

Something's Not Right with Dave:

To Mania and Back, and Back Again

Preface

When I was in high school, everything seemed possible. I was a leader among my classmates, I had great friends, and I could juggle numerous outside activities while maintaining excellent grades. My path in life, to college and beyond, seemed to be set. Then, less than a month after graduating from high school, I developed manic depression. This singular event changed my life in every way. For the next eight years, on and off, mania would rule my life. This is my story, of the person I was before I got sick, the person stuck toiling in the abyss of mental illness, and the person who ultimately worked their way back to sanity.

Note: In 1980, the third revision of the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders."(DSM III) changed the name manic depression to bipolar disorder. It was determined that the terms manic-depressive, manic, and depression had become highly stigmatized. Because the term manic depression was in use during the majority of the time I was sick, I have chosen to use this term throughout.

I An Overachiever

My Demanding Parents

My relationship with my parents revolved around one core idea: ensuring my excellence in high school and then my enrollment in a prestigious college (preferably one with Ivy League in their description). Early childhood testing identified that I had an IQ of 135, in the 99th percentile. My parents' mission from that point was to ensure that (in their words) I did not waste the gift I was given. The pressure for grades was intense (no B's need apply). Report card time resembled close order inspection as each grade and related comments were scrutinized for signs of slippage. Good grades were expected for my parents and met with mild expected congratulations. Sub-A grades were met with severe recriminations and accusations of a lack of effort. In my house, poor grades were always blamed on laziness. I was bombarded with the absolute certainty that the only thing that stood between me and the hallowed A in any course was my level of effort. My standard retort was to propose that my level of interest in the subject matter interest played a role in achieving good grades. My parents dismissed this out of hand. For me, the link was obvious. I liked Social Studies, Science, and Math: I routinely got A's. With its insistence on reading an array of fictional works, English was significantly less to my liking. In fact, to this day, I avoid reading works of fiction, reading instead a voracious amount of non-fiction works revolving around social sciences, hard sciences, and mathematics (go figure!). But that unwillingness to read fiction placed me at odds with many English teachers throughout my academic career. Predictably, this resulted in the hated B in English with frustrating regularity. Tragically, there was even an occasional C in the offing.

I Got an F

Then, there was the time that the impossible happened, and I received an F. I had just finished my junior year in high school in an unaccustomedly precarious fashion by failing my English exam! In truth, I had never disguised my contempt for the rudimentary monotony of high school English, but failing the exam? I was used to getting As & Bs, but now an F had attached itself to my resume like a horrifying blotch of mold, and just as I was beginning to contemplate applying to colleges. This set off waves of panic from my parents, along with some very nasty rebukes. It wasn't until the actual cause for the F was identified that some sanity returned to my life. It turned out that I had carelessly neglected to notice a 30-point essay question on the back page of the exam. I had finished the exam with the characteristic haste that had always prevented me from consistently obtaining outstanding grades in English. I had inadvertently lowered my exam score to five points from failure before a single exam answer had been graded. I was not that good, and the F was the result. The specter of that F disfiguring my high school transcript loomed. Reluctantly, I arranged to spend my summer recycling through 11th grade English so that I could retake the final exam and expunge that blight on my permanent record.

A Dramatic Solution

Art Crannon was co-chair of the English department and was responsible for the department's literary, creative, and dramatic side. After hearing of my plight, Mr. C offered an intriguing suggestion. I could attend his summer drama workshop and retake the English exam at the end of summer school. I had no experience with drama, plays, or theater other than participating with the stage crew for our "Hello Dolly" production the previous year and my upcoming involvement as business manager for the Summer Musical production of "Brigadoon." While I had performed as a bass player in rock bands since 7th grade, I had no real stage

experience. But I was a “born extrovert,” and drama class seemed much more inviting than English. There was only one problem: Mr. Crannon alone could not authorize it. I would need the approval of Mrs. Shrub, the other English department head, and Assistant Principal Mr. Marriott, neither of whom was in the habit of cutting me much slack because of my agitating activities in student government (I was the incoming Student Forum president). But, having fallen victim to one of my personality failings, I was determined to use one of my personality strengths to improve my summer school options. Mrs. Shrub and Mr. Marriott sympathized with my desire to retake the English exam. They understood very well what a blemish that “F” was on my transcript and that it would severely damage my hopes of landing a prestige college. Predictably, the idea of taking Drama instead of English was preferable. Mrs. Shrub found the arrangement “highly irregular.” Mr. Marriott, supporting his department head, said he would abide by Mrs. Shrub’s decision. After pleading my case and groveling appropriately, Mrs. Shrub acquiesced. I would be allowed to spend my summer taking drama classes and receive my chance at redemption on the English exam.

Summer Drama and Summer Theater

Summer Drama was unlike anything I had encountered before in school. It was intoxicating, wildly careening from straight readings to improvisation and back again. My most vivid memory is of an improvisation Mr. Crannon borrowed from a national comedy troop that we developed into a routine. I sat in what appeared to be a waiting room; Mr. Crannon would come in, sit down, and begin tapping his fingers on his briefcase. Annoyed, I would respond in kind. The briefcase duel escalated back and forth, with each trying to outdo the other. As we reached a wild crescendo, with both of us madly flailing away, a door opened, interrupting our revelry, and the receptionist walked in, looked at Mr. Crannon, and said, “The doctor will see you now.”

Looking back, many of the things that Mr. Crannon taught me that summer served me quite well over the years, especially the knowledge of how to prepare a presentation, commit complex information to memory, and how to deliver a relaxed, articulate presentation in front of a large group of people. Later in life, as president of a couple of large user groups, I would repeatedly put these guidelines into practice.

The summer before my senior year, a minor taxpayer revolt resulted in the school budget being voted down. This was a relatively uncommon occurrence in my school district. The Town of Tonawanda and Kenton schools were awash in baby boomers. Schools were at or near capacity; we had over 900 students in my class alone. With that many parents voting, passing a school budget was usually not very difficult. But there was a burgeoning anti-tax movement of taxpayers in the town, and they had stormed to the polls to narrowly defeat the school budget. They were led by self-imposed watchdog Eric the Red Heinz, a nemesis I had come to know well from my time sparring with him on the Superintendent's Advisory Council student member.

An arcane set of New York State laws prevented the budget from being resubmitted before the start of the school year. A significantly reduced contingency budget had kicked in following the defeat of the budget, which stipulated that only essential services be paid for by the school district. Sports, Music, and other extracurricular activities were eliminated, along with busing. Budget supporters were forced to vote on each of these items separately. The cynical motivation behind this method was obvious: remove all the services that make a school unique and force voters to pass judgment on each item individually. This had the side effect of pitting supporters of school athletics (and they were legion) against the supporters of music and the arts. No one seriously feared that the fall sports schedule, including football, soccer, and cross-country, would be canceled. There

were plenty of boosters with deep pockets to guarantee that the games would go on as scheduled. The prospect was considerably bleaker for music and the arts, especially theatre. Every summer, a musical was produced, combining the talents of Kenmore East and West students. This production was supported by school budget dollars almost exclusively. Without funding, it looked like the summer production of Brigadoon would be the first casualty of the budget defeat. Musical director Jerry Stare, from Kenmore West, had other ideas. Taking a page from the athletics supporters strategy, Jerry put together a group of teachers, parents, friends, and students to raise the money necessary for the show to go on. I was honored to be chosen as student business manager for this herculean struggle to save our musical.

Everything had to be acquired from scratch; we didn't even have a place to rehearse. Since we were no longer school-funded, school facilities were unavailable for us to use. We arranged with a local church to use their basement community room for rehearsals. My primary role, along with my parent/friend cohort, Ira Glassman, was to organize the fundraising effort. We had only five weeks to raise all the money necessary to fund the production. We focused initially on selling ad space in our show program. As the money started to come in, we started referring to our financial backers, big and small, as our angels. Our tote board began to look like a Christmas tree in July, as we pyramided angel cutouts to chart the nearness to our goal. We decided to do something commonplace today but revolutionary in 1972: we sold individual advertisement space in the back of the program to anyone who wanted to support the musical. For a sum as small as \$10, the patron got a couple of lines in the program to post congratulations, well wishes, or just a bunch of silliness directed at anyone they wished. Sure, we also needed to locate some deep-pocketed donors, but the surprisingly high volume of these low-cost ads helped put us over the top. As the show went into dress

rehearsal, we had reached our target and raised enough money to cover our production costs. There was an intense feeling of satisfaction and pride among the cast and crew of the show; everyone had contributed to making the staging possible. After opening night, the cast party featured a rousing tribute to the Angels. Predictably, all three supplemental budget resolutions passed by wide margins a mere two weeks after the show closed.

A student's best friend

Through the Student Forum, I was named chairman of the Dance Committee in my junior year. My responsibility was to book the bands for school dances. Conveniently, this required me to attend other school dances in the area to listen to prospective bands. A responsibility I gratefully relished. It was by running school dances that I formed my most crucial alliance, one that benefited me greatly throughout my time in high school: the night custodial staff. Forget the teachers and the principals; in a school building, it's the janitors that make the building run. Befriending the Janitors, especially the night crew, was not a deliberate act, the result of some calculating move on my part; it developed as a happy byproduct of my normally outgoing personality and willingness to help. It all started early in my junior year; I would stay to help clean up the gym after dances. This decision made me a hero to the night custodial crew. The head night custodian, Art Hayes, told me students rarely stayed after to help with the cleanup. Thanks to that simple act of common courtesy, from that point on, if I needed something stored temporarily, if I needed access to the backstage of the Auditorium before it had opened, or if I needed access to the loading dock for delivering or dropping something off; all I needed to do was ask. This unique ability came in mighty handy for the remainder of my time at Kenmore East. In return, I made some friends that lasted many years beyond graduation. This experience taught me an important lesson about

fellowship, decency, and respect for those performing manual labor, which I will never forget.

Through my involvement in various afterschool activities, I also developed close relationships with a few of the teachers at East. The Drama teacher, Mr. Crannon, was undoubtedly one. Another was Mr. Doug Crown, the advisor to the Booster Club and the Student Forum. Mr. Crown was a laid-back math-teaching intellectual who encouraged me to channel my emotions into positive actions with mixed success. Mr. Crown was easygoing. I had never seen him mad. Unfortunately, one autumn day in my senior year, I discovered he could get angry.

Student Forum President

From the time that I first saw it depicted on an episode of “Room 222” at the age of 13, I knew I wanted to be a student government president in high school. I have been interested in government and politics for as long as I can remember. That interest was first demonstrated when I defended Kennedy over Nixon on my bus to kindergarten. School politics was the perfect outlet for my altruistic desires and extroverted personality. Growing up in the 60s, I was offered many opportunities to become active in politics. In that era, student struggles with school administrations and school boards took their place alongside the other more central struggles against the war in Vietnam and for civil rights and social equality, if not quite as consequential. Becoming involved in student government would give me my first opportunity to make a difference. I immediately immersed myself in the process, getting elected homeroom representative my first month in high school. I was in my element. Gradually, I befriended the upper-class students who ran the Student Forum (I was told the term Student Council had been deemed too corny and was abandoned the year before). The highlight of my first year was a series of successful student actions. A cafeteria boycott was formed to protest the short-sighted banning of student bake sales. The school administration had deemed

bake sales unfair competition for the inferior cafeteria food. And as ridiculous as the idea seems today, we brazenly organized a spirited demonstration in favor of establishing a smoking lounge for students (several of which were provided for the faculty). This action featured several senior students, having already been accepted to college, who felt safe to act up, lighting cigarettes in the school foyer instead of in the more traditional locale of the Boy's lavatory. After this provocative action, 3-day suspensions were meted out for the offenders. Still, we had successfully drawn attention to an idea that had previously been wholly ignored and, a few years later, eventually prevailed.

Running as a Sophomore

As the year ended, Dan Berg, a brilliant student and serious radical (as we called ourselves in those days), came to me with an intriguing proposition: would I be interested in running for Student Forum President now? A sophomore had never run for president before, so I was stunned by the suggestion. Dan said he “had it all figured out.” If I ran, he would act as my campaign manager. Each campaign manager was entitled to address a school assembly held before the election. He would use that address as an opportunity to make a political statement on the vacuous nature of student life and the gross indifference of the faculty and administration, likening them to Nixon and his cronies, who were currently running for reelection. Dan said sure, I had no chance to win, but when we were done, everyone in the school would know who Dave Hyzy was, and my election the following year would be virtually guaranteed. Naively, it never occurred to me that Dan might be using me to further his ends. More significantly, it never occurred to me that in running, I would be denying some other qualified junior candidate a shot by taking that position on stage. Ultimately, both concerns turned out to be true. But at that moment, it just seemed like a fun idea. And who knew, I might even win. Dan was right about one thing: I got to know significantly more

people because of my experience running for president. Prominent among them were the supporters of one of the other candidates. Going by the Name de plum “George,” Dave V. was a remarkably clever, deadpan guy who had prepared for years for his moment to run, putting together a farcical presentation worthy of Jonathan Winters. He had been denied a place on the final stage because of a sophomore candidate whose campaign manager seemed to care more about making a political statement than about winning! In spite of the disastrous start, I escaped a terminal introduction; eventually, Dave and I became good friends.

Becoming Student Forum President

The following year, as I made a serious attempt to be elected Student Forum President, George V. returned to the scene to extract a measure of vengeance. He decided to turn his zany wit on managing the campaign of my chief rival for president. His hilarious nominating speech was delivered in a deadpan style (a style like that made famous a few years later by Chevy Chase on Saturday Night Live). George poked fun at me, the school, the administration, the student government, and a thousand other tangentially related topics. He had the student body in stitches. Watching the audience's reaction, I knew I was in serious trouble. Fortunately, my savvy campaign manager, Carey Zachs, realized that it was getting out the vote that always made the difference in a close election. She activated a network of volunteers to ensure that my supporters came out to vote for me. Hopefully, this would reverse the momentum George's presentation had created. I was left to fret about how my flippant decision to run the previous year had directly contributed to this whimsical candidate who could deny me the prize I had worked the last two years to attain. Ultimately, after a frighteningly close election, with a margin of 22 votes out of 1,100 cast, I was fortunate enough to win! My opponent, John “The Mighty Quinn” Kwiniski, who had fittingly told me flat out before the election that he had no desire for the presidency, rode the new-found

popularity of his Student Forum run to be elected Senior Class President in the fall, upsetting the popular Joe Demste, who had been president of the sophomore and junior classes. When I opened the closet door that led to my new office for the first time, I thought again about that episode of Room 222. Exhilarated, I was now that guy that could make a difference!

II My Life Before Mania

My Heart on My Sleeve

Throughout my life, especially in high school, I excelled in academics and interpersonal relationships. I was friendly, outgoing, and an intent listener. I made friends easily and was often looked upon by them as a leader. My relationships revolved around the multiple universes of friends with distinctly different interests and dynamics. Following this pursuit, I met many intriguing, dynamic girls. But no matter how alluring the girl, the thought of exclusively pairing off in high school never appealed to me. One reason for not getting too close was self-preservation. At 13, my physician father had drilled into me that pre-marriage sexual relations would invariably lead to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Unquestionably, I would be responsible for the pregnancy and be forced to give up my education dreams to get a job so that I could support the girl and our baby. Delivered by my Catholic father, there was never any consideration or discussion of birth control or abortion. But equally important, at that stage in my life, no one girl was so important to me that I would be willing to abandon all these other universes of friends and the activities they represented. Of course, no one ever told me I would have to abandon everything else for a girlfriend; it was my observation that isolation was the ultimate result of pairing off. Most significantly, regarding my high school years, I had arrived at a profound conclusion regarding my relationship with girls. I had always found the interaction with girls to be much more interesting than conversing with most guys. Maybe because I never had a sister, I sought out these friend relationships with girls. Regardless, I valued these friendships and avoided doing anything that would potentially damage the relationship. To me, chief among these risks was escalating the relationship to the next level – pairing off, becoming a couple. Observing couples over time, I developed a fatalistic two-outcomes

theory of relationships. My reasoning is as apparent to me as it may appear silly to you. Elevating a treasured friendship to steady dating status, you virtually guarantee certain death for the friendship. I have discovered this truth, and painful personal experiences throughout junior high and high school have confirmed it. Even without sex, it is a rarity, on the level of the Hope Diamond, for any dating couple's relationship to end and then return to the previous friendship state. To escape that terminal fate, I preferred to content myself with as many close friendships as I could develop throughout my high school life. While I doubt that I was the only teenager not having sex, at times, it sure felt like it sometimes. When I look back on those days, I feel fortunate that this perspective of mine offered me a unique advantage. Avoiding dating allowed me to befriend and get to know a wide variety of girls instead of concentrating on dating, at most, a couple of girls. I wasn't interested in conquest, and the girls realized that. As a result, girls were more willing to let me see their true personalities and to be real friends with me. By resisting the certain risk of dating, I maintained these friendships over the years, something that would have been highly improbable had we paired off. This was my relationship philosophy.

Goin' Down to Izord's Farm

Zoar Valley, in the southern tier region of Springville in New York State, is about an hour's drive from metropolitan Buffalo. Its lush gorge and refreshing waterfall have been popular hiking areas for decades. During my junior year, I discovered that my Chemistry teacher, Mr. Izord's family, owned a significant portion of land in Zoar Valley. His father made a lot of money after helping to develop Rayon during WWII, and he invested his profits in land in and around Zoar Valley. Mr. Izord hosted an annual camp-out on his property for the American Foreign Student Exchange (AFS) every year. This sounded like fun, but unfortunately, it was only open to AFS members. Since becoming a member took

nothing more than signing up, I quickly added AFS to my school activities resume, with an eye on camping at Zoar Valley. The camp-out was scheduled for Memorial Day weekend. Hundreds of AFS students from all over Western New York gathered at Izord's Farm (as we referred to call it, parodying Yasgur's Farm from Woodstock) for a weekend of communing with nature, camping out under the stars with bonfires and guitars.

I had been playing the 12-string Guitar for about three years. I enjoyed playing the bass guitar in bands during junior high but turned to acoustic guitar in high school. A combination of an infatuation with CSN, Eagles, America, and their country-rock sound (heavily laced with 12-strings) and the emergence of the singer-songwriter movement (featuring Cat Stevens, James Taylor, Jackson Browne, and Paul Simon) compelled me to move to the 12-string acoustic guitar. Using a few chord books and an already well-worn Beatles songbook, I taught myself to play the guitar. I wasn't interested in soloing or any standard electric guitar techniques. I just wanted to sing songs and accompany myself on the guitar. I didn't even use a pick. I borrowed a finger-picking style by imitating James Taylor; I gradually increased my repertoire of songs. I had no illusions about having a great voice or being an exceptionally talented guitarist, but no one could question my love for the music or the enjoyment I got from playing it. By the time of the Zoar Valley camp-out, I was a veteran of many campouts and bonfires, and I regularly took my guitar with me. I have always been attracted to the magical power of synthesizing voices singing to an acoustic guitar accompaniment. No matter the size of the ensemble, the experience has always touched me and never become passé. Whenever anyone was interested in singing, I was always willing to break out the guitar for a little sing-along. Such was supposed to be the case at the Zoar Valley Jamboree, and I anxiously awaited the evening campfire, when the music and singing would begin. Adding anxiety to the anticipation was the

realization that I would be playing in front of more people around the campfire that night than I had ever played before, many of whom I had just met that day. As dusk turned into night and the embers began to glow, the guitars came out, and the sing-along was on. What an amazing night, one that I never wanted to see end. Three or four of us had brought our acoustic guitars to the campfire. We each took turns suggesting group numbers to sing, from well-known artists from the Beatles to Peter, Paul & Mary. We also each took turns on solo numbers. I sang “Farther & Son” by Cat Stevens, “Fire & Rain” by James Taylor, “Is it Really Love at All?” by Eric Anderson, and my original song, “Sunny Day,” which I had written earlier that year. Everyone’s performance was very well received. I was honored to be asked, via popular acclaim, to repeat all four of my songs later in the evening. It was the kind of night that could create visions of a musical career dancing in your head (however farfetched you knew that was).

As the music faded into the night, an unexpected vision was spread out before me: all these pretty girls mulling around, waiting to talk to the musicians (me). As I looked on, it was clear to me what many of my musician friends had been trying to tell me for years. Their motivation for playing out: girls love musicians. Happening in front of my eyes was what was commonly referred to as the groupie effect. Girls, many of whom I had just met, expressed an interest in taking a walk with me or having me return to their tent. No wonder so many marginally talented guys want to become musicians. How else can you get this kind of access to so many girls? This intoxicating outpouring of affection from all of these girls was staggering and, frankly, a little disconcerting. Unlike the majority, my motivation for playing had always been the music. I had poured my heart and soul into it that night, as I always did. I kidded myself that maybe there was just something about the night or something in my music. Whatever the reason, I had clearly touched some of these girls. The whole experience was quite

surreal. But unlike many of my peers and much to their bewilderment, I expressed no interest in having a casual sexual encounter with any of these girls, no matter how interesting and attractive they might have been. As far as how the night would proceed, I felt a bit like the proverbial kid in a candy store. I decided to try to find one girl from this oozing mass of desire who seemed genuinely friendly, pretty, and not interested in a casual sexual encounter. Someone I could enjoy talking with on a hike to the falls. I sought out the girl I had bumped into while we were waiting for food. We shared a few laughs, and she sounded genuinely interested when I mentioned that I would play my guitar at the campout. I located her standing smiling on the edge of the campfire and asked if she would like to go hiking with me. We talked as she was surrounded by a sea of music-loving peers vying for a walk with any one of the night's musicians. Seemingly surprised that I had asked her, she gave me a quizzical look. After a pregnant pause, she smiled and said, "Sure!" As we headed out on our hike, I hoped she would understand that, unlike seemingly all the other boys on the campout, I was only interested in talking, companionship, and hiking. I hoped she would be too.

Michelle was a beautiful little hippie girl with straight, long blond hair and a peace sign patch on the pocket of her jeans. She reminded me of her namesake, Michelle Phillips, from The Mamas & the Papas. Michelle went to school at Maryvale and was going to be an exchange student in France for her entire senior year. I told her about my hopes to attend Georgetown's Foreign Service school. We joked about someday running into each other again halfway around the world. Michelle had a wealth of interests, which made her enjoyable to talk with. We swapped stories of our failed love lives and laughed about how little we both had in common with each of them. Time just glided by as we effortlessly talked the night away. By the time we returned from our hike, the moon had set, and the night sky was pitch black, except for the sporadic twinkle of stars. Cautiously, we

struggled to find Michelle's campsite in the darkened night. Since my tent had been struck on the opposite side of the compound, with a significant expanse of dark wooded terrain in between, Michelle suggested that I not struggle back to my camp and stay at her campsite. It was a clear, warm night perfect for sleeping under the stars; I figured, why not? Michelle gave me a blanket, bid me good night, and headed for her tent. It had been such a perfect night; we had sung around the campfire for hours, and I had just had an exhilarating hike with this beautiful girl. For me, life didn't get any better than that. I fell asleep euphoric, gazing in awe at the constellations in the night's magnificent sky. I couldn't help but think that perhaps fate, in the form of this campout, had led me to my dream girl.

The next morning, I woke up with the sun before anyone in Michelle's camp awoke and made my way back to my friend's camp. I was horrified to be greeted by the sickening macho strains of hail, the conquering hero. No amount of protestation on my part could convince my friends that I had only gone on a hike with Michelle. I assured them that I had simply crashed under the stars at Michelle's campsite. Slaps on my back and raucous insinuating laughter followed me wherever I went. I was perplexed at the overwhelming obsession with my status from the night before. All this unfounded talk was making me increasingly uncomfortable. I was especially concerned for my new friend, Michelle. Together, we shared a fantastic night and became quick friends. I had even entertained the possibility that we might become more than that. I knew Michelle would not be happy with how my raucous friends characterized our evening together. Eventually, the painfully inevitable happened. Through the grapevine rumor mill that teenagers are so adept at building, Michelle had heard that I was supposedly bragging about my alleged sexual conquest of her. Having only known me for one night, it was easy for her to believe that I may have been telling tales to my friends at her expense. Knowing nothing to the contrary and believing the rumors to be

true, Michelle was rightfully furious with me. Unfortunately for me, I had little time to resolve the confusion; we were scheduled to strike camp that afternoon. Desperately, I searched for her so I could clear my name. I finally found Michelle in tears, unwilling to even look at me, much less talk. Summoning up as much earnestness as I could muster, I told Michelle that I had pig friends and that they had made up this whole horrible story after I returned from spending the night at her camp. I told her that I supposed it was unimaginable for my friends' hormone-driven brains even to imagine the idea of a boy spending the night at a girl's camp without eventually resorting to sex. Out of desperation, I reminded Michelle that we had actually discussed this topic during our previous night's walk. I reminded her that I had mentioned that most of my friends were sex-obsessed and had no comprehension of my more gentlemanly attitude toward girls. And that my friends just assumed that their piggish attitude must have applied to me. Sadly, I had been too shy and embarrassed to discuss this topic with my friends. Humiliated, I admitted to Michelle that I had sheepishly allowed my friends' misconception to persist because it had saved me grief from my friends when they were bandying about sexual bragging rights. Regrettably, this was actually the first time my deception had been exposed and had come back to haunt me. I was brokenhearted that my reluctance to discuss this topic with my Neanderthal friends had come back to hurt Michelle. This kind, beautiful girl I had just spent a magnificent night with had been humiliated due to the disgusting vulgarity of my friends. I was anguished by the knowledge that my reluctance to talk honestly with my friends had severely damaged our budding friendship. After listening intently to my account of what had transpired, Michelle seemed to understand how I felt. Magnanimously, Michelle forgave me for inadvertently causing her to endure that awful mocking. But while Michelle seemed to believe my explanation, I think the whole experience had exhausted her. As we broke camp, saying our goodbyes, we

made no plans to continue seeing each other in the future. Tragically, I knew my embryonic relationship with this wonderful girl was now permanently ruined; I would never see Michelle again.

A “Burning” Desire

KenTon’s two high schools had a long history of pranks during homecoming week. Being seniors and interested in leaving a mark, my friends and I struggled mightily to come up with something we thought would be noteworthy. John, “The Mighty Quinn,” had the original idea, “Let’s go burn West’s wood pile before they hold their bonfire this weekend.” “Brilliant!” I replied without hesitation. The wood would be stacked on the side of the school building, towards the soccer field, waiting to be burned at their rally the following night. What a great prank it would be to deprive them of their bonfire by torching it a night early. The plan was simple: drive over to Kenmore West, douse the wood in gasoline, light a match, and then get out of there as fast as possible, leaving the West bonfire to go up in smoke. What could possibly go wrong? As we drove over to deliver our coup de grace to Kenmore West, suddenly, the image of Principal Koats flashed into my mind, along with the image of my having to explain this act of vandalism to him. It reverberated in my brain. Here we were, the Student Forum president and the Senior Class president (Quinn), on their way to torch a rival school’s wood for their bonfire. For the first time since the idea had been proposed, the reality of the act made me feel extremely nervous. As we pulled up to the school, we realized that, despite our best-laid plan, there was one variable that we had not accounted for: people. Even though it was around 7:30 at night, quite a few people were still milling around the building, especially in the parking lot near where the wood had been stacked, awaiting the weekend’s pyre. There was no possible way for us to ignite that bonfire unobtrusively. Discretion said we would have to abort; getting caught in the act was not a part of our plan. But wait. I had an idea that could

salvage our trip and satiate our lust for a genuinely senseless act of juvenile bravado. We could use the gasoline we brought to ignite the wood to burn a giant K E in West's front lawn. Everyone agreed it seemed a much less dangerous endeavor. Quinn and I would take the gas cans and walk on the lawn, each spelling out a letter. We would be inconspicuous since it was dusk, and our actions would not be evident from a distance. Our friend John Engel, driving the getaway car, could position the car in front of the school, waiting to whisk us away from the scene. Of particular concern was that we would need to coordinate our match droppings, used to ignite the grass, with the traffic light signals in front of the school. Failing to take that into account could have resulted in the uncomfortable prospect of watching the grass go up in flames while waiting at the light to attempt our getaway. As we emptied the gas cans onto the Kenmore West lawn, no one seemed to take any notice of our actions. Completing our gasoline mission, Quinn and I took our positions at the base of the letters we had formed, located nearest the street, and waited for the light to turn red and finally green. As the cross-street's light turned amber, we struck our matches. It all came together instantly; the light turned green, we dropped our matches, and we sped to the waiting car. Not until we rounded the corner onto the side street did we get a chance to admire our handiwork. Flames were jumping all over the lawn, and the people who had been milling around were now running toward the flames to see what was happening. Our revised prank was a huge success. As we crossed the train tracks on Harrison at high speed, the tops of our heads bounced off the ceiling of the carp. Traveling over the bump in the road at high speed caused a massive reaction. We were giddy with excitement and talked about possibly driving back to admire our handiwork. I reminded them that returning to the scene of the crime was the worst thing we could do. We would have to endure waiting for secondhand reports. It was also agreed that we would tell NO ONE what we had done. We would have to content

ourselves with anonymous pride whenever the subject came up. Everyone agreed that this would be the wisest course of action. Unfortunately, no one accounted for our student advisor and math teacher, Mr. Crown's knowledge of Quinn and me, along with his extraordinary powers of deduction.

The next day, the school was all a-buzz with talk about the big K E that had been burned into the lawn at Kenmore West. It appeared from reports that no one had any idea who was responsible for this school branding on the front lawn. Quinn and I congratulated ourselves on a job well done. After our first-period Calculus class, Mr. Crown made a polite request. "Dave and John, could you stay after class for a minute?" In his capacity as Student Forum advisor, it was not unusual for Mr. Crown to ask us to stay after class. We were completely unaware of the fury that was about to ensue. Mr. Crown looked grim, "so, do either of you know anything about the 'branding' at West?" The look of shock and fear on our faces must have easily betrayed our pathetic attempts at denial. Neither Quinn nor I were very good poker players, and judging by Mr. Crown's stern demeanor, there was little to be gained in perpetrating a charade. "You Idiots! You risked your entire future last night." "What on earth were you thinking?" Mr. Crown continued in this vein for five minutes, the redness in his face intensifying with his escalating volume. We responded meekly, "We thought it would be funny." "Funny?" Mr. Crown responded incredulously, "Are you guys crazy? What if something had gone wrong? What if someone was hurt putting out your 'funny' fire?" The worst part about this blistering scolding was not just enduring Mr. Crown's justifiable wrath but the feeling he conveyed in no uncertain terms that we had greatly disappointed him. As with a parent, the feeling of having let him down hurt the most. It was not for nothing that many students involved in Booster Club and Student Forum had referred to him as "Dad." He was the kind of teacher that inspired you to do your best for him. Quinn and I had betrayed the faith and trust

that Mr. Crown had shown in us, and we would spend the remainder of our senior year attempting to make it up to him. Our anxiously anticipated day-long victory lap had been abruptly aborted after the first period!

Shootin' the Bull and Slingin' the Shoist

Unlike its title, the Booster Club is a lot more than all that Rah Rah nonsense; it was the student business center of the school. When I arrived at Kenmore East, personality clashes had marred the relationship between the Student Forum and the Booster Club (devolving into a so-called battle of Radicals vs. Rah RaHS). However, a change in personalities in my junior year resulted in some fresh air and a much-needed truce between the groups; the Student Forum and the Booster Club worked very closely together after that. Everything that the Student Forum didn't handle was addressed by the Booster Club, from selling refreshments at dances and sporting events to holding movie night fundraisers. Some of the more creative among us even found an entertaining way to perform the traditional "booster" functions. Inspired by a devilish desire to wreak havoc on the opposing teams at basketball games and our love of outrageous puns and limericks (inspired by The Firesign Theatre) - The Bullshoisters were born. Our name was derived from our school's nickname (Bulldogs), and the only acceptable euphemism for the ritualized BS that was our stock and trade. Our motto was "Shootin' the Bull and Slingin the Shoist. We would chant cheers in unison, highlighted by pun-filled witticisms that we would create, and run off on the school mimeograph machine and distribute before the games. Sometimes, we would be a little too clever for our own good. As a result, I would occasionally be summoned to the principal's office to explain a particularly inventive cheer. Fortunately for my academic record, the assistant principal I was sent to see, Mr. Koats, thought we were entertaining and even funny, if occasionally careless with our prose. I had known Mr. Koats since junior high school; he had moved up to high school the same year our class did. He

could become exasperated with our shenanigans, but he never tried to censor us or shut us down. Occasionally, in a supportive but serious tone, he would remind me, "Regardless of how funny YOU think you are, there are some things that aren't so funny when yelled by 30 guys at the top of their lungs!"

Our crowning recognition came when the basketball coach, Mr. Matte, credited the Bullsisters with a pivotal role in our most significant victory of the basketball season. The opposition's star center became so obsessed with, and distracted by, specific cheers and chants we performed that he took two technical fouls and ended up fouling out early. What had so enraged him? While many cheers have long since faded from memory, this simple but effective chant remains etched in my mind, along with the look on his face as he lunged at us in the stands! His name was George Pete; standing 6'7", he was an imposing presence on a high school basketball court. His team, the North Tonawanda Lumberjacks, was undefeated at that point. From the moment of the player introductions, our taunting began. In call and response form, everyone would lustfully chant, "Pull your Peeter!" I would gleefully retort, "Pull HIM Out!" This lustfully delivered, repetitious chant had taken Pete utterly off his game. Distracted, his play was ineffectual before finally fouling. Whenever he passed our location on the sidelines, he would take his eyes off the court and glare at us. Paradoxically, I often felt that our taunting actually did him a favor that day. With his size and ability, he would undoubtedly play college ball. The style of chanting we had harangued him with had a long tradition in college basketball. He would need to learn to ignore the taunts, or his college basketball career would be short-lived. And yes, this was one of those times when our chanting landed me squarely in the principal's office the next day!

Hey, Space Opera!

Mr. Crown was also responsible for helping me achieve one of my greatest triumphs as Student Forum president, bringing a national recording artist to Kenmore East for a concert. The idea of a concert in the auditorium, as opposed to a dance in the gym, was an idea I had been pursuing since my first days as a homeroom rep. It was not an idea that the teachers and the administration easily understood. When I first proposed it to some members of the Faculty Senate, I explained that, at a concert, we needed to be all able to sit down and listen to the music; they were sure that listening to all that hippie music would surely lead to anarchy! By my senior year, I had built up enough goodwill within the administration and faculty that my request was finally being taken seriously. Mr. Crown agreed to present my proposal to the Faculty Senate, and after some spirited debate, I was permitted to hold the first rock concert at Kenmore East! I was elated; now, all I had to do was to find a band. Freddy Side had helped me book many local dance bands when I served as Dance Coordinator. During that time, I had always told him about my desire to book a national act for a concert. “Sure thing, kid; we’ll take care of you,” Freddy would always say. At one point in my sophomore year, we even talked seriously about bringing Chuck Berry in. He was having tax problems and was willing to book gigs anywhere that would pay. However, it turned out that he did not bring a backup band with him, and he depended on us to hire local musicians to back him up. This seemed too complicated and risky for us, so we dropped the idea. In 1972, a new hybrid music form of Country and Rock was just taking off. Pioneered by the Byrds and specifically Graham Parsons, many bands performed this new style of music. The Eagles, Poco, and The Flying Burrito Brothers were some of the most well-known bands. Space Opera, an up-and-coming band out of Austin, Texas, had just released their self-titled debut album. It was a classic example of the genre, mixing

country roots, acoustic guitars, and multi-part harmonies into an engaging musical tapestry. Freddy said they were touring the northeast in the spring and, more importantly, were in my price range. I brought the album in and played some songs at the next student forum meeting. There was unanimous agreement that they would be a great band to bring in for our first concert. A date was set, and tickets were printed. Cool posters were made and hung around the school. Everything was ready for the big day. We aggressively promoted the “first concert in Kenmore East history” show. Unfortunately, ticket sales never quite matched my enthusiasm for the event. As the day approached, I desperately hustled to sell tickets to avoid a money-losing disaster. Little did I know that money problems would be the least of my difficulties that night. Everything started well; the band arrived and performed a sound check in the afternoon. As the auditorium began to fill, it was obvious that this was not “just another school dance held in the auditorium.” For one thing, a much greater percentage of hippies were seen in attendance, their colorful dress in stark contrast to the usual polite school dance attire. The well-known aroma of patchouli oil and hemp waffled through the room, too, one of many alien presences on display in the school that night. Finally, fashionably late, the band began their set. The band’s sound was good, and the vocalists were in good voices. I settled in to enjoy this culmination of two years of effort. As I began to relax, Cliff LeStein sat down beside me with a grim look; he said I needed to go backstage right away. Lou Reuler was a student favorite as a history teacher, JV football coach, and student advisor. He advocated for student activities and helped me obtain permission for the concert. He was attending the concert as a teacher/chaperone. Before the show, Mr. Reuler wandered backstage to the dressing room area and discovered the band smoking pot. As I arrived backstage, he was going berserk. He wanted to terminate the concert just as it was beginning. After listening to him rant for almost five minutes, I was able to convince him (with a couple of other

teachers' support) that prematurely ending the concert and sending all the people home disappointed would not accomplish anything. We would probably be forced to refund at least some of the people's money. And there was little guarantee that we could recover our fee for the band (they had been paid in advance). So, thankfully, cooler heads were allowed to prevail. The concert was deemed an artistic success, and it even turned a small profit. However, according to the school administration, it was one success that they were in no hurry to repeat. As word of the backstage pot affair spread among the students and teachers, I was repeatedly called on to explain why it had been so important to have a concert. Some teachers began to mockingly refer to me as "Space Opera Hyzy" or just "Space Opera" whenever they wanted to get my goat. Unperturbed, I replied that I had no regrets. I had realized my dream of bringing a real rock band to my school. It was the first WNY school to have such a show. Protestations from the administration notwithstanding, within five years, rock concerts in the auditorium would be commonplace.

What's It All About Alfie . . . Doolittle

Following the successful summer production of "Brigadoon," I was asked to be the Business Manager for our school production of *My Fair Lady*. My responsibilities were administrative and routine: to assist Mr. Crannon and the student director, my close friend Cliff LeStein, in any way they deemed necessary. Through my involvement in student government, I knew how to get things done and organize people. Perhaps most importantly, I was on a first-name basis with all the custodians (my badge of honor). Auditions for speaking parts were winding down when fate intervened. I had maintained a list of candidates who had tried out for each part, what piece they had performed, and the impressions that Cliff and Mr. Crannon (and Miss Hills, the Choral director) had of each hopeful. I have replayed the events that happened next so often that it has become indelibly etched

in my mind. Mr. Crannon turned to me, seemingly in jest but with surprising earnestness, and said, “Hey Dave, why don’t you go up there and try Alfie Doolittle?” Why indeed? Alfie Doolittle was the cockney father of Eliza Doolittle (My Fair Lady). He was a jovial “bloke” who enjoyed life in all its excesses and never passed up a chance for “a pint.” Alfie’s role had two big production numbers, “With a Little Bit of Luck” and “Get Me to the Church on Time.” I decided I would “give ‘er a go!” What did I have to lose? Painfully, we had endured a series of mediocre renditions of “With a Little Bit of Luck.” By then, we had suffered through the song at least a dozen times. I had every inflection and phrasing down cold. During the auditions, for our amusement, Cliff and I had been cracking jokes in a mock cockney accent all day. Maybe that’s why Crannon had me go up there; maybe it was time to put up or shut up. Until this point, all the guys auditioning for the part had tried to sing the song without dramatic elaboration. Since my only experience was in drama, I decided to ham up the song by injecting some of the cockney phrasing Cliff and I had been using, which added some personality to the first two lines of each verse. As I rolled into the chorus, looking out into the audience, my characterizations seemed well received. I could hear Crannon laughing in the back of the auditorium. But wait, was he laughing with me or AT me? I soldiered on to the conclusion of the song. Maddeningly, I would have to wait until the next day to find out if I had gotten the part. I had never previously considered being in the musical; now, I was sitting on pins and needles, hoping to find out if I’d made the cut. To make matters worse, performing my original role, I had to continue working with Cliff and Crannon. I had agreed to help them sort through all the auditions for all of the other roles. That was originally why I was there in the first place. They did their best not to tip their hand, but I was confident I would get the part. After all, why bother having me audition in the first place, right?

The Making of My Fair Lady

The student director, Cliff LeStein, and I had known each other since we first met as politically motivated sophomores. Cliff was the only cast member with whom I had a preexisting friendship. I barely knew any of the cast and crew in MFL when we started rehearsals. Having spent the past two-plus years going to school together and having made it my goal to know as many of my peers as possible might make that unfamiliarity seem peculiar. However, my high school had almost a thousand people in each of the three grades. Depending on your areas of after-school involvement, it was easy to traverse through the halls, blissfully ignorant of many of the people you passed daily. That lack of familiarity was particularly true of each of the other primary leads in *My Fair Lady*: Larry as Col. Pickering, Bill as Henry Higgins, Joe as Freddy Einsfort Hill, and Pam as the star Eliza Doolittle. I was a senior, and all four of them were juniors. More significantly, none of them, except for Joe, had been involved in student government and booster club activities, where I had spent most of my extracurricular time during high school. Predictably, initially, there was the usual awkward feeling-out process among the cast members. But friendships quickly blossomed as rehearsals progressed, and we each demonstrated our commitment to the show. Numerous cast and crew members would frequently go out as a group after rehearsal to relax, unwind, and, most importantly, get to know each other. The safety in numbers afforded by this type of group outing can prove to be a subtle incubator for more meaningful one-on-one relationships. Relationships develop like subconscious thoughts that recur in your mind until one day, with dumbfounded amazement, you realize that something significant has occurred while you were unaware. Through a mixture of naive obliviousness and a genuine interest in getting to know people, I have been caught unaware in this way more than once in my life. Such was the case with Eliza.

My Relationship with Eliza

When I joined My Fair Lady's cast, I wasn't interested in finding a girlfriend; I was too busy. Besides, I was attempting in vain to carry on a long-distance relationship, truly only a friendship with Carey. Carey and I had an on-again, mostly off-again relationship in my junior year. During one of the on-again moments, I accompanied her to her senior prom. Carey was now a freshman at Oswego State. We saw each other occasionally during her infrequent visits home. Carey was a talented actress and director. She was involved in drama throughout high school, so she continued that pursuit at Oswego. Carey was thrilled to hear that I had gotten a leading role in My Fair Lady and wrote with great anticipation about coming home to see me on stage as Alfie Doolittle.

Pam Stack was a beautiful, talented girl with a positively incredible voice. At the beginning of musical rehearsals, I barely knew who she was. Again, how was this possible? How had I gone through almost my entire school career without encountering this long-haired blonde girl with a fabulous voice and dynamic personality? Our post-rehearsal group sojourns offered me a perfect opportunity to rectify that oversight. Like a well-crafted song whose delicate intricacies continue to reveal themselves long after you've become familiar with the tune, meeting Pam was an ongoing revelation. Pam had a trained operatic voice and was the orchestra's first violinist. Pam had also participated with the Erie County and NY State Choral groups, even singing in the chorus for jazz great Chuck Mangione. Did I mention Pam also played the piano for fun? As a hack rock bass player and bedroom musician, I was in awe of Pam's talents. During rehearsals, Pam displayed a personality that could only be described as "volcanic." She had an intensity that could be extremely challenging. On more than one occasion, she attempted to shake the cast out of our repetition-induced lethargy by reminding us in full voice, "This show has to be PERFECT!" As the weeks wore on, Pam and I

started spending more and more time alone together. Imperceptibly (at least to me), we had pulled away from the group. I can't say there was ever a conscious decision to start a relationship, at least not on my naive part; I just enjoyed Pam's company. To my good fortune, the feeling was mutual. Incredibly, our lives had converged on this musical stage in one challenging and exhilarating moment. As time went on, all other concerns faded to insignificance. During the crucible of this short three-month period, I forged many lasting personal relationships, but none was more significant or lasting than my connection with Pam. Occasionally, after rehearsal, we drove around town, talking about the show, the people in the cast, and the experiences we were both having. It was intoxicating.

As rehearsals wore on, I started picking up Pam at her home and then dropping her off afterward. I was never the impatiently rude honk-in-the-driveway type. Since I was regularly stopping at Pam's house, I had the opportunity to meet her remarkable family. Pam was the oldest of 8 children, with six sisters and one brother. Even by baby boom-era standards, that was a big family. I remember Becky, Curt, and Lizzy, her younger sisters and brother, nearest Pam's age, incessantly teasing Pam whenever I came around. Since I appeared, as my friends would say, like a long-haired hippy freak, I always tried to assure my friends' parents that while I might look threatening to them, I was just a regular guy – albeit one with shoulder-length hair. Pam's father, a former college football player at Syracuse, was a baseball coach/history teacher at a rival high school, Kenmore West. My strategy for winning over wary parents was explicitly meant for people like George Stack, Pam's father. I believed I could put him at ease; a short conversation about sports usually did the trick, at least so I hoped. He was always stoic in his demeanor, and after many of our conversations, I was never sure if my strategy had actually worked with him. No such elaborate strategy was necessary for Pam's mother. On first entering their home, I was immediately greeted by

brightly colored paisley-printed wallpaper and the sound of '60s music on the stereo. Pam had repeatedly told me she had the coolest mom; now I could see that for myself. Janie Stack raised her eight kids with passion, enthusiasm, and discipline. She was friendly, outgoing, and straightforward to talk to. It was easy to see where Pam got her engaging personality from.

Wouldn't it NOT Be Lovely

The production seemed to be rounding into shape as the show's opening night approached. Everyone who has ever been in a high school musical has uttered the self-congratulatory phrase, "THIS show is NOT your average high school musical." Obliging, the experienced musical director is heard to say, "This is really a special group of kids, the best I've had in years – if ever." I will stipulate that we probably tended toward this self-delusion, but those around My Fair Lady regularly engaged in this type of hyperbole. However, there was one indisputable exception to the cliché: it was clear to all involved that Pam as Eliza Doolittle was giving a virtuoso performance, rarely seen in high school musicals. Her incredible vocal range, comedic skills on the order of Lucille Ball, and believable cockney accent combined to deliver a stellar presentation of Eliza Doolittle. As I said previously, Pam possessed an operatically trained voice, which she commanded to effortlessly deliver the heavy musical load placed on Eliza in My Fair Lady (we determined that there were only four scenes in the entire show when Eliza was not on stage – two of them mine). The result was a truly remarkable performance. It was truly unfortunate that this musical took place in the pre-VCR era; therefore, no video recording of Pam's stellar performance exists. You will have to take me at my word for it: Pam was incredible. My Fair Lady was a marvelous showcase of Pam's talents; she made the most of it.

The last week of rehearsals featured a dangerously aggressive performance schedule that had never been attempted before with Kenmore East musicals.

Incredibly, including three complete dress rehearsals in front of audiences. A Sunday matinee had been added to the traditional Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night performances to meet the overwhelming ticket demand. There would be six complete performances in a week. Unbeknownst to the cast and crew, there had been a great deal of debate within the school music and drama departments regarding the wisdom of such an aggressive schedule of performances. The most serious concern was the toll it would undoubtedly take on Pam, who carried such a significant singing burden in the show. In retrospect, it was regrettable that there wasn't a decision to reduce the performance load in either the number or nature of the performances.

Following three fruitful full-dress rehearsals, opening night was a rousing success. It was announced to the cast and crew before curtain up that all four performances had been sold out. This sparked talk of possibly extending the show's run to the following weekend – completely unprecedented. Buoyed by the thrill of a show hitting its stride, Friday night's show even surpassed the opener. Then, on Saturday night, during the opening number "Wouldn't it be Lovely," the unthinkable, yet sadly predictable, disaster struck. Pam opened her mouth to sing, but her vocal cords betrayed her – to our horror, Pam had lost her singing voice. I'll never forget the look of helpless shock and panic on Pam's face. Standing just off stage left, I had been looking right at her when disaster struck. Amazingly, being a real trooper, Pam managed to finish the song and the scene before bolting to the dressing room in a blaze of tears and fury. While I took the stage for the "With a Little Bit o' Luck" scene, Mr. Crannon and Miss Sticks struggled to calm and console Pam, all the while trying to decide how to best proceed with the show. Should the understudy be sent in to take over? Pam demonstrated on stage that she could still deliver her lines; it was just her singing voice that seemed to be affected. Together, they arrived at an ingenious solution, especially for 1973 technology.

Understudy, Mary would sing the songs off stage into a microphone, and Pam would simply lip-synch the songs. Pam could continue to perform all the other aspects of her role. Proof of how well Pam and Martha carried off this charade came following the conclusion of the show. Barely anyone realized that Pam had lost her singing voice during the opening number or that she did not sing any of the remaining numbers.

After the Unthinkable

As I mentioned, Cliff and I had both been involved in Student Affairs. Cliff was the school newspaper editor, and I was the student government president. The backstage aftermath following Pam losing her voice drew out our well-worn leadership skills. Bedlam is not too severe a word to describe the scene. Girls were sobbing; guys were wandering around aimlessly (some of the guys even had tears welling up in their eyes). “What are we gonna do?” was like some kind of zombie mantra. Amidst the chaos, Cliff and I knew the show was on the line. There was one thing we had to do, and quickly. While Pam, Phil, and Lauren were on stage, we called the rest of the cast into the Chorus room. There, Cliff and I took turns assuring everyone that the show would indeed go on that night. Cliff described how Mary was doing the singing while Pam lip-synched. I reminded everyone that, in all likelihood, this would be our last show together. Building emotion, I urged the cast to take this opportunity to perform with as much determination and professionalism as possible, as Pam was demonstrating. Our words seemed to re-focus the cast, and everyone returned to business, concentrating on the show. The cast demonstrated an extra sense of enthusiasm during the closing choral number, “Get Me to the Church on Time, which is the last time the chorus is on the stage.” Everyone had pitched in to ensure that if this were to be our last show, this production would be something special. Following the conclusion of the show, friends and families joined the cast and crew on stage. I spied Pam’s mother on

stage left, looking a little dazed. I walked over to her and gave her a big hug. Too emotionally drained for words, I just wanted to assure her how proud we all were of Pam's performance under extreme duress and to guarantee that somehow everything would be okay. Following the trauma of Saturday night, there would be no first-time Sunday matinee and obviously no unprecedented following week. With Eliza Doolittle's singing voice muted, *My Fair Lady* came to an abrupt, premature, and devastating end that Saturday night. This was a huge disappointment for the cast, many of whom had brothers and sisters scheduled to come to Sunday's now-canceled matinee show. Such was the case with both Pam's younger sisters and my younger brothers; all had waited for the Sunday matinee to see the show.

There is a unique bonding that takes place during the creation of a musical. All that time spent together rehearsing in close proximity is a powerfully intoxicating experience. As the performances commenced, everyone was so totally absorbed with show preparation that few had time to contemplate the fact that we had reached the final stage of this glorious, all-engrossing experience and that soon it would be coming to an end. Some theatrical observers have likened the melancholy that sets in after the end of a musical to that of the grief accompanying a death. If there is any truth to that analogy, then the end of "*My Fair Lady*" was like murder. No one had seen the end coming; we had no time to prepare. There was no triumphant march to the final curtain call. In the straining of a single vocal cord, plans for a triumphant Sunday performance had been permanently, unalterably aborted. Of course, no one felt worse about the result than Pam. I tried to assure her that a physical injury is just that, a physical injury. No one had the right to blame her for losing her voice any more than they could blame her for having appendicitis. Pam may have believed that logically, but the fiery performer could not forgive her voice for deserting her at such a critical moment.

Moving Apart, Staying Friends, and Making New Ones

With Pam Stack, I had just spent two months in the intoxicating hold of a completely new group of friends and a very intriguing, dynamic person. But no matter how alluring, the thought of pairing off with her never appealed to me. So, without the musical to hold us together, Pam and I gradually drifted apart, back to our natural friend universes. But, in keeping with my relationship theory, by not ratcheting up the relationship, we remained friends, something that would have been highly unlikely had we broken up after truly pairing off. This fact was of trivial significance to me at the time. In retrospect, maintaining that friendship with Pam ultimately played a significant role in the future course of my life.

Vibecca Harlbach, an exchange student from Denmark, was a striking blonde in the Danish tradition, and like many in her country, she was a socialist. That concept, so despised in America, fascinated me. As school commenced, I decided I needed to get to know this Danish girl. Discussing the social democrat compact in Denmark was quite illuminating to a person who had always been taught that the United States had the greatest government/economic system on the face of the earth. Vibecca talked with great pride about how her country had provided healthcare to all their people and how they provided all workers with five weeks' vacation. A government-driven social safety net had virtually eliminated poverty. Vibecca appreciated my intelligent questions and was grateful that I didn't possess the usual jingoist attitude toward her country that she had become all too familiar with in the US. I commenced a friendship with Vibecca that day, which was to last the entire year. As the senior prom approached, I turned to Vibecca to help me out of a self-imposed jam. As the prom date neared, I realized that having broken up with Pam, I was without a date for the prom. Most of the guys in high school were intimidated by Vibecca's combination of beauty, intelligence, and self-confidence. She went through the entire year without a single date, observing

the neanderthal nature of the American boy. Having been her friend for the whole year, it seemed a shame that this remarkable girl would end her American high school tour without experiencing a high school prom. I decided to ask Vibecca to accompany me to the prom, and she happily accepted. In addition to her intelligence, Vibecca was a witty conversationalist with a sharp tongue, making her a pleasure to be around. Her European education gave her exposure to a broad range of topics. My goal for the evening was to explore as many of them as possible. We had a wonderful time exploring each other's minds and even had time for a few laughs. It was a glorious evening; it made me wish I had found time in my busy life to spend a little more time with her. We doubled with my friend Joe and his girlfriend Leslie (who had spent a summer in Indonesia as an exchange student). For the prom, I decided to dress to the hilt. I wore a Black Tux with a top hat, tails, cape, white gloves, and a walking stick. We finished the night with a trip to the darkened Niagara Falls. Two weeks after the prom, Vibecca returned home with college and law school awaiting. Sadly, after a brief exchange of letters, the trail between us grew cold. I always expected to hear one day about Vibecca serving in the Danish parliament.

III New Love to Mania

Finding Pam Bolinski

Pam Bolinski and I became friends during our sophomore year in high school. Pam was a cheerleader with an above-average intellect who shared my interest in student government. We rarely hung out together and certainly never dated, but we remained good friends throughout high school. Pam had a few jock boyfriends, full of teenage macho bravado. The kind of guys who treated her like a

mere possession as they basked in the reflected glow of their trophy girlfriend, Pam. I always wondered if this kind of relationship was meant to satisfy the cheerleader's unwritten obligation to date a sports hero (Pam was a cheerleader throughout high school). I had observed that these one-dimensional boyfriends tended to leave Pam frustrated and unsatisfied. These superficial relationships left the person inside the cheerleader façade emotionally and intellectually unfulfilled.

Our graduation class (1973) of almost one thousand students was far too big to graduate all of the students together in the school auditorium. Instead of finding a larger venue, the class was split in half, and two ceremonies were held. (The following year, it dawned on the administration that holding one graduation ceremony in a larger hall was probably preferable to this bifurcated affair.) As student leaders, Pam and I were required to attend both ceremonies. At a graduation party following our double graduation, Pam and I found ourselves pleasantly talking to each other, continuing for a few hours. We talked about our college plans, future pursuits, and life in general. Having both been actively involved in numerous school activities, we also talked about how strange it would be to suddenly have so much free time. To help fill the void, we made plans to go to Friendly's Ice Cream the next day to continue our conversation. Picking up Pam the next day to go to Friendly's, I had absolutely no preconceptions or delusions of a budding romantic relationship of any kind. In my experience, beautiful blonde girls like Pam didn't date guys like me. I may have been funny, maybe even interesting to talk to, but amazing girls like Pam never found any romantic interest in ordinary guys like me. Following through on our plans to talk, I was merely extending my longstanding practice of befriending interesting girls, a pattern I had begun in elementary school.

Her name was Carol Gaden; we were in fourth grade, so I guess that made us 9 or 10. None of my male friends could understand why I wanted to ride my

bike to Carol's house instead of going to the park with them. I can't articulate my reasoning any more clearly today than I could explain it to them at the time; "I just enjoy her company," Something I used to say with apologetic certainty. The truth is I have always found girls and women much more interesting as friends. At an early age, I learned that by listening attentively and sharing their interests, the most amazing conversations could be had with girls. That is not to say that I did not form lasting friendships with some of the boys I grew up with and other adult men. I have formed many such relationships, some lasting over 50 years. However, male friendships tend to be more superficial and centered around a specific activity, event, or hobby. Veering from the designated area of interest is rarely encouraged and often disdained. In my experience, women are exceedingly more open-minded, thus producing much more interesting conversations.

Pam and I picked up right where we had left off the previous day, diving into a conversation about our lives and futures. Delving into the intricacies of our plans, we were blissfully ignorant of the comings and goings of the people around us. So intent were we in our conversation that a couple of hours disappeared in the blink of an eye. Suddenly realizing that Pam needed to be home to help with dinner, I hurriedly drove her home as we planned to see a movie that evening. For me, everything was starting to take on a dream-like quality. Without being genuinely conscious as it was happening, we had fallen into a comfortable pattern of seeing each other every day. For some improbable reason, two people who only knew each other superficially through three years of high school had suddenly discovered a whole world in common. Being together became effortless. The urge to share with each other the wonders of our world had become powerfully compelling. Thinking about Pam and what we would next talk about started to consume my every waking thought.

Naturally, the real world had to intrude on my reverie. In the spring, I was accepted to attend Georgetown University in the fall. I would attend the prestigious Edmund G. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC. As a result, I would have to interrupt this budding love affair and leave town for three days to travel to Georgetown for first-year orientation. While Georgetown had been my first choice, and I had looked forward to attending school in Washington, DC, for some time, I now looked upon traveling to Georgetown as some horrible chore and a hideous interruption of my idyllic summer. The thought of going to Georgetown and leaving Pam also posed a looming predicament. What would happen in the fall? Something had to be done so I did not have to leave Pam at the end of the summer. Returning home, traveling on I-81 through the hills of Pennsylvania, as I watched the golden sun fall below the western horizon, an answer to my dilemma came to me. It was simple: why not transfer to the University of Buffalo and attend college at home? Pam was attending Buffalo State College. So, if I went to UB, I wouldn't have to confront the inevitable long-distance dissolution of our relationship. I could avoid the slow breakup that invariably occurs when someone leaves home for school. UB had a nationally ranked program, and my father was an alumnus. Undoubtedly, for these reasons, my parents would be understanding and supportive. After all, the superseding fact was that this was my life, and this was what I wanted to do with my life. I anxiously counted down the miles in anticipation of sharing my new plan with my parents.

Sadly, I couldn't have been more wrong regarding my parents' reaction. After I returned, I announced my intentions at the dinner table. My proposal set off a firestorm of recriminations. "How could you be so stupid as to throw away your future over this girl, over any girl? You have always wanted to be in government service; why would you change those plans now? You're just scared to leave home; that's normal. You'll be fine after you've been at Georgetown for a little

while!” Then, most cuttingly, “This girl you’re dating isn’t even in your league; she’s a town girl, nowhere near your intellectual equal. She’s just not right for you, and besides, you know there will be plenty more like her at college – actually, plenty more, even better than her!” And finally, from my father, summoning up all his emotion, with a great deal of anger in his voice and a determined sense of finality, “I am saying you CAN’T do this; I am paying for your college education, so you are going to Georgetown, and that’s that!”

Obsession to Illness

Thanks to my parents’ vehement reaction to what I felt was a reasonable request, conditions in my life devolved quickly. My mind was awash in a sea of animated anxiety. A relationship that had initially seemed so natural and easy was now suddenly in mortal jeopardy, thanks to my impending move to Georgetown. Fear of losing Pam caused me to obsess about the relationship even more. This obsession insidiously altered my behavior. The changes were imperceptible to me at the time, but in retrospect, I can see that my friends, and most ominously Pam, could sense: “Something’s not right with Dave.”

One significant incident, out of many during that fateful fortnight, illustrates how mania had infested my mind. Reading the newspaper one night, I came across a cover story about the opening of Rich Stadium (at the time, the brand-new football stadium for the Buffalo Bills) scheduled for a grand opening gala the following month. Browsing the article, my mind wandered excitedly to the fact that Pam and I had already made plans to attend the game together. I stood there euphoric, thinking about how great that night was going to be. Impulsively, I decided I needed to see Pam right then and there. I was anxious to see her and share with her everything that was on my mind. As luck would have it, my parents and younger brothers were visiting my mother’s sister in Michigan, so I had no parental requirement to explain where I was headed; I could just go see Pam. It

was a glorious, warm night; I grabbed my guitar and set out on foot to see my beautiful girl!

At this time in my life, my 12-string and I were inseparable. I took my guitar with me regularly and enjoyed playing wherever I went. Often, I would participate in sing-alongs with my friends. That guitar was my prized possession, and I took great care to protect my instrument wherever I went. However, that night, I felt euphoric; casually, my guitar was strapped over my shoulder, troubadour style. A brilliant full moon hung in the summer evening sky as I walked the route to Pam's house. The lunar glow helped illuminate the usually darkened streets of my town as I made my way, guitar in tow. I had just begun playing with an open tuning technique for the guitar and had begun experimenting with open tuning in the key of D. I called it perfect D. A 12-string guitar, as the name implies, has 12 strings, twice the usual collection of strings on a standard guitar. All strings are joined in pairs, with the lower four pairs out of six an octave apart. This new tuning allowed for a great deal of experimentation. Walking with my guitar strapped on allowed me to tune and strum as I walked, something I had never done before. On this magical night, I enjoyed the tuning-strumming process very much; I found it invigorating. I can't say that the same may have been true for everyone I encountered along the way, but their small-minded disapproval could not deter me. I was reveling in the inspiration of the moment, and it was sweeping me away.

After what seemed like no time at all, I was in front of Pam's house. The walkover had been entirely exhilarating, and I was anxious to share my experiences with Pam. With naive exuberance, I rang the doorbell. Instantly, a sudden jolt of reality intruded on my perfect world. "Dave, what are you doing here at this hour?" Pam's mother angrily greeted me as she opened the door. "I need to talk to Pam," I eagerly replied, still blithely unaware of the extent of my transgression. Pam's mother was uncharacteristically stern with me, "Dave, it's

after midnight!” Obsessing over my intentions, I was still undeterred, “could I just talk to Pam for a minute?” “Dave, she’s sleeping!!!” Pam’s mother was a very kind and generous woman; she reminded me of my Polish grandmother. Having this kind-hearted woman yell at me so forcefully startled me. Suddenly, I became uncomfortably aware of the lateness of the hour and the awkward nature of my presence at Pam’s house. I apologized profusely and immediately headed away from the door. Pam’s mother assured me that she understood that I was just over-excited. As a conciliatory parting shot, she suggested I “just mind the time the next time around.”

The walk back home was nowhere near as idyllic as the walkover had been. Now, the moon appeared to have swollen in size and hung menacingly low in the sky. This appeared to me as an ominous harbinger of the coming day. My mind was racing, rehearsing potential thoughts to answer the inevitable recriminations I would face from Pam for disturbing her mother so late at night. I remained blissfully unaware of exactly what it was that I had done wrong, but my feeling of foreboding was overwhelming. Obsessively worrying about the morning ahead made any chance of sleep impossible. However, in truth, I hadn’t been sleeping very much recently. Strangely, I just didn’t seem to need much sleep. My buddy Joe’s standard admonition to anyone looking to end the night prematurely rang sarcastically in my ears, “You can sleep when you’re dead!” Sleep was out of the question as I lay awake in my room, listening to music on headphones and compulsively scribbling random thoughts in a notebook. As the night wore on, the pain of the scolding Pam’s mother had delivered to me and the dread of Pam’s coming retribution seemed to have subsided to some degree. Now, my mind was filled with a cacophony of indiscriminate new thoughts coming at me from all directions. Like soap bubbles blown from a wand in my brain, they would evaporate before I could get my head around most of them. But there always

seemed to be new random thoughts to take their place. Watching the sunrise, my hurtling mind was bolstered with a false euphoria. Foolishly blind to the nature of what I had done the night before, I desperately contemplated ways that I could make things right with Pam.

Impatient, I struggled to wait for the clock to reach a respectable calling hour. As the hours crawled on, I again rehearsed the conversation I wanted to engage in with Pam. Each recitation increased the level of my anxiety and apprehension. At eleven in the morning, with an overpowering mixture of suspense and dread, I called Pam's house. As expected, Pam was justifiably upset with me. Her anger was humbling, but it was the sound of fear in her voice that really devastated me. Fear regarding my recent unpredictability and her inability to cope with it. This attitude confirmed my gravest fears regarding Pam's reaction to the previous night. This was my worst nightmare being realized. After weeks of moving full steam ahead with our budding relationship, Pam now thought it would be best if we slowed things down the pace. "Frankly, something is going on with you that I really don't understand, and it frightens me. You're scaring me, Dave, and I'm not sure how I can feel comfortable around you anymore." The helium balloon of emotion that had lifted me to her house the night before was now totally collapsed, shattered by the pointed prick of Pam's deflating words. I struggled to mollify Pam's concerns by assuring her that I had been temporarily overtaken by emotion and that she had nothing to fear from me in the future. Shaken, Pam replied, "You have no idea how your actions look from my viewpoint." Pam added with a touch of melancholy, "I'm just as much afraid FOR you as I am afraid of you." In desperation, I summoned all the contrition I could muster and sincerely apologized again for acting so erratically. I promised I would do better going forward (a promise I was sadly incapable of delivering on). After hearing my anguished appeal, Pam was still guarded but seemed slightly more conciliatory.

Closing the call, we made tentative plans to see each other in a couple of days. As we hung up, the fact that nothing had been concretely resolved gnawed on my mind. Over the ensuing years, I have attempted to reconstruct this conversation a thousand times, looking for some insight into what really transpired on this call. I could never make sense of it with my manic brain, and the fog of time has ensured that I would never develop greater insight with time. I remain haunted by the fact that this tragically unfortunate incident cost me my relationship with this wonderful girl, in my mind at the time, the love of my life. Though we continued to date sporadically until I left for Georgetown three weeks later, in all reality, my relationship ended with my mania-driven walk to Pam's house. Following the call, I immersed myself in a calmingly beautiful, warm, sunny summer's day, but it did me no benefit. My mind was still scrambling, propelled by an avalanche of random thoughts of love and paralyzed by the fear that something extraordinary had just been tragically lost.

The Breaking Point

To truly understand the transformational nature of my mania and how my thinking was peculiarly altered, we must start by looking back five years to when I was 12. After completing my confirmation ceremony, I joked to my family, "The way that Bishop just slapped me, I'm never going back to church." Of course, the polite tap from the bishop was just another of the mysterious rituals of the Catholic Church that my parents had made me endure. The truth is, I did stop going to church after my confirmation, but it wasn't because of that quizzical ceremony. No, for me, the Catholic Church was too heavily burdened with indignities like the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the imprisonment of Galileo. For a young student of history, the Catholic Church had too much to answer for, and no one seemed willing to provide a valid justification for continued reverence toward this very mortal institution. It didn't help that the religious instruction teachers provided to

answer our questions were universally reluctant to engage in any serious discussion of the factual inaccuracies and logical fallacies in the bible that I had pointed out. Living in the Space Age, it seemed quaintly naive to insist that these clearly illogical things should be believed on the basis of faith alone. Perhaps I was missing some cosmic clue, but try as I might, I could not suspend my belief in the logic and reason that had proven so vital to me.

My views on the church never faltered in the intervening five years. For this reason, the essence of my manic-inspired stream of consciousness should have set off many alarm bells. Indeed, anyone paying particular attention to what I was saying would have been certain that something strange was happening inside my head. Independent of any specific religious doctrine, I had been overcome by an epiphany. I had been imbued with a knowing certainty that endless love was inside and around us all. Since most people were simply too busy in their day-to-day lives, they were unable to perceive this magical beauty. Even more powerfully, I was certain that I had uncovered the true meaning of god. My epiphany had convinced me that god's presence existed as the life force in each of us. Here I wasn't referring to the personal god of Christianity that answered prayers, but the powerful life force in the universe that kept everything in motion. At barely 18, I felt genuinely intoxicated by this revelation. Overcome with this spiritous love, I felt compelled to share these awe-inspiring insights with everyone I met, especially my brother and friends. The most common response I received from my friends was laughter. Not only was this an uncommon topic for discussion, but coming from the most aggressively agnostic person in the group, it must have seemed as if aliens had inhabited my body. Infuriatingly, nobody would take anything I said seriously. And, as if the spiritual insights were not enough, mania had also induced a peculiar Christ Complex in my head, something, it turns out, not uncommon for manic individuals. The revelation of a Christ complex originated

from my parents' three-volume book on the illustrated life of Jesus Christ. These books had temporarily become the focal point of my mercurial attention. Stored on the family room bookshelf, I had readily ignored them for years. But now, the words were providing a deeper, more powerful meaning. A meaning that seemed specifically designed for me. Telling of a person who had spent many years wandering unaware before finally being compelled to share the compassionate message he had learned. The books also told the story of one who was laughed at and scorned for preaching his message of love. For this, he was cruelly persecuted but was ultimately vindicated. The more I read these passages, the more certain I became that the story was mine. I was sure that these books had been brought into my house so that I could discover them and thereby understand my life's mission. When I discovered the passage about his having many misunderstandings with his parents, I thought about how I had spent so many years arguing with my parents and how we had spent so many years not understanding each other. Excitedly, I located my mother's phonebook and looked up my aunt's phone number in Michigan. I got my father on the line and breathlessly told him, "Dad, now I understand." Confused, he mentioned something about coming home the next day. Hanging up, I felt euphoric.

Mockery and Torment

It was a warm summer Sunday afternoon; my friends were hanging out in the park across the street from my house, boisterously laughing and joking in the shade of a couple of old elm trees. Still euphoric from the past fortnight's revelations and undeterred by my painful encounter with Pam two nights previous, I eagerly strapped on my guitar and went to the park to join my friends. Bolstered by an undeniable certainty in the ideas my recent epiphany had bestowed on me, I crossed the street to the park, infused with a passionate spark that no amount of cynicism could extinguish. Reaching my friends in the park, I broke into a chorus

of David Crosby's "Music is Love." Smirking, one of my friends interrupted to ask if I had been smoking pot that morning (I hadn't), then he added with a sneer, "Didn't everybody think Hyz's been acting kinda strange lately?" As I began to protest, I was suddenly greeted with a mocking chorus of complaints about how peculiarly everyone thought I had been acting lately. In turn, each of them chimed in with their laundry list of corrosive complaints against me. As euphoric as I had felt crossing into the park, my emotions had now plunged into deep frustration and abject despair. Why couldn't, or wouldn't, anyone understand the depth of my feelings? I had been completely frank with them; I had shared the power of love and the mighty truths the universe had revealed to me. Why wouldn't they take me seriously? Why couldn't they comprehend the depth of my beliefs? Desperate for my friend's understanding, I was gutted by their mockery and torment. My mind was reeling. Was this the persecution and betrayal that my readings had foretold? Just now, my brother Bob, having heard the racket from across the street, came to check things out. Hearing about my exploits from my friends, Bob laughed dismissively and said, "Dave's probably high." In an instant, everyone started laughing and nodded in agreement. I felt utterly hopeless about my ability to ever get my message across to these guys, the most important people in my life.

Inharmonious Fragments

Desolate, I searched for an appropriate gesture to demonstrate the seriousness and the depth of my feelings. I needed something that would unambiguously convey the irrefutable intensity of my emotions. In a blurred instant of fury, I gripped my precious 12-string guitar, held it like a Louisville slugger, and swung for the fences with a mighty cut, shattering my guitar against the nearby tetherball pole. In a desperate instant of manic rage, I had smashed my prized possession into inharmonious fragments of wood and steel. I was sure now I had their attention. Of course, my actions in that instant confirmed for my friends

their worst fears that none dared express out loud: something's wrong with Dave, unmistakably, Dave's nuts. In vain, they tried to calm me down, attempting to restrain me, but I would have none of it; I had to flee.

You're Bleeding Real Bad

As I frantically raced away from my friends, my mind was locked on my old high school friend, Jeff. He lived a short distance down the street from the park. Jeff and I had engaged in many deep philosophical discussions over the last few years. Surely, he would understand me; I made a beeline for his house. Desperately, I knocked on his front door, but there was no answer. I continued knocking with increasing urgency. Suddenly, my hands penetrated the windowpane in the middle of the large wooden door. The jagged glass cut into both my hands and sliced across my right wrist. As I started to walk back home, I was downcast at Jeff's unavailability but strangely oblivious to my wounds and the blood trail I was starting to leave. On my way down the street, my brother Bob intercepted me along the sidewalk. Looking at my bloody arms, he went ballistic, "Holy shit, Dave, you're bleeding real bad." Leaving me, Bob rushed home to call a doctor friend of my father's who lived only a few streets away. In all of the excitement, my heart was pounding; I couldn't focus on anything happening around me. My obliviousness made me a compliant patient as the doctor washed my wounds and stitched me up in our kitchen. After he was finished, the doctor mentioned that he had spoken with my father, and they decided to give me some medicine to help me rest. Indifferent to what he was saying, I just shrugged. I was heedless to what the doctor gave me, but according to my brother, there were enough sedatives to put down a horse. Whatever it was, it did not affect my disjointed emotions. I remained in a wildly agitated state for the remainder of the day, with random thoughts racing through my unsettled mind. Unmindful of most of the activity around me, I still had a sinking feeling that something terrible must

have happened. But in a scattered flurry of guilt-ridden recriminations, I had no idea what was really in store for me when my parents returned the next day.

So, This is a Mental Hospital

Motion pictures had created a vivid impression in my mind of mental illness and mental hospitals. “Fear Strikes Out” and “Snake Pit” both did a graphic job of portraying the hell that is mental illness and the deplorable life many sick people are forced to live. The movies painted a picture of a human cesspool of despair, something to be avoided at all costs. The hopelessness depicted in these films brought to mind the phrase from Dante’s “The Inferno,” the words emblazoned above the gates of hell: “Abandon Hope, all ye who enter here.” It makes logical sense that individuals solving complex problems usually turn to the tools they are most comfortable with to help resolve them. Since my father was a physician, it was only natural that he would look for a medical solution to his current problem: me. Determined to find a medical solution for my apparent delirium, my parents predictably had me admitted to a mental hospital, Linwood-Bryant Hospital, for observation. Still unmindful of the extent of my actions, I did not understand the reason for this forced incarceration and felt I was being unjustly victimized. I continued to protest even as the doors were being locked behind me. I struggled to understand what had landed me in this modern-day snake pit. I freely admitted to busting up my guitar, so I guess I had some kind of penance coming. But admission to a mental hospital seemed like an awfully extreme step; at least, it sure did to me.

I knew my family was scheduled to leave for a cottage they rented in Canada the following week. So, I was reasonably confident I would have to be released from the bin by then. The confounding part, and what troubled me the most, was that everybody working in the hospital actually thought there was something wrong with me. With mania still cursing through my brain, I knew they had to be

the delusional ones. Quietly sitting on my bed in the hospital following that traumatic Saturday in the park, I was bemused by the notion that everyone could be so concerned about me. After all, I knew I was completely fine, better than fine; I felt inspired. I had been energized by the power of the universe. Sure, I sometimes talked a little cryptically, using a word-matching code I created with my mind. But if that confused people, I gladly clarify it for them. It seemed to me that there was nothing strange about any of my behaviors. Yes, I was often accused of having my ideas burst out of my mouth in an uncontrolled, rapid, staccato fashion. But I felt I was just passing along the thoughts I needed to be said. And I realized I had been accused of having a high opinion of myself. But humility aside, those who are touched by the gods of the universe and called to service can't help but feel imbued with a special gift.

Linwood Bryant Hospital was housed in an old 19th-century Buffalo mansion, emblematic of Buffalo's civic peak at the turn of the 20th-century architecture. Grafted on this fine old three-story structure was a dull square, two-story, yellow brick building that appeared to have been built without any imagination in the 50s or 60s. Combined, these two buildings gave the impression of a bad joke, interesting but completely tasteless. Inexplicably, the grand old house would be demolished years later to provide parking to support the still dull yellow-brick monstrosity. The reality of the hospital was quite different, both from the movie depictions I remembered and the camping frolic I had arrogantly anticipated. The most prevalent emotions in the mental hospital were boredom and exhaustion. The incessant medication stew created the exhaustion. The workers at Linwood-Bryant were obsessed with making sure the patients regularly took their meds. The pill routine was always the same: hold out your hand for the paper cup with your pills in it, swallow the pills, then open your mouth and stick out your tongue so they could verify that you had, in fact, swallowed them. The degrading

nature of this exercise was matched by the ferocity with which it was enforced. Those that resisted compliance were pulled aside and force-fed their meds. Moving from total degradation to complete humiliation, I never saw anyone resist twice. The days were excruciatingly tedious and dull. For me, the high points of each day were the mealtimes; at least then, you had something constructive to do with yourself. Hospital staff discouraged you from staying in your room between meals. If you lingered, someone would come in and emphatically encourage you to go out to the dayroom. The Dayroom was where time seemed frozen in aspic. Like some warped interpretation of the “President’s Council on Physical Fitness” directives, patients were encouraged to go to the dayroom in the basement of the new building. There, they would aimlessly wander all day from one side of the room to the other. Alternatively, they could sit on the expansive porch stretching out in front of the old building. What a sight the patients made on the porch. Nervous nurses’ aides closely monitored the crazy people as they took their rest on this antebellum porch. In their grand rocking chairs, confined mental patients gazed quizzically at the freedom just beyond the porch gate. I was always amazed that more people didn’t try to make a break for it. I never actually saw a concerted effort to escape; it was always some poor, confused soul looking for the bathroom. The aide would smile and say, “OK, Charlie, the bathroom’s this way” (pointing to the building), and Charlie would turn and amble back in. I ultimately found some refuge in the day room with an old upright piano. I definitely don’t consider myself a legitimate piano player, but having destroyed my beloved guitar and needing a musical outlet, I found a temporary home in playing that piano. I was truly a piano hack, barely capable of banging out chords with my right hand and rudimentary bass notes with my left. However, I could transpose the guitar chords for songs I knew and turn them into piano chords. This allowed me to play my repertoire of James Taylor, Cat Stevens, Simon & Garfunkel, and The Beatles. It was a merciful

break from the constant monotony in the bin. I played every chance I got, initially only when the room was empty. However, gradually, patients heard me playing and asked me to play for them, which I was happy to do. When I had a group of patients in the room, I would joke, “Hey, we’ve got drugs, food, and music; we must be at Woodstock!” But if it was like Woodstock, the pouring rain downer came in the form of the activity on the third floor of the old building. I wasn’t sure exactly what went on up there, but I saw the results firsthand. On my first day in the lunchroom, one of the old timers pointed out what he referred to as the zombie people in the buffet line. I watched as these alleged zombies put food on their plates, their faces expressionless and lacking any emotion or facial affect. If you bumped into a zombie while waiting in line, they would silently recede. I figured some heavy medication had to be involved. It would take a more serious future visit to reveal the true secrets of the “zombie people.”

Heartfelt Pity

As I had expected, I was paroled after seven days of what seemed to me to be a pointless incarceration. I had been sedated, but if I was supposed to feel differently, I didn’t. If I was supposed to take to a newly medicated life, I wouldn’t. I planned to stop taking the numbing pills I was given as soon as I got home. In a cruel twist of fate, I was to be released on my 18th birthday. A coming-of-age date that had previously been so pregnant with symbolic importance had now faded into utter irrelevance in my mind. My parents must have sensed a problem and foolishly decided to do something about it. Incredibly, showing no insight into their son’s mental state after what he had just endured, they invited 20 of my friends to welcome me home from the Looney Bin with a foolish surprise party. There is nothing quite so demoralizing as the look of heartfelt pity on the faces of your friends. I can’t really blame them; indeed, just to show up, their hearts had to be in the right spot. But with only a few exceptions, they could not

conceal their unease with being around me or their mistrust of my actions. The cumulative effect of such intensely harmful exposure caused me to wonder if it would ever be possible to have a normal relationship with any of them again. The overwhelming answer turned out to be no. Mainly out of fear, most of these allegedly good friends would abandon me within weeks. I wanted to shout, “Hey everybody, nothing’s changed; it’s still me!” But those earnest faces belied real fear, fear of the unknown, fear of mental illness, fear of me. The exact extent of how much I had been acting crazy was actually irrelevant. Stories of my bizarre behavior were now fixed in their minds, and through rumor, gossip, and mythology, a damning portrait of me had calcified in their minds. Any spontaneous action on my part, regardless of how frivolous, was now met with severe apprehension. “Take it easy, Dave, don’t get so excited, Dave,” these admonitions rolled effortlessly out of my friend’s mouth like carbon dioxide. No amount of pleading on my part could change their horrified reaction to me. While I had been a leader among this group of friends (as I have been in most of my peer relationships), I was now viewed as badly damaged goods. Who willingly befriends a crazy person? Within this particular group of friends, my standing had been irreparably damaged and diminished. Instinctively, I knew this was going to be a tough crowd to convince. We had recently all graduated from high school and would soon go our separate ways in one short month. What chance did I have to repair the damage from my unusual actions and remove the stigma they had branded me with? I feared it was inevitable that the damage to my relationships would be permanent. An additional painful, unintended consequence of this forced coming-home party was that it was blatantly obvious who chose not to attend. While some absences may have occurred for perfectly benign reasons, it was easy for me to assume the worst in the emotional soup brewed up by this emotionally charged atmosphere. Predictably, Pam, the only person I genuinely wanted to see,

did not attend. A mutual friend told me she was still recovering from the trauma precipitated by my actions ten days ago. At that moment, amid all the other emotional baggage in the room, Pam's conspicuous absence had demolished all my hope, proving conclusively to me that the fairy-tale romance that had sustained me for the past month was truly over. Love's hope dies hard, but my heart had to begin to accept that my worst fears had been realized: I had squandered my opportunity and lost the girl of my dreams.

12-String and Grandview

There was a single bright spot on that horrible day. My parents bought me a Guild 12-string guitar for my birthday to replace the one I had unceremoniously smashed the week before. Not only was I extremely fortunate to have a guitar, any guitar, but using their limited knowledge of musical instruments, my parents had managed to pluck a veritable guitar version of a Mercedes out of my fiery wreck of a destroyed Volkswagen! I now had an instrument that would last a lifetime. I have always been grateful to the folks at the local music store who guided my parents toward this beautiful guitar. My only wish is that my parents would have stuck to just buying me the guitar and not bothered with the agonizingly painful surprise party. As I mentioned earlier, my parents were scheduled to drive to Canada that day to stay in a cabin at Grandview Lodge. Something which had been reserved and paid for months ago. In the Catskills tradition, Grandview had a series of cabins centered on a main lodge, used primarily for meals and entertainment. This vacation was an annual rite of summer that the whole family always looked forward to. There are two memories of Grandview that are indelibly etched in my mind. The first came when I was 13. It was the day my youngest brother Michael, then two years old, toddled off the dock right into the cold waters of Duck Bay. I remember looking down at Michael, a foot below the water's surface, and seeing his little eyes wide open. Instinctively, my brother Bob and I immediately jumped

into the water and pulled him out. Michael, smiling, was utterly unconcerned. Then there was a time when I was 15 and my brother Jimmy, eight years old at the time, climbed into the front seat of my dad's car and slipped the transmission into neutral (this was before the days of locking steering columns). Gravity began to take effect, and slowly, imperceptibly at first, the car started to slide towards the lake! Fortunately, Jimmy lacked the strength to close the driver's side door completely. So, I jumped into the open door, nudged Jimmy to the side, and applied the brake on the car. An amphibious test of an Oldsmobile Tornado had been averted. Needless to say, my father never again left the driver's side car door open when he left the car.

I wasn't originally scheduled to go to Grandview that year, having outgrown the desire for a family vacation. However, my stay in the looney bin required a change of plans. My parents weren't about to spend their vacation letting the crazy person roam free at home for a week while they tried not to worry about it. They came up with an ingenious plan to entice me to join them. They asked one of my friends to accompany us on the trip. This idea alone wasn't unique. Craig Marvin, one of the legions of older friends who graduated a year ahead of me, had driven me up to the cottage the previous year. Craig was enlisted so I could spend a long weekend in the woods before driving me to attend the summer school class I took to clear my record of that inadvertent F fiasco and so I could also take Drivers Ed. That scenario seems so pedestrian a context when compared with what had necessitated the change of plans the following year. But the truly inspiring part of my parents' calculation was that the friend they had invited was a girl, Leslie Fishler. Leslie and I had a very short-lived flirtation with dating in 7th grade, right after we met in our honors classes. When that relationship ended, we went on to develop a great friendship throughout the remainder of our school years, as I might have done if I had been fortunate to have a sister growing up over the years. I had

introduced Leslie to two of my good friends (each from different friend universes). In both instances, Leslie went on to have a long, if not permanent, relationship. Leslie was a sensitive, caring person who thought deeply about many things. Conversation with her could be light or intense; the subject matter could be very specific or extremely broad. Years later, I would come to realize that the characteristics or qualities I valued in a relationship were the traits I had first observed in Leslie. It is particularly ironic that Leslie Fishler, a girl I had barely dated, would ultimately end up being the epitome of the kind of girl I wanted to have a relationship with.

Happily, Leslie agreed to drive up to the cottage with me. We would follow my parents and brothers in a two-car caravan. At Grandview, my parents had arranged a Bunk for Leslie to sleep in. These one-room cabins had always been a mystery to me during the years we had been coming to Grandview. I had never observed anyone staying in one of them. As their name implies, bunk beds were positioned along one side of the rectangular mini cabin, with a small but nice sitting area on the opposite side. Leslie and I split our time between hiking around the lake and sitting at her Bunk singing songs, with me providing accompaniment on my guitar. Leslie was very gracious about my novice guitar playing and loved singing. She had a soft, pretty singing voice, and, more importantly, she knew how to harmonize. With my brand new guitar in hand and possessing a novel James Taylor music book given to me by a thoughtful friend on my birthday, I saw a lot of “Fire and Rain” that week!

My Manic Gordian Knot

Upon returning from that idyllic week at Grandview, reality awaited me. I needed to deal with my impending departure to Georgetown. It was crucial that I attempt to repair the damage my slide into craziness had wrought on my friends. And I desperately struggled to find a constructive way to approach Pam. Sadly, I

had no insight into my behavior; the hubris induced by my mental illness clouded my perspective. Clearly, my manic episode had a profound effect on Pam's attitude toward me, influencing all her feelings regarding our relationship. What was once celebrated as spontaneous enthusiasm and passion was now viewed with nervous suspicion. My intense empathy and caring for people now seemed more like a crazed obsession. I had trapped myself in a psychological "Gordian Knot," the harder I tried to explain my actions to Pam, the less receptive and more worried she became. After numerous pleadings on my part, perhaps acting out of pity and with more than a little bit of trepidation, Pam finally agreed to continue limited dating. At her insistence, I reluctantly agreed that our resumed dating would have to proceed at a significantly reduced frequency and intensity. Gone was any notion of being an actual boyfriend-girlfriend; I would have to be satisfied with a causal relationship. For me, this was a hollow victory indeed. In my heart, I knew that Pam was merely appeasing me. But I was grateful for the chance, any chance, to demonstrate my desire to make things right with her. Regardless of Pam's current state of mind, I knew my motives were genuine and that my affection for her was undying. I was frantic about finding a way to continue this fairy-tale relationship (at least in my mind). I hoped that by consistently demonstrating my true, stable personality, I could eventually convince Pam that I was still the same guy she had liked before. However, the wary look in her eyes as we discussed renewing this modified version of our dating told me that it would be a formidable challenge.

After a few phone conversations and a couple of limited visits to her house, we made plans to see the summer musical "Fiddler on the Roof" the following weekend. While a year ago, I had been intimately involved in the summer musical production; now I would be watching from the isolation of the audience. I was frustrated and envious at the thought of watching my friends put on a first-class production. I firmly believed I should have been up there. In retrospect, it was my

temporary sojourn from sanity that had prevented me from having a sound enough mind to win any part in that very talented and competitive cast. Embarrassingly, during rehearsals, manic jealousy had compelled me to engage in a humiliating argument and scuffle with Jim Schifle, the person whom I indignantly accused of stealing my part. As absurd as that idea was on the merits, consider that this was the same Jim Schifle that I had idolized, performing in roles such as Camelot's King Arthur and as JC in Jesus Christ Superstar. Fortunately, Jim had too much class to engage me until I finally made a confrontation inescapable. Treating me with undeserved respect, Jim resisted what must have been a compelling urge to break me like a twig.

Sadly, I have no clear memories of taking Pam to the musical that night. In fact, the only tangible thing I have from my entire relationship with Pam is a few beautiful photographs taken by my parents from a night we went out to dinner. We made a good-looking couple (in the early seventies style, long blonde hair – both of us, light blue suit – me, hippie peasant dress -her). As for the date to see Fiddler, did we have a good time? Had Pam's attitude towards me softened? The only indisputable fact coming out of that night is that it represented the last actual date we ever went on. I frantically attempted to visit her a few times at her house with limited success. There would be no goodbye; I was leaving for Georgetown in just over a week. My opportunities for redemption had run out.

IV Georgetown and Back to the Bin

... Ask What YOU Can Do For Your Country

The Edmund G. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Washington DC is the educational factory that turns out the largest percentage of government workers who toil at what is known as Foggy Bottom, The US Department of State. Gaining admission to and graduating from this prestigious school virtually guarantees a career in Foreign Service or related government fields. It is every bit as demanding and selective as any of the more well-known Ivy League schools, and it was just as apt to produce statesmen and politicians. In my application, I navigated a demanding series of probing interviews that explored my motives, inspirations, and goals. This was capped off with a grueling written exercise. Writing what felt like a short novel, I outlined my view of America's position in foreign affairs and how I intended to play a role in that future. (I was careful to stick to the traditional view of US foreign policy and not delve into my recently uncovered radical view of American Imperialism). Completing my admissions bundle were my SATs (in the low 1300's, above average but not great). My extremely well-rounded extracurricular resume completed the package. It was hoped that my well-constructed writing and broadly based extracurricular portfolio would make up for my mediocre (by Georgetown standards) SAT grades. There was an exhilarating atmosphere at my house the spring day that my acceptance letter arrived from Georgetown.

Washington Disneyland

For as long as I could remember, I had dreamed about a life in public service. As a child, I resisted reading fiction in favor of the more compelling (to me) biography and history books. One particular event, which happened at an early age, crystallized my love of history, government, and politics: our family trip to

Washington, DC. I was nine years old; John Kennedy had been assassinated only five months previously, an event that was seared into my young consciousness (as with all those who were alive at the time). This was a historic time when sweeping civil rights legislation was being debated (unfortunately, Congress had adjourned for Easter recess the week we were there, so we could not see Congress in session). The images, indelibly stored by my nine-year-old brain, remain clear to this day. They are a flood of majestic, historic, and awe-inspiring grandeur. The white marble, the long green lawns, and the pink Cherry blossoms all gave the city a fairytale quality. Despite the all-too-human failings of its temporary inhabitants, my awe-inspired feelings for this city remain with me to this day.

To see the city, my father had arranged public tours of the White House, the Capitol, the Smithsonian, the FBI, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (where all the money is printed). Of course, we also went to the National Mall to see the Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson Memorials (the FDR, WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Memorials would be built in the future). The majesty of Washington was like Disneyland to me; forget the rides and games; give me the White House and Capitol. As we were eating dinner on our last night in DC, it didn't seem that this trip could possibly get any better. Then, at one point in the middle of dinner, my father was called away for a phone call. As a physician, seeing my father called away for a phone call was not unusual, even while on vacation. However, my brother Bob (8 years old) and I were completely unprepared for the news being carried with my father's triumphant return to the table. He informed us that he had just received a call from an old UB fraternity brother who was currently working in the Secret Service. The agent said that if we hurried, he would be able to take us on a private tour of the White House! In disbelief, we jumped up from the table and hurriedly headed for the door. In a few short minutes, we arrived at the west gate of the White House. Just like I had observed in the movies, the guard asked my

father his name and then, after locating our name on his list, waved us in. After parking our car, Agent Willie Lawson came out to welcome us to the White House. He then proceeded to guide us through the White House. This included a series of ornate rooms, most of which we had previously seen on our public tour the previous day. However, unlike during the general tour when we were rushed from room to room, now we were able to linger in each of the rooms and genuinely absorb the house's true beauty. First Lady Jacquelyn Kennedy had spearheaded a project to wholly refurbish all the rooms in the White House. It had been completed just two years prior. As we continued our historical history tour of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, I sensed that we were in an unfamiliar part of the White House, one that we hadn't been in during the tour. Agent Lawson confirmed that we were now in an area in the White House referred to as the West Wing (this now familiar term that had only recently come into general use). Agent Lawson then led us into a grand, unlit conference room, the Cabinet Room. Tall black leather armchairs were arrayed around a massive conference table. On the back of each chair were golden rectangular plaques with the names of each current Secretary inscribed on them. Rounding the table and chairs, one by one, Bob and I read off the names on the chairs: McNamara, Rusk, Dillon, R. Kennedy, Udall, Freeman, and Wirtz, all recognizable names from the news. As we continued circumnavigating the table, Agent Lawson apologized for not being able to turn on the main lights in the meeting room. He said President Johnson was on an austerity kick, and if he noticed the lights on in the Cabinet Room, the President might get mad, and he didn't want that to happen. Bright lights or not, that image illuminates my memory to this day. Incredibly, I learned many years later that Secret Service Agent Willie Lawson was the man responsible for planning the route for JFK's doomed motorcade in Dallas. I can't imagine the burden that extremely kind man must have carried for the rest of his life.

Why can't I just go to UB?

For as much as I had originally planned on going to Georgetown, as the day to leave approached, I was consumed by doubt and unease. Still recovering from my manic episode from a month earlier, a stream of alternate ideas flooded my brain. Predictably, the manic episode had drained a fair amount of my self-confidence. And my epiphany had completely altered my view of what I wanted in life. I no longer possessed the high-powered drive to pursue a career in government service. Having looked so deeply inward, I was certain of what I did and did not want in my life. I wanted to carve out a small piece of my world and carefully tend to it, making it as perfect as possible. This wouldn't require a sojourn to Georgetown to accomplish; in fact, diving into that pressurized world would be counterproductive. I decided I would approach my parents using a revisitation of my previous plan, this time emphasizing the significance of my recent manic event. Why couldn't I just enroll at the University of Buffalo? After all, my father had attended UB for both undergraduate and Medical School. As a bonus, I could save them money by living at home. It seemed like a perfectly logical solution to me. However, my parents' response was no more positive than it had been the first time. They immediately reminded me that "government service was what you've always wanted to do." And in a patronizing way that only parents can achieve added, "You're just nervous about leaving home and starting up at a new school." To prove it wasn't a fear of leaving home, I pointed out that I would be willing to move out and live in the UB dorms if they preferred. I was adamant that it was not a case of nerves but a stark reflection of the changes that I had experienced in my life in the past month. That trauma was what motivated the change in my plans. I was seemingly incapable of clearly conveying to my parents that I just wanted to stay in Buffalo and go to school there. Undeniably, I wanted the opportunity to attempt to resurrect the damaged relationship with Pam. However, given the

deterioration of that relationship, reconciling with Pam was no longer my dominant motivation. Something profound had happened to me over the summer, something that took me years to understand fully. Sadly, it was something my parents were never able to comprehend. My breakdown in the park and my subsequent epiphany had altered my way of thinking permanently. For me, there was no sense in pretending otherwise. I was no longer interested in the same things out of life. In vain desperation, I sharpened my protestations with my parents. Wasn't UB a good school, I asked. (it was nationally ranked in many departments). Haven't you always said, "It wasn't the school you attend but the effort you deliver that makes the difference?" Listening to their oft-repeated arguing points returned back at them, my parents' response was to cruelly attack my heart by returning to Pam. "Why would you place such importance on a silly high school romance? You know that those flings never last." (as an ironic twist, two of my brothers remain married to their high school sweethearts). "Why would you want to give up your future so cheaply for that kind of girl?" Playing amateur psychologists, they mocked my transformation and returned to an accusation of fear. "You think you have changed; what do you know about change? You are just growing up and facing the fear of change, the fear of moving on." Emotion poured out of my mouth. "Georgetown was their dream, not mine," I shouted. "I have been going through the motions with government service for years. I actually like music and theatre every bit as much as government and politics. Maybe I should study one of them instead. Exasperated, I asked plaintively, "Is it so terrible that I stay where I want and go to school where I want, with some of my friends? It is still MY life, right." Once again, backed into a corner, my father, ignoring all of the points I had made, resorted to his usual terse response, calculated to end the debate. "As long as I am paying the bills, you will go where I say you will go!" Then, in a gratuitous attempt at the kind of negative reinforcement he learned from his father, "Now,

why don't you just grow up and start acting like a man about this? We are leaving for Georgetown this weekend, and that is final!"

In reconstructing this conversation years later, I am genuinely amazed that even though I raised the topic with them, the elephant in the room, my recent psychiatric past, was never even acknowledged by them or mentioned by my parents during the discussion. Amazingly, my departure to the ultra-high-pressure world of Georgetown came one month to the day after my release from Linwood Bryant for, at the time, some kind of still undiagnosed psychotic event. After living through the traumatic nature of these events, how my parents could be so deaf to my pleading for a change of plans has remained the greatest mystery of my life. This highly emotional exchange over my plans and where I should go to school underscored how little my parents truly understood about what had happened to me. Even the original misdiagnosed diagnosis of Adult-Onset Schizophrenia would seem to have been severe enough of a psychiatric condition to force a change in school plans, at minimum temporarily, since it came only a month after my hospitalization. Later psychiatric diagnosis would show that during that moment in time, I was in the throes of a full-blown mental illness. Yet my parents, a physician and a nurse, respectively, seemed utterly oblivious to the fragile emotional state that the trauma had put me in. Unthinkingly, they insisted that I continue with my school plans even though those plans had been made long before my emotional breakdown or whatever euphemism they wanted to call it. Coldly turning down my impassioned request for some kind of alternative betrayed how deeply in denial they were about the nature of my mental illness. Their blunt, ignorant answer to my desperate request to change my college plans was to imply that I was weak, afraid, or love-sick. Most painfully stubborn was the inference that it was impossible to turn back on these plans once they had been made. My parents would soon discover that refusing to compromise with me, demeaning my views, and

backing me into a corner would provide them with only a temporary victory. Knowing I had my life on the line, I took whatever means were available to me to extricate myself from these deplorable plans. Sadly, in a transparent way, my parents betrayed their true feelings of shame over what had happened to me. My parents always seemed much more concerned with hiding the fact of my illness from friends and family than with helping me cope with my new reality. Wishing to hide the fact of my stay in a mental hospital, my father had used his connections in the local medical community to have me registered at Linwood-Bryant under an alias. You might claim that he was merely trying to protect our family's privacy, given the stigma of mental illness. However, I discovered years later that my parents had concealed the fact of my illness from all close friends and family members, including my aunts, uncles, and grandparents. People who surely had recognized that "something's not right with Dave." Lacking insight from my parents, they were left to draw their own conclusions regarding my frequently wildly erratic behavior. My parents were too ashamed to frankly discuss it with anyone.

Fifth Floor of a Four-Floor Dorm

The trip to DC and Georgetown was completely surreal. First, traveling with my parents, all alone in the back seat, was a rare and awkward occurrence. I felt isolated without my traveling companion brothers, who always provided comic relief. Second, my mother insisted on incessantly talking with this chirpy, have-a-nice-day attitude that drove me crazy. It was like the 8-hour drive was some indoctrination/reeducation camp, and my mother's mission was to make me happy about going to Georgetown. It was a fool's errand; no amount of artificial sunshine was going to burn the fog that had descended over me regarding being taken to Georgetown. My illness may have had me hopelessly confused about some things,

but I knew this was a mistake. As the miles roared by, I stared out my window, desperately searching the hills of Pennsylvania for an answer to my predicament. Arriving in Washington, we went directly to the Georgetown campus. As we drove through the Washington streets, the once friendly, familiar sights of DC now seemed strangely ominous and forbidding, absent any of the excitement they previously held. This kidnapped return had stripped the capital city of all of its majesty, revealing a cold, heartless reality. Unquestionably, I did not want to be here. Then, Georgetown's housing department delivered the final, crushing blow. With the incoming class arriving at the height of the baby boom, classes were bursting at the seams. To accommodate the exceptionally large number of students requiring dorm space, storage areas (closets) on the fifth floor of this four-floor dormitory were converted into student living spaces. Each unlucky student would get two closets, one that barely fit a bed and the other that barely fit a desk. I was assigned my dual closet keys, and we headed over to the dorm to move my stuff in. Robotically, I unpacked all my worldly belongings (mainly consisting of my stereo equipment, my albums, and my clothes). My closets were everything you would expect from a turn-of-the-19th-century design. Configured as a proper home for a broom, mop, and pail, they were inadequately configured for human habitation. Death row inmates get more spacious accommodations. My most vexing decision was deciding which closet to put my stereo in. Since I liked to listen to music when I went to sleep, the bedroom won out over the luxurious sitting. A room that barely contained my desk. At dinner that night, my parents assured me that this would be a funny story someday. I pointed out that, "At the moment, the joke is on me!" My parents made plans to stop by at 11:00 to say goodbye before they drove back to Buffalo. I settled into my bedroom closet and hoped that sleep would awaken me from this raging nightmare. Overcome with fear and loathing, I had a fitful night trying to sleep. My mind was racing with thoughts of how I could find a way to

parole myself from this unjustly enforced imprisonment. I struggled to identify how I could free myself from this hell while still satisfying my father's oft-stated reproach to not be a quitter. As a sleepless night turned into day, a single word coalesced in my mind: Sabbatical. This would be my ticket out of this mistake. I would ask the Dean of Students for a leave of absence or sabbatical. I made sure to be at the Dean's office promptly at 9:00 a.m. when the office opened. I informed the Dean that I had some unfinished business back home and wasn't ready to begin classes this semester. I requested that I be granted a leave of absence. The Dean responded that while my request was not a common one, it was not unusual for a few freshmen every year to defer entering class for a year or more. He indicated that the school would hold my place at Georgetown for a year. I would be contacted in the spring to arrange for me to enroll in the School of Foreign Service next year. The Dean drew up the papers, and in a matter of 30 minutes, I was free. I wasn't even thinking about my parents' having the perception that I had used this maneuver simply to outsmart them. I was just happy to know that I would be free of this travesty and that I would be going home. When my parents arrived at 11:00, with naïve excitement, I bounded down the walkway to break the news. "You won't believe it. I found a solution to my dilemma; the Dean has granted me a leave of absence, and I can put off going to Georgetown for a year. Now I'll be able to go home with you." Foolishly, I had expected my parents to at least be satisfied with my resolution of this situation that so clearly bothered me. They were not. The looks on their faces showed a mixture of anger and disgust. "When did you do this? How were you able to do this? This is so stupid of you; you are throwing your life away." And most ominously, "Things are going to be very different for you when we get home." "You must think you are really smart, mister; well, you're not. You are going to pay a price for your proud moment of stupidity." I replied that the Dean had said that a small number of first-year

students apply for this every year and that with the leave of absence, I could come back to school next year (not that I intended to). Nothing made any difference to them. Variations on their threatening statements, punctuated by general silence, were the features of the return trip home. I was being taught a lesson by being frozen out; suitable punishment would be meted out upon our return.

Fool's Silver

Doctors Silver and Straus had psychiatric practice in Buffalo during the 1970s. I assumed that, having been picked out by my father, they would be reasonably competent, board-certified psychiatrists. Following my original “guitar smashing” episode, my parents started taking me to see Dr. Gold. His manner was a combination of fastidiousness and pomposity. He made me feel like I was trapped in the middle of a Monty Python skit. I had a hard time taking his imbecilic questions seriously. I will admit that my elevated mental state may have played a role in my finding the whole thing ridiculous. But trust me, Dr. Silver played a rather significant role in the surreal nature of these encounters. With his preposterously imperious questions and Freudian psycho-babble analysis, I took to greet him, “Hello, Dr. Fraud,” to his quizzical reaction. All of this would have been a just ludicrous game, except for one thing: he totally missed my diagnosis. Dr. Silver was the one who initially pegged my diagnosis as adult-onset schizophrenia. Even worse, he medicated me as a schizophrenic with Haldol and other psychotropic drugs, whose side effects made me goofy, sleepy, and angry. Out of self-preservation, in short order, I was skipping my meds, hoping to end the side effects that seemed worse than the disease.

The sad reality is that it took another two years and a new doctor for me to be correctly diagnosed as manic depressive. The new doctor assured me and provided me with the referenced medical books, which confirmed that my symptoms

provided a textbook case of manic depression. Silver's medical incompetence created a two-year delay in my treatment and sentenced me to two more years of needless and frustrating suffering. I often wonder, had I been correctly diagnosed the first time and given the proper medication, could I have saved myself the precarious years that followed my initial refusal to take meds.

Ominously, the day following our return from DC, my parents again consulted Dr. Silver. I'm sure they did so, as much out of exasperation with my recalcitrance as any clear diagnosis. Dr. Silver recommended that I be re-admitted to Linwood Bryant, something my parents were only too willing to accept. It would be a recurring theme for my parents: when in doubt about David, hospitalize him.

The Shocking Hospital

I have no clear chronological memory of the next series of events. While I am confident that all of them took place, I have had to use the available medical records to determine what event preceded what. Incredibly, within two days of my triumphant return home from DC, I was back in Linwood Bryant. I will concede that a clear psychotic episode precipitated my first hospitalization. But no one has ever been able to point to any similar episode triggering my second stay in the mental hospital. I was lucid, and I was not erratic. And even if I was still recovering from my preceding mania, I appeared outwardly as a mentally healthy person. The only possible reason I can deduce for the rush to put me back in the hospital is that my parents considered my defiant decision to take a leave of absence from Georgetown to be a psychotic act. Admittedly, while I believed that I was functioning normally (and my parents could point to no incidence to the contrary), it is possible that I was still in a recovering hyper-manic state on my return from Georgetown; it had been only five weeks after all. And it is an indisputable fact that stressful situations can induce mania in me. Given the fact

that only five weeks had passed since my first psychiatric event, it is certainly possible that I was in some elevated state when I returned from DC. However, my parents could never articulate any psychiatrically abnormal activity on my part before I was re-hospitalized. There was nothing beyond my rebellious act of defiantly requesting a leave of absence from Georgetown. I am emphasizing the sheer meaninglessness of all of this and my lack of any clinical abnormality because the heinous actions that followed changed my life forever. The traumatizing attack on my psyche was a direct result of my parents placing me in the hospital because they “didn’t know what else to do.”

Shock Treatment: the mere mentioning of the words conjures up the worst images of Dante’s “Inferno” and Joan Crawford in “Snake Pit.” Just the previous year, Thomas Eagleton had been forced to resign as the Democratic candidate for Vice President after he had admitted to having had shock treatments in his past. Fear and ignorance of mental illness contribute mightily to the prejudice against the mentally ill, and nothing was more feared than the application of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as shock treatment was now euphemistically referred to. ECT is used to distinguish the contemporary version of this therapy from the “barbaric” shock treatments of yore. Unfortunately, the public’s fears regarding the nature of shock treatments were matched by the medical profession’s blind ignorance of its true effectiveness, amazingly, even including the exact way that ECT provided therapeutic relief. Medicine’s answer at the time was that we’re not sure how it works, but it appears to make some people better (unfortunately, they cannot accurately predict who will benefit ahead of time). In that climate, I received a course of 10 shock treatments over 16 days. What was this supposed to do for me? Ask doctors Silver and Straus. It turns out that Silver specializes in BS and Straus in procedures. Straus administered every one of my ten shock treatments. As I said, I can’t really describe the day-to-day life during this hospital

stay. However, I have one slice-of-life anecdote from my stay which illuminates I topic I had discussed from my previous stay. During my first stay at the hospital, a patient had pointed to another patient walking the line for lunch; and the way she was shuffling along, I assumed that she must have damaged her legs in some way. “She’s had the treatment,” the first patient explained. “We call them the zombies.” I would notice a significant number of zombies over the rest of the week.

Modern shock treatments aren’t at all like what is depicted in the movies. For one thing, thankfully, the surroundings are clean and sterile. On the other hand, right out of central casting was the third floor of the old turn-of-the-century mansion on Linwood that had been converted into a hospital operating room. Climbing the stairs to this operating room in the old house always had a macabre feel. Another humane difference from the movies is that patients are sedated before the treatment. My last memory was always of the nurse putting the anti-choking bit in my mouth and then an oxygen mask over my face, then asking me to count backward from 100. I never remember hitting 97. When the process was over and the anesthetic had worn off, I was released for lunch. That the anesthetic had worn off did not mean I had returned to normal functioning. The post-shock haze left me unaware of my surroundings. Strangely, like tripping a switch, eventually, a surge of consciousness would wash over me, and I would come to consciousness, standing in line waiting for lunch. Like a tape that had been cut and spliced, I had been lying on an operating table counting backward, and then, suddenly, there I was in line for lunch. How long had it been? What had I been doing during the interim? There were never any satisfactory answers to those questions. During my first stay at the hospital, I was introduced to the mysterious zombies. Now I knew all about where the Zombies came from. Because now, thanks to shock treatment, I was a Zombie, too.

V Life After Shock Treatment

Depressed Manic Depression

As I found out, Shock treatment has a cruelly insidious way of obliterating your memory. There is no discernable pattern to what is retained and what is discarded—the randomness of this effect is its most painful part. For instance, in chronological order (all within six weeks of my shock treatment), my Prom, I remember; my graduation, I don't; meeting with Pam after graduation, I do remember; our ultimate breakup, I don't. Shock treatment-induced memory loss is a complete washout; when it occurs, it is like the event never happened. This is the most vicious aspect of shock treatment for me. Incredibly, regarding memories, other than the process of being administered anesthesia and then waking up in the lunchroom, the only completely intact memory that I have from my hospital stay came from watching the now-disgraced OJ Simpson break the single-game rushing mark in the Buffalo Bills' opening game on the road in New England. The Bills followed that up with another big road win and a repeat 200-yard-plus effort for Simpson the following week in San Diego. I watched both games from my hospital bed. It says something about the hold of football on my psyche that even shock treatments, administered before and after the games, couldn't completely blot out my memory of my beloved Bills.

I was released from Linwood-Bryant in late September, exhausted, groggy, and dull. Exuberance had been replaced by lethargy and mental alacrity with a stupor. Shock treatments had certainly affected my affect. I no longer cared enough to be furious with my parents about what they refused to admit they had done to me. But despite my parents' indifference, there was no mistaking the fact that something consequential had happened to me. Some clarity came when, months later, I came across a bill from Linwood Bryant for my ECT treatments lying on

my father's desk. Reading the paper, it was all clear. I was stunned to discover the extent of what had been done to me. While in the hospital, I had no clue that shock treatments were being administered to me. In fact, the terms shock treatment, or ECT, were never used at the hospital. I was stunned to comprehend the cruel torture that had been administered to me in the name of medicine.

Alone Again

Shock treatment had achieved my parents' main objective. Where I had been aggressive, I was now docile; where I had been argumentative, I was now mute; where I had been unpredictable, I was now docile. My life was an endless banal cycle highlighted by eating, sleeping, and watching TV. Every morning, I would lie in bed for hours after waking up, engaged in an internal debate on the relative merits of actually getting out of bed. After reluctantly deciding the case in the affirmative, I would take up my desired position on the family room couch. It was a position that would only occasionally be disturbed by meals, and sometimes not even then. The deleterious effect of the shock treatment was clearly evident to anyone who took an honest assessment of my condition. I had been forcibly transitioned out of mania to depression. This was one of the few periods of true depression I would ever suffer in my lifetime. Well-meaning friends initially tried to help return me to normal by inviting me to parties and other social gatherings. As well-meaning as their intentions were, I just wasn't that person anymore. Unfortunately, I was the only one who seemed to realize it. Everyone wanted me to "be Dave," but, to paraphrase Cheech & Chong, "Dave's not there, man!" I made a few half-hearted attempts at channeling my former persona, but it was painfully obvious (at least to me) that I did not have my heart in the effort. I started to believe that, actually, the person they were expecting did not really exist anymore. I was convinced that the sooner I wholeheartedly admitted this fact to myself, the

sooner I could get on with my life. This painful, post-hospitalization attempt at socialization illustrated to me both the defects and virtues of human nature in stark relief. Some of my friends were wonderfully supportive and genuinely interested in seeing me recover fully. Their kindness to me was touching and most evident in their willingness to treat me as if nothing unusual had taken place, a blessed slice of normalcy in relations. But in high school, I had acquired another, less empathetic kind of friend. The kind that would leech off your energy when things were going well but would, when that energy subsided, flit away like a parasite leaving for a new host. Following the news of my hospitalization, these friends saw me as nothing more than damaged goods, something to be pitied or ignored. They studiously avoided contact with me as if they were passing a dangerously troubled person raving on the street corner. Indeed, to them, I was precisely just another crazy person on the loose. I saw the truth of their feelings reflected the fear in their faces, their uncertainty towards me, and their doubt in responding whenever I came upon them. Their apprehension consumed them (perhaps they thought mental illness was contagious). Over time, I chose to spare these friends further distress or confusion by gradually receding from their lives voluntarily and without regret. Their true nature had been revealed, and I had no intention of playing any of the games they required to restore their friendship. As I struggled to get hold of my life, I knew, ultimately, that I would be better off without their painfully cutting, judgmental ways. I was tormented by the likelihood that Pam fell into this unforgiving category.

Getting My Life Back

Removing the pressure to be someone I could no longer conjure up was liberating. Gradually, I began to feel less like a freak and more like the new person that I was. When the dust settled on my life, I was left with two reliable universes

of friends. Steadfast through my struggles were the guys that I had grown up with, the self-named Curtis Park Killers; we had known each other since I moved to Curtis Park in 1961. The other was a very small band of brothers I had known from school, but our friendship revolved around our love of Buffalo Sabres hockey. Over time, they received some local notoriety as the Phantom Signmakers. Both groups of friends had remained loyal to me during my most troubling times. They were not disgusted nor dissuaded by my erratic manic behavior (or by my now insular depressive behavior). These guys made me feel like a real person again, not a patient. They were the ones who would not accept no for an answer; they were the ones not fixated on warily asking me, "So, how are you feeling today?"

In fact, how I was feeling proved to be an interesting topic. I had gradually stopped taking the mis-prescribed anti-psychotic drugs the doctors were giving me (like Haldol). Gradually, my stupor had lifted, and so some aspects of my personality actually returned. But with a return of my personality came a renewed anger with my parents over the grotesque treatment they had subjected me to. I was enraged at their willingness to consent so easily to allow the doctors to perform what amounted to an experiment on my brain. This betrayal altered my relationship with my parents permanently. Eventually, I would again come to view them with the traditional respect owed to my parents, but I would never again see them as reliable authority figures in my life. Lacking trust, I would no longer assume that they were necessarily looking out for my best interest. For this reason, I kept my parents totally unaware of my withdrawal from the medication. To their eyes, I remained a dutiful patient. The pills disappeared every day; they just didn't end up in my stomach. Although I was totally oblivious to the long-term effects of stopping the medication, I relished this successful deception as a small piece of retribution for their tragic betrayal.

VI The Era of Good Feeling

Get On With It

Finally, after a full year of sloth, I decided to get up from the couch and get a job to kill the boredom that had gradually reemerged with my recovery from depression. I went over to the Boulevard Mall and signed up for washing dishes and bussing tables at the Mall Restaurant. It was the Christmas shopping season, and as the only eatery in the mall (in these pre-food court days), they were continuously busy. There I learned that bussing tables (and, by observation, waiting tables) is actually difficult, thankless work. Yes, I know about tips, but the good tippers rarely compensated for the indifferent or, especially, for the rude. Paradoxically, given the Christmas season, there seemed to be a never-ending supply of the rude. I also learned the hard way how hot the water is that the dishes are washed in. Many nights, I would come home from work with my hands so raw that the idea of picking up my guitar for a nightly practice session was entirely out of the question. With these life lessons in hand, I reached one lasting conclusion: I did NOT want to bus tables and wash dishes for the rest of my life. So, just after Christmas, I quit. As the calendar turned to 1974, I bid a bitter farewell to the most traumatic year of my life. From the euphoria of finding Pam to the nadir of losing her, from the powerful epiphany of life's understanding to the psychic pain of forced shock treatment, I was determined to move on with my life in the new year. Working at the Mall Restaurant helped me finally shed the last of my depression, and I returned to something approaching a normal life, especially when socializing with my friends. I was once again living my life. I decided to enroll at UB for the Spring semester. My overwhelming motivation was a need to prove to myself that my intellect had survived the brain-numbing effect of repeated shock treatments. I craved some tangible proof that I was not irreparably brain-damaged from the ill-

fated drugs and procedures I had been given at the hands of doctors Silver and Straus during my stays at Linwood-Bryant. I remained haunted by the realization that the shocks to my brain had erased significant parts of my recent past, including some of the end of my high school year and some of my time with Pam. I was driven to uncover if, intellectually, I was still me, including my memory and my ability to reason. As I prepared to matriculate to UB for the January 74 spring term, I was by no means certain of the answer to those vexing existential questions. Seeing their formerly talented son vegetating on the couch day after day seemed to have completely transformed my parent's perspective on the benefit of my enrolling at UB. Incredibly, when I broke the idea to them, my parents betrayed no hint of any guilt or remorse for the traumatic travails they had repeatedly put me through regarding school. There was no remorse for attempting to force me to attend Georgetown against my will. And no acknowledgment of their cruel mockery of my previous suggestions that I attend UB. Now desperate for any scholastic advancement on my part, predictably, they thought my attending UB was a great idea. They both repeatedly stated how thrilled they were that I had decided to attend school. I tried very hard not to betray my bitterness at their abrupt and convenient change of heart. But the irony of their new position was just too intense for me to withstand. Dripping with sarcasm, I replied, "Gee, are you sure UB is good enough for one of your sons to attend? Do you think this school is sufficiently important scholastically to impress the bridge club and poker group?" They adamantly protested my comments' unfairness, but I would hear none of it; my point regarding their duplicity was made. They could debate the bitter reality of what they had said all they want, but now they would know unequivocally about the effect of their words. Despite their histrionics less than a year previous, I was going to attend UB. And I was going to go because I wanted to go, no other reason.

Classwork at UB

Happily, it turned out that my powers of critical thinking were still intact. My schoolwork was as interesting and challenging as it had ever been. Taking Ethics, Calculus, and World Civilization classes proved to be stimulating and productive. I had forgotten how much I enjoyed being challenged by classwork, especially interacting with professors and fellow students. Before my shock treatments, I had always done well in school; everything came easily to me. At an early age, I discovered that I could fully grasp the course material simply by paying strict attention in class. I would, of course, need to do the assigned reading, but I was never one for taking reams of meticulous notes. I had found that I could not pay sufficiently close attention to the teacher if I were trying to write notes. I was more successful simply sitting and listening attentively. At the beginning of each class, teachers always found this practice disconcerting. But their unease usually only lasted until the first quiz or test was given. When I demonstrated that I had, in fact, retained the material, all was well. I assumed college would be a new test for my strategy. Everyone had told me that things were going to be much different in college. I was warned that I had better learn to take good notes or risk becoming hopelessly lost. It sounded serious, and frankly, it made me a bit nervous. However, I had achieved good grades and above-average SATs working my way, so I was reluctant to change. My time in the mental hospital had certainly shaken my confidence more than a little, and I wasn't sure if all the synapses would be firing with their old alacrity. Still, I decided that I would dance with the one that brought me and continue to use the same methods that had worked so well for me in the past.

As it turned out, things in college were different. For example, the teachers (now professors) didn't seem to care at all whether I took notes or sat there in stoned silence. At the beginning of the semester, one of the professors announced

that it was our responsibility to master the material he had outlined and that he couldn't care less how that was achieved. Another difference was class size. I had thought my high school, with over 3,000 students in 3 grades, had large classes, but UB had over 20,000 students attending. Most of the classes were held at the original Main Street campus, with its old ivy-covered buildings. A few classes were held at the handful of buildings at the new suburban Amherst campus, just taking shape on converted swampland. While the new campus in Amherst was being completed, temporary classroom space was obtained in a suburban office park between the two campuses on Ridge-Lea Road. The Ridge-Lea campus was an example of the cramped trailers and single-story offices. The kind that had just started to sprout up as alternatives to the more traditional downtown office buildings. Similar to a mobile home park, there were dozens of identical buildings, which made finding the one with your class rather challenging. When you got there, you found a tiny classroom that was hot or cold at all the wrong times. The classes themselves, however, were another story; I found them completely invigorating. I dove into my classwork with gusto. Particularly enjoyable was the philosophy of ethics course. The study of the great masters, from Epicurus to Mill, was punctuated with a lively discussion of the issues raised in the readings. Modern ethical dilemmas were often framed and illuminated by the text, then debated at length. Having been schooled in a homogenous suburban environment, I was invigorated by the diversity of perspectives on the issues. I finished my first semester with 3 A's and a B. While there is nothing wrong with a B in calculus (and I could probably blame a teacher who never stopped looking at the board), I decided that college-level math was a little too esoteric for me. I concluded my college math career with that B. Remarkably, at least to my parents' belief, my method of learning had withstood the crucible of college classes unscathed. I took no notes and rarely crammed for a test. It always seemed to me that the mere

process of cramming (staying up late, trying to force retention) made you less likely to retain the information and more unprepared for the test than being rested and relaxed as the test began.

Go West Young Man

Following a couple of unremarkable semesters at UB, my CPK friends and I made plans for an epic drive across the county. We embarked on a camping expedition to a series of National Parks in the west. After stopping in Phoenix, we drove to Sedona and the underrated but beautifully mesmerizing Oak Creek Canyon. The granddaddy of them all, the Grand Canyon, was next, and it did not disappoint. Through the Painted Desert, we drove to Zion, which featured some incredible hiking trails and scenic camping. Finally, we traveled to Zion's neighbor, Bryce Canyon. Bryce is known for the surreal nature of the park due to the so-called Hoodoos, orange and white rock formations that stretch out like a series of fingers from the canyon floor. The experiences at these parks were incredibly inspiring, unlike any previous trip into nature I had ever taken. New music was jumping out of my guitar; songs were practically writing themselves. It was by far my most productive period of musical creativity, rivaling the period during my epiphany. Heading out of the last park, I felt the experience had moved me deeply. I was obsessing about the beautiful Oak Creek Canyon region, and I began to plot ways to return someday.

After a layover in Las Vegas, we headed for the Angeles National Forest outside of Los Angeles. Camping in the hills above LA served as a staging ground for our forays into Los Angeles. Ritzy Beverly Hills, the Sunset Strip, and the record mecca Tower Records were all high on our list. After two nights of sleeping in the Hollywood Hills, we decided to head down to Huntington Beach and see if we could spend the night on the beach. As the sun started to set, it appeared that we

would have the beach to ourselves. However, as dusk approached, something odd began to happen. More and more people started taking up positions on the beach. Curious, I approached a small group of people on the beach and asked them why they had come out to the beach that night. “The Grunions are running.” came the excited reply. They continued, “On the night of the full and new moons, female grunions follow the waves in towards the beach and then swim as far up onto the sand as they can.” Evidently, this was a big deal as the beach was now crowded with hundreds of people. Fortunately, the Grunions ultimately didn’t interfere with our night on the beach.

After stopping in San Francisco, we headed toward home, arriving at Yellowstone as fog descended on the region. The mist also completely obliterated the majestic Grand Teton Mountain range. Fortunately, the fog did not affect Old Faithful. We were able to enjoy the sight and smell of the iconic landmark. Yellowstone would be our last stop on our trip. We had squeezed every last day out of Mike’s vacation. We now had four days to drive back to Buffalo so Mike could be back at work on time the following Monday morning. With just over 2,000 miles to traverse, we decided that with four competent drivers, we should be able to drive straight through. Stopping only for the bathroom, gas, and food, we arrived in Buffalo in less than forty hours.

Back to Pizzas or Back to Oak Creek?

After arriving back in Buffalo, I was consumed by one compelling thought, something that had been nagging at me throughout the trip out west: I had to find a way to get back to Oak Creek Canyon in Sedona, Arizona. I had been completely enthralled with the region. Camping at Oak Creek, I was bursting with creative ideas. For the first time since my breakdown, I felt relaxed, and I knew where I belonged. I had to find a way to get back there. I don’t remember this as being a

manic-inspired desire, although that was always a possibility. Regardless of its origination, I had decided to discuss the idea with my parents after they returned from their trip out west with my younger brothers. I was going to need money to get back to Oak Creek, so I had to get a job. Old boss Tony Scirri was kind enough to welcome me back. In short order, I took up my old post delivering pizzas in the Village of Kenmore. Yet again, I was naively unprepared for my parents' reaction to my proposal. To them, I had, in essence, committed myself to attend UB, and that was what I was going to do. Pulling out the big threats, they stated they would not provide me any assistance (including rescinding possession of the car they had granted to me when I returned to school over a year ago) to facilitate my dream of returning to Oak Creek. Crestfallen, I reluctantly agreed to attend school at UB in the fall. But in a self-destructively devious way, I reminded myself that they could demand that I go to school, but they had no control over what I did when I got there.

VII Manic Depression's a Frustrating Mess

Drugs, Pool, and Hypomania

It had been almost two years since my last trip to a mental hospital, and my life seemed to be going well. I had a fun group of friends and an active social life. During the previous three semesters at UB, it had never been about earning the degree. I demonstrated to my satisfaction that my intellect was still intact, having earned decent grades and gotten a GPA over 3.00. I felt I had accomplished my mission. For this reason, I thought I was well within my rights to consider embarking on a new adventure in Arizona at Oak Creek Canyon. I was compelled by a strong desire to explore the mysteries of life. Predictably, my parents had another idea. It looked, for the moment, that I would have to continue my studies at UB.

Since leaving the mental hospital in the fall of '73, I had experienced an extended period of calm mental health. Despite refusing to take any psychotropic drugs, I had been able to avoid any debilitating manic outbreaks and was living a mercifully everyday life. In truth, I did partake in one drug rather liberally during this period: pot. Marijuana was a staple within my circle of friends, and we smoked it regularly. In fact, I gained a bit of notoriety among my friends for my unique ability to smoke a ridiculously large number of bongos without becoming completely wasted. In retrospect, I think I was clearly self-medicating with pot, sedating my higher-energy emotions. But for now, it seemed to be working.

However, my desire to actually attend classes during this particular semester had been extinguished by the mandatory nature of my participation, forced on me by my parents. This deep frustration at the lack of control of my life eventually caused me to slide into hypomania (a less severe but no less destructive version of the mania I had two years prior). As I have stated, my parents could force me to go

to school every day, but in my growing euphoric state, what I did when I got there was highly unpredictable. The professors couldn't have cared less if I attended a single class, so I didn't. I filled my days listening to music in the state-of-the-art listening rooms in the Student Union and honing my skills at ping pong and long-table pool in the activity rooms in the Student Union. I had strategically scheduled my "classes" for Tuesdays and Thursdays, so I only had to continue this deception for two days a week. Fortunately, I had plenty of friends at UB, so there was always someone available to play games against. In this vein, the semester glided by with nary a thought about the classes I was supposed to be attending.

My comeuppance arrived at the end of the semester with the delivery of the semester's report card. I guess I always knew this day would come, and I was cavalierly prepared to deal with my parents' predictable wrath. Arrogantly, in my mind, they had brought this situation on themselves by forcing me to attend class this semester. Opening my report card, inexplicably, my mother's initial reaction was one of elation. She had mistaken the credits for each class, 4.0, with my grades, believing I had just garnered straight A's. I had the unenviable task of pointing out the Rs in all my classes, representing resigned classes. Furthermore, I had to point out that my total grade average was 0.0. It took a few moments for the reality of what I had said to set in and her rage to erupt. More threats and recrimination ensued that only escalated when my father got home from work. To their dismay, as I had when I escaped Georgetown, I was able to use whatever means were at my disposal to circumvent my parents' directive. And as the holidays approached, this revelation cast a pall over my relationship with my parents. They knew they could not trust me, and I could no longer live in their world. I began to make plans to head out on my own to Oak Creek sometime in the New Year.

A Red and Blue Night at McVans

My good friend Ted Reinham's band, Nador, played at the popular nightclub McVans every Sunday night. Out of the goodness of his big heart, Ted had invited me to play a few songs with my 12-string acoustic guitar between sets. I was thrilled at the opportunity to play in front of strangers, even though most patrons tended to leave the bar between Nador sets to get high. Now firmly in a hypomanic state, I thought about getting ready to head down to McVans. I particularly contemplated the bar's unique lighting style. The bar featured alternating red and blue ceiling lights interspersed throughout the floor. I had what I considered an inspired idea: why not have some fun with the lighting by drawing red and blue lines on my face? This way, blue lines would be visible in red light, and only red would show in blue light. I decided, for emphasis, to line all the smile lines on my face in red and all the frown lines in blue. Four days before Christmas, with red and blue paint on my face, I took my guitar to McVans. Ill-fatedly, this was unlike the usual Sunday night; my car was in the shop, so I needed a ride to McVans from a friend. Nothing particularly noteworthy occurred during my mini-gig that night. Some people were mildly amused by the paint on my face in the McVans lights. A polite group stayed to hear my short set consisting of James Taylor and Cat Stevens between Nador's powerful sets. It remained a totally routine night for me until the bar was about to close. Hanging out until the end, as was my practice, I was horrified to realize that all my friends had left. In my usual gig euphoria that night, I had forgotten that I didn't have my car. Oblivious to the reality, I had neglected to ask someone to give me a ride home. Now it was almost 4 am, my house was over 6 miles away, and a Buffalo snowstorm was raging outside. In the pre-cellphone days, I had no choice. I bundled up, grabbed my guitar, and headed out into the stormy pre-Christmas night.

When You Plow the Sidewalks, I'll Walk Up There

Heavy lake-effect snow was falling on the quiet Buffalo streets. The thickly falling blanket of snow appeared magical to me. I took off down Hertel Avenue, aiming for Military, where I knew some 24-hour shops could provide me with a respite along the way. Then down to Sheridan Drive and on to my house. In my map brain, it made complete sense. I knew I would have to pace myself, but I thought I could make it. As I kept telling myself, I had to make it. Trudging through the heavily snow-covered street, carrying my guitar case, it was starting to feel like a boat anchor. Surveying the abandoned wintry streets ahead, I had a solution. I decided to place my guitar case on the snowy streets, with the smooth top side on the snow, and slide the case down the streets. Given the lack of traffic on this stormy night, I felt I could go a significant distance in this manner, hopefully at least until I reached Military Road. Oblivious to the monumental walking task in front of me, I happily glided my case up the street through the packed snow. Walking along, I sang Genesis songs out loud to amuse myself (specifically, epics like Can-Utility and the Coastliners and Supper's Ready). Despite the task at hand, I felt at peace, determined to make my way home in the snow.

My idyllic state was shattered by the sound of a radio voice blasting out in the night. "Get up on the sidewalk," came a voice from behind me. In my euphoric state, I was happily oblivious and chose to ignore that request. However, again came the voice and the demand, this time more emphatically, "Get up on the sidewalk." Aggravated at the untimely disruption of my revelry, I took a look behind me. Through the thick snow, I faintly recognized a Buffalo cop car following some distance behind me. Since the voice had come from a cop, I decided I had better consider his request. To me, the facts were blatantly obvious: the snow on both sidewalks was easily 3 feet deep; the idea of anyone walking on

the sidewalk was ridiculous. To my everlasting regret, fueled by the mania in my head, instead of politely debating the condition of the sidewalk with the officer, I resorted to an ill-advised smart-mouth response. At the top of my voice, I yelled back, "When you plow the sidewalks, I'll walk up there." I felt clever for about thirty seconds. Suddenly, I felt the painfully cold steel of cuffs around my wrists, tugging like a vice around my shoulders. Then, I was unmercifully shoved into the back seat of the patrol car. Sitting in the patrol car, in the throes of manic euphoria, I had a vague realization that I had acted stupidly, which I would pay for. But, in spite of the season, there would be no holiday-inspired lucky break for me tonight. I had the misfortune of having been arrested by a truly hard-ass cop. In the car, driving to the station, his partner tried to encourage him to drop it. "It's Christmastime, give the kid a break." But the only break this cop was interested in was the one crushing my wrist. The booking, with fingerprints and a mugshot, was a blur to me. The whole affair felt like a bizarre joke. Was I really being arrested for walking in the street in the middle of a snowstorm? The call to my father was terse. I told him what had happened, and he told me that I was going to stay in jail for the night until he could find an attorney for my case. There would be no rush by my parents to the police station to bail me out. Thanks to my father's indifference, I could spend the night in jail and take my medicine. Though not explicitly stated by my father, I clearly felt his message: I could rot in jail, at least for the night.

Whether my impertinent remarks and casual handling of my booking may have been an indication of my elevated mental state, my attitude to being confined in jail confirmed it. While I should have been scared to death to spend a night in jail, I was giddy. I was soaking in all the atmosphere without a care in the world. After gleefully enduring a sleepless night in the dank, grimy confines of the Hertel Avenue Police Station Holding Center, at 9 am, an officer came to inform me I was

being taken for arraignment. Downtown, at City Court, I encountered my father, with my lawyer in tow. My father had very little to say to me, but the look of disgust on his face spoke volumes. He had arranged for my friend Joe's father to act as my attorney. Mr. Cantina explained that there was only one route for getting the charges dropped. I would have to agree to an immediate, involuntary commitment to a mental hospital. In return, I would be granted something called an ACD by the judge. Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal meant that the case would be adjourned for six months. If I stayed out of trouble during that period, the case would be dismissed and expunged from my record (As a little aside, I found out 40 years later, while applying for a Nexus card, that a Judge saying your record will be expunged and actually having it happen are two very different things). After listening to Mr. Cantina's description, my father, without even waiting for my response, said, "Well, of course, that is what we will have to do." It was always so easy for my father to send me to the mental hospital. I knew my actions had put me in this box, and there was really nothing left to do but acquiesce. I would have to return to the mental hospital. The hearing before the judge was short and uneventful. I verbalized my agreement to involuntary commitment, and with a wave of the judge's gavel, it was over. The drive home with my father was incredibly tense as he repeatedly reminded me how incredibly stupid I had been. Nothing I said in my defense mattered. Neither having to walk home after being abandoned at McVans at a late hour nor the presence of a significant snowstorm to traverse would appease my father's rage. As we pulled into our driveway, my father coldly reminded me that I had better quickly gather some clothes together, "We are heading back down to Linwood Bryant in fifteen minutes." I raced up to my room, gathered some clothes and other necessities, and then ran out to my father's waiting car without encountering either my mother or

any of my brothers. I was off for my third stay at a mental hospital in the past thirty months.

Another Week in Linwood Bryant

Returning to Linwood Bryant felt like a sick old-home week. Everything seemed so familiar. Unlike previous stays, I told myself that this incarceration was merely to comply with a court order. Oblivious to my earlier actions, I did not feel I was having a manic episode, although my Linwood-Bryant jailers certainly felt differently. The concern pressed on my mind that they might send me up to the third floor for another round of shock treatments. I was adamant that I would not allow the orderlies to force me into that room again. Fortunately, shock treatment was not on the docket for this week's stay in the bin.

As I was checking into Linwood Bryant, the big topic on everyone's mind was Christmas. It was only three days before the big day, and the atmosphere was significantly more relaxed than either of my previous stays. However, that didn't change the reality of where I was, nor the monotony of my existence. Like before, my tedious routine consisted of listening to music, playing the piano, and being force-fed medication. The depressing feeling of déjà vu was overwhelming. However, there was one critical change during this stay: I was seen by a new psychiatrist, Dr Sebastian Fassano. The difference between Dr. Fassano and Dr. Silver was significant in every way. Dr. Fassano was intelligent, engaging, and even funny. He was a breath of fresh air for my doctor-weary psyche. Most significantly, Dr. Fassano discarded Dr. Gold's failed diagnosis of Adult-Onset Schizophrenia and proposed a new diagnosis for me: Manic Depression. Manic Depression's symptoms, as listed in the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM), lined up perfectly with my mental history. When I reviewed the symptoms in the DSM myself, I was furious at Dr. Silver all over again that he had not come to this

plainly obvious conclusion initially. Having the correct diagnosis would have saved me two years of being force-fed incorrect, ineffective medication. With this correct diagnosis came a prescription for a drug that would ultimately change my life: Lithium Carbonate. Tragically, due to the stubbornness resulting from two years of being given the wrong medication, it would take six more years of my refusing medication before Lithium ultimately performed its transformative magic. But, marking the date, Christmas 1975 was when Lithium first came into my life. Even with my delay in actually taking Lithium, this was a significant milestone in my life, worth marking its beginning.

While I vegetated in the mental hospital, the presence of Christmas on the immediate horizon posed an interesting dilemma for my parents. We had a tradition of family gatherings for both Christmas breakfast and Christmas dinner. Being banished to a mental hospital, how would my parents explain my absence? Out of a mixture of stubbornness and fear, my parents had never discussed my mental illness issues with any friends or family when I first became sick. So, there was no prior foundation of knowledge regarding my illness that they could use now to explain why I wasn't in attendance for the holiday. The thought that this incident would cause my parents to finally reveal my condition to the family was, to them, entirely out of the question. They struggled to arrive at a compromise that could spare my parents the shame of having to admit that their oldest son suffered from mental illness. It was years before this humiliating pact to withhold my condition from family and friends was revealed to me. I always assumed they were aware of the truth. Accordingly, I did not know the truth behind my parents' compromise that Christmas day. It was incredible to me that two medically trained people would refuse to discuss such basic medical facts about their son. So, I was unsurprised when they told me that they had arranged a day pass for Christmas and that my father would pick me up from the hospital on Christmas morning.

After spending three days of my seven-day sentence wandering through my forced incarceration at Linwood Bryant, being temporarily released on Christmas seemed like a cruel joke. After waking up, getting dressed, and, as usual, being force-fed my pills, I was off to the surreal world of my parents' holiday parties. In the car, I sat in silence while my father drove me home from the hospital. Some coordination on our schedule must have been arranged, as I arrived just prior to the arrival of our traditional breakfast guests, the Verlocys and Grandma Helen. We had lived across the street from the Verlocys and Grandma Helen (Ethel Verboy's mother) for five years, and when we moved to Curtis, they committed to remaining in our lives. Christmas breakfast was just one manifestation of that commitment. Only my brother Bob made any mention of my internment in the mental hospital, conveniently speaking outside of the earshot of our guests. I assured him that it was an exceedingly dull daily routine and that I was extremely anxious for this sentence to expire. The rest of the day was like living in a holiday Neverneverland, where everything was wonderful, and nothing bad ever happened. After the Verlocys left, it was time for my father's family, my Grandparents, my Uncle Don, Aunt Joanne, and my cousins Sue, Tom, and Patty. Our families always enjoyed getting together. For the last five years, my cousin Tom and I had begun sneaking away to play our guitars. I always looked forward to this musical interlude. While the visits were tolerable, one thing really bugged me. After all the acrimony that had recently occurred between me and my parents, it was disconcerting to hear them acting so pleasantly towards me. The hypocrisy of their conversations infuriated me to no end. My parents carried on with inane conversations about nothing, with the express purpose of masquerading to our guests about what was really going on inside our family. I realized that I possessed the power to easily unmask this farce in front of our guests with one word. But, regardless of the alleged manic state of my thinking process, I had decided not to broach the topic of

my mental health with my relatives directly to spare them from having an uncomfortable conversation. Now I realize that in doing so, I was inadvertently complying with my parents' charade.

After the last of our guests departed, it was time for me to return to the mental hospital. Fortunately, my brother Bob had offered to drive me back, sparing me another awkwardly silent ride with my father. Bob was extremely curious and peppered me with questions all the way. I didn't mind at all since they were the kind of honest, thoughtful questions you would expect from an interested family member. As we pulled up to Linwood Bryant, I thanked Bob for his interest and concern; he wished me well and hoped that I would get out for New Year's Eve. Returning to my confinement was incredibly distressing. Now that the distraction of the holiday reprieve had passed, all that was left was the soul-crushing tedium of my incarceration. Not knowing when I would be released added to my misery. I had been admitted on a Monday, and Christmas had been on that Thursday, so I had hoped to be released the following Monday, the 29th. However, I had heard nothing regarding a discharge date, and this silence just added to my depression. When the weekend came and went without any discharge information, I was determined to act on my behalf. Monday morning, I decided to take matters into my own hands, contacting my attorney, Mr. Cantina. I asked him how long I needed to be hospitalized to satisfy the court order. Mr. Cantina said that the court order was for a one-week stay. Unlike my previous stays at Linwood Bryant, I was now over the age of 18 and fully capable of signing myself out of the hospital. Excitedly, I asked, "So, I can sign myself out on Tuesday?" Mr. Cantina recommended that I plan on signing out on Wednesday since last Tuesday was my first FULL day in the hospital. He added that he was unsure what date the court had marked as the actual start date, so I should play it safe.

I decided I would free myself from this confinement on New Year's Eve. I went to the nurse's desk and announced my intention to sign myself out on Wednesday. I was warned that I was breaking standard practice by not obtaining clearance from my doctor to have me discharged. They also mentioned that they would be notifying my parents of this decision. That was the downside of springing myself, I knew my parents would not be happy and there would be recriminations when I got home. I decided to postpone their lecture for as long as possible. After the hospital sprang the news, and I got the predictable phone call, I informed them that I would not need to be picked up at the hospital; I would find my own way home. This marked another reason for my parents to be displeased with me, but I left them no choice. When my discharge came the following day, I executed my travel plan to get home. I walked the two blocks from the hospital to Main Street and hopped on a bus heading north. At The Loop, near the UB Main Street campus, I changed busses and took one down Niagara Falls Blvd, getting off at Moore St. and walking the remaining half mile home from there.

There was no family celebration upon my arrival, no prodigal son returns. Instead, I walked into an emotional freezer, where interaction with me was frozen out, and my presence was barely noted. Rather than the emotional storm of accusations I had anticipated, my parents seemed to have decided to give me the silent treatment. While this was initially disconcerting, I retreated to my room and enjoyed the solitude for however long it might last. My parents were headed out to a New Year's Eve party that night, So Grandma Helen would be coming over to babysit my younger brothers. Once again, fortunate timing had prevented my parents from having to explain why I wasn't around. I had escaped the mental hospital just in time to keep the charade with Grandma Helen alive.

Super Bowl Mania

Two and a half weeks from New Year's Eve was Super Bowl Sunday, featuring the Cowboys and the Steelers. My parents planned on watching the game somewhere else, so I invited some friends to come over to watch the game at my house. Mike, Joe, and Larry are my oldest friends from the neighborhood, original CPK members. I'll never forget that they were the ones who had stood by me during my manic episodes the previous two years. I was really looking forward to having them over for the game. It had been a couple of years since I last had an opportunity to have them over. Football was a religious rite among my friends, so watching the Super Bowl was a really big deal. But as the game began, I seemed to have other things on my mind. Intermittently, I would get up from the game and run downstairs. The basement was where all my musical instruments were, and I seemed intent on playing with some of them during the game. More Annoyingly to my friends, Periodically, I would insist on one or more of my friends coming downstairs to listen. Initially, they politely responded, but as the game went on, they became more and more aggravated with my requests. By the end of the game, it was obvious to Joe, Mike, and Larry that "something's wrong with Dave." Naturally, in my euphoric state, I was completely oblivious to all of it. I believed I was having a great day with my three best friends. Following the end of the game, they all came downstairs to talk to me. They quizzed me about how I was feeling and, especially, why I had skipped almost all of the game after I had invited them over to watch it. My nonsensical answers, owing to my exhilarated state of mind, only served to concern them further. Reaching the climax of the discussion, they moved in closer and dropped the bomb. "Dave, we are not leaving until you check yourself into a mental hospital." Dumbfounded, I couldn't believe what I was hearing, so they repeated their demand. Finally comprehending what was being said, my initial reaction was one of anger, but I could see from the looks on their

faces that they were sincerely concerned about me. Each, in turn, recounted my odd behavior that day and how closely it reminded them of my similar situation two years prior. They said they recognized I needed help, and they were determined to see that I got it. As alien as these words were coming from my friends, I was utterly at a loss for how to respond. My standard show of defiant outrage seemed pointless to these guys, yet was I really ready to submit to my fourth stay in a mental hospital in a little over two years? But my friends' steely resolve gave me the answer. They had vowed not to leave without taking me to a mental hospital. I knew them well enough to realize that there was no bluff in their demand. Reluctantly but more than a little exasperated, I agreed to have them drive me to the mental hospital.

Unbeknownst to me, my friends had contacted my parents and apprised them of the situation. In turn, my parents contacted my psychiatrist, Dr. Fassano. He advised them to take me to Buffalo General Hospital's psychiatric ward on the 5th floor, where he was on the staff, instead of giving me a fourth stay at Linwood Bryant. My friends directed me to the hospital intake, where I would, for the first time, sign myself into a mental hospital. As I completed the paperwork, I spied my parents far off to the corner, silently taking it all in. I pretended not to notice and said nothing. While my friends' efforts seemed completely organic, I would never know what role, if any, my parents played in this effort to get me to the hospital. History says it was probably originally my parents' idea.

Buf General 5th Floor

By the time I arrived at the 5th-floor ward, I was extremely frustrated and more than a little agitated. Having had time to think on the drive down, I felt that my friends had overreacted to my behavior, received coaching from my parents, and preyed upon our friendship to force me to acquiesce. Worse yet, I now

recognized that they had probably betrayed my confidence and conspired with my hospital-eager parents to get me to admit myself. The inescapable truth was that I was once again in a mental hospital, a place I believed I didn't belong in. Stupidly, I took out my frustrations on an orderly who was just doing his job, pushing back at him when he tried to direct me to my room. My physicality was quickly rewarded with a new mental hospital experience: banishment to the isolation of a padded room. After the initial shock that came from the realization that I was actually in a padded room, I began to gradually calm down. I was bemused by the contours of the space, confirming the mental image derived from so many motion picture depictions. After three or four hours, mostly spent humming along to songs in my head, I was released from padded confinement and ushered to my room. My days consisted of a group therapy session, a one-on-one session with my psychiatrist, and a heavy dose of free time in the day room. The day room at Buf General had an impressive array of diversions, including a pool table, a ping-pong table, and two card tables. Since no patient was ever allowed to linger in their room, there was always a fair number of games participants. Much to my parents' chagrin, my time at UB had provided ample preparation for participation in both ping-pong and pool. I looked forward to providing spirited competition for my fellow patients.

Group therapy was a brand-new experience for me. Sitting around that patient circle, listening to everyone talk about their issues, you quickly learned a lot about your fellow hospital patients. It turned out that nearly half of the 20 patients currently on the floor were there to deal with alcohol addiction. Naively, I had never considered alcohol abuse to be an addiction. However, after listening to the powerful stories these people related, all doubt in my mind on that score was erased. My sessions with Dr. Fassano were more predictable. Sitting in an examining room, he would quiz me on my state of mind, my emotions, my

feelings, and anything else he could think of. He was an intelligent, witty conversationalist. Dr. Fassano had a good sense of humor and an easy-going nature; I enjoyed our conversations. Eventually, we developed a friendly rapport that helped make the time go by. Kiddingly, I began greeting him with a fake-mocking variation on his last name, calling out, “Hello, Dr. Farce-ano.” To which he would sternly reply, “Are you ready to be shrunk?” But Dr. Fassano’s most significant achievement, where I was concerned, was to stabilize my mental affect using Lithium. Lithium was a naturally occurring salt and the third element, after Hydrogen and Helium, on the periodic table of elements. A doctor in Australia had been the first to discover a link between Lithium and Manic Depression. More significant was his discovery that in addition to treating acute manic episodes, Lithium was effective in preventing future episodes. At the time I was first prescribed, it was a relatively new medication, approved for general use by the FDA only five years before I started taking it at Buf General. For Dr. Fassano, the first week was spent returning my mental condition to something approaching normal. From there on, it would be about convincing me of the value of taking Lithium, yes, for the rest of my life, to prevent recurring manic episodes like the four I had experienced in the past two years. While I had spent the previous two years resisting medication, my ultimate three-week stay at Buf Gen would provide a longer window for the doctor’s message to potentially sink in. Whether it would or not was another matter.

The patients on the fifth floor at Buffalo General were an eclectic assortment of engaging mental patients. Some were friendly, others sullen. Some were ready to take on a game of pool, ping-pong, or cards; others were content to sit silently by themselves. As I had hoped, there was a cadre of people I could count on every day to play the games that helped make the hospital tedium go by. But there was one patient who caused me a great deal of consternation. Julie was a pretty girl

with long, light-brown hair. She was around my age and, based on the group therapy sessions, sadly, had tried to commit suicide multiple times. While in the day room, we would engage in pleasant, polite conversation, but no more involved than my conversations with a half dozen other patients. I was not in the hospital seeking a relationship. I talked to Julie because I was always friendly to anyone that was friendly to me. Then, one night, everything changed. As I lay awake in my bed, Julie walked into my room wearing only a thin, short nightgown. Before I could say, "What the hell are you doing?" She was climbing into bed with me. I was paralyzed with a combination of fear and anger. Turning toward her, I yelled, loud enough for the orderlies to hear, "Hey, get out of my bed.". Within moments, an orderly appeared and attempted to coax Julie out of my bed and then finally out of my room. After she had been removed, I lay there in shock. What had just happened? I had never had a woman come on to me at a bar, let alone have one crawl uninvited into my bed. One thing I knew for sure, no matter how pretty Julie was, she had severe problems, the kind that I had no intention of getting involved with. The next day proved to be equally troubling as Julie followed me around like a lost puppy. Whatever the orderly had said had not dissuaded her from stalking me. The hospital day room experience was strange enough on a good day, but being trailed by this obsessive woman seeking my affection bordered on the surreal. When Julie appeared in my bedroom again the next night, this time dropping her nightgown and standing there naked before jumping into my bed, I knew something drastic needed to happen. Either Julie had to leave the hospital, or I did. I could not continue my therapy with this girl obsessively following me during the day and climbing into my bed at night. In the morning, I went to speak to the nurses. I was adamant that something needed to be done. After listening politely, they assured me that they were aware of the seriousness of the situation. And that they had made plans for Julie to be transferred to a different facility by

the end of the day. Thankfully, my strange period of disturbed adulation was at an end. The remainder of my stay at Buf Gen was uneventful. Each day was a carbon copy of the last, consisting of group therapy, my therapy, and the day room.

Happily, I made friends with several of the patients. Approaching my release after a 3-week stay, we exchanged addresses and made plans to reunite once we were all released from the bin. The fact that that reunion never materialized doesn't lessen the sincerity of our intent when we decided to exchange information. We were coming to a close on a significant time together in the hospital, and we felt a unique bond with each other.

VIII The Best Thing That Could Happen to You

Off to the Real World

As I left the 5th floor of Buffalo General, Lithium in hand, I had no idea what the world had in store for me. During my time in the hospital, I had gone from a profoundly manic state to a calm, relaxed, normal version of myself. Undoubtedly, Lithium played a significant role in my achieving that psychic calm. However, the unanswered question at that moment was whether I actually believed that to be true and whether I would continue to act accordingly by taking my pills. My track record on pill taking was not a good one. After all of my previous hospitalizations, I ceased taking my pills within days of leaving the hospital. Predictably, this occasion would prove to be no different. I confirmed to my parents that I had taken my pills and then flushed the daily allotment down the toilet. Once again, the pills were disappearing, but they were not medicating me.

Why did I stubbornly refuse to take my medication when I must have been able to see its therapeutic effect? I could hear myself saying that I didn't need pills, that I was stronger than that. But the vagaries of my life over the previous two years would seem to refute that notion easily. Another complaint that I used many times to justify not taking Lithium was the fear of losing the seductive highs that came with the early stages of mania. The heightened energy and enhanced creativity provided by the pre-manic phase is a powerful motivator, hypnotically tantalizing and deceiving me into believing I could always feel that way. Watching those ached-for superpowers subside at the onset of medication provoked a stubborn determination in me not to take the pills. I was willing to preserve that heightened awareness at all costs. Naïve to the consequences, I always ended up succumbing to the urge to cease medication once the drug began to tame my mania. To anyone outside of an altered mental state, this action is clearly dangerous and wrong. While I was blind to this conclusion in the moment, I now

realize that, at least for me, there is no such thing as a permanent state of benign pre-mania. Without medication, there is no way for me to prevent my inevitable escalation of symptoms and my descent into full-blown mania. If only I had realized this at the time.

The significant side effects of the medication also played a role in dissuading me from taking them. Reading the little folded-up paper that came with the Lithium revealed these potential side effects: tremors, weight gain, diarrhea, vomiting, increased urination, dizziness, muscle weakness, blurred vision, and increased thirst. Who, reading that list, would be excited about taking this medication, even if not all of the side effects are realized? On top of all of that, however, there was one fact that continually preyed on my mind regarding taking this medication. When Lithium was first introduced to me, I was told that I would need to take the medication for the rest of my life. That freaked me out. The rest of my life was a long time. There was no way I wanted to get involved with any drug having those side effects for the rest of my life. It was incomprehensible to me, and it drove my stubborn unwillingness to take my medication. Ultimately, my thinking was that I felt perfectly fine right now; as long as I stayed that way, I wouldn't need to take the dangerous medication. Why take the risk? Would I stay perfectly fine? Only time would tell.

Days after I returned home from the hospital, a high school friend contacted me to say that he was working on Terry Dozad's State Assembly campaign and asked if I wanted to work with him on the campaign. His timing had been providential, saving me from a painful job search, and I readily accepted. The pay would be entry-level, but the experience for a political science nerd would be invaluable. In the pre-Internet days, local campaigns were all about direct voter outreach. We spent day after week after month canvassing the district, door to door, with the goal of reaching every voter at least once. Obviously, it was most

important for the candidate to visit each voter, but given the size of the district, a decision was made to use polling data to identify the areas that would most benefit from a candidate's appearance; we would canvas the rest. As the election approached, we were cautiously optimistic of victory.

While the overall experience had been fascinating there was one aspect of the campaign that was extremely troubling to me. Dozad was married with a young family of seven children (the seventh had been born during the campaign). As the campaign was coming to a close, it was announced that his secretary Sherry would be moving to Albany to work in Dozad's Assembly office there. As odd as this initially appeared (there was an ample supply of experienced secretaries in Albany), all the facts were soon to come out. Incredibly, it was revealed that Terry and his young secretary (barely out of high school) had been having an affair for months. They had managed to be discreet and had kept the relationship a secret from the campaign staff. Only Dozad's campaign manager had been aware of the infidelity prior to the disclosure the week before the election. News of the affair spread gloom over the entire campaign staff, many of whom admired the charismatic Dozad. We trudged to election day, minus the usual enthusiasm. When the results came in, Terry had won in a landslide. The campaign manager remarked that this proved you could get anyone elected. Subdued by the news of our candidate's indiscretion, we nonetheless celebrated our accomplishment that night at the Ellicott Square Building, home of the Erie County Democratic Party. Adding salt to the wound, we had to watch as Dozad took victory congratulations surrounded by his wife and older children. I felt sick.

I had been offered a position in Dozad's local assembly office but now I felt extremely conflicted about it. I was no longer enamored with the idea of working in politics, and Dozad's infidelity confirmed my worst fears about the nature of politicians' ethics and their repeated mendacity. Yet, I needed a job, so I decided to

disregard my indignation and work in the office until another opportunity arose. I almost never saw Dozad during my time working at the local office. He devoted the majority of his time to his Albany office and his concubine, safely away from his wife and kids. I never knew if that poor woman was aware of her husband's adultery. Truthfully, I just wanted to kick him where it hurt.

Shipping and Receiving – A real job with real people

In 1977, I was four years out of high school, one full year removed from my last manic episode. Having grown tired of working in the assembly office and given up for now the idea of returning to college, I decided to take a job working in shipping and receiving at a Buffalo manufacturing company, Compressed Air Components. Incredibly, after many abortive attempts, I had finally found a job that I truly enjoyed. I had been recommended by my friend and hockey-playing teammate Norm, who I would be working for as head of Shipping and Receiving. He and I would commute to work together every day, always stopping in the morning for coffee and a donut on the way. As the job description implies, my work involved preparing items for shipment, or receiving same. We processed everything from small parts to large assemblies shipped on pallets and requiring a forklift to load or unload. My favorite part of the job required me to drive to the famed Broadway Market every day to hand-deliver the bank deposit. "Did I know how to drive a stick?" Norm's boss asked me when I first started. "Sure, I did," I said, not wishing to miss out on the opportunity to drive to the market simply because of my ignorance commanding a stick shift. Soon, it was obvious that I would be learning to drive a stick the old-fashioned way by just doing it. On my maiden voyage, I successfully got out of the yard while still in second gear without drawing any undue attention to the fact that there was a beginner behind the wheel. I was on my way, and over the next few weeks, I became adept at driving a stick.

The Best Thing

As I said, I loved my job. I enjoyed the work, and I especially enjoyed the people I worked with. With breaks at 10 & 3 and lunch at noon, I had ample time to immerse myself in this working-class culture that had been so alien to me growing up in the suburbs. These were a hard-working group of guys, coming from diverse backgrounds, with humorous stories bubbling out of them. I like to say that sitting among them during our breaks, I received a doctoral course in creative swearing; the frequency and tone of my cursing would never be the same. And it wasn't just the swearing; These guys made me feel at home in a way I had never experienced before. Had fate not intervened, I genuinely believe that I could have happily spent my entire working life in some version of that job. But, of course, fate did intervene.

The day I started working there, Norm taught me what he called the Cardinal Rule of Shipping & Receiving: "Nothing moves in or out without paperwork." Norm advised that "if I stick to this rule, everything else will be simple." It made perfect sense to me; invoices and packing slips were the lifeblood of any office's shipping and receiving. On one particular Friday, with Norm off, I was flying solo. This wasn't my first time in charge, but Norm didn't take off very often. So, I relished the opportunity to demonstrate to the bigwigs what I could do. It was a routine Friday (which is to say extremely busy). There was the usual assortment of equipment coming and going. During the day, one of the suits from the office came back to see me and asked that I ship a large compressor. In my reply, I repeated the familiar refrain; "get me the paperwork, and I'll be glad to ship it." He nodded to me but didn't appear to be listening, and as it happened, the paperwork never arrived before closing. Consequently, the compressor sat on the dock over the weekend.

When we got to work on Monday, Norm was immediately called up to the office. He came back with a sullen look on his face; Norm asked me, “Did Perry ask you to ship a compressor on Friday?” I told Norm that he had, and that I had reminded Perry to provide the required paperwork so I could ship it. I added that the paperwork was not provided, so it did not ship. “Okay, good,” Norm said, sounding reassured. As we were talking, I was next paged to the office, an extremely infrequent occurrence. Norm’s boss (also named Norm) asked me the same questions as Norm, and I provided the same replies. He paused to take a deep breath, “Well, that particular shipment was a special request for the owner, and he is mad as hell that it did not ship on Friday.” I repeated that I had been instructed never to ship anything without paperwork. I added that, certainly, Mr. Arnod would understand that he should be taking his anger out on the person in the office who failed to provide me with the paperwork. I could see that relating the details of my instructions did not appear to provide me with a sufficient defense. I was certain that Norm was working his way around to punishing me. But I was entirely unprepared for what came next. “I’m sorry to tell you, Dave, but Ray (the owner) has ordered me to fire you immediately.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Was I really getting fired for following the rules? I had to admit that had to be a first. Then Norm summoned up what was either a high degree of compassion or pure BS. Looking right at me, he said, “Dave, we both know you know you don’t belong in this place. You’re a really smart kid; you could be doing so much more with your life. I know how much you like your job, but I think, when you look back, you will realize that this is the best thing that could have happened to you.” I thought, that’s easy for him to say. From my perspective, I was 22 years old, and I had just lost the best job I ever had, one that I truly believed I had a future in. It provided me no consolation that I had been banished for one of the oldest reasons in the world: a vengeful boss.

Back to School and Hello Again, My Fair Lady

It had been a stubborn tradition of mine to find a new job on the way home from quitting or being fired. It helped to lessen the sting of the job loss and the impact of my parents' inevitable displeasure. But this time, I was too crushed to even think about picking up a stray pizza delivery or dishwashing job. After licking my wounds and feeling appropriately sorry for myself, I realized this could be an opportunity to assuage my parents' passionate devotion to educational pursuits. Since dropping out of UB 2 years previous, my parents had incessantly lobbied for my return to school. Maybe this would be an excellent time to reconsider that option. If I wanted to go in this direction, I would have to act fast. It was already mid-August, and the fall semester began right after Labor Day. And as it turned out, it was already too late to register at UB. Unfortunately, I thought I would have to bide my time waiting until the winter semester starting in the new year. I was reluctantly resigned to looking for some new job when I heard an ad on the radio for the fall semester at Buf State, still looking for students to register. The State University of New York College at Buffalo (Formerly Buffalo State Teachers College) was the academic inferior of UB; at least, that's what all the snobs at UB always said. I remembered that previously, I had argued in favor of UB over Georgetown, saying that you could always obtain a good education anywhere you put your mind to learning; I reasoned that the same logic would have to apply to Buf State over UB.

During those final weeks of summer, I was unemployed and enjoyed hanging out with my friends who were home from school. One of those was my old musical cast mate "my fair lady" Pam Stack. Pam had appeared at my door one day with her brand-new orange Datsun. "Come and take a look at my new car," she said with pride. It wasn't unusual to see Pam during the summer. Every year since she graduated from high school, Pam would look me up at some point

while she was home on summer vacation. We would spend time together catching up on the year's happenings. As it turned out this year was particularly noteworthy. Pam had decided to quit school (with a year to go at Potsdam) and return home permanently. Apparently, her father had moved out of their house, leaving her mother to fend for herself with Pam and her seven siblings. I think Pam naively envisioned leaving school and coming home to assist her mother, which turned out to be a fanciful notion on Pam's part. Of particular interest, Pam mentioned that her little sister Becky was going out with a drummer in a local rock band and that most nights, they were all hanging out at her house playing foosball, drinking beer, and making music. Pam said that her mother was "cool with all of it" and that they all had a fun time. She said I definitely needed to come over some night. I was intrigued. There was only one way to find out what it was all about, so I made plans to stop over later that week.

IX Music to My Ears

The Place to Be

The scene I encountered at Pam's house was unlike anything I had ever witnessed before, at least at a time when one or more parents were at home. There were young people everywhere. I knew Pam had a large family, and I recognized some of Pam's sisters, but everywhere you looked, there seemed to be more people. The house, a modest suburban two-story, seemed to go on forever. In the front den, there were four people playing foosball, with a few more cheering them on while waiting for their chance to compete next. In the living room at the back of the house, a dozen people stretched out over an oversized sectional couch (referred to as "the pit"), and in the kitchen came the sound of voices accompanied by an acoustic guitar. Pam was right; this was a really enjoyable place to be. Among the throngs in the kitchen was Pam's mother, soaking up the sounds of her two daughters singing. I knew Pam's mom from the *My Fair Lady* days and the summer vacation visits with Pam in the years since. Like her daughter, Pam's mom, Jane was a beautiful woman. Uniquely, in temperament, Jane always seemed a little more aware of the outside world than the typical high school mom I encountered. I always thought she was a pretty cool mom, but to tolerate and actually enjoy this much chaos in her house took a truly enlightened attitude.

Pam and her sister Becky both sang like angels and they had a unique ability to slide in harmony parts when multiple voices were singing the melody. This created an unbelievably intoxicating sound. After years of singing alone with my guitar, I was determined not to pass up the opportunity to sing with these talented girls. I gradually added my name to the list of "regulars" at the Stack house, with my guitar always at the ready, safely in its case, stored in the trunk of my car.

The Kenmorons, Foosball, and Mark Freeland

Eventually, I learned the identities of the eclectic assortment of personalities that frequented the Stack house. Pam's brother Curt and sister Becky had cross-pollinated the environment with band members and hangers-on from her boyfriend's band, Pegasus, adding a group of Curt's friends from nearby Kenmore who lovingly referred to themselves as The Kenmorons. This eclectic collection loved two things above all else: music and foosball. Epic foosball tournaments at the Stack House would stretch into the wee hours of the night, accompanied by the strains of progressive rock music on the stereo. These people approached foosball with a fanatical devotion that could be pretty intimidating to the uninitiated. As a novice, when I attempted to play one of these expert players. I would watch helplessly as they easily deposited ball after ball into the goal behind me. After repeated painful schooling, I eventually acquired a passable skill level, at least enough to compete adequately in the 2-man team competition.

This eclectic assortment of musicians and music lovers ensured that there was always a discriminating critical listening audience for any of the musical numbers that were performed each night. Invariably, one person was simultaneously the most critical and most creative person in the room, Mark Freeland. Mark had a non-stop mind for creative ideas; they randomly burst out of his head, some fully formed, others embryonic, but all demanding attention. He wasn't an overly skilled guitar player or a particularly gifted singer. But, he could convey his musical ideas with a mixture of passion and sarcasm, as well as any musician I have ever heard play.

Four Part Harmony

The magical sound of four voices joining together to sing has a storied position in musical history, from barbershop quartets to the doo-wop groups of the 50s to pop groups like the Beach Boys and CSNY. However, I have always believed that

there was something especially sonically satisfying about vocal groups that add male and female voices to this quartet mix (The Mamas and Papas are an example of this beautiful blend). So, when Pam's boyfriend, Tommy, began singing with the three of us, I knew we had something extraordinary in the making. From the moment we blended our voices on the first chord of the chorus in the Beatles "Rain," I was in heaven. Our voices slotted in effortlessly and flawlessly. This blended sound was something I had been searching for my entire musical life. I couldn't get enough of this spectacular harmony. This had been a special night of musical discovery. But eventually, after a few wondrous hours of singing, the music came to an end.

After the guitars were put away and the girls had gone to play foosball or gone to bed, I would stay in the kitchen and wind down having a cup of tea with Jane, who always stayed around to the end. After singing for a couple of hours, my throat longed for a nice hot cup of tea with lemon and honey; Jane was always happy to oblige. Jane was, as I said, a very pretty, youthful 41-year-old mother of 8 whose husband had decided to bail on her and their kids. You would have thought that her separation would have consumed Jane's conversation, but in reality, it was anything but. Jane was well-read, well-informed, and just plain fun to talk to. Topics would run the gamut, from politics and music to sports and philosophy and everything in between. I had never met anyone so willing to engage me, with her opinion and her wit, on just about any topic under the sun. I came to enjoy the post-music tea and talk almost as much as the music session itself. Immersed in conversation, we would sometimes lose track of time and stay up talking into the early morning hours.

What can I do to help

I had initially frequented the Stack house in the evening, well after bedtime, for Jane's four younger girls, so I ran into them infrequently. It gradually occurred to me that my new friend, Jane, raising eight kids on her own, might need some help occasionally, so little by little, I started to come over during the day, as well. Jane accepted my offer of help graciously. The atmosphere at the house was very different during the day. Jane's youngest girl, Leslie (5), had just started half-day kindergarten. At 3:00 in the afternoon, the house came alive as Heather (13), Vicky (10), Amy (7), and Leslie all came home from school. Since this was wintertime, they would go into their basement playroom or up to their enormous dormitory-style bedroom to play. I was undeniably fascinated by these friendly, adorable little girls. Growing up in a house of 4 boys and finding my girl cousins mostly annoying, I had no real experience with the world of little girls. Now, effortlessly and unwittingly, I was becoming preoccupied with the subject. My first obvious observation was that, clearly, little girls think differently from little boys. Not a particularly original insight I realize, but one that had never occurred to me before. That appreciation reminded me of the old platitude that if girls grew up to rule the world (and there were no men to mess it up), there would be no more war. Senseless destruction, such a staple of little boys' play, seemed to be mercifully out of bounds for these little girls. The little kids (as everyone referred to the four youngest girls) were really fun to be around in a way that I had never encountered before and couldn't explain. I was absolutely fascinated by everything about them. It was something I had never experienced before with any kids, boys or girls. Happily, the more often I came around, the more comfortable the little kids seemed to get with me. They seemed genuinely glad to see me when I popped in. Which, by now, had become a daily occurrence.

Jane's third oldest daughter, Liz, was 16 years old, but she was witty and sophisticated well beyond her years. We both loved the same progressive music, so I decided to take her to a couple of bars to see bands we both liked (yes, Liz possessed a fake ID). Liz was in the middle of a long-term relationship. Her boyfriend worked on the crew for the band bands Pegasus. With my relationship with Liz, I once again reverted to my high school role of listening to a girl's woes while trying to be compassionate. I should have left it at compassion. Instead, I did something really stupid; I tried to help. It seems I am genetically incapable of hearing about a problem without immediately looking for a solution. Regarding Liz, I should have tried harder to resist. Liz told me her mother was being completely unreasonable with her, not letting her stay over at her boyfriend's house (hardly unreasonable given Liz was 16, after all). Liz and her mother had argued about it that day, and for that reason, Liz didn't want to go home. Instead of staying out of it and forcing Liz to work it out with her mother, I stupidly prevailed upon my parents to let Liz spend the night in their basement. Unfortunately for me, in this case, I was very persuasive, and my parents agreed.

The next day, I woke up, realizing the extent of what I had done. I was in a panic. At a minimum, I knew Jane would be extremely upset with me. What if she was so angry that she did not want me to come around anymore? I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. My mind was spinning; why had I done such an utterly stupid thing? I had no business getting between Jane and her daughter. I decided that I needed to make a grand gesture to convince Jane how sincerely remorseful I was. I went to my friend's florist shop and bought Jane a floral peace offering. With my heart pounding, I took the flowers over to Jane's house and begged her for forgiveness. After greeting me at the door with a scowl, Jane graciously accepted my apology. I thought, now I could go back to breathing again. The overriding thing this incident demonstrated to me was how strong of an

emotional bond I had already formed with Jane and her family. The thought of carelessly destroying that bond had scared me to death. I vowed I would be more careful in the future.

X Tending a that Small Piece of My World

Finding My World

When I left the mental hospital for the first time, I came away with a clear understanding and firm belief in how I wanted to live my life. Because of a possible genetic component to Manic Depression, I decided that I would never father children of my own. I concluded that no matter how small the degree of risk or the magnitude of what I was choosing to give up, I didn't wish to take any chance that a child of mine would have to suffer the same crippling effects of Manic Depression that I had endured. I was committed to the genetic inheritance of this condition stopping with me. To compensate for that genuine void in my life, I concluded that I needed to actualize the mantra that emerged from my original breakdown. I would carve out a small piece of my world and carefully tend to it the best I could, making it as perfect as possible. My emotional experience with Jane and the little kids made me feel like maybe I had found that small piece of my world. It wasn't a conscious thought yet, but the overwhelming feelings were authentic.

As the months wore on, my feelings for Jane and the little kids intensified. I had become a daily part of their lives, and I couldn't imagine my life without them. This all came to a head one night after the music playing had ended. Jane looked directly at me and stated directly, "I think you are going to have to stop coming around here." My heart sank; I was in shock. I was so stunned that I barely heard what she said to me next, "Because I think I'm falling in love with you." In an instant, I had gone from the depths to the heights. My heart soared as I replied, "I think I'm falling in love with you, too." For a 41-year-old woman and a 22-year-old man, this was the easy part. Next, there was telling everyone else about this unusual pairing. Declaring our affection to the family might create some awkward

conversations, especially with Pam. It was likely that the little kids would view our relationship positively. But Jane's mother, Edna, and my parents could both be counted on for stubborn resistance to the relationship. As if playing from a script, the little kids were ecstatic at the thought of their mother and me being together; Jane's older kids were mostly a little confused, but they were unopposed. As predicted, my parents were indignant at the mere thought of a relationship with an older woman. Questioning my mental health regarding my decision-making, Jane's mother accused Jane of having me take her place in her daughter's life.

In spite of these significant obstacles, three months later, we decided that I would move in with the family. It was time to take this big step to see whether we could all life together. It was going to be a challenge, to be sure. Living with so many people necessitated picking your spots when doing anything on your own. It was a big house, but nine people living under one roof could get very stressful. Fortuitously, we all got along well, and I was able to make a place for myself in this sea of women. It may sound a little peculiar, but one of the crucial lessons that I was quick to learn was remembering to put the toilet seat down. Growing up in an all-male household, I had no idea how annoying this could be to females (my mother made sure to steer clear of the bathrooms my brothers and I frequented). As the only male in this house, if the seat was left up, there was no doubt who the guilty party was. After a few teachable moment mistakes, I vowed that I would never again commit this offense.

Even though I had known them all for over six months, I decided I needed to reintroduce myself to the family and help them understand who this person moving into their house with them and their mother truly was. I chose to use our first dinner together to make that reintroduction. Looking around the large kitchen table, I thanked them all for welcoming me so warmly into the family. Then I moved to the primary purpose of my talk, "Regarding my role in the family, I want

you to know that I realize you already have a father. I am not your dad. I'm just Dave; that's how I want you to think of me, and that's what I want you to call me, Dave." There was no overwhelming reaction to what I had said, simply smiles and nods. But I felt I had given them an important distinction to consider on my first day with the family. The next few months passed like a dream. The kids celebrated my 23rd birthday at Sherkston Park. We enjoyed a stellar Crystal Beach Day up in Canada. Later that month, we took a family nature hike at Akron Park. Life was good, perhaps better than I ever could have hoped for.

To pay the bills, Jane worked as a waitress at Tan Tara Country Club, I played regularly in a 50s band, and the two of us managed the income properties Jane had purchased with money she inherited when her father died five years previous. Rents from these properties provided the bulk of the funds to support our household. Managing the properties that we rented to UB students provided me with a whole new view of the working world. Growing up, my family had never had more than the superficial tools around the house. When my father needed something special done around the house, he would ask my grandfather and Uncle Don to come over. They would arrive with a vast array of tools to tackle whatever job was at hand. Now in charge of maintaining these three income properties, out of necessity, I learned a wide array of carpentry skills. I also learned to use a table saw, erect the studs for a wall, and then install the drywall, mudding up all the seams. In addition, I learned to wire and rewire electrical switches and outlets. I even learned minor plumbing skills, replacing fixtures and water lines. All these skills were learned because the alternative was having to pay expensive contractors to perform the work. Our margins in those days were so thin that the money we saved by doing the work on the houses ourselves provided us with a significant financial benefit. I eagerly devoured as many home self-help books as I could find to master as many useful skills as I could.

Nuptial Vitriol

Having successfully navigated the trial period of our living together, four months after I moved in, we decided to get married. By this point, everyone in Jane's family was thrilled with the idea; even Edna had come around. However, this news turned my parents' attitude from the righteous indignation they had displayed when I moved out to a violent burning outrage. I stood in silence as they bombarded me with some of the vilest abuse I had ever heard regarding this severe mistake I was making with my life. There was even worse revilement in their attitude saved for the older woman I intended to marry. Regardless of how passionately I may have presented it, the idea that I would be marrying a woman 19 years older than me was a fact they were incapable of accepting. They launched a disgusting diatribe about Jane that was intended to hurt and belittle me.

Predictably, I also had to defend the state of my mental health since they were sure that only mental illness could push me to do such a ridiculous, disgusting thing. I was also told, by way of the nastiest of ultimatums, that if I married this woman, I shouldn't ever plan on coming back; the door would be closed forever. In every way, they were indisputably making a point of turning their back on me. Well, I hadn't really expected to gain their support, so they certainly had sadly met my expectations. When it was my turn to talk, I told them that I thought they were pathetic parents who had no idea what they were talking about. Maddingly, they had shown no faith in my ability to decide the course of my own life. I reminded them that it had been two whole years since my last manic attack and that just because I was being antagonistic with them didn't connote my being mentally ill. When I asked, was the statute of limitations on mental illness? Would my history of mental illness cloud every decision I make for the rest of my life? Moving to their hateful attitude toward Jane, I pointed out how remarkable it was that their professed Christianity didn't prevent them from launching into the most disgusting

attacks against the woman I intended to marry, a person they had never met. I guess judge not; lest ye be judged is just for suckers. Regarding ever moving back in, I assured them that they could burn everything in my abandoned room upstairs because I would never be back. I had a wonderful relationship with a beautiful woman and a loving family. I would not be looking back, ever. These wonderful people that they had refused to meet were my family now. In the future, if they wanted to have anything to do with me, they would have to do it with me and Jane and the kids. Having made my rebuttal points, I turned and left in a flurry of recrimination. Painfully, there was no reconciliation, no resolution. My parents had made it abundantly clear that making this decision had assuredly left me on my own. That would be my last contact with my parents for over two months.

Costume Wedding

Succumbing to the tenor of our friends' comments regarding the unique nature of our marriage, we decided to have fun and get married at our house on Halloween night. It would be a costume wedding with Jane and I dressed traditionally as the bride and groom and everyone else arriving in costume. Family and friends came in an assortment of guises; most notable was the three Reinham brothers as hockey's Hanson brothers. We were surrounded by family and friends, including Jane's mother and sister. However, unsurprisingly I had no members of my family in attendance. They had followed through on their intent to shut me out. It was such a joyous evening that I barely took note of their absence.

Playing Santa

Two months later, on the night of Christmas Eve, I received a startling phone call. It was from my mother. Incredibly, she wanted to know if I was going to play Santa Claus on Christmas day for the relatives over at her house, as I had in the past. I asked what possessed her to call me after all this time for this trivial

purpose. After all, it had been more than a couple of months without any contact from them. I stated emphatically that I had no intention of coming over there; this was my family now, and if I were going to play Santa Claus for anyone, it would be for them. Then, I abruptly hung up the phone. I was still shaking with rage when I recounted the exchange to Jane; she replied, “They’re going to be over here in 10 minutes; they’re not going to lose their son over this.” Jane was wrong; five minutes later, I saw my father's car pull into our driveway.

It was a bizarre scene as my parents walked into my house, finally ready to meet Jane, the woman who had stolen their son. I greeted them at the door and introduced them to Jane as we exchanged pleasantries. Thankfully, my parents arrived on their best behavior. After a few uncomfortable moments, they began exchanging stories with Jane. Jane excelled at telling stories in a funny way, and she soon had my parents in stitches. The evening ended with an era of good feelings descending on the relationship. Because of Jane and my age difference and the fact that Jane was only four years younger than my mother (something that had driven her to distraction), total normalcy in my relationship with my parents was probably out of the question. However, after this Christmas Eve visit, perhaps some decency and civility would prevail. That felt like all I could ask for under the circumstances.

Living in That Piece of My World

Marrying Jane, I had found that piece of my world, and now I set about tending to it. The next three years were an idyllic time in my life. As I established my position more firmly in the family, I became a bona fide stepfather, especially to the little kids. What I was establishing with them was precious and warmed my heart in a way I could never have imagined. Jane and I had a close, caring relationship, spending most of our time together while working at the houses. The

little kids and Jane and I formed a tight family unit (the older two girls, Pam and Becky, had moved to Boston seeking music stardom). Holidays were big in our family; in addition to Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter, we would celebrate each birthday with a family party. Because of the number of people in the family, there was a family party almost every month.

I felt like I was living in a dream; I had never been so happy in my life. Remarkably, by the end of this period in the fall of 1981, I had gone over four years without a single manic episode. I started to believe that my manic episodes were an aberration, something in the past and had come to an end. I was taking no medication of any kind, and yet I had remained entirely mania-free for over four years. I felt I was cured.

XI Here Come Those Mania Feelings Again

Utility bill shut-off threats.

As I said previously, Jane and I lived on tight margins. While we tried not to make a big deal about money, especially to the kids, unmistakably, our financial situation was always a source of stress. To add some more income to our monthly coffers, Jane began working year-round at Tan Tara, and I resigned from my band to make more consistent money working at Brand Names. In another attempt to supplement our income, we started taking on odd jobs, mainly painting ones. But even with these adjustments, we lived in an environment where one bounced check could throw everything into chaos. Predictably, one day, it did.

We were working a painting job at the home of Jane's Tan Tara boss, when we received a call from one of the girls. She said they had just received a call from Niagara Mohawk stating that our monthly payment was overdue and that they were shutting off our service at 5:00 pm. Niagara Mohawk provided electricity, so this threatened to shut off all of our appliances and plunge our house into darkness. Jane was very conscientious about paying the bills on time, so we assumed that it must have been a bounced check. There was only one thing to do, I left Jane working at the house and drove downtown to the Niagara Mohawk office. When I got there, after working through the building's labyrinth to find customer service, I sat down, introduced myself, and begged the customer service person to please accept a replacement check for the one that had bounced. With even greater emotion, referencing the presence of my four young children, I pleaded that Niagara Mohawk did not turn the electricity off on my family that night. After a bit of back and forth on logistics, she considered my request and left to consult her supervisor. I held my breath. When she returned from talking with her supervisor, she said they would be able to cancel the disconnect scheduled for that night. Extremely relieved and with much gratitude, I thanked her for her efforts on my

behalf. I drove home triumphantly, congratulating myself for my success, but I was still badly shaken from the traumatic experience. Having to beg to keep the power on had completely drained me emotionally. Getting a successful result did not erase the doomsday scenarios I was forced to consider as I had driven to the office and then while I sat there awaiting a decision. I felt completely exhausted and deeply troubled by how close we had come to a catastrophic event.

Sadat assassination

I have been interested in history and politics since I was a little boy. For all that time, I have been an avid follower of current events, US and international. So, when Anwar Sadat of Egypt courageously decided to sit down and negotiate a peace treaty with Israel's Menachem Begin at the behest of Jimmy Carter at Camp David in 1978, he instantly became a hero of mine. From that point, I closely followed his career as president of Egypt. Horribly, three years later, on October 6th, 1981, Sadat was assassinated while reviewing a military parade. The geopolitical implications for peace in the Middle East following his assassination were staggering, and thoughts of the implications preyed heavily on my mind. For years, I had been convinced that the next World War would start in the volatile Middle East. For me, events like this only exacerbated those feelings. I had a hard time concentrating or thinking. While my obsession with this scenario may seem abnormal to the average person, it was nonetheless quite authentic to me. These concerns played a significant role in altering my mental state of mind.

Who Needs Sleep

For all the times that I had experienced mania, you would think I would be able to recognize the early warning signs and intervene, but you would be wrong. The utility crisis and the Sadat assassination had occurred within two days of each other. The juxtaposition of these two highly traumatic events took a toll on my psyche. In a plainly visible symptom of mania, I had lost my interest in, or ability

to, sleep. No longer needing sleep is a practice that is very hard to explain to the other people you live with. To eliminate any knowledge or concern about my sleep state, I would pretend to sleep. I would lie awake for a while; after Jane was asleep, I would get out of bed and go downstairs and amuse myself for a few hours before returning to bed. There, I would lie awake for the remainder of the night, pretending to wake up when Jane woke up. This pattern continued for weeks, staying awake all night and deceiving my family of anything abnormal. Sleeplessness is a classic symptom of mania. It is an interesting question whether lack of sleep actually accelerates mania or whether mania deprives the body of the need to sleep. From my admittedly one-sided perspective, mania's arrival precedes and induces sleeplessness, but not by much.

Sleeplessness alone, especially staying up all night without sleeping, was clear evidence (as it should have been to me) that mania had reared its ugly head following a four-year absence. But sleeplessness was not the only indicator I was exhibiting. As the trauma of the two events subsided over a week or so, more clear signs of mania were manifested in my life. The little kids remarked to their mother that Dave was "really talking a lot, way more than usual." That rapid, impulsive speech was always delivered with a lot of energy, confidence, and a feeling of euphoria. These were my go-to symptoms. Suppose I could only have seen myself from a distance. Because none of my family had any experience observing my mania, my behavior merely seemed unusual as opposed to an indicator of a disorder. Weeks passed, and I continued in this agitated state, still able to function within the family structure, but just barely. I learned later that at one point, Jane had told the girls, "Whatever difficulty Dave is going through, if you love the Dave we all remember, you have to support and understand him right now." Thankfully, for my sake, they did. No one, including Jane, challenged my odd behavior. Actions, however, would be harder to ignore.

Would You Like a Ride

I have always been willing to help a person in need. Euphoria and manic energy, combined with this natural desire to help, led to a number of incidents that ultimately exposed my mania for all to see. The first incident occurred as the fall had morphed into winter; I was driving home in a heavy snowstorm after working at one of the houses. As I pulled up to a traffic light, I noticed two teenage girls standing alone through the falling snow on the abandoned streets. They were shivering in the cold, apparently waiting for a bus that had probably stopped running in the storm. I approached alongside them and rolled down my window. Through the blizzarding snow, I asked these young girls if they wanted a ride. They looked at me a little funny and sternly said no, they didn't want a ride. So, I drove off without giving the incident a second thought, except maybe hoping that they were able to get where they were going safely in the storm. To me, it was a benevolent act of neighborliness, the kind I had performed countless times in my life. Unfortunately, the Town of Tonawanda police had a different view of my offer. It turned out one of the girls' fathers was a town cop. She had written down my license number and given it to her father. He was now over at my house, demanding to know precisely what my intentions were when I was asking the girls into my car. I stated adamantly that I was just offering assistance to two people who appeared to be stranded in a snowstorm. Nothing more than that. In desperation, I asked, "Do we not live in the City of Good Neighbors?" The cop/father finally seemed to be coming around to the impression that I was just an over-eager do-gooder and not some weirdo out to harm the girls. As he left, he admonished me, "The next time you see two girls waiting for a ride, just pass them by." I was so relieved to have convinced the cop of my innocence that I had forgotten that Jane and the girls were standing behind me, absorbing everything that was being said. I hadn't felt the need to mention the incident earlier, so they

had known nothing of the incident until the cop appeared at our door. After the cop left, I had to sell my innocence to all of them, especially Jane. As I tried to make my case to them, the stupidity of what I had done became painfully apparent to me, as Jane repeatedly questioned, “What was I thinking?” I had to admit that offering a ride to two young girls probably was a dangerously reckless thing for any individual adult male to propose, regardless of the circumstances. They all agreed that it should have been obvious to me. No one realized it at the time, but it was the euphoria of mania that had clouded my thinking and allowed me to be so reckless. Again, absent any insight into my behavior, as the person with the mania, it never occurred to me that this disease from my past had reoccurred and had caused my erratic thinking.

Shoveling Out the Snow

On another snowy night, I headed for old CPK friend Randy’s house for a couple of hours of music-making. A new coat of snow made driving difficult, and as I turned the corner to Randy’s house, I spied him digging out his car, which was stuck in the driveway. I parked the car on the road and went to help dig his car out of the snow. As I began to dig, I noticed that the entire block seemed to be shoveling their driveways or digging out their cars. Again, my euphoria-induced altruism kicked in. I said, “Shouldn’t we help your neighbor across the street?” Reluctantly, Randy said sure, and he joined me across the street. It was with this neighbor that I experienced something truly remarkable. After we finished shoveling his driveway, the old man asked my name. When he heard my last name (which I pronounce Hi-zee), he looked at me, frowned, and said, your name should be pronounced Hizgh-A. I had heard my grandfather reference this Polish pronunciation before, so there was nothing too remarkable about that other than he recognized my name. Then he continued, “Hizgh-A people come from the

Carpathian Mountains. They are strong, like bulls.” This blew me away. I always believed my grandparents’ grandparents came from Poland. But when they lived there, at the end of the 19th century, the entire region was under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Carpathian Mountains run along the present-day border of Poland and Hungary. It would not have been unusual for Polish people living in that region to have a Hungarian name (which Hyzy clearly is). This was something I had never considered, and it was a revelation for me.

With my euphoria-induced altruism reinforced by the excitement of this startling information, I looked down the street at some of the other neighbors still shoveling out. I turned to Randy and said, “Let’s go down the street and help some more of your neighbors shovel out.” Randy was not as similarly inspired as I was and told me that I was on my own and he was going back to his warm house. Undeterred, I made my way down the street, shovel in hand. I lost track of how many houses I had assisted that snowy night. Incontestably, I had also lost track of the time. By the time I arrived home, it was past two in the morning. I had promised Jane I would return no later than eleven and had made no call to say I would be later. As the night wore on, and I still had not arrived, Jane’s anxiety escalated; she spent the night considering all manner of horrible reasons for my not being home. When I finally pulled into the driveway, Jane was waiting at the front door, furious with me. No amount of excuse-making on my part could console her. The generous nature of what I had been doing just seemed like a completely selfish and self-centered act on my part. After a heated night-long debate, I eventually convinced Jane that my lateness was due to my being outside the entire time and that I had truly lost track of time.

Manic Depression is REALLY Real

The final chapter of my manic saga begins at a Buffalo Sabres hockey game. I had been a season ticket holder for the preceding ten years, and I rarely missed a home game. I sat in the upper deck of the building in the Orange seats. The location of my section in the Oranges gave me the benefit of sitting near the entrance to the press box. I was constantly bumping into reporters, along with radio and TV personalities. On this night, I ran into a friend of Mike Mombrea's, Brian Blessed of WIVB-TV. Brian and I knew each other from attending parties at Mike's house. I decided to pitch Brian a story idea I had been mulling over regarding the massive trade of the previous week that sent Jim Schoenfeld, Danny Gare, Derrek Smith, and Bob Sauve to Detroit for Mike Foligno and Dale McCourt. This trade had animated my imagination and plainly drove my euphoric mania. I was thrilled when he said if I could give something to him in the morning, he would run with it. On the way home, I excitedly told my friends, the Phantom Signmakers, about my encounter with Brian Blessing. After returning home from the game, Jane told me that we were out of milk. I got back in my car and went to pick up the milk. But my mind couldn't concentrate on milk or the convenience store I was supposed to be headed to; my mind was on how to prepare what I wanted to say to Brian in the morning. I drove around the streets aimlessly until I ultimately landed at a department store parking lot. Why I decided to park my car in front of a department store and then spend the cold night outside in a partially protected doorway instead of picking up some milk and going home remains a total mystery to me to this day. The only possible explanation for my behavior is that I was, to put it clinically, mentally ill at the time. Hunkered down at the department store, fueled by my manic haze, I spent the night listening to music and thinking about interacting with Brian Blessed in the morning. After languishing there for over seven hours, I got in my car and drove the 20 minutes to the WIVB studio

where Brian worked. When I arrived at the station, the receptionist told me that Brian was not in yet. I told her I would be happy to wait. She advised me that it could be three or more hours before Brian came in to work. I assured her that I was glad to wait since I had important business to discuss with Brian. As I sat there for over an hour waiting, a parade of radio and TV personalities came through the door on their way to work. Suddenly, a familiar face walked in the door. It was Steve Hall, my friend from the Phantom Signmakers whom I had just been with at the hockey game the night before. Was he here to help me with my presentation? He walked over to me with his usual kind look. "Come on, Dave," he said, "We're going home." I protested for a moment, but Steve was insistent. "Let's go, Dave." On the way home, Steve said that Jane had reached out to him that morning, saying I hadn't come home after going out for milk following the hockey game. Steve said he told Jane that, based on our conversation on the way home from the game, he had an idea where I might be. Steve then volunteered to go to find me.

Suffering and confused in my manic state as Steve drove me home, I struggled to understand precisely what was happening. All I was sure of was that, again, I must have done something really wrong for Steve to come looking for me. As Steve pulled into my driveway, my anxiety grew as I anticipated how Jane and the girls would react to my belated return. As I opened the door, Jane greeted me, sobbing. Between her tears, she repeatedly asked me, "Why did you do this," and, "Where have you been all night?" I saw the little kids sneaking a peek down the stairs, and frankly, the look of fear on their faces really sobered me. I was overcome with a crippling apprehension that with my actions this time, I might have really screwed up and lost Jane and the girls forever. I desperately needed to convince them, and quickly, that I fully understood what was wrong and that I knew what had to be done to fix it. Panicked, I summoned up what sanity I could muster to forcibly subdue my mania. It was critical that I demonstrate some clarity

about my condition to the people I loved. I attempted to calmly tell Jane (and the ears upstairs) that I was suffering from Manic Depression, something I have suffered from since right after I graduated from high school. I mentioned to Jane that she might recall me talking about it in the past. I hadn't had an episode of mania in over five years, but clearly, it was mania that was what was happening to me now. We needed to talk about what could be done to treat my illness.

I told Jane that to treat manic depression, the most important immediate task was to secure Lithium for me to begin taking immediately. Jane indicated that actually, she had contacted my parents the previous night after I hadn't come back from the store. My father had mentioned that it sounded as if I was ill again and that I would need to start taking Lithium. Following our conversation, Jane made the phone call to let my parents know I had come home and to ask my father to prescribe the Lithium for me to begin taking. When Jane finished the call, she turned to me and said, "I don't care about what happened last night; I just want my Dave back." As frustratingly devastating as it was for me to admit that mania had struck me again, I needed to be brutally honest with Jane and the kids. I prepared Jane for the weeks and months ahead. I told her that as the euphoria of the mania subsided, I would become inordinately tired, sleeping much more than usual. Based on my last hospitalization, I was pretty sure this transition would last approximately two weeks. On the longer-picture front, it was virtually a certainty that taking Lithium would cause me to gain weight. And importantly, I would need to significantly increase my fluid content to compensate for the Lithium in my system to protect my kidneys. To all these conditions Jane just repeated her recent mantra, "I just want my Dave back." That kind of warm, emotional support from Jane and the girls strengthened my resolve to manage my medication and finally kick Manic Depression for good. The following afternoon, we drove over to my parent's house to pick up the Lithium my father had prescribed. The sight of my

parents working in consort with Jane seemed incredibly unreal. But now they were bound together by a mutual desire to see me get well. All other trivial animosities were put aside. Sadly, Jane and my parents would never again be so effectively in sync. As we were getting ready to leave, my mother said to Jane, "Please make sure that David takes his pills." Jane responded, "If Dave wants to have his life with me and my girls, he will have to remember to take his pills himself every day. That decision is up to him."

XII Epilogue - My Life on Lithium

From that momentous concluding day of my last illness in December 1981 until this day, some forty-plus years later, I have never missed taking my daily Lithium medication. For that reason, the destructive cycle of mania that ruled my life abruptly ended. I would never again suffer the slings and arrows of manic depression.

Unmistakenly, I was one of the fortunate ones. I had a loving wife and family who were willing to forgive the excesses of my mania. Most importantly for me, their mere presence in my life provided me with a compelling reason to do the one thing I had always resisted doing in the past: to take my Lithium. This simple act of commitment changed my life forever, preventing crippling bouts of mania from intruding into my life and allowing me to live without the crippling fear of a future breakdown. Becoming stabilized on Lithium took a couple of months, but eventually, I was able to begin living a normal, mentally healthy life. Two years after stabilizing on Lithium, I returned to school for computer programming. A year after that, exactly three years after my last manic episode, I began working at a job in IT for a commercial real estate developer. I worked hard at that company for 38 years, ultimately rising to the position of IT manager. Obtaining this position provided me and my family with the kind of life and the level of financial security we could have only dreamed of during my manic days.

As I have said, one of Lithium's most powerfully useful effects on me was to prevent the reoccurrence of manic episodes. I had experienced a number of emotional traumas during my Lithium-medicated life, many capable, had I not been medicated, of throwing me into mania. The most powerful illustration of Lithium's ability to control my mood during a time of stress came during the time immediately after my wife Jane broke her hip. Coming out of surgery, the doctors informed me that the anesthesia had not completely cleared out of her brain and

that Jane had descended into dementia. I was shocked and confused. I realized she was 78, but I had never heard of this complication. Frustratingly, the doctor was unsure how long she would remain in this state or whether it might be permanent. Thus began an almost two-year period taking care of this confused, disturbed, helpless person. Yes, this was still my wife, but intellectually and emotionally, this incoherent person bore no resemblance to the woman I had married. Providing care was a tedious, demanding, and exhausting exercise. But it was something that I took on willingly, day after day, until her merciful death almost two years later. Concurrent with caring for my sick wife was an equally challenging predicament at work. After over twenty years as IT Director, ownership decided to look for new blood to head my department. Curiously, while there were no guarantees, I had been promised that I would keep a position in the department. As much as I wanted to believe that was true, the experience of some coworkers in other departments made me very uneasy. I was desperate for a positive resolution; given my situation at home, I could not afford to lose my job. And to add salt on the wound, thus adding to my anxiety, I had been tasked with the responsibility of assisting in hiring my replacement. These two contemporaneous processes, caring for my sick wife and precariously holding on to my job, continued over the same 18-month span. The uncertainty pushed my stress levels to the maximum. Worried about the increased stress during this period and concerned about my potential manic fallout, I called a special sit-down meeting with my girls. After explaining my concerns, I pleaded with them to alert me if I began to exhibit any strange behavior. I asked them if they remembered how I had acted when I was manic years ago. I was greeted with universal acknowledgment and nervous laughter. I cautioned them to make me aware immediately if they detected any of that familiar manic behavior from me. My primary concern was that I could slip into mania and, as had happened before, be blindly unaware of what was happening to me. They all

assured me that they would each be vigilant in analyzing my actions. Incredibly, despite the stress of the situation, through the help of a regular dose of Lithium, mania never developed. Thankfully, I was free to experience all the varied emotions derived from the tribulations that had engulfed my life without becoming manic. I had passed the test with a major assist from Lithium.

Taking Lithium for over 40 years, there was one side effect that had always concerned me the most. The potential long-term impact on my Kidneys from continued Lithium use. According to Lithium documentation, this constituted a potentially significant side effect that would have to be monitored closely. My first step was to take frequent blood levels to ensure proper Lithium dosing. It turned out, according to the documentation, that the therapeutic level for Lithium is remarkably close to the toxic level. Great care needed to be taken to maintain my proper blood level. Accordingly, it was a graduated process for measuring my Lithium level. I took monthly blood samples for the first six months, then every three months for another year, and then every six months for many years after that. Finally, after twenty years of routine blood test results, I moved to annual testing, which I continue to this day.

Another recommended step I took to protect my kidneys while taking Lithium was to consume a large volume of fluids, as directed in the literature. For me, between coffee, soda, and water, I drink approximately half a gallon of fluids every day. My recent Nephrology exams have confirmed that this strategy continues to keep my kidneys healthy despite the exposure to potential risk. Of course, as a result of drinking all those fluids, I do need to urinate more frequently than the average person, which can occasionally be problematic. But obviously this is a small price to pay for maintaining healthy kidneys for over forty years.

As I complete this manuscript, it remains unmistakable to me that my happy, healthy, and successful life was only possible due to the regular use of Lithium.

That drug has been nothing short of a miracle in my life. As I have often remarked in the intervening years, without Lithium, in all likelihood, I would have lost my family, ended up living on the streets, and, quite possibly, wound up dead before my 30th birthday. That none of these calamities occurred shows the essential role Lithium has played in normalizing my life. Without Lithium, my life was an arbitrary, uncontrolled flurry of chaos and confusion. With Lithium, I could live a reasoned, caring life with the people I loved, as I had always envisioned for myself. I will be forever grateful for the day that fate smiled upon me and Lithium finally came and stayed in my life.