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In the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
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A Special thanks to my wife  
Mary Ann for translating my  
chicken tracks into readable  
text.

Many thanks to my editor  
who for obvious reasons  
declined to be identified

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Prologue

*Why does anyone sit down to write a book? I suspect in my case it would be to try to make sense of so many things that to this point in life have been totally baffling. To try to make any sense of life in general may be impossible. However for some reason I feel compelled to do so. Since I have never been able to put things into proper perspective this is also a quest for perspective.*

*The people and places in this book actually existed at a point in time when the whole world seemed to have taken total leave of its collective senses. All of the names have been changed to protect the innocent and the not so innocent.*

Introduction

The main character in this book is James Thomas Hall, JT for short. JT was born in the early 1950s, a dirt-poor gas station jockey's kid in a farming district of the Midwestern United States. That was back in the time when you pulled up to the gas pump and some one came out and actually serviced your car pumped your gas and washed your windows.

All through the central United States are scattered many small towns that service the surrounding farms and farmers. Farmersburg was typical.

There were very few opportunities for JT. Being an only child in farm country you don't have much chance to find work or develop social skills.

JT's first recollections were of living in a small camper sized trailer parked near his grandmother's old house. There was a row of maple trees across the front of the lot and they made the best play areas in the summer. JT played for hours under the shade of these trees. To this day when he pictures the old" home" he sees these trees.

The road into the nearby small town ran just on the other side of those maple trees. There was a fire hydrant just past the driveway in which the trailer was parked.

The house itself was modern and had city water! And electricity! However you still had to go to the outhouse when the need arose. There was one faucet in the kitchen sink hooked to the cold water line. There was no hot running water except what came from a pot on the stove. The lights were simply incandescent bulbs hanging from light sockets in the middle of the room. Each room had one outlet.

Out the back door was a summer kitchen with a cellar. Between it and the house was a concrete slab. And on the west side was the backup water supply an old free standing hand pump that was attached to a hand dug well. The path to the outhouse led off the slab and back past the clothesline to the back of the lot where the paper work was done.

You got to look at a wish book while you took care of business. The Sears and Roebuck catalog and sometimes Montgomery Wards came in handy for lots of things. The pages were a little slick for finishing up business, newspaper was better, it was more absorbent. This particular outhouse was a 'two holer'. You had the big hole for backsides that were wider and a smaller hole so the little people didn't fall in!

The town of Farmersburg was very small. It had a four way stop at its center cross road. No stop light just signs.

The post office sat on the Northwest corner of the cross road. John Elder was the post master when JT was a boy. On the north east corner was an old building with antiques for sale. The south west corner held the parsonage for the Christian church which was adjacent to it on the south. On the south east corner of the crossroads was Moore's general store.

An old railroad track also ran through the center of town and directly behind Grandma's house. JT saw train cars on this track from time to time but not often.

JT's mom and dad were an unlikely pair. His dad John Robert was a big man 6'3" weighing 200-250 pounds in his prime. He never graduated high school. His father, JT's Granddad Hall was killed in a slate fall while working in a coal mine, when John Robert was only seven years old. When the depression hit the family was fatherless. John Robert along with his younger brother Paul Richard and sister Rose Marie were supported by their mother. This was JT's Grandma Hall who

was said to be part Cherokee Indian, mixed in with some German and Dutch. She was suffering from chronic depression never fully recovering from her husband's early death.

Anyway John Robert went to the local school but only through his junior year when he dropped out to help feed the family. He worked gardening and hunting. He trapped for the money he got from selling the hides. Rabbits and squirrels often found their way to the table. Fishing was also a way of bringing home something to eat.

Eventually he wound up working for the Civilian Conservation Corps, created by FDR as part of the recovery effort from the depression. When World War II started John Robert volunteered for the army. He was inducted and went to boot camp. An old injury from a prior job surfaced. The Army doctors tried to fix it and failed. Finally he was given an honorable discharge and a partial disability pension.

Back home his sister Rose had gone to bible collage and had taken nursing classes. At school Rose met a young lady named Jean Ann Patrick. They became good friends. Rose brought Jean home on a visit. It was on this occasion that Jean Ann met John Robert. John was smitten and in due course they were married. Jean Ann was from a poor Irish family. She had twelve brothers and sisters, so life had been hard on her as well.

Jean who was a petite 5' 3" and 100 pounds was very different from John Robert. John Robert was hardheaded and stubborn. He meant well but had poor people skills. Jean Ann was usually gentle and kind but when her Irish was up you would get it with both barrels! Somehow they managed to make it work. Jean let John be in charge up to a point, but she had his number. When he crossed the line she would make sure he knew it!

At any rate they were in love but dirt poor. And with this we start our story.

## Chapter 1

### JT the Early Years

James Thomas was an average kid and developed pretty normally. Spending much of his time alone and being John Robert's son he did lack some of the usual social skills.

In his early years he grew tall but remained skinny. This would lead to problems later but not in his early years. When he did have company, it was usually cousins coming with their parents to visit. They would play around their grandmother's old home place. This was the way life went up until he started school. In those days there was no such thing as Preschool or Kindergarten. You went right into first grade.

The Jackson Township School he attended was an old building of three stories. Two and a half were above ground and half a floor was below ground. It was the standard old red brick outside and wood inside. The thing that stood out to James was the staircases. This part of the old building was for junior high and high school although it had once housed all grades. The old staircases were actually worn down. The wood on the steps had the depressions of all the thousands of feet that had used them over the years. James knew that his father John had gone to school here as well.

The new part of the school was cinder block and concrete, one story with one long hall and one short hall in the shape of a “T”. Grades 1-5 were in this building. JT started first grade at this new school building. Since he lived in town he had to walk to school. It was only about 4 blocks away so it was no big deal and he rather enjoyed the walk.

The first thing JT found out in school was that he did not understand other kids! The teacher he understood. These kids were an entirely different matter. They had no respect for either your person or your things and seemed to go out of their way to make trouble. His early life with adults as his primary companions had not prepared him for his first encounter with his peers. Needless to say there were some adjustment problems. However, JT managed to get through his first year without too much difficulty.

When it came time to start the second grade there were a whole new set of peers to deal with. His family had moved that summer to the county seat. Columbia was the largest town in the county and had several schools. The closest for JT was East Side Elementary.

His second grade year went pretty much like the first with one exception. There were people of a different race from himself in the class. His dad had explained this to him but until this year he had no direct contact with black people. In second grade there were three or four in his class. Now JT’s dad had explained it like this, “They were people just like us. They simply had darker skin”.

So, JT had no problem with it. He was not raised a bigot. That year he befriended a black boy in his class and they played together at recess and talked. They just had fun. After several weeks of getting to know each other, out of the blue this young black boy told JT he was not supposed to be playing with him! JT did not know what it was called but he had just had his first encounter with racism. JT was hurt when the boy shunned him and would not speak to or play with him. He simply did not understand!

In the third grade he learned another lesson. Girls are crazy! He had one chasing him around trying to kiss him. Yuck! It was also the year that he found out just how different girls really were; enough said!

During this time his family lived in what was called a 'shotgun house'. A shotgun house is one that you could stand at the front door and shoot out the back window with the bullet passing through all of the rooms in the house. The front room was the bedroom. His mom and dad had their bed here. JT slept on a folding bed at the foot of their bed. Mom had to get his bed out each night and put it up of a morning. The living room was next. It was small and on the wall between it and the bedroom was the chimney connected to a big "warm morning" coal burner.

Coal heat was not unusual in that area because coal was plentiful and cheap. In addition to farm crops coal was the other big product from that area. The local coal was soft and very dirty but it kept you warm in the winter! It had also created plenty of good fishing holes, over the past 100 years or so. JT and his dad went

fishing in the old strip pits as they called them. The bass and bluegill they caught were very tasty!

The kitchen was an 'add on' to the back of the house. It was just big enough for a small refrigerator, an LP gas stove, and a small sink with cold running water. A very small back porch was just off to the left side of the kitchen. The path to the outhouse started there.

### Out in the Boondocks

After the end of the third grade they moved again. It was a rough time. Money was very short. John Robert had some serious health problems and could not work full time. The place they moved to was way out in the boon-docks. The house itself was little more than a tar paper shack consisting of three rooms. But it did have sheeting behind the tarpaper and the roof was good.

The room that you came into through the front door was large and ran the full width of the house. There was an old desk and chair on the left side and another chair that was fairly comfortable also on that side. In the center was the old warm morning stove, it was connected to the chimney in the center of the house. This chimney also served the kitchen stove on the other side of the wall.

Just to the right of the front door was an old Victrola record player. For you who may not know what a Victrola is I will explain. The Victrola was a hand cranked record player and ran off of a spring much like old time clocks and

watches. It did not require electricity to operate! This was handy since the house had none because the power lines ended about one mile up the road.

The Victrola played what were called 78-RPM records. JT came to enjoy this record player very much, a good many of the records were old cowboy songs and JT wanted to be a cowboy!

The front room had a ceiling and in the right hand corner of this room was where JT's folding bed was placed. His mother no longer had to fold it up and put it back down every day. There were two doorways, no doors that led from the front room. One doorway led to the kitchen and the other to the third room which became his mom and dad's room. The back door was in their room and led to a set of four steps. These took you out to the summer kitchen which was made entirely of logs with a tin roof. They put a curtain up to the doorway into his parent's bedroom. These two back rooms had no ceilings, just rafters and the main roof above that. The walls between the rooms were simply cardboard nailed to the studs.

Since there was no electricity there were no electrical fixtures. The cook stove was the classic old-fashioned wood burning flat top stove, with an oven in the middle.

For lighting you depended on the light supplied by the windows and kerosene lamps, just like you see in the old western movies. There was a good reason to go to bed with the "chickens" and rise with them. There really was not

that much you could do after dark. They did have one luxury. It was a modern transistor radio that ran on batteries. But they were so far out it would only pickup one or two stations.

Times were tough on the Hall family. John Robert could not work due to the old injury to his legs. But the rent was only \$15 per month. Coal for heat was cheap and wood for the cook stove was every place just lying around to be picked up.

When they first moved to the boondocks there were two improvements that had to be made immediately. Number one was a new outhouse had to be dug out and rebuilt. The old one had collapsed. And number two was getting a source for drinking water. There was no running water. The closest drinkable water was from a spring dug out of the side of the hill on the far side of the pond which was across a gully and a creek. Bridging both the gully and the creek solved this.

Now when I say bridging I don't mean footbridges like you see now days in a park! "Oh" no remember these people were poor! The bridges consisted of four trees cut from the woods, trimmed and placed across the gully and creek. There were two for the gully and two for the creek. They were placed about two feet apart and had boards nailed between them. In order to save wood these boards were spaced around four to six inches apart. It looked like a ladder lying across the space between each end. There was no hand railing. Just don't slip or miss a step!

These bridges worked pretty well. JT drew the chore of getting the water each day. He would take 2 galvanized buckets about 2.5 gallons each, cross the bridges, and walk along the foot path that was cut into the side of the hill. It led to the spring. The spring was dug out of the side of the hill. A large brown glazed pipe section was buried part way in the ground over the spot where the spring bubbled out of the ground. When they first moved in the pipe had no covering and it was filled up with leaves. John Robert cleaned it out and built a lid for it that was kept in place by a good sized rock. He also dug a small drainage ditch so that most of the area was dry and you didn't have to walk in mud to get the water, John Robert also made a small box and dug out a place in this ditch for it. This was to have a place to keep things like milk and butter cool so they would not spoil. It was part of life living without electricity. The box had to be weighted down to keep the raccoons and such out of it

The family had chickens to give them eggs and made for a special fried chicken dinner from time to time. They had a big garden and Jean Ann canned a large amount of food each year. They also got some goats and for a while a cow to supply milk. Storage was a major problem. You could not keep that much in the cooler box at the spring. Sometimes they would put the milk in bottles that had a good seal and just place it directly into the cold spring.

This place was paradise for a young boy. There were 40 acres to roam in with hills, woods, a creek, and a small pond. The pond was just big enough to get cooled off in on a hot summer day.

As with all good things there always has to be something that spoils it! And when fall came it was back to school. It was a tough pill to swallow. JT had just had the greatest summer of his life. There had been no other kids to bother him or help get him into trouble. Now reality set in again.

JT had never had to get on a school bus to go to school! He had always walked before, so riding the bus was a totally new experience for him. To JT it was like being cooped up with a bunch of crazy people on wheels! The bus driver was an old farmer by the name of Rocky Lane. He was really nice and turned out to be JT's best friend on the bus. Then there was Mike Jackson. Mike Jackson lived just about a mile down the road from JT. Mike had everything it seemed including an attitude. It was a bad attitude when it came to JT. He never knew why Mike did not like him; maybe it was the way he looked or something. He did not even know Mike until that first day on the bus. Mike started immediately hassling him, calling him names, and generally making things miserable for him. Mike even went so far as to threatening to beat JT up.

Fortunately Rocky let JT sit up front and so Mike could only threaten. One day Mike did charge up to the front of the bus intent on doing JT harm. Rocky saw him coming, slammed on the brakes, stopped the bus and sent him back to the back

of the bus. Thankfully, Mike who was about twice JT's size was older so JT did not have to put up with him at school.

The fourth grade went as well as could be expected. It was school, so you made the best of it. One thing that JT got to do was start learning to play the trombone. He liked music and took to it quite well.

During the following summer two things happened to JT that would change his life forever. The first came one day when his mom and dad went some place together and could not take him. This was highly unusual; however they left him with an older couple that lived down the road in an old log cabin. Effie Ferrous and her husband were really nice people who lived much like the pioneers had done over 100 years before. Their cabin had one room with the back part partitioned off to make a bedroom. JT was tall for his age and noticed the first time he went in that the ceilings were very low. He could reach up and touch them. The floors were old rugs thrown down on the dirt!

JT enjoyed this few hours and it made a lasting impression on him. He saw guinea fowl for the first time and a pig they were raising to butcher and eat. The Ferrous' also had an actual working smoke house for curing meat as well as leaf tobacco on the stalk hanging in the shed to dry. This was quite new and different to JT.

When his mom and dad came back to get him they were all wet! That seemed odd. It was something about being baptized what ever that was. However

JT did not think too much about it. His dad and mom had been listening to a preacher on the radio for quite some time. They decided to get baptized. This did not mean much to him at the time but eventually it would change his life forever.

A couple of weeks later that change started to take effect. Instead of going out and enjoying his Saturday off, he had to get cleaned up and go to church. It seemed this church had its services on Saturday instead of Sunday like all the rest of them. JT had attended church with his mother a few times but did not have much taste for it. Now this new church not only messed up his Saturdays but it took up almost the entire day because the only church of that type was in the state capital 70 miles away. There were no interstates so it was nearly a two hour drive there, three hours at church, and two hours back! The whole day was shot!

To top it off the meeting was not actually in a church building. The group met in a rented hall that was on the third floor of what was called the Fraternal Order of Moose club. You had to go up two flights of stairs and past the bar to get to the meeting hall. It was also in the middle of the biggest city in the state! This was all foreign territory for JT.

The seats were metal folding chairs lined up in rows in front of a stage. On the stage was a place for someone whom JT had never seen in his life to stand and preach out of the Bible. The thing that impressed JT the most was how hard the seats were. But the worst was yet to come! This preacher went on and on for two hours without a break!

JT had never heard so much talking at one time in his life! Not that he understood any of it! But man, your backside sure got worn out! But his mom and dad apparently got something out of it so it became a weekly routine.

The other thing that changed his life was Grandma Hall came to visit. Now there was nothing too strange about that because they lived the closest to her. Grandma did not drive, never had, and she stayed much longer than usual. JT did not think too much about it then but that was the beginning of a time of real problems for his mom and dad. It would affect JT as well. Grandma Hall was starting to get very forgetful and having problems taking care of things back in Farmersburg. Finally Grandma went back home, and things seemed to return to normal.

School started up again and JT went into the fifth grade. This was the first time he had a man for a teacher and he kind of liked it! However things were setting up for a very rapid change. His grandma had gotten worse and by Christmas break they all had to move back to Farmersburg to stay with and take care of her. She was diagnosed with dementia and was deteriorating rapidly. The family did not know it, but this task would take nine years. Each year got harder and harder.

## Back to Farmersburg

So JT was back in the school he had started out in. He had to get used to a new teacher and class half way through the school year. This was no fun.

He found himself a misfit in this class and never really recovered from it. He began to feel increasingly alone, and rejected by his peers. Thus started his first battle against the world as he knew it. It was a vicious cycle. The more he was shunned and ridiculed by his peers, the more withdrawn he became. The more withdrawn he became the more his peers ridiculed and shunned him. He was fairly tall by now but skinny as a rail. The bullies had a field day with him. This only made him withdraw even more. By the time he reached junior high JT had developed not only a real inferiority complex but also a very defiant attitude. If the world hated him he hated it right back! JT looked at it as a fight for survival and he was not going down without a fight! He built up a wall between himself and the rest of the world that no one could get through. What he did not understand was the wall was a trap that he would pay for dearly. All others were outside the wall and were either the enemy or suspect. He could trust no one! This wall helped him cope with the day-by-day insults and humiliations that his tormentors heaped on him. But it took a toll on his heart and soul. JT did not understand what was so wrong with him that made the others hate him. Try as he might he just could not figure it out! The world he had been raised in was civilized and he had been

sheltered. The bullying coupled with his lack of social skills compounded the problem until he was completely withdrawn.

Having to tend Grandma Hall became more difficult. She would wander off and then not be able to find her way back. She got lost in a town of less than 200 people! So she had to be watched all the time. Sometimes JT's mom and dad would have to go some place and JT got the job of keeping track of his grandma. This was no fun at all!

By the end of junior high JT was fed up with the world as he knew it. He was ready to move again.

## Chapter 2

### High School

By the start of JT's freshmen year in high school they had moved into an old farmhouse down in the river bottoms about 5 miles outside of Kingdom City. It actually was a relief for JT. The closest neighbors were an older couple by the name of Harvey and Frieda Simmons. They were very nice to JT and he really liked them. Harvey and Frieda lived about a mile down the road from the Hall family. Harvey had been a farmer all his life and compared to the Halls he was rich! Freda was a great cook and whenever JT was around at mealtime they would invite him to eat with them.

The Whitewater River ran through this area, and it was about a mile north of the house. JT spent a good bit of time on the riverbank; it was one of the few places he felt at peace. High school was even worse than junior high. JT was a new kid in a closed community. He was an outsider from the get go. He would never belong. Though he wrestled with his feelings they got the better of him and he sank into a dark and ugly attitude. He did not know it then but he was suffering what now days would be called clinical depression. All he knew was it seemed that the world was against him and he hated the world! JT struggled on. He dreaded every Monday and was always grateful for Friday. He visited the river often especially on Saturday after church and Sunday. He explored every inch of the river from

Center point road to state road 69. The river was his friend. It comforted him and helped him find some inner peace.

During the summer of his freshman year, his Uncle Leroy gave his dad an old John Boat. Uncle Leroy who was a good carpenter had made the boat himself. The boat was only about 8 foot long and very heavy. It was made out of marine plywood and two by two bracing. It was painted a dark blue and was just the right size for JT. He started out taking short trips with it down the river by himself, of course. JT found that this was the best thing he did all year.

He would camp out on a sandbar cook his own food on an open fire and sleep in his two man pup tent at night. He especially found mornings to his liking since there was usually a cool mist hanging in the air. The morning birds started twittering as they woke up. Then as the sun rose they would start fluttering around and singing. JT usually chose good days on which to plan his trips. In mid to late summer the river was down with not much chance of flood or rain.

He would stoke up the fire from the night before to cook up some hash browns and scrambled eggs, usually adding some kind of beef jerky or something like it to help the flavor. It was pretty much a one pan meal. He usually drank hot tea or just plain water. JT had not yet developed a taste for coffee. Next were camp chores, cleaning up the pots and pans, and stashing the gear in the boat for the day's trip. Morning on the river was always the most peaceful time. Everything was so quiet, no unnatural sounds just the birds. JT took solace in these times.

Being on the river gave him a sense of freedom even though he was still a slave to circumstances beyond his control. He always yearned to see what was ahead just around the next bend in the river.

### The Freshman Year

JT's freshman year at school did nothing to help improve his view on the world at all, just the reverse. It did not take JT long to figure out that he was an unwanted intruder in Kingdom City High School. It became abundantly clear that this was going to be no fun at all! He felt his presence at KC High School was an intrusion on private property. There were a total of sixty five students in that freshman class and he knew no one. No one bothered to welcome him, help him get around, or anything. All he got from his classmates were either blank stares or sneers. It was the start of a long rough year.

JT had to ride the school bus again and he found it just as distasteful as it was the first time. Homeroom was simply a place to either get into problems or be made a fool of in front of everyone. The seeds of hatred that were sown in junior high were producing a fine crop of pure hate.

It took sometime for JT to realize why he was not acceptable. The establishment did not like people who did not fit their mold. JT was still going to church with his parents. Going to church on Saturday was plain un-American, un-Christian, and unacceptable to the sensibilities of a good "Christian" community! The fact that the church he attended followed the teachings of Christ and believed

in the same Bible as they supposedly did was of no relevance. JT did not understand it then. He just wanted to be accepted and that was never going to happen!

Another religion that this small time school had was basketball. Now JT had never been around enough people to even form an interest in the game during his younger years. With all the humiliation and torment he received in Phys-Ed classes in the past he had no taste for the game or the locker room mentality. This only got him more trouble.

When he first showed up for freshman Phys-Ed he immediately started receiving more than what he thought to be an acceptable amount of negative attention. It was from someone who turned out to be one of the track coaches. Phys-Ed was a required class and so JT did what he could to adapt. But he was the second tallest kid in the entire high school and he committed the unpardonable sin. He did not go out for basketball or track or any of the “team” sports. This made several people put him on their non-conformist list which no doubt included the basketball coaches and the school administration. He found out later the track coach put him on his list as well.

Besides the torment in Phys-Ed, JT found out his general math teacher did not like him either. Yet he had to have both classes in order to graduate.

He managed to pass Health and Phys-Ed on D’s but no matter how hard he tried he could not please the math teacher. She was an old maid who he suspected

hated boys anyway. She was retiring at the end of the year. She made it clear to JT that she did not like him and would not help him. Faced with that attitude he simply gave up on it. Math did not come easily for him and with no help from her he flunked the class. The consequence was he had to take math over the next year under only marginally better circumstances.

The rest of his freshman year was unremarkable. He passed with C's and D's but at least he did not have to do it all over again. The only good class he had was woodworking and mechanical drawing. He was not very good at them but at least he did enjoy these classes.

### The Sophomore Year

Being an outcast in general took its toll on JT. His hatred continued to simmer, fester, and grow. His sophomore year he found out that even though the old bitty general math teacher was gone, she was replaced by the basketball coach! JT could never prove it, but he was convinced that the basketball coach/math teacher made sure that his pet basketball boys surrounded him. So whenever there was some kind of commotion from that corner it was automatically JT's fault. JT took it for about half the year. Then after class one day he simply snapped and marched up to the teacher's desk and told him just exactly what he thought of the whole situation.

The teacher's desk was right by the door and before the teacher could react JT was into the hall full of kids between classes. By the time the "coach" caught up

with him he was halfway down the hall. The “coach” grabbed him by the arm and slammed him up against the lockers. He demanded to know what JT meant by favorites and JT made it quite clear to him. Even though the coach insisted on an apology he never got it!

JT did notice after that incident the coach’s buddies did not bother him any more. JT made a “B” in the class and managed to pass all his other classes that year.

However, he was still riding the school bus. And these buses were no improvement over the ones he had ridden before. The only difference was he was a good bit bigger now. JT had developed a cold stare that could cut you in two and it warned others to leave him alone. It was still a trial every day to get up and get on the bus.

By his junior year his hatred and loathing of school had him looking for alternatives. Unfortunately this year brought another confrontation with the establishment. He learned that U.S. History was a required class for juniors. And guess what? The track coach was the teacher! Could it get any worse? Short answer yes!

### The Junior Year

It seemed this teacher had it in for him too. JT did the best he could. It seemed hopeless as far as JT could see. He was surrounded by the coach’s track buddies and when any thing happened it was JT who got the blame! JT barely

passed the first semester. The second semester they were all told that in order to pass they had to have a written essay on some historic event. Coach took every one to the library (no computers in these days) and they were told to pick out something in U.S. History to write their essay on. However he had to approve it!

JT had studied some history on his own and liked western literature. He had a small collection of Zane Grey books and a set of western history books. So JT wanted to study and write about The Battle of the Little Bighorn, Custer's Last Stand. He selected a book and took it up for approval. The coach glanced at it and said no! JT was already fed up by that time and simply said to himself. "Ok then I won't write any essay". Coach was as good as his word JT flunked!

One thing that happened early on in his junior year did not seem significant to JT at the time. But it would turn out to be in a few more years. JT still went to church with his mom and dad. There were other kids around and so he was not the only one with a tired rear end after sitting in the hard seats.

Each fall they took a trip to spend a whole week sitting in those hard chairs while listening to preachers for up to 6 hours a day. The day was split up into two parts with a break in between meetings. The up side was there would be thousands of people gathered for these meetings. They were located in some very nice places. The first time JT went, the trip took them through the Smokey Mountains. He got to see the Atlantic Ocean for the first time in his life! Totally amazing for a Corn Belt country kid!

Another time they went to east Texas and he got to ride a horse for the first time. So these trips did have their good points. They always camped out when they were at these meetings and that was fun!

During his junior year the trip took them to the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. They camped out in the state park. His family arrived early and all the rest of the church people chose another part of the park. This left them pretty much alone with just a couple of other families at that spot. One of the families was from the same church that JT's parents attended so he recognized them. They were the Shirley family; Richard, his wife Joann and their daughter Mary Ann.

The Shirley's were about the same age as the Halls except for Mary Ann who was about five years younger than JT. She was twelve years old and JT was seventeen. Mary Ann was just a tall skinny girl that JT had fun teasing. They played catch with a rubber ball she had. JT would make it go over her head and she would have to chase it down. When Mary Ann tried the same thing he would catch it with no problem and she would get mad at him. But she did not stay mad and always came back the next day! Had JT known that he would spend most of the rest of his life with this girl he might not have been so aggravating. How could he know that six years later he would ask her to be his wife and she would say yes!

Another incident occurred not long after JT got back from this trip. Getting back on the school bus was simply pushing him to the point of exasperation. Finally one Friday morning he determined that he had had enough and was not

going to take it anymore! When the bus got to school he went directly to the guidance counselor's office. He had spent a lot of time trying to get help there in the past only to find out that the "guidance" counselor did not care either!

That day JT told the "guidance" counselor he was quitting school! The "guidance" counselor basically told him goodbye! JT then went to the boiler room where the only real friend he had hung out. He was the janitor! JT had worked part time during the school year and full time in the summer with the janitors on a program that paid low-income kids to help with the janitorial work at the school.

JT liked Cliff the janitor. He was one of only two people JT had any respect for in the entire school! The other was Mr. Miller, the shop teacher.

Cliff asked him what he was going to do. JT told him he was probably going to hell! JT marched into the principal's office and told them he was leaving. No one tried to talk him out of it! Not that it would have done any good. He was too far gone!

JT walked out and started the five-mile walk home. He had made that walk many times so it was no big deal. As he passed the back of the school property he saw his bus driver gassing up his bus. He stopped to tell him he did not need to pick him up next Monday! JT walked home and told his mom and dad that he had quit school. To his surprise they did not get upset or try to talk him out of it! JT spent a good bit of time thinking things over that weekend. He was pretty sure his mother was upset but she hid it well. His dad simply said he would have to get a

job and that was all that was said! By Sunday night JT had cooled down enough and decided to go back.

He got up Monday morning and prepared to walk back to school. He knew he was going to be late but so what? Just as he was getting ready to set out a strange car pulled up in the driveway. It was his bus driver. He had come to try to talk JT into coming back to school. Mr. Snyder was the only person who seemed to care other than his mother and dad! Mr. Snyder drove JT back to school. Nothing was ever said about the incident at school. However, from that point on no one bugged him any more!

It was a turning point for JT. It seemed everyone in the school gave him room and left him alone. To JT it was quite an improvement.

In the spring after the quitting school incident another thing of significance happened. JT got his first vehicle. He had held his driver's license for some time and had been driving his dad's car from time to time. But this was his! It was an old farm pickup truck. A 1952 Chevrolet half ton with an in line six cylinder, it sported a three speed column shifter with torque tube drive.

The truck was nearly 20 years old and half rusted out. But it was his and it meant he did not have to ride the bus anymore! It took a good bit of work to keep that old truck running. The specter of having to ride the bus was plenty of motivation to make JT work at it!

## Lessons from the River

During the spring of his junior year he had purchased an old canoe. That summer he took the longest river trip of his life to that time! Four days and three nights on the river with just himself, his gear and his canoe! The lessons he learned from this trip would change him forever in ways he would never have guessed. This trip covered about 80 miles and finally gave him the satisfaction of seeing what was really around the next bend in the river! Just another bend!

JT eagerly shoved off from the shore under the state road 69 bridge on the Whitewater River. This was going to be the greatest adventure of his life! JT had done many over night trips but never multiple nights and days out. The first day was in familiar territory. He even camped in one of his old camp sights that night. However the next day he passed the place he normally would have taken out and was suddenly in new territory. It had an impact on JT he did not expect. He started feeling very lonely. He had gone over 24 hours without seeing or speaking to anyone. It was against his principles to bring a radio or anything like it with him on the river!

Later that afternoon he slipped from the Whitewater River into the Big Blue River. The Big Blue was about 3 times the size of Whitewater and called for a different set of navigation skills. But it was nothing JT could not handle. JT passed the town of Jasper and headed into the unknown. He was headed for the sea!

A few miles below Jasper he came upon an old ferryboat used to ferry farm equipment across the Big Blue. There was an old man sitting in the little shed built on the ferry and cables ran across the river to hold the ferry on course. It was propelled by a large outboard motor! JT had never seen anything like it, so he pulled up along side of it and got the shock of his life!

As he started talking with the old man he found that it was nice just to hear another voice! By then it had been about 36 hours and he actually missed people. How could that be? He had just spent the major part of his life learning to have total contempt for people. He had learned a lesson no one should learn, how to hate! And suddenly he found himself missing contact with the very thing he hated! It made no sense but there it was. He knew he had to confront it. Needless to say he reflected on this the rest of the evening while he made camp and cooked dinner.

That night after JT went to bed in his tent he continued to think about this. As this process continued he heard a tractor up in a field above him. By itself that would not be unusual. The farmer could not know he was there and it would be difficult to get through the under brush that was between JT and the field. He was not too worried. However something very strange happened. This farmer had a radio on his tractor and it was tuned to the broadcast put out by the church JT's mom and dad went to. There in the middle of the night, in the middle of no place, JT was listening to this preacher again! Finally the tractor went home and he got to sleep.

When JT woke the next morning he found it had rained overnight and was drizzling still. His fire was dead and he did not feel like starting it again. He just ate some parched corn and jerky he had brought, loaded up the canoe, and pushed off. That third day was miserable damp, cool, cloudy, and lonely.

About mid morning JT came to a big steel bridge across the river. From his map he knew that the small town of Jasonville was just above on the bluff on the left bank. JT pulled over and tied up his canoe in a place he felt it would be safe. He walked up across the bridge into town.

About 2 blocks from the bridge he found a small café and went inside. He ordered hot tea and some eggs. He noticed that while the waitress was polite she and the cook stayed at the other end of the room. It did not matter to him. JT knew he probably looked pretty scruffy. Just to see people and talk to someone even if it was to order food was good. Being warm and dry was really nice!

As he sat there sipping his tea and enjoying the warmth two things struck him. Not only was it nice to see people even if they were total strangers but he also realized that he was wrong. He needed people. Like it or not he had to come to grips with this shocking bit of news! Needless to say this gave him something more to think about as he went back to his canoe and headed down the lonely river in the mist and rain. A little after noon the rain broke and the sun came out. This made things much nicer and his last night was rather enjoyable. The next day he finished his trip. What he did not realize then was this trip was actually the start of

another trip. Had he known what was yet to come he would have simply kept on paddling his canoe to the sea.

### The Senior Year

With this back drop he started his senior year. Senior year was fairly easy. He had a total of four hours of woodshop. One hour was for his credit. Since he had taken four years of woodshop it was his major. Woodworking was something JT enjoyed even though he was not very good at it. His second hour was supposed to be mechanical drawing but ended up as another hour of woodshop. Mr. Miller, who taught these classes, was a great old gentleman. JT liked him and he liked JT. Mr. Miller asked JT to assist him with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade woodshop classes. These classes were the third and fourth hours. So his entire morning was spent in the woodshop. This suited him fine. Right after lunch he had homeroom then English and Art. That was his schedule for the first half of the year.

The last half of the year he had to take US History again. The class took up his home room time which was fine by him. One was as bad as the other! Remember the essay problem last year? This was the same teacher/coach just a different class filled with the same bunch of sports buddies he had endured when he took math over. They left him alone this year. JT saw to that. He took a seat in the front row. He had to have this credit to graduate. So he did his best to do everything the teacher/coach wanted.

This time he did not consult the teacher on what his essay was going to be about. He wrote it on the Battle of the Little Big Horn! This class went by fairly uneventfully until about half way through the semester.

Then, one day JT on his way to History he realized that he had left all his pencils in Woodshop. He was unable to take notes. JT saw this as a minor infraction of class rules. The teacher/coach did not see it that way. Class started normally enough. The teacher started his lecture and JT set there minding his own business. About 15 minutes into his lecture the teacher/coach stopped in front of JT's desk and asked him why he was not taking notes. JT tried to explain but was cut off. The teacher started yelling at him,

**“YOU KNOW THAT WHEN YOU COME INTO THIS CLASS YOU ARE TO BE IN YOUR SEAT AND HAVE PENCIL AND PAPER READY TO TAKE NOTES WHEN THE BELL RINGS!!”**

He continued to yell at JT for what seemed to be 3 or 4 minutes. JT was no longer listening. He was so angry that he grasped the sides of his desk top with both hands. He stared directly at the blackboard in front of him. JT was very close to standing up and belting that individual in the mouth. It took every bit of his self-control to keep himself in check.

When the teacher/coach saw that JT was not going to respond to his tirade, he quieted down and asked if someone had a pencil JT could borrow. Someone did. It was passed up and the student behind him tapped him on the shoulder with

it. However JT did not move. He was still gripping the desk top and staring at the blackboard. He was so angry that he could not see straight and still wanted to punch the teacher out. Finally, who ever was behind him passed the pencil to the person who was sitting beside him and that person placed it on JT's desk. JT still did not move.

Finally the coach/teacher went back to his lecture. Only then did JT pick up the pencil. He opened his book to no particular page, opened his note book, and started drawing pictures for the rest of the class. This was the final confrontation that JT would have at school! The only thing that stopped him from punching out that individual was his mother. His Mom wanted him to graduate and he had to have that credit to do so. "Oh." The coach/teacher gave him a C- on his essay on the Battle of the Little Big Horn!

On graduation day the only reason he showed up was because of his mother. When it was all over he escaped and fled the area like a convict who had just been paroled. JT never went back.

## Chapter 3

### Free at Last

JT would never fully recover from his years in the school system. Obviously when given the choice to continue his education the answer was not just “no” but “hell no”! He was destined to be low-level working class for the rest of his life. The scars left from the worst lesson of all would impede him for the rest of his life; Hatred is not something that you simply walk away from. The consequences are lasting; it is only by the grace of God that anyone walks away from that lesson at all.

After graduation, JT shifted gears and started a new life. Following in his father’s footsteps he became a service station attendant. This was in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s.

During his high school years a brand new highway, Interstate 83, had been built through the county. JT remembered passing under the bridge they built over Yellow Willow creek on one of his river trips. The construction was underway at the time and he was somewhat concerned that something might fall on him as he passed under it.

At any rate, after JT got out of hell (school), he got a job at the brand new Sunoco service station at the junction of State Road 69 and I-83. John Stevens was the manager and knew JT’s father. He offered JT his first real job.

He worked the night shift out in the middle of no place. His primary duties were cleanup and tending the pumps all night alone. After all the problems he had been through JT liked working the night shift alone.

Because of his job he was able to afford another vehicle. The old truck was getting harder and harder to keep up. He traded it in on a 1963 Corvair Monza. It was rear engine air cooled, 4 on the floor, and had bucket seats. JT was now 6'3" tall and 145 pounds so it was a tight fit. He really liked that car. The speedometer registered 100 mph and JT had the needle bouncing off the peg. It would really get up and move. That fall he got to take his first road trip in that Corvair.

All through high school JT had continued to go to church with his parents. After graduation he decided to continue going to this church on his own. He liked taking the church trips each fall and saw no reason not to continue to do so. This year (1970-71) he had worked all summer and saved up for the trip. When the time came he was ready!

His mom and dad went a couple of days early. JT batched it and worked two more nights. He stocked up on cold drinks; made himself some sandwiches, put it all in a cooler in the passenger seat, and took off around midnight. Lake of the Ozarks was about 460 miles away and JT made it there in just over six hours. He stopped only for gas and restroom breaks. Yes, he did break the speed limit. And considering the traffic filled cities he had to pass through he made good time. JT

rolled into the state park at the lake at just a few minutes after 6:00 a.m. He pitched his pup tent next to his parent's tent, crawled in, and got a good nap.

JT had come to accept the beliefs of his mom and dad's church and so he went to the services. The young people his age for the most part accepted him. After only two days of attending church services he came down with bronchitis. He spent the next three days lying in his sleeping bag wondering if he was going to live or die! JT had never been that sick in his life. He was coughing so hard that he was spitting up blood. He was hurting! Man his whole body felt like he had been beaten with a club.

Their camp site was right by the lake and on the fourth day while everyone else was gone he crawled out and went down to the water's edge. He just sat on a rock in the sun. The coughing had slowed down quite a bit and the sun felt good. After that he was able to eat something and he started feeling a little better.

By the last day of the "Feast" he felt better and was able to attend church service. This annual meeting was called the Feast of Tabernacles and was kept as a part of fall holy day season in this church. The basis for keeping it was straight out of the Old Testament book of Leviticus chapter 23. JT had come to understand that most churches did not even believe that the Old Testament had anything to do with modern day Christians. They thought it was done away with or simply used as historic reading.

So JT was feeling better and after church that last day broke camp and headed home. He took a little longer getting home and really enjoyed his first road trip, even if he did get very sick.

### The Strike Out That Became a Home Run

Now JT had been smitten by a young lady that lived about 20 miles away in the small city of Jacksonville, JT would go over and spend time with her and her brother. He got to know her mom and dad, but she finally made it plain that she liked another guy from their church. Greg Johnson was a bit of a book worm with coke bottle glasses. As it turned out JT and Greg became best buddies when she dumped him too!

Over the next year they cemented their friendship and had a good bit of fun just chumming around at church and during the week. Greg was just a couple years younger than JT and was a senior in high school at this time. Greg was just about as opposite as they come from JT. He was smart and well liked, but for some reason it just clicked between them. Getting dumped by the same lady turned out to be good.

The next spring they attended a church Holy Day called Pentecost. A large group of several churches came together and met in the Farmer's Building on the state fair grounds. JT had no way of knowing it but his life was about to change again. He would never be the same.

JT and his friend Greg were together and as usual girls were a major point of conversation. They had both been burnt and JT declared that he did not ever want to get hooked again. Just then Mary Ann Shirley walked by with one of her friends. At first glance JT did not recognize her, but after looking at her some more he did recognize the face. What he did not recognize was the rest of the package. That skinny little girl was gone. Man! What a package she had become. JT's jaw dropped and as they walked past he had to take a second look.

Wow! What a change. She had it together. Needless to say Greg saw his reaction and started ribbing him something terrible about it. JT denied it and said it was nothing. But he was smitten and could not lie to himself. JT could not get her out of his head no matter how hard he tried.

JT knew he had a weakness for the ladies, so he had steered clear of them. Due to his defensive posture at school and being practically an outcast, the ladies left him alone too. He never even knew what hit him when Mary Ann walked by. There wasn't even a fight. She knocked him out with one smile.

Now JT had a whole other set of problems to deal with. He couldn't just ignore her. She was not going away. But she was jailbait for JT.

Mary Ann lived in Columbia, the state capital, and she was only a freshman in high school. She had four more years to go before she graduated. JT was 20. Boy was this a dilemma!

Now Mary Ann lived about 80 miles from where JT was living with his mom and dad. Grandma Hall had died and life was somewhat better for JT now that he was out of school. But what was he going to do about this new development.

### Losing His First Job

JT had to quit his night job at the Sunoco station over some differences he had with some so called customers. They wanted the boss's money and were willing to beat up and hurt him to get it. The first time this happened JT had gotten most of his work done. It was 3:00 in the morning and no one was around so he figured it was safe to go to the restroom. Just as he was finishing up the bell that warned him a customer was on the lot rang. JT opened the door to the restroom and was immediately pushed back into the restroom by a man in a ski mask. This man threatened him and made him empty his own pockets. Then he demanded the boss's money. The thief took his car keys, billfold, and pocketknife. Then he threatened to use the pocketknife on JT. Needless to say JT was very compliant.

About that time another person came to the door and said there was a safe in the office. He needed JT to open it. The first guy came up with a cord and tied JT's hands behind his back. Then he led him around to the office. This was when JT saw that there were a total of 4 people doing this job. All but one of them was wearing a ski mask. JT gave them the combination to the safe. They got just over

\$250.00 for their trouble. They tied JT to the chain link divider in the office and took off in JT's dad's car. He had driven his dad's car because his had a problem.

JT was tied to a chain link partition in the back of the station all alone with his hands tied behind his back. Now what! It could be quite some time before anyone would find him. It was now four a.m., the quietest part of the shift, and JT was mad as hell. He pulled and yanked on the part of the electrical cord that was holding him to the cage until it finally gave way. But his hands were still tied behind his back. Try as he might he could not get them loose. He got a set of wire cutters from a tool box but could not get them on the cord because of the way his hands were tied. Then he remembered that earlier in the night a guy had come in and asked if he could park and get some sleep. JT had said ok. When JT went outside that car was still sitting there. He woke the man up and told him what had happened. He cut the cord off.

JT went back in to call the boss and the police only to find both the office and the pay phone cords cut. The guy in the parking lot took him to the only other 24 hour place around. It was on the other side of the highway. After he called the police, the man dropped him back at the station and left.

It never occurred to JT that this guy may have been part of the hold up plan. However, it did occur to the police. They also suspected JT as well. When the boss got in JT told him he had two weeks to replace him. Coming back that night was hard but JT tried to keep his word. He spent a good part of the night just keeping

watch out. He suspected every thing that moved. He got through that night and the rest of the week without any more problems. By the first part of the second week he had decided to stay.

His boss was glad to hear it and by the end of the week every thing started to return to normal. His dad got his car back. JT was still a bit nervous but he was getting back to normal.

Then two weeks to the day he was robbed the second time. The first time it was called a strong-arm robbery. No one actually got hurt physically. This time JT was not so lucky. Once again it was late at night. This time around 3:00 a.m. JT spotted these two guys walking across the lot from the general direction of the interstate. He met them at the door. Everything was closed up due to the fact it was late winter. They explained that they had a broken fan belt and needed a replacement belt. JT asked what model of car. They replied that it was a 1963 Ford Falcon. JT went out to the workbench where the catalogs were kept and started to look it up. The bell rang. A car was at the gas pumps. JT excused himself and went out to serve the last customer he would ever serve at that station.

The vehicle was a big camper rig with extra fuel tanks so it took a good bit of gas to fill it up. There was a rule that if a credit card sale was over 15 dollars, the card had to be verified through the national data center for approval. JT took the card back to the office, called it in, went back out and finished the sale. The truck drove off.

JT went back into the station and started paging through the catalog again. Suddenly he felt a stunning pain on the back of his head. At first he did not understand what was happening. Then he was hit a second time and it registered that he was being hit in the head. He didn't know what they hit him with but it hurt. So JT acted like he was knocked out and fell to the floor.

The two guys were on him in a second. They took the office key and also pulled the coin changer from his belt. One guy stayed beside JT and frisked him looking for the cash roll he had for making change. The other one took the key and got into the office. To this point JT had been able to keep his eyes closed. But he could not control them completely and his eyes fluttered. The guy that had stayed with him hit him again so hard that he found out what it meant to see stars. All kinds of lights were flashing before his eyes. It also made him lose control of his bladder. He actually wet his pants. He remained conscious but he kept his eyes closed now.

JT heard the other guy swear and say that there was a safe in the office. He rummaged around but could not find anything and finally said,

“Let's get out of here.”

Then they left. JT heard the door close but he was afraid to move at first. He just laid there for a couple of minutes just to be sure they were gone. Then he jumped up and cautiously looked around. They were gone. With a throbbing head,

he checked things out. They had clipped the cord on the pay phone but not the office phone. JT sat down and called the boss and then the police.

When the boss got there JT told him, "I guess you know I don't work here anymore." His boss said he figured as much. That was the only time JT quit a job without having another job to go to.

In the next couple of weeks JT had to answer a good many questions from the sheriff's office. They had him check out a couple of line ups, one in his home county and one in the next county. JT thought he recognized the one guy who did not have a ski mask on from the first robbery. But he could not make a positive identification at the first line up. He was sure that he recognized the two from the second robbery in the second line up. They had been caught in the next county and were being charged with much more serious crimes there. JT's home county did not press charges. JT was glad because he did not want to go into court and hassle with a trial and all that stuff. He just wanted to get on with his life and put all of it behind him!

What really got JT was the fact that these last two guys were willing to do him bodily harm for \$11 in change. They never even got the main roll of bills he used for making change just the money in the changer!

The police found the changer and the tool that they had used to take JT down with just a few miles down the interstate. He had been hit with the rubber hammer that they used to put hubcaps back on tire rims! They apparently did not wish to

kill JT because just on the other side of the tool rack hung the large ball peen hammer. One hit would have been all that would have been necessary with it!

## Grandma & Grandpa Perkins

### And the Final Years at Home

With no money and no job JT was at loose ends and did not know what to do. That was about to change. Over the years the Hall's had become good friends with an older couple, Grandma and Grandpa Perkins. They met them at church and would go out to their farm Saturday afternoons to visit.

JT had known Grandma and Grandpa Perkins since he was 10 years old. They had gone to the very first Feast of Tabernacles with them. They may not have been related by blood but they treated JT just like he was their own grandson. JT dearly loved them.

Just after JT was robbed at the service station, Grandma and Grandpa Perkins's house was badly damaged by a fire. As JT did not have anything better to do, he volunteered to help grandpa clean up and salvage as much of the house as possible. When JT first got there grandma and grandpa were living in the popup camper that they used when they went to the Feast. JT bunked on a cot in the back part of the house where the fire damage was not too bad and the roof was still good. He did not have to worry about mosquitoes and other bugs because they did not like the burnt smell of the place.

The work was hard and dirty but grandma was a great cook. It was a good time. There was a pond to go swimming in and a big double wash tub out back of the tool shed for baths. You just had to make sure everyone knew what you were doing so no one went out back while you were bathing. Bath water came from a garden hose and was drawn early in the morning so that the sun would heat it up during the day! They had electricity at the tool shed but JT had to use a flashlight at night when he went to bed.

They worked all summer on this cleanup. About a month into the project grandpa brought a house trailer in and placed it in front of what was left of the house. Once they got electricity hooked up to it grandma got to move in. It made things better for her. JT stayed in the back of the house and continued to help until early fall.

In the fall his dad told him about a job that he might be able to get. JT went to check it out. A son of his dad's boss was taking over the operation of a service station on the south side of Columbia. This was a neighborhood service station. It would not be going 24 hours a day. They closed at night so there was less chance of getting robbed.

JT took the job. It lasted through the winter but in late spring the station folded due to lack of business. Before it folded JT was able to get a new job. This job lasted about six months. It was another service station; more like a gas station than a full service station. They would work on tires but that was it.

The station was operated by two brothers, one of whom JT had had for a substitute teacher at Kingdom City High School. The thing was their dad ran the two brothers. His name was Harvey but not the same one that lived next to the Hall's. This guy was a farmer who also owned the gas station. Harvey hired JT to work at the station but he quickly switched him over to farmhand when spring came around. Harvey taught JT how to use a tractor and plow a field, how to use a disk, and just about every other job around the farm.

This was the first and only time JT worked on a real working farm with crops plowing, planting, and cultivating which JT never got the hang of. One of the most curious jobs JT got was cutting the cockle burr and jimson weeds out of the beans! Now this job was something else. Harvey took JT out to a field a couple of miles from the house and introduced him to a weed hook.

The weed hook had a handle similar to a shovel. The last foot or so was made of a steel rod about a half of an inch in diameter. On the end of this was a hook made of flattened steel about 2 inches wide and maybe an inch and a half long. The inside of the hook and the flat part on the bottom were sharpened.

You walked down the bean rows hooked the bigger jimson plants and cut them off near the ground. The sharpened flat end on the hook was to cut and up root the cockle burr.

Now these were large bean fields. Each row was probably over a mile long! Harvey took out two water jugs and set them at the end of the rows. He proceeded

to demonstrate how to use a weed hook while JT watched and followed his example. They went all the way down two rows and all the way back two rows. Then after a short break for a drink they started it again.

Harvey made two trips, put his hook up and got himself a drink. He told JT he would be back to get him for lunch. JT spent many days with a weed hook alone in the middle of more than one field. One would think that a body would have quit a job like that. JT found the solitude and the work to actually be pleasant. He liked it. It gave him time to think and what was on his mind most of the time now was Mary Ann Shirley!

JT got to see her at church but that was never enough. He could not afford to drive to the state capital every other day and he had to work! So there he was daydreaming about a young lady out in the middle of a bean field.

## Chapter 4

### Off to the Big City

JT spent a good bit of time cutting the weeds out of the bean field day dreaming about Mary Ann. Finally it came harvest time and JT got to help get the crop in. This year Harvey had planted beans and corn so the combine was set up for beans first then corn. JT got to drive the old grain trucks. It had been a very educational year! Once again change was coming.

There was an older couple named Roy and Elsie who were in the same church and lived in the same county as the state capital. Roy offered to see if they could get JT a job with the school system that Roy worked for. This would more than double the hourly rate JT was making now. More importantly it would put him a whole lot closer to Mary Ann.

JT made the application and was interviewed by the assistant administrator. Based on Roy's recommendation he got the job. Not only did Roy and Elsie help him get a job but they also let him stay with them at their home. He had three meals a day, his own room, at a very good price, and plenty of spare time for Mary Ann.

The job was basically a glorified janitor's job. Much of the work he did was similar to the work he had done when he was in high school. However, there was a bit of difference. JT did not stay at just one school all the time. He was given a

truck and went between five different schools. His circuit included three grade schools, a junior high, and a high school.

He assisted Roy on different jobs. He also filled in for any of the other janitors at any of the schools as needed. You might have found him mowing grass, shoveling snow, or lining the football field. He also worked on the wastewater treatment plants that serviced these schools. JT had no way of knowing that this exposure to these tiny wastewater treatment plants was the start of what he would do for the rest of his working life.

Now being a young man JT could not keep his mind off of Mary Ann. She was one beautiful young lady and was getting more so all the time. JT got to see her more often. The only thing that slowed him down were the limits her mom and dad put on it. Mary Ann still had two years of high school to finish. Her parents told her she had to be 18 and graduate high school before they would consent to them getting serious.

Well that was not going to work for JT. He did everything he could to see her. He would often talk her into going on a bicycle ride by herself. The ride would just happen to end up where JT was walking after he parked his car.

Mary Ann did not help matters any. She would talk about all the boys at school that wanted to date her and things that went on at school. Of course even one boy trying to date her was too many for JT.

To JT's mind he had to put up a no trespassing sign on Mary Ann right away. So he asked her to marry him and she said yes. But she was still going to honor her mother and father's request and graduate first. JT felt that he could live with that and he put up his no trespassing sign. This probably made life a bit easier for Mary Ann. It helped get rid of unwanted pests.

Things continued to change. JT had been going to school to study for a certification to be able to do the paper work for the little package treatment plants as they were called. This was so that he could take over for Roy when he retired. But when Roy retired they put another man in his job. JT was left as the assistant to this new guy. This did not sit well with JT.

JT had pretty much decided that he was going to throw in the towel, go back home and restart his life. It broke his heart that he and Mary Ann would have to wait even longer. What else was he to do?

JT had not yet said anything to Mary Ann. He did tell the man who taught the class he was thinking about it. As it turned out Mr. Jansen, his instructor was the manager of the two big treatment plants that handled the wastewater for the capital. He told JT that if he wanted a job he should go to city hall to a specific room and tell a specific person that Mr. Jansen had sent him.

This was the lifeline JT needed. Maybe now he could stay close to Mary Ann. JT did as Mr. Jansen said and within three weeks he was hired at the Acton wastewater treatment plant.

The Acton plant was the smaller of the two city plants. The larger was the State Street plant. The Acton plant was more out in the rural area of the county. It was down by the river in the middle of a bunch of cornfields. Its location made JT feel more at home. JT was scheduled to start work on a Saturday night at midnight. He wanted to see the plant in the day time so the manager Ed Donaldson set him up with a tour for the Friday before he started.

JT drove through the gate and went to the office where he was introduced to an older man by the name of Joe. Joe took him on a complete tour of the plant and showed JT everything he would be working with.

JT had never seen anything like it in his life. As he drove back out of the gate he wondered to himself, “My God what have I got myself into now?”

### The Assistant Operator

The Acton plant was the newest of the plants and was built on 250 acres of river bottom land located just south of the city. The ground was low and the plant was protected by levees built to prevent flooding.

There was a bewildering array of buildings filled with many types of pumps and equipment that JT had never seen before. He had read about these things when studying for his class 1 certification. He had passed this certification by the way and understood the basics. But this was on a scale he had never imagined!

There were open tanks filled with wastewater in different stages of treatment. It all was a continuous process. Water went from one stage to the next in a continuous flow measured in millions of gallons per day. Two large sewers fed the treatment plant continuously and the average flow was around 50 million gallons per day (MGD).

JT was hired as an assistant operator and was making nearly \$5 an hour. He worked a full time 40 hour week and made more than enough to get married. And he had the benefit of health insurance for the first time in his life.

Now the assistant operator's job was to check equipment, take samples, take readings, change charts, calculate data readings, make out new sheets at midnight, clean and paint. JT soon found out that the cleaning and painting were his primary jobs.

There were four shifts that ran 24 hours a day 365 days per year. People never stopped flushing so the treatment plant never stopped treating. JT was on "A" shift. His workweek started at 12:00 midnight on Saturday night, so it did not interfere with church on Saturday. The shift was a 12-hour one that ended at noon on Sunday when "B" shift came in.

JT had to sleep during the afternoon and evening. In those days air conditioning was only for the rich people. Open windows and fans had to do. He was living in a suburb of the capital city and no one else around worked nights it

seemed. JT found out that you could sleep through most anything if you are tired enough.

Each shift had four people on it; the Foreman, an operator and two assistant operators. This was a completely new world to JT and he really did not know what to make of it. His shift Foreman was Glenn and he was a hillbilly fresh out of Kentucky. The operator Greg was a poor city kid. The other assistant operator was named Louis. Louis was an older man and he had been there about 3 months when JT arrived. He was JT's primary teacher. Greg taught JT how to pick up and run the lab samples.

The dissolved oxygen test was a titrimetric test where you combined a specific set of chemicals in a specific manner and then added a coloring agent. Another chemical was used to titrate to an end point until the color was gone. This particular sample was critical to the operation of the biological part of the operation and was done two times per shift. The settleability of the biological mass that was used to treat the wastewater was tested by taking a well-mixed sample and pouring it into a one liter graduated cylinder and letting it sit for 30 minutes. The brown colored 'flock' as the activated sludge was called would settle out leaving the upper part of the cylinder clear and giving a reading as to how well it had settled.

Most of the testing the operator did. However, the plant was divided in two parts both of the same design. This meant each assistant operator got to take the same samples and do the same amount of work. It was pretty evenly divided.

The entire plant was divided up into what were called cleaning sections. Now this was divided by shift and seniority. The senior shifts got the easier areas, while the junior shifts got the worst assignments. Of course JT was on one of the junior shifts. JT being the most junior got the worst of the worst.

The screening chamber was the first process in the treatment plant so naturally it was the nastiest place on the plant. Bar screens were exactly what the name implied. They were bars that screened. These bars were set in the channel vertically. When the channel was opened the wastewater flowed through the bars. Now these bars were set about three quarters of an inch apart. Anything that was bigger than that got caught on them. These were called 'tailings'. Most people wouldn't have a clue what tailings consisted of. Let me explain it to you. The short explanation is it consists of anything that gets in the sewer.

The primary source was the thousands of homes and offices connected to the sewers. Industrial plants also dumped into the sewers. Restaurants and food processors dumped into the sewers. The sewers carried off the rainwater from the streets and buildings downtown. So just about everything imaginable could come in.

JT was introduced to all of this during his first week of work. The rags, cans, paper and different plastic materials were not so bad. But this was always covered in grease and a sticky mess. JT even got through the dead animals that came in. What got him the most were the personal items that came in such as tampon applicators. The used tampons and condoms were the worst.

Fortunately he did not have to come into direct contact with this stuff. They had large mechanical rakes to clean the bar screen. He did have to use a rake to pull the stuff out of the bin that the rakes deposited the tailings in, onto a conveyer belt which dumped it into the back of a dump truck.

JT soon learned that the operator and foreman were trying him out to see if they could wash him out. No doubt this was ordered from the manager. In later years JT would understand why. But he was still young and naive.

So JT took it personally and he set out to beat them at their own game. They put him on cleaning the bottom floor of the screening chamber. This level was just two or three feet above where the wastewater came into the plant. During a rain event this level would sometimes get covered with wastewater. A good bit of junk got on the grating and floor. All this had to be shoveled off and put back on the screens.

One day the whole crew was down there cleaning up. JT was shoveling a pile of junk and for some reason it did not want to move. He shoved harder and

suddenly the pile rolled over and he saw why it did not want to move. Under this pile of tailings was the body of a small dog.

Now that would have been bad enough but the dog had been in the sewer for some time and had no hair on it. JT did not know it then but this would be the worst thing he would ever see. JT had a pretty strong constitution but this was sickening. He had helped butcher animals. He had killed and plucked chickens and shot varmints like ground hogs and such. He had also done some trapping so this did not run him off at all.

The next thing they tried was to give him the job of cleaning the weirs on the final clarifiers. The final clarifiers were 100 foot diameter round tanks. On the outer edge was a trough that the water ran into and channeled it away from the clarifier after the activated sludge was settled out, the weir is the area where the water leaves the tank.

There was quite a bit of ammonia nitrogen in the effluent and algae grew on these troughs and weirs. If not controlled it would cause problems in the disinfection stage. In the summer it was the worst. The algae would grow rapidly and the weirs had to be cleaned every two to three weeks.

The test was would JT stay at his assignment and do as he was told? This particular night the foreman took him first thing and instead of doing the normal routine JT was given a weir broom. It was basically a deck brush about 8'' long and 4'' wide with stiff bristles on the end of a friction fit broom handle. He was

also given a pair of hip waders and told to scrub the weirs until they came back to get him.

These guys had no idea that JT had cut the weeds out of bean fields and did not mind dull and boring time-consuming work. JT finished the first weir. No one came by so he started on the second clarifier. He finished it and still no one came. So he kept going. There were four clarifiers that made up one final clarification system. It was starting to get light out when he finished the fourth clarifier. About that time the foreman came back to get him. JT figured they were watching him to see if he would goof off or take off and find a place to sleep. But if they were he disappointed them.

The next trick they tried to play was to put him in a long pipe chase with a paintbrush, a wire brush, a ladder and a bucket of paint. The job was this. There was a six inch water pipe with couplings and valves whose bolts were starting to rust. He was told to use the wire brush to knock the worst of it off and then paint each joint and valve. The pipe was in a hard to get to place and there were a lot of joints and valves. The foreman told him to stay at it until he came back.

The job like the last one took hours but JT stayed at it until he was almost to the wall where the pipe went out the back of the building. Just like the time with the weirs, the foreman showed up when he was almost done. Again he must have been disappointed because the evidence pointed to the fact that JT had not crawled

off to take a nap. JT spent two years as an assistant operator before being promoted to operator.

JT went back to the tunnel where he spent the entire night painting many times over the years. 35 years later that job was never completed. No one else had ever touched the job. It never would be finished. That line would be torn out as part of a major change in the operations of the plant in the years 2010 to 2020.

## Chapter 5

### Mary Ann Shirley

Even with all the changes in jobs, JT did not forget Mary Ann. It was quite the contrary. His every move was to insure that he could be close at hand.

Mary Ann just got better looking all the time and JT was defiantly a guy! He could not have put her out of his mind even if he wanted to. She had him eating out of her hand and following her around like a little puppy.

JT had always been sure that if he ever got close to a lady he would be hooked. He had red blood running through his veins with a double dose of testosterone mixed in. So he definitely was attracted to the female race. Had it not been for the social problems in school he would probably have been in trouble much earlier in life.

Mary Ann seemed to know how to keep him hooked. JT never was sure whether she did it intentionally or not. But she kept him excited. And she seemed to want him around, so what could he do?

After she had said yes to his proposal JT was in a pickle. He still had two more years to wait. She had promised to graduate before she got married and so all JT could do was keep close. Yet not getting too close was a very hard task to say the least.

Mary Ann's mom and dad did not know what to make of JT's attentions to her. The situation was a bit touchy. She was under age and had some health

problems which made them very protective of their little girl. Yet JT could not walk away.

He was so firmly hooked that if he tried to shake the hook loose it would cause him mortal damage. At least that is what he thought. Had she rejected him it probably would have nearly killed him. He needed someone to love him and accept him after all the pain he had been through. He did not think he could survive if she rejected him too! So what to do?

Needless to say he lived with the fear of losing her and it kept him always guessing. It was good practice for the future. He had to get used to the female race. Learning female moods and when to back off and shut up did not come naturally to someone as inexperienced as JT. He was always getting himself in trouble with her. She even kicked him out a time or two. But if he begged enough she would take him back. She did not stay mad at him for too long.

During the intervening two years Mary Ann took a couple of trips out of state with her grandmother. These trips were for about two weeks each and nearly killed JT. He was afraid that if she had too much time away she might change her mind and tell him to take a hike. So these trips became times of great anxiety for JT.

JT went ahead making plans to be married and this included where to live. By now his mom and dad had moved to a run down part of Columbia. They purchased an old house. It was the only one they would ever own. There was

another house directly across the street from them. It was in no better condition than his mom and dad's. The owner let him buy it for next to nothing. Both places took a good bit of work but were made livable at least by JT's standards.

(Remember the place he liked the best had no electricity).

This house had electricity, an indoor bathroom and hot and cold running water. All the luxuries. It looked like a dump but JT was used to that way of living and Mary Ann did not seem to mind it. She seemed determined to go through with the marriage.

JT had thought about it some and decided he better make sure just what Mary Ann was thinking! He had to be sure she was in love with him not just the idea of being married.

Mary Ann chattered about having a church wedding with all the frills and such. JT was glad her dad was footing the bill. The church wedding did give him the tool he needed to make sure she was the one. She was very wrapped up in wedding plans. So one day when she and JT were alone he asked her this question.

“If I were to tell you that I did not want to go through a church wedding and if we were going to get married it would have to be just us at the JP. Would you still marry me?”

She gave the right answer without hesitation. “Yes!” If she had paused or had to think about it, it could have been time to reconsider. Mary Ann didn't even flinch. She loved him no matter what.

Once she passed the test with flying colors, JT told her to go ahead with the plans for a church wedding. He would show up. JT probably would have taken the risk even if she had totally flunked the test but he was glad to know she would take him under any circumstances.

These were good days for JT. He was still suffering from the damage that hatred had done to him. He hoped that Mary Ann's love would help heal his wounds. He had no idea how deep they were.

Now that JT had a steady job making good money (at least he thought so) he felt he was ready to take the leap. JT had never met anyone who affected him like Mary Ann. She was the most beautiful lady he had ever met and he had no idea what she could possibly see in him! But he was not about to pass up a good thing if he could help it.

The day they got married was a quiet one. The wedding was scheduled for right after church services. As usual there were last minute things that came up. Finally the time came. His bride to be was at the top of the aisle. JT knew she was going to look good in the wedding gown but he had no idea just how good. The vision of her walking down the isle took his breath away. How could any thing so gorgeous want to have anything to do with him? But there she was and he distinctly heard her say I do. Okay. I do too.

They had a few days off before JT had to go back to work. JT took her out to a nice restaurant for dinner that evening and they spent their first night together at a small motel just outside of town.

Being the hayseed that he was JT had planned to introduce Mary Ann to his favorite part of the world and his way of life. She was a city girl and he was mostly country. The thought never crossed his mind that she might not like camping under the stars and roughing it on a sandbar by an old muddy river.

So Romeo took his beautiful bride out to the river to a place that had afforded him refuge during the bad days of high school with the stupid idea that she would appreciate it. It was a no go. When he realized his failure he packed her up and took her to their “new” home.

JT had to go back to work and Mary Ann had a bunch of adjusting to do. She must have been thinking, “My God what have I gotten myself into.”

Jean Ann was right across the road so Mary Ann was not totally alone. She liked Jean Ann and Jean Ann liked her. It could have been worse.

## The Long Road (part-1)

JT knew he had been badly damaged psychologically by his time in the school system. No young man should learn to hate. Hatred is the tool of the devil and at the core of the world's problems.

The thing that was different at least to JT was he had learned to hate the very foundational parts of society. To him the educational system was no good and he hated it. The thing was the world was made up of people who had gone through the system and thought that it was ok; some even thought it was great! JT never did understand those types of people and he never would.

JT had read the Bible cover to cover more than once. He had listened to the ministers of the church teach out of it. And while some would say he was brain washed, JT did not think so. What the ministers were saying just plain made sense to him and what's more it was backed up in the Bible.

So the only thing JT had to do was decide if he believed in God and if so did he believe that the Bible was God's word. To JT it took a whole lot more faith to believe that life was just a cosmic accident, then to believe that life begets life. The old man that JT had come to respect, who was the leader of the church, had a very simple explanation that summed it up very well.

He said that if you were walking through a freshly plowed field and you found a very expensive Swiss watch all wound up ticking away out there in the middle of no place would you assume that the watch put its self together and

wound its self up and started running on its own? The earth itself was so complex that the watch was simple by comparison. We humans with the ability to build that watch were so much more complex. Yet some people said we just evolved by accident after a big bang! This was a totally idiotic idea to JT.

If we were created by a superior being, why? To what purpose? Did this being just walk away and leave no instructions? Could one contact this being? Would He hear you?

The old preacher also impressed JT with the fact that he always stated that he did not want you to believe him. He wanted you to prove it to yourself. Don't take his word for it. Open your Bibles and prove it.

Being a young man and growing up in this particular organization he had come to believe that the Holy Bible was the foundation of all knowledge. He had read it several times. It made sense to him that this was the instruction book the creator had left to guide man in this present "enlightened" age. The age in which the "intelligentsia" of the world was saying God did not exist. Naturally due to his experience with the "enlightened" community he had no trouble rejecting what they had to say.

They created the society that had taught him what hatred was. In the process they nearly destroyed him. So it only followed that JT would look to another source to find out what life was all about.

He turned to God for the answers. Just over 10 years before that JT's mom and dad had come home all wet. Now it was his turn. JT's baptism was in 1972 on the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting for the people of God's church.

It could not have been more appropriate. JT needed all the help he could get and in the end he had found the right source. JT did not get married to Mary Ann until 1976 and his baptism had come at about the same time that he first really took notice of her.

JT was no saint. Far from it. But he understood that God can forgive all of your sins. He sent His son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could come before God in prayer, clean and free of our sins. And JT knew he needed that for sure.

JT also realized that according to the scriptures we have to be forgiven daily for our sins. God will forgive our sins. But we have to acknowledge them and strive to overcome them. He understood the basics of wrong and right. He understood the laws of God. He also understood that even though the "Christian" world said the law was done away with, it was not.

He knew that the part that Christ came to do away with was the sacrificial law. The spiritual law still applied. Christ was the focal point of all of the sacrifices in the Old Testament. They all pointed to Him. He came and made the ultimate sacrifice. There was no longer a need for the sacrifices that only pictured what he did.

What JT did not realize was the depth of his sins. He had no real idea even what his worst sins were. Fortunately God continued merciful and patient, because it would be another 35 years before he could fully come to grips with this.

He thought he was doing everything right. He went to church each week, he tithed, and he attended the Holy Days regularly. But he was wrong and it would take another 35 years for God to show him just how wrong he was.

### Back At the Ranch

JT was still working in the state capital and driving 160+ miles a day to work. The trip took about one hour and forty-five minutes each way. Working midnight to noon and being on the road for three and a half hours a day left only 8 hours to eat and sleep. Fortunately JT was still young. The shifts were three days one week and four the next. He worked Saturday midnight to Sunday noon and repeated this Sunday, Monday and every other Tuesday night. He lasted two years at that schedule before he became convinced it would be hazardous to his health.

JT came to that conclusion one day on the way home. He was only a few miles from home when his car started bouncing around and shaking. This woke him up just in time to avoid hitting a very large light pole head on at around 60 mph! The little rinky-dink car he was driving would have been totaled and JT would probably have been dead. Living in the small town of Columbia while

working in the state capital had certainly made this first couple of years interesting. He knew something had to change.

Mary Ann seemed to adapt ok. But she did have a lot of headaches. JT was not sure but he suspected that he gave them to her. They discovered three or four years later that she was allergic to red top grass. Guess what the three-acre lot that they had in Columbia was covered with? It was indeed red top and she mowed it.

The blizzard of 1978 was one incident that occurred while they lived there. As it turned out JT had just pulled up in the drive way when it started to snow. It was his last day on shift and there was no snow on the ground yet. He noticed that the flakes were huge. They looked the size of quarters. He did not think too much about it and he had not heard that a blizzard was coming. He went in the house and shortly went to bed.

He had just worked his four-day week so it was Wednesday afternoon around 2:00 pm. Being tired; it was not unusual for JT to sleep right through till the next morning. What a surprise he got when he looked out the next morning. The snow was nearly two feet deep and up to the bumper of the car. Nothing was moving.

JT got his clothes and boots on and started to go out the back porch, He was unable to get the door open for the snow. He finally had to nearly break the door off the hinges to get it open. He walked across the road to his mom and dad's to

see how they were doing. He found out that all the city streets were closed and no one was allowed out driving.

Well that was fine because he did not want to go any place anyway. They shoveled a path between their back doors. They sat around and played euchre all day. It was actually one of the best times they ever had.

When they got low on milk, butter and other things, JT and his dad put on a couple of back packs and walked about two miles to the only store in the area. The shelves were not too well stocked but they got what they needed. They put everything in the packs and went back home. It was three days before the plows opened the road between the houses and they were finally able to get out. Just in time for JT to go back to work.

After the near miss with the telephone pole they had to look at the options. He and Mary Ann determined that they needed to move closer to JT's job.

Also Mary Ann had turned up pregnant and was now getting pretty big. JT really had not wanted to have kids. JT really did not think he would make a very good father. His mom and dad, Mary Ann's mom and dad, Mary Ann's grandmother and Mary Ann had out voted him. Even Grandma and Grandpa Perkins were on her side. He was so out numbered he had to give up.

When the blizzard hit Mary Ann was about five months along and JT was just glad she was not due yet. This situation made it necessary for Mary Ann to start staying with her mother and father again since her doctors were in the capital.

She had planned to have the baby at a facility she was familiar with. JT had to work. He stayed part time in the big city and part time in Columbia, especially when the grass needed cut.

Mary Ann was not due until the last of July or the first of August. There was work to do at home in Columbia. As the summer wore on she got bigger and bigger. When she walked she waddled like a duck. When she sat down on the couch she had to back up to it and fall in it. To get up she had to have help. This delighted and amused those around her, especially since she did not see the humor in it. She would give JT that look and he knew he had gotten her goat.

Mary Ann wanted JT to go into the delivery room with her. JT's work schedule conflicted with the Lamaze classes that were required at the time. So JT got out of that ordeal. (Not that it made him mad)!

When the day finally arrived JT did have to sit in the labor room. There had been many false starts and JT did not believe her when she told him he should get some sleep that day. It was his last day of work that week and as usual he stayed up. This helped him sleep at night on his days off. Therefore, he had been up 24 hours when she told him it was time to go.

The hospital was only about four or five miles away, so no problem there. The trouble began in the labor room. Now the labor room was a fairly standard two bed hospital room. There was hardly any one else having a baby at the hospital that day so they had the room to themselves.

The only thing JT could figure was that since the hospital was run by women they must not have cared what the fathers did. There were only two hard chairs in the room and it was as cold as ice in there. You could nearly see your breath. If JT had known this he would have brought his insulated coveralls and hat.

Though sleep deprived her moaning and groaning would have been enough to keep him awake during her contractions. To add to it the nurse brought in this big machine that had cables and belts attached and turned it on. This was to monitor her contractions and the baby's heart beat.

JT knew that a baby was going to change his life forever but he hadn't expected the first one to drive him crazy even before it was born! The part of the machine that monitored the baby's heartbeat had an audible sound that it made every time that little heart hit a beat. Wup, wup. Wup, wup! Every 20 to 30 seconds. It might not have been so bad had he not been freezing cold, sitting on a hard chair, and going on 24 hours with no sleep. The noise became like Chinese water torture.

He was being paid back for getting Mary Ann 'urped'. It went on all night. The baby did not come until 8 or 9 o'clock the next morning.

JT knew his plight was not nearly as bad as what his wife was going through. He was not unsympathetic but there was little he could do for her but keep out of the way and listen to wup, wup, wup, wup, wup, wup.

One of the night shift nurses did take pity on him and got him a second chair, some pillows and more importantly a nice warm blanket. This was around midnight and he had already been tortured for four hours.

After the kind nurse helped him out he was able to sleep a little but every one of Mary Ann's contractions would bring him out of it. JT had suffered working long night shifts going 24 hours with no sleep and many other such things. This night on a roughness scale of 1-10 was about a 14.

By the time the kind nurse was getting off her shift, she came in and convinced JT to go down and get some breakfast. She led him down to the hospital cafeteria even though he had been there several times before. JT could not have told you what he had.

When he got back they had taken Mary Ann to the delivery room. He was shown to the waiting room. There was only one other guy in the waiting room at the time and his wife delivered fairly soon after JT got there. Suddenly, he had the waiting room to himself. You guessed what happened, didn't you? JT stretched out on the waiting room couch and the next thing he knew someone was telling him everything was fine. He could come back and see his wife and new baby girl.

If JT had not had the keen sense of responsibility his dad had beaten into him, he would have gotten up and run the other way. He still did not think he would be a good father, but it was a little too late now. Had he known just how much he lacked he probably would have run anyway. It was a good thing we

cannot see our future. So they took little Gracie Ann home to Columbia, and grand parents on all sides were happy.

It was not too long after this that JT had the close call with the telephone pole and he knew something had to change. He could not afford to risk his life traveling so far back and forth to work. He had responsibilities which he took seriously. They put the house in Columbia up for sale and moved to the big city.

### Back To the Big City

Mary Ann's grandmother was a great old lady. She loved JT because he loved Mary Ann. Secretly Mary Ann was her favorite granddaughter.

Grandma Wilkins had a big house near Mary Ann's parents in the middle of the city. Mary Ann had grown up in the neighborhood and she liked it.

Grandma consented to let JT and Mary Ann live up stairs in her home. Their only cost was splitting the utilities and food. This worked out great. JT did work around the house and helped whenever he could. And he was only 25 minutes from work. 25 minutes is quite a bit different from 90 minutes one-way.

Living in the big city did not appeal to JT but there was no other alternative he could see. Running the risk of sleeping behind the wheel was simply not worth it.

Mary Ann and Gracie were at home in the big city. JT simply had to endure it.

Mary Ann and JT were both only children. They had agreed that they would have at least two children. Growing up as an only child had its advantages. It also had its disadvantages. About two years later Mary Ann had Pamela.

JT was already feeling the pressure of living with all that estrogen. The thought of living in the same house with three women was down right intimidating. He called a halt. People kept asking if he was going to try for a boy! JT said no way! With his luck he would be living with four women and that would simply be impossible. From one woman (his mother) to three women was scary enough.

He still had no clue how to be a father, especially with girls. The only real lesson he had learned about child rearing was from his dad. That lesson had been sheer intimidation. When JT looked back at it was the only thing that would work on JT. He was just as hard headed as his dad. His dad however, was about two times his size. 140 pounds versus 260 pounds was no fight. That would have been a massacre. JT was never crazy enough to take his dad on directly.

He had reservations about using this tactic on girls. It seemed to him that girls would require more finesse. He had no clue or guideline on how this might work. So blundering on in his normal style JT launched into fatherhood.

The first thing he realized was he had to have an income. Man did these women get expensive fast! Fortunately, he had a steady job and there was room for advancement.

Grandma Wilkins was good to JT and Mary Ann and they stayed with her for about four years. The girls had their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother all there to take care of them. JT felt he did not have to worry about them. He was working all kinds of bad shifts and was pretty worn out most of the time.

The first few years of the girl's lives were not influenced much by dad. As they grew bigger it became rapidly apparent that something had to change. Grandma Wilkins was great and she tolerated the kids quite well, but it was obvious that they needed more space. So when a small two bedroom one bath bungalow went up for sale on the next street over they bought it. Or should one say JT and Mary Ann took out a mortgage on it.

The place was a mess. The lady who owned it had about twenty cats. She had kept them in the house. She also had six dogs out in the garage. It took days of cleaning and disinfecting just to be able to move in.

During this time JT had been promoted a couple of times. They were able to meet their bills without too many problems. It was about this time that Gracie started school.

Mary Ann set about making their new place livable. The house had no air conditioning and was set within four feet of an alley. It was not too easy for JT to get sleep. The windows had to be kept open with fans going. The neighbors dogs barked and cars ran up and down the alley in the day time heat. Many nights he

went to work with not nearly enough rest. All too often he would wake up in a pool of sweat and be unable to get back to sleep. And then there were the children.

Mary Ann usually kept Gracie and Pam fairly quiet. Many times she would take them to grandma's or great grandma's so JT could get some sleep.

This did not help with the other kids in the neighborhood. JT often thought that if he ever met the guy that invented the 'Big Wheel' he would tie him up, put him in the center of a big roller skating rink with about 100 kids on Big Wheels, and see how long it would take him to go crazy.

Then there were the dogs. One dog would start barking at a squirrel or something. You could hear each dog on the alley start up one at a time until they all were going. It was usually the dog right across the alley that started it all. If JT had had his way he would have loaded his shot gun and walked down that alley. Any dog that barked would no longer be able to.

Sleep deprivation is hard even on young men. But he was young and he managed to survive until he could afford a window air conditioner.

This is how he started his life in the big city. He was in for yet more unimaginable changes.

## Chapter 6

### The Growing Years

With a wife and two kids to feed JT had to really buckle down and work long hard hours to take care of them. Mary Ann had talked about going to work. JT thought it was more important that the girls have their mother at home so she stayed home.

All these things had been on his mind for sometime. He took his first promotion just a little before Gracie was born. He went from assistant operator to operator.

The operator's job was more responsibility than the assistant operator. The operator was charged with the overall operation of the plant not just half of it. He made the decisions about how much air to put up, how much wasting to do and where to set the return rates.

For those who wouldn't have the slightest idea as to what I just said let me put it to you this way. The biological system that comprised the heart and core of the wastewater treatment plants of that era were controlled by the amount of wasting, return sludge flow and air provided. In other words, if he fouled this up the plant would not do its job.

As an operator JT also had to share the training duties with the shift foreman. JT had a new foreman by the name of Roger Williams. Roger was about

two years younger than JT but he had a whole lot more experience. He was a good teacher.

Roger was good at drawing things in 3D. This helped JT and the assistants to better understand the workings of the plant. Roger and JT started the first ever training manual specifically for the Acton plant. They used Roger's drawings and hand written explanations. JT found that he liked helping others understand the plants. It also helped him learn it even more.

After a couple of years with Roger, JT could handle just about anything that came up in the plant. Apparently the old manger thought so too because when another foreman job came open they were after JT to take the shift. He did not think he would like it much. He did not mind taking orders but giving them was another thing. Unfortunately, the manager was a good manipulator and conned JT into it.

JT had never been directly in charge of anything bigger than an old Farmall tractor. Being placed in charge of a multi million dollar plant, responsible for protecting the environment and other people's health was something he took seriously.

His job was to make dirty water clean so that the fish and wildlife as well as the "down stream users" were protected. That is what this plant was designed to do. His bosses had enough confidence that they turned it over to him for 12 hours a

day three and four days a week. Along with that he was given charge of a shift of one operator and two assistant operators. “Oh” and a pay raise too.

By now he had his class three certification and was ambitious, His shift would be the best shift on the plant. Boy was he in for a rude awakening. There were three other people who had to want it too and at least two thirds of them disagreed with him. The operator had been around long enough to know better than to fight him directly. The assistant operators would fight him every time he tried to get something done.

The idea that they were viewing him as the enemy did not readily occur to him. JT had been brought up to have a respect for his bosses and for the most part the bosses had been deserving of respect. These guys simply were out for a fight. JT was getting this first lesson in why you don't want to be a boss. There are people out there who view the boss as the enemy and make it their business to make life difficult for him. He would learn later that some did it because they were just plain lazy. To others it was a game.

The ones who made a game of it were the worst. They actually looked for ways to cause trouble. Since this was a completely foreign concept to JT, they had a field day with him at first. It did not take JT long to figure this out. Being 6'4" tall and weighing over 200 pounds now became a good asset. They were never sure that they wanted to take him on physically and JT could still turn on those ice-cold looks if he wanted to.

As JT matured into a seasoned supervisor he collected a reputation for being an s.o.b. With few exceptions he did not have to flex the authority figure too much. Things were changing at work.

The city was expanding the treatment plants. They were going to become ‘advanced’ wastewater treatment plants. In layman’s terms this meant that they would do the job even better.

JT had never been around a major construction site. It amazed him to see how much they could change the way the very ground looked. Great mounds of dirt rose up and then disappeared again; some mounds were leveled and left where they were. Holes were filled with concrete slabs. There were walls, pipes, and all kinds of equipment. This was all done while the operations of the existing plant were still going on.

The construction continued for four years. At one point they had the main pump station almost completely surrounded by excavations. The station was just a few hundred feet away but you had to drive over a mile around the new levee just to reach it. There was “no way to get there from here”.

One of the major things JT found out about huge construction sites was that you were either up to your rear end in mud or choking on dust. Since the construction companies normally did not work Sundays JT was able to get a detailed look at what was going on with the construction. This would stand him in

good stead later. It helped him understand how everything worked when the new plant came on line.

He would go out to the different parts of the site and make sketches of the structures as they were being built. He would walk through the giant pipes that connected it together and went places where very few people would ever go again. When the plant began operations these places would be buried underground and full of nasty water.

These were some good times for JT. He was learning and he enjoyed it. There was much more to come. This new plant would use high purity oxygen to make the process work even better.

### The New Plant

The new plant that JT would be helping to run was in many ways different from the old plant. The basic concepts were the same. You screened the waste coming in. It had to have the sand, gravel, grease and floatable materials removed. The heavy waste materials had to be settled out. This was all done in the same way as before only on a much larger scale. Physical means were still used. You would screen with bar screens, slowing the flow down so that sand and gravel (grit) would settle out. This could then be removed in the grit chamber. The flow had to be slowed down more so the grease and floatable material could be skimmed off the top. The heavier solids would sink and be pumped off.

These were all very simple principals used in all treatment plants. The only difference was the size of everything had to be increased! The plant would go from handling about 50 million gallons per day to about 150 million gallons per day!

The biological part of the plant was another story. The old plant had a biological system that could not comply with the new regulations on handling ammonia nitrogen in the effluent. A plant with a newer type of system was required.

To put this very complex process as simply as possible, you have two basic types of waste materials that require biological treatment. They are either dissolved into the wastewater, or so light that they will not settle, or are too heavy to float physically so they stay suspended in the water. Without treatment these two basic types would be the cause of many problems in the river.

These basic “polluters” are complex carbon based wastes usually dissolved in the water or dispersed in it. They might be things like milk, sugar, food particles and fecal matter. The old plant’s biological system was designed to handle these types of materials. But 100 million more gallons per day needed to be handled and additionally remove the ammonia nitrogen that the old plant could not handle.

The human body puts off a good bit of ammonia nitrogen as a waste by-product. Now for any one who knows anything about growing plants like corn, beans, or flowers or anything like that you know that the nitrogen levels in the soil are important. Farmers use ammonia nitrogen in their fields as fertilizer. There is a

good bit of ammonia nitrogen in the wastewater of a city, and its effect on the rivers lakes and streams can be major.

So the new plant was designed to handle this with a two stage biological system and the use of high purity oxygen. The first stage was a system called biological roughing. It consisted of a pump station with four large centrifugal pumps and four large fixed media towers. These pumps were the biggest centrifugal pumps on the plant. They stood every bit of ten feet tall and could pump 60 million gallons per day (or about 4200 gallons per minute) each 45 feet in the air. Each pump required a 700 horse power electric motor the size of a small bathroom for power.

The pipes were large enough for a fat man to crawl through on his hands and knees. There were four of them. Each of the towers was 100 foot in diameter and stood 30 foot above the ground. A large pipe was in the center of each tower, and a set of large rectangular arms that spread the water over the plastic media that filled these towers. The towers did not hold the water. The plastic media was designed to allow the water to flow over it and provide a large surface area for the zoological (bio) mass to grow on.

This mass forms a slimy growth that clings to the media, and as the wastewater flows over it the protozoa and bacteria trap the small particles and absorb the dissolved material and use it for food. With large ventilation fans supplying air this

system removes 30 to 60 percent of the harmful carbon based material still in the water.

From these towers the water flows to the second phase of the biological system, which is a suspended media biological system. This is a little more complicated. The building or structure was bigger than four football fields put two wide and two deep to form a rectangle.

JT had walked through the pipes and channels that fed this system when it was being built. Yes I said walked upright through these pipes. And standing in the center he could spread his arms straight out and not touch the sides of these pipes. JT was over 6 feet tall and these pipes were about 9 feet tall! This was one of those places where no one would walk again for many years.

Two of the large pipes fed a complex multi level structure with 12 large gates that controlled the flow coming from the bio-roughing system. These gates channeled the water through a large mixing chamber where the suspended bio-mass was mixed into it. Next it went up to six large Archimedean screw pumps which lifted the entire flow about 25 feet vertically so it could go to the reactor tanks. Now a screw pump is simply a large auger like the farmers use to transfer grain from grain bins and other farm equipment. The difference is instead of corn or beans it moves water.

These screw pumps were a bit larger. Twelve feet in diameter and about sixty feet long, they could each pump up to 66 million gallons a day. They pumped

all the plant flow and several million gallons of the suspended bacterial mass that had to be mixed in to finish treating the wastewater.

To understand the basic principal you have to understand that both types of bacteria are present in the wastewater. The type that break down carbon matter. In other words you and me. Humans are carbon-based and live on carbon-based food. We also have a major intake of nitrogen in our food and our respiration. We require oxygen to live but pure oxygen is toxic to us. God put only enough of it in the air to do the job. About 21% of what we breathe is oxygen. The rest of the air we breathe is about 78% nitrogen and 1% rare gasses.

The human body has to get rid of this nitrogen and much of it is exhaled. We do retain it in our systems and accumulate it from the food we eat. It is this complex ammonia nitrogen that has to be broken down so it does not cause problems in the rivers. The bacteria that breaks down carbon is dominant in wastewater because carbon based waste is the predominant type. In order to help the ammonia 'nitrifiers' become predominate in the second phase 30 to 60% of the carbon based material must be removed in the first phase. This makes the nitrogen based material more predominant and they multiply in the second phase. The nitrogen waste is broken down into more stable compounds that will not do so much damage to the environment. This giant structure was designed and built to make this happen.

The first two football field size parts of the structure were actually large covered tanks. There were 40 tanks. 20 were on each side divided east and west. Each tank had a mixing system with a 96” wide four bladed mixer in the center. The tank’s purpose was two fold. First to give the bacteria in the mass time to work on the material that is left in the wastewater. This required about four hours of mixing time in the tanks. The second purpose was to provide the necessary oxygen for the bacteria to breathe.

This type of bacteria requires oxygen to breathe like you and me. Obviously you cannot leave this mass suspended in the water. If left it would destroy the river almost immediately for many miles. It just so happens that if you stop mixing this material the mass settles out leaving cleaned water on the top.

The other 2 football field sized parts of this structure were a set of tanks that allow the settling to happen. The bacterial mass settles and is siphoned off, returned to the mixing chamber to treat more flow coming in. It was a continuous recycling operation.

The cleaned water is taken off the top and sent to the two final processes. These processes polish the water to the point that it meets the permit requirements that the government has set. These two final processes are filtration and disinfection.

The problem with filtration is volume. 125 million gallons a day of filtered water is not as simple as using the filter on your faucet. Another structure called

the effluent filter building is required. This building is only about the size of one football field divided into 12 filters. These filters have layers of sand and gravel that the water flows through and filters out the fine particles that are left. One problem is that eventually the filters get plugged up and require an entire system to clean them up.

This complex system of pipes, tanks, and channels was nearly JT's undoing. During the construction phase of this building JT and one of his operators were exploring the inner workings of this system. JT wanted to see a part of the system that required him to step out on a large 4x4 that was partially submerged in water. This would enable him to reach a ladder that went up to the channel above. They were deep underground in parts of the structure that would not see the light of day for many years to come. The structures were two to three stories deep and would be filled with water when the plant was put on line.

JT not thinking that it might be a problem stepped onto the 4x4. It seemed firm enough so he took another step. Then it happened. The 4x4 went under the water and so did JT; clothes and all. His heavy boots took him down quickly. He just had time to grab the ladder and the edge of the structure to keep from going under entirely.

He was in up to his armpits when he finally was able to stop himself falling. His feet were not touching the bottom. JT was able to get out with the help of his operator and the ladder. He lost his calculator. (The little hand calculators had just

started getting to the point the common man could afford them.) They simply did not like to be soaked in water.

It turned out that this system would be JT's favorite part of the new plant because you could actually see a major difference in the effluent this system would make.

The final system was the disinfection system. There are only two things left that can be harmful to humans after the water goes through the filtration process. They are e-coli and fecal coliform. These are the toughest of all the harmful material in the wastewater. These are actually viruses and dangerous bacteria that cause diseases like cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, polio and typhoid. You don't have out breaks of these diseases like they had 150 years ago and this is why. The disinfection system in the wastewater treatment plants stops it.

Many people think that chlorination is a bad thing. Without it we would still have these diseases much like in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. So for most of our current modern age JT and men like him had been actually protecting public health as a routine part of their jobs. Only men like JT understood it.

Presently they are trying new types of disinfection that don't have residual problems. JT understood that it was not a perfect system but it was the best they could do at this time and it sure beat having epidemics of typhoid, cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, and polio.

The new plant had experimented with a different type of disinfection called ozonation. Electrically charging a high purity oxygen stream and producing O<sub>3</sub> ozone produced the ozone needed for disinfection. The ozone was better in many ways. It was produced on sight not hauled in on trucks and it left the water so crystal clear you could see the bottom of some of the deeper structures.

Its by-product was oxygen. Ozone returned to oxygen after about 20 minutes with no harmful residuals. The down side was it is very costly to make and the cost of maintaining the equipment was even higher. Ultimately the city scrapped the idea of using ozone and went back to good old chlorine. It was cheap, easy to use, and effective. They added a dechlorination system which helped some.

### The Big Challenge

We all know that JT did not have a good deal of success in the educational system. However the new plant required a good bit of training. This training was job specific and was similar to the training JT had been doing on his shift for several years.

JT took a long look at the different parts of the new plant and without a doubt the oxygen generation system was the most complex and difficult part of the project. Cryogenic oxygen generation is the science of fractional distillation of air into its component parts. To JT this was a make or break situation. If he were able

to grasp the cryo plant operation all the rest would be easy. JT volunteered for cryo training.

In order for the primary parts of the new plant to work the oxygen plant had to be functional. Training on it started about six months before the scheduled start up of the new plant. The first month was spent in the classroom learning the basics in the operations manual which was about six inches thick. The process and instrumentation diagram was about 17 feet long.

The entire concept of fractional distillation was totally new to a high school flunk through but JT found it fascinating. How gasses are formed and maintained in place by temperature and pressure was something JT had never studied or even heard of before this. Why couldn't they have had something like this in school? He might have had a much more active interest in science class, then again maybe not. Expansion and cooling of gasses to liquefaction temperatures was and still is an amazing process.

Remember to operate the second half of the biological system required high purity oxygen and so did the new ozone disinfection system. Cryogenic oxygen generation was the best technology available at that time.

So JT launched into this with great interest. The cryo plant was by far the smallest part of the new plant in size, yet it contained the most powerful motors, and the second most dangerous product in the entire plant. Only ozone was more dangerous and then only because the ozone gas produced is extremely deadly.

Oxygen makes common things explosive and high purity nitrogen is also deadly. The chances for exposure to ozone were much higher than being exposed to high purity nitrogen. The dangers of high purity oxygen were only if you fouled up pretty bad and or did not follow safety procedures. Ozone could get you before you even knew what happened and someone else could be the cause.

JT was used to dealing with 100% chlorine in liquid and gas form. It was deadly in just a few breaths in high enough concentrations. Ozone was said to be 100 times as bad. If someone over pressurized the contact tank when you were on it you could get ozone at 15-20% directly. This was not good and there would be no chance of survival.

At any rate, JT studied cryogenic oxygen generation for over a month before the contractor started up the cryo plant. They started running it straight to atmosphere. In other words, they made the oxygen and vented it directly back to the air where they just took it from. This was so the plant operators could learn operations by actually operating a fully functional facility. This was very expensive training. The cost of electricity alone was about \$10,000 dollars a day, or so JT was told.

The cryo compound consisted of two buildings of rather small size and a cold box that looked like an extra long railroad box car set on one end and bolted to a concrete pad. The circular cryogenic liquid oxygen tank was about the size of a medium sized grain bin. It had an inner tank like a giant thermos bottle made of

stainless steel that could hold up to 10,000 gallons of liquid oxygen at a temperature of  $-298$  degrees Fahrenheit. They actually used part of the training period to fill this tank.

JT actually enjoyed this project. He threw himself into learning everything he could. He found the science of the mechanical expansion of gas fascinating. The gas crossed a turbine expander to cool. It went from around 30 pounds per square inch to 10 pounds pressure then taking that cooler air through a heat exchanger. This allowed the first air to be expanded before the second loop of air was expanded. The second loop was already cooler when it was expanded and so the third loop was even cooler. A continuous cooling cycle was formed that allowed the gasses to reach super cold temperatures of  $-320$  degrees Fahrenheit. At this temperature both the nitrogen and the oxygen became liquid.

This whole process happened inside the 'cold box'. The cold box was built in Pennsylvania and shipped to the site in one piece where it was set up and bolted to its specially made concrete pad. Then the main compressors and all the other equipment were connected to it.

The only way to know what was inside the cold box was to take the training and learn to read the 17-foot long process and instrumentation diagram. Some parts were not even included in the training other than to give a verbal explanation of what they did. There was something about proprietary information and need to know. Apparently JT and the others did not need to know. Exactly

what the inside of the cold box looked like was never known by those who used it. But it did the job.

JT remembered the first time he ever actually got to see “LOX” (liquid oxygen). It was the most beautiful deep blue color and crystal clear. It looked much like the sky on a clear winter’s day along about evening. Liquid oxygen at ambient pressure (the same pressure we have on us every day) is at about a  $-297$  to  $-298$  degrees. It is boiling at this temperature and is giving off high purity oxygen as a gas.

For those of you who do not know, high purity oxygen is very dangerous; some say that it is flammable. Technically oxygen is not flammable, however when you combine oxygen with nearly any other carbon based material the material becomes very flammable. The type of material determines just how flammable.

Oxygen allows steel and iron to burn. It is called rust and it’s a very slow process. If high purity oxygen is poured on to asphalt, the asphalt becomes explosive. If you were to drop a hammer onto asphalt where high purity oxygen had been poured it would explode. It would be very fast burning. If a person were exposed to high purity oxygen and then went out to take a smoke they would become a human torch.

Oxygen aids in combustion but is not flammable. Nitrogen on the other hand will put out a fire. The problem with nitrogen is that it will not support life as we

know it. One or two good breaths of high purity nitrogen will kill you. Nitrogen liquefies at around  $-320$  degrees Fahrenheit at ambient pressure. JT only saw liquid nitrogen one time and it was crystal clear with no color at all. Nitrogen was a by-product of the plant and was released back into the atmosphere.

The cryogenic oxygen plant was by far and away the most complicated process of the new plant. JT was able not only to learn how it worked but excelled at it. When the actual start up production time arrived JT was given the job of “acting cryo coordinator”. There was a need for a ‘go to’ guy for this system and JT was the go to guy. The position did not exist at the time on paper. The “acting” cryo coordinator was on call 24 hrs a day seven days a week.

Lest you think, “Why go through all of this?” and “What does it have to do with the story?” Remember back when JT was in school he had his self-confidence kicked out of him. This was the point in his life when JT finally got it back. He joined an elite group of people who actually understood how to separate the molecules of oxygen from the molecules of nitrogen in common every day air. They were able to capture them separately and use them in large quantities. The new plant demanded up to 150 thousand cubic feet of 98% oxygen in gas form to do what it was designed to do.

JT was one of a handful of people in the plants that could make that plant work. His work kept oxygen flowing so the oxygen nitrification process could take place, (the second phase of the biological system). He was no longer the bumbling

fool that his enemies had made him out to be in years past. At least some of his old wounds were healing.

JT remained apart though. He was never just “one of the boys”. He never would be an insider. Everything he did was on his own merit. Fortunately for JT he had a manager who appreciated his work and rewarded him accordingly.

### The Quiet Years

The next several years were quiet years. Life fell into a routine at home that did not change very much. JT had taken on the new job with the city. After the start up of the new plant JT began working with the training manager. Now at this time they had a new training center where they could also create training materials. The federal government had funded training of all the new employees as well as existing employees with the start up of the new plants.

JT had always liked the training part of the job. When he was offered a chance to do it full time he jumped at it. This put him on a day shift five days a week. Teaching others about the plants was a great job and he loved it.

However trouble was brewing. JT worked in the training department for a total of about six years. Between the third and fourth year would be the worst time of his life to that point. It was only the beginning.

JT's mother was diagnosed with skin cancer and by the time they decided to have something done it was too late. JT would watch in horror as his mother slowly died before his eyes over nearly a year.

To his dying day JT would never get his mother's face the last time he saw her alive out of his head. That horrible thing that took his mother in such a cruel way was not done yet either.

After his mother's death, JT went back to work and things gradually returned too normal. The girls were growing like weeds. Both of them were in school now.

Mary Ann decided to see how well she bounced one day during that winter and found out she did not bounce well at all. The fall broke her arm. Mary Ann never did things just part way, oh no! She had to break her upper arm. JT got to do all the shopping, cooking, and housework for about six months while Mary Ann healed.

There were rumors going around work of something to do with having the plants privatized. This idea did not appeal to JT but then they were just rumors. During JT's last year in the training office those rumors became fact. JT had a choice to make. He either stayed with the training center or went back to working shift at the plants.

The plant manager Ed Smith was a good friend of JT's. Things were very uncertain. JT decided to go back to plant work before the take over. Had JT known

what was about to happen and its outcome he might have made a different decision. He could never have guessed what privatization would mean.

JT went into it trying to keep an open mind. By the end of the first year he would be convinced that this was not a good idea. JT had worked for the city for nearly 20 years and the public employees' retirement fund was going to be his road to a decent retirement. It had been his intent to work for the city for 30 or 35 years and then retire to do something else.

With the advent of privatization that all went out the window. By working for a private company he could no longer invest in the public employees' retirement plan. He had what was in there but it was not nearly enough for a good retirement check. He had to start over with a different plan that included a 401k and a mystery plan that the company claimed they were funding to insure that the employees retirement would be "as good as" or better than what they had with the city. Most of the employees were skeptical. What choice did they have?

Everyone had to reapply for his or her job, have an interview, and take a drug test. JT had no problem with this part of the plan. Then they were told that if the company did not make them a job offer they would be placed into a work pool with the city helping patch pot holes in the streets. If you did get a job offer you had better take it. If you did not you would be out of a job.

JT was one of five supervisors at the Action plant. They all shared an upper floor office in the main building. The office was just down the hall from the main

control room. When the day came and everyone got their notices JT found that he was the only one left who was still working the plant. All four of the other supervisors were gone. His new job was not as a supervisor but as a training coordinator. The entire operations staff had been cut by two thirds. For every one person still working on the plant there were two who were gone over night. Needless to say this was quite a shock to those who now had to do the work that three people used to do.

JT still tried to keep an open mind. He knew that the down sizing was necessary. There had always been a core group of people who were dedicated to taking care of the plants and the environment. However there was also a layer of “dead wood” as the saying goes.

The dead wood consisted of the bum kids of politician’s buddies who wanted those kids to have a paycheck. The politicians would hire them even if they were useless trouble makers. Privatization gave the plant managers the golden opportunity to get rid of the dead wood. The problem was they also got rid of some of the “good wood” as well. They had to meet quotas to be politically correct and reduce the staff to the number agreed to.

Sorting this all out took some time. JT started his new job. And while it was short lived, this period of learning nearly did him in.

## Chapter 7

### Privatization and Other Problems

In order to understand this chapter you first have to realize that many of these things occurred almost simultaneously. Privatization kicked it all off. For JT it was much like a domino effect. One thing after another after another occurred for the next 10 years plus.

JT was dedicated to his work. He knew that helping keep the environment clean was a very worthwhile thing to do with his life. He was proud of what he did and the plants where he worked. JT had done his job and done it well in all kinds of circumstances including the worst weather. Neither rain or snow or sleet or hail kept the wastewater treatment plant operator from his appointed rounds.

The thought of making a profit off of the work he did, paying dividends to investors or making merchandise of caring for the environment had never crossed his mind. He was providing a public service as a servant of the city tax payers and the people who were the down stream users.

Suddenly, people were talking about profit margins, selling the technology and even worse the knowledge of what they did back to the taxpayers and the city. It stunned him. The city had paid for his training and rewarded him fairly for his expertise and experience. Now he was sold off like a piece of meat on a chopping block. Take the job or become unemployed. Not much choice at all, so what do you do? Make the best of things and go on.

One of the benefits of privatization was you no longer were required to live within the county that the plants were in. This was something the politicians had come up with after JT was hired and only applied to him after he moved back to the big city. This was a good thing for JT because around this same time John Robert was getting sick. He was developing the same problem grandma Hall had. With John Robert it was a bit different. JT could not move in with him or he would be back to the 160 mile a day drive. Now it would be 5 days a week. John Robert would not move up to the city.

Two things happened that pretty much forced the situation. John Robert had two car wrecks that pushed his car insurance out of sight and the old house he and Jean Ann had lived in burned way beyond repair. JT had no choice but to take control of the situation.

In order to take care of his dad he had to sell out in the big city and find a place that would work for both of them. JT found a place that was ideal or so he thought. It was out in the country. There were lots of trees and woods to walk in. The house had multiple levels so his dad could have his privacy but still be kept an eye on. The kids had their own rooms. It all seemed to work out except JT was now driving 100 miles a day. He was working just 8 hours a day 5 days a week so it was doable. It wasn't great but it was doable.

JT lost money on the sale of the house in the city. The house that his dad was living in was in JT's name. He wound up selling it and the property for a loss

as well. JT did not have the time or money to clean up the mess left by the fire so he took a beating.

All that was left was just a moderate down payment on the new place which came with a thirty-year mortgage. At least he was out of the city again. This place was by a moderate sized lake created primarily for flood control. It was surrounded by a bunch of hills and hollows and some good fishing holes. It made the daily drive worth it for a while.

About the time they were moving another thing occurred that stunned JT. The old preacher JT had come to respect and love had died about 7 years earlier. The church had been taken over by another man who did not impress JT much. However, as long as he taught from the bible JT accepted it. His life was busy. He did not notice the subtle changes being made to the foundational principals of his faith until suddenly he was confronted with a change that Mary Ann first caught and brought to his attention.

Now, in the midst of all the other upheaval at home and work, the church came into question. He had to confront this. As it turned out the church he had been attending for so many years split over doctrinal issues.

JT had to go back and reprove what he had come to believe and determine which way to go. If that was not enough he had two daughters whose world was coming to an end because their dad had taken leave of his senses and made them move to the boon docks.

This was just the beginning of the pressure JT was starting to feel. The new house needed a whole lot of work. Had JT known how this would turn out he would have grabbed his backpack and gun and disappeared into the woods never to return. As usual JT stuck to his responsibilities.

The next chapters will deal with these issues separately even though they were occurring during the same time frame.

### Your Environment for Sale to the highest bidder!

Someone got the great idea that private companies could do a better job of running the treatment plants than the politicians. In theory they were right. As far as JT was concerned this reality was highly debatable.

He knew that figures do not lie, but he also knew that liars figured. The more he was around them the more he was convinced that these people were a bunch of liars. Of course they were very good liars because there was no way to prove it. According to the new owners they had saved the plants. Had they not come in the plants would have failed due to the incompetence of the people working there. JT took it personally. And so did the rest of the staff that had been successfully running the place for the past 10 years.

This set the tone for employee relations for the duration. The new management could not figure out why the employees did not love them. After all

they gave them all a good raise. Being insulted and put down by a bunch of liars simply should be okay as long as you get more money.

JT tried his best to adapt to the situation. It had taken 6 years for JT to realize that the training department was just for show with the city. It only took him six weeks to figure out that the company was even less concerned about training the operators.

In spite of their much-touted million dollar international training center nothing ever came of it! JT was one of the first to know that it was pure BS. Training was DOA. He knew that he was in a bad position and had to get out as quickly as possible. After six more months he finally got out of the training coordinators job, by the grace of God.

He was shuffled off to another dead end job; something called an operations specialist. He was assured this job was very important. He would be writing standard operating procedures for the plants (SOP's). Once again, it did not take him to long to figure out that this was another bunch of BS.

The people in charge did not really care if the information was accurate. It just had to be in their special format. This job bought JT some time while his friend Ed Smith, now the manager of both plants, worked to get him out of the clutches of the administration department and back into the plants.

Ed was a great guy. He and JT had worked together as operators and spent some very rough times together. They were good friends. Ed knew that he could

trust JT and JT had a great respect for Ed. Ed may have been someone JT called a friend but he was also the boss. JT did everything he could to help him. He had Ed's back. Ed finally got JT back on shift and out of the insanity of administration.

JT took a console operators job on weekend nights. Now at least he was a much lower profile target than he had been. Increasingly it became apparent that all the console operators were targets. Well paid to be sure; but targets nonetheless. Management treated the console operators as if they were ignorant, useless and out to deliberately pollute the river. The fact that these operators were the same people who had been (in their own view) the assigned protectors of the river for years before this company was even a company seemed irrelevant.

The operators suddenly went from being the heroes to being the villains. All of the work they had done to achieve their certifications meant nothing. So the people who understood how the plants worked and had the most experience handling millions of gallons of wastewater in every type of situation and weather were now replaceable with novices off the street.

People who had never operated a plant with a flow of 1MGD were now telling those who had been operating 150 MGD plus plants for years what to do. What made these people so special? They had degrees in engineering and chemistry and BS's in just about everything else. You would think these new people might expect a bit of resentment. They could not see and never did get why

the old operators did not love the company. After all they gave them good raises and bonuses.

The operators had pride in their work and their plants. These were their plants (yes they knew that the taxpayers paid for them) and these plants were given to them to do a very important job which they had done well.

In order to sell the city a bill of goods (BS), the company said that these operators were letting the plants fall apart. The city needed to hire them to save it or there were going to be big problems very soon. All the politicians could see was that big pile of money they would get for turning control of this critical operation over to these people.

The operations people that were left had to either keep working or quit. How do you walk away from a job that you love, you are good at, and have been doing for 10-20 years?

You had to become like them to remain employed. You had to tell them what they wanted to hear, never mind what the truth was. So you swallowed your pride and took their abuse. JT marveled that even though the upper management changed the company they still kept the people who were so 'incompetent' running the place. If they had been that bad why were they kept around?

The facts were the new management did not have a clue how the plants worked. The remaining workers were the only group of people that did. The ones that kept it going 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 days a year. Engineers had to

have their beauty rest at night and weekends off. They still needed the “little” people out there doing whatever it was that “little” people do.

One thing that JT started to see was how they fixed everything that was not broke. If it worked right they worked very hard to insure that it became broken so they could point to it and say, “See I told you those dumb operators did not know what they were doing. If we had not been here it would have been a disaster.” The fact that it was their hare brained idea in the first place would never come to light and the politicians believed them.

It became obvious that since the console operators controlled the entire plant they would also be the prime targets if anything went wrong. The supervisor would also take the heat since he or she had the impossible job of keeping track of all three sections. The State Street plant was divided into two sections. The treatment plant that was similar to the Acton plant. There was also a very large solids handling section. It came with headaches totally different from the treatment plants themselves.

Before privatization there was a supervisor and a superintendent on each shift for each section. This made three supervisors and three superintendents. After privatization there was 1 supervisor per shift and he/she had to cover the same amount of turf that 6 people had before and one third of that was seven miles away.

There was no way the supervisor could keep track of it all. The console operator became the primary target. There was one at the State Street plant and one at the Acton plant.

According to upper management the console operators did not do anything. They were replaceable with someone off the streets. There was no way for the console operators to defend themselves against this attitude displayed by the new management. Even Ed Smith was put down because he did not have a collage degree and they still held him in the plant manager's position.

These long time operators, who had taken the jobs no one else wanted, were nothing more than scum to these people. A consumable commodity to be used up and thrown away!

It amazed JT how people who were supposed to be so smart could be so dumb. The battle lines were drawn. It was the old school against the "new school". JT did not realize it then, but this battle would not end until Ed Smith finally died due to problems that JT was convinced were brought on by the stress that upper management put on him. JT nearly lost the battle for his own sanity. What they did to his good friend, the people, and the plants caused him much stress.

## The Last Years of John Robert

JT could never shake the memory of the day of the fire when what little was left of his mom & dad's life was destroyed. Pictures, furniture, and collections of their lives together went up in smoke. It broke JT's heart and it was the final straw for John Robert.

John Robert had never recovered from Jean Ann's death. She had died in his arms and nothing could console him. Unknown to JT his dad would spend much of his time at home alone drinking. In retrospect it made sense to JT. If it had been him in that situation he would probably done the same thing.

The problem was that the medications John Robert was taking did not mix with the 100 proof whiskey he liked to drink. Trouble was brewing long before the fire.

After the fire, one of John Robert's church friends Howard let John Robert stay with him in the small town of Lizton just northwest of Columbia. This gave JT the time he needed to get things situated and his move made. But just barely.

The alcohol and medications finally caught up with John Robert. JT got a call from Howard that sent him straight up there. JT's buddy Greg went with him and they found John Robert in a total state of confusion.

The only thing JT could do was pack him up and take him to the nearest VA hospital. JT was very glad that his dad had been in the Army or it would have been very difficult to get treatment for him. During this stay the VA diagnosed him with

dementia and congestive heart failure. But the biggest problem was the alcohol addiction.

JT had never seen anyone go through detox before and he hoped he never would again. The nurses had to put restraints on his dad and keep him strapped to his bed. One of the nurses had been bruised pretty badly when he fought them during withdrawal.

After all of this John Robert's dementia was even worse. JT brought him back to his new home. JT suspected that his dad would never accept this as his home. There was no other choice short of a nursing home. JT was not quite ready to take that step yet.

The next two years were hard. John Robert wanted to go home but there was no home to go to. He wandered off and got lost in the woods.

There were times when John Robert was himself enough to realize what was happening. And on at least two of those occasions he asked JT to give him a gun and then walk away for five or ten minutes.

During the summer and fall JT took his dad fishing when he could. This at least got him out some. JT tried to make him comfortable but it was hopeless. In one of John Robert's more lucid moments he slipped out. He then walked and hitchhiked back to Columbia. That was over 25 miles away. JT was at work and Mary Ann did not realize it until she got a call from the car insurance company in

Columbia. John Robert had just been in their office trying to get his car insurance reinstated. He was also planning to get residence in a set of apartments.

JT was 80 miles away at work so Mary Ann had to go and get him. That incident seemed to be a turning point for John Robert. He started getting much worse afterwards. The culmination was JT finding him in such a condition that he was left no choice. JT could not quit work and care for him 24 hours a day and Mary Ann was not physically strong enough. (John Robert was not a small man).

There was no alternative. Knowing that his dad would never come home again made the trip to the VA hospital the longest JT had ever made. It was only 50 miles but by the heart it was 1,000,000 miles of bad road.

The VA took him in and after more tests put John Robert in the one place he did not want to be. It might as well have been jail for him because the nursing home was the same thing. The only difference was jails keep bad people in to keep them from hurting others. Nursing homes keep sick people in to keep them from hurting themselves. It would be six more years before John Robert was finally free again.

JT knew when his dad died. Even with him in the nursing home JT would take his dad out fishing in the summer time. The day JT realized that his dad was dead was on the last of these trips. John Robert could not walk anymore so JT would park his wheel chair by the water, put the brakes on and use a 2x4 to chalk the wheels. This particular day was no different.

JT got his dad parked. He took out the fishing poles set one up for him and then handed it to him. John Robert took the pole from JT's hand, looked up at JT and asked "What do I do with this?"

At first JT thought he was just kidding around and said. "You know good and well what that is for."

John Robert looked back at him and said, "What do I do with this?"

JT said, "You catch fish with it."

John Robert looked at the pole and then at JT and said, "I don't understand what I am supposed to do with this."

That is when JT realized that the man who had taught him to fish when he was just a boy was no longer alive. This poor helpless shell that had been his father was empty. It was a very hard blow for JT to take. His dad's body was alive but his dad was gone. JT simply turned around packed everything back up and took that empty shell back to the nursing home.

JT had never felt more alone than he did that day. Both his mom and dad were gone. He had very little family and what family he did have other than Mary Ann did not have a clue. Even she could not understand how he felt. The others could not possibly know or understand what he was going through.

It took about three more years for John Roberts's body to follow his mind and spirit. The pain that JT had every time he visited him was crushing. It hurt so bad that JT would put off visiting. This would hurt his conscience. There was no

winning for him. The day they laid John Robert in the grave by Jean Ann was a cold winter day. It had snowed and the wind was blustery, but the sun was out. JT tried to give honor to his dad in a speech he directed at those who came. Some friends, some family, some who were not sure.

JT remembered that day as the coldest and emptiest day he had yet had. He could only pray that he did not have to watch Mary Ann die as he had his mom and dad.

### The Long Road (part 2)

With all the mess at work and dealing with his dad's problems JT had not been paying a whole lot of attention to what was going on with his church. He had heard of problems but as with anything run by men there will always be problems.

He listened to the preacher who was now the head of the organization and did not find anything that was obviously questionable. But there was feedback from other church areas that was not so good. JT knew that God was still on His throne and he would take care of the problems.

JT had his hands full with his own problems. So he did not take an active interest in what was going on at that time. JT had some problems with the congregation and especially the pastor of the church in the capitol. Since he lived about half way between that church and the one in Columbia he started there. His buddy Greg went there along with several others that were long time acquaintances

of JT's. Greg's mom and dad who also attended there had always been good to JT and he really appreciated them. The pastor in Columbia was much more affable than the one in the capitol.

The rumors of problems still persisted but at least for a time things started to quiet down. It turned out to be just the lull before the storm.

When it broke loose it came as a deluge right about the time they were moving to the boon docks again. JT had to deal with selling two properties buying another, making the necessary changes to the new house, his dad's illness, upheaval at work and two teenage daughters whose lives he was ruining. Even Mary Ann had some misgivings about moving.

Now the church was falling apart. How could things get worse? Well just hold on. It could and it did.

The basic tenants of belief that JT had come to accept were under direct attack. The new head of the church was systematically doing away with the very foundational principals that JT's faith was pinned to.

This snake in the grass had been slowly watering down the doctrines that had brought JT to believe in God. These doctrines showed what God was doing in this end time. And now he was saying that the keeping of God's laws was optional. Christ abolished the law and only the weak kept the law. In the midst of all this other stuff JT and Mary Ann had to sit down and review the very basics of their beliefs.

The mainstream churches said that Christ came to free us from the law to which we were in bondage. They threw out all the teachings of the Old Testament and said it was no longer applicable. JT had a hard time with this because of the direct words of Christ. He stated that we were to “think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfill.”

To JT the word fulfillment meant to complete or make complete not do away with. Christ said he had not come to destroy the law or the prophets. In Christ’s time the law and the prophets was the only bible that was available. Christ Himself quoted from it on many occasions. If it was no longer of any value then why would he use the information in it? This did not make any sense to JT. If you do away with something then turn around and use it did you really do away with it?

What did Christ do away with? “The laws and statutes that were against us”. What where they?

JT read the bible regularly so he was not a total novice when it came to the word of God. JT reasoned that if the Old Testament was done away in totality as these people said then it should be evident in the New Testament.

So let’s get out a concordance and look up the word law. JT and Mary Ann sat down for several hours each day and reviewed every scripture to do with the law.

They were in the middle of getting the new house ready for the kids and his dad. JT had taken some time off work. They took the time each day to pray and think and read every scripture.

They were halfway through the book of Romans when they came to the conclusion that the New Testament supported the law. So what did Christ's coming do away with? The sacrifices that the Levites did at the temple pointed to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for all mankind. They were a separate added law given to the Israelites some time after the law was given from Mount Sinai. They were added "because of the hardness of their hearts" and they cost them. Every time someone sinned blood had to be shed to atone for it. All the rituals and sacrifices pointed to this. Every one of them had to be without blemish and clean because they all pointed to or were in place of Christ until He came.

When Christ died He became our high priest before the throne of God. He now applied His shed blood for our sins which now were no longer physical but spiritual sins. Where there is no law there is no sin. Yet Christ said all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. JT could find nothing that said the spiritual law of God was done away even in the New Testament. He came to the conclusion that the old preacher was right and this new one was a fake.

This is how he came through this stressful time in his church and how he retained his faith in God. This was also a good lesson in not trusting what a man or any organization says. If it can't be proven from the word of God then it cannot be

right. The church disintegrated and took on many other forms. JT and Mary Ann went with one group that pledged to stick to the teachings of the old preacher and for now that would have to do.

The division split Mary Ann from her parents, which was a hard pill to swallow. The new organization they joined was leaving pieces of the old behind and reforming into a totally different type of organization. There was an elected board that made the decisions not a single man or secret group. It was hoped that this would prevent this type of mess from happening again. When this organization printed out its articles of belief or foundational doctrine JT and Mary Ann checked it out thoroughly. They decided that though they were not thrilled with the way it was organized that as long as it preserved the teachings handed down by the old preacher they would stick with this organization.

## Chapter 8

### The Dark Years (part 1)

JT could never be accused of being real smart. After the mess with the church and his dad, he actually thought that there was the possibility that he might be able to retire. He thought he and Mary Ann might be able to live out their last years in a decent home in a good location and he could actually go fishing when ever he wanted. Wrong! JT had no idea just how wrong he was.

JT decided that when he turned 50 he would draw out the annuity from the public employee's retirement fund, use the money to fix up the house and get a small monthly check. JT had just made his first large financial mistake. He had no way of knowing that the loan on his house was going to eat him up or that gasoline, heating, and electric costs were going to sky rocket. He certainly had no way of knowing what his kids were about to do to him.

As prices increased and the kids got out of school, JT's fears of being unqualified to be a parent started to become reality. As soon as she could Gracie bolted. She took the first fast freight out of town so to speak. Son-in-law #1 was nearly as old as Gracie's mother.

JT tried to be fair minded about the whole thing but when he was asked at the wedding who was giving the bride away he really had to force himself to say "Her mother and I".

JT suspected that this was going to be trouble and he was right. Nine years of trouble to be exact. JT had hoped that by some strange circumstance it might work. His better sense told him it would not. And it didn't. Before it was over they would help put JT into total financial ruin. Gracie and her sister would help him lose his house and go into bankruptcy. His financial record would also include repossessed vehicles that were not even his. In general they would use and abuse him and Mary Ann.

By the time JT reached 58 he was wrecked. It took them a total of 8 years to do it, but they did a good job.

Gracie and her husband were always broke and her husband was never able to hold a good job. JT and Mary Ann tried to prop them up as much as possible in the vain hope that they would get on their feet and make a go of it. The couple just kept making choices that made no sense. Her husband seemed to be the core of the problem. Gracie only helped.

JT started borrowing against his 401k. He used his good credit record to help expecting to get them going and maybe even get some of it back later. This was his second big mistake. Never invest in your kids after they turn 18. It is not a good plan.

Pam had gotten married against JT and Mary Ann's better judgment to a guy that she asked JT to run off during her high school years. She told her dad he was a drug user. And now she married him. "Oh he's changed".

JT could not believe the daughter he had raised could be so naïve. It only got worse. About six months after they were married her husband had a wreck that should have killed him. JT found out later, much later by the way because his own daughter covered it up, the reason he was not dead. He was so drunk and doped up that he hardly felt anything.

Because of the cover up and JT's natural love for his daughter he had little trouble trying to help them out also. When her husband lost his job shortly after the wreck, (wonder why) JT and Mary Ann let them move into their basement. This was to be just until they could get back on their feet again. Big mistake #3.

Seven years later and in total exasperation, JT would kick son-in-law #2 out of his apartment. JT and Mary Ann had lost everything and this guy had not held a job for more than two months at any time during that seven years.

The problem was compounded by the fact that while they were living in JT's home Pam came up pregnant. It was interesting how this conveniently happened at about the time JT was ready to throw them out. They had been there for nearly 3 years.

During this three years Gracie and son-in-law #1 had been conning JT and bilking him out of more and more money that he did not have. Now Pam turned up pregnant and complicated matters even more. How could he kick his pregnant daughter out? In retrospect he should have let her stay and kicked her husband out. Hindsight is 20-20 and much too late.

His first grandson Robert was indeed a joy but he was also a heart breaker for JT. JT could see far enough ahead to know that this poor boy did not stand a chance for survival with a worthless dad and a working mother. What could be done? Now all of this would have been bad enough but it was only part of JT's troubles. At work things had deteriorated even more.

The original company that had control of the plant was locally owned and operated. It was sold off to a German company. This set off a chain of events that ultimately put a French company in control of the plants.

Privatization was one thing but being sold at auction to the highest bidder was ridiculous. The only thing that changed was the name on their uniforms and the signs around the plants advertising how great each company was. Then the real trouble started.

These new owners did not think that anyone without a degree of some sort should be in charge of anything. This started what amounted to a vendetta against Ed Smith. In their view, Ed was not qualified. He had been successfully running these plants for years but he did not have a degree. So he had to go. They could not just fire him. Oh no. They had to take him down first. If he quit it would not look like it was their fault.

They set about piling work loads on him that no four people could handle. He was given operational goals that were impossible to meet. They wanted him to screw around with the operations staff; switch their hours, switch the areas they

worked, force people to work in areas they did not want to work, and in general cause unrest in the operations division.

Ed refused to do this. He did his best to meet the impossible goals they set. (Note: These goals were drastic cuts in chemical usage, power and just about every thing else.) The owners kept reducing the staff by attrition not hiring replacement as the staff slowly deteriorated. This meant that those who were left had to work more overtime to cover the gap. The entire staff was getting worn out and finally started refusing to work the overtime. Collectively this took its toll on the entire staff and morale suffered.

Ed held the line for nearly 8 years, but these people were relentless in their pressure on him, and it was starting to weigh on him. His blood pressure was out of control. His stomach was always giving him fits. They simply wore him out, both physically and mentally. He could not realistically meet their goals.

JT could not help being angered at what the company was doing to his friend. His old nemesis, hatred, came back to haunt him. This stress was made worse by even more complications in his own life.

During the summer of 2000 JT was hit with the first of the many personal problems he would have to deal with in the next few years. These things just kept adding up until it would finally break him.

JT had been working on a retainer wall along the drive way that supported the dirt in front of the house. It led to the lower level of the house. JT wanted to put

stone up in place of the old cinder blocks. A neighbor wanted the old blocks to help with an erosion problem.

The work was pretty heavy. JT was in fairly good shape and heavy work did not bother him. He did not think anything about putting his back into helping move some blocks that were cemented together.

He felt the strain but nothing serious and he continued on. They got the job done and JT quit for the day. He was tired and slept in. Mary Ann had to go some place early that morning. About 9 a.m. JT decided he had been in bed long enough. He rolled over to get up and it hit him. It felt like someone had stabbed him in the back. The pain was so intense that he could hardly breathe.

He lay there for a few minutes to see if it would ease up. It would not. He noticed that pain was shooting down his left leg. The pain was intense and constant. JT tried to sit up but it hurt so bad that he gave it up. He did manage to get himself turned so that his head was at the foot of the bed. From there he rolled off the bed onto the floor on his hands and knees.

The move caused intense pain. After recovering, he started crawling on all fours very slowly out to the front room. He was the only one at home. He had to get hold of Mary Ann. He took the phone down, rolled over and put his legs up on the couch to see if that would help ease the pain in his back and leg. It made it a little better but only slightly. JT called MaryAnn. She was over 30 minutes away so JT just laid there. That was one of the longest half hours he had ever spent.

When Mary Ann got there she helped him get dressed and finally he was able to get up on his feet. His left leg did not seem to want to work.

About the only way JT could walk was to take a step with his right foot and then drag his left foot up to it. It was still extremely painful. JT did not know it then but he had worked the last full day he would work for the next 5 months, and heavy work was over indefinitely.

Mary Ann took JT to the hospital where he was checked out. They suspected a ruptured disk but the MRI was down. He would have to return next week. They gave him some pain pills, and sent him home. JT had never felt so helpless. The pills knocked him out and he could not move without severe pain.

The next week they got their MRI pictures and referred him to a surgeon. After another week of waiting he got into the surgeon and found out for sure that he had a ruptured disk. It was impinging on his sciatic nerve which was why it felt like someone had a knife stuck in his thigh and was twisting it around. The surgeon said that some times these things would heal themselves up and they needed to give it a couple of weeks to see. JT was off a full month. After that it was determined that he would have to have surgery to repair the damaged disk. It was another month before the surgery could be scheduled.

JT got permission to go back to work half days. Ed let him come back and work on the training program. He wanted to finish in spite of the company. So JT's routine was to get up in the morning, drive to work, work till noon and then go

home. He would then take his pain meds and go to bed. The next day he would get up and do it all over again.

The day of the surgery the doctor said that JT should feel the difference as soon as he came out of the anesthesia.

He said to the doctor, “So you are going to go in and hack around on my back and it will immediately start feeling better?”

“Yes it will”.

JT was still in a good bit of pain and this seemed a bit of a reach. The doctor was right when he came to there was no doubt it was better.

It took another 2 months to get back to work full time but JT had very little trouble with his back after that. He never pushed it to the limit anymore.

### The Dark Years (part2)

In the next couple of years JT worked closely with Ed trying to get operator training off the ground. The company continued to foil their efforts. Then the bean counters arrived.

Technically JT was assigned to the day shift as one of two console operators. JT only worked the console to cover when one of the overlap console operators from the weekend shift could not cover it. (Remember the plant ran 24 hours a day 365 days a year.) This left as much free time for JT as possible to work on training. When Ed saw the bean counters coming he had no choice but to put

the training project on hold and get JT back on shift full time. The stress continued building steadily with less and less people working. More and more demands were being made. More and more road blocks were being raised blocking all chances those demands would ever or could ever be met

Ed was taking the heat but it was taking its toll on his health. Ed had one bad habit that only got worse when he was stressed out. He smoked more. Ed's blood pressure and weight were getting out of control. JT could actually see and know when Ed was having trouble. Ed did not have to say a word. It was obvious to JT.

Many times Ed would come back from meetings with his face beet red. JT knew this was not good for Ed's sky high blood pressure and did everything he could to help him. It became more obvious the company had it in for Ed. It was just a matter of time before they broke him. They made Ed's life impossible and took away his pride and self respect. Ed fought them but to no avail. When Ed would get his performance evaluations he would be rated 'just meets requirements' no matter what he did. When Ed gave JT his evaluations he had no choice but to do the same with him. Now JT understood that if Ed were only mediocre then he would not rate any better.

This process upset Ed and he would apologize to JT. The thing that JT looked at was what Ed put in the comments section and that was always good. What hurt JT the most was seeing a good man like Ed being put down by people

who would not make a patch on his shirt. All of this was because Ed did not have a degree and was not a "yes" man.

All of this was affecting JT. Under that big ugly gruff exterior that he had developed over the years JT had a gentle kind heart. Seeing his good friend being stressed out stressed him as well. JT could also see what the company was doing, or maybe better put not doing. He understood the consequences of it and this disturbed JT greatly.

Over the years it had been customary for the core group of people who actually ran the plants to work together. As new people who actually showed an interest in doing a good job and protecting the environment came along that core group insured that they were trained and when possible promoted. The riffraff were always there to be dealt with but the good people actually made sure that everything was working right. As time went by the core group was replenished and supplied from the outer dead wood as those good people proved themselves. They were then assimilated into the core.

That method of supplying the core was done away when privatization chopped away the dead wood and much of the core as well. To Ed and JT this only meant that training for new people and existing operators was even more important. However the company said the opposite. The company's line was, "We hired the best-trained people available they don't need training." Now JT and Ed knew better. They also knew that eventually more people would need to be hired

“off the street”. This made a complete training program more important than before since there were less people to do the training.

The company came back and said that they would only hire “certified - qualified” people. Big lie as it turned out. Even if they had done so site specific training would still be needed. Ed and JT knew you don’t just walk into one of these plants and automatically know where to go and what to do. Not even if you are a class 4 certified operator, the highest class available. This did not faze the company. Ed and JT had resumed work on the training program after the bean counters left but the company would not support it.

Finally age and stress took their toll and a couple of the older console operators went on medical leave, then disability and finally retirement. This left Ed short handed in the console. JT finally gave it up and went back to the console for good.

With the stress continuing to build both Ed and JT’s health started to deteriorate. They were not that old yet but they began feeling it. JT started having problems sleeping and he started snoring very loudly. The snoring was so bad that Mary Ann could not sleep in the same room any more. JT learned that his snoring was possibly connected to a serious medical condition he had never heard of, sleep apnea. JT came from a long line of fine snorers. John Robert’s snoring was legendary, and Grandma Hall was not too far behind him. It never occurred to JT

that this was anything but natural. But when Mary Ann had to move out of the bedroom something had to give. He went and had it checked out.

JT was always tired. He wrote it off to all the night shifts he had worked and all the years of sleep deprivation he had been through. Test results showed that he never really slept at night. That was a bit of a shock to him. “How could that be?” he thought. “My eyes are closed and I don’t remember anything. How could I not be sleeping?”

As he found out there are five different levels of sleep. His snoring problem would allow him to get to the first level but never into the deeper levels of sleep that actually rested the body. So he felt like “crap” all the time. He had come to accept that feeling like “crap” was normal and so he did not think too much about it. But this condition was hurting his entire body. He was depriving his vital organs of oxygen each night. His blood oxygen level, which was supposed to run in the mid 90’s, was dropping to the mid 80’s. This was not the worst case but it did require some action before it got worse.

JT was introduced to what was called a C-PAP (Continuous Positive Air Pressure) machine that pressurized the air he was breathing. This kept the airway from collapsing and restricting his airflow. It took some getting used to but once he did get used to it, it seemed to help. This turned out to be only part of the problem and he continued to have trouble sleeping.

The worst was still on its way.

### The Dark Years (part 3)

JT's life was like a snowball barreling down a mountainside. The stressors of the kids, work, and health continued to come. JT found himself more and more in a dark mood. There seemed to be no hope. He was trapped with every thing working against him.

JT was a true blue red neck and so he never took very good care of himself. This included his teeth. He finally had to look at having what was left of his upper teeth removed. He was about halfway through this project when JT got the worst news of his life.

Ever since his mother died of malignant melanoma, JT had gone in every year to have himself checked out. Several spots had been removed and had always tested benign. This year JT very nearly skipped the exam. For some reason unknown even to him he changed his mind and went in anyway. The exam went normally. The doctor found one place on his neck he wanted to have checked. So he took a biopsy. There were no other problems. The test results would come back in a week or so.

JT never would forget when and how he found out the results of that test. He was driving the winding back road into town to get some more teeth taken out when his cell phone went off. The call was from the skin doctor's office.

A lady's very sweet voice was telling him he had malignant melanoma. It took some time for this to soak in. He was actually at the dentist's office when he finally realized that he was in real trouble. The dentist was going to have to wait.

He drove all the way back home on auto pilot. All he could see was the picture of his mother the last time he saw her alive. Melanoma had killed her and for once in his life he was truly afraid. He would never forget the horrible way she had died.

JT made the necessary appointments and the surgery was set up very rapidly coming only two weeks after he found out the diagnosis. The urgency was noticeable. He had a very responsive surgeon and the job was done quickly. The cancer was on the left side of JT's neck. In order to get it out and insure that it had not spread into the lymphatic system they had to test to see which lymph nodes in this area were affected and remove them as well.

This would leave the left side of JT's face numb for the rest of his life but he figured it was a good trade. The cancer was measured in centimeters depth into the skin. JT's was 8 tenths of a centimeter deep. The doctor told him that they really get concerned when it reached 1 centimeter deep. JT had 2 tenths of a centimeter leeway and the tests on his lymph nodes came back negative for cancer. He did not have to have chemo or radiation. God was good to him. So now it was back to the dentist's office with a cancer checkup every 6 months.

Things were continuing to deteriorate on the home front. Son-in-law #1 was starting to show his true colors openly abusing Gracie. She left him a couple of times.

On one occasion early in the marriage JT went over to talk to him about the fact that Gracie was back at her mom and dads. JT realized that Gracie was no prize and she well could have been a major part of the problem. He also knew enough about son-in-law #1 to know that he was unstable and could be dangerous. So JT took precautions before he left home. He loaded his Smith and Wesson 357 Magnum and strapped his under the arm holster on the outside of his shirt.

The affect was definitely noticed by son-in-law #1 and he was quite reasonable and calm. Son-in-law #1 made mention of it directly. Then he stated, “You (meaning JT) really don’t know me do you?”

JT said, “No I don’t and I am naturally a cautious sort anyway.” Gracie went back after a cooling down period, but it did not last.

Son-in-law #2 was still being his normal self, doing nothing and causing trouble. During this time JT began to suspect Pam of disloyalty to the family.

One evening when JT walked past the door that led down to the basement he smelled something burning. Pam was in the kitchen just across the hall when JT opened the basement door and verified what he thought. Pam rushed down to “check” it out and came back up and told him it was just some candles burning.

Now JT loved his daughter but he was not as stupid as she seemed to think. JT knew what pot smelled like from instances at work and that was pot.

From that point on JT could not have confidence in his younger daughter's word. Gracie had made a habit of lying to him and had brought pot into the house back in high school. Now both of his daughters were unreliable.

Things continued to deteriorate financially. JT was getting in deeper and deeper and his kids did not seem to notice or care. He was a money tree and they seemed to be determined to clean him out.

JT looked at this rather fatalistically. He figured it was his just deserts for being a bad father so he did not complain. JT felt that, "Okay I will 'go to the wall' for them so to speak. Once they have wiped me out then they will have no choice but to move on."

In the last 5 years he had started to realize that he would never own his home. He had made two more big mistakes. First he had refinanced his house. The interest rates were down and everyone was saying now was the time to get lower house payments. As JT was in a bind propping up failed marriages of kids and supporting other kids directly, this sounded good. Had he been smarter he would have seen it for the trap it was. Lower payments were emphasized but longer pay time was not. That was his second mistake. Remember JT was not very smart and looking back on it JT realized just how dumb he really was. He fell for the old second mortgage scam.

By the time he realized what he had done it was too late. One of the bad things about being an only child is you have no one to talk things over with. No one you can trust to get good advice from. So you wind up learning every thing the hard way.

Things continued to get worse. JT always had a hard time telling his girls no when they wanted something and he definitely could not tell Mary Ann no. Pam asked him to cosign for a loan on a truck she felt she needed. Like a fool he did. Son-in-law #2 assured them that he would get a job and help with the car payments. Deep in his heart JT knew better. The Proverbs said be surety for no one. But being the fool he was he did it anyway. This step would prove to be his financial undoing.

Son-in-law #2 was true to form and never got a job and did not help. The truck had to be repossessed. This ruined JT's credit and left him with \$10,000 more debt. It was simply too much.

Meanwhile, son-in-law #1 had finally pushed Gracie too far. She sought refuge once again with her mom and dad. JT knew that son-in-law #1 was mentally unstable and prone to fits of rage. He sat up for several nights with a shotgun on his lap and a pistol by his side. He feared his son-in-law would try to take back "his property" as he viewed Gracie. JT was ready to kill him if necessary. As it turned out, he was not crazy enough to challenge JT in his own home.

Gracie could not be accused of being too smart either. She planned a yard sale with a friend in a small town south of where they lived. JT advised against it warning that this is where son-in-law #1 would try to get at her. Her reply was, “He doesn’t even know where we will be.”

“But he knows that you are having a yard sale in that town, right?” JT asked. Her answer was “Yes.”

“Then,” he replied. “This is a small country town all he has to do is start driving around until he finds you, duh.”

But she was insistent about going so JT loaded up his smaller 357 Magnum and put it in his pocket. Mary Ann thought JT was over reacting. But Gracie and Mary Ann did not know much about men.

Mary Ann had gotten lucky. Gracie was not so lucky. JT knew from simple observation that son-in-law #1 would not give up his slave and dish washer without a fight. It was obvious he did not love Gracie. She was a possession to him and he wanted her back.

When the sale day came, JT parked his car at the side of the alley behind where they were having the sale and waited. It was a longer wait then he expected but sure enough down the road came that old beat up van. JT recognized it immediately. JT was sitting in his car looking straight at him. JT got out of the car and that is when son-in-law #1 saw him! He was not expecting to see JT. He gunned the engine and left.

The fact that he had showed up surprised Gracie and Mary Ann. After he took off they thought it was over and he would not be back. JT knew better. JT started a foot patrol of every angle that he could come from and waited for him. Sure enough about 20 minutes later he came back. JT knew that his presence had made son-in-law #1 rethink his tactics and come up with a new plan.

JT watched as he drove up the alley straight at him. JT did not think son-in-law #1 had the balls to try and run over him so he stood his ground. JT had already decided which way he was going to jump. If necessary he would jump to the driver's side as he pulled his pistol. JT was right son-in-law #1 did not have the balls. JT put his foot on the bumper and waited for him to get out. He did and demanded to talk to Gracie. JT told him that she did not want to talk to him. He tried to step past JT and go over to her. JT stepped in front of him with his hand in his pocket and he backed down and tried to talk his way around it. JT would not move. Son-in-law #1 had to either put up or shut up. Then he made a statement that put an end to the conversation.

Son-in-law #1 said. "Well I admit I have made some mistakes over the years."

JT came back with, "Yes and the first one was marrying my daughter."

Son-in-law #1 had no come back. He turned around got back in his van and left. This time JT was pretty sure he was gone for good. JT never saw him after that.

Now on top of cancer, brutal slavery at work and financial ruin at home, JT had to play John Wayne to get daughters out of relationships. Gracie went through with the divorce but even before it was final she was out with what would become son-in-law #3.

JT began to notice he was sick a good bit. He found himself waking up in the middle of the night and then not being able to get back to sleep. Physically he was breaking down and the doctor could not find any thing wrong.

#### The Dark Years (part 4)

The stress at work was becoming unbearable. JT simply could not get used to being a target. They were down to one operator and one console operator at the plant. The console operator had charge of the minute by minute, hour by hour operation of the entire plant. The operator had appointed rounds to make and put out the fires that the console operator found. JT knew that the system was recording his every move. If anything went wrong whether it was his fault, someone else's fault, or no one's fault, he would get the blame! These people were all smoke and mirrors. They were liars that figured the console operator was the fall guy.

JT could not stomach this and continued to spiral down into dark despair. His whole life was disengaging around him. Then the final straw hit. JT had always worn glasses and periodically he would get his eyes checked. The old

gentleman that was his optometrist was a likeable guy. JT had been to him several times and had been happy with the results.

He went this time not expecting any surprises, but boy was he in for one. The Doc went through his exam as usual until it came time to tell JT what he needed to do. Then the bomb was dropped. Doc was sitting on his exam stool. He backed away a bit, looked straight at JT and told him there was nothing more he could do for him.

JT was totally caught off guard and completely confused. Do what? He heard Doc say something about fast developing cataracts and needing surgery to correct it on both eyes. Doc gave him some information and sent him home. The trip home was about 30 minutes long. JT was about halfway home when it finally sank in. "He just told me that I am going blind."

The shock was simply too much. JT was wallowing in the darkness of despair. Nothing was going right.

JT had been seeing a young MD in a nearby town for the aches and pains which seemed to have no origin. One visit JT was telling him about his problems when out of the blue the Doc said, "I can give you something to help that."

JT had a pretty good idea what he was talking about. His first reaction was to reject the idea. He was not a head case. These things were not just all in his head. That was his first thought. His second thought was, "Hey, I am hurting here nothing has helped I am desperate enough to try anything."

The Doc explained that it sounded like a standard case of depression and gave JT a prescription for Prozac. Doc told him to take it for six to eight weeks and come back to see him. So JT did as he was told. JT noticed a difference within a couple of weeks. His spirits began to lift. Things did not look so bleak.

Man what a difference! Six weeks almost to the day his outlook turned around. JT actually felt good for the first time in years. It was like a door to a totally different world was opened. There was something better.

JT started studying what was going on. The Doc had explained that a chemical imbalance in the brain was causing the problem. Exactly what triggered it he could not say. Long term stress could be the cause. Sometimes it was heredity. Sometimes sudden massive trauma could be the cause. Whatever the cause it was called depression.

If a specific chemical in the brain is lacking the brain starts malfunctioning. This sends you off in a very despondent, hopeless mind set often spiraling out of control into suicide. The Prozac helps restore that chemical providing a complete turn around. JT could not believe how much different he felt. It was nothing short of amazing. As he got to looking at it he was not so sure that he had not been suffering with this all along. Once he understood the symptoms it became plain to JT that John Robert and Grandma Hall both had the same problem.

He was hereditarily inclined in the first place and with all the other stressors it was no wonder he nearly lost it. If JT had not taken the chance to see if this

would help, he would have continued thinking that this was simply normal. He had lived in that negative environment all his life and it nearly undid him.

The fight was just getting started for JT. At least now he was not bound by the depression that had haunted him for all these years. He had turned the corner. It would be an uphill fight but he knew that God was on his side. Now he could reclaim his life.

JT went through cataract surgery on both eyes. He did not have time to fool around and wait for them to worsen. He did not want to cause a wreck or something worse.

As expected, the time came to give up all hope of saving their home. Just before the collapse JT got an apartment close to work and they all moved. He got a bankruptcy lawyer and filed for chapter 13 bankruptcy. He made too much money to qualify for chapter 7. He was locked into a 5-year payment plan through the court after which he would be free and clear.

His kids were not done with him yet. Pam and son-in-law #2 with grandson Robert and a brand new grandson William moved with them to a three bedroom apartment. When discussing this move JT had to make it plain that he would need help with the rent and utilities. Son-in-law #2 assured him that he would get a job and help out.

JT was skeptical but let it go for the baby's sake. Three years later JT would have to throw him out and to JT's dismay Pam followed him. There was nothing

JT could do. A further complication came when Gracie married son-in-law #3 who promptly became unemployed. They wound up on JT and Mary Ann's front room floor.

JT and Mary Ann finally had enough and refused to sign a new lease on the three-bedroom apartment. They signed for a one-bedroom so everyone else had to get out. This lasted for about 6 months. They began to take care of the little boys regularly so their parents could both work. JT and Mary Ann decided to go to a 2-bedroom apartment.

Son-in-law #2 stayed true to form and did not actually go to work. He and Pam were evicted from their apartment and were right back with JT and Mary Ann again. If this was not bad enough son-in-law #3 spent the year on unemployment and found himself running out of benefits. They fell behind in their rent and lost their phones. They became dependent on the state to support their new baby Rose Marie. She was as sweet as they come and the spitting image of her mother.

JT and Mary Ann had not heard from them in a while so they went down to see how they were doing. The house was a wreck because they had to move out. JT and Mary Ann loaded Rose up to take her back with them. Just as they were getting ready to leave the landlord and his wife drove up.

The guy who JT had never seen before jumped out of his truck and started yelling at son-in-law #3 and JT's daughter demanding that they get out right now. The man was obviously out of control. JT raised his voice to distract him and try to

calm him down. The man's wife said something and JT's reply set the guy off. He stepped up and threatened JT by cocking his fist back like he was going to swing at him.

JT had the van door between himself and the man. He also had his hand on the pistol in his pocket. JT froze and their eyes met. JT gave him that old icy stare that had served him well at school and as supervisor. It worked. The guy backed down, and became more reasonable. JT brought himself a couple of more days to get them out. He kept his word. They were out on time.

JT told Gracie later that because of her he had come close to pulling his gun two times. "Please let's not let it happen again" he said.

The fallout from this was that JT wound up living with nine people in a two bedroom apartment. Something had to give. JT finally had enough when son-in-law #3, the one he had just pulled out of the above mess, made the statement that JT just did not have the big picture. Son-in-law #2 was hogging one of the beds that were supposed to be for the boys. Pam had the other. Gracie was pregnant again and sleeping on the front room couch and this character had the gall to make 'the big picture' comment while sleeping on JT's front room floor.

JT let a couple of days pass so he could cool down. Then he wrote up two pages on the "picture" he had and literally read the whole bunch the riot act. JT ended it by saying that in all of this the only thing that really upset him was the

little babies. They had nothing, no future, and no hope because of their parents. He left them with these words, “No, I don’t hate anyone here.”

Not too long after that JT had to kick son-in-law #2 out. Pam initially asked him to but after a few days changed her mind. JT told her that if she went back to him she would have to go with him. He and Mary Ann were not going through that anymore. The day they moved out JT sat on the edge of the bed and cried like a baby. He knew it had to be done but losing daily contact with Robert and William was hard for JT to take. The boys had been living with him and Mary Ann since they were born. Robert was now four years old. JT loved those boys with all his heart and in the end he could not help them. This hurt was far worse than the worst physical pain he had ever had. His heart was broken.

Gracie and her husband finally moved out too. Suddenly JT and Mary Ann were alone.

### The Long Road (part 3)

JT had endured all these things and yet he did not understand them. There were some very critical things that JT had never gotten through his head. He had been baptized and had accepted Christ as his personal Savior. He believed in the greatness of the Almighty Creator God. He understood that God is a family consisting of God the Father and the Word and they had always existed.

He understood that the Word was the being that actually did the creating. The Word was the one who recreated the earth after the great rebellion that destroyed the first creation which Lucifer was responsible for. He understood that the one who was Lucifer became Satan the devil, rebelled against God his creator. One third of the angelic host followed him into this rebellion which caused the destruction of the earth and surrounding planets.

JT also understood that God created man in His own image, to become His sons and daughters. He made man a free moral agent; man chose to find out for himself what was going on instead of God showing him directly. He understood that man had cut himself off from his Creator by disobeying God and this brought the death penalty on all mankind.

JT knew that God had already planned for this possibility and the Word would have to become a man, be born of flesh and live among men in order to be a just judge of man. And due to the sins of all mankind Christ (the Word) would have to suffer a horrible death. His life was worth the sum total of all His creation. His sacrifice would more than cover the sins of all mankind.

JT realized that one had to actually repent of one's sins and quit sinning before God would grant him grace, covering his sins with Christ's blood. He also knew that many of the laws that modern day Christianity said were done away were not. They still applied. He understood that the law "that was against them" was the sacrificial law of the Levitical priesthood. This was what Christ did away

with. He became our “high priest after the order of Melchizedek”. It was a different order from the Levites and their animal sacrifices.

The new covenant was a spiritual not a physical covenant and upon repentance and baptism you were given a down payment of God’s Holy Spirit to help you to continue to overcome and “grow in grace and in knowledge” to become a complete man and qualify to be a born son of God.

He further understood that God would send His Son Jesus Christ back to this earth at just the right moment to prevent mankind (with the help of Satan the devil) from destroying himself entirely from the face of the earth. Ultimately all mankind would be given a fair opportunity to repent, be baptized and follow in Jesus Christ’s footsteps. They could become born sons of God with the ultimate mission of ruling the universe.

And yet JT still missed the point. He had spent 35 years thinking that he was doing what was right. He paid his tithes. He attended church regularly and went to Holy Day services. He prayed and studied. JT was doing everything he understood to be right, yet he missed the most critical point.

Like Job, in the Old Testament, he did not truly understand what God wanted. He thought that he had to do these things. How wrong he was. God had put him through all these things to teach him what God wanted him to know. It took JT 35 years to learn that he could not do anything. No matter what he did he was wrong.

It took nearly being beaten to death to get the point through his thick head. It was not what he did but what God could and would do through him. James Thomas Hall had to get out of His way and let Him. James Thomas Hall had to be converted. It only took 35 years to finally get it through his head that he could not do it.

God had to do it through His Holy Spirit and JT simply got in the way. All these things he had brought on himself because as the old preacher used to say “you just don’t get it”. The old preacher was definitely used by God. Yes, he made mistakes, but so did all the men God has used through out history. Only our Savior Jesus Christ was perfect as a man.

Now for the first time in his life he started to understand, truly understand the greatness of God. God created all mankind as human so that if he absolutely refused to accept God’s plan then he could be eliminated not continuing to suffer sin’s consequences which have plagued all mankind since the Garden of Eden. God’s plan is to save all mankind from himself and bring him to the understanding that He is God the Almighty Creator. He created man to be His sons and daughters for eternity. He offers that to who ever He decides to when He decides to, not before and not after. Should a man knowingly reject God’s offer of eternal life in God’s family then he will be in the third resurrection which is the resurrection to condemnation. After that all of the wicked will be ashes under the souls of the feet of the righteous. Not those who made themselves righteous but those who accepted

Christ's sacrifice and allowed God's Holy Spirit to clean their hearts, minds, and spirits. Those who have the mind of Christ and are of a clean, right spirit will receive the promises of salvation from our great Creator God who cannot lie.

## Epilog

### The Road to Recovery by the Grace of God

JT finally "got it" and he was rewarded with the fruits of God's spirit. Peace, which he had never known from his birth. Joy, which he had not understood until God granted him that gift only He can give. He found happiness. JT thought he had experienced it before but found he had never really known it. Peace of mind. JT had never had peace of mind. His whole life had been a battle and he had paid a very steep price for his ignorance. But then he realized it was necessary.

His father, John Robert had to use sheer intimidation on him to keep him anywhere close to staying in line. It had only partially worked. Looking back JT could see that so many times his dad had stopped him from doing things that would hurt or even get him killed. He had not appreciated it.

Now in order to save his spiritual life God had to bring him to near physical death and then open his eyes so that he could see what he had done. Not unlike what He is doing with all mankind.

As Job said, “I have heard of you through the hearing of my ears but now I see you with my eyes, and I abhor myself and repent in sack cloth and ashes”

Now JT could actually start to live as God wanted him to. He no longer sought his own way. He was no longer John Wayne against the world. By the grace of God he could live out his last years in peace, a very good gift from God.