

## COMING OF AGE

"Griffin, what's it like living with servants in a big house on the lake?" Larry asked sarcastically.

If he hadn't said it in front of my new friends, I would have shrugged it off. But I couldn't. I doubled up my fist and hit him in the face. I wasn't strong enough to knock him over, but I did give him a bloody nose. At twelve, I was barely five feet tall. Larry was fifteen, bigger, and heavier. He was still in my grade because he had fallen behind while touring with the Ice Follies, a professional skating group.

We traded punches until Mr. Gray, the Clover Park Junior High School principal, broke through the ring of classmates and stepped between us. "Since you two want to fight," he said, "you can do it properly with a referee tomorrow at recess."

The next morning when I got off the school bus, janitors were erecting a boxing ring. As I walked to class, I caught glimpses of students standing in small groups and pointing at me. I was the new kid who was going to get a drubbing. But I wasn't afraid. I had boxed many times, which I figured Mr. Gray knew or he wouldn't have let me fight. Even so, I had the usual pre-fight stomach butterflies.

"Stay away from him," Gary said while lacing up my gloves. "He can't hurt you if he can't hit you."

Gary was my best friend. We had met on the school bus the first day of seventh grade after I moved from my mom's home in Everett to my father's home in Tacoma. But I wasn't going to take Gary's advice. I had been taught to jab with my left hand until I had an opening, then to swing my right fist straight into the jaw.

Larry and I fought three one-minute rounds without either of us landing a severe blow. The school's athletic director called the fight a draw. I didn't win the fight—but I did win Larry's friendship and the respect of my classmates, who began including me in their social activities.

I entered puberty that summer and, after school started in September, I fell in love with Maura. I joined the eighth-grade debate team to spend more time with her. When we passed papers, our hands touched, and I fantasized about kissing her. My opportunity came the following Saturday evening.

"Do it now," Gary whispered when Dianne's father shouted that the hamburgers were ready. "Nobody will notice you leaving."

Gary had been kissing Georgia since the beginning of last summer, and he told me what to do. I ambled over to Maura who was listening intently to Georgia. Hopefully she was getting the same advice as Gary had given me.

"Maura, would you like to take a walk?" I asked as my shoulder gently brushed against her shoulder.

As if on command, Maura's arms, which were folded, dropped to her side and our hands touched.

"Yes," she said, intertwining her fingers into mine.

This was turning out better than I could have hoped. So, off we went.

Neither of us looked back, but I would have bet everyone was watching. On the other side of the house, I turned and faced Maura. We were silhouetted in the moon's reflection off Steilacoom Lake.

"May I kiss you?" I asked.

Gary had said don't ask, just do it, because she might say no.

Before she could answer, I leaned over and put my lips against her lips. Our lips barely touched, but it was enough to make me feel like a Fourth of July Roman candle was shooting through my veins. Gary hadn't told me about that part. Maura must have experienced the same sensation, because I felt her tremble. Then we stepped apart and looked into each other's eyes. She blushed, which caused me to believe it was also her first kiss. Neither of us spoke. It wasn't necessary.

We returned to the party. Maura stayed well ahead, which seemed ridiculous to me, because everyone knew where we had gone.

"Did you do it?" Gary asked as he raced over to me.

"Yes," I said. I looked over and saw Maura encircled by her own friends and hugging Georgia.

"That-a-boy," he said.

He slapped me on the back so hard that every head turned. From their smiles, it was obvious that Maura's and my kiss was no longer a secret.

That same year, I learned about the absurdity of war and how fortunate I was to be born an American.

"You did what?" I exclaimed as the gardener Fred and I raked up the golden-brown popular tree leaves from my home's lakeside lawn.

"Every night at sundown, the American and German soldiers declared a truce. We came out of the trenches and drank schnapps and played cards in 'no-man's-land' until sunrise. Then we returned to our trenches and tried to blow one another's heads off again."

Fred was small, five-foot-four, and couldn't have weighed even 120 pounds. When he had returned from France at the end of World War I, he had killed a man in a bar fight. He told me the man was abusing a young woman, but Fred wasn't able to convince the jury. When he got out of prison, the only work he could get was gardening.

Fred was an environmentalist before the word existed. He taught me what time of the year to plant and dig up bulbs, when and how to trim shrubs, where to find night-crawlers, and which lily pads concealed the elusive small-mouth bass.

A Ukraine couple, Peter and Jenny, was also working for my father when I came to live with him in Tacoma. One night while Dad and Sarah were out and we were eating dinner in the kitchen, I asked Peter how he happened to be in America.

He said the night that Russian tanks rolled into the Ukraine, he and Jenny had escaped. He had survived a German World War II work camp and wouldn't risk spending the rest of his life in a Siberian work camp. The Russians had secured the roads leading in and out of the village, so Peter and Jenny had swum across a river, and eventually made their way to England. Until that evening, I hadn't realized how fortunate I was to be born an American.

In the fall of 1951, I followed my brother Ted to Vermont Academy, a college preparatory school on the east coast. A family friend, who had sons attending Vermont Academy, suggested that Dad send us. The school had an excellent college acceptance record.

I was eager to go because the school had a ski team; the ski coach had been an Olympic Game's cross-country skier and jumper. I had learned to ski using my mom's edgeless wooden skis on the hills of the Everett golf course.

Our grandmother, Adock, drove Ted and me to the train station. As the cross-country trip took nearly three days, she brought us a basket of sandwiches along with an assortment of candy bars.

"Boys," she said, as she pulled up in front of the station, "Do you know where babies come from. Before either of us could respond, she added, "You know they don't come from storks."

Ted and I tried to hold back our guffaws. We were not successful.

"Well you have answered my question," she said. "I won't be concerned any longer."

On the train, and many times over the years, Ted and I had a good laugh at Grandma's naivety.



Jim jumping off Vermont Academy's 30 meter hill (1953).

After two years of attending the all-boys' school and living in the shadow of my athletic brother, I wanted to finish high school at Clover Park in Tacoma. Dad was pleased to have me home. He and his new wife, Judy (he and Sarah had divorced the previous summer), were recovering from a serious automobile accident, and needed help.

Within days of returning to Clover Park, I was fully integrated with my Tacoma friends. Life was as it had been before my two years at Vermont Academy. Summers didn't change. Dad required Ted and me to work eight hours a day, five days a week. When I complained to my grandmother that many of my friends were enjoying the summer doing minimal work, she was totally unsympathetic.

"Jimmy," Adock said, your grandfather was always the first man to arrive at the freight yard and the last to leave after his employees finished their twelve hours. He led by example. He split wood and loaded wagons, side by side, with his men. You and Ted have it much easier than your Dad and your Uncle Fred."

Tragedy struck in March of my senior year. March 9, six days after my eighteenth birthday, Mr. Gray, now the high-school principal, interrupted my American History

class. He whispered to the teacher, Mr. Burkhart, who came rapidly (for a fleshy, short-legged man) to where I was sitting. Mr. Gray wanted to talk to me in the hall, he said. Curious eyes followed me out of the classroom as I speculated on what irregularity might have occurred with the class accounts; in my student-council position, I had the responsibility for all non-administrative school funds.

Mr. Gray shut the classroom door and put his arm around my shoulders, suggesting a more serious matter than the loss of a few dollars.

"Your father is dead," he said.

"No!" I shrieked and began sobbing. "How did it happen?" But I knew without asking. I had left the gun-room door unlocked.

"He shot himself."

I didn't cry, which must have shocked Mr. Gray. I had learned not to cry during my tumultuous childhood of being passed back and forth between my parents like chips in a poker game, with never a hug or an "I love you." I had even been hauled off to a psychiatrist during one of my quiet periods. I had to stifle a laugh when I heard the psychiatrist tell Dad that he couldn't help me because I wouldn't talk to him. I had sat, stone-faced, on the psychiatrist's humongous cushioned couch for half an hour without answering any of his questions.

Mr. Gray told me that our gardener, Fred, had found Dad dead in the basement. Dad had asked the gardener to meet him there to help move boxes. Fred had called the school because my new stepmother, Gail (Dad and Judy had divorced soon after they had recovered from their automobile injuries), wasn't home and Ted was away at college.

I didn't know why Mr. Gray thought it necessary for the school doctor to take me home. During the five-minute drive, his only words were, "I'm sorry." When I got out of the car, he accelerated away before the door had closed.

Fred was waiting on the front porch. "Are you sure you want to see him?" he asked. "It's not pretty."

"Yes," I answered.

I followed Fred down the stairs. My foot touched the step where Dad, six years before, had caught Ted and me smoking. He had forced us to smoke the remaining cigarettes, and neither of us ever smoked again.

The gun-room door was open. Fred stepped aside and let me go ahead of him. I noticed that the paddle lock was hanging open in the bolt fastener. My eyes shifted to the vertical, wall-mounted gun rack. I knew before looking, one slot was empty.

I was the only hunter in the family. I had inherited my grandfather's guns as well as his hunting gene. I had always watched the gun room like a hawk and I had the only key because my stepmother Sarah had been warned by a psychiatrist that Dad was bi-polar and might take his life one day.



Jim with Labrador Retriever (1954).

My eyes dropped to the concrete floor and one leg in a gray-flannel suit pant. Dad always wore a gray or blue suit with a vest. The foot of the other leg was protruding from behind a wooden crate. I walked around the crate. Dad was lying in a fetal position, with one hand on the stock of my rifle. More than fifty years later, I still wonder if there was a hidden meaning in his using my gun.

I burst into tears, and Fred wrapped his arms around me. The terrible things that Dad had said to me when he was drunk no longer mattered. He was gone and there would be a big void in my life.

I needed to take some action so I reached for my rifle, but Fred held me back. He told me not to touch anything until the sheriff arrived. Fred had waited a few minutes after he called the school before he called the sheriff, so I could see Dad before he was moved.

My friends, Gary, John and Joe came over after school. "How are you doing? Are you okay? Anything we can do?"

I didn't say it, but no, I wasn't doing well. No, I wasn't okay. No, there was nothing they could do. But they were there for me.

My guilt over not locking the gun room brought back my nightmares. This time, it wasn't angry green eyes looking through the window. It was Dad, with the barrel of my gun in his mouth.

I learned later that there was nothing I or anyone else could have done to prevent Dad's suicide. Dad, believing that World War III was about to start—and may well have started if President Truman had not replaced General Douglas MacArthur as the US commander in Korea—had purchased thousands of dollars of trucks and equipment for his business. He lost a great deal of money disposing of the merchandise and was facing bankruptcy. Dad's psychiatrist told us that the humiliation of bankruptcy, compounded by severe depression, was more than Dad could cope with. Leaving the gun-room door unlocked just made the taking of his life more convenient.

A life-insurance policy paid off Dad's personal obligations and a portion of the company's debt. Fortunately, we were able to refinance the business's remaining debt. My newest stepmother Gail inherited the house, and Ted and I each received a \$25,000 war bond plus one-half interest in the near-bankrupt business.



Clover Park Principal, Harold Gray, presenting diploma to Jim (1955).

The following year, Ted quit college and bought a pet store. I entered Stanford University. My father would have been proud to know I had been accepted.

I drove to California with my high-school friend John who was also attending Stanford. We turned off El Camino Real, the highway connecting San Francisco to Palo Alto, onto the tree-lined Palm Drive, the university's principal boulevard.

"John, can you believe the fragrance?" I asked as we passed beneath overhanging eucalyptus trees. The aroma permeated the air like incense from a Buddha pagoda and conjured thoughts of entering a world of make-believe.

It was September 1955; six months after my father died. I had applied to Stanford because I was tired of Washington's winter rain and I would be able to play tennis in the winter. Dad had started me playing tennis at age ten and, within a year, I was filling in for his Sunday-doubles foursome. Also I was attracted to pony-tailed blondes in shorts and t-shirts.

The day after John and I arrived at Stanford, I went to look at the tennis stadium where I would be competing to make the freshman team.

"Hey, kid, do you want to hit some?" asked a shirtless, hairy-chested upperclassman wearing thongs and a Mexican sombrero.

If he hadn't been holding two of the legendary Jack Kramer tennis racquets imprinted with Stanford logos, I would have thought he was a nerd. That was the only time I got to play tennis with Jack Frost, the Stanford All American who went on to represent the United States in the Davis Cup tennis world competition.

A few days later, I was in my final qualifying match to make the team. The match was close and, when it looked like I might lose, I recalled my grandmother's advice at a boxing tournament. "Jimmy, don't lose. Make him beat you." I made the team.

Within days, I could feel myself changing. The veneer that had kept my feelings and emotions bound up for so many years began to peel away in the friendly and accepting campus atmosphere. I made friends easily and, for the first time, I was able speak from my heart without fearing criticism.

When I returned from Christmas vacation, "Rush"—a two-hundred-year tradition of a college student being asked to join a fraternity—was underway. My father and his friends had recommended joining a fraternity, because it would lead to lifelong friendships.

This put me in a state of considerable consternation because most of my dorm friends were on freshman football or track teams, and recruitment lists of fraternities that I was

interested in were composed principally of athletes. I was an unheralded tennis player, so I wouldn't be on any list.

My friends let me tag along to the recruiting parties, however. By the start of the second week, many of them had accepted bids from the Phi Delta Theta fraternity. Those who hadn't committed were invited to a second party, and I went with them. After a few beers, the social amenities gave way to arm wrestling and "chug-a-lugging"—to determine who could drain their beer mug first. I stayed out of both competitions until Paul, an All American football tackle, had put down the arm of every challenger. Then before he could rest, I popped down across from him. My friends knew I had a strong arm from playing tennis. Everyone else began laughing because Paul was nearly a foot taller than me and weighed a hundred pounds more.

I put him down twice. The first time, his fraternity brothers thought he was pretending to let me win. The second time, they knew better. I'd no sooner left the chair, when the rush chairman, Rudy, asked me to join their fraternity.

My twenty-one Pledge brothers and I moved into the Phi Delt house fall quarter our sophomore year; Stanford prohibited freshmen living in a fraternity. Today, many of those who pledged with me, and are still living, remain my closest friends.

The next three years were my happiest. After tennis, skiing was my second passion and joining the ski team allowed me to spend many wonderful weekends in the mountains. The opportunity came when a team member, who knew I had jumped and run cross-country at an eastern prep-school, asked if I would fill in at a meet in place of a sick skier. I placed near the top in both jumping and cross-country, and they invited me to be a permanent member of their team.

My time at Stanford was not all play and no work. Stanford was intellectually challenging and exposed me to new ideas and concepts. Grandmother Elsie had started my religious training in the Christian Science church—she paid me 25 cents for each Psalm I memorized—which lasted until she died of a minor complication when she wouldn't see a doctor. My high-school girlfriend had introduced me to the Episcopalian church, a requirement for dating her.

After taking a course in Introduction to Philosophy, I began to doubt what I had previously taken for granted. I became fascinated with the meanings of "being" and "morality." I'd come to Stanford intent on studying economics. Then I decided to major, instead, in philosophy, with a minor in comparative religions.

I read the great thinkers; from Herodotus, a fifth-century B.C. historian and philosopher, to twentieth-century externalists. I delved into Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. I concluded that there are no metaphysical right or wrong answers, and that tenants of all religions require one to take a leap of faith.

My thoughts finally coalesced into a very personal religion or, more appropriately, a philosophy of life that satisfied my inquisitive mind. Briefly stated, here is that philosophy: God created the universe. Man has "free will," though his every action is predetermined. Prayer is the transformation of energy. Religious doctrine originates from prophets, not from God. Heaven and Hell exist in the here and now, not after death. The soul survives our demise. With respect to this last tenet, I believe I have lived at least one former life (see Chapter 3, "Soul Mate").

I spent the summer of my junior year studying philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, where my mentor, David Hume, had taught in the eighteenth century. Sixty

students from over forty countries participated in the program. I learned more about world affairs at Edinburgh than any course Stanford could have offered.

At the end of the semester, two Americans, Hans and Colin, and I took a ferry to Warnemunde, East Germany and picked up visas to Berlin. Hans's family had escaped from Germany prior to the start of World War II and he hoped to locate his family's home, which had been confiscated by the Third Reich.

We left Warnemunde in a Volkswagen "Beetle" I had purchased in Amsterdam on my way to Edinburgh. We ignored the official directions, deciding instead to take an alternate shorter route. We were picked up by police at a military installation roadblock. We hadn't taken seriously the American Embassy warnings. East Germany was arresting American students for minor infractions to use as Cold War bargaining chips. Fortunately, the police were military, not the Federal Police, and we were released after explaining that we had lost our way.

At Warnemunde, we also had been instructed not to stop other than for fuel until we entered West Berlin. However, after driving all day we were tired, so we pulled over alongside a hayfield. We didn't know we had been followed. I had no sooner drifted off when we were roused out of our sleeping bags by a growling German shepherd and soldiers poking at us with bayonets. We were sent on our way, once again fortunate that the soldiers were not the Federal Police.



Jim and Hans in East Germany hay field.



Jim and Colin on way to East Berlin.

The following morning, after a few hours of sleep at a West Berlin inn, we made several trips through the Brandenburg Gate into East Berlin. To locate Hans's family estate, we had to research pre-war landownership records, which were housed at the Berlin University in East Berlin. On our third border crossing, a Federal policeman opened our passenger door and with his machine pistol motioned for Hans to get into the back seat with Colin. Then the policeman got into the front seat and, at gun point, directed me to the East Berlin police station. We were strip-searched and our car was thoroughly examined. After an intensive interrogation, we were finally able to convince the police that we were not smugglers, and we were released.



Policeman checking passports at Brandenburg border crossing between East and West Berlin.

We eventually found Hans's family estate. The caretaker told us that both Goering, Hitler's second-in-command, and Hitler's personal doctor had lived in the house during the war. It was a scary few days of intrigue that allowed us to experience the Cold War firsthand—prior to the erection of the Berlin Wall.

From Berlin, Hans, Colin, and I drove to London. We stayed at Michael Beecham's, home, which was more like a castle. Michael was a friend of Hans's father and a nephew of Sir Thomas Beecham, the greatest symphony conductor of the twentieth century.

I left Hans and Colin in London and picked up my high school classmate John and his friend, Chuck, both six-foot- six and broad shouldered. They rode in the Volkswagen slumped over to keep their heads from banging the car ceiling. They had just returned from Russia. After winning England's prestigious Henley Cup, the University of Washington's eight-man shell had been invited to compete against the Russian National Team. Washington's rowers were the first foreign athletes to enter Russia since the beginning of the Cold War. Two years later, John and Chuck competed in the 1960 Olympic Games and came away with gold medals.

John, Chuck, and I put 7,000 miles on my Volkswagen as we toured Europe before I returned to Stanford for my last quarter, where I met Wendy, my wife of fifty years—I graduated nearly one year ahead of my class.

As wonderful as my Stanford experience was, I nearly lost my life at a beach outing in the spring of my junior year. (See chapter, "Life Threatening Encounters.")