and would wonder if he might be having trouble sleeping. He switched off the light and lay awake in the darkened room for at least an hour. Every creak and bump from somewhere in the house made him ask himself, "What was that?"

Eventually, Robert remembered the hymn that he had played so often at the Methodist Church:

When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will, he abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But his smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh nor a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Robert drifted off to slumber.

Chapter 29: The Ancient Ones

Robert had only two more years to help his father with spring planting before Robert would be off to a university. As Robert preferred disking to plowing, Joe agreed to do any plowing that had not been done in the fall while Robert did as much of the disking as possible. This arrangement often meant that Robert and his father were not in the same field.

At the time when the family had moved to the new house, Joe had inherited a hundred-acre farm from his uncle Marshall. It was located a mile east of the Williams place. The field rose gently—almost imperceptibly—to the north and to the east from a lower area that had been a pond before the early settlers tiled the land. Often, Robert would be disking part of what Joe called "Uncle Marshall's farm" (Great Uncle Marshall to Robert) while Joe was plowing or planting at the Williams place.

On one of the days when Robert was disking by himself with the International 560 at Uncle Marshall's farm, he was writing stories in his imagination. The cloudless sky was cornflower blue at the horizon, shading to a rich azure at the zenith. The sun shone like an arc welder's torch almost directly overhead. Red-winged blackbirds sang *conk-la-reeeee!* while brown thrashers flitted among the emerald green leaves of the thickets at the edge of a long and narrow ten-acre woods on the west side of the field. Various warblers trilled rapid arpeggios, showing off their virtuosic talents. The "chuffy" soil (Robert's adjective) lay fluffed: the perfect bed for the kernels of corn to come. Robert spent many minutes going one direction before turning at the edge of the big field and going back, over and over again.

Suddenly, he wondered how the nose of his tractor could be pushing against the rusted wire of an old fence along the northern border of Uncle Marshall's farm. Robert flew into action, stopping the tractor before it was damaged. He had fallen asleep, and the tractor had kept going straight when Robert should have been turning. By repeatedly backing up the short distance that his tractor could go before the drawbar of the disk would be turned too far to one side, Robert finally was able to make the turn with the corner of the disk missing the rusty fence by a whisker.

"Now, take a mental note," Robert said aloud to himself. "You dare not fall asleep while operating a tractor. You must stay awake at all times." He stopped the 560 and walked around to look at the nose. The paint was so strong in those days that there was not so much as a scratch from where the tractor had pushed against the wire. Robert felt relieved that he had done no damage.

When he regained the by-now hot black seat, he laughed at the sight of the last pass he had made, for it angled on a slight curve to the left from the moment when slumber had overtaken him. No harm done! He could go back over that part in reestablishing a straight line.

To keep himself awake, he watched for flint knives. Beginning in the Archaic Period and continuing through the Woodland Period, Native Americans had lived on the land of which Uncle Marshall's farm was a small portion. A heavy sprinkling of flint chips in an arc surrounding the lower area of the field suggested that, from at least eight thousand years before Christ, knife makers had surrounded the pond. The Akers family had acquired the part of Uncle Marshall's place to the south of the road. On that land and in the surrounding fields that had already belonged to the family, Bob, a veteran of World War II who had earned the distinction of having driven a car on the Alaska Highway and who epitomized what the noun "gentleman" means, had amassed a vast collection of artifacts including gorgets, bannerstones, pipes, mortars, pestles, axes, and seemingly countless flint pieces. Clearly, thousands of years of habitation had left their mark on the landscape across the road.

As Charles was attending Indiana University, Robert discovered that he could conveniently take artifacts to be identified by Dr. James H. Kellar, the first director of the Glen Black Laboratory of Archaeology on the Bloomington campus and an expert on Angel Mounds near Evansville. Robert could not have foreseen that, in the future, he would take fifteen hours of anthropology courses, including Dr. Kellar's upper-division archaeology course, and that, when Robert was finishing his undergraduate degree, Dr. Kellar would offer Robert the opportunity to take a graduate student position at the laboratory—an opportunity that Robert would forgo to pursue a master's degree in creative writing, instead. While Robert was yet in high school, he decided he could examine farmers' collections of artifacts, draw sketches of them, and have Dr. Kellar review the sketches, thereby making it unnecessary to transport heavy collections to Bloomington for identification. Robert sketched many pieces in a large collection that Pete Thurman had made and that Louise Thurman, a sister of Robert's Great Aunt Margaret and a former teacher who had taught Joe, let Robert peruse for the several days that were required to make the drawings. Robert also sketched a number of Bob's exquisite pieces from his farms and from the portion of Great Uncle Marshall's land that Bob had acquired.

When Professor Kellar paged through Robert's sketches, he said, "Until I met you, I had no idea there were artifacts in Warren County, let alone such a concentration of them." Dr. Kellar began sharing his findings with archaeologists at other universities.

Immediately, Bob took a keen interest in learning all he could learn about the cultures that had produced such masterful utilitarian pieces and such artistically fashioned stonework. Within a few years, Bob had attended archaeological digs and had taken part in workshops and classes offered by faculty representing several universities. Bob was responsible for an eventual scholarly exploration of an earthen mound on Don Akers' farm northwest of Pine Village. Bob became a familiar figure in the study of the ancient cultures of Warren County.

While Robert was in his junior and senior years of high school, he and Bob had many discussions about artifacts. Quite often while tilling the soil, Bob would discover another piece, and, at his earliest opportunity, he would show it to Robert, who might share a fact that he had learned from Dr. Kellar. "Is that right?" Bob would ask, adding, "I thought this piece looked to be a good one."

Ever kind and considerate, Bob would ask Robert, "Do you suppose the people were becoming less nomadic even earlier than was thought? That might account for why there are so many of these artifacts here." Then Bob and Robert would spend a happy hour conversing about the possibilities to be deduced from the kinds of materials that had turned up.

Robert and Bob soon learned that one of the best times to find flint knives and other pieces was in the spring soon after rain had washed the surface of fields that had been recently plowed and disked. Both became adept at stopping tractors in the nick of time to hop down and pick up a beautifully shaped knife just before the disk would have run over it. Frequently, only the edge of the knife was revealed above the soil. Keeping a sharp lookout became a goal, especially when disking.

Robert's imagination continually roamed over what the ponds and marshes must have looked like before European descendants began to tile the soil for farmland. He tried to picture bison finding their way between wallows in the pockets of prairie grass like islands amid bogs. The land must have been good for hunting.

Once, during a full moon, Robert wondered if flint knives could be seen by moonlight, so he drove his 1953 Packard to Uncle Marshall's farm. He walked slowly along the slight ridges left by the disk, but he soon realized that the light was not strong enough. A fog was forming in a thin blanket near the ground in the lower area where the pond had once been located. Robert stood watching the fog slowly swirl. He could easily picture the fog as water. Before long, he envisioned the people who were living along the edge

of the pond. They had eaten their dinner and were settling down for conversation and story-telling. A man turned, saw Robert, and beckoned to him.

At that instant, Robert's hair stood on end. He knew that everything he had pictured was nothing more than a product of his imagination, yet he felt a time-defying presence in the land. Jogging over the ground, he jumped into his car, started the motor, turned on the headlights, backed into the road, and drove home, vowing that he would never again risk returning to that farm at night.

Chapter 30: The Corn

In the spring, Robert was privileged to help his father plant corn, as well as soybeans. If the disking were finished, Robert waited beside the Chevrolet pickup until it was time to restock the four-row planter. From a bag, he poured corn—coated pink with captan—into the hoppers, which were covered with neat lids. When a bag was empty, he dropped it behind the planter and placed a heavy clod on the bag to hold it against the wind and not have to go chasing it across the field. He opened bags of fertilizer, which had a lightly acrid scent. Robert thought that, if a rock could rot, it would smell like that. The fertilizer was poured into the receptacles behind the corn hoppers.

Joe would start back through the field. He would pull the string that tripped the arm that dropped with a pleasant metallic sound to one side, so that the small disk at the end of the arm could spin and send up a little cloud of dust while it laid down a groove that would enable Joe to know exactly where the nose of his tractor should go for the return trip through the field.

The warm sky was bright azure. White clouds like cotton balls sailed along. Birds sang in the narrow thickets beside the field. The sunlight was vigorous. To be outdoors and breathing such fresh air was a joy. Spring planting days afforded pure contentment!

Next came the cultivating, which Robert tolerated—especially after he "got on the wrong rows" the first time and eradicated corn for a distance the length of two tractors before he managed to stop. Robert learned to cultivate. He had to! But cultivating corn was an acquired skill, analogous to an acquired taste. He had to be ever vigilant so as not to wipe out corn plants, and such attention to detail interfered with his preference for exercising his imagination while daydreaming.

In the fall—sometimes as late as Thanksgiving—Joe picked corn. On a cool day, wearing his boots—each with four buckles that looked like miniature furnace grates—his blue denim coat, and his warm corduroy cap with ear flaps, he first strode into the field among the cornstalks, pale yellow, tan, and dry. The stalks were spaced a few inches from one another, and the rows were fairly widely spaced—enough for Joe to pass between two rows without having to brush the leaves aside. Selecting an ear, he pulled back the husks to examine the corn. Through experience, he could detect whether the corn might be ready for harvesting. He tried another ear and another, holding between his elbow and his ribs those ears that he had already examined. Later, he broke the ears into thirds and gave the pieces as treats to the cows.

The skies already hinted at the winter to come; it was a pale Turkish hue with cold-looking, vague streaks of cloud lacing them. The daylight seemed strained through thin silk. Joe tramped back to the barn and set down the ears of corn he had collected. He backed a tractor up to his two-row pull-type corn picker parked under the leafless hedge apples. After hitching up, Joe had returned to the seat of his tractor in a jiffy. All that remained was to hitch the tractor and picker to a wagon. Joe was excellent at backing up and often tried to explain the intricacies to Robert, who could not comprehend where the tongue of, say, a corn picker would go while the tractor reversed.

Then Joe went to the field with his tractor, corn picker, and wagon in procession.

With the air just cold enough to turn his cheeks rosy, Joe started into the field. Ears of corn began falling from the elevator of the corn picker into the wagon. Two rows at a time, Joe slowly passed through the field. The corn harvest was underway: the reward for the hard work and the expense of planting and cultivating.

Picking corn was a one-farmer job, so Joe picked corn alone. Robert could not help. Besides, corn picking was considered too dangerous for Robert. Although he could not help, Robert enjoyed coming to the field to watch his father and to chat with him for a few minutes. Robert thought the corn picker resembled a weird rocket with three noses.

As evening drew in, the sky turned yellow with a touch of chartreuse. Near the horizon, orange with traces of rose spread into pink haze above a mauve tree line far away. Indistinct gray masses of cloud hung motionless just above the distant farmhouses and barns.

Joe pulled the last wagon of the day toward the barn, where he would store it temporarily.

For the rest of his life, Robert would cherish the memory of his father picking corn as if Robert were looking at an old snapshot in a picture frame.

Chapter 31: The Past

In 1956, the National Safety Council, working with automobile associations, reached agreement on a standard size of automobile license plate with mounting holes in the same places on all plates. Those plates issued in Indiana in 1955 complied with the new regulations. When Robert was in third grade, the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles began issuing plates with a one- or two-digit prefix assigned to each county alphabetically, with the large-population counties of Marion and Lake receiving additional prefixes. Robert's home county, Warren, was 86. Letters of the alphabet after the prefixes represented further refinements in coding the locations, as in 86A or 86B.

When Robert was in the fourth grade, the postal service began recommending the use of two-letter abbreviations representing the various states, but most people continued to use "Ind." The abbreviation "IN" was not in common use until sometime after the Zone Improvement Plan, or ZIP Codes, became mandatory for bulk mail in 1967. Robert did not like the two-letter abbreviation because he thought the way he formed his handwritten I looked confusing with his handwritten N. He resorted to printing the "IN"—which he thought looked strange when the rest of the address was written in his longhand, or cursive.

In the 1960s, dialing only numbers became the common method for using a telephone to call someone. The dialing was done, in fact, with a *dial*, which had holes to accept the fingertip used to spin the dial the correct length for each number. To accommodate more than one party on the same line, the ring pattern indicated which house was being called; for example, with two parties, the phone would ring with long rings in rhythmic succession to indicate one home and with two short rings followed by slight pauses to indicate the other home.

By the early 1970s, men's hair had become long. In the early 1960s, the Beatles had begun to change attitudes about men's haircuts, but it was not until 1971 and 1972 that the hairstyles of men in such rural communities as Pine Village had made the full transition into long hair. In the decade after Robert graduated from high school, the caboose would vanish from the train while the pump would switch to self-serve gasoline.

Such changes as license plate sizes, license plate numbering, state abbreviations, ZIP Codes, dialing phone numbers, and men's hairstyles were noticeable. Other changes were less so.

In the 1930s, metallic oxides, such as rust, were used by paint manufacturers to make a cheap—but poor quality—paint for barns and outbuildings. When Robert was small, several barns in rural Indiana were painted cheaply, and the color was nearly a dark orange with much of the wood grain showing through, as if the building were stained, rather than painted. Joe referred to the orange hue as "turkey blood" because, when the earliest painting of barns occurred, some milk-based paints had been mixed with blood to form a red color. Throughout the years that Robert was in the Pine Village School, fewer and fewer barns were coated with the rusty orange paint.

In 1900, when the U.S. population was a fraction of what it would become, more than twenty million gallons of sorghum were produced. Sorghum is a cereal grain that is harvested for human consumption in some parts of the world. Benjamin Franklin wrote about using sorghum straw for brooms, but not until a century later was sorghum widely cultivated in the U.S. The *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Ohio State Board of Agriculture* (1859, published in 1860) announced that the state fair had witnessed "many samples of syrup of the Sorgho, or Chinese Sugar Cane." As late nineteenth-century homes had gallon containers of sorghum syrup (a.k.a. *sorghum molasses*) to pour on buckwheat pancakes, to sweeten baked beans, to make cookies, and to flavor bread, there was widespread interest in techniques for boiling the juice from the crushed sorghum stalks to transform into syrup. According to the *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1867*, 6,698,181 gallons of sorghum molasses were recorded in the census for 1860. Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri were responsible for approximately half the total production in 1867. When Robert was small, fields of sorghum were not uncommon. By the time he was in high school, sorghum had virtually vanished. During his years in the Pine Village School, more and more farm families quit using molasses. Syrups were readily available in grocery stores.

Molasses could be added to livestock feed; for example, Joe often asked the Pine Village Feed Store to add molasses to the ground feed that he purchased to serve his Holsteins on Christmas Day. Joe wanted his cows to have a special treat. Ground feed was usually a light sandy color; the molasses feed looked like light brown sugar. Over the course of Robert's childhood, farms were gradually becoming larger and less diversified; accordingly, fewer farms raised livestock. Incrementally, livestock fences were torn down, and fields of corn and soybeans were planted right up to the roadside ditches. Molasses and fields of sorghum became relics of the past.

Little by little, the old ways were disappearing. Joe told Robert that Don Akers and he had once put a floor in a bridge over the dredge ditch on the Thomason place. Three trees, fourteen inches in diameter, served as beams, and planks were laid at right angles over the trees. "It was almost dark by the time we got those last planks in place," Joe said. He and Don dipped 60-penny nails in a can of grease and pounded them down. A new moon came up. "If the old-timers are right," Joe said to Don, "the nails will pop up." ... and, sure enough, every month, the nails kept working up, according to Joe. Such a notion—even one unsupported by scientific inquiry—was a thing to be appreciated, as it contributed to the spice of life, if nothing else.

There were jobs to be done during a new moon, when the light of the moon was absent from the sky at night, and jobs to be done during a waxing moon. Activities for the new moon included planting root crops, such as potatoes, and making sauerkraut. Those for the waxing moon included planting vegetables that are harvested above ground and butchering hogs. Pork produced during a new moon would shrink and turn tough when cooked.

Ida warned Robert never to thank anyone for a plant because doing so would cause the plant to wither away and perish. A common occurrence in the spring and fall was the trading of plants among rural women. Mrs. Bowen would pull into the driveway, open the trunk of her car, and haul out a bucket full of daisies in the springtime or a bucket full of iris tubers in the late autumn. "I thought you'd want some of these," she would say to Ida, and Ida would stop whatever she had been doing and would gleefully take the time to choose a location and to plant the contents of the bucket—while sharing the latest news with Mrs. Bowen. In turn, Ida would dig peonies or poppies or crown imperials to take to Mrs. Bowen, as well as other women in the community, and no one ever said so much as a "thank you." Such superstitions lent charm to living. While some superstitions persisted, many others gradually disappeared.

Chapter 32: The Indiana State 4-H Band

In the second summer that Robert participated in Ouibache, he played clarinet in the Indiana State 4-H Band.

It was the summer before his junior year, and the big concert band was 116 members strong. The director was Roger C. Heath, who was an assistant director at Purdue University. He would go on to found the band program at Virginia Tech. He had earned his degrees at the University of Colorado and had taught in Montana before coming to Purdue.

Heath had assembled a challenging concert for such a young concert band with limited rehearsal time. Part I included "Slavonic Folk Suite," and Part II concluded with "Stars and Stripes Forever."

The director tolerated no monkey business, and he demanded excellence. Robert's jaw grew tired from playing passages again and again with only seconds of instruction in between. Everyone felt increasingly on edge. During the rare breaks, band members discerned that Mr. Heath was displeased.

The final rehearsal before the concert was tense.

"Trombones," Mr. Heath said, "that passage must be cleaner. Try it again!" He gave the downbeat with his baton. "No! Cleaner! Try again!" Another downbeat. "Still not clean enough! Again!"

Next, the tempo was of concern. "Band, you are rushing!" Mr. Heath said. "Keep your eyes up here, and keep the tempo with me!"

The band played the passage again.

"Still rushing! Still not looking up here!"

The volume was a problem. Mr. Heath said, "The audience wants to hear the piccolo. You must bring down the volume!"

The band played the passage again.

"Still can't hear the piccolo! Still not bringing down the volume! Again!"

The band played the passage another time.

Finally, there was no time left.

Mr. Heath set down his baton and stared at the band for several seconds. "This evening," he began, "I will be all smiles and roses, no matter how well or how poorly you perform. At the end, I will still be all smiles and roses, but, if you have performed poorly, I will not tell you that you performed well. I will simply say nothing."

With those words, Mr. Heath turned on his heel and was gone.

On that Tuesday evening, June 30th of 1970, the band members slowly filed onto the stage of the vast Edward C. Elliott Hall of Music for the Seventh Annual Concert of the Indiana State 4-H Band, to perform for the public during the Fifty-Second Annual 4-H Club Roundup.

Robert felt dread all the way to his toes, and his stomach kept doing somersaults. He could not remember ever having been so nervous before a band concert, although he certainly had experienced nervousness before many a piano solo. He took his place amid the clarinet section. (A few years later, he would be first chair of the second clarinets in the famed Indiana University Marching Hundred, and, in Robert's senior year in college, he would be named the Outstanding Bandsman, an honor he would share with drum major Fred Kelly.)

Wearing a black suit and bow tie, Mr. Heath stepped onto the stage to the applause of the packed hall.

He was all smiles and roses.

During the intermission, he was all smiles and roses.

At the end of the concert, he remained all smiles and roses.

Robert breathed a big sigh of relief when the program was over. The music had made a hit with the audience, for the applause was like thunder. After bowing, Mr. Heath turned to the band and said, "You—were—excellent!" enunciating each word so that he could be heard over the applause. He immediately pointed to the piccolo player to stand for special acknowledgment; then he waved all the band members to their feet to be congratulated.

The next summer, Robert was back for more.

The director of the 1971 Indiana State 4-H Band was William D. Kisinger, also an assistant at Purdue. Affable and easygoing, Mr. "Bill" Kisinger greeted the 111 band members warmly.

With his head held high and his chin up, Mr. Kisinger said, in his characteristic rapid pattern, often nodding. "I want to welcome you to the campus of Purdue University and to say how much I'm looking forward to working with you and to tell you that we are going to be making music! We have charts that are really exciting, and we're going to be a big hit, and the audience is going to love us!"

With those positive sentiments, Mr. Kisinger began the rehearsal. He often left the baton lying on the stand and conducted with his hands.

Mr. Kisinger was a product of the University of Illinois, which had a tradition of innovation going back to the earliest years of marching band performances at football games. He embodied assurance and confidence.

Mr. Kisinger liked what he heard from the 4-H band, and he would like it even more if the trumpets could keep their bells up. Brass instruments were suddenly lifted higher. If an entire section missed a note, he calmly stepped down from the platform, strode over, picked up the music from one of the stands, pointed at it, and said, "Not your fault! Transcription error! There was supposed to be a flat there, so let's make it a B flat in bar 77, and does everyone have a pencil—if not, there's one over here—and now we know it's a B flat in bar 77, so let's hear it, beginning with bar 75 and one, two, three, four!" He had hopped back onto the platform by the end of his statement and was counting and conducting. He beamed when he heard the B flat, and he went on without stopping.

Breaks were timed well, and the ratio of instruction to playing was just right.

On a ridiculously hot Monday evening, June 28th in 1971, Mr. Kisinger stepped onto the stage of the Slayter Center, a spacious band shell that looked like Alexander Calder's answer to Stonehenge supported by an enormous tripod. The stage was only seven years old. Mr. Kisinger was in a short-sleeve shirt and wore a 4-H cap.

Every moment of the concert was fun.

When the band performed a medley of songs from *West Side Story*, Robert could hardly believe his ears: "Tonight" had such a sumptuous sound, and "America" had such a driving rhythm!

The hill stretching away from the stage was so full of families sitting on blankets that almost none of the green grass was showing. At concert's end, with one accord, the audience stood to applaud and applaud, until Mr.

Kisinger announced an encore number, for which he had planned all along and which the band had rehearsed.

From his two years in the Indiana State 4-H Band, Robert took away the realization that excellence can result from at least two divergent methods: from strict discipline leading to the attainment of a high standard or from amiable collaboration bringing about a joy in a job well done. In the spring of 1972, he auditioned for Mr. Frederick C. Ebbs, director of bands at Indiana University, and was accepted into the renowned Marching Hundred. Robert wondered which pedagogical styles directors Mr. Ebbs, Mr. Ray Cramer, and Mr. Wilbur T. England would evince.

Chapter 33: Ben–Hur

Robert had been selected as a delegate to the 1971 Rural Electric Membership Corporation Youth Tour of Washington, D.C. The bus taking the Indiana delegation first to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was to leave Indianapolis at 2:00 in the morning, so as to arrive at the battlefield by 8:00. The evening before departure, Robert saw the 1959 movie *Ben–Hur* at the Devon Theater in Attica. He had never seen it before. Joe and Ida reluctantly turned down the opportunity to accompany Robert, as they felt they were too busy just then, so Robert drove himself to the theater.

Many years earlier, Joe and Ida had taken Charles and Robert to see Lew Wallace's study in nearby Crawfordsville. Lew was the author of *Ben–Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, which was published on the 12th of November in 1880. Lewis was born in 1827 in Brookville. Lew's father, David, a lawyer, moved his family to Covington. Lew's mother, Esther French Test, died in 1834. In 1836, David married Zerelda Gray Sanders. By 1837, David had been elected Governor of Indiana, and he moved his family to Indianapolis. When Lew was thirteen, he was enrolled in a private academy in Centerville, where a teacher encouraged him to develop his talent for writing. While Lew did not see combat, he did serve in the Mexican–American War. In 1849, Lew was admitted to the bar and became engaged to Susan Arnold Elston, with the marriage taking place in 1852. He moved to Crawfordsville in 1853. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Governor Oliver P. Morton invited Lew to recruit volunteers for the army. Lew was soon promoted to the rank of brigadier general. He became something of a scapegoat when the victory at Shiloh came under heavy criticism for the high number of casualties. The injury to General Wallace's military reputation was a topic he returned to repeatedly during the rest of his life. General Grant eventually modified his earlier criticism, thereby helping exonerate General Wallace. Meanwhile, Wallace distinguished himself by preventing the capture of Washington, D.C., by the Confederacy.

President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Lew Wallace to the governorship of the New Mexico Territory, where Wallace spent three years. He completed the manuscript for *Ben–Hur* while living in Santa Fe; he had begun the work while living in Crawfordsville. President James A. Garfield then appointed Wallace U.S. Minister to the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople, Turkey, where Wallace lived for four years.

In 1900, *Ben–Hur* had outsold Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Between 1895 and 1898, Wallace built a study adjacent to his home in Crawfordsville. As Robert entered the Devon to see the movie *Ben–Hur*, he thought back to the park-like setting where the brick study with its

Byzantine, Greek, and Romanesque influences stands. He remembered the tower and the domed copper roof with its skylight. He also remembered the chair in which Lew Wallace sat while writing *Ben–Hur*. Most of all, he remembered Wallace's art, for he was an accomplished painter.

As Robert took his seat in the Devon, he was within a short distance of the location where another writer, Bernard Sobel, had been born in 1887, the same year that Robert's grandmother Kosie was born. Sobel's father, Nathan, manufactured cigars at the family home on the north side of Washington Street not far from the corner formed with McDonald. Robert could easily have walked there from the Devon. Nathan and wife, Hattie, moved their family to Ferry Street in Lafayette. Eventually, Bernard attended Purdue, where he played violin in the orchestra. He made his way to New York City, where he became a drama critic for the *New York Daily Mirror*. Bernard Sobel handled publicity for several Broadway producers. Among them were both A. L. Erlanger, who (with Marc Klaw) produced the 1899 stage version of *Ben–Hur* as dramatized by William W. Young, and Flo Ziegfield, who held an interest in the 1925 silent film of *Ben–Hur*. Sobel wrote numerous articles and a handful of plays. Between 1931 and 1961, Sobel published seven books.

In preparation for viewing the movie, Robert had read General Lew Wallace's *Ben–Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. Robert even had made for his brother a plaster Nativity set that Robert had painted according to the colorful descriptions given by Wallace.

Robert marveled at the spectacular scenes and the breathtaking action. He particularly enjoyed the music of *Miklós Rózsa. Robert exited the theater inspired by director William Wyler's Ben-Hur, the MGM blockbuster based on a novel by a Hoosier author.*

As the movie lasted nearly four hours, Robert had little time to sleep before his parents drove him to Indianapolis for the trip to Gettsyburg and Washington, D.C.

Chapter 34: The Youth Tour

For a week between his junior and senior years in high school, Robert participated in the Rural Electric Membership Corporation Youth Tour of Washington, D.C. Delegates were chosen through the state 4-H organization in a fairly selective process. The bus left Indianapolis in the wee hours of Monday morning so as to arrive in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for a visit to the battlefield at dawn. Robert noted the low ridges that the soldiers formed for their protection. Fog crept across the ground of Pickett's Charge. The vapor swirled as if churned by wounded soldiers walking back to the woods. The hills and patches of meadow could have been idyllic, but the landscape seemed weighed down by the carnage that occurred there. The guide took the group past monuments, markers, and statues, including the new Indiana monument. Ultimately, the students ascended Little Round Top and looked down upon Pennsylvania's Elysian Fields.

Later that day, the enormity of the Capitol impressed Robert—especially when he stared at the ceiling of the rotunda. A young guide exclaimed, "You're all from Indiana? Far out!" A tour of the Supreme Court Building included the courtroom with its red plush curtains hanging between pillars. Robert found the atmosphere dark and forbidding. As each chair was different, the chairs became the judges—in Robert's imagination.

After the group relaxed at the Marriott Twin Bridges Motor Hotel, the delegates from all the states took part in a boat cruise past Ladybird's Fountain, jutting high above the Potomac and lit by colored lights.

Tuesday morning found the Indiana group at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Building. Arthur Mitchell, NRECA director of youth activities, kept the delegates laughing with his "Johnny Carson" style of humor. At the Rayburn House Office Building, delegates from Robert's area of Indiana met Congressman John T. Myers, who represented the Hoosier State's Seventh Congressional District, and Congressman William G. Bray, who represented the Sixth Congressional District. Robert sat next to Congressman Myers at lunch. A waiter gestured toward Congressman Myers and said, "This is the nicest man in the House."

Then the bus took the students to the Smithsonian Institution. Robert was mesmerized by the Hope Diamond, although he considered rumors about its curse both unfounded and silly. Robert appreciated seeing a mockup of the Apollo Lunar Module.

Robert found the Iwo Jima Memorial imposing. The struggling forms of the statues called to his artistic spirit.

The Lincoln Memorial and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial were visited in turn. Robert found the quiet of the Jefferson Memorial a peaceful change from the chatter of tourists elsewhere. He looked out upon the great rippling bay with its reflection of the Washington Monument.

On Wednesday, the delegates from all the states filled a ballroom at the Marriott where they listened to a speech by Senator George McGovern, who was running for President of the United States. Then buses took the students to the South Lawn of the White House, where Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin, from Knightstown, Indiana, greeted them. Secretary Hardin had hardly begun his prepared speech, when he was interrupted by President Richard M. Nixon, who put in an unscheduled visit. Secretary Hardin glanced over his shoulder, saw the President, and said, "Well, here is a man I think you all know. May I introduce President Richard Nixon."

"I saw these young people gathered here, and I thought I should come say 'hello,'" President Nixon said. Robert happened to be standing only ten feet from the podium, so he had a close view of the Thirty-Seventh President. Robert heard hardly a word of President Nixon's extemporaneous speech, but he knew it focused on the importance of the 1970 Farm Bill.

Thursday began with a tour of the Washington Monument. Robert took the stairs from the top of the obelisk back to the ground. Next, the bus transported delegates to George Washington's Mount Vernon. Robert stood silently before the graves of George and Martha Washington as he tried to imagine the Colonial Era.

Robert doubted that the people who lived in the past could ever have felt that anything was new and fresh. They wore historical clothing, they lacked present-day conveniences, and they depended on primitive means of travel, such as sails and horses. They might have felt glum. They might have sighed, wistfully wishing they, too, could live in the 1970s. Robert tried again to picture that, in George and Martha's day, the present moment was just as present to them as the present moment was to him. Their lives unfolded as a succession of surprises, for their history was not yet written. All at once, Robert felt that George and Martha could walk around the corner of their home and say hello to him.

Robert was surprised to learn that George and Martha Washington's house was sided with yellow pine that was rusticated to give the illusion of sandstone blocks with beveled edges and that it was painted with sand paint.

Later, the guide at Ford's Theatre said that planning was already underway for a salute to entertainment that would star Bob Hope and Raymond Burr in the autumn. Despite the bright lights, Robert felt a gloom lingering about the stage and the box where tragedy had occurred on Good Friday of 1865. The black cloud of melancholy hung thickly over the Petersen Boarding House across the street where Lincoln had been carried.

Later, at Arlington National Cemetery, Robert stood at the grave of John F. Kennedy during the changing of the guard. He could hardly believe the number of graves of those who had lost their lives in Vietnam.

On Friday, Robert and the other delegates from Indiana toured the Vietnam Embassy before going to the Washington Zoo, where Robert found the gorillas and the elephants fascinating.

When Robert returned to Indiana, he felt a growing affinity for the study of American history—a fact that might help to explain why he would eventually earn a PhD in early American literature.

Chapter 35: The Sectional

Pine Village had won the sectional basketball contest only five times: 1921, 1922, 1934, 1939, and 1941. Thirty-one years had elapsed since the last win. Calling 1972 the "Year of the Village," the cheerleaders, the Pep Club, and the Booster Club shared the view of Mrs. Cottingham, a teacher who was serving as guidance counselor: "This is our year." Coach Bill Barrett said, "We have to be ready mentally to play the game. I feel we're the best team in the county—the ability is there, and we're twenty points better than any team in the sectional."

As editor of *The Chrome-Plated Clipboard*, the school newspaper, Robert did all he could to support the team.

Pine Village won the first game of the sectional by beating the Fountain Central Mustangs with a score of 83 to 67. Robert distributed a hundred purple Ditto sheets as souvenirs. "Friday night will see the contest where the team and the fans alike must strive with every ounce of strength and spirit to overpower the Seeger Indians."

Coincidentally, the weights of the team members added up to 1972 pounds; their heights, to seventy-two feet.

In all the years that Robert had attended the school in Pine Village, basketball games were exciting occasions.

The architectural design of the gymnasium lent itself to a feeling of immediacy—with everyone seated so near the court! The elongated-dome ceiling trapped the cheers of the crowd and magnified the sound until the noise could be described as "deafening."

Cokes and popcorn were available down a flight of stairs and around the corner in the bay area of the shop and agriculture classroom on the north end of the gym, but students carrying wire baskets hawked soft drinks up and down the aisles between the benches. Members of the band in their blue uniforms with silver buttons, white stripes, and white braids gathered for the half-time show.

Basketball games were the principal entertainment of the farming community. Everyone, it seemed, turned out for the contests. The parking lots were full of cars and pickup trucks.

In 1972, farmers talked about the 1954 team from Milan, Indiana, that achieved the Milan Miracle, winning the Indiana High School Boys Basketball

Tournament Championship at the Butler Field House in Indianapolis. Could Pine Village be another Milan? One by one, the small schools across Indiana were falling—merging into consolidations. Such small schools had grown accustomed to losing to teams from the big cities of the Hoosier State, but now those local schools that remained also faced tough challenges in overcoming teams from the consolidated school districts.

Joe had been present for Pine Village's 1934, 1939, and 1941 sectional championships, and he had listened to the Milan victory on radio. He wondered if the heyday of Pine Village basketball had already occurred in the 1930s and early 1940s, but he hoped the halcyon time lay yet ahead.

In the weeks leading up to the 1972 sectional, townspeople who happened to meet on the sidewalk or at the elevator or post office or who were gathering for church services talked anxiously about the team's chances.

Years later, Robert would be a clarinetist in the Indiana University Pep Band at two NCAA championship games when IU emerged the victor, and he would remember the Pine Village sectional games as fitting in the same thrilling category.

The sectional final game between Pine Village and Seeger felt unreal. Robert sat next to his cousin Pam in the Pep Club seats. Pam and Robert yelled until they were hoarse. They were continuously leaping to their feet. These players on the court were their friends, and their friends were playing their hearts out to win.

Once, Robert had reflected in print, "For Pine Village to cheer forward its team in this game in this way is truly fine! This brings our small world together!"

Robert glanced across the intensely emotional faces of townspeople and of neighbors such as Mr. Reed, driver of the team bus, and Mr. Brutus, driver of the fan bus. The noise was like that of an agitated ocean crashing on a rocky shore. Robert could see people shouting, but he could not distinguish their words amid the roar. The cheerleaders sustained frenzied cheer after frenzied cheer without pause.

This was glory! Hope and fear wrestled in the countenances and the gestures of all from young to old.

The team raced back and forth in a fast-paced matchup that the strongest defense could not slow. Mr. Barrett cupped his hands like a megaphone and

yelled instructions to his team. Mr. Owens, the assistant coach, paced the sideline like a lion in a cage.

With a fierce expression, Bax Brutus guided the total team effort of Pine Village.

Each time the ball flew up, a collective breath was held. When it slid straight through the hoop, the noise from one side surged.

Before Robert could comprehend what had happened, the clock ran out. Pine Village had won with a score of 76 to 72! On the blue side of the court, pandemonium reigned.

It was indeed the Year of the Village.

Even though the team eventually lost to Benton Central in regional play, it had broken the spell and had won the sectional. The team's victory had proved that hearts and minds—collaborating with confidence and skill—can attain high goals.

Chapter 36: The Convention Center and the Commencement

Robert's senior year demanded effective use of time. His responsibilities included editing the newspaper, editing the yearbook, serving as class president, competing in the regional and state piano competitions, and auditioning on piano at Indiana University.

One of his lighter duties was giving a short talk at the Prom. He handled that obligation well enough, but he and his classmate Susie also had to dance the first dance—a burden less assured of adequate attainment. By the time the dance rolled around, Susie and he were having so much fun joking with their friends that worries vanished, and they gave a lighthearted and carefree demonstration of their dancing prowess (or, in Robert's case, lack thereof).

The newspaper staff had made money. Toward the end of the academic year, the members and their advisor, Mrs. Nealon, discussed what to do with the profits. The staff decided to attend Sammy Davis, Jr.'s concert celebrating the Gala Grand Opening of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on the 18th of May.

After driving to the capital city and walking from a nearby parking garage, the group slowly made its way down a packed hallway beyond the foyer of the Convention Center. The scents of new construction and floral perfume mingled in a heady atmosphere. The concertgoers were dressed to the proverbial nines. Eventually, the students and their advisor found their seats in the vast exposition hall with its stage at one end. The huge space was just as redolent of fragrance as the hallway had been. Robert thought the predominant tones in the bouquet were peach mingled with jasmine.

At 8:00 p.m., the lights dimmed so much that, to all intents and purposes, they went out. Simultaneously, the stage was lit with brilliant spotlights. When Sammy Davis, Jr., walked out, the applause was pure thunder. Having starred in eleven movies, having released over thirty albums, and having had two hits on Broadway, the entertainer was poised to become one of Los Vegas' most enduring performers.

Davis performed "Gonna Build a Mountain," "What Kind of Fool Am I?," "Black Magic," "I Gotta Be Me," and "Hey There." The star whose "Here Come de Judge" skits on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* and whose other TV appearances had made him a household name, entertained the audience with ceaseless energy and boundless warmth.

It was one of the rare times in Robert's life when he thought he might have to pinch himself to see if he were awake or only dreaming. For the rest of

the summer before Robert left for college, he thought of the trip to the Convention Center whenever he heard Sammy Davis, Jr's "The Candy Man" on the radio.

Graduation offered another of those times when Robert thought he might have to pinch himself.

When Robert stood at the podium on the stage in the gymnasium in Pine Village and gave the valedictory address, he heard his voice almost as if he were someone sitting in the rows of folding chairs on the tarps that had been spread to cover the basketball floor. He could hardly believe that he was the Valedictorian—especially after his cousin Pam had come so close to earning the title herself. She was a gracious Salutatorian.

While he spoke, Robert thought about the fact that his father and his brother had been Valedictorians at the same school. Had he failed to achieve the same goal, Robert would have felt humiliated.

A few days after Commencement, Robert and his mother were drinking iced tea on the front porch.

It struck Robert as strange that everything was ending. The school that he had longed to attend when he was but four years of age was now a place he could only visit. He had graduated. Within only three months, he would have no more piano lessons with Miss Jamieson. Even his room in the house on the farm east of Pine Village would no longer be occupied by him throughout the year but only in the summer. Robert would begin attending summer sessions at Indiana University after his sophomore year in college and would never be home again, except for holidays. Why should such tremendous changes be happening to him?

Ida seemed to understand her son's jumbled emotions.

"You'll be in college soon," Ida began. "I want you to call and write as often as you can. Tell me about what you're reading."

She paused to sip her tea.

"College won't be the same as high school," she continued. "Through your classes, you'll have experiences that, right now, you can't even dream of having."

Again she paused.

"You've been very successful in high school," she went on. "College will be much more difficult. You may not succeed—"

"Oh, I'll make sure I succeed," Robert interrupted.

Ida smiled. "I wonder if I was as confident when I was your age," she said. "You always prepare thoroughly, and you anticipate what lies ahead. Maybe there will be no limit to what you can accomplish. All I can tell you is to study hard and to listen closely to what your professors say. You can always turn to your brother for help and advice."

She paused once more.

"You should slow down once in a while to look at where you're headed because you don't want to look back at the end of your life and realize you missed it. You tend to drive yourself, and I wouldn't want you to forget the enjoyment along the way."

Robert appreciated his mother's insights. He looked above the young corn plants in the field across the road. The rows stretched toward a cobalt blue line of distant trees. He knew he would soon be leaving the farm, and he wanted to take vivid mental pictures to serve as clear memories later on. Yes, if he had to leave the farm, he was surely going to take the farm with him.

Chapter 37: The Competitions

Miss Jamieson had honed Robert's music to the point of a gleaming polish. He practiced several hours every day. To prepare for the regional and state music competitions, he tested his memory by picturing exactly which keys were to be played by the proper fingers from the first note to the last. If he were uncertain, he played the edge of a desk or table as if it were a keyboard while he concentrated on the key that was not clearly seen in his mind's eye. If—after treating the desk or table as an imaginary keyboard—he still could not know precisely which key it should be, he took out the score, which he always carried with him, and checked the passage that was in doubt. Eventually, he could play the movement of the Beethoven sonata in his sleep.

At the regional contest, Robert knew the piece so well that he experienced no nervousness. With utter confidence, he performed the movement flawlessly and received a perfect score in return.

Next up was the state competition. Miss Jamieson met him in the hallway of the building on the Butler campus in Indianapolis.

She smiled. "Well, Ro-BAIR, this is it. Remember that you play the piece better than anyone."

"I will play it," Robert said, "for Beethoven. He wouldn't want his music performed badly."

"Oh, Ro-BAIR! Only you would put it that way!"

The time had come. Robert entered the large room and handed the score to the judge, a thin man in his fifties with a most serious expression on his face despite the bright red slacks he was wearing.

Miss Jamieson had taught Robert to relax, particularly from the waist, through the shoulders, to the elbows. He sat on the bench and deliberately slumped forward, taking all tension away from his upper body. Then he turned to the judge.

"Whenever you're ready," the judge said.

"This is your last time to participate in a state piano competition," Robert thought. "Let it be your best but let it be fun!"

With joy and inner peace, he launched into the Beethoven, silently singing the melodies. When the last note died away, he believed he had played as flawlessly as he had at the regional competition.

Taking a deep breath, he pivoted on the bench and remained sitting while he looked at the judge.

"That," the judge said, pausing dramatically, "was perfect in every way. I am giving you a perfect score. It is the only perfect score I will give all day because I am confident I will hear no other performance equaling yours. But are you aware that you play with your mouth open?" The judge made a face imitating Robert's face. "When you do that, you look like a moron! Keep your mouth shut! You may go."

Robert smiled, knowing full well that he would not take the judge's advice—and Robert never did, preferring always to play with his mouth open so that he could sing the melodies as Miss Jamieson had taught him.

In the hallway was great celebration! Joe and Ida could hardly believe that a son of theirs was walking away with a perfect score from the state competition.

Miss Jamieson said, "Formidable! My Ro-BAIR is now a virtuoso!"

Still ahead lay the audition for the famed School of Music at Indiana University.

At his weekly lesson prior to the trip to Bloomington, Robert played the three pieces that Miss Jamieson wanted him to present to the judging panel.

"They will accept you on the basis of your Beethoven," Miss Jamieson predicted. "They will find your Bach excellent. They will consider your Chopin competent, but you are yet too young to play the Romantics with the depth of feeling that comes only from experience."

She rocked thoughtfully.

"Well, Ro-BAIR, this is near the end of the road for us."

"I will write and call often," Robert promised.

"I hope you will," Miss Jamieson said. "I hope you will. Your music will be under the guidance of someone else, and you will have to take to heart whatever you discern to be the *truth* in what your professor is teaching you.

Do you envision a career as a pianist? Before you answer my question, I want you to know that the music profession is a mug's game. The competition is infernal. It can change a person. I would not want to see you transformed by it."

Robert wondered if Miss Jamieson were trying to talk him out of his decision to major in piano performance—if he could pass the audition. He said, "I do also like writing and literature."

Miss Jamieson guffawed. "Spoken like the writer I have come to know! Don't think I haven't noticed your gift for wording your ideas! You remind me of Yeats. I met him, you know. You don't use the same rhythms, but you have the same clarity. And something in your face tells me that you and he share a certain *je ne sais quois*—an unusual economy of expression! You could do worse than become a writer. I have a friend in Toronto who has devoted her life to writing, and I must say that, nonetheless, she has been happy. I would like for you to remember this: life is a crapshoot. No matter what career you choose, you will need good fortune on your side before you can be a success. Read philosophy, my Ro-BAIR! Read philosophy! Now, play 'Happy Birthday.'"

Robert stared at Miss Jamieson. "Do you mean the song?" he asked.

"Yes, the song! Whatever else could I mean? The judges will ask you to play some song by ear. It could be 'The Star-Spangled Banner'—oh, you had better hope you don't get that one! It could be 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.' Practice them, but, for now, play 'Happy Birthday.'"

Robert tried, but he played the wrong chord where a singer would sing the name.

"You fell into the trap, my boy! Think minor seven followed by major seven."

Immediately, Robert had the correct chords.

As he tromped down the flights of stairs from Miss Jamieson's flat high above the clothing store, Robert began counting how many more times he would have lessons with his formidable teacher. When he realized how small the number was, he felt his throat tighten.

Joe and Ida sat in the hallway of the Music Building at Indiana University while Robert entered the room for his audition.

Three judges—two men and one woman—sat in a curve near a Steinway grand. The man with long silvery hair said, "We are auditioning twenty applicants today. You are near the end of the list. If you would like to wait outside until the last applicants have performed, we can tell you whether or not you have been accepted, thus eliminating the need for you to await a letter in the mail. What do you have for us today?"

Robert listed the Beethoven, the Bach, and the Chopin.

The silver-haired man smiled at his colleagues. "What is your preference?" he asked them.

"Let us hear the Bach," the woman said.

Robert motioned toward the bench.

"Please!" said the man with the silver hair.

Robert sat, adjusted the seat, and began the Bach. He had performed only the beginning of the piece when the woman said, "That is enough." For a moment, Robert wondered if he had failed to play to her expectations, but he quickly put that thought from his mind, as he knew he had played well.

The silvery-haired man said, "Shall we hear part of the Beethoven sonata."

Robert took a breath and began the piece that had earned him the perfect score at the state competition. His mouth was open while he performed. The judges did not interrupt him until he was very near the end.

"Ahem!" said the man with the silver hair. "In the interest of time, we need to move along. Does anyone care to hear the Chopin?" The other judges shook their heads. "Well, then, could we ask you to play 'Happy Birthday'?"

Robert grinned. He turned and played "Happy Birthday" with the closing arpeggio that he had rehearsed.

The judges smiled. The silver-haired man said, "Done with panache! Please wait in the hall."

Robert exited. Joe and Ida stood. They were about to ask him how the audition had gone when the door opened and the woman stepped out. She spoke in a quiet voice. "I am Marie Zorn, and I teach piano and harpsichord. You have been accepted into the School of Music, and you will study with me

to become a Bach specialist. I must go back inside, if you will excuse me." She quickly closed the door behind her.

Robert suddenly realized that he had been given an incredible opportunity. That day, the judges accepted two applicants from the field of twenty. Robert realized that he would never have made it, had it not been for Miss Jamieson. Now, would he spend a lifetime pursuing the mug's game of music? Only time would tell.

THE END