

Chapter 20 – University – Part 2

During the summer between my Freshman and Sophomore year, I lifeguard and teach at the Roswell East Side Hondo pool. Most of the kids are dropped off by the parents for all-day pool care. Most are Black and Mexican. Their dark skin takes a beating in the hot sun. I bring bottles of mineral spirits laced with tinctures of iodine for color. I rub down the shoulders and back in the heat of the day. I make only 9 saves that summer. These kids are much smarter about survival than the ones in the pool on the white side of town.

After she graduates, my girl “A” and I stay at her apartment most of the 1962 summer. She is provided the living space as part of an “always on call service ” for businesses. We become engaged.

I drive my 1950 Nash bathtub to Las Cruces for my Sophomore year at the end of August. I change dorms to a closer, cheaper one near the Student Center. I work nights. I study. I write love letters. Suddenly I am the only one writing love letters. By the end of the first week in October, I call “A”. She says she wants to end the engagement. I panic! (Why?). It is a Tuesday evening.

I jump in the car and race to Roswell through the mountains on the windy, dangerous two-lane road. I make the 200 miles in about 2 hours and 50 minutes. I pull up to the apartment. “A” and I talk most of the night. She says she had an encounter with the man living in the duplex apartment next door. I convince her to continue the engagement and to marry me on Saturday. I call my parents on Wednesday morning.

Flabbergasted is an understatement. Plans are hastily made. The wedding happens Saturday at 10 AM in the same Calvinist Church I hated as a child. Perhaps that is a sign. My old Navy roommate “T.G.” is the ‘best man’.

We drive back Saturday afternoon and stay in Ruidoso Saturday night. Arriving in Las Cruces without a place to live on Sunday, we find a cheap motel. Monday morning, first thing, I go to student housing and rent a \$30 per month WWII studio barrack with a bed, a couple of chairs, and kitchen appliances. That includes pet cockroaches.

“A” gets a job right away in town at the telephone company. I catch up in my classes and keep on working the night shift at the University PBS board. I remember worrying about the Cuban missile crises. I listen every night on the AM radio. Thank God, the Russians blinked. After Bay of Pigs, I did not know if JFK had the power to pull it off.

Part 1 - Times and Places

Things coast along for a while. We upgrade to another barrack building which is much nicer with one bedroom and is a corner unit. I start a little garden in the back. Life is good. For some reason, we do not use contraceptives.

Walking between classes is when I study. I never take notes. I walk long distances between classes. Rather than chat with others, I review in my mind what the previous lessons were. Somehow, that is enough to get me by on the tests. I doze occasionally in class. Working at night from 3 AM to 8 AM is tough. We buy a new 1963 VW Bug for \$1,601. It weighs 1,601 lbs.

The Kennedy assassination hits me hard. Classes are suspended and I watch the news coverage. I somehow developed a suspicion about LBJ. I watch the live scene when Ruby, wearing that distinctive hat, walks through the crowd toward Oswald in the basement and shoots. It was the only hat in the crowd moving. I had a feeling that hat was going to attack.

Sunday, April 5, 1964, at 11:05 AM, after one and a half years of marriage, standing in the kitchen, "A" says casually. "I want a divorce." Stunned, I did not try to fight it this time. I check into a dorm. I help her move to an apartment in town, walking distance to work. I keep the 1963 VW and payments; she gets the living room furniture and payments.

I hurt worse than at any time in my life. A deep, penetrating pain of loss that attacks every 3-4 minutes. It keeps me awake. Then I notice the time between attacks lengthens to 5-6 minutes. Deep in my gut. Two to three weeks later, the attacks are about 20-30 minutes apart. I often wonder what the cause is. Loss of "A", loss of self-confidence? I never figure that out. I do know that I am not willing to expose myself to that depth of pain again. Self-preservation takes over.

One of the ending moments was classic. After moving "A" into her new apartment on a Saturday, I find a kitten and take it to her early the next Sunday morning. Surprised, I see her keys in the front door. I open the door, and walk in with the keys and the kitten to her bedroom door. Guess who is there? Best man, best friend, "T.G." under the covers with her. I throw the keys at the wall over their heads, leave the kitten on the bed, and leave.

That event was probably a godsend. There needs to be a time when one knows to move on.