

## PROLOG

*Spring, 1959.* I'm walking east on the south side of Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena. Before I finish my walk, I will have stopped at the C&H Sales war surplus store to dream once again about the wonderful things that could be made from the military junk inside. I will have listened once again to the wonderful audio and stereo offered by Dow Radio, Stereo and Electronics. Before I finish my walk, I will have traveled to Rosemead Boulevard, about eight miles from Pasadena City College, where I am enrolled in the second year of a pre engineering curriculum.

I am enrolled, but for the most part I do not attend class. I am hopelessly behind in all my class work, and I am seriously depressed. I cannot work up the courage to tell my father that I am failing in my classes, first because of his reaction and second because he made it clear that he would only continue to give me food and shelter if I was successfully enrolled in college. I'm not successfully enrolled.

Something has got to give. As I stand there in front of the amazing window that separates C&H Sales' wonderful riches from my hands, I am all but overwhelmed by a dire need to escape. Slowly there bubbles up from the depths of my depression's darkest recesses the question, upon which the answer to which my survival depends. The question is: what do I escape from, and where should I escape to? I know the answer to the first part of the question: I want to escape from myself. And where to escape to? Well, that's what this story is all about.

*Later spring 1959.* I am sitting in a go cart which I had just constructed, getting ready to test it for the first time by ripping around the empty Sears Roebuck parking lot. I am not sitting comfortably because the go cart is barely 5 ft. Long and I am easily 6 ft. 2 in. Tall. My legs are wrapped over and around the steering wheel support so I can barely make contact with the gas and brake pedals. It is Sunday and Sears is closed. There are almost no cars in the parking lot. Overhead, the sky is overcast, dark gray and ominous, almost a perfect mirror of my state of mind.

My brother, Dirk, and his girlfriend, Leslie; one of my best friends, Chip Lusby; another friend Dave Howard; and currently my car pool companion, Barbara Cady, are all on hand for the first run.

Dirk is the youngest of my two brothers. He also is more than 6'2", dark-haired and slimmer than me. He is a Junior at El Monte high school, I'm not quite sure why he is here. He is too young to run in my social circle. Perhaps he is just curious to see how my latest project will turn out. So am I. His girlfriend, Leslie, is pathetically shy. She prefers to stand behind my brother, or if absolutely necessary, to weld herself side-by-side to his hip.

Chip Lusby has been a constant and close friend of mine since Cub Scout days. My mother served as a den leader. After my brothers and I, Chip was the first unrelated member. Paradoxically he also worked part time at Dow Radio, where he bought, if necessary, components for stereos that he constructed. Electronics was not his only talent, but it would someday be his profession. I know why chip is here: he helped weld the frame to the go cart. He's got a vested interest.

## THE LOG

Dave Howard and I gravitated toward each other, perhaps because at that time we both sported sullen, depressed attitudes. In the next few minutes he will play a critical part in my life.

Barbara Cady is here because the go cart is my favorite topic of conversation on our commutes to and from college. She has just got to see what I have been talking about. She is tall, lithe, blond and recently an award-winning high school majorette. I think she's beautiful.

The time has come, we are all ready to test the new go cart.

Dirk ties a tow rope to the rear bumper of his 51 Ford. I wrap the other end around the front axle of the go cart, keeping the free end in my hand for a quick release. We are towing the cart to start it. Dirk inches forward cautiously. At first, because of motor compression, the cart's rear wheels skid on the pavement. I bounce up and down once or twice to get the wheels to start turning. At about 15 miles an hour I let go of the rope, which allows me to fall slightly behind the Ford. Only then can I dare to flip the magneto kill switch on, energizing the spark plugs. Nothing noticeable happens. I depress the throttle. All hell breaks loose. The 120 horsepower, 67 lb. Keicauffer V-4 air cooled drone target aircraft engine explodes to life. There is no transmission, no clutch, only high gear. With me included, the go cart weighs less than 350 lbs. At any speed I can smoke the wheels.

The acceleration is amazing! I am having the time of my life. The exhilaration of slamming myself into the back of the seat by simply pushing down on the accelerator pedal is intoxicating. I want more.

I feel moisture on my back through my sweatshirt. I look up. The skies are low, dark and ominous. It must be raining, I think. I roar past the little entourage of observers. I have no idea how fast I'm going but to speed must be terrific. I briefly glimpse the faces of the crowd. They appear far more worried than I would think my speed alone should cause. I look back toward the fast disappearing group and realize that I am looking through a translucent wall of red just behind me. The fuel line has ruptured. The cart is on fire! And I am in it.

I slide forward in my seat, away from the searing heat towards the front of the cart. I am so far forward that my feet slip off the accelerator and brake pedals. I am coasting toward my friends out of control and on fire. "Help me! I Help me!" I yell. I can see looks of horror, but no one moves.

Then suddenly, Barbara is there beside me, yelling at me, screaming, "jump off! Roll off! Get out!"

Her commands give me strength to act. I realize that suffering a few broken bones is far better than being burned to death. I roll. I'm off. The ground hurts, just as expected. Barbara is there beside me once again, this time to help me roll on the ground and smother the flames. Someone brings a blanket. I am put out like a snuffed candle. I feel a warmth on my back and elbows, reminiscent of the warm glow from a fireplace in a mountain cabin. I yell at no one in particular, "save the go cart! Put out the go cart!" Someone pulls my sweatshirt off, not over my arms and head, but straight in front of me as though it had a zipper down the back. I realize the sweater has no back. It is still smoking. Many people are crowding around me now.

I can hear Dirk behind me. He is telling me that he has taken care of the go cart. "Don't worry he says, just take care of yourself."

We are getting into Dave Howard's car. They are making me lean forward so my back doesn't touch the seat. My back is beginning to feel hot. I keep asking, "What's wrong, what's wrong." Dave is driving like a maniac, running stop signs, squealing around turns, doing anything it takes to get me to the emergency clinic.

## THE LOG

I'm in the doctors office, screaming. It feels like someone has placed a red-hot skillet on my back. The doctor orders a hypodermic. "This is a little kick-a-poo joy juice," he explains as he empties the contents of the syringe into my arm. The Demerol works fast.

I feel no pain. Everything is perrrrfect, just perrrrrrfect. The doctor stops into my cubicle to see how I'm doing. "Thanks for your help," I tell him. "I'm feeling fine and I'm ready to go home now." I am feeling fine but I soon learn that I am far from ready to go home.

I am flat on my stomach in an ambulance on my way to a hospital in Arcadia. The pain is beginning to return, but I am at peace with myself. And last I have found a way to escape. It will be a painful way, but I'm happy. The classes I was failing are now incomplete. Professors, who recently dunned me for class work, now, with sympathy, offer me time, all the time I need to escape.

*Just before summer break, 1959.* It is Friday. I am driving my car home from UCLA. I have been recuperating for the last four weeks, three of them in the hospital. And most of them without any noticeable improvement in my condition. Then last week, one of the interns came by with something he called a new miracle drug, which is being tested. As delicately as possible my back is slathered with the new product. Overnight, the infection in my back disappears and in its place new skin starts growing. I probably owe my life to Bacitracin.

In the car with me are Peter Berardo, second-year student in physics; Chip Lusby, second-year engineering; Dave Howard, sophomore with a scholarship in athletics; and Dave LaFaille, sophomore in economics.

I am in awe of Pete Berardo. I became acquainted with him after I joined a so-called "off campus" club called the mountaineering club of El Monte high school. Most members of this club are what I consider to be the elite personalities on campus. Winning his approval is one of my primary goals. Pete is serious and dedicated. He is driven to make a success of himself, and so far that's what he is doing. He is pursuing a degree in physics primarily because he could not get into an engineering curricula because of class space limitations.

Dave LaFaille is beautiful, possessed of soft curly hair long thick eyelashes, fair features and a slightly soft, medium framed body. He is also possessed of a lightning quick intellectual mind, an almost photographic memory and a sense for taste and decorum that none of us can fully fathom. For all this, he is a ladies man par excellence. He is also critical of just about everything and everyone around him.

I am driving Pete, Chip, Dave H., Dave L., and myself home to El Monte for the weekend and trying with all the powers of persuasion I possess to convince them that we should take a trip around the world. Only Dave Howard seems to be interested.

My rationale is that opportunities for adventure from this point forward in our lives will decrease and finally disappear as the responsibilities of employment, marriage and children fall upon us. "Is that what you want," I ask, "to be trapped into the humdrum of a classic life style with nothing to be said of it but that you followed a well-established path from birth to death and did nothing in between to warrant that existence. Break away to something new. Challenge the norm.

"Some ancient Greek said something once like, 'the unexamined life is not worth living.' I extend this principle to the unexamined environment -- the planet we live on, the universe we live in, the peoples of the world, the exotic features of the world.

"Most of everything that would be interesting will soon be excluded from us because of the tie downs of our increasingly burdened lives.

## THE LOG

“Do not sink into this low state. Expand your horizons, your minds and your experience. Think ahead. Then think back from that point. What you do now will be your past and your memories forever. “What kind of memories you want them to be, something like this? ‘I remember when I got married. I remember when I had my first child. I remember when the boss promoted me.’ Instead, how about: ‘I remember that I circumnavigated the earth. I saw exotic cultures and places, unimagined before I was there to experience them in person. I met people who became my friends from all cultures and all areas. When people today talk of world affairs I can knowingly say, I’ve been there and I know what it’s like, at least once in my life.”

Dave La Faille, as ever sarcastic, belittling and above it all in his attitude, speaks up. “Do you think somebody from El Monte would know culture, even if they saw it? We are from the pits of the world, destined to be unsophisticates. Hitchhiking around the world just for the sake of going is pointless. Time will be taken from our lives and we will have nothing to show for it but some fading memories. Do you think anyone will care whether we went on this trip? Do you think it will matter to us? I think the way to go is to get a good education, use that to get a good job, use the job to get some money and then use that money to take the trip, if that’s what you want to do.”

Pete speaks up. “What I’m worried about is, if I stop going to school for a while, that I might not be able to return. My family is sacrificing for me so that I can get a good education and I think I owe them my diploma as a return on their investment.”

“But what about the concept,” I interject, “that that with meager means and nothing much more but pluck, we might be able to travel around the world and become worldly, right, Dave.” I try to draw La Faille back into the conversation.

Nothing much changes. So I strike out this time, but time is on my side. I have all the time I need, really. Its traveling companions I’m looking for.

*Summer, 1959.* After many sessions while playing shuttle for the El Monte boys, back and forth from school, things change for no particular reason that I can see. Pete suddenly starts talking about the trip as though he might be interested, at last. In fact, we schedule a date to broach the subject with Pete’s family during one of the famous Sunday Italian dinners cooked by Pete’s mother Margaret.

“Mom, Dad, Thor and I have something we want to ask you,” Pete begins as he tries to subtly raise the subject of an around the world trip. And so he launches into his spiel. As expected, issues of responsibility to self and family are brought up.

After what seems like hours of debate, Pete’s mom settles the issue. With Solomonic mien, she deflects the question back to Pete. “Pete,” she says in a voice that reflects the fondness and pride she feels for her firstborn son, “we have raised you the best we can, and you have become a fine young man. With manhood comes responsibility. Whether to go on this trip or not is your decision to make. We are sure that you will make the right decision. And I want you to know that whatever that decision is, your father and I and this family will give you our full support.” I look at Pete’s face, and I know, he is going around the world! Now it’s up to me to see if I can go as well.

*Late summer, 1959* I am covered with dirt and grease from head to foot. It is hot and I’m sweating. Things are beginning to look hopeless again. My plan is a simple one -- complete the hot Rod that I had begun a year before, then sell it and use the proceeds to finance my trip around the world.

## THE LOG

The \$350 my father advanced to me for the job has been spent and the work is far from completed. All the major components have been installed and the car is in running condition. I had just spent the morning under the car connecting the driveline and completing the adjustment of the shift mechanism. All that remains is to install the hood and headlights. When this work is done I will have completed the conversion of a 1931 two-door three window Ford coupe from a 40 horsepower flivver into a 300 horsepower hot Rod.

Less than a month remains until our scheduled date of departure in mid-October. I am not skilled enough to do the bodywork and painting, which is as yet unfinished. It's time to renegotiate my contract with my dad.

Dad is not very impressed with what he sees. "As I understand it you want me to buy this car that I have just spent \$350 on to finish, for \$500 more, is that right?"

"I know this doesn't make much sense, Dad, but I have no money to complete it, and I'm running out of time. I don't know what else to do."

Dad thinks for a while. "Well, I tell you what I'll do. You sell that car to me for \$500, and I will forgive repayment of the \$350 you spent to complete it. Deal?" Deal? Oh yes! "Deal!" I say. Pete and I are going to hitchhike around the world, and my budget is 500 bucks!

"Don't tell your mother about this," Dad continues, "but I'm a little envious of you. It should be the experience of a lifetime. All I ask is, please be careful and come back safely."

I grab my father by the shoulders and hug him with all my might. At first he acts a little surprised (we rarely make physical contact) then he hugs back. This is one moment I know I will never forget, no matter what else happens.

10-5-59 (12:58 p.m.). On the fifth day of October 1959 our preparations having been completed for the trip, we set out for a year of adventure on the continent...