

The Trial of Malcolm McCabe:
Truth, Justice, Reason and the Compassionate Life
(Intended for Socially Concerned Adults and Young Adults)

Tom Gnagey

Family of Man Press

© 2018

/

Putting 1890 Kansas in Perspective **[The time and place of this story]**

1890 Kansas was less rootin'-tootin' than it had been a decade earlier, but, still, one was seldom out of sight – or reach – of a gun. Trains were on the upsurge. Stage coaches were on the way out. Both were still robbed occasionally by colt-tottin' outlaws on horseback. Along the several well-established, if no more than hard packed dirt, roads that funneled cargo and people from place to place within the state, one was seldom more than 25 or so miles from a telegraph office. Most settlements were civil and safe and, in appearance, continued to resemble those from 1870 – the setting of TVs, *Gunsmoke*. Religion held sway as a potent force in people's lives. Local politicians and religious leaders often possessed unprecedented power and frequently felt little compunction to adhere to state and federal laws that didn't reflect their beliefs, desires and greedy nature.

Benjamin Harrison was the 23rd president of the United States. Lyman U. Humphrey was the 11th Governor of Kansas. A few of the legendary, old west lawmen were still in the saddle: Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Doc Holiday. Institutions such as the Pony Express, Billy the Kid and Jesse James were things of the recent past. The Dalton Brothers were about to meet their demise (1892) back in the Midwest. The future, 5 Star General and President, Dwight David Eisenhower, who lived most of his early and later life in Kansas and called it home, was born in Texas on October 14, 1890.

Local transportation was still dependent on horseback, livery wagons, and buckboards. The struggling stage coach lines maintained short runs just beyond the shadows of the ever-expanding rail service. During the previous 20 years, the railroad had taken over longer distance and cross-country transportation, leaving a new club of millionaires in its wake. Because of trains and the telegraph, the feeling of distance in America was shrinking at a startling rate. News, therefore, traveled faster than ever before – in print, by word of mouth, and, most rapidly, in the form of dots and dashes flashing across thousands of miles of sturdy, copper wire, strung along a million wooden poles. Newspapers were the primary local sources of news. Practical use of the telephone was still 20 years in the future in the east and more than that in Kansas and the plains and mountain states. Common use of electricity in rural Kansas was still 40 years in the future – candles and kerosene, or coal oil, as it was often called, were the popular sources for staving off the dark of night. There was a coal or wood-stoked cook stove in every kitchen, with strategically placed fireplaces and the occasional cast iron Franklin stove for general warmth. Most children were cozied into soft, warm, thick featherbeds on winter nights that often howled in across the Kansas plains at more than 40 miles an hour bringing with it temperatures slipping below 10 degrees.

Kansas remained a hotbed of racial unrest and atrocities – whites against Negroes*, whites against Indians*, Indians against whites, whites against Chinese. Many communities had '*Sundown Laws*', which prohibited those minorities from remaining within the city limits after dark – one method of assuring they didn't 'take root' within the towns and cities and upset the economy or the pure, white only, ethnic balance. Once proud Indians, as Tribes and Nations, were forcibly squeezed south, into submission and humiliation onto desolate reservations in the Indian Territory (to become, Oklahoma in 1907.)

The War Between the States ended in 1865. The Great Sioux War and Battle of Little Bighorn (Custer's Last Stand) had taken place in 1876. The Wounded Knee Massacre would take place on December 29, of 1890. On any given morning,

black bodies could be seen hanging from trees somewhere in Kansas. The World War was still some 25 years in the future.

Back east, the era of the 'Gay nineties' held sway – a reference coined during the more staid 1920s to describe the bawdy 1890s in which the 'decadent' art of **Aubrey Beardsley** and **Oscar Wilde**'s witty, if 'naughty', plays were presented; a 'morally loose' society ravaged by scandals lingered on; and the birth of the **suffragette** movement occurred. The west was a leader in the early women's right to vote movement. As early as 1854 women's' right to vote was defeated by a single vote in Washington state's legislature – somebody slept on the couch for a good long spell. In 1869 Wyoming became the first to grant women full voting rights. Although Kansas women were zealous early promoters of women's rights in a general way, their right to vote would await the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920.

*Native Americans were locally referred to as Indians or Red Skins so those are the terms used in this piece to reflect a sense of authenticity. No disrespect is intended toward our precious first citizens, the Native Americans. Similarly, black-skinned people were called by their racial root, Negroes, so that is the choice of this author, again with nothing intended but respect for them and their rich heritage.

* * *

A Note From the Author

For the adult reader, the author's biases will become evident without dwelling on them here. For the younger reader, it would be constructive to compare and contrast the liberal or progressive social philosophy with that of the conservative point of view.

The author hopes to stimulate constructive thought among open minded individuals.

/

CHAPTER ONE

Walking the Land in 1890

That night, if you had found yourself on top of the hill that overlooked that narrow valley there in east central Kansas, you might have surmised a lone rider had made camp below – the stillness of the scene and the lonesome lilt of a harmonica rising to meet you. You even might have imagined his horse or burro tethered just outside the irregular ring of light radiating from the small fire that rose and fell with changes in the breeze. Just beyond, the water from a stone-studded creek gurgled and splashed offering a friendly backdrop to the evening. The stars were right where stars belonged. There was the slip of a waning moon directly overhead. Occasionally, swirls of sparks arose from the fire and then quieted again. You might have wondered why. Those might have been your thoughts if you had been looking down from the top of that hill that June night in 1890 Kansas.

At the campsite, however, it was not a lone rider. There was no horse. There was no burro. There were an old man and a young teen boy. They had scooted closer to the fire as the chill of the night crept in upon them. The boy struggled to find a tune to his liking on the harmonica. The fire had burned low from earlier when the rabbit had been roasting on the skewer and the beans warming in the iron skillet. The boy had already cleaned the skillet in the creek and set it on end against a rock near the fire to dry. From time to time, as boys will do, he poked at the fire with a thick, green stick, sending an array of sparks into the night sky. He clearly enjoyed that more than the old man, but the old man smiled, puffed his pipe

and remembered how it was to be a youngster with an unquenchable thirst to know and the constant desire to manipulate the possibilities of his world.

“No clouds tonight,” the old man said looking up and pointing with his pipe. “Temperature will fall. We’ll need a well-banked fire.”

“I figured the same, Grampa. Already got the wood we’ll need, I think. Let me get to arranging it.”

The old man relit his pipe with a twig. The boy reset the fire for the long burn – larger back logs set in a wide V to direct the heat in their direction, with smaller pieces nestled close together in front. Clearly, he had done that before.

“We have about the best life there could be, Grampa. You, me, wandering the country, wherever the winds take us. I know how lucky I am and sometimes I just need to pass it on.”

“The topic is something we need to discuss,” the old man said.

“Like where next?”

“Sort of, in a way, I suppose.”

“The uncertainty in your response is unlike you.”

“We are not far from Cob Corner, Kansas. About a day’s walk due west.”

“Cob Corner? An unlikely name.”

The old man nodded, using the boy’s curiosity to ease into the conversation that was on his mind.

“Story is that some years back when it was just an unnamed, bar, brothel, and general store at a well-traveled crossroad, the surrounding area was tilled in corn. A booming business developed for a young man who invented a large, efficient, corn shucker. The shucked corn was shipped east by train. The cobs remained. Need I go on?”

“I got it. I take it that it’s grown since then.”

“To nearly a thousand folks. One of the largest in central Kansas. A peaceful town with what I have been told has a good city government and a robust economy. Possibly a bit too pious for our tastes, but we’ve dealt with that before. They have one of the new County High Schools being developed across the state. May draw as many as 60 students

from all corners of the territory. Unlike the five or six-month elementary school terms – necessary, so the youngsters can still work the farms and such during the warm months – it is in session a full seven to eight months with the opportunity for additional time if enough interest develops. I guess they believe the boys who go on to high school will be leaving the farms and ranches, thus the extended term away from home. The students board in town the first three weeks each month and return home to help during the fourth. The time has come in your life when you need to be mingling regularly with other young people your age. I'm thinking this town and school has possibilities. I want you to sleep on it and we'll think it through together later on."

"You're not *dying*, are you?"

"Of course, I'm dying, Lucas. I'm nearly seventy years old – certainly not regaining my youth. I have no intention of buying dirt for a long time yet, however. When I start looking for a plot you can begin wondering. Alright?"

"Alright. Until you begin taking an interest in plots. Got it. . . How will I know when your interest takes that turn?"

"I promise not to make a purchase without your approval."

"I'll be able to live with that – even if *you* won't."

The boy doubled over in laughter at his little joke. His Grampa's tummy jiggled watching him – more at the boy's reaction than the actual humor. Like young Lucas had indicated, they had a good thing going between them. His grandson was Malcomb's entire life – his purpose for being.

His Grampa's concern came at a time when Lucas had begun wondering about the old man's future – once his ability to walk the land began to wane. That was something else they needed to talk about. Clearly it was not of imminent concern. Lucas would let it wait.

Malcomb McCabe had been many things in his long life – a farm hand as a boy, a shop keeper, an investor, a teacher, even a college professor of history and philosophy for several years back east. He had come to America as a young man upon the completion of his university education in Scotland where he had been born and spent the first several decades

of his life. After fifty years in America, more than a bit of his tell-tale Scottish brogue remained. Once here, he soon fell in love, married and had a son. Hence, eventually, *Lucas*, whose parents, along with his grandmother, perished in a steamboat fire on the Mississippi one summer while the boy was staying with him. Malcomb had made some very good investments in real estate and cashed out when Lucas was eight. That was when they started 'walking the land', as Lucas christened it. They had been at it six years.

Their life together had begun in Galena, Illinois, coincidentally President Ulysses S. Grant's home. They left the little town in 1884. From there, they had followed the southern shores of the Great Lakes east and then the Ohio River west again to the Mississippi. They sailed the river south to New Orleans and circled back, exploring the southeastern states. They walked Tennessee and Kentucky and Arkansas and then southwest to the Texas gulf. They headed north across the Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) turning west toward the most newly christened parts of the country including Colorado, and north through Idaho to the Canadian border. From there they traveled east through Montana and the Dakotas, south through Nebraska, finally arriving in Kansas early that June.

Lucas calculated they had covered 6,000 miles in six years – 1,000 miles a year. It averaged out to less than 4 miles a day. In reality, they often covered 30 miles between sunrise and sunset. They sometimes remained in places for a number of days, even weeks, at a time. They enjoyed seeing new territory, learning what they could from the locals, and making many dozens of friends. They traveled light – a bed roll each, a food staple pack (salt, pepper, sugar, flour, lard, salt pork and so on), two changes of clothes, a canvas tarp for wet-weather shelter, an assortment of cooking supplies, a rifle and cartridges, and little more. They took turns pulling a *travois* – a V-shaped, Indian 'prairie sled' made of saplings – which carried most of their belongings. [Pronounced, tra voi] At the outset, Grampa did most of that. In the recent past, Lucas had taken over more than half of the task.

Malcomb carried letters of credit from two respected

banks and a letter of reference, written a number of years earlier, from U.S. Grant, himself. They needed little money, preferring to eat off the land and streams and sleep in the great outdoors. On their person, they each carried a hunting knife, a hatchet, and fish line and hooks. The rifle only surfaced when they got a hankerin' fer roasted rabbit or squirrel stew. During their travels, they learned about wild vegetables and which berries and fruit were edible and which poisonous. And, important to each of them, their journals – each wrote almost every night. They had filled many, not so slender, volumes. A comparison of entries would have disclosed some interesting differences – Malcomb's, for instance, mentioned not one female – well, there was that one recent entry – the widow Atherton, from Omaha, Nebraska. His apparent interest was one of the things that had sparked Lucas's budding concern about his Grampa's future. Most men had their wives with whom to live out their lives. Once he struck out on his own, his Grampa would be alone. Lucas's journals unabashedly documented his maturing assessment of girls from, "Yuk" at eight, to "My, what have we here?" more recently.

During his seventy years, Malcomb had virtually never been sick and prided himself in being in excellent physical condition. His hair was gray but full and his cheeks firm and ruddy. He proudly wore the spreading moustache that graced men's faces in the portraits of Scottish statesmen. He relied on glasses for reading but could still pick off a rabbit at fifty yards without them. During those past six years, Lucas had developed from a skinny, 60-pound, eight-year-old, with no trace of a waist, into a strong, well built, 125-pound young man. Wherever they went, he received an ample serving of feminine attention, which he had come to relish even though he had no idea what to do with it. Apparently, shoulder length blond hair, blue eyes, ample, well-proportioned muscles, and a smile that wouldn't stop, were in vogue. Sometimes a dog would join them for a day or week or month before taking off for who knew where. People, like the dogs, were mostly temporary in their lives, and Grampa and Lucas made few demands on them.

Their journey had not been without perils – dangerous storms, floods, menacing bad guys, unfriendly wild animals, hostile Indians, river pirates, lynch mobs, and other treacherous encounters – but they survived them all and took pride in how they had grown from each experience. Lucas commented that many of those things that had been death defying terrifying at the time, he had recharacterized as but invigorating exercises when he looked back on them.

Lucas figured he was getting the finest education ever made available to a boy. He pursued no formal school subjects and completed no actual lessons – certainly, no pencil and paper tests. When he required new knowledge, he learned it. His grandfather was a bottomless well of information who preferred the Socratic method of education – leading Lucas to solutions by asking questions rather than providing answers. Lucas flourished. His mind was quick and creative. His thirst for knowledge was not to be quenched. They managed a ready supply of wonder-filled books with which to fall asleep most nights.

“I guess I’ve never come right out and asked how you came to decide on this life for us, Grampa,” Lucas said, taking a seat on the ground while rubbing his palms together to rid them of the clinging stubble from the bark of the firewood.

He shifted, facing the old man more directly. The fire had grown more robust as a result of the boy’s attention and provided a noticeable, welcome, surge in warmth and light. Malcomb emptied the ash from his pipe by tapping against his boot. He became thoughtful in response to his grandson’s comment. He understood it had been a genuine request for an explanation. Malcolm never took genuine requests lightly.

“When we lost your parents and grandmother – my wife of 37 years – I found myself in the midst of a severe downhill spiral in my life. I felt tremendous loss and sadness, like you did, of course. I concluded the two of us needed a major shake-up in our lives – one that would be complete and extreme, one that would be overflowing with new experiences, one that would force us to develop new skills and goals and a new sense of purpose, and one that would allow us no time to wallow in our grief and sadness.

“Back during the summer when I was 17, before I entered University, I spent three months hiking the *Northwest Highlands* and the *Grampian Mountains* in northern Scotland. It was a grand time – a time during which I felt completely free from responsibilities to anybody but myself, a time during which I reformed my relationship with nature, with myself, and with life, a time during which I proved my worth and mettle by facing whatever the land and elements threw at me. I came to believe *that* should be the essence of all education – meet life head on and master whatever it required. After all, if school work did not accomplish that – and I was convinced it had not, at least, for me – then traditional school work should have but a minor, secondary, role in our lives. The essence of education should be twofold: First, assuring that the student knows how to go about learning; second, it should entail venturing out into the world, confronting it, asking the important questions of it, and formulating a vision of what his personally unique approach to living needs to be.

“So, at that time of great sorrow back in Galena, understanding I had the financial side of our lives well covered, I made the unilateral decision, arranged my affairs accordingly and off we put to explore the world.”

“It wasn’t a total unilateral decision, Grampa. I will never forget the night you tucked me into bed and asked me what I thought about the two of us locking up the house and setting out together to explore America. I have never been so excited in my life. I ended up sleeping with you that night – not because I was frightened: more because I didn’t know how to contain such excitement all by myself.”

“I didn’t know you remembered. How nice. I’m glad you understand you were in on the decision. That *is* how I intended it. You seem to think it was a good one.”

“Oh, my yes. I especially remember us buying our new hiking boots, long, thick stockings, and the rugged blue trousers from Levi Strauss.”

Lucas fell silent and shifted position again, so he could stare into the fire. Minutes passed. Grampa didn’t interfere. He sensed important thoughts were transpiring. Grampa never interfered when there was the possibility for important

thoughts to transpire. He was convinced the contemplation of the *'as yet unsolved'* was an indispensable part of becoming a competent, openminded person.

Presently:

"I've been thinking about your proposal, earlier this evening, Grampa. At least in a general way, I can see what you are saying – a longer term, probably more in-depth, set of relationships with a wider variety of peers. It makes sense that a boy needs to experience and master such things before he reaches manhood. You have been my only long-term friend and I fully understand that you not are a typical human being."

Grampa offered a quick smile and scuttled chuckle as Lucas continued.

"I clearly can't understand about such a relationship with age mates, which probably verifies your contention that it is necessary. The downside is abandoning the only life I've ever really had – the one I love – for staying in one place, probably inside a building, sleeping on a bed, having to follow a schedule and somebody else's rules, study things I'm not interested in or already know, and meeting artificial deadlines. That represents a massive change that is more than a little unpleasant to contemplate."

"But, a change that reflects how adult life is for most men in this day and age. Without experiencing that – understanding the option – how can you make a studied decision about how you want to spend the rest of your life? And, you really haven't had sufficient opportunities to become acquainted with and accustomed to the fairer gender."

"I must admit I think about that – them – girls – a lot, recently."

He had addressed the comment more to the fire than to his Grampa. Lucas felt some embarrassment with the topic. It wasn't that Grampa had neglected the growing up talks. He wasn't sure why the feeling.

"I am going to turn in," Grampa said. "We need to get started at day break if we're sure to make Cob Corner by sunset."

Lucas nodded and began spreading his own bedroll.

As was his habit, he removed his boots, his thick, leather belt with the large brass buckle, and unbuttoned the top two buttons of his trousers, enjoying the feeling of freedom more conducive to relaxation and sleep that allowed. He placed his knife – sheath unbuttoned – and his ax close beside him. During their 6 years on the road, he had needed them at night but once – still, once was once and he figured that was enough to continue the practice.

Physically, the boy lived on a practical, common sense, safety first level; his mind, however, soared unfettered by rules or certainties or the supposedly substantiated. Most of his pondering – out loud *and* inside his head – began with, ‘What if . . .?’ or, ‘I was wondering . . .’ or, ‘Do you suppose . . .?’ – even, ‘Why couldn’t. . .?’ None of that was typically conducive to a quick fall asleep.

As usual, the next morning, Grampa was up first. As usual, the teen boy slept in until it became clear Grampa was moving on without him. He wouldn’t have, of course, and Lucas never missed the breakfast his Grampa prepared for him. Just saying, as *unusual* as the boy was in most ways, that did *not* extend to his adolescent sleep habits.

With dawn’s light following them west through the valley, they were on their way. Their routine for the following ten minutes or so was pretty much the same from morning to morning. Grampa took first shift with the travois while Lucas worked on eggs, bacon, and cheese layered between two large slices of toasted sourdough bread. He followed that with an apple or berries – even sweet wild carrots or a parsnip if they had been fortunate enough to have run across a patch. He would then take a long swig from his canteen, fasten his belt buckle and finger comb his hair. The completion of the hair ritual – meticulously time consuming – signaled he was ready for the day and he moved up beside Grampa to take over the load.

“A day’s trek, you say?”

“About that. Been some time since I studied the map. It will probably be best if we stay the night outside of town. It will give us time to look things over early, before the town is fully awake.”

“Where did you find a map?”

“That itinerant preacher we ran into just as we crossed into Kansas a week back. He’s the one that gave me the update on the town – size, nature of the place, school, things like that. He gave quite a sales pitch. We had a long chat while you were swimming and fishing. Like most men of the cloth I have experienced, he was inquisitive to the point of irritation. Perhaps that was the price for the fine map of Kansas.”

“He sure talked about God a lot.”

“He was a *preacher*, son. *That’s* what preachers do!”

Lucas shrugged and smiled, sheepishly.

“He made it sound like Kansas is a very religious place. Did you get that impression, Grampa?”

“Indeed – almost scary in some ways.”

“That’s what I thought, also. I suppose it will be informative to have a chance to experience that phenomenon first hand.”

Grampa nodded and offered an uncharacteristic word of caution.

“It will probably be best if we – meaning *you*, Lucas – don’t press them on their beliefs. They will probably be touchy and become defensive if they feel they are under interrogation or attack. They likely hold to a, ‘never question what you are told to believe’, sort of religious system. Therefore, they really don’t understand it so can’t defend it. Best not to work them into a corner over it. Do you understand how serious I am?”

“With the addition of that final question, yes, Sir. I understand the seriousness. It won’t be easy since that’s contrary to every impulse in my being.”

“Just the same . . .”

“Yes. Just the same. I understand. Not sure I can do it over the long run if we decide for me to stay there and go to school.”

“We’ll work on that if things develop in that direction, okay?”

“Sure. If it develops – such a thing – we’ll work on it.”

He snickered at the little joke only he and Grampa would understand. His grandfather smiled in return. Lucas

contended that he grasped ideas the first time they were offered, and he humorously pointed it out to his Grampa every time the old gentleman went on and on and on about something – even, in fact, when he merely went *on and on* about something.

As the sun paused directly above them and their shadows disappeared, they came upon a stream that wandered westerly, just as the preacher had indicated.

“That should be *Pleasant Creek*,” Grampa said. “If it is, we can follow it all the way to Cob Corner. It might mean we are much closer than I calculated.”

“Maybe time for a swim after we eat, then.”

It had been a question.

“I’m sure there will be. We’re both caked in Kansas dust. That’s a good idea, actually. We can present a clean mien as we encounter the new community.”

They ate. They talked (they *always* talked!). They worked away the grime while in the water. They were on their way again in fresh clothes by one o’clock.

Well before Malcolm had expected, the town rose in front of them. It was, indeed, much larger than most of the towns they had come across in the western states and territories, stretching in, around, and over, something close to 30 or 40 acres, they estimated. The streets were wide. The lawns were green. The houses were painted – mostly white, a few pale yellow. The porches all had sky blue ceilings as was the practice at the time – a sky thing. The buildings were mostly wood frame – several on Main Street were faced in brick. With the stately, quarried gray-stone, county court house at one end of Main and a large, white church, presenting a perilously tall, cross-capped spire, at the other, they became the bookends that marked the east/west dimension of the settlement – perhaps six, long, blocks apart. Main, and two equally wide north/south streets were graveled and free from ruts and holes. Most things they saw appeared to reflect civic and personal pride.

Having arrived before four o’clock that afternoon, they proceeded into town. Grampa liked to know where the sheriff’s office and the bank were right up front. The bank

stood like a monument – oversized, brown brick with pillars out front and six cement steps up to the massive, carved, double, front door. The Sheriff’s office was nowhere to be seen.

Grampa asked for directions from a man who was tethering his horse at the hitching rail in front of the general store.

“Looking for the Sheriff’s office. Can you direct us, please?”

“No sheriff here. Laws are enforced by the Christian Peace Force – Reverend Redding is in charge. That’s his church, down there – the only church in Cob Corner.”

“Thank you. Not the arrangement we are used to. Thanks, again.”

“A restaurant over there, Grampa.”

“You hinting?”

“No, suggesting.”

“Why not. It’s been weeks since we have had a meal prepared for us. We can stow the travois on the walk, against the wall, beside the door.”

They entered and surveyed the large room.

“A nice place,” Lucas said looking around. “It reflects the rest of what we’ve seen here in Cob Corner, I guess – modern, clean. Probably suggests a generally affluent community.”

The ten-foot-high walls were paneled – perhaps in pecan. The tall, wide windows were flanked by long, heavy red drapes. The tables were ample and sturdy, each one home to four equally substantial chairs and covered in a red tablecloth draped on the diagonal. The ceilings were 2 X 2 foot, squares of embossed metal, painted black. A lamp hung above each table, which must have cast a friendly, warm glow across the room during the supper hour.

They took directions from the sign just inside the door and seated themselves. A friendly, middle aged woman set their table with napkins, utensils and glasses of water. They ordered steaks – thick and medium-well done – with baked potatoes and the vegetable of the day. Malcolm had coffee; Lucas, milk. There would probably be cobbler or pie later.

They passed most of an hour while they ate and talked. It had been a good retreat from the far more rugged world they had been experiencing just outside. They were ready to leave. As they stood, three men entered and approached them. They were all wearing side arms and stars embossed with crosses. One of them spoke.

“You Malcomb McCabe?”

“Yes, Sir, and my grandson Lucas. I am surprised you have my name.”

“You are under arrest. Come with us.”

“Arrest? On what charge?”

“Violating the mandatory education attendance laws of the state of Kansas and the city of Cob Corner.”

“We just arrived. We haven’t yet been in town an hour.”

“We have our orders. You will come with us.”

/

CHAPTER TWO

There Must Be Some Mistake (There was no mistake!)

Malcolm was taken into custody – civilly, no handcuffs – and walked down Main Street to the courthouse where he was booked and placed in a relatively comfortable, if small, basement room. A hearing/trial was set for the following morning.

“Will legal counsel be provided for me?”

“You will be on your own.”

“I believe federal law requires you to provide competent counsel for me.”

“Federal anything is often not considered applicable here in Cob Corner – we are a theocratically based community. Only one higher authority.”

The conversation had been with a man in clerical garb – all black, long coat, vest, shin-length trousers tucked into long black stockings and shoes. He had ushered Malcolm from place to place, person to person during the preliminary activities. He had not introduced himself. There had been no unkindness or impatience involved in the doings.

“Will you at least repeat the specific charges against me?”

“Violating the mandatory education attendance laws of the state of Kansas and the city of Cob Corner – they apply to all minors under the age of 16.”

“As I said earlier, we have just arrived in Cob Corner. Our purpose for coming here was to investigate the possibility

of enrolling Lucas in the new high school about which I only recently learned.”

“The charges go back many years.”

“How can you possibly claim jurisdiction for all the years Lucas and I have been out of state?”

“If Reverend Redding says it is so, believe me, it is so.”

“What about Lucas?”

“We have been told he is a resourceful boy.”

‘Told by whom?’ Malcolm wondered.

“Can he come and visit me?”

“No.”

“Will he be allowed to be in court with me?”

“He will be allowed to be in court but not with you.”

The man left. Malcolm heard the lock in the door click secure.

The old man turned, hands on hips, and, muttering under his breath as he faced his new 10-foot by 10-foot home.

“First, you people have no idea how resourceful my grandson can be. Second, don’t bet that he won’t visit me here.”

The room had one window – 24 inches wide, 12, top to bottom – high in the east wall. It was barred from the outside. Malcolm observed that it could be swung up and open from inside. At that hour, it lit the room but dimly. There was a coal oil lamp with glass chimney on a table set against the north wall. There were two wooden chairs in place beneath it, a tin plate, cup, and spoon – also sheets of writing paper in a neat stack and three pencils laid precisely side by side.

‘It would seem their theocratically based community was also compulsively neat,’ he thought.

He changed the position of one of the pencils – his initial, clearly devastating, act of rebellion. He smiled, lifting the spoon and gently tapped it against the plate.

“Apparently, I can expect to be fed,” he continued under his breath.

He set them down.

Also, on the table was a pitcher of water – full, if not cool. He was not thirsty. There were a Bible and several other religious books on the table. The bed was double, not

uncomfortable, and was appointed with two pillows and two wool blankets. Perhaps he should be prepared for a roommate. Malcolm fluffed up the pillows and lay back, recalling his grandson's negative reaction to having to sleep inside on a bed. At that moment, it didn't seem so bad. He smiled and napped.

At six o'clock, supper arrived – stew, bread, juice and an apple – ample proportions, quite good, like everything else concerning his incarceration. The same, black-clad man had brought the food and he stayed in the room, waiting patiently for the old man to finish. Malcolm delighted in taking his time. The man stood by the door and was not inclined to engage in conversation even though Malcolm laid a barrage of comments and questions in his direction. The reason for the man's continued presence was not immediately clear. It wasn't as if Malcolm were going to steal the furniture.

When Malcolm announced he was finished, the man lit the lamp on the table – leaving matches – stacked the dishes on a tray and left with them. The lamp provided ample light in the small room – brighter than before. It was heightened by the whitewashed ceiling and stone walls.

The reading material was not of interest to him, so he began pacing – that was more a Lucas activity. Malcolm was more of a sitter, smoker, and thinker. He felt his shirt pocket. He still had his pipe – and matches. What sort of a jail was it? He walked to a spot under the window, which was nearly six feet above the floor. He could see out, if only a few blades of grass up close and the dusky sky in the background. He turned back into the room and lit his pipe, preparing to settle in for whatever the duration might become.

“Psssst!”

Malcolm looked around with a start.

‘Rap, rap, rap.’

That he located immediately – the glass in the window. There would be not so much as a moment's wonder about how those things had come about. He reached up and opened the window into the room. Lucas was bellied down on the ground outside, eye level with the window. He began speaking.

“The trial will begin at nine in the morning, just upstairs from where you are. The court room is huge. The good news is, they have not yet begun construction of a gallows.”

He offered a quiet chuckle and big smile. Malcolm returned both – unsure how the boy could still catch him off guard with such comments.

“They got you a lawyer?”

“No. Furthermore, Cob Corner apparently sets itself above federal law, so we are really on our own here. Have you heard anything else?”

“Bunches. The postmaster has a daughter about my age. She’s a girl, so she talks – a lot. Here’s what I’ve learned. It all apparently stems from that preacher we talked with up at the Kansas/Nebraska border. He has some sort of connections in Cob Corner and hightailed it here after our encounter and told the head religious guy the story we had told him – about our lives. I thought he was way too interested in us. Apparently, unlike many religious groups we’ve come across, the people here in The Corners – that’s how the locals refer to it – revere education. However, God’s Law, as she referred to it, is absolute in resolving conflicts with facts, but they do seem to give facts a pretty fair shake and are willing to take reasonable liberties with the scriptures when it makes sense. You being treated well?”

“Very well, actually. You must come join me to sleep on the bed tonight.”

“You are jesting, of course. You have a plan?”

“Let it play out, I guess. Did you get any idea about the penalty if convicted of this?”

“Not really, but I get the idea humane treatment is not granted to those convicted of breaking the law. It’s worse for breaking religious laws. The girl said not long ago a man just passing through town who swore in public was strung up by his feet, stripped of his clothing, and forced to endure two days of sun and heat and thirst. She thinks he may have died because one morning he just wasn’t there anymore. She’s a girl, so she was probably being overly dramatic. I am learning that seems to be a female thing. On the positive side, I found out that tomorrow will just be preliminaries – it’s not like trial

and decision day all rolled into one.”

“That is good news – if time will really help. Are you alright – of course you are alright. Let me start again. Where are you staying?”

“I figure to stay hidden nights, just outside of town. There’s a woods south of here. You saw it earlier. I’ll be fine.”

“I’m sure you will. I think the concept of staying hidden is a good one. You can come to the trial, I’ve learned.”

“Well, I hope so. It’ll be difficult defending you from out in the woods.”

Malcolm did not follow up. Lucas would do what Lucas would do.

“Does that Post Master’s daughter have a name?”

“Yes she does. She has blond hair almost the same color as mine. And she had a green ribbon woven in and out of it today – it almost matched the color of her eyes. They were green. You’ll love her smile when you get to meet her. She smells good. I’m not sure how girls and women do that. I assume it’s not a natural scent.”

“And, does she have a name?”

“Oh, yes. Sorry. She does. Mary Lou Miller. Mr. Miller is her father.”

“And let me guess – go way out on a limb here – Mrs. Miller is her mother.”

“You’re pulling my leg.”

“I am.”

“Shhh! Somebody coming. I must leave now. See you in court.”

He disappeared into the rapidly darkening world. Malcolm began singing quietly, a song from his youth *Cdul gu lo* (Sleep on till dawn), just in case the somebody might be wondering about the sounds from the conversation. He saw legs walk by – high black stockings rising out of black shoes with thick heels. They did not stop as if suspicion accompanied them.

Malcolm closed the window against the cooling of the evening air and prepared to sleep. He only ever worried about Lucas – never about things he had no control over. More and more, however, his grandson was becoming one of *those*

things. That was as it should be, he told himself.

* * *

Breakfast arrived in his little room at seven – eggs, toast, bacon, grits. The table lamp was still needed. A few minutes after the dishes had been removed, his ‘keeper’ returned with warm water in a bowl, soap and a towel. Malcolm refreshed himself. The addition of perfumed soap was a nice touch. He hoped Lucas didn’t mistake him for Mary Lou. It was worth a private chuckle.

At eight thirty, the man returned accompanied by a second man – both apparently wearing the uniform of the decade – black from head to foot. The new man offered several things about what to expect upstairs and Malcolm’s expected decorum during the trial. An interesting twist was that he – Malcolm – was not to speak unless spoken to. More and more it seemed the trial was a mere formality to substantiate Reverend Redding’s conclusion that Malcolm was guilty. Reverend Redding, he was told, would be acting as the judge, prosecutor and sole juror. The man turned toward the door and offered a parting shot.

“Your grandson has attracted quite a following among the adolescent girls here in the Corners. I trust we may expect him to deport himself as a gentleman where they are concerned.”

“I trust you may – *can* even.”

The man offered a quick, weak, smile.

“Do you expect many onlookers at the trial?” Malcolm asked.

“Very few, actually. A reporter from the paper, perhaps. Cut and dried cases never draw a crowd.”

“Can you explain, ‘cut and dried’?”

The man offered a condescending smile and the two of them left, the first man saying: “I will return for you in fifteen minutes. I trust you will be ready.”

He pointed to Malcolm’s stocking feet and open shirt.

With them gone, there was again rapping on the window. Malcolm raised it. He buttoned while Lucas spoke.

“Not going to wish you good luck,” Lucas said. “I’m pretty sure we got this one all sewn up, as the tailor said.”

Don't be surprised to see a huge turnout upstairs."

He disappeared before Malcolm could respond. The boy was in exceedingly high spirits. What did he have up his sleeve – a large turn out? That was clearly contrary to what had just been indicated to him.

His 'attendant' returned and looked the old man over – brown boots to gray hair, belt buckle to rear pockets and back again. He seemed to pass and was escorted out of the room, along a narrow hall, and up a flight of circular stairs. They emerged into a small room – a holding room he assumed. Presently they exited through a far door into the court room – stark, and large. A slightly raised judge's bench was in place at the front with room for several others to sit on each side – panels or jurors, Malcolm assumed. There were pews like in a church – three wide across the large room and twelve deep, front to rear. That made room for 300 or so – an exceedingly large number for a town that size, Malcolm thought.

Clearly, to the attending man's astonishment, every seat was filled – most by teens – where Mary Lou and the other girls went, the boys seemed to follow. Imagine that! There were also several dozen adults.

Malcolm was escorted to a chair in front of, and well to the left of, the bench as he sat facing a small open window on the far side of the room – perhaps no more than ten feet above the one in his room. Lucas was seated on the front row – left end of the center pew. A young lady matching Mary Lou's description was sitting beside him – too far away for Malcolm to manage a sniff. She seemed prepared to take notes – as did most of the other girls. Apparently, a record of the proceedings would be kept.

The judge – Reverend Redding – entered from a door on the right side of the room and walked directly to his seat at the center of and behind the bench. He was an imposing figure dressed all in black – tall, with long, wavy, white hair, he carried a black walking stick and wore a black ascot and a small round black hat – hand him a thunder bolt and you had the image of God himself. Those in the gathering rose in uncertainty, as if surging crests in a wave, then settled again when the Reverend sat.

The attendant urged Malcolm to stand and face the bench.

After a moment of surveying the unexpected and unexplainable crowd, the Reverend's furrowed brow cleared, and he began.

"We are here for the preliminary hearing of Malcolm McCabe on the matter of his negligence in the education of his grandson, Lucas McCabe. Mr. McCabe, we have it on the respected authority of the Reverend Justice Abernathy that you confided to him on the second day of this month that the minor boy has had no formal education since second grade and that instead of being enrolled in an approved institution of learning, you have been dragging him from place to place around the United States. Do you deny the charge?"

"I disagree with your characterization, 'dragging', but the essence of your claim is correct."

"And your characterization would be . . .?"

"Providing the young man with vast more opportunities than he could ever receive cooped up inside a classroom with a teacher who, himself, had likely spent most of his years cloistered within those same sorts of unexciting, musty walls, thereby denied truly meaningful experiences in the arms of Mother Nature's stimulating and rewarding world."

"I see. There is *clear* disagreement between you and the court on that matter. Do you have an opening statement?"

"Although I was not informed such a thing would be expected – permitted, even – I suppose I just delivered it, didn't I?"

Before the Reverend could respond, Lucas stood and took two steps forward toward the bench. He was dressed in clean long brown trousers, a rust colored shirt, and boots that had clearly been scrubbed and waxed.

"I am the minor in question, Sir, Lucas McCabe. Since I am central to these proceedings I wanted to introduce myself. Also, may I ask your Eminence what, I assume, will seem like several simple-minded questions coming from a kid, so I may understand the purpose of this trial? I'm sure you would not want the child in question left in the dark right from the beginning. That could cause unnecessary discomfort if not

out and out fright and despair.”

Reverend Redding seemed momentarily amused – the possibility of such a reaction neither Malcolm or Lucas would have attributed to the gruff, straight-laced, poker-faced countenance they had witnessed up to then.

“If they are to the point and reasonable, you may take a minute or so to state what is on your mind. Just keep on point.”

“Thank you. I can see you intend justice to be served in your court. My first question is to clarify the basic underlying purpose of the trial. Is it merely to prosecute my guardian for having broken the law – period – or is the true purpose to make sure the child – me, in this case – is receiving an adequate education?”

The Reverend moved somewhat uneasily.

“Of course, the child’s welfare is the basis for the law.”

“Thank you for that clarification. So, before my guardian can be found guilty of depriving me of my education, which you just stated was the sole, crucial basis of all this, I believe – Lucas looked to the crowd to receive their nods of support – I’m sure you will agree that the adequacy of my education under his tutelage must first be found to be deficient. I am pleased that we agree on that, your Eminence, unless, of course you hold that the mere activity of sitting in classrooms is deemed more important than what I have learned through the years?”

“Well . . .”

The Reverend cleared his throat, hand covering his mouth. Lucas offered him a way out.

“Pardon me for my youthful impatience, Sir, but may I propose that I take a test of your choosing before the trial proceeds – that, I assume you agree, would be the necessary and only logical place to begin – gaining an actual measure of the adequacy of my education to date – as you said.”

“How old are you, young man? You speak like you’re thirty.”

“Thank you for noticing. My vocabulary is the result of my guardian’s constant efforts to help me improve myself. I am fourteen and will be fifteen in two months. If I may return

to the just previous point – I assume you have an examination 12th year students – you may call them seniors – must pass in order to qualify for graduation from high school. May I propose that you have me take that exam and see how well I do? Once those results are in, *then* it seems to me, the court will have the only possible, realistic basis upon which to proceed, a basis you certainly do not have at this point – how well does my education stack up against what you expect from your Cob Corner graduates. You agree, of course.”

Reverend Redding motioned for several of his colleagues to approach him for a conference. They had been sitting together on the far-right side of the most forward pew. That discussion went on for some time. It was liberally laden with glances at the young man. Malcolm winked at Lucas suddenly realizing it had not been fair to the court for him to unleash his grandson on such mere mortals as an educated pastor, a degreed schoolmaster, a lawyer sitting as the chief law enforcement agent, and the doctor. He was content to sit back and take it all in.

He hoped the boy was not overconfident in his abilities – never having taken an exam in his life. If a part of the test entailed field dressing squirrels or determining in a split-second whether a snake was poisonous and deserved to have its head pinned to the ground with a quick flick of his hunting knife, Lucas would pass with flying colors. He would have terrible difficulties with True/False questions because he had never settled for merely examining just two sides of any question in his life. And, without a doubt, the space provided for written answers would fall far short of what he would require. There *would* be a trail of well-chosen footnotes.

The consultants returned to the pew and the Reverend spoke, as if presenting his own conclusion, fully aside from anything that had been said or proposed up to that point.

“It is the belief of this court that until we are able to determine the adequacy of education the minor has achieved, it would be impossible to continue the proceedings with a course of justice in mind. The Schoolmaster shall prepare a copy of the high school graduation examination. Lucas McCabe, you will present yourself back here at noon today to

begin that examination. I am informed it is presented in four sections and four hours are allowed for the completion of each section. Therefore, you will take one section today, two tomorrow and one on Wednesday morning. At that time, your responses will be checked, and a summary of the results will be provided to me for my evaluation.

Lucas frowned, sighed, feigned teary eyes, looked into his lap, and mounted a worried expression – all for show. The pitiful little urchin’s grand defense of his Grampa was already well into stage three.

“Court will reconvene at a time to be determined on Thursday morning. Do you have an adequate place to stay, son?”

“Yes, Sir. I am fine. Mostly safe, I think. Very hungry, but otherwise fine.”

The Reverend summoned the doctor to the bench for a quiet exchange before he spoke again.

“Consider Doctor Swenson, here, your contact person during the remainder of this trial. You may obtain food at the restaurant. The Doctor will furnish you with any other reasonable needs.”

“Thank you, your Eminence. Once again, you have demonstrated your wisdom and compassion.”

(Hip boot time, yet?)

Malcolm hoped the boy wasn’t laying it on too thick, but, as has been said, Lucas would do what Lucas would do.

The Reverend caught Malcolm’s gaze and held it for some time, before gaveling the session to a close. The gaze suggested Redding’s initial assessment of the case – strictly in Biblical language – “What in the *Hell* have I gotten myself into?” Again, the members of the gathering rose, awkwardly, as the judge exited the room. The youngsters surrounded Lucas while he was trying to make his way to his grandfather. That would not be. Malcolm was swiftly removed from the room.

* * *

At 11:45 Lucas was back in the courtroom – his belly filled with a dinner that had featured the largest pork chop the boy had ever seen – that time, free, courtesy of the court. He

was prepared to do battle with the first of the four sections of the examination. He learned they were according to subject: Math, English, History/geography, and Science/philosophy. He figured if philosophy really meant the ins and outs of the Religion as construed in Cob Corner, he was probably a goner. Still, he was determined to do his best.

A small library table, chair, and lamp had been set in place in the area between the bench and the front pew. The lamp reeked of coal oil – not on Lucas’s list of top 3,000 favorite aromas. His overall assessment, however, was that the setting should be conducive to the task at hand – cool enough to keep him alert and, otherwise, large and semi-dark, totally free from distractions. As the afternoon sun turned the building into a furnace, he would modify an important aspect of that assessment. Four pencils were provided. One eraser. The Headmaster arrived and explained the design of the exam.

“Questions fall into five forms: True or False, Multiple Choice each with five foils, problems to solve, short answer or fill in the blank, and short essay. You will be expected to understand the questions as they are written so do not make inquiries pertaining to them or to the vocabulary used. Skip any questions you cannot answer placing an X in front of the question number. Do you understand?”

“I believe I do. Oh, do you provide a urination break or perhaps at least supply a quart jug?”

“I will allow five minutes at two o’clock.”

That really hadn’t answered the implied question as to break vs jug, but Lucas had mostly just asked it to annoy the Headmaster, so a more detailed response was unnecessary.

The Headmaster lay the twelve-page exam on the table.

“You will have until four o’clock when you will stop.”

“Could we make that five after four to allow for the bladder break?”

“Very well. Five after four. Begin.”

Lucas first paged through the sheets to get a feel for what lay ahead. That completed, he nodded and smiled over at the Headmaster who had taken a seat one pew to his left.

He was reading. Lucas moved through the sheets with dispatch. At the end of the first half hour the Headmaster rose, approached him, cleared his throat and spoke.

“If you are finding the exam too difficult, you may decide not to continue at any point.”

“Nothing like that, Sir. Just hurrying on, trying to find the difficult questions.”

The Headmaster raised his eyebrows and returned to his seat. Lucas smiled to himself and worked on through the next two hours, at which time the man approached him a second time.

“Time for your evacuation break, Lucas.”

“That worked out just fine, Sir. I have finished this section of the exam. I will be happy to begin the second section after the break if you wish. This was math, which I assume will be the most time consuming since I double checked all my work.”

Clearly puzzled, the Headmaster picked up the papers and shuffled through them slowly, spot checking the answers to random questions.

“You are turning this in as complete, then?”

“Yes, Sir. If I may say so, it was a well composed exam – although never having taken one before I guess, in reality, I have nothing with which to compare it. So, more test today or not?”

“You will return here at eight in the morning according to Reverend Redding’s previous instructions.”

“May I see my Grampa – since it appears we are going to have lots of extra time?”

“That is not within my bailiwick.”

“And within whose bailiwick would that be?”

“Reverend Redding.”

“May I see Reverend Redding?”

“No. You should report to the Doctor to make arrangements for having your time supervised and your needs met between now and in the morning.”

The man walked him up the aisle, into the foyer – it had not been an option – and out the front door onto the cement landing at the top of the steps. Several dozen young people

were there – sitting on the grass, steps, in trees, and on the low, wide stone wall out near the street. Amazed to see him that soon, they stood and moved toward him. A few clapped – for what purpose was not clear.

CHAPTER THREE

A Nation of Law *for* Order

Mary Lou joined Lucas on the steps and became the spokesperson, voicing the question they were all wondering.

“Are you on a break?”

Lucas looked up at the Headmaster and phrased his response carefully.

“No. I guess they gave me a shortened version of the test, so I am done for the day.”

He looked deliberately into the tall man’s face. The man nodded, his expression suggesting it was not the sarcastic response he had expected, but a considerate one that he appreciated.

“Will somebody be kind enough to walk me to the doctor’s office, Dr. Swenson, I believe? I am to receive instructions from him.”

A number of the girls stepped forward, but Mary Lou had clearly, staked her claim on the boy with the long blond hair, blue eyes and endearing smile.

She crooked his inexperienced arm, slipped hers through it, and gently urged him to move. Lucas did not understand one thing about what was going on but, chin up, maintained his composure and descended the steps in dignity. The girls were certain they might swoon. (That was what girls were certain they might do in 1890 Kansas.)

“He pronounces his last name, ‘Svenson’,” she said, clearly reveling in her role as on-the-arm-guide-and-confidant.

“Thanks. I guess I misheard it. Tell me about him.”

“Of all the people in this town he’s the one who really doesn’t fit.”

“In what way?”

“He is not into the theocracy and makes no bones about it. The Reverend Redding needs him here, so it is overlooked, I suppose. Best doc in 100 miles any direction. Everybody says so. He’s been to medical school and everything. You can count on him to be here for you – like all us kids – you’ve seen.”

“That is reassuring – doc, kids, all of you, like that.”

‘How in tarnation are guys supposed to talk to girls?’

According to his earlier observation, Mary Lou was happy to do the talking and the talking and the talking. Lucas was a quick study, immediately catching on to the smile and nod thing all males seemed required to master.

They arrived at the doctor’s, small, double-duty house – full width porch, office in front, home in back, a fireplace on each side. She opened the door and they entered. It was a small, stark, waiting area with a half dozen, straight-backed, wooden chairs spread left and right and an unlit, oil lamp hanging from a metal arm extending just above head height on the back wall. Ample light streamed in through the large window beside the door. There was a green and brown braided rug that covered most of the floor in front of the chairs and thick green drapes beside the window. Everything in Kansas that had to do with winter was thick.

“Doc? You here?” she called. “It’s Mary Lou – with Lucas.”

She indicated the door to their right. It stood slightly ajar.

Presently, it opened, and he stepped into the room. He had dispensed with the jacket, and the sleeves of his blousy, white shirt were rolled up to his elbows. He wore a smile and offered a hand as he removed his wire-rimmed glasses and slipped them into his shirt pocket. Lucas and Doc shook. Lucas noted that he was not at all the man of gruff countenance he had seen on display in the court room – a required or necessary, pious act, there, perhaps.

“I’ll leave you men to your business,” Mary Lou said,

and she left – swishing a bit more than swishing seemed necessary, Lucas noted.

Doc put a hand on the boy's shoulder and Lucas explained his presence.

"As you will recall, I was told to come to you for instructions, Doctor."

"Well, let's see. You are 14, that means the most continually relevant aspect of your being is your hunger. As you have been told, a running tab has been set up in your name at the restaurant – as much as you want whenever you want. I assume you prefer to be left alone – if that's wrong just let me know what you need. There is space for you to sleep in my loft if you want."

"I have a place to stay, thank you. In general, you have me sized up well, though, Doctor Swenson whose 'W' is pronounced 'V'."

The man smiled and responded.

"I guess I've learned a lot about teenage boys down through the years – having been one, having had one and having treated hundreds. And, please make it *Doc*. You say Doctor Swenson in these parts and people won't know who you're speaking of."

"Okay, then, *Doc*. You can just call me Lucas, I guess. I was Lukey as a little boy, but I discovered there was no general consensus as to how to spell it, so I've stuck with Lucas."

"What do you hope to become when you get older, Lucas?"

"A really fine human being. Grampa says there is no greater goal in life and I believe him. From what I have heard, that will be a lot like you, Sir, *Doc*."

"Not only can he wrest the proceedings of a courtroom from a master of congregation control, he also knights people. Thank you, I suppose – your majesty, is it?"

"I once had a first-grade teacher refer to me as the Prince of Pests, if that counts."

They exchanged chuckles.

"So, the 'courtroom *Doc*' is not the real *Doc*."

"You've picked up on that, have you?"

“Mary Lou indicated it first, actually.”

“She appears to really like you, Lucas.”

“I have to admit I have no ideas about that *or* what to do about it – with it –to it. I hope it doesn’t show up on the second part of the examination. My life has provided very limited exposure to the fairer gender, as Grampa refers to girls. It is in part why we came here – to see about enrolling me in the high school so I could learn about mingling with my peers. Clearly, after seeing their test, the education it provides will not be meaningful for me. I guess that decision will necessarily await the outcome of this trial – if that’s what it is.”

“Reverend Redding is not a bad man – quite the contrary – but, as years have passed, he finds himself and his religion maintaining less and less power in this community. He senses that – of course – as his personal failing. I think he believes – hopes – this trial may reestablish his control – his stature. With education and child welfare as the focus, rather than religion – which is the waning side of his hold on the town – he hopes to regain the respect he enjoyed in past decades. So far, it doesn’t seem to be going in his favor. Where on earth did you learn to turn and control a conversation like you can? Stephen Douglas could take lessons from you.”

“Nothing formal, I assure you. Grampa and I continually banter back and forth. Neither of us gives quarter. It is the best thing ever – going at it tooth and nail and never for a second doubting how much the other one loves you. It’s not really about winning – just enjoying the interchange. That experience is the only possible source. It has often been said I’m smarter than the average kid my age. That might contribute. I guess the next few days may put that to the *test* – so to speak.”

Doc caught and acknowledged the humor.

* * *

Lucas finished each of the following three sections of the examination in about two hours, also – history, two and a half, due to the detail he wanted to include in the two essays: 1) Trace the evolution of political parties and allegiances since the earliest days of our Republic, 2) Discuss how the political

landscape would be different today had John Breckenridge been the party's candidate instead of Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860. That had brought a chuckle to Lucas because at one point in their travels, two dogs had adopted them, and he had dubbed one Abe and one Johnny in honor of those two historical figures.

It was Thursday morning at eight, inside the courtroom – again filled with a mix of adults and young people as well as a dozen or so new reporters from papers as far away as Topeka, the Kansas City Area, and Waco Texas. Word had spread. The test was over. The expectation was that this was it; the boy's scores would be revealed or at least the pass/fail decision rendered, and the trial would be over. The Reverend Redding gaveled the session to order. His opening statement raised a question that had not been part of the original arrangement as Malcolm and Lucas had understood it.

"Today I will announce the outcome of the first phase of the academic examination of Lucas McCabe."

The first?

Lucas and his grandfather exchanged puzzled glances. Humorously, Malcolm recalled his earlier thought – perhaps field dressing an animal *will* be included on the second phase. Neither had any idea what was to transpire. They sat forward in their seats and listened. Redding continued.

"Lucas has achieved a rather remarkable feat in obtaining a nearly perfect score on the written examination."

Lucas stood and stepped forward.

"Pardon me, Sir. But, *nearly*? I believe you are mistaken. I answered *every* question correctly."

Reverend Redding motioned to the Headmaster who stepped forward with his explanation.

"The boy missed one question in the Science Section, True or False question number 27: The sky is blue because of the reflection of the oceans onto the moisture contained in the atmosphere above: a ninth-year question. Lucas answered False. The correct answer is True."

With that, he had taken obvious pleasure in deriding the boy – it would be his only opportunity and he would come to have serious second thoughts about it.

Lucas wrested the conversation.

“I beg your pardon, Sirs, but the answer is most definitely false. In the late 1600s, Sir Isaac Newton proved light is made up of seven distinct wave lengths which appear to humans as colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet – in order of their wave lengths from longest to shortest. In the middle of *this* century – 1859 I believe – John Tyndall, showed that blue, having a shorter wave length as it travels through our atmosphere from the sun, therefore scatters more easily and frequently than red, orange, yellow and green when confronted by and reflected by the miniscule particles in the air above the earth’s surface, thereby giving the sky a blue appearance. Bodies of water, in fact, reflect the blue of the sky. My goodness, gentlemen, have any of you ever seen a glass of blue water? I can give you the references when I get access to my backpack. Also, John William Strutt is currently updating that research. By the way, Dr. Strutt is also known as Lord Rayleigh in case your search of the literature seems confusing.”

The Reverend summoned his colleagues for a quick conference at the bench. Since Lucas had received the highest ever grade on the exam, the outcome of the trial certainly did not hinge on that one question. From the finger wagging in the Headmaster’s direction, Redding’s outrage was clear. The doctor nodded at several points appearing to support Lucas’s statement. The Reverend turned back to the front as the others returned to their seats.

“It appears you are correct in your contention on question 27. The result will be adjusted accordingly. You have most certainly shown that your grandfather has not neglected *that* part of your education.”

“Excuse me, Sir. *That part? That was the only* part put in contention when the case against my Grampa was called to order.”

“Yes, well, that has changed – been extended you might say.”

“And how, if I may inquire?”

“We will call that exam the formal academic aspect of your education. There is another equally important part. I will

call it . . . the *cultural* aspect of your education – things like the legal system, the foundations of society, government and the economy, morality and ethics, the role of education in society . . .”

“Do I understand that the adequacy of *my* education will be judged on things none of your own students are required to know squat about – sorry for the slang, Sir – make that ‘anything whatsoever’ about?”

Reverend Redding moved uncomfortably.

“Leave it at the fact these will be among your requirements.”

“I protest on two grounds: One – A change in the stated investigation of this trial since it was plainly offered at the outset. Two – The fact that according to this recent revelation, your community is clearly satisfied to graduate sub-par students, well below the standard you have conceded you truly believe is best – the one over which I am about to be examined. I protest for the welfare of your educationally neglected children.”

He turned to where the reporters were gathered, and he continued speaking.

“The man there at the table is setting down a word for word transcript of the proceedings, as are many of the young people in the room, so, under law, you will be able to obtain the exact wording of the original charges. My name is Lucas McCabe – two ‘C’s’ – my grandfather is Malcolm – with two ‘L’s’. Malcolm carries a personal letter of reference from Ulysses S. Grant, who was our next-door neighbor back in Galena, Illinois, and perhaps my God Father – I’m a little fuzzy about the details of that.”

He offered an exaggerated wink, secreted from the bench.

“That will be enough, Lucas. Another disrespectful outburst and you will be confined, also. You will apologize to the court.”

“But, Sir, I believe I have nothing for which to apologize. That being so, just let me understand this; you, a minister, are requiring me to lie to this court by saying, in effect, ‘I’m sorry’ when I’m not.”

“Young man, you are simply exasperating.”

A buzz murmured across the smiling gathering. Malcolm tried – unsuccessfully – to swallow *his* smile.

“I guess I am what I am, Sir. My grampa always encourages me to find myself and live accordingly – to be true to myself you could say. Give me a few moments and a Bible and I believe I can find you references that indicate that same suggestion – necessity, in fact.”

The reporters moved in closer to Lucas, some knelt on the floor as they took notes. Redding ignored the commotion and spoke.

“You will return here at one o’clock p.m. this afternoon for the proceedings to continue.”

Lucas wanted to ask how *proceedings* could do anything *but* continue, but he thought better of it. Instead:

“One question, then, please, Sir. Does Cob Corner have more than one telegraph line, because I’m thinking these reporters will be tying one up for the next several days and that will certainly interfere with the normal traffic flow in and out. I am concerned about emergencies – safety issues for your citizens. It appears that you and the Corner will soon be national news, but, then, I’m sure you understood that from the beginning.”

Redding stood, red faced and puffing, and left, pressing a hurried, wide stride, understanding he had lost rounds one, and one and a half, to an upstart teenager who most likely had dirty fingernails and filthy feet. He would redeem himself in round two. More than ever he believed, the boy *had* to fail.

Lucas did hope he hadn’t pushed too far by indicating the man would soon be disgraced across the entire nation. But, what would be, would be. It wasn’t he, Lucas, who had brought it on. That being the reality, still, Lucas wished he could find some face-saving way out of the mess for the man. It was not his intention to ruin his life the way it seemed it was Redding’s intention to ruin his and his Grampa’s.

‘Just what was my intention?’ he wondered.

He thought about that while he tucked in his napkin and waited for another steak dinner at the restaurant – that time with a baked *sweet* potato and hominy, as well as green

beans, for variety. Returning to rabbit and squirrel and generic stream fish was not going to be easy.

'Hmm! My intention is, first of all, to free Grampa. If the court had followed its own rules, he would already be free. I'm sure that by this evening, the injustice of extending the proceedings will be met with indignation throughout Kansas and elsewhere. That, is *not* here, however. I'm really eager to hear what new kinds of questions there are in store for me this afternoon. My favorite kind of questions are those in which I have to defend a position on some concept or idea. Grampa has a way of throwing simply great ones at me. It sounds like this new phase may be exactly that. I will need to tie my answers to experiences I have had while on this trek with Grampa since that is the basis of the entire bruhaha. I've had such a wide variety, that shouldn't be difficult. I must take time to select them carefully – each one must be perfect – clearly relevant and, without question, to the point. Maybe I can work in some that will extend these men's understanding beyond their apparent present, woefully deficient state of knowledge and social conscious.'

He hoped his Grampa was eating well. The steak came; it left behind but two strands of flame-crisped, blackened fat. The baked sweet potato came and left behind its brown, orange-lined, brittle, layered, jacket. On the trail he would have buttered it or salted it or sugared it and eaten it like bread or dessert, but he didn't know if that would be considered poor manners in the city. The green beans and hominy came and left behind virtually nothing – the slick trace and aroma of melted butter harboring two slender, white strings. The apple pie came. He wanted to lick the plate clean, but he didn't. *It* left behind only one huge smile on the relatively good-looking face of an apparently well educated, recently proclaimed exasperating, soon to be 15-year-old boy – the talk of the town and most likely soon the talk of the state. Being a boy, whose name was essentially never known by anybody other than his grandfather, *that probability* of fame was uncomfortable for Lucas.

As he left the restaurant, several boys his age were waiting on the raised, wide-plank, sidewalk that ran the length

of both sides of the street in front of the buildings.

“You plannin’ on stickin’ around after the trial?” one asked.

It had not necessarily been friendly in tone.

“Don’t know. I had come to enter the high school, but that seems unlikely now. I guess it depends on the outcome of the trial.”

“Our girls seem to like you.”

Ah ha! The true reason for the conclave bared its hormone-driven head.

“You must realize I am just a novelty to them, guys. Your girls are *your* girls. Trust me. They will tire of me once all this becomes a thing of the past. Good girls take *local-stable* over *novel-fly-by-the-night* every time.”

Once again, Lucas had proved his absolute and total lack of knowledge about the fairer gender.

“You think?” another asked.

“Of course. I’ve seen it happen all over the country.”

There were shrugs and with them, the topic shifted.

“You’ve really been all over the US of A?” the youngest of the group asked.

As one, the seven of them settled into seats on the sidewalk, steps, and hitching rail. Lucas held forth for half an hour, relating his experiences, including several close calls with bad guys and the darker sides of Mother Nature. He realized his flair for the dramatic probably stretched the truth a bit. If pressed, he’d own up. Otherwise he would chalk it up to his innate male-teen-boy-ness. The truth was often far too confining for boys that age!

On his way to the courthouse, he stopped and took a long drink from the well in the center of Main Street and made use of the public ‘facilities’ located at the rear of the gap between the General Store and the Post Office. He noted that ‘facilities’ had been a rare luxury in his life. The pack of boys escorted him the rest of the way down the center of the street. A gaggle of girls gradually abandoned the sidewalks and grew that number.

At the base of the courthouse steps, he endured a generous round of well wishes, and more than a little black

slapping. With that over, the group parted ahead of him and allowed Lucas to mount the steps by himself. Visitors, other than the reporters who had demanded admission under the authority and protection of the First Amendment, were not to be privy to the proceedings. Doc was waiting for him at the top.

"It appears you have gained some friends. You are fine, I assume," he offered.

"As fine as I usually am and over the years I've found that to be pretty darn fine. I hope 'darn' isn't considered swearing here in Cob Corner."

"Frowned on but not so considered. Any questions before we enter. In there, I will become one of the inquisitors."

"You make it sound like if I provide an answer somebody doesn't like, the hungry lions will be unleashed in my direction."

"Nothing like that. Let me just say this, though. The good Reverend has given us – the panel of questioners – one directive: 'Grind that cockroach into the sand.' Clearly, I was not authorized to repeat that to you."

"And *what* would that be, Sir, that you were not authorized to repeat to me?"

Doc smiled and nodded.

"I have every reason to expect you are going to do very well."

"How long do you think this will go on?"

"Heaven only knows, and here in Cob Corner, you may take that literally."

An anxious Lucas pressed.

"The rest of the afternoon? Another day? Two days? Best guess?"

"Let me just say, the more you impress us – the harder you hit us – in the beginning, the shorter the whole affair should last."

"So, mow down the enemy's first advance and they may come to the table to talk settlement?"

"And he is also a savvy general. Best of everything in there."

"One more thing, Doc. Will you check on Grampa at

the end of today? I'm sure he's fine, but he needs to hear that I am, also, fine."

"Of course. Didn't I just hear a rumor he might have a heart condition. It is surely my duty to check in and make sure he is surviving this ordeal with no ill effects. Hippocratic oath, you understand. Sacred stuff!"

"You are a sly one, Doc. I knew it. Thanks."

Doc descended the steps, so he could move to the rear of the building and enter with the other panel members. Lucas thoughtfully configured a deep breath, pulled the huge door open and moved inside. To his surprise, his Grampa was there sitting up front again, in the chair originally reserved for him. He had not been present at any of the written exam sessions. Lucas was happy he was there. It always felt better when Grampa was close by – something he was coming to understand he would need to wean himself from in the future. They were not allowed to speak together. He briefly considered having a chat in Indian sign language – they had both become fairly proficient as they crossed the Indian Territory two years before. Amazingly, it was a system that allowed Indians who spoke a wide variety of dissimilar languages and dialects to communicate with speed and accuracy. He decided against it for the moment. It did cross his mind, however, that when his Grampa was found not guilty, a blood curdling version of a Comanche War Cry might be in order.

* * *

The panel assembled, spreading themselves to the right and left of Reverend Redding who explained how things would be. He addressed Lucas who rose from his seat at the table and faced the bench.

"You have before you a panel of distinguished and learned citizens of Cob Corner, Kansas. There is John Brimm, attorney at law and local marshal; B. L. Munson, local banker and City Financial officer; Purvis Rakes, Mayor; Doctor Peter Swensen, local Physician; Abraham Sills, graduate of Buffet College and the Headmaster of our schools. I will participate as I see fit. Each will ask a question in turn. That process will be repeated until we are satisfied as to your

competence or incompetence. Do you understand?"

"In a general way, yes. In terms of the biases and prejudices of each panel member, or any directives you may have given them, certainly *not*, but given it is your playing field and your ground rules, I will do my best under a system clearly, deeply stacked against a 14-year-old child."

Pencils flew across reporter's pads.

Lucas was pleased with how that had come together. Malcolm just shook his head. What had he created? He took solace in the fact that whatever it was, it had mostly created itself.

Redding's forehead turned red, but he maintained his composure, offering a nod and an almost smile. Lucas wondered if foreheads had ever been known to burst. He would keep close watch on that throbbing vein on the man's left temple.

"Mr. Brimm will have the first question."

"If I may before the inquisition gets underway – am I to stand or sit or kneel, your Eminence?"

"Stand. Sit, if you tire."

"Only if I tire? I suppose I need to hear how you will verify *that*, should I choose to sit."

"Stand or sit as you please when you please, where you please!"

It had been the man's least pleasant and most impatient tone to that point. The boy took heart. He momentarily envisioned several interesting places he might choose to stand but dismissed them.

Lucas nodded and pushed the chair back under the table. He faced the bench, spread his legs and crossed his arms – the artist's textbook illustration of, 'defiance'.

"Oh, one more thing. As I am sure you know, it grows quite warm in this room in the afternoon. Since we are all male, here, will I be permitted to remove my shirt and, perhaps my wool trousers should that happen?"

"Absolutely not. You are bating me and that is to cease."

"Sorry, Sir. I didn't realize you had unresolved issues related to male nudity. My Grampa handled my early

problems in that area and I'm sure he will be happy to counsel you once all of whatever this really is comes to an end."

"I have no issues and will not seek counsel from your grandfather. You will confine yourself to the question."

"But it has not been asked."

"You will not stop chattering long enough for it to be asked."

"Very well, Sir. Sorry. I feel the need to make a short opening statement – two minutes tops."

Redding rolled his eyes. The reporters turned their pages.

"Very well. Two minutes."

"Thank you, again. Here it is. If it appears – as you earlier suggested – that I am speaking beyond my years, remember, I will be speaking the things my grandfather has taught me – often, I suspect, in his exact words. I have been told I have an astounding memory for details. Grampa and I have talked together all day, most every day of my life. I just wanted to lay to rest that question about whether or not I am a youthful appearing 30-year-old posing as an adolescent."

The reporters chuckled but kept writing.

"Oh, and one more thing of relevance, I suppose. While Grampa and I talk, we play a game we call – '*Saying things in ways they have never been expressed before*', meaning avoid the trite and common usage phrases. For example, instead of saying, 'The weary old man still had good posture', it might become . . . 'His erect bearing belied the long, hard life the aging gentleman had endured'. By this point in my life, it happens all quite automatically, or, restated according to the game, 'the process now asserts itself with little or no conscious effort on my part'."

The reporters nodded – in admiration, perhaps. Some rolled up their sleeves as if ready for the main event. The panel members moved uncomfortably in their seats – except Doc who worked to disguise his smile. Malcolm settled in, making himself comfortable, ready to enjoy a renamed version of the ever-popular, Biblical Classic, David versus the Goliaths of Cob Corner, Kansas. Someday, it might even become the bases for a far-ranging novel.

Lucas took one step backward and nodded toward Reverend Redding, indicating he was finished. Redding gave no response, moving right into the proceedings. He looked to his right across the panel.

“Mr. Brimm, will you please begin. State the area of your inquiry before posing the question.”

Lucas moved a few steps to his left and some closer, so he was looking slightly upward, confronting Mr. Brimm, face to face, from as close as the physical arrangement allowed. The man spoke.

“The area of inquiry is the law.”

He cleared his throat.

“The question is short and to the point: Why must laws always be obeyed?”

“You are joking, of course. Please ask your actual question.”

“I most certainly am *not* joking. You will address my question.”

“Sorry. I’m sure those in attendance will understand how I made that mistake.”

He flashed a quick glance at the reporters who whispered back and forth. Lucas began pacing, head down, clearly deep in thought. He turned toward Mr. Brimm and addressed him from across the room.

“Since the adequacy of my education derives from my life on the road with my Grampa, I will select an example – an incident – from which to develop my answer.”

He left no moment for permission, disapproval, or comment.

I was eleven years old. We were in a small town in Kentucky. As we arrived we watched as a woman – in her mid-twenties – was being dragged down the dry, sunbaked, dirt street to the jail by two burley deputies. Her three young children – five and under – were terrified, reaching out after her and crying as several men restrained them. As we have often done, in order to quickly get to the bottom of some local issue, I asked a group of boys my age what was going on – kids are always in the know and have no tendency to be

dishonest about it.

"It's Mrs. Olsen," one boy began. "Her husband died of the fever last month. They are transients – foreigners – not sure where they come from."

"She got caught stealin' bread and milk from the general store," another added. "Stealin' is about the worst there is around here – 'cept fer killin', I reckon. Never knowd there to be a killin'."

My first concern was for her children, so I asked about them.

"What will happen to her children, now?"

"Grandma Purdy will probably take 'em in fer a while. Then, I ain't got no idea."

The Reverend Redding interrupted.

"Young man you will use proper grammar during this proceeding."

"Really? I figured you wanted my most honest rendition. Repeating people's responses accurately seems the only honest way to go about things. You want me to represent 11-year-old, uneducated, barefoot, Kentucky boy's as speaking like high school graduates from Cob Corner? There is certainly nothing honest in that. How they speak is the basis for how they think, and how the people in that little town thought, is central to this story and to the answer you are requiring of me."

The men huddled for a long moment. Presently, Redding spoke.

"You may continue as you were."

We approached the sheriff's office and Grampa spoke with a deputy out front after the woman had been taken inside.

"What seems to be the problem, deputy?"

"The woman stole food from the general store."

"And why would she do that?"

"Had no money, I suppose."

"And why would that have been?"

"Her husband died a few weeks back. He was a drifter – worked at odd jobs around this area. Sweeping stores, farm

labor, gardening, things like that. Couldn't have left her much money."

"So, what if she had the money to pay for what she took?"

"She done broke the law. The law says if you break a law, you git's punished."

"Why did she steal the food?"

"I don't know."

"Of course, you know. You're a man of stature in this community. You have a job with a great deal of responsibility. A sheriff's deputy. Dumb men don't get such positions of trust. So, tell me. Why did she steal the food?"

"To feed her children."

"Tell me, Sir, if you had been in her position – penniless, with starving children – would you have just let your children go hungry?"

He pursed his lips and refrained from answering. Grampa answered for him.

"Of course, you wouldn't have let your children suffer."

It moved him to respond.

"I'd a got a job and earned the money to buy the food."

"What jobs are available in this community for a woman like her with a Norwegian name and probably a very poor grasp of English?"

"None."

"Why?"

"Just ain't. Like you said, she's Norwegian."

"I do not understand."

"We don't cotton to foreigners around here – especially those Scandinavians. They'll steal ya blind – just like she done."

"I see. You have had Scandinavians steal from you before, then?"

"We'll no, not me personally."

"Many others here in this town have had that happen to them, then?"

"I guess not, but it's their reputation."

"Let's say she could have gotten a job. How much could she have earned in a day?"

“A woman who don’t speak English good – maybe thirty-five or fifty cents.”

“And what would she do with her children while she worked?”

“Jane Little takes care of kids.”

“For free?”

“No. Five cents a day a kid.”

“So, fifteen cents for her three children?”

He nodded.

“What did the food cost that she stole?”

“Proprietor says seventy cents.”

“So, let’s see. She could earn 50 cents and pay 15 for Jane’s care, leaving 35 cents – only half enough to buy the food she needed. What is your suggestion for her?”

“I guess I ain’t got none.”

“So, all you can think to do is to put her in jail because she found herself in the place of being unable to feed her children while none of you locals were compassionate enough to offer help.”

“No, ‘cause she stoled the food – she broke the law.”

“How can you miss the point, young man? To follow your logic, she and the people of this town should just let those children over there starve to death right where they sit. Is that what your law says has to happen here? I’ll pay for the food.”

“Let me talk to Jesse – he’s the sheriff.”

He went inside. Grampa and I waited for nearly fifteen minutes. At that point, Grampa was invited inside. I had gone to be with the children to do what I could to comfort them. I had several heels from loafs of bread stuffed I my shirt that I had planned on using for bait to catch lunch. I handed them over to the children. They had wonderful smiles. I’ll never forget the hug from the three-year-old girl.

I was entertaining them with Cat’s Cradle, when Grampa and the deputy came outside with an older man wearing a badge. Not unexpectedly, it turned out to be the sheriff. He sent a boy off running – on an errand I assumed. He returned several minutes later with an older man. I moved close to listen.

“So, we have an arrangement?” Grampa was asking.

“The five dollars you are providing will pay what she owes and keep the family in food for several weeks,” the sheriff said.

“I feel like a fool,” the other man said. “If I had only knowd the situation I would a give her food for her kids. I’ll provide enough food from my store above the five dollars to keep them in food for a month. I’ve been thinkin’ I need some Saturday help. Put the woman in one of my wife’s dresses and she’ll make acceptable store help – cleaning, stocking, things like that. My daughter can help her with her English.”

Grampa turned to the Sheriff.

“There is still the matter of the law she broke, Sheriff. I’ve been told you won’t give an inch where enforcing the law is concerned.”

“Let’s just say a good lesson learned today, Sir. I guess law needs to be dispatched with com . . . What’s the word I’m searching for? I hear my wife spouting it in my face often enough.”

Lucas addressed the bench.

“I interjected myself into the conversation – you may have noticed I do that sometimes.”

Doc snorted, trying to cover his reaction in the elbow of his jacket.

“Compassion may be the word you’re searching for.”

The sheriff nodded, his thoughts were clearly elsewhere. He whispered to his deputy who entered the jail and returned with a boy who appeared to be not much older than I. The sheriff spoke.

“Bart, here’s, seventeen. He’s serving ten days for disorderly conduct. He was passing through town when he and some of our older boys got into it – pushing, shoving, punches got thrown. I took our boy’s word for how it started. Must say, knowing the boys, that was probably ill advised, but I didn’t know the new kid at all. Anyway, Bart fought back and before the fray was over he had broken one nose, one arm, blackened three eyes, and put the progeny of several of them

in serious doubt.”

“I notice Bart is black,” Grampa said.

“I noticed that, also. I know where you’re going. I just went there myself. If he’d a been white kid, I’d a brushed him off, kicked his butt and escorted him to the city limits. Then I’d a give my local boys a talkin’ to. My wife’s been on me about it ever since, but he broke the law.”

“As did a group of your boys, apparently,” I added. “How are you as a cook, Sir?”

“What? I don’t understand, son.”

“I was just thinking maybe you could stay home and tend to things while your wife took over sheriffing for a while.”

He actually smiled – sheepishly – and shrugged.

Grampa continued. He spoke directly to Bart.

“If you were to accompany us away from this town – my grandson, Lucas, and me – say 50 miles on west from here – make it a three or four-day trek – would you be falling on us by night and robbing or hurting us?”

Bart broke a wonderful smile.

“No, Sir. My granny’s a pastor. She’d send me directly to H-E-double L. Never nothin’ like that from me unless I have ta defend myself. I’m a good fisherman, make great flapjacks, and I’m strong. I can pull that sled-contraption fer ya while we’re hikin’.”

“You bet you will – one third of the time – evenly divided. Now, we just have to see if we can square things here with the Sheriff.”

Grampa turned to him.

“Is there a fine that could be paid in lieu of lock up time?”

“There is, but that won’t be necessary. I got a half-dozen boys here in town who are about to handle that – once they’re all walking upright again. The boy is free to go. You interest me more than I can say – Malcolm, is it? Tell you what. It’s gettin’ on toward lunch time. You two come home with me, and my wife will put on the feed bag for us. The best pot roast in the county. Smelled it simmerin’ already early this mornin’.”

I butted in, again.

“We’d love to do that, but there are now three of us, Sheriff. Is your table big enough?”

The sheriff put his hands on his hips, hitched his head, and we – the three of us – accompanied him down the street to his house. He was right. It was the best pot roast I have ever eaten.

“Implied in my story was the fact that the storekeeper and his wife saw to the mother and her children. I hate to let potentially disastrous endings, dangle.”

Lucas stopped. He was near the right wall beside the window. He walked deliberately back to the bench and continued.

“If the inquisitor, Mr. Brimm, insists on sticking with his question as phrased to me, my answer is that his question is fully inappropriate, so I cannot in good faith provide an answer. If he will delete the concept, ‘always’, as I assume he will do, I will proffer a response.

Again, without hesitating for any indication from Mr. Brimm, Lucas continued.

“I will suggest that at every step in the development of our Nation, from the signing of the Declaration of Independence – an unlawful act in and of itself, the drafting of the Constitution, to the last law passed here in Cob Corner, the United States is a nation of law *for* order. Without the thoughtful adherence to the essence of the law, society will disintegrate in flames and gunfire – I reference the war during the sixties. However, as I hope I have illustrated, when sticking to the letter of the law, without keeping the factors of common sense and human compassion and decency as its guide, obedience to the law can in the least result in the most heinous of injustices and at the most, force the citizens to rise up in revolt against it. The reason we have laws is so we can assure a society in which compassion and decency can exist and endure. To suggest we should just blindly follow laws in circumstances when they deny that, is asinine, Mr. Brimm.

“As an editorial aside, if I may, it appears from what I’m hearing here in town, there is currently a growing groundswell

of interest in getting on with the rising up possibility.

“I suppose that is the answer with which I will leave you for question number one.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Shame on You, Citizens of Cob Corner

At the end of Lucas's response to the first question, the panel put their heads together and Reverend Redding made a note of some kind on a sheet of paper. He set it aside and focused back on Lucas.

"The court will move on to question, two. Mayor Purvis Rakes, if you will, please."

Mr. Rakes was a short, pale, obese man in his late fifties. His balding head allowed his permanent blush to radiate, chin to nape. His white collar was already soaked in sweat. The closely aligned furrows across his forehead were either just plain unattractive original equipment or reflected his continual state of stress. Lucas figured being the mayor of a small city was understandably stressful and left it at that.

"One moment please, Sir."

Lucas poured a glass of water from what had been provided for him on his desk and took it to his Grampa. It was as much to highlight the thoughtless of those in charge as to ease the old man's thirst. Without a word passing between them, he returned to the bench – that time stopping in front of the mayor, who read from a small slip of paper.

"Here is the question – number two: What is the fundamental purpose of society?"

As he had done before, Lucas walked back and forth near the window for several moments, aligning his thoughts. He stopped, faced the bench, and began.

"First, I need to know if you are referring in a general

sense – across all human societies – or specifically to the clearly skewed society here in Cob Corner.”

The man wiped his brow and patted the top of his head with a dainty, white handkerchief. He looked aside toward Reverend Redding, then back at Lucas.

“The first, I believe. The more general.”

“Thank you for the clarification. And may I assume you intend for me to consider culture *and* society since they are so interwoven that one cannot be properly discussed without consideration of the other. Yes or No, please.”

Again, the little man popped with perspiration. He looked at Redding, obviously out of his league with the question he had been handed to read. Redding gave the smallest indication of a nod. Rakes answered the question.

“Yes. Of course. By all means.”

Each of those attempts to appear erudite, just further pegged him as an intellectual fraud in Lucas’s mind. Fantasies of turning their time in Cob Corner into a bestselling novel, raced through the heads of more than one of the reporters in the room. Would it be comedy? Would it be tragedy? A slapstick, melodrama, perhaps.

“Thank you, Sir. One more clarification, if you will? Then I can begin. May I assume your question refers only to the societies of the developed western world and not central Africa, the Indo-European sub-continent, and tropical core of South America?”

Rakes threw up his hands, surrendering before the lad. He turned away. Redding delivered the response. Everything about his manner suggested he was deep into reconsidering the wisdom of his expanded strategy.

“That seems reasonable, considering the limited time we have.”

Clearly, he was also at a loss but was better schooled in the art of saving face. Lucas had noted that, at least in his presence, most reverends demonstrated that they were good at that.

“Thank you. I will stick as closely to Society, itself, as I can – in the interest of time as you so helpfully pointed out. Although I understand it is not necessary for such a learned

group, let me state the essence of the difference between Society and Culture as I will be using the terms. A *Society* is a group of individuals living in close proximity and interacting on a regular basis. *Culture* is how people go about living their lives including inventions, religion, government, music, art, and so on.

Lucas took several steps away from the bench, then turned and began addressing the question.

“During the early centuries of the human species, it became obvious to them that living alone was dangerous, while living in groups was less dangerous. Threats from animals and hostile humans could be better handled by groups. When the group was too small, they were destroyed by larger or more powerful outside, predatory forces. When the group was too large, they became cumbersome to manage, and maintaining an adequate supply of food and often water could become impossible. So, early on, we discovered a balance had to be defined and maintained. – between who needed what and how much of what was readily available.

“Let me refer to a story I was told in the foothills of Colorado – *Ore Ville*, now a largely abandoned town at the center of one of the gold mining areas from less than a half century ago.

Grampa and I approached what was left of the town from up on a mountain where we had been studying the differences in the flora and fauna on each side of the tree line.

“It would be great if later on you have a question relating to that because it is absolutely fascinating – the way species diverged and evolved depending on whether the seeds or babies ended up being nurtured on one side or the other. As I said, hopefully later.”

He returned to his story – well, a story within a story, as it would be.

From above the settlement, we estimated there were perhaps a dozen functioning shelters – from indicators such

as solid roofs, intact walls, ricks of firewood, smoke rising from the chimneys, laundry on lines, and such. As we entered what had once clearly been a good sized, thriving community, we were greeted by a dog and two chickens.

Moving on east along the road, we were hailed from ahead by an elderly man sitting beside a lean-to – gaunt, nearly toothless, bow-legged, with a stringy, black and gray, mottled beard that extended to his belt buckle. The animals ran ahead. He greeted them earnestly, first – a bone and a hand full of corn – then offered his hand for a shake and his smile for friendship. He identified himself only as, Platts.

“An interesting settlement, here,” Grampa began.

“Ore Ville was a livin’ breathin’ bein’ back in sixty. Seven thousand and twelve people here – seven thousand men and twelve pretty ladies if you know my meanin’.”

It had clearly been his oft repeated little joke.

“I believe we do,” Grampa said.

I was eleven. I was honest. I was outspoken.

“No, I don’t get your meaning, really,” I said, freely displaying my naivety.

“The best time for an explanation will be later this evening – you and me,” came Grampa’s response.

It was his way of telling me to let the topic go. I understood. After comments from him that limited my pursuit of a topic, the ensuing discussions were usually absolutely fascinating, filled with information about sexual activity, procreation and the like that I had never even dreamed about, so I was eager for the day to move ahead.

“You are not keeping on point, Lucas,” Redding said.

“Sorry. I suppose how I came by the facts of life is *not* entirely germane here, although I did hang on every word of every, cumulative, edition, and I could make a case connecting it to my discussion of both the adequacy of my education and the function of society.”

Redding ‘ahummed’ without additional interference. Lucas continued.

We combined our stores with Platt’s – his beans, bread

and fire, and our six, small trout from a mountain stream alongside which we'd camped the night before. We talked as we prepared the meal and ate.

"Were you here through the hay day?" I asked.

"Sure was. Worked for the territorial government – laying out claims for miners and plats for builders. On salary, I came away with more money than most of the poor suckers who worked the veins. A few hit it big – not sayin' they didn't."

"Was it an organized town?" I asked.

"Depends on what you mean, organized. Early on, a Settlers' Council was set up to look after things. Everybody chipped in to finance it. One thing they did was hire the sheriffs."

"Plural – sheriffs?" Grampa asked.

"Went through five in six years."

"Quit or deceased?" I asked.

"Equal amount of both."

How 2 ½ could have quit and 2 ½ were killed escaped me, but he had made his point – being a sheriff in Ore Ville offered little long-term security.

"It was lawless?" Grampa asked.

"Oh no. We had laws. Problem was, to many refused to follow them. You have to understand it wasn't a regular town where people moved to in order to set up a home. This was all temporary like a fantasy. Well, that ain't exactly true neither."

He related a story from the earliest days.

"The Co-op Committee will come to order."

That had been Big Jim Atherton one of the first on site to stake a claim and the acknowledged leader of the early arrivals. They set up camp in a large, shaded, grassy area east of the creek and took some pride in the place they occupied – dug a latrine, set a place downstream to throw out dirty water, had barrels for trash, fire pits, things like that. Big Jim asked three or four of the others to help set up rules. Big Jim did the enforcing. Knowing that, there was hardly any trouble. By the time that settlement had grown to about two, maybe three hundred or so, the west side of the creek began to fill in with hundreds and hundreds of newcomers – just all

helter-skelter – no plannin’. Eventually, most of the town was over there to the west. Almost all of it, really.

Big Jim continued speaking.

“We got a problem with the west-siders puttin’ trash and worse in the creek north of us. Last night I saw a corpse floatin’ downstream. We need to put a stop to it so we can all continue to have a clean water supply. Any ideas?”

“Burn ‘em out. Most of them ain’t nothin’ but trash themselves.”

It had been Roscoe – shoot-from-the-hip talkative – never very far-sighted – like end of his nose far-sighted.

“That’s just plain stupid,” Big Jim said.

“We could hire a lawman,” Burt suggested.”

“Are our claims doing well enough to afford that? One worth his keep’ll cost us twenty or twenty-five dollars a month plus eatin’ around among us.”

It was decided to send Burt into the nearest established town and see about such a hire. Three days later he returned with a kid in his twenties – one of those proudly bearing notches on his gun. He lasted a few months. While he was here, the west-siders cleaned up their acts – kept their distance, less rowdy, the water cleared up. Then some other kid come along wanting to prove his was faster and the new hire was killed.

Without that protection, the much smaller east side community, found itself periodically put upon at night and supplies and equipment were stolen. That, of course, led to injuries and even fatalities – enough so that a mortician arrived and set up shop – one particularly vicious week he had 11 ‘clients’. He took over the deeds to the claims as payment for his services and eventually could have left the mountain a wealthy man. I’ll get back to him.

Big Jim was banking his fire for the night when he heard a voice out of the darkness.

“Big Jim. I got wind a somethin’ big.”

It was a boy no more than eleven or twelve who had been living on the west side, doing odd jobs to survive. Jim had only ever seen him from a distance.

“So? Spit it out!”

"Ezra Blackburn – you know who I'm talkin' about?"

Big Jim nodded.

"Worst of the lot up here on the mountain. Has way too much power over there."

The boy continued, acknowledging the truth in it through his own series of nods.

"Well, I overheard him and the undertaker talkin'. They's up to no good. Here's what they's doin'. One a Ezra's men fingers a man whose claim is producin' really good. Then Ezra kills him, the undertaker takes over his deed ta pay fer the burial, and he and Ezra split the worth. The undertaker, you know, ain't keepin' any of the claims – he's auctionin' them off. I been countin' up and I bet Ezra done killed nearly two dozen claim holders. That' ain't right, Big Jim. I didn't know who else to come to."

"You did good, kid. You can stay over here if you need to."

"I got my digs over there. Doin' pretty good. Savin' up for the trip to San Francisco to go live with my uncle. Ma and Pa got killed in a stage robbery last year. The gang let me go. 'Cause I was a kid, I guess. Pa was carryin' all the money he had – we was headin' to California."

"Sorry, kid. You always got a place over here if you need it, understand?"

The boy nodded and soon disappeared into the night.

The next morning, Big Jim confronted Ezra. Ezra was basically a coward with an overactive mouth. He always wore sidearms, but nobody had ever seen him draw one. Big Jim always carried a long-handled pick – lots of folks had seen him use it.

"I've been hearin' guys say they seen you killin' men up here. Then, I hear tell the Mortician takes over their claim to pay for the funeral. Then, I even hear more – that he splits the money with you that he gets from sellin' the claims. I'll be sendin' for the U.S. Marshal to look into it, unless you and your band a thugs is out of here by sunup."

Ezra, known for his quick tongue but not his quick draw, reached for his gun – Jim being unarmed. Big Jim knocked it from his grasp and with one swift blow from his pick handle,

broke the man's right arm. With a well-placed fist to his jaw, Ezra fell back onto the ground, where he remained for a good hour.

Big Jim returned to his claim and got to work – an hour late. He didn't mention the encounter to his people, but word was soon out. Big Jim realized he had acted without havin' a plan. By his action he had put his own life in danger and he was not at all sure what he would do about it.

Back at his campfire that night, he heard a familiar voice from out of the night.

"Kid?"

"Ya."

He showed himself. His clothes were torn. His face was bruised and cut, and his hair caked in blood. Tears were streaming down his face.

"Ezra?" Big Jim asked, not really having to.

The Kid nodded.

"Three of his own men took him to the ground when they come upon him beatin' on me and I got away. I'm sure his plan was to kill me. He must a figured I'm the one who told you about him and the undertaker. I do – well, did – lots of stuff for him. I think I got broken ribs and I can't use my left wrist. I been spittin' up blood. I don't know what to do."

"First, you will stay here, and we'll take care of things."

Big Jim put his fingers to the sides of his mouth and whistled. A dozen men in various stages of dress, entered the ring of light from his fire. They saw the boy. They looked to Big Jim for instructions.

"Jasper, you and a few men take the Kid – you got a name, kid?"

"Joseph, Sir."

"You take Joseph over to the girl's place to get fixed up – ribs, wrist, he'll tell ya. Some of you stay with him. Pete, rouse me a couple dozen more men. We're gonna pay a call across the creek."

Half an hour later they were quietly approaching Ezra's place from all directions.

"Figured you'd be commin' once you seen the boy. You're soft, Big Jim. Soft like a woman."

It was Ezra from behind him. He had been hiding, waiting.

“How would you know how soft a woman is? The way you stink no woman would ever let you close enough to find out.”

Ezra raised his gun as Big Jim slowly turned around to confront him.

The event that followed was unexpected. From out of the darkness, a lariat whirled above Ezra’s head and soon dropped, cinched tightly, binding his arms to his sides and knocking his gun free. Several of the West-Siders appeared – one attached to the other end of the rope. That man spoke.

“Big Jim. Honest to God, we just found out what Ezra and the Undertaker has been up to. We can’t find the undertaker – he’s skipped out. What shall we do with Ezra?”

“How about two of your men and two of mine take him down to Boltonville in the morning. There’s a U.S. Marshall’s office there. Round up any witnesses and take them along, too.”

Others approached the group from down the mountain. It was Rosco and Bruce with the Undertaker in tow.

“See what we found, stranded a few hundred yards down the road.”

“I do see. What? How?”

“You know that kid?”

“He has a name. Joseph. Yes, I know him.”

“It seems before he got back to you, tonight, he paid the man a visit and removed the axil pins from his hearse. This here guy set out ta leave the mountain. Before he reached the valley road, his Funeral Carriage just plum fell apart. The horses bolted and run off. The kid – er, Joseph – said you have reason to want the man.”

“That I do. How is the boy?”

“He’s thirteen and surrounded by six gorgeous ladies of the evening. How do you suppose he is?”

When Joseph awoke the next morning, he found himself in a bed with sheets and pillows, his wrist in a splint bound to his chest, which, itself had been tightly bound in strips of cloth. He learned he had passed out. He’d say one

thing for those sweet-smelling girls: they sure did know how to take care of a guy's body – a hurting, bleeding, and banged up body, that is.

Beside him on the pillow, he found a small, soft, yellow-brown, leather, pouch, closed with a drawstring. He hefted it. It was heavy. He untied it and dribbled the contents onto the sheet. Gold nuggets: irregular in shape – big, small, tiny, round, square, oval, flat, yellowish, brownish, reddish. The girls and many of the men – from both sides of the creek – had pitched in. The boy would ride to California in style, first class, on the California Limited Express Railroad.

Big Jim became the acknowledged leader of the entire camp and order was restored.

“If it had been *my* story, gentlemen,” Lucas went on, “I would have had well-dressed, Big Jim suddenly show up, as the train pulled out, and take the seat next to Joseph, saying he'd had enough of the hard life. He was returning to California to reopen his law practice and he sure needed an honest, dependable office boy to run errands. Grampa and I strive to make all the real-life stories we encounter end well. But, that one wasn't my story to finish.

“Now, let me tell you the things I learned about the fundamental purpose of society from that experience. ‘Purpose’, of course, should have been plural in the statement of the question.

“As I already indicated, historically, the first purpose of social groups – society – was probably mutual protection and the staking out of a secure food and water supply. A leader probably emerged based on some mix of smarts and physical prowess. Thousands of years later when monogamy became common, the man, woman and children became the basic social group, so another purpose of society came into being, the protection and fostering of the family unit. To some extent, people could choose which society they wanted to be a part of – sorry there, of which they wanted to be a part – the group on hill ‘A’, the group in cave ‘C’, and so on. There were undoubtedly qualifications that had to be met for acceptance. To some extent, that choice remains today.

“From the earliest days, when creative or ‘new-thinking’ men attempted to disrupt the social order, they were most likely dealt with summarily, without a hearing. There was and continues to be an inherent problem related to survival of the social group at that point. Although it might be that the disruptors – the rabble rousers – the new thinkers – had something positive to bring to the social group – progress – it was most often refused in the rush to protect the accepted old ways that had been proven useful and comfortable and kept them safe.

“In the miner’s story, people of good will joined together and helped Joseph survive and move on – two basic functions of society – making sure nobody has to suffer or do without what they need. Even the rough and tough miners felt compassion and acted on it for the good of the boy. The story suggests that society without adequate and appropriate, citizen-friendly leadership falls into chaos. Compare the atmospheres and daily life in the east and west sides in the story.

“When we agree to live with and among others – as a part of a society – we enter into an unstated, but universal, social contract that asserts, ‘I’ll do my part to make our life together good for all of us’ – society must always be a mutually helpful process. Leaders must be chosen by a careful consensus of the people – without such active group participation in living together, individual rights may be lost. When a leader forces himself on people, society suffers because it inserts a wall between us – we no longer share the mandatory, respectful give and take necessary for a society and basic freedoms within it to flourish.

“The story also shows how a positive society protects the weak and less able and removes or segregates those who would harm others or the social establishment. Historically, there have been cultures that destroyed the weak and less able. The supposition was, that sort of ‘pruning’ contributed to a stronger society. In modern times it has never been born out. At its best, ours chooses to feel responsible for those with diminished or limited capacity. It reveals and manifests man’s softer, caring, responsible side. Grampa and I have

met brilliant men with the puniest of bodies. Had they been 'pruned', society would have been set back decades.

"One purpose of society should be to limit inequality. It is inevitable that some people will accumulate more resources than others due to differences in innate ability, training and good fortune. Good for them! It is a condition most societies allow, given certain limits. It can also get out of hand and cause the downfall of societies. Example: For one person to have 100 times what others have seems immoral to me. If the social purpose of life really is to take good care of each other, nobody needs to make and keep 100 times what others have. The person with that level of resources who takes steps to share, and sees it as a privilege, is a pillar of society, a morally responsible person, a builder. The one with that level of resources who selfishly keeps it all for himself is greedy – in essence, a destroyer – and Grampa and I believe greed is as great a sin as there is. The greedy person says, "I earned it so it is mine to keep and use." The morally responsible person says, 'I have had the good fortune to earn *lots*, so I have the grand privilege of helping *lots* of the less fortunate'. Can you imagine the fantastic world we would have if *status* were based in what we gave in time and possessions instead of on wealth or power or fame?

"One social purpose of parents is to set the stage for an improved society for their children. Every parent must ask: How am I defining for my children, through my own words and deeds, what it means to WIN in life. The basic choice, Grampa and I believe, is between, *I am a hoarder, or I am a helper*. Answer that and extend it to its likely outcomes – peace, war, hope, fear, need, plenty, compassion, knowledge, ignorance, equality, freedom, suffering, servitude, greed, helpfulness. That – what they regularly model – is how *parents* in the here and now *always* shape the society their children will experience – build – when they become adults. Kids are generally extensions of what they saw in their parents. Kids don't become what parents tell them they should be; they become what they see their parents being. Grampa and I believe when that model is greed – however it may be disguised and however it may be rationalized – they have

brutishly lessened the quality of their children's futures and the future of mankind. Children who are shown that the spoils of greed are the *symbols of winning* in life, build absolutely destructive societies. As a personal note, I'm coming to believe greed is really just an extension of a man's debilitating feeling of insecurity – his fear of how he will be able to survive in the future. I'm working on that theory.

"Today, we are approaching a World-wide society with trains whizzing us from one side of the continent to the other and steam liners crossing the oceans in shorter and shorter times. It is becoming more and more difficult to maintain a cloistered social group steeped only in our old ways, because outside influences – influences we didn't even dream existed before – now impinge on us from every angle. Soon, gentlemen, there will be no place to hide.

"Although it is artificial to break the world into societies based on county borders, that makes a useful place to begin, but it is certainly not definitive. In our huge country, for instance, we are not one big, general, society. It is absurd to think so. I can think of several, large, unorganized, groups that can be thought of as sub-societies within the United States – the north east, the south east, the upper middle west, the central and southern middle west, the southwest and the far west. Perhaps the northern tier – Pacific North West, east to the Great Lakes.

"Grampa and I have had the opportunity to meet and study all of them. Each one is partially defined by accent or dialect, partially by their world view – liberal, conservative, middle of the road, independent – and partly by the lifestyle imposed on them by their surroundings. Admittedly, accent and political and religious bents are more cultural than societal, but those things have profound effects on each local society and the purposes that develop. For example: the East Coast and the south east – and from what I have seen, Kansas – work to keep white people of European ancestry separate – that is safe from – other races and cultures that contradict or place in doubt or otherwise threaten their ultimate validity, superiority and authority. I could go on, but that seems sufficient to develop my answer.

“I could examine the universal presence and fundamental usefulness of Ladies of the Evening, but I imagine you would gavel me into silence – not wanting to hear about that truth that runs contrary to your beliefs and teachings.

“I would, then, just add that Grampa and I are quite worried that as local, loosely knit *customs*, develop into well-engrained *biases*, and biases solidify into *prejudices*, and prejudices into *mandated exclusion*, we approach the point where one group believes they have the ordained right to exterminate those who are different. An illustrative case in point is what our federal government has done and is still doing to the Indians – they are made out to be so different from us that we have convinced ourselves it is our duty to cleanse society of their kinds, their beliefs and their ways of life. I tell you here and now, history will record it as the blackest possible mark on *our society at large* for allowing it, and on *our government* for doing it. Andrew Jackson will headline the list of despicable Americans who led the genocide of the American Indians.

“To clarify any *abstraction* inherent in the phrase, ‘society at large’, I refer you to the signs at both roads where they enter this town. They proclaim that no Negroes, Mexicans, or Chinese may remain within the city limits after sundown. Shame on you. Have the churchgoers and leaders of this community forgotten the ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ and the ‘good Samaritan’ teachings of your religion – or perhaps hereabouts it is practiced as a ‘buffet’ religion where you just pick and choose what you do and what you do not choose to believe from the available teachings found in your scriptures. It becomes finding scriptures that support your original positions rather than your following a given set of teachings.

“I suppose that editorial was more Culturally based than Socially based.

“Let me summarize before you order the construction of a gallows for me – many of my beliefs clearly being so different from yours and therefore most likely threatening to your way of life – your social order and culture.

“The purposes of society include but are not limited to

things like these: protection, both of our physical beings – the right to continue in this life – and protection of our ideas and our rights to hold them and act on them so long as we don't harm others because of them. That first point must also guarantee one's right to exist and flourish regardless of the look of one's bone structure, or color of the skin God chose to grant him, or the smarts he put in our heads, or the maladies and malformations he allowed to overtake him.

“Since no society can be sustained without healthy, relatively content, citizens who have reason to believe they will remain safe and will have the opportunities to be productive and make a good life for their families, every society must be based on reasonable freedoms and active compassion embodied in universal, helpful action. Historically, compassion has been defined as sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. Modern writers and social philosophers are moving forward from such a passive definition, and are reframing that in a more positive, proactive, form: sympathetic feelings and concerns for the wellbeing of all men, and the determination to see that the good life is made possible for all citizens who demonstrate a willingness to live constructively among us. That was my paraphrase of my understanding of what I've read from the greatest minds of our day. Grampa can provide a more in-depth presentation, if you are interested.

“As a postscript to the interesting question Mayor Rakes posed – or at least read out loud – sort of – I had hoped there would be a question about the purpose of life. I only bring it up here because human life is the *single*, necessary precursor to society. If there is such a question forthcoming, I apologize for getting ahead of things. Anyway, it would offer similar challenges that this question has. Grampa and I would posit there are two purposes of human life – defined after the fact, of course: First, the *biological purpose of human life* is to procreate and insure the continuation of our species. All species share that. Second, and to guarantee the first, is the *social purpose of human life*: to take very good care of one another so nobody must ever go without something they need – shelter, food, medicine and

health care, clothing, purpose, goals, education, achievement, and of course, love, respect and self-esteem.

“You see, in the view of my Grampa and me, society most fundamentally encompasses the collection and preservation of living, maturing, human beings, therefore the purposes of life and the purposes of society become inseparable.

“I will stop talking, and I want to thank you for prompting and allowing me to think through some very important concepts.”

CHAPTER FIVE

“It soils my stockings!”

“We have time for one more question this afternoon,” Reverend Redding said. “School Master, Abraham Sills will ask it.”

Lucas moved to a spot directly in front of him and engaged his eyes as the man spoke. Lucas sensed a state of animosity existed between them. For some reason that pleased the lad far too much. Perhaps he could further it – that is, work to *resolve* it. The great adolescent dilemma: knowing he should want to help when every fiber of his being wants to maim and destroy.

“What is the purpose of education?”

“From my point of view, Sir, that is by far the most relevant question of this inquisition to this point. Thank you for finally raising the discussion to a truly meaningful level. Give me just a moment to organize my thoughts.”

Sills preened, chest out, looking back and forth at the others, sweeping the audience for approval. No one would have been surprised had he stood and taken a bow. Lucas walked to the window to his right and looked out for several moments. He began speaking even before he turned back to the panel.

“Although Grampa may have never stated it in so many words, I’m quite sure he and I agree fully on this one. It may take some time.

“Education is at its best a process of personal discovery; at its worst the accumulation of bits and pieces of

information forced on one by somebody else according to their biases – like those things over which I was tested, before. At its best, education encourages and allows one to discover how things have come to be; how he – the person – has come to be and what his potential is; how society has reached the point where it is and its likely destination; an understanding of culture – before now, currently, and the direction it is heading. But most of all, education helps the individual discover how to think honestly and productively based in facts, devoid of old biases and folk tales, and how to anticipate and approach the fruitful solutions of problems in all areas of life.

The School Master's once resplendent spread, rapidly faded, closed and became tightly tucked between his legs.

Further the animosity – 1; resolve it – 0.

“One of the most beneficial parts of my education has been accepting the fact that the brain most of us humans possess is not capable of answering some of the big questions and comprehending the far-reaching implications of some of the facts we already know. I have grown to the place where I can say, ‘I have no way of answering that,’ and leave it there. *Where did the universe come from? How did life begin? How big is the universe? Does the universe have edges? If so, how can nothing exist beyond it?* Education has been less my accumulation of knowledge and more the honing of my abilities to discover the truth at whatever level it is currently available to me. The accumulation of facts just naturally occurs during such a process – no specific ‘teaching’ needed. Inventing magical, non-physical realms to use in explaining the as yet unexplainable is not only fully illogical – creating one unexplainable to explain another unexplainable – but it denigrates all facts as they have been diligently discovered and substantiated.

“Look at it this way. I characterize the process of educating as being approached in two ways: *First*, I've seen a lot of *Stale* teaching methods. They tend to be descriptive – they seek to describe the present and maintain the status quo. Most things learned by rote, separate from their meaning, fit this category. This level of education evolves from asking, “What is?” and “Why?” Without any doubt there are pieces of

information that are important – crucial, even – to know. To often, I've seen the process stop right there at '*what is*'.

"*Second*, is what I refer to as *Vital* or Developmental approaches. These ask, 'What if? and How?', thus making them dynamic. They tend to focus on processes, interactions, uses, innovation, how things came to be and how they are likely to develop – grow, change, fade.

"I remember like it was yesterday a moment when I was six – very likely the most important moment in my educational life. I took a moss-covered rock to Grampa and said, "See, it's green." He responded with, "I see, so what?" In other words, it is fine for me to know it is green, but what does that mean, what difference does it make, how did it come to be green, how did it come to be covered in moss, from where did the moss come, why is moss green, what is moss, and on and on and on. In that moment the aim and the effectiveness of my process of inquisitiveness absolutely exploded. To find and name and describe something, was fine, but that must always be the beginning – the first 1% – of a wonderful exploration to exhaust all possibilities associated with that initial find – that thing, that process.

"For our purposes here, I am suggesting the person seeking to obtain the most he can from his education, replaces the question, 'Why', with the question 'How', at every point that seems reasonable. 'Why' refers to purpose and tends to easily allow answers based solely on opinion and lore, while 'how' really asks, 'in what way', and addresses progression, development, and seeing a situation in light of its step by step emergence, *always* better than supposition. 'How' requires reference to demonstrable method and sequence rather than speculation. A simpleminded example of the choices: *Why* is Johnny a good boy? OR, *How* did Johnny come to be a good boy? Although we often misinterpret it or even misrepresent it, *Why* really only asks, 'for what purpose is Johnny a good boy. Compared with, *How* did Johnny become a good boy, which refers to the steps and influences that led him to his current state – goodboyness. Or, Why is Robert a bad boy? Compared with How did Robert come to be a bad boy? 'How' is demonstrably superior in

where it leads one's thinking – in the nature of the processes and the answers it requires.

“You can see, of course, how these basic questions posed as parts of an educational plan, direct the course of education in remarkably different – opposing – ways. In my experience, when educating is planned by or driven by religion, it typically remains at the go no place, ‘why’ level. ‘Why? Because our religious teachings say so.’ Period! The end! It need not be that way. The, ‘what if and how’, approach *could* be followed, but is usually vetoed by the keepers of the faith who maintain that their religion represents certainty and must not change. Allowing questions such as ‘what if’ and ‘how’ or ‘how else’, pose a threat to the established ways. Science and archaeology are the subjects most often defamed by church leaders because they are believed to pose the greatest challenges – threats – to what has been believed in the past. There are, of course, other things beside religion that demand a similar, ‘worship the status quo’ approach. All ideologs suffer from it.

“Let me digress just a bit into religion – since, having listened to me up to now, I assume you will *not* be asking me a question about that subject. At the outset, please understand I have no intention of denigrating religion. It can be a powerful, positive force in society. We see that every day. I *do* have the intention of denigrating ignorant and insecure church leaders who, to keep the faith backward and out of touch with new realities, disallow any proposed deviations from established beliefs and doctrine – even with demonstrable proof at hand. If I weren't afraid it would offend so many gathered here, I might characterize it as the contention that ancient, unsubstantiated, religious fairy tales must always trump carefully gathered and well-established facts. Since I'm sure many would be offended, I will not do that. Suffice it to say, religion really isn't into learning or incorporating new discoveries – so religious *education* more accurately becomes religious *recitation*. Religion just lays there dead or at least at an inanimate standstill, instead of a becoming a living, growing, maturing, entity. There are exceptions.

“Let me approach it from another angle, which, it seems to me, will have to make sense even to those who currently choose to deny my premise. If one believes God created the universe and the basic things that occupy and inhabit it, then that person *must* also believe He created the laws that set it in motion, govern it, made it possible, allow it to continue – most basically the behaviors of the atom and gravitational forces, but also things like what makes metal, metal; what makes liquid, liquid; what makes things animate and inanimate; how germs make us sick, how cures make us well, how the sun comes to appear to rise and set and why that isn’t so, and so on down a truly endless list – of His laws.

“Now, if the laws of the universe that science strives to uncover and understand came from God, since those are the only laws there can be, then it would only seem right – intelligent – mandatory, even – for religions to flock to new discoveries made according to His laws, and immediately incorporate the provable of them into what they believe and teach. History shows, however, during the past 20 centuries, it takes religion about 100 years to do that – to catch up with science. Hmm? It seems that eventually they almost always accept the findings of science, but they fight them – God’s newly discovered laws and their applications – for a century. I admit I don’t really understand the concept of a god, but it seems inconceivable to me that for those who claim to understand and believe, that they could accept God but not the laws that he set in motion to govern the operation of the universe – those very things science is dedicated to discovering and utilizing and making available.

“A God believer must, also, recognize that it is the brain He configured for man, that has been responsible for the discovery of Science, and developed Science, and continues to refine and expand it with that same, God-given brain that allows and encourages it. How can a believer deny Science? I think it will be hilarious, if, upon arriving at heaven, a devout soul is asked if it has diligently supported the findings and advancement of God’s Science and scientific methods of inquiry, and it hasn’t. “Oops!” If you find that sacrilegious, I sincerely apologize.

“It was about five years ago, I imagine, Grampa and I were hiking across north central Arkansas. It was rolling terrain, lots of trees – pine, oak, walnut, mostly – valleys with streams, low hills spotted with wiry grasses sought out somewhat competitively by cranky, lean cattle and goats. There was a smattering of small towns that often lay many miles apart, but mostly just clusters of isolated folks – often expanded families – surviving somehow on rocky, red soil, much of which was reluctant to even suckle the most tenacious weeds. There were few schools and even where there were, the residents were reluctant to send their children. They were needed to help at home, *and* teachers had ways of filling young heads with ideas that weren’t compatible with the traditional ways and beliefs – not to mention how they required them to learn useless, that is, *impractical*, information.

“I will never forget, *Bella’s Holla*, a town of about 100 – newborns through octogenarians. There were two extended families living together. Everybody in *Bella’s Holla* had a function. Babies taught love and responsibility. Kids taught . . . well, I’ll get into all that. By the time he was ten, a youngster understood about responsibilities – his own and those of others. He understood his role was to master the next step of required skills or knowledge and grow into them as he matured – say, the set required to move successfully from age 6 to 7, or 13 to 14. By the time one had grown into his mid-twenties, he had complete knowledge of how to live his life – what was needed, what was expected, what had to happen. He was also, most likely, the parent of four to six children.

“When life presented a problem, one was expected to solve it.

“*Come on now, figure it out,*” was a frequent remark, lovingly offered to encourage the younger folks.

“*Good goin’*,” was another remark often heard when success was obvious, and, ‘*good try*’, when a kid was on the right track but not quite there yet.

“They weren’t much for living in the future. If the roof had a hole in it, *that* didn’t indicate it needed patching. If the roof had a hole in it and it started raining, *that* indicated it needed patching. And a joyous patching party they would

have.

"I had been talking with the kids, there, for some time – Grampa with the adults. At one point I looked around for the school building and I asked:

"Where are your teachers?"

A ten-year-old boy pointed at two nearby eleven-year-olds.

"I don't understand," I said.

"When I need ta know somethin', I asks kids about a year older. They generally know. I do the same fer nine-year-old's – when they ask, or I see they's needin' help, I help 'em learn how to take care a it. It's like this. When I turned 10, I got my very own knife. When the older boys seen I was havin' mumbly-pegin' trouble they pitched right in and soon had me all straightened out about it. Nine-year olds couldn't a did that. Twelve-year-old was busy helpin' eleven-year olds. Can't see why we'd need teachers. Lessen they grewed up here, I doubt if they'd know much about really helpin'."

"If I may ask one question, please. Isn't playing mumbly-peg barefooted, dangerous?"

"Not if ya never hits your foot."

"In that place, at that time, it seemed like a pretty effective educational system to me. Perhaps, with certain modifications, it would be at any place and time. I am sure Grampa would agree.

"Don't get me wrong. Kids were kids there and demonstrated natural and therefore expected immaturity. They disagreed and scuffled. The less brave called names from some distance with one foot wisely pointed in the opposite direction in case a fast getaway might soon need to be initiated. I remember one instance when two boys – seven, I'd guess – were fighting. I have no idea why, but they had come to serious, red-faced, cheek puffing blows.

"A man approached and separated them. He led them some distance from the point of the scuffle, sat them down in the shade, and asked the question always asked when errors or misbehavior occurred, there.

“What will you need ta do different next time, so this don’t never have ta happen agin?”

“Notice he didn’t ask what was going on. He didn’t try to establish who started it. They were smart enough in Bella’s Holla to understand that both boys truly believed the other one had, so it was a fruitless path to start down. Also, smart as they were, they seldom tried to find out who was telling the truth – again both parties always believed they were in the right, regardless of the shade of truth on which they were operating. To those folks, none of that – establishing fault or guilt, a thing of the past – mattered. The total focus was on *teaching* – learning how to avoid the necessity for such a confrontation or dysfunction in the future. My observation was that, with cool heads, it seldom took long for logic and reality to allow a well-reasoned solution – a life lesson learned. Without formal training they had logic figured out but ask them what logic was and they’d likely respond, ‘Loj what?’. I have to wonder how many of your students who can define logic – as was required of me on the examination – have any useful idea about how to apply it regularly in their daily lives.

“I could tell you stories about how kids were treated in the often dubbed more civilized northeastern United States, where Grampa and I walked early in our journey. It wasn’t at all pretty and almost never successful. Some call it the Puritan ethic – ‘Disapproved behavior must be punished – period’. If rehabilitation were desired, it played no part in that initial phase. I saw kids get whipped until they could no longer stand. Inquiries suggested it was often the same boys, week after week, suggesting – proving, I’m going to say – that punishment really didn’t help the boys change their behavior – but then that wasn’t its purpose, was it? The purpose was just to inflict great pain on them for what they had done. Oh, they learned to be more careful and didn’t misbehave in the presence of those who had the power to hurt them for doing wrong, but once out of sight of them, they were likely to be at it again. Enter the seamy role of snitches. The whippings did, of course, teach them that adults could be cruel and hurtful and

were allowed to beat on kids. The Bible even required it, they taught. Many probably even came to believe that must prove they were innately bad people – depending on the over-all tone of their homes, of course. I can just imagine how the less loved of them could hardly wait to become grownups, so they could legally be cruel and hurtful as well.

“The whipped boys learned only to be sneakier about their misdeeds. A whipping never, ever, in the course of human history suddenly put brand new, never before available information or insights into a youngster’s head about how to solve a problem – how *not to behave*, perhaps, but not *how to behave*. The boys who were urged – required – to solve the problem together, carried with them a skill that would always be useful when it came to conflicts and disagreements.”

“To satisfy my curiosity, I slipped some telling questions into the conversation.”

“Who’s the nicest kid in Bella’s Holla?”

“I got very strange looks.”

“We is all the nicest kid in town. Whatcha mean?”

“Who’s the baddest kid in town?”

“You sure asks crazy questions. Your Grampa know you talk that way?”

“Sorry. Just checking to make sure I understood the ground rules around here. I’m really learning to like how you live.”

“Again, I got strange looks. It hit me. They had no idea people lived any other way, so my comment made no sense to them. Thomas Gray wrote, ‘Ignorance is bliss.’ I’m upset how people react to that quotation. Most take it to mean, ‘How nice or uncomplicated it must be to be ignorant’. I think, ‘How terminally terrible’. To be a happy, contented ignoramus is one of the most devastating things I can foresee for humankind – a total waste of being a human. We have a mind that is primarily dedicated to answering questions – answering questions on the basis of what information it has accumulated about the world and what processes it has acquired and devised about how to utilize that information in solving problems and in

making new discoveries. Brains with only minimal information or opportunity can, therefore, only produce minimally useful answers – and, in the end, ‘minimally useful’, typically means wrong. The uninformed society is destined to wither and die and, likely, take the rest of us with it. I believe the human brain only thrives on the constant acquisition of knowledge, with knowledge most effectively acquired by asking questions, not just read in a book or absorbed from lectures. People who are content with what they already know are therefore, the scourge of human progress.”

“Grampa and I have come across towns and regions and religious enclaves that require themselves to remain ignorant for fear additional information might threaten their beliefs – and they fear they would be lost without their beliefs. I ask again, why in the world would anybody want to hold onto a belief that contradicted the laws of nature and our verified knowledge about this world and the human species? That is just stupid confounding stupid. As they matured, history’s greatest thinkers each continued to grow in understanding of how the universe works and how societies must function. I refer you to the writing of John Stuart Mill over the course of this very century. Sample him early on and sample him later in life. Maturation.

“There is another thing about questions. Many people ask the first question and have no idea it requires additional questions to ‘bulk-out’ the fullest, most helpful, most fact-based, most accurate, answer. ‘Why’ questions are the biggest offenders, of course. Take those hideous signs prohibiting certain human beings from staying here in town at night. I can just about guarantee you how the city fathers’ shallow discussion went:

‘We must keep Indians, Negros and Chinese out of town at night.’

‘What must we do so that will happen?’ (A single question.)

‘We can pass a law and put up signs.’ (A single answer.)

‘Did anyone show verified reason how it had come to be necessary to do that? Did those who were acceptable during the day, magically become malevolent beasts in the dark – while they were asleep, even? Was it because other towns had similar laws? Did anybody ask how those other towns made their decisions or what the results had been? On what data did they base their conclusions? Most people can remain in here over night. How have those other human beings evolved to be a different breed of humankind that should not be allowed to stay in town at night? In their own land – China – are all of them – the Chinese – required to leave town at night for some reason that should just be obvious? More to the point, how has it come to be those three types of human beings that locals want to prohibit? See all the questions that had not been asked!

“I suppose you get my point – and probably don’t like it much. Asking just the initial question, ‘In what way can we keep them out of town at night,’ skips over at least a dozen questions that needed to have been asked and well-answered *before* that one was even proffered. “Does any group need to be barred at night?” “If so, why not during the day as well?” “How has it come about that we believe they should be barred at night?” “What proof do we have of that?” Or, maybe the question really was just, “We don’t like them, or we are afraid of them, so how can we keep ‘them’ out of town at night?” “If we allow them in town 24 hours a day, won’t they want to build houses or set up business here. That would be bad for real estate values and would provide competition for our current businesses.” A first question must be, “How have we come to this point of wanting to ban them from town at night?”

“I may have rambled too much and said it poorly, but it soils my stockings when folks think one question is *ever* sufficient on which to base a major decision. Remember my moss-covered rock? It spawned dozens of wonder-filled questions for me to pursue. Grampa calls it, ‘*Chaining questions back to the prime factor*’, or, *Expanding the prime factor by asking questions*.” It becomes an exciting adventure, I can promise you that.

“I realize my response has been seriously unorganized.

Some of that may have seemed like unnecessary side-trips, but how the brain operates and reacts to both positive strokes and to punishment is surely consequential in terms of establishing classroom atmosphere, a curriculum, and a teaching plan that actively engages the students in the planning and implementation of the most efficient approaches to educating. If religion is going to direct the educational process, we need to understand the possible – probable – biases that will keep the process from being open, fully effective – accurate – fact-based.

“For what it’s worth, Grampa and I both detest the word ‘*education*’. There is a finality to it, as if at some point one’s formal learning ceases – graduation, perhaps – that point at which we are finally fully and sufficiently *educated*. We prefer, ‘*educating*’, which implies ongoing processes that never stop but continue throughout one’s life.

“My editorial on your prejudice against certain groups is merely a reminder that this community is purposefully teaching its children that bigotry and prejudice are important, positive parts of living that the next generations need to preserve. We also prefer *living* to *life* for the same reasons I went off on before – ‘*living*’ emphasizes vital and dynamic processes suggesting personal in-put and responsibility, while ‘*life*’ suggests a static state of being, the acquisition of which, the individual had nothing to do.

“I suppose you all see, that at its base, this trial is pitting your local prejudices against real world, verifiable facts. Perhaps that is the headline these fine representatives of the fifth estate will spread across the nation atop tomorrow’s papers: *Cob Corner Pits Well Engrained Local Prejudice against the Case for Reason*. Translation: that, like your belief that white folks of European stock are the only worthy race, also, your, sit-in-a-seat-and-learn-what-the-headmaster-tells-you-to-learn educational model, is the only legitimate way to receive an adequate education. People who don’t have white skin are bad. Grampa’s approach to education is bad. In fact, I’m probably bad because I have not been privy to what you believe is the only acceptable method for educating – pardon me, in your case, fer gettin’ *edjicated*. Sorry, that was cruel

and uncalled for. It does, however, characterize the level of sophistication of what I might think of as the Cob Corner mentality. Sorry again, I suppose.

“But, allow me to continue for just a few minutes more and I promise I’ll shut up. To present the purposes of education in a matter of two hours or less, is asking a lot of a scholar, let alone an assumed-to-be poorly educated young adolescent.

“If I were reorganizing the educational system I’d take a lesson from that back woods village we visited. I have personally found I never learn and truly understand something so deeply and thoroughly as when I am teaching it to somebody else. I’d build that into the system – those *just older* kids, teaching those *just younger* kids. The teachers would be there to keep things accurate and on track – ask leading questions and suggest topics or resources as necessary.

“Positive recognition and rewards for appropriate behaviors or answers bring about change – learning – rapidly, happily, eagerly: hurtful and negative responses to errors don’t. I witnessed the approach happening in Bella’s Holla. All the kids knew how to use it. They believed that mistakes were important indications that some new approach needed to be devised and tried – like solving a puzzle or finding the right clues that allowed a mystery to be solved. Mistakes were seen positively as necessary parts of learning – merely, *mis*-takes rather than *proper*-takes. None of those kids would have ever thought about putting down another person because he made a mistake, because mistakes represented necessary steps in learning. The only people who don’t make mistakes are either those who don’t try, or, I suppose, those who *died* trying.

Believe it or not, a group chuckle arose from the bench. Lucas continued right on through it.

“In my system of educating, I’d give points for making quality mistakes – well, probably not because I doubt if I’d give points for anything.

“Another thing I noticed there, was that to a person, people were generally kind and helpful and clearly treasured each other. Jake’s success was Elmer’s success. Grampa

and I have a game we play when we enter a new settlement. We listen in on conversations to determine if it's an 'I' society, or a "We' society.

"I won the race. My dad's the richest man in town. I made the honor roll. Compare that with: We just put a new roof on the school. We're all going down to the river and swim after supper. Jack's father is ill, so we are organizing our mothers to make sure the family has food and clean clothes and our boys are keeping them in fire wood. We have found that the first kind of communities were often mired in 'I know better than you do'-driven problems and disputes – at their base, *winning* – the kinds that can hang around and weigh heavily on citizens for generations. The second, almost never. They foster cooperation and compassion. For what it's worth, this town – let me delimit that, this town's young people – seems to be a, 'We Society'. Congratulations for that.

"Returning to Bella's Holla again, something I intended to touch on earlier, not once in those several days did I ever see an adult strike a child. When there was a problem, the adults immediately characterized it as an important learning opportunity. Striking is well recognized as a lazy approach to behavior management. Teaching is the inspired, though more time-consuming approach. Striking requires no skill or training or thought – any ignoramus can hit a kid. Teaching requires commitment to taking the time to define the need or misinformation and teach to establish more useful, acceptable behavior. Striking often is the result of an adult allowing himself to succumb to anger and unleashing the primitive desire to hurt – in that case strictly selfish and never other-centered. Teaching is the result of patience and the desire to be helpful in the long term – never selfish, always other-centered.

"You know the adage, "Spare the rod, spoil the child"? I have heard reverends footnote that as being from Proverbs, 29:15, I believe. That is *not* its legitimate source. Its use in that way represents religion trying to legitimize a dismal, fear-based approach to child raising – one way that too many lazy adults claim is appropriate – by making it seem to be a directive legitimized by the Bible. It first appeared in a poem

by Samuel Butler – in the 1660s, I think. As far as what I've learned from the way Grampa has related to me, and from what I observed in Bella's Holla and hundreds of other wonderfully comfortable places, Mr. Butler's dictum could not be further from the truth. Perhaps he felt the need to legitimize the hurtful treatment from his own parents (people he was required to love under threat of Hell) as having been appropriate – for his own good. UGH!

“Sometimes people say I tend to be outspoken.”

He took a moment to regather his thoughts.

“The children and the grownups in the Holla spent a huge amount of time together because the adults believed their most important job in life was to be good models for the children and to be available to them whenever they needed something. That's how it has been between Grampa and me. Now that I'm older, I even hear Grampa thanking me for asking questions that help him think about something differently. I guess in a way, it has always been a two-way street between us. When he figured it was time for me to acquire some new skill, he set things up, so I could discover it. When I didn't understand something about the world – take prejudice, for example – I asked him to assist me, and he found wonderful ways of helping me learn about it – then think it through and make decisions about it for myself. I cannot remember a single time when Grampa insisted that I *had* to believe a single thing, or that I had to do something in a given way – like his way, or the churches, just as examples. Early in life, before I had the appropriate skills or common sense, there were, of course, safety-related ‘rules’. You probably can't imagine the various looks my creative – ‘I'll do it myself, please’ – shoe lacing strategy went through before I realized the common way was actually the most effective way. I have been so lucky not to have been forced into classrooms where somebody else tried to fashion me into his own image. That fires my risibles just thinking about it – the abject self-centeredness that projects.

“I should stop. It's getting late. That doesn't mean I'm finished. If there are one or two main points that I hope came through from all of this, they are that the child should be

involved in planning and executing his educational goals and activities at all levels, and, to be both effective and efficient, the process of educating must be approached through questions – often the student’s, other times leading questions from his . . . I don’t want to call them *teachers* because that conjures up all the things I believe are wrong about educating . . . how about *Facilitators*. Yes, I like that, the Facilitator of a child *leading* him toward those things about living and the universe that will be useful and interesting to him.”

Lucas stepped back and stopped talking.

“Thank you, Lucas. These proceedings will resume at nine o’clock in the morning. How is your throat holding out, son? We had no idea your answers would be so lengthy.”

The considerate inquiry had, surprisingly, come from Reverend Redding.

“Grampa and I talk all day long, so my vocal cords are like shoe leather. I’m used to it and doing fine. Thank you for inquiring. If any of you gentlemen develop a problem, Grampa and I learned a sure cure for a raw throat – or a cough – from a Cherokee Medicine Man down in the Indian Territory a year or so back. Equal parts of honey, brown sugar, lard and coal oil – you may call it kerosene, in these parts. Gargle warm. Try to not swallow. Not recommended for smokers or for those sitting close to a campfire or fireplace.”

Doc took notes.

The reporters smiled.

Lucas and Malcolm allowed their impatience to become obvious.

(The author remains dubious about the prescription.)

CHAPTER SIX

What's this about 'The Golden Boy'?

Before they left the court room, Lucas exchanged looks with Grampa. Lucas mouthed, 'You doing okay?'

Grampa responded, "Doing fine and *you're*" – he pointed at the boy – "doing great. Proud of you."

Lucas offered a nod and smile, then remained to watch him being escorted from the room. He was pleased with how well his Grampa was apparently being treated. Perhaps, it was the, 'Innocent until proven guilty thing', actually in action.

The reporters had thirty minutes of questions. Lucas patiently responded to each one of them, then moved up the aisle to the rear of the room and opened the outside door. He was met by applause from a large gathering – kids and adults – not all of them locals. He was startled and surprised. He didn't understand nor was he sure what he should do.

Mary Lou hurried up the stairs to rescue him. With some pride, Lucas crooked his arm in anticipation. It was the only thing he knew for sure that seemed to be an expected and acceptable part of boy/girl things – well, that and the boy's role as listener.

"How do these people have any idea what's going on in there?"

"The local paper has a reporter who comes out every fifteen minutes and briefs the crowd."

Lucas couldn't believe the interest. Mary Lou continued to speak about her real purpose for being there.

"We have a picnic arranged. Expecting maybe two hundred. We hope you'll tell us all about your fascinating life."

"Two hundred! That's some picnic! The poor little ants must be experiencing fits of apoplexy just contemplating the

task before them.”

She smiled. Clearly humor was not as important in her life as it was in his. He figured it had been fall-down, hold your stomach, kick your feet in the air, funny.

“The women have been preparing all day. It will be at the park at the east edge of town. Mr. Ford and his sons took down a section of the rail fence between it and their meadow, so everybody will fit. What do you have to say?”

He wanted to say: ‘If I am the central figure in it, would it not have been a good idea to consult me first?’ Instead he went with:

“Three things: First, I’ve been sweating like a pig in that hot old court house all day, so I need some of the guys to take me to the nearest swimming hole to clean up. Second, I am starving so a picnic sounds great. Third, I’m always glad to share about my life with Grampa.”

And share he did, until the last sandwich had been devoured, until the last drop of lemonade had been licked from a rim, until the sun had dipped too far beyond the western horizon for them to easily see their way back to town, and until the last ant had dropped from exhaustion. He related serious events, fascinating events, and humorous events, all woven in and around his amazing relationship with his Grampa. His basic message was his Grampa’s message: The very best and most important parts of living are, *first*, learning to value, revere, and love the people in your lives for however long or short that might be. And, *second*, recognizing what a privilege it is to always be able to be there when people need you.”

Lucas needed to unwind. With that in mind he hung behind as the gathering dispersed. So did Mary Lou – hang back not need to unwind or disperse.

“What you said was wonderful, Lucas.”

Silence. It was the first time Lucas had been alone in the dark of night with a girl. His physical responses were at once fascinating and puzzling. His respiration increased. His palms began to sweat. His mouth went dry. He even experienced slight trembling in his legs. All those same things had happened that time he was suddenly confronted on the trail by a mountain lion. Should he run or stay? It was

confusing and more frightening than he had expected it would be.

“You have a girlfriend?” she asked, taking his hand in both of hers. It brought his attention back on her. My, *how* it brought his attention back on her!

In answer to her question, he shook his head, eventually recognizing that was probably not an efficient mode of communicating there in the pitch dark of a moonless night.

She reached out and touched his face. He was startled and slapped it away, momentarily envisioning a five-pound mosquito positioning to tear off his cheek. He apologized and quickly replaced it, holding his hand over hers for a long moment. My how soft her skin was. He went for the truth.

“I’ve never been alone like this with a girl before.”

“I’ve never been alone like this with a boy before.”

“So, we probably need to get you back to town. Your parents will be wondering where you are.”

“I told them I was going to Hannah’s after the picnic. They won’t be worried.”

He had heard guys talk about how girls were conniving, devious, single-minded, and told untruths in ways that made them seem fully acceptable – at least to the guys.

“So, then?” he asked figuring she was engineering some alternative.

“Do you know how to kiss a girl?”

Lucas gulped – well he half-gulped, finding his dry throat was unable to bring a full-fledged gulp to fruition.

“I’m really not sure. I remember seeing my parents kissing when I was really young.”

“Want to try?” she asked.

Now, Mary Lou had *not* gone to all the trouble of arranging the late afternoon picnic, the food, the fence moving and the lagging behind, just to go unrewarded. She rose on her tiptoes and placed her lips against his. Perhaps it is genetic – at least somehow innate. The lad’s lips knew just how to respond. They responded for some time, actually – and then just a bit longer, in fact.

Grampa had told him it was not something for which he could prepare him. When it happened, it would happen and

once it had happened he would most certainly know it had happened. Once again, it happened that Grampa had been right.

Thank you, I guess. I'm not sure what to say," he offered nervously.

"Thank *you*. I guess that makes us even."

"I guess so. Anyway, that was really nice. Thank you."

"You said that."

"Oh, yes I did. Well, I meant it – the thank you. We better get back to town, now. People will wonder."

"I suppose so. You can take me to Wilson's barn at the edge of town and I'll go on to Hannah's by myself. I'll carry this basket. That will make it seem I have a reason for coming in late – staying to clean up and how heavy it is would have slowed me down."

"Sure."

And there it was: conniving, devious, single-minded, and telling untruths in ways that not only made them seem acceptable but necessary and beneficial, even. The boys seemed to know of what they spoke.

Lucas managed another three, 'Thank yous', before they reached the barn and one more to send her on her way. He had to get that trial over in a hurry. Suddenly, there were *lots* of questions for Grampa.

* * *

Reverend Redding gaveled the morning session to order. He addressed Lucas.

"As I indicated earlier, we had not anticipated that your answers would be so long – so involved – so time consuming. Perhaps today you could work to shorten them."

"So, you really don't want to hear *my* answers, is that what you are telling me? I thought in a court of law, 'the *whole* truth' was revered and required."

Redding sighed and flitted his hand across his face – the universal sign for, 'Whatever'.

"As you feel you must do, then. The first question today will come from B. L. Munson, owner of the local bank and several businesses here in Cob Corner."

"Good morning Lucas. Here is my question for you,

today. Why is Capitalism the best economic plan for a country – or if you wish, for a town such as Cob Corner?”

“Thank you for the question and the latitude suggested, but I cannot answer it.”

The men in the panel looked at one another and spoke quietly back and forth. Had they finally found a topic about which Lucas was ignorant?

Redding addressed Lucas.

“Will you explain your response, please?”

“Certainly. I could only answer the question if I agreed with the underlying premise. I do not – not entirely, that is. I would be pleased to discuss a related question, like, ‘Compare and contrast several possible economic plans governments commonly utilize and their typical consequences for the citizens’, or ‘Discuss and compare the up sides and down sides of Capitalism’ – perhaps closer to the intent of the original question.”

Again, the men put their heads together. Again, Redding offered the response.

“Very well. The second, but if it seems you are skirting the issue, I reserve the right to stop you.”

“First, it is *that issue* to which I am objecting, and Second, I figured you had that right whether I was skirting or not, Sir. Shall I proceed?”

The big man nodded and parked himself heavily onto his chair.

“I will begin with another story from our travels. A number of years ago, we stayed for a week – a little less, probably – in, Wet Mound, Ohio. It sets on the north bank of the Ohio River, between Portsmouth and Marysville. Although small in comparison to Cincinnati, Huntington and even Parkersburg, it was built on a significant, river-based economy. Up until six months before we arrived, it had flourished for generations with robust commerce and a well-ordered, safe and peaceful society. When people left, it was due to some misfortune other than dissatisfaction – like prison, death or marriage.

Doc chuckled out loud.

The first morning there, while we were enjoying our eggs, steak and fried potatoes in a rustic, riverfront restaurant, we overheard several men talking at a nearby table.

"I can keep my barrel business going for a couple more months, then I'll have to sell out, I guess."

"You can't let Lester win," another said.

"I got no choice, he's underbidding me on just about every contract that comes my way. He can't be making any money."

"Of course not. Like every other interest he has around here, his aim is to make us sell or run us out of business. By next year at this time, he'll own half the businesses in Wet Mound and have his greedy eyes on the rest. None of us can hold out much longer."

Another man added his experience.

"I hate to lose my business, of course, but mostly I hate that all my employees will be out of work. Many of those families have worked at my family's livery business for three generations."

"What we ought to do is burn his place down some night – house, warehouses, rigs, boats, the whole thing," the youngest of the group said in a rage.

"That ain't right, Charlie. Fighting wrong with more wrong just ain't right."

"Got a suggestion, then?"

"Probably not. It's only partly him – Lester. It's the system we live under – free market, supply and demand. Lester is taking advantage of it – some would say just using it better than we are. That's just a way to cover up the flaws in the system. It only works well among men of honor and integrity. It seems we have fewer and fewer of that kind. A sense of what's fair and humane has been overridden by green-eyed greed and indifference."

"But this ain't no free market," the first man said. "In a true free market, competitors streamline their operations and find less expensive sources for their products and methods of marketing, so they sell at the lowest possible price. Often it comes down to the same price even, but with better service or reputation or a more accommodating staff. This thing with

Lester ain't free market because his wealth allows him to sell way below any price us little guys can set – he can work at a loss for many months and still survive. That ain't fair competition – that's rigging the system. It's playing dirty. He is using his wealth to circumvent the system. It ought to be against the law."

"Can we pass such a law?"

"I doubt it. A man has the right to set lower prices than his competitors – it's just a fact of life doing business here in the U.S. of A."

"But it just isn't right, killing off all the smaller business – putting so many out of work – creating suffering – ruining lives."

"Lower prices are intended to mean a better life for the consumer."

"Really? We've had a fine community here for generations. Now, those who are still hanging on to their businesses have to live among growing poverty, children going hungry, men so desperate they hang themselves or put a shotgun to the roof of their mouth. A few months down the road, with Lester owning everything and setting any price or wage he wants, nobody's going to be able to afford what's available."

"And through it all, Lester gets richer with no concern for the pain and downward spiral our town is taking. He gets richer and the rest of us get poorer. We used to all pitch in and support and help each other through hard times. Now, we're too involved in just trying to survive, ourselves."

"What's our hope, then?"

"For everybody to accept the fact that the only good bottom line, is maintaining a good life for the people of our community – not selling at the lowest possible prices. I know it's only a hope and not the likelihood."

"I used to think if Lester's workers would all quit or stop going to work, he'd have to come around."

"But they make pretty good money. They have families, too. It's not fair to ask them to give that up. If they didn't show up they'd get fired. Lots of men need work – more now than ever. Heck, by this time next year, all of us here at this table

may be working for Lester.”

“I know. Like you said, even if they did the right thing for the community, it wouldn’t solve the problem. Lester’s already threatening to take all the manufacturing to some of his other factories up and down the river. He will happily kill our town and never think twice about it.”

The men shook their heads and dug deep into their pockets for change to pay for the coffee. The owner of the restaurant waved it off. He wasn’t doing well, but all the coffee the five of them drank that morning hadn’t cost him three cents. The men needed their money to feed their children and pay their bills. He couldn’t keep that up indefinitely, but when he went under, he was determined to go under with integrity and dignity – things the Lester fellow clearly did not possess or even desire. He was an unprincipled, despicable – if financially successful – thief.

Lucas walked to a spot close to Mr. Munson.

“I understand you own a number of businesses, so I’m sure you understand my underlying point – few economic systems can be so easily abused by unprincipled, greed-driven people as can the capitalistic, free market system. When you phrased your original question, I assume you were placing it within the confines of an integrity-based community.

Not requiring or really allowing an answer, Lucas moved away, speaking.

“I have – myself – devised a modified, free market system in which, among other things, no owner or manager may earn more than ten times what his entry level worker can earn. As I play it out, I see it doing several things, in addition to ameliorating the growing, ‘haves vs have-nots’ problem in our society. If the owner wants to make more money, personally, he has to raise the lowest level income. If he does that, he will be forced to raise income right on up the line, of course. It could result in improved products to induce more sales, and more efficient procedures to lower the cost of the products. And – this is the part I really love – the greediest of the people in charge – the one wanting to accumulate the most for himself – will eventually be paying his workers the

maximum possible that his company income will allow. Owners' greed is turned around for the benefit of the employees. I love it! The first time I saw how that was where the system was heading, I almost wet my pants, I can tell you that.

“Unfortunately, since the people who make the laws are all too often members of the greedy, monied class, initiating such a plan represents an uphill battle. I hope that recognition of the situation and the realization there is a solution, will energize voters to elect only fair-minded men with a sense of integrity and compassion for all the citizens – all the other human beings. The dark side of human nature being what it is, I have to question that it will just happen by itself.

“Here's an idea that just wormed its way into my head. Such things usually evolve as I think them through and seldom stay where they were originally. Think with me about this: What if nobody could hold office if their income level was more than the median income in the community or state? I will need to think that one through, but if it produced the reverse greed thing, I can see massive reorganization of wealth – all within a capitalist system. Probably need to change *median* to some specific, community-based dollar amount and review it regularly, since *median* will just rise and fall with the increases or decreases in income and is not affected by the highest and lowest incomes. Better yet, perhaps, governing by a council made up proportionally according to the income levels of the community – if 1% of the community earns X amount then 1% of the council membership would be drawn from that group, if 40% made – well, you get the idea. Have, maybe, five or six income categories. What I'm pointing out is that there are viable options that can save the positive aspects of capitalism. I hope you men get as excited by new ideas as I do. Just now, thinking that through thrilled me. It adds wonderful sizzle to life. Then, the revisions and fine tuning that must follow also become a fascinating challenge. I'll lose a good deal of sleep just over the possibilities I just proffered – whether they actually hold any usefulness or not.

“If you want, I can hold forth about the new Socialism of Marx and Engels. Grampa and I believe that it also needs

modification, the human spirit withers and dies if it cannot work toward goals that are personally important to the individual. I believe at least a tad of capitalism must be merged with socialism to make socialism work – each person allowed – encouraged – to work for the basic good of everybody but, *also*, having the opportunity to work to allow some limit of personal creativity to produce some degree of additional personal gain, legitimately. Hmm. Perhaps some percent above their usual income.

“Am I to continue?”

“I think we have been able to grasp the essence of your position and understanding of the concept contained in the question asked of you and, of course, modified *by* you. This court is in recess until 1:00 this afternoon. The court also wants to make it known that Malcolm McCabe is being released on his own recognizance. If for any reason that does not seem to work out, Mr. McCabe will be sentenced to twelve straight hours of listening to his grandson hold forth on the most esoteric topic I can imagine – tracing the family trees of dark-green and yellow-green asparagus comes to mind.”

During that response, Lucas’s expression turned from the broadest possible smile at the good news, to that of complete puzzlement at what just may have been Redding’s attempt at humor. In the end, his face brightened. He approached the bench, looked up, his brow furrowed, and spoke in low tones.

“Sir, did I detect the smallest trace of humor in your last remark? Doc is still here in case you are experiencing a fever.”

Redding stood, looked Lucas in the face and without so much as a twitched cheek, strode out of the room.

Lucas trotted across the expanse to his grandfather. Malcolm stood, and they melted together in a grand and lengthy embrace.

“Did you hear him? You’re free.”

“I haven’t agreed to it yet, son. That punishment he suggested suddenly seems overwhelming – excruciating, perhaps.”

The old man put on a shiver.

“Grampa!”

“Lucas!”

“What do you think is going on, Grampa?”

“I think you have intrigued the man right out of his long, black, stockings.”

“Do you think the trial is over?”

“With that bird, I wouldn’t bet either way. I’ve been watching him closely. Near as I can tell, he fluctuated between just two reactions – boiling rage and absolute wonder. Do they still have steaks down the street?”

“They do, and mine are being paid for by the court – so, two for one, I guess. We have two hours. You up for one, I take it.”

“Lead the way. Their stew is delicious, here, but it *is* stew.”

“Okay. We will leave by the back door. You won’t believe the attention all this has focused on us.”

Malcolm raised his eyebrows, suggesting he *just might* believe it.

They left. They made their way east, down an alley. They hurried across Main Street several blocks from the mob that had taken up residence on the street in front of the court house. Lucas pointed.

“See the signs people are carrying with your name on them, Grampa.”

“I see more with *your* name on them, I believe.”

Lucas stopped to look.

“Well, I’ll be. Why? This isn’t about me. Reverend Redding made it clear that it is you and *not* I who is on trial.”

“I just doubt if the girls carrying the LUCAS signs decorated with little hearts, give a hoot about the old man, son. My best guess is that love is in the air and in the air and in the air. . .”

He floated his moving fingers up and away from his body.

“I guess I get your point, but I don’t understand. It does remind me that I have several questions to discuss with you. Perhaps they can wait until tonight. They refer to the fact that I kissed a girl last evening, and really, really liked it, just to get

you primed for what's coming."

The meal was fine. The conversation, as usual, was beyond fine.

"I have a place fixed up in the top of a tall tree in the woods south of town. I'm sure you will be more comfortable there tonight on a good, stable, solid surface that you know you can count on."

Grampa was not all that certain, but he offered no reservations about it.

With lunch finished, Lucas made a suggestion.

"I have a private sitting place up on the roof here – to keep away from others. I'm not sure I could ever learn to live in a town on a permanent basis – there are *so many* people, saying *so many* words, and none of them seem to understand the *first thing* about personal space – boundaries – privacy. They actually touch up against you as they pass on the walk."

Grampa chuckled. He removed his wallet and got the eye of the proprietor. The man approached them.

"I'm ready to pay our bill."

"No bill, Sir. Because of this trial, several hundred people have come to town. Out of town folks need to eat and rent beds for the night." He pointed upstairs. "I should be paying you for being here."

"I am used to paying for what I use, Sir."

"I'm sure you are. But, please. It means a lot to me to have you let me do what I can to cast aside this sham of a trial."

"Sham? Will you explain?"

The man – 110 pounds soaking wet – became confidential, took a seat at the table, and leaned forward on his boney elbows. He lowered his voice and looked back and forth between them as he continued.

"Reverend Redding has been losing his power, his control here in the Corner, for a decade now. He's managed to corral both the church and the government under his care – under his thumb, really. It's not easy for a small community to fight that – he controls the people's behavior, their taxes and their souls. I guess you get my meaning."

"*And*," Lucas added, "the education of their children."

“Yes, and that.”

“I am still not sure how you mean ‘sham’ regarding the trail,” Malcolm said.

“He has to find you guilty to regain his status and power. From everything I hear, it is not going as he expected thanks to the boy, here. I’m sure he is boiling angry inside. For a man of the cloth, he has one ferocious temper – just ask his grown sons about how he handled them.”

“Why would he release Grampa, then?”

“Maybe to show us all here that he remains our compassionate leader. Maybe hoping to get some of the pressure off him that the papers are piling on him here in Kansas *and* around the country. Have you seen any of the headlines?”

The two of them shook their heads.

He went to the cash register counter, removed a stack of papers from beneath it, and brought them back, reading the headlines as he dropped each one on the table.

Young Prince Goldilocks with the Golden Tongue Bashes Court.

The Golden Boy Confounds ‘Cobmen’ Once Again

Golden Boy on way to Saving Public Education in Kansas.

Golden Genius Continues to Humiliate Kansas Courtroom

Congressman Pledges to Investigate Golden Boy’s Concerns

“My goodness, son. You have stirred up a hornet’s nest.” Grampa said.

“Was that wrong? I didn’t set out to do that – well, maybe, sort of, probably.”

He offered a shrug and a sheepish grin.

“What you are doing seems to have been way overdue here in Cob Corner and, apparently, in lots of other places. We will call it . . . let’s see . . . ‘trugress’.”

“Trugress?”

“*Truth plus progress* – two things that too many places seem to be missing these days.”

Lucas addressed the owner.

“I don’t understand the Golden Boy references. Do you?”

The man sorted through the papers, pulling one out. He slid his finger down the front page.

“Here. This may be where it started. How one reporter with a knack for the flowery words, described you in a New York City paper.”

Lucas scooted his chair toward his Grampa’s so they could read the column together.

The lad, facing forward, rose in front of us, his long, golden hair brushing his broadening shoulders. There was an elegance about him. His carriage was fluid and confident. His arms and hands moved in perfect synchronicity with his words – perfectly chosen words, his tongue as golden as his heavenly hair. When he turned to face us, the first of his handsome features to reach out and garner our attention were his eyes, deeply set and blue – that blue of the sky, which emerges once the reds and yellows, pinks and Fuchsias of the breaking dawn fade, with pride, so they can grant us our first peek at the heavens that will watch over our new day. So it is, that young Lucas McCabe – The Golden Boy – presents himself as he defends his Grandfather against the blatantly unjust charges lodged against him here in Cob Corner, Kansas.

“Wow!”

Lucas slumped back in his chair, dumbfounded.

“Why on Earth would anybody concoct such a story about me?” I’m just a kid, saying what I have to say.”

His Grampa offered an intervention of sorts.

“That’s what it says, doofus. Read it again! Just ignore

the flowery, dollar words.”

Malcolm turned toward the owner.

Thank you for sharing that. Might we purchase this paper?”

“Of course. Please. Take as many as you want. On me.”

“This one will suffice. I plan on clipping that paragraph, so I can show it to the lad’s own teenage son, twenty years from now.”

Lucas pretended to count on his fingers.

“Looks like you’ve set a pretty heavy agenda for me during these next six or seven years. Procreation is just about the most significant responsibility I can imagine, but, I will do my darndest to get the job done.”

It had not been the response Grampa had expected from his little boy, still it did not really surprise him in the context of his young man. Where had time gone? He chuckled on for some time. It became a wet cheek moment. Lucas just watched, pleased and fascinated by the response.

Presently, they stood. Grampa continued speaking.

“You have made your case, Sir,” he said to the owner, returning his wallet to his pocket. “Let us know if there are things we can do in return.”

“Jist don’t muzzle that boy.”

Malcolm nodded, thinking, ‘sure, like that is possible’. He suddenly realized the tremendous responsibility people were laying on Lucas, apparently as far away as New York City. During his forced exclusion from the world, the old man had no way of knowing how it was coming down outside the courtroom. Perhaps it was good the boy had been separating himself from the locals when he could.

“May I use your backdoor again, Sir?” Lucas asked.

“Of course. It’ll let you *in* as well as *out* if you’ll just knock. I’ve seen how they all flock around you. Must be terribly wearing on you.”

Grampa shook the man’s hand and followed his grandson out the back door and up to the roof by way of a ladder attached permanently to the building.

“See how great it is up here. On my belly I can keep

track of what's going on all over town and nobody can see me. I usually lay on my back, though, and look up at the sky while I think . . . or nap."

"More naps than thinking, I hope. Can't have you wear out that fascinating brain you've been putting on display – Golden Boy."

"It's nothing different from what the two of us talk about every day, Grampa."

"You know that, and I know that, but clearly the rest of Kansas *doesn't* know that."

It was worth gentle grins. Regardless, Lucas was mostly at a loss about the commotion he was causing.

"I will appreciate it if that was the first and last time that nickname passes between us."

"Certainly – G B, then, is it?"

"GRAMPA !"

They chuckled themselves back into their usually good-natured relationship. Things grew quiet and thoughtful.

Lucas managed himself into a position on his side, head cradled in his palm, facing his Grampa who sat, resting his back against the chimney. It felt good to be close again. It felt good to be enjoying silence, together, again. The way Lucas remembered it, some middle-eastern philosopher – Buddha, perhaps – had said something like: 'Never break a silence unless you are sure it will improve the silence.' Several philosopher-types had claimed it as their own since. It had become one of the rules for living Lucas and Grampa treasured between them.

A bit later, as they approached the crowd waiting in the street in front of the courthouse, the throng turned and moved toward them. Lucas and Grampa neither ignored them nor encouraged them. *Minimally acknowledged*, would best describe their behavior.

At 12:50 they made their way through the crowd, climbed the steps, and took their places inside the courtroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Negro Boy – Huddled and Quaking

Redding gaveled the session to order. It was a more tentative rendering than on previous occasions. He looked out over the group of reporters. What had amounted to no more than a handful at the outset, had grown to nearly three dozen, some representing newspapers from as far as San Francisco, Dallas, Chicago and New York City. To meet the failure of the Cob Corner telegraph, the Cumberland Company had established a temporary, pony dispatch service – three times a day – like the old pony express, which carried messages from Cob Corner as far as the Kansas City area. As someone had predicted, the local telegraph service had been overwhelmed – in both directions. Trains ran but twice a week so were relatively useless, other than to populate the town with its growing number of reporters and inquisitive visitors.

Redding seemed uncomfortable at what he saw. By then, he had to have known that he had overplayed his hand and, of course, that in the first place he had greatly overestimated the hand he believed he had to play. Perhaps, *underestimating* his adversary(ies) would state it more accurately. The reporters took seats and quieted. Redding acknowledged Malcolm with a nod and turned forward to address Lucas.

“Since, in past questions, you have tended to restate them to fit your understanding of this proceeding, this afternoon, instead of a question, I will provide you a topic, with which you may gallop off in any direction you wish. The topic will be, Leadership.

Could it be that Redding really *did* possess a whimsical side?

“An excellent choice, Sir, since it permeates most of what we have been discussing – education, society, government, law for order and, well, you know the topics we have been engaging up to this point.”

“Excuse me, son, but you have said it before – law *for* order. Is the phrase not law *and* order?”

“Not *my* phrase, Sir.”

The members of the gallery chuckled.

“The connecting word ‘and’ suggests the words it bridges are separate entities that must be forced into a relationship. My word, ‘for’, suggests there is a dynamic connection – a flow – between them from the start. Why do we have laws? To ensure order, for one thing. Laws that don’t establish, maintain, or improve the order in citizens lives, are most often antithetical to a humanity friendly social order. Hence, Law *for* Order. Is that sufficient, Sir?”

“Yes. Thank you. Proceed.”

As had become his habit, Lucas walked to the window and gazed out, presumably to organize his thoughts. Whether it was that or merely a device for growing his sense of the dramatic was not known.

“Basically, Leadership can be separated into several, broad, categories – often dichotomies. Most obviously, I suppose, *Benevolent Leadership* versus *Oppressive Leadership*. The first focuses on the interests and wellbeing of the people – those who are being led. The second focuses on the leader’s own best interests. Benevolent Leadership can, I think, be broken down even further into *Imposed Benevolence* and *Emerged Benevolence*. Grampa and I have visited villages and even cities that will illustrate all three: *Oppressive Leadership*, *Imposed Benevolence* and *Emerged Benevolence*. I listed them from least humanity-friendly to most humanity-friendly.

“About a year ago, perhaps more, we came upon a small community of several hundred people – *Cavern, Utah*. It was in a mountainous region. The air was clear, and the clouds were high, driven upward on streams of intense heat

radiating from the desert floor covered in sparkling sand and white rock. For most of two days we had been crossing a rather unfriendly plain – hard baked dirt and blistering hot sand, scrub plants, little water, and animals that wisely confined their worldly sorties to the cooler darkness of nighttime. I was baffled to determine what food sources sustained them. My eventual observation was that they seemed to eat each other, and I have no idea on what flora those lowest on the food chain might have dined.

“It grew cold at night in contrast to the sapping heat of the day – as much as a 60-degree shift. Late afternoon, one day, we decided to climb part way up a mountain, just to our north, where we could see trees and a lush plant growth with water in ponds and streams. We pressed on past eight o’clock, finding ample kindling for a fire where there had been virtually none on the plain. A fine spot came into view near a tiny stream – rill or rivulet, more appropriately – protected by a rock shelf overhead and huge boulders to each side. There were trees. We soon had a good fire going – *not as good a thing as we had figured it would be.*”

“We had just finished eating and I was cleaning the dishes in the str . . . riv . . . rivu . . . running water (several of the panel members smiled) when we were put upon by four armed men. Their guns remained holstered.”

“What ya doin’ here?” the leader said through his thick, brown beard.

It was difficult to tell which was worse: the fright they instilled, or the fact they reeked from months without bathing. It took no more than a moment for me to settle on the first. The man continued.

“This mountain belongs to Jesse Lambert and he don’t cotton to no strangers.”

“We apologize, then. We had no idea we were trespassing. We came across no signs to indicate that. If we may stay until daybreak we will be gone.”

That had been Grampa.

“You’ll come with us – now. Get your stuff together.”

“We certainly mean no harm, Sir.”

“My pappy taught me ta never trust nobody that called ya, Sir.”

Grampa looked at me and we traded shrugs.

They herded us on up the mountain to a large flat area with tiers of smaller flat, ledges above and to the east and west. There were armed guards along the way and narrow passes ideal for managing the flow of visitors – those of us that Jesse Lambert apparently didn’t like. They were neither friendly nor were they in any way abusive. In fact, they helped manage our things up the trail. The main level area – shelf, I suppose – was 100 yards wide and variously 35 to 75, front to back. Once there on the open space, the nearly full moon lit the area as if it were dusk.

We were taken to a rock building near the center of what I can only describe as a huge oasis floating there in the clouds – a large pond, grass across the entire area, a number of trees sprouting from mounds of soil. It had clearly taken years to cart the soil up from the valley and quarry the stone used to erect the buildings – I counted nearly two dozen on that level and considerably more than that when combined with those on the ledges above. The leader of our captors went into the building, soon returning with a relatively well dressed, and far less odoriferous man in his fifties. Two young children followed, hanging back. Then a woman appeared in the doorway. A family. Perhaps lots of families. A town, I figured.

“I understand you are trespassers,” he said, circling us, appearing to assess us as he spoke.

“Unintentional, I assure you,” Grampa said. “We were trying to avoid the nighttime chill and gather wood for a fire – heat against the cold night.”

“From where do you come?”

“A lot of places. We are travelers.”

“Ah, vagabonds!”

“Yes. An even better term.”

I was amazed he knew the word, although thinking about it, his English was impeccable.”

“Originally, from where?”

“Galena, Illinois.”

“Home of U. S. Grant,” he offered. “A great fighting man. I admire fighting men.”

“Had I been in charge between Grampa and me, I would have pulled out the letter from President Grant that Grampa carried, but Grampa had decided otherwise. He enjoyed such games. Jesse continued.”

“You knew the man, then?”

Before Grampa could answer, two more disheveled looking men came up, dragging another man between them.

“Found old Ben in the garden drunk as a skunk, Jesse. It’s his third time this month.”

“Ben, you understand?” Jesse asked, addressing the man, face to face.

“Ben nodded and unsuccessfully managed a short-lived, mostly feigned struggle against the men who restrained him.”

“Thirty stripes with the cat-o-nine tails. No food or water for two days.”

“It had been Jesse’s pronouncement. We were beginning to see how things were. Jesse turned to us as the man was taken away.”

“I apologize for the interruption. You will be my guest for the night and may leave in the morning. You can tell me all about U.S. Grant. Have you eaten?”

“Yes, thank you.”

He turned to his wife – well, the woman, at least.”

“Bring water. They must be thirsty.”

He motioned us inside.

“Please take seats.”

It was pleasant. Chairs, tables, a bookcase, rug, oil lamps. The children followed and stayed close to us as if we were oddities that needed to be observed at very close range. Jesse offered what seemed to be his full explanation about what we had witnessed with Ben.

“I can understand old Ben. Feel for him even. I have a rule here – no drunkenness. But he’s understandably upset, I suppose. His son was caught stealing several months back and I had to hang him. That’s my law.”

“May I ask how old his son was?” I asked, slowing

moving my hands to my neck.

“Seventeen. How old are you – fifteen?”

“Fifteen next month. Good judge of age. Does this place have a name?”

“Cavern. I know, you don’t see a cavern. It’s way on up the mountain – where we lived while we brought the ledges to life.”

“I admire what you have done, here,” Grampa said.

“Your fine command of the English language surprises me,” I said. “I apologize if that is offensive.”

‘Jesse smiled as he picked up the youngest child and sat him on his lap. They traded kisses.’

“This is Manny – my youngest. That is Amy. My wife is Emma. You have questions about this place. I don’t tend to answer questions. I will tell you this. I studied to be a physician in Philadelphia. I was required to serve in the Northern Army medical corps during the war between the states. My observations at the University were amplified in the army – most people in power are greedy, self-centered, and stupid. The masses need strong, benevolent leaders. So, I came west to establish this community where I make fair laws, I enforce the laws justly, we are happy, contented people. The citizens have few decisions to make because I make most of them for them. Like most people, they are too inept to make good ones, anyway. They are good people, don’t get me wrong. We are a well-organized and efficient community. I love my people and they, me.”

Lucas turned to more directly address the bench.

“We talked on for some time – philosophy, science, politics – being careful not to ask questions that put the man on the defensive – or us on his gallows. I could have crushed much of his logic in ten minutes, but Grampa gave me his look indicating it was time for good sense over triumph. I extended that to mean, survival over instant death. As you see, Cavern, Utah illustrates a case of Benevolent Leadership of the *Imposed* variety. Some writers use the term, Oppressive Benevolent Leadership. In this instance, any downsides from the oppression were clearly ignored – allowed – by the

citizens, in favor of the many advantages rendered by the benevolent leader.

“Jesse had clearly established a loving community, which he believed met most everybody’s needs. He hadn’t, of course. His definition of freedom had shrunk the meaning to include only those freedoms he granted them, although he did grant enough for them to apparently live happily. Their lives were dependable – his rules were clear and well defined as were the consequences for breaking them. He was apparently consistent in their enforcement. He provided safety there on the mountain and had organized their lives around adequate sources of game, water, and garden products. He saw to their every medical need. The time most of us spend working to improve our society, culture and government, was freed up for other things – like enjoying family and a very good, if somewhat restricted, life style.

“He was not a religious leader using that at his source of power – which, typically, would have included extreme fear; it is how most religions control their members. His power came from the people’s willingness to live within his boundaries and from their appreciation for how well he took care of them. The history books I’ve read suggest such arrangements don’t last past one generation. People, even those who have not experienced full freedom, soon come to feel the need for that – especially the young. It seems to be a part of the human make-up and social evolution. Teens and young adults rebel, pushing the social limits. When the upheaval settles, most of what was, remains. A few things change – improve – and meld with the rest for the following generation to once more evaluate and restructure around the edges.

“I have to wonder if there was punishment for trying to leave. It could be that wasn’t necessary since they had a good life and probably no skills of any value away from there. I suppose he never had to fear an uprising against him. Like he said, he was loved. I also have to wonder what his plan was for when, in old age, he became incompetent to continue as the physician – go kidnap another one, maybe?”

Lucas surveyed the men behind the bench.

“Perhaps, I should ask if there are questions before going on.”

Silence.

“Hearing none, then, I want to introduce you to Middleburg County, Alabama, population 11,000. It’s County Seat was Middleburg – no surprise, I suppose. The only three words a citizen really needed to know there were, *Sheriff Cantrell, Sir* – Moses Cantrell. At age 71, Moses had been Sheriff for 50 years. At 21 he had assumed the position upon the death of his father, Abraham Cantrell. Moses was a smiling, glad handing, white, Southern Baptist on the outside and an evil, greedy, violent, unprincipled man on the inside. His public nickname was ‘King’ – he encouraged its use, so, of course, it got used – especially in his presence. I won’t repeat here in a court of law the nicknames one would hear in the shadows. Heard aloud, any one of them would be the cause for jail time and a year or more on the chain gang picking cotton in his fields.”

I was a few days past my eleventh birthday when we came upon the community one hot, August afternoon. I was anticipating the piece of cake I had missed on my special day, the previous Monday. Grampa is a lot of things, but a cake baker, he is not. We entered Middleburg. On first sight, it appeared dirt poor. The hit and miss graveled Main Street was wide, two blocks long, with mostly unpainted, two-story, clapboard buildings rowed up, shoulder to shoulder, along both sides. Just back from Main were several narrow streets carrying out a random, unplanned pattern. There were connecting roads that seemed to have just happened – more of convenience than esthetic design. The one piece of real estate that stood out was the Sheriff’s office on the Main Street. It was single story, painted bright red and displayed a massive sign above the door: in large letters, Sheriff Moses Cantrell, Middleburg County, Alabama. Underneath, in smaller, but clearly legible letters, Passing Through, make it quick. Staying, get permission from the Sheriff.

At three o’clock in the afternoon, the street was empty except for two horses at the Sheriff’s office and another

hitched in a shady spot at the watering trough in front of the restaurant. I addressed Grampa.

“Doesn’t sound like a friendly place. Seems to live up to the rumors we heard back down the road. Didn’t think the stories could be true – one man so evil. Where are all the people?”

“In response to your comment,” he said, “I agree, not friendly. In answer to your question, I don’t know. It is not uncommon in the South to take a mid-afternoon break during the heat of the day.”

He pointed, and we headed for the restaurant. It had a roof extending out over a raised porch. There was a large window on each side of the door. There were two, well-worn, wide, wooden steps leading up to the equally wide, well-worn, wooden porch. Typically, in such a situation, we would have left our bags and such outside. That time Grampa kept his with him. So did I, of course. Nothing about the place seemed hospitable. Inside, however, that chilling impression faded.

We were met by a jovial, rotund man in his early fifties, wiping his hands on a full-length, surprisingly clean, white apron. He offered Grampa a hand for shaking and then helped relieve us of our baggage, which he stowed with some care next to the counter. Despite the horse outside, the room was empty.”

“Sit anywhere you like. There’s been a nice breeze back there in the corner between the north and east windows this afternoon. Will this be drinks or food?”

“Both please.”

“Menu’s on the wall over the passthrough from the kitchen.” He pointed. “You being new here to Middleburg, I need to tell you the Sheriff requires passer throughs to pay when they order. Cuts down on problems and the Sheriff don’t like problems.”

“That will pose no problem for us,” Grampa said. “How about two thick steaks, medium-well, with all the trimmings. If you have lemonade, we’ll take two.”

The owner accompanied us to the corner table and helped Grampa with the chair – considerate I thought, even if

unnecessary. Oddly, at that point, Grampa offered a second shake with the man. Perhaps just his way of thanking the man for his assist. He was soon back with two tall glasses and a pitcher of lemonade. I figured he understood about what men needed. I stood up and poured, carefully. I saw something out of the corner of my eye – a shadow, maybe, moving just outside the open window. I craned my neck to get a better look. I was intrigued. I stretched on tiptoes to take it all in.

There in the darkened area below the window, behind a large bush, huddled a Negro boy – 15 or 16, I figured. He was wearing nothing but skimpy, way too tattered, white, knee-length shorts. There may have been blood on his shoulder. I couldn't make it out for sure in the dim light of the shadows. He was looking up. I smiled and nodded. He offered a faint, quick smile. He put his finger to his lips. I nodded, repeating the gesture, and sat back down. If I had ever seen terrified, that was terrified.

I spoke quietly across the table.

"Grampa. Just below this window is a quivering, Negro boy – older than I. He gave me the 'don't speak' sign – finger over lips. He may have blood on him."

Grampa scooted back a bit, stretched and stood up, putting on a show of a kind. He moved close to the window and, first, scanned the sky, gradually working his gaze toward the ground.

"I see him," Grampa said out of the corner of his mouth. "I think it's time for you to ask the owner where the outhouse is. See if the boy will talk with you. Make it quick and if you need to make arrangements with him, work out something specific."

I was back on my feet immediately and walked to the passthrough, locating the man – the owner, we assumed. He directed me out the back door. Once outside I looked around to make sure nobody was watching, then I bent low and hurried along the side of the building just under the windows toward the big bushes. The boy pulled back from me as I arrived."

"I'm friendly. Clearly, things aren't good for you. Can I help? My Grampa and I are just passing through town. We're

from up north.”

I hoped that disjointed set of carefully selected facts would telegraph a genuinely friendly intent on my part. Apparently, it had.

“I run away. I can’t take it no more. I got stripes fer sleepin’ in the field. My ma’s sick and I’ve been up wit her all night fer a week. I don’t know what ta do. Runnin’ wasn’t a good idea, but now that I run, I can’t go back. If he finds me he’ll kill me for sure and certain. That always happen to runaways – they jist disappears.”

“He, meaning Cantrell?” I asked.

The boy nodded, wide-eyed in thoroughgoing fear.

“You make it sound like you’re a slave,” I continued, puzzled. “The slaves have been freed.”

“Not here in Middleburg Country. Every darkie belong to Sheriff Cantrell. He work us in his cotton fields – day break ta dark.”

“But that’s against the law.”

“Not against Cantrell’s law and that the only law these parts knows.”

“Grampa and I will try to help you. We can come back after dark and take you away.”

“I can’t stay here. We’d never make it out a town along Main street tonight. Cantrell’s men is everywhere.”

“He raised up just enough to look through an opening in the bush.”

“See the old green silo, way over there to the south? Edge of town.”

“Yes.”

“That where I’ll be after sunset. It is dangerous to help me. He is ruthless.”

“I was surprised at his use of the word, ‘ruthless’, but considering the conditions he had just described, I figured he had reason to know it.”

“Can I see your back?”

“No. It would make you puke. Go now. Thank you.”

“What’s your name?”

“Best you don’t know it. Believe me.”

I hurried back inside. A basket of rolls had arrived

along with silverware and small bread plates. At least the town was not totally uncivilized. I related what I had learned. There was no question but that we would do what we could. We chose not to discuss plans there. I secreted a roll to the window sill and dropped it outside. I hoped he was still there. The steaks arrived but neither of us was hungry. We ate. To have not, would have seemed suspicious. Actually, the more I ate the more my appetite returned.

The man removed our plates when we had finished and asked if there would be anything more. Grampa said no. I was momentarily saddened, having hoped for the cake. I was also puzzled that the man had not required the money up front as he had indicated.

“Give me just a minute longer to finish my drink,” Grampa said to me.

“I turned, to look out the window wanting to look down at the boy but knowing I didn’t dare risk it, so I studied the view for some time. As I turned back to Grampa, I got the surprise of my life – a cake with eleven candles, flames flickering.”

“How in the world, Grampa?”

“I looked up at the man in the apron.

“Thank you so much, Sir. This is just the best.”

For those few moments, I allowed my concern about the runaway boy to slip into the back of my mind. I blew out the candles – one extended blow. It took all the air I could muster. I hoped my lungs would re-inflate. They did. I made a wish even though I didn’t believe in such foolishness – it had to do with the Negro boy. The man cut the cake and served it – an extra big slice for me. For such an unfancy place, things had certainly become fancy.

“We’ll take the rest to go if you can arrange that, please?” Grampa said.

“The man nodded and left with the cake plate.”

“I really don’t understand, Grampa. Telepathy?”

“Grampa chuckled.”

“You can figure this out. What things have been out of place since we sat down and I’m excluding the obvious.”

He hitched his head toward the window.

“Well, let’s see. The owner didn’t require the money up front that he had indicated you would need to give him. And . . . You shook his hand a second time – awkwardly, if I may offer an observation. I got it. That handshake. You passed him a note about the cake.”

“I did. There is one more thing, however.”

In a fully puzzling move, he raised his right hand into the air like I used to have to do in first grade in order to speak – I hated that! The man returned with one hand behind his back. He stopped, did sort of a bow-thing directly to me, and brought his hand forward. It contained a small, long, narrow, package wrapped in colorful paper. He handed it to me. I took it and thanked him. My heart raced. I looked at Grampa. I unwrapped it – relatively carefully I figured for a new eleven-year-old boy. A hunting knife with a six-inch blade in a substantial, hand-embossed, leather scabbard – the designs were Cherokee.”

“I don’t care how you managed this. Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

“You’re eleven. Time for a boy to have a knife. There will be rules. Later, about them.”

As I loosened and rearranged my belt, so I could attach the scabbard, the man offered Grampa a dollar in change. I figured he must have slipped him a five-dollar bill along with the note – the meals, the cake, the knife and the wrapping. That would have been about right. We moved to the door. By hefting our canteens, I could tell he had filled them for us. What a nice human being he was. I thanked the man, again. As we turned to go outside he offered a piece of advice.

“If you stay in town overnight, you will need to obtain a Cantrell Coin over at the Sheriff’s office. Don’t cost nothin’, but everybody in the county has to carry one. Expect a short lecture when you pick them up. If you’re caught without it, you will be in big trouble. Our sheriff is not known for his kindness.”

“Just what kind of big trouble?” I asked.

“Depends on his mood. Moses is a very moody man. Maybe overnight in jail – maybe a beatin’. Like I said, he’s a moody man.”

“We are on our way out of town right now. I think we

just picked up our pace, in fact,” Grampa said trying to add a humorous twist to what seemed like it could become a deadly serious situation.

“If you’re stopped by one of his deputies, use my name as a character reference – Joseph Cantrell. My greatest sorrow in life is that I’m his first cousin.”

I wanted to pick that man’s brain all night long and figure a way to fix things there in Middleburg County. Instead, we set a steady stride west on Main. We were not stopped or accosted. I continued to fear for the Negro boy’s fate.

Lucas took a step toward the Bench.

“Speaking of Lemonade, as I was. My lips are parched, as yours must also be in this dry, oppressive, heat. May I request a short break for water?”

The break was granted. Redding even made it fifteen minutes long.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Apple Pie and Bacon

Reverend Redding and the other members of the panel returned and took their seats behind the bench. Their expressions and bearing suggested mounting weariness. Redding ignored the gavel. Instead, he motioned – twirling his index finger – for Lucas to continue. He began.

“I thank you for that, and my lips thank you for that.

“I believe before the break I had us leaving Middleburg.

A hundred yards or so outside the city limits we left the road to our left and crossed a field, circling back in the general direction of the green silo. We drew to within 30 yards of what we discovered was a deteriorating old, wooden structure that had most likely witnessed multiple passages of both Confederate and Federal soldiers during the war. It was a few minutes after four – four hours until sunset. Grampa pointed to our right – a grove of trees and bushes. It was an ideal place to wait out the sunlight, hidden from all but the rabbits and ground squirrels that were about to share their stompin’ grounds with us. They had no vote in the matter.

I pestered Grampa to lay on the rules about using my knife. They were all reasonable and, in fact, instructive. Grampa’s rules have always been reasonable and instructive. They’ve always been easy to make my own because he always helped me understand why they were necessary. While I took time to get the hang of using it, Grampa took a nap. Once again, that was him telling me that he trusted me. I managed some more cake, which required more water, which

eventually required a trip just a bit deeper into the woods.

After he awakened, we shared more of the cake, which, on top of the steak dinner, would hold us. I could tell he really wasn't into more cake, but he understood I just needed to extend the celebration a bit longer. I would only ever be eleven once.

The sun was gone by 7:45. We waited until 8:15. We left most of our things in the woods and made our way along a wire fence toward the silo. Though relatively small, it sat atop a gentle rise, so it stood out plainly against the dimming horizon. It was 20 or so feet tall and 8 feet in diameter. As was our style when I was that age, Grampa led, and I attached my left hand to the rear of the waistband on his trousers. Several times he raised his right hand to indicate a pause. Then we would continue. We assumed it was empty of whatever might be stored in a silo in central Alabama. It was.

Presently, we came upon an opening – a hole in the side at ground level – the door, I figured, if silos had them. Once inside, Grampa lit a lantern, turned low. It was enough. Interestingly, I thought, he held it up close to his face and pulled me into the circle of light. It came to me. The boy needed to see it was us before he showed himself. That was just how it worked.

The boy was sitting cross-legged on the floor. He looked up at me and pointed to Grampa.

“This is my grandfather. I mentioned him to you when we talked behind the restaurant. We are here to see how we can help.”

With that transition completed, Grampa knelt beside the boy and spoke in his always gentle manner.

“I understand you have a back we need to attend to. We brought water to cleanse it and salve to cover it. That will help keep it from getting infected and ease the pain.”

With gradually lessening hesitation, the boy began turning so his back was facing our direction, but not so far that he couldn't keep an eye on us. Grampa pointed to scars from previous strappings without mentioning them. The boy had been right; I wanted to puke. Grampa urged the boy's shoulders forward and slowly poured water across the open

wounds. He then patted the area dry with a towel.

"I know it hurts, son, but we must get it dry for the salve to stick. The wounds were relatively clean. That's good."

The boy sat stoically through the entire ordeal. He had been there before. I would have been screaming my head off and my tears would have left my chest dripping wet. As it was, I shed a few.

That over, I asked the next necessary question.

"So, how do we get you out of here, my friend?"

That brought the hint of a smile. He sighed and visibly relaxed. Perhaps some of the pain had been relieved. Things became immediately serious, however.

"I can't leave without my mama. Cantrell will beat her senseless with me runnin' away."

"Then, we will just have to bring her with us," Grampa said.

The boy looked puzzled.

Grampa continued:

"First, is there a little used route that will take us away from here? Second, is there somebody we can take you to outside this county?"

He looked back and forth between us for several moments. I figured he was making up his mind whether to grant us that final measure of trust. Clearly, in Middleburg County, that could have life and death consequences. Earlier, I had stuffed a roll into my pocket. I offered it to him.

"Thank you. I got the other one – the first one – too. You are kind people. Why?"

He went to work on the roll. Clearly, he was very hungry and had been for a long time. His ribs showed through his skin. I tried an answer.

"I'm a good person. You're a good person. Good people help each other. Is that enough?"

"Not really, but I'll take it. I have an uncle in Mississippi – Uncle Jackson. He's livin' a free man. Mama's still sick and can't walk. I'm too weak ta carry her."

"The route?" Grampa repeated, emphasizing it was a question of immediate importance.

"Yeah, along the river – north bank. Hardly never used.

May be overgrown. Runs southwest. He lives at a place called Alexander. Never been there. Don't really know how to get there."

Grampa unrolled his maps, selecting the one of the southeastern United States that we had been using. He spread it on the floor. He explained it to the boy.

"Do you know about maps?"

He nodded.

"This is Alabama – he ran his finger around its boundary – and this is Middleburg County. He repeated the finger thing. This is where we are. Here is the river you must be talking about. Over here is Mississippi and just up here is Alexander, not five miles across the border. It's not really all that far."

"But mama?"

"We know how to make a kind of stretcher – you know the word?"

He nodded.

"Do you have blankets where you live?"

Another nod.

"We'll fix your mama up so fancy she'll think she's a queen. We need to go back to the woods where our things are. There are saplings we can cut to use for the stretcher. Do you stay here or come with us?"

"I'll stay here. If they catch us together your lives won't be worth nothin'."

"To move the story along, Grampa and I made another travois, configured to more or less comfortably transport an adult. Less than an hour later, the three of us were within sight of where the boy and his mother lived – a hovel, but it was theirs. We waited a few minutes to make sure none of Cantrell's men were there."

He went in first and explained. He motioned for us and we soon had her secured on the blanket-padded travois and were heading for the river. She was tiny and clearly very sick. She could have been thirty. She could have been sixty. She was clearly thirsty, so I placed my canteen in her lap.

“Just sip, now,” the boy said. “Too much’ll make you sick.”

Two hours later, we heard horses approaching from behind us along the river path. They were moving at a slow, irregular – stop and start – gallop. We turned right, up a rise, into a stand of thick brush.

The riders came into sight. They carried lanterns slung low just above the trail. They stopped to examine the ground. They had been following the marks our two travois had cut into the dirt. Fortunately, we had carried them up the rise so there was nothing to follow. They took time to examine the slope down to the river. It was covered in rocks, so no trail would have been left had we gone that way. They were soon on their way back from the direction they had come. I figured we were close to the county line. Perhaps that was why they stopped the chase. Most likely, they thought we had entered the river.

We took the opportunity to provide drinking water all around. We had a loaf of bread in our provisions and I cut pieces with my new knife for the boy and his mother. He continued to reassure her that things were alright – that they were on their way to her brother’s place. Long story short, we arrived in Alexander about 7 hours later and quickly found the uncle’s house. He brought a doctor who attended to both of them.

“The next morning, we slept in but were on our way by ten o’clock. I would not have advised Cantrell’s men to have followed us there. Uncle Jackson was a 6-foot 6-inch, 250 pound blacksmith and his upper arms were nearly as big around as my eleven-year-old waist.”

“That was, of course, my example of Oppressive Leadership. Middleburg County had essentially been a dictatorship, uninterrupted for nearly a century. The citizens had no rights except what the leader granted them – work, eat, sleep. That county was 90 percent Negro – uneducated, poverty stricken, people with no means to either fight the situation or leave it. They had to please Cantrell and work his fields just to survive. There was no alternative for a dark

skinned human being in that place and time.

“On our journey, I have sat in classrooms that resembled Cantrell’s county. I always left with deep sadness for the students.

“Later, Grampa wrote a letter to the Governor about the situation and included the name of U.S. Grant, his former ‘close’ friend. We have no idea if anything has changed.”

Lucas turned toward the press.

“Come to think of it, that will make a great, investigative story for some of you gentlemen – a follow-up. I see the title: The Demise of Disenfranchisement in the Decadent Domain of Middleburg County, Alabama.”

“Let me move on to my third example – this, which I’m calling Emerged Benevolent Leadership. There is no one powerful leader who just assumes control as in the first examples. Control and leadership emerge from the people. There is no caretaker – the people must learn to fend for themselves and to design the social order they want and require. The intelligent and the dull, the liberal and the conservative, the optimists and the pessimists, the cranky and the loving, create a system that allows each one the freedoms and the checks and balances he needs. This style holds for nations, states, classrooms and families alike.

Let’s travel to Hoffman, Wisconsin – a 50-year-old German settlement. We were there this time last year, good planning since we heard stories of fifteen-foot windblown snow drifts up there in winter. Five years before we arrived, the town of 3,500 had been leveled by a tornado. Not one building was left standing. Several people lost their lives. Many were forced to leave. A few were resolute in their intention to stay and rebuild. It was determined that since there was no town left, it would be removed from the state government’s role of municipalities. That effectively severed any official ties between the town and the state and freed the people to begin from scratch.

In the end, only a handful of families remained. They saved what they could from what was left – scavenging siding, beams, metal roofing, pipes, bricks, even, somewhat

remarkably, windows. Within a few months, they had built what they called the Lodge – a place in which up to 20 families could set up temporary housekeeping. With that as their base of operations, the town gradually came back to life both in terms of buildings and streets, and in terms of organization. The former mayor and all the past, city council members had fled the ruins. Those residents who remained found themselves on their own. To their surprise, it turned out to be a great relief.

Hoffman, despite its sturdy sounding German name, had been given to problems down through the years. The residents had grown lethargic about their government and lax about oversight of their elected officials. Many had not voted in years. At the time of the devastation it had been run by a tightknit group of wealthy men who owned vast herds of cattle and the local cheese manufacturing plants. The plants moved away and with them the rich men and their cattle.

Once they were gone, it became evident to those who remained, that for decades, the officials had been funneling vast amounts of money from the town's coffers into their own pockets. They had gained control of the important offices and paid state officials to give them favor where favor would enhance the fortunes of those several families. The three cheese producers colluded to keep wages low, and competition at a minimum. They arranged for state safety regulations – few as they were to begin with – to be reduced at their plants. They confiscated retirement plans in the name of maintaining solvency of the supposedly struggling companies. On that basis, local citizens were hoodwinked into voting for the removal of many employee benefits, and so the owner's wealth grew while the worker's take did not – was even reduced in some cases.

Granted, most of the remaining residents knew next to nothing about what went into running a town but considering the corruption of the previous government and the rights they believed were fairly theirs, they gradually began to mold a new, common sense, approach to making a town work.

First, they listed aspects from the former government they did not want to become a part of their new community –

most basically, power placed in the hands of an unmonitored few, which could come to control their lives. The idea of having only one person in charge at the top was the first to go. It was replaced by what they called a Governing Body with three members, one elected every three years, and none could serve more than two terms during a span of ten years.

They made another list' – that one of the functions they wanted the Governing Body to carry out. That evolved after much thought and discussion. In the end, they agreed on one dozen areas of authority. Some were things they were given power to attend to by themselves. Several required them to form specific recommendations, hold hearings, and allow the adult citizens to vote on them.

They established a Bill of Liberties. It prevented discrimination on any basis. It provided for those unable to obtain services on their own, including medical care, food, housing, clothing, short and long-term care for whatever reason, disaster relief – those things any compassionate human being would insist should be available to everybody. It established a system of local justice based on the concept of prevention and rehabilitation – before the fact as well as after the fact – rather than merely focusing on punishment for wrong-doing. A justice council oversaw that. Six elected members were limited to one, six-month term and excluded repeat membership for three years.

They provided for education in a unique manner. They hired a Chief Educator – someone with an appropriate college education. Each adult agreed to 'volunteer' several hours each week, to carry out the curriculum that the Education Board (five members) and the Chief Educator established. It gave wide latitude to the nature of subject matter, and individual student's needs and desires were always considered. A school day was divided into two sections – four hours in the school building and two away from the school building. Students, with the advice of parents and school personnel, would write Life Studies Plans. There were no limitations if the plans could be justified. Some learned the cheese making business, others apprenticed as carpenters or plumbers, other worked at the library or the hospital, some

older students helped teach the younger students, a few took up farming. Those who were interested, assisted the area doctor and administered and staffed the medical and geriatric and child care services. Some, who planned on furthering their education in college, used those hours for study. There were other laudable aspects of their educational program.

There were some economic controls. They had a council of business people and consumers charged with setting fair prices, wages and taxes. With free health care, job training, education through 12th grade, child care, elderly care, insurance, and other things, it was possible to live well in Hoffman on far less money than before, thus the necessary higher taxes – called Dues – were more than offset in services.

As problems and new issues surfaced, they were discussed, researched, and eventually the relevant options were put to a vote. When the town – re-christened, New Hoffman – doubled and then doubled again in size during the first six years, additional arrangements were instituted. For example, the town was divided into Neighborhood Zones, each small enough to hold intimate discussions and decision-making activities. It was a core principle that every citizen would be easily included in the decisions and never have reason to remain uninformed or without a voice.

Something I really liked was what they refer to as Block Exchange Parties. Two Saturday afternoon's each month, the people living on one block would travel to another block – across town, perhaps – for half a day of good food, games, conversation, and meaningful discussion of matters of importance to the town, state and country. In that way, everybody in town knew everybody else – you look after people you know. The fourth graders saw to the random matching of blocks for those get-togethers. It was amazing how much those nine-year-old's learned from that one activity.

“I could go on, but I think that satisfactorily describes what I have referred to as Emerged Benevolent Leadership – the social organization arises from, grows from, and is maintained according to the needs and desires of the people.

Consensus at the neighborhood level is prized as the effective way to make well considered decisions. Life in such places is based on cooperation and compassion. The concept of competition is relegated to less life-dependent things such as sports and games – which is the only place it is appropriate, I believe.

“Note that the system devised by the people of New Hoffman, is only *one* way it could have developed. The meaningful aspect is that each place builds their own, citizen friendly, society in accordance with their own needs, beliefs, and desires and maintains full control down through the years.

“New Hoffman moves ahead in business, discovery, and economy, driven by the fundamental need of human beings to cooperate – to take good care of each other. Wherever that happens, humanity flourishes. Some argue that without competition, new discoveries and ideas would cease to develop – really? Did you ever know of a dedicated scientist or doctor or teacher or inventor, or writer, or social leader – most of them sorely underpaid to begin with – who would just give up and wilt away if they weren’t on a course to *win* – personally? I don’t believe so – well, yes, I suppose, the greediest among us just might. Grampa and I witnessed no greed in New Hoffman. Its philosophy and organization just didn’t allow for it. (Well, there was that four-year-old boy who I observed dividing a cookie between himself and his younger sister – he took the larger chunk – but then, his tummy was clearly bigger, so . . .)

“So, I guess that’s my response. The truly great leader, the one history will revere, is the one who brings a people-centered focus to society and can unleash the creativity, cooperation, and determination of his people. Most often such societies are guided by a group of elected leaders rather than one person. The leader who attempts to control his people with rules and laws of *his* making – which always leads to sever treatment of those who do not comply – will surely fail in the end. The human spirit must be free, respected and encouraged. Human society must be inclusive in honest, meaningful, and compassionate ways. Great leadership understands that the human being must be nourished, cared

for, repaired – when necessary – and made fit for life’s journey. With these elements in place, society will flourish.” *

Lucas stepped back to his table and waited.

“Thank you for your response, Lucas. Are you in need of anything?”

“Just my Grampa by my side most anywhere that is a minimum of 300 miles away from this thoroughly disturbing place.”

The members of the press corps chuckled. The panel members did not.

“The proceedings will continue at nine o’clock tomorrow morning.”

Redding and the panel stood and left the room – more as a leaderless, undisciplined flock than the respectful, courteous leave-taking ritual observed earlier in the week.

Lucas sank into his chair. He had hoped that day would have put an end to the trial – the ordeal – the inquisition – the sinister intrusion into their lives. Malcolm left his seat and went to him. He placed his big hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“I must tell you son, your opening disclaimer about you only using *my* words notwithstanding, I am quite certain that I never proffered most of the words you offered so eloquently here this afternoon. I must begin listening more closely while you jabber on as we hike.”

Lucas managed a faint smile, patted the man’s hand, and lay his head against him. Grampa pulled him close. Sigh met sigh.

The reporters rushed in like ravens to carrion. Grampa brushed them back.

“The boy’s exhausted. He’ll speak with you before court in the morning. Meet us at the restaurant at seven. Be prepared to buy our breakfasts.”

“May we use that quote, though. The one about the boy’s eloquence?”

Malcolm looked at his grandson and shrugged, indicating for him to make the call.

“Well, if you have reason to believe it might provoke intimate attention – a kiss, even – from a young lady my age, I

say go for it.”

(And with the additional mention of that *last* statement, letters and telegrams too numerous to count, would begin pouring into Cob Corner – merely addressed to: ‘Lucas, Kansas’.)

As had become their habit, Lucas and Grampa left through a rear door.

“I am starved,” Lucas said.

“How about picking up some things at the grocery and skipping town for the remainder of the day?”

“That really sounds good. Suppose the grocery has an alley door.”

“We’re about to find out, I guess.”

They did. It did. It also had black pepper bacon, slices of thick cut ham, a dozen eggs, a loaf of bread, a jar of jam, a quart of milk, fruit and a double crust apple pie – the kind with strips of dough woven in and out across the top.

They built a small fire on the dirt under the tree in which Lucas had been staying nights. Within a half hour they were enjoying a wonderful breakfast for supper.

“That was a delicious slice of apple pie, Grampa.”

“It was very good. I have a bet with that crow up there on the limb about whether or not any part of it will see the light of day.”

Lucas smiled. Why they even needed to bet seemed uncalled for.

“I have missed this so much – you, me, the critters and crows out here together,” he said. “I heard that some crows can be taught to talk. You think that’s possible?”

“It is. I’ve witnessed it. The bird’s tongue is split in some fashion and it becomes able to mimic the essence of human sounds – some being intelligible words. They even learn to use them appropriately. As we have noted before, the crow is highly intelligent.”

“Interesting. If you were to split a person’s tongue he *couldn’t* talk.”

“Don’t say that in Redding’s presence, son. I’m sure he is feverishly looking for an out.”

Wonderful smiles. It caused Lucas to wonder if some of

his 'performance', as the papers had characterized his testimony, was just showing off. He understood he had a dramatic flair and found himself purposefully going for the quarter words rather than the nickel ones. That was probably showing off instead of offering solid communication. Without any doubt, he had a desire to show up the insipid Reverend Redding for the deceitful, callous, apparently unprincipled man he was. He was making it unbelievably simple, which supported the 'insipid' characterization.

He addressed his Grampa.

"Would it seem too juvenile if I sat up close to you for a while, like I did back in the days when some of the night sounds still frightened me?"

"Do you really care if it seems juvenile or not?"

"Of course, I don't. Not sure why it came out that way."

"Actually, I think it will be absolutely necessary."

"I don't understand, Grampa."

"I see lots more pie in your immediate future and you will surely need some means of support to hold you upright."

"You know I'll share."

"Said the fox to the chickens."

Lucas put the pie pan on his lap and scooted close, legs out in front of him.

"I needed this, Grampa."

"I, also, grandson."

He wrapped his big arm around the boy and they sat in silence for some time – well, silence if you discounted the sound of the fork scraping across the tin pie pan and the periodic, raspy call of the impatient crow, beseeching Lucas not to forget him. After the pie was mostly gone, Lucas tossed a piece of crust a few yards away. Without fear or hesitation, the crow swooped down, strutted in close, and was soon dining on the small lard-laden morsel. When it had enjoyed the last crumb, it looked up and, hopefully, it seemed, took several steps in their direction.

"I don't know on which side of the bet with Grampa you came down, Mr. Crow, but if you won, that crust is your purse. If you lost, you're just welcome!"

Grampa's belly jiggled as it had so many times before.

He still wasn't sure if his grandson were putting him on or being all quite serious when he communed with the critters that came across them along the trail. Lucas would never tell.

Lucas soon fell asleep. Grampa removed the pan from his lap and enjoyed the time just being there with him. The boy had mostly outgrown those precious years where hugs and holding close had come so naturally. Grampa understood such times were limited – soon Lucas really needed to prepare to be on his own. Malcolm understood that. Malcolm was not necessarily happy about that. Oh, he was pleased the boy was nearly ready to meet the world on his own and he had full confidence he would do so successfully. He understood it was right, proper and laudable. Grampa, however, like mothers and fathers always miss those hugs and lap-sittings that indicated they were still needed.

“I wonder if he and his wife will let me bunk down in their hayloft,” he mumbled to himself, smoothing the boy's long hair against his shoulder.

“Of course, we will, you silly old man,” Lucas said, rousing through sleepy eyes. “You'll be out there with your *great* grandson preparing him for *his* 6,000-mile hike.”

*The author has written another novel in which these ideas of Emerged Benevolence are explored at length.
Envisaging an Ideal Society: Lelonia rises out of chaos.

CHAPTER NINE

“Responses not Answers”

The following morning found them on the path to town. They had spent the night on bedrolls, in the grass at the base of the tree, no longer needing to hide. Before setting out, Lucas had stowed their things up on the platform.

“You may not believe this, Grampa, but I’m still content from last evening.”

“Full, you mean?”

“Goodness no, I’m never full – just nicely content.”

“That’s good news because you’re about to have 6 dozen newspaper men taking notes about every motion your fork makes on its way to and from your mouth.”

“That seems disgusting.”

“You’re a celebrity, face it.”

“How will I become an *uncelebrity* once this is all over?”

“Might be you can’t. Although, with a little work I think we could dye that hair black, darken that skin with nut husks, and turn you into an absolutely adorable Indian lad. You’ve always admired them, and you know as great deal about their culture. Perhaps you could hide *that way*.”

“Ha, ha. And *that* was sarcasm, although I will hold the suggestion in reserve.”

“Understood. Just trying to lighten the mood.”

“Lighten the mood while darkening my hair and skin.”

They shared expected – required, perhaps – chuckles and Lucas continued.

“I don’t understand how I can be a celebrity when I’m

clearly doing something wrong.”

“Wrong?”

“Yes. This thing should have been over long ago. Clearly, I’m doing something wrong.”

“*You* are not the one who is doing anything wrong. Every time you open your mouth in there you make me proud. It’s Redding who’s done something wrong and he has no idea how to extricate himself. So, it lingers on.”

“Thanks for that. Hmm. So, all I need to do is give him some face-saving way to tie all this up.”

His Grampa offered no response but had not disagreed.

They walked on to the restaurant. It sat thirty people at tables and six more on stools at the counter. Nearly one hundred reporters showed up. Unorganized as it was, first come first served became the order of the day. Most found their way inside. The proprietor opened the windows onto the walk out front so those stranded out there could participate.

Somewhat humorously, Malcolm thought, Lucas put on his very best table manners. It was worth chuckles and winks between them.

The reporter’s questions boiled down to just a few that were asked in a variety of ways: How did the idea of such a vagabond life-style come about, where were some of the favorite places they had visited, how had Lucas learned so much without ever being in school rooms, would they recommend such an educational style for all kids, what were the best and what were the worst parts of the life they chose to live, was Lucas going to go off on his own someday and if so when and to where, what did Lucas plan on doing with his – *in his* – life? There were others.

To the enjoyment of the reporters, Lucas, gaveled the session to order with a salt shaker and demanded with some drama at the outset that each answer would be followed by five bites of breakfast before the next question could be asked. Those not adhering to the dictum would be sent to stand in the corner – if one could be found. During those five bite pauses he sometimes inserted random comments.

“Do any of you have daughters my age? I’m just

beginning to learn about boy/girl things. Grampa tells me I'm a boy. He promises that next month he will tell my how he knows. I've beat him to it. The dark hair on my upper lip, right?"

Laughter.

"I kissed a female not long ago at the urging of some of the local boys who seemed to know more about such things than I did. It turned out to be a terrible experience. They had failed to mention it didn't count if it was a female, Blue Tick Hound."

More laughter. He continued to endear himself. That couldn't be all bad.

"Not long ago we rented a one room cabin for the night. When we arrived, the door was locked, but that did not keep us out. I just ran around it and ran around it until I was all in."

Moans (and smiles).

Lucas only had time to give cursory answers. He appreciated many of the questions and would spend time later thinking about them in more depth.

At 8:45, Grampa folded his napkin, laid it on the table, and called the gettogether to a halt. As if somebody had yelled, fire, the reporters pushed and shoved their ways through the door, hurrying on ahead to vie for the front seats in the courtroom. It allowed the two of them to dawdle along behind.

"Suppose this day will end it?" Lucas asked.

"I have no way of knowing. It depends, I believe, on how soon Reverend Redeye is ready to admit defeat. He is already well beyond the point of diminishing returns. He's a proud man, apparently desperate to hold onto his power here in Cob Corner. It seems to be just about all he has in life."

"Did you just refer to him as Reverend *Redeye*?"

"Certainly. Truthfully descriptive. I assume he has not been sleeping. Have you not been observing his scarlet sclera?"

"I suppose not. For some reason other things come to mind, instead, while I'm standing up there whiling away my time. Also, *The Scarlet Sclera* – isn't that a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorn?"

Quick smiles. Moans from Grampa.

They were in place by 8:55 as usual. The Reverend called the proceedings to order – again, no gavel.

“The next question will be asked by our School Master, Abraham Sills.”

“Since the focus of this trial is education, I have selected a question that relates to that, if in a roundabout way. “What is the most important responsibility of an author or teacher?”

Lucas paced while nodding his approval.

“I must say it intrigues me how you men all try to simplify important topics down to one facet. I seldom can, as you understand by now. Issues have sides. They need to be pitted against each other.

“Authors are of course, teachers. When one begins reading a book, or begins receiving the tutelage of a teacher, he has the right to several expectations. Let me list a few that come to mind immediately, and then go into more detail on some of them: Honesty, unbiased information, thoroughness, a readily understandable communication style, topics relevant to the title of the book or course, no hidden agenda, logic in both organization and information, reasonable conclusions that are tightly tied to the legitimate information made available. Others may emerge. I find it has been difficult to mine my brain of *all* relevant information on a moment’s notice like this. Sorry.”

He was becoming a master at putting the others in their places while appearing to take the blame. Everybody understood. The men at the bench pulled at their collars and cuffs, nervously. Malcolm smiled a bit. Lucas became emboldened – *quite* a bit.

“I suppose above all else, authors and teachers must be honest. Honesty, of course, should probably be one of your questions all by itself.”

Someone on the panel groaned. Lucas cracked a short-lived smile. Perhaps he was not losing, after all. He paused but did nothing to legitimize the rise and fall of laughter from behind him. Redding also let it pass.

“The basis – characterization, perhaps – of one’s

honest intentions needs to be stated at the beginning: is the teacher or author intending to be honest about his discovery, his information gleaned from elsewhere, that his presentation will be fraught with his own biases or that of whomever is employing him. Is his purpose to discredit or affirm some other presentation or theory? In books, these things can be placed in an introductory statement up front or as parenthetical explanations or footnoted references. An author holds its reader captive. It is a one-way arrangement. There is no opportunity to ask questions or to dissent. It is crucial, therefore, that authors are scrupulously honest.

“In the specific case of a teacher – and any speaker, if I may expand the terrain just a bit – not only must his presentations be honest, but he must answer students’ questions with the deepest sense of honesty possible. By definition, the ideal arrangement between a teacher or speaker with his listeners is two-way. He must never brush off a question – that is not being true to his profession – in other words, not honest. A teacher must relish and encourage questions. If he does not know an answer he must admit that, do the research, and return another time to offer what he has found – an improved human being because of it. Student’s respect that. Nobody smells a bluff faster than a student. And nothing saps their respect like a bluff. A big part of honesty for a teacher is that, to the best of his ability, he presents the most relevant and best validated information on the topic. He should also mention – admit – that which is not yet known or understood.

“Deceitful writing and teaching are thoroughly despicable, for they lie to the most vulnerable – the students – those who do not yet have a sufficient basis of knowledge to defend their innocence and understandable ignorance. At that level of educational development, the student remains gullible – accepting things that can be made to appear truthful when in fact the opposite is true. I am drawn to reference early religious training before the child’s mind is capable of sorting out the established from the lore – before he can defend himself – before he knows what questions need to be asked.

“I recall listening to a political speech some time ago.

The man, while thoroughly deceitful, was masterful at verbal sleight of hand. He was speaking to a naïve audience – less educated and poorly informed. He was there to convert them to his side – to be against the other candidate, better said. Here’s how it went.”

“Of course, dear friends, I don’t have to remind any of you that three years ago my opponent left his position at the courthouse under dubious circumstances. It was a repeat of similar things, I understand, when he lived back in Ohio. Now, tell me this, if he could not be trusted in the past, can we believe he can be trusted now?”

“No. No.” came the resounding, fists-raised-in-the-air, response from his audience.

“Truth be told, the other candidate had left his post at the courthouse because his wife became ill and he needed to take care of her. He had never lived in Ohio. But by creating ‘facts’ that the speaker legitimized by making his audience think they already knew (or should have), he pulled them – willingly and cooperatively – right along into the conclusion he wanted them to believe. There had been no *dubious circumstances* – at home or in Ohio – and even if there had, that had nothing to do with *trust*, but in their rush to agree with him (because he had already given them credit for knowing relevant things he was ‘repeating’), it sure seemed that way.

“Now, transfer that technique to a writer or teacher and they are able to wield deceitful power in situations where the ‘target’ has every reason to believe he is learning the truth – after all, it may well seem logical, based on those fabricated ‘facts’. And, a teacher or author – by definition, *the trusted learned one* – is just expected to possess great knowledge, honestly shared.

“Moving on, the author and teacher must be unbiased. This relates to the honesty concerns, but it is more specific. Remember, a teacher or author may be dishonest for many reasons: to make money or achieve some other sort of personal gain, to actively promote one side of a question over another, to hurt someone or his or her reputation, and others.

All *purposefully* dishonest.

“The biased presentation may be biased by design, or the author or teacher may not be fully aware of what he is doing – the most dangerous kind, perhaps. He may be knowingly promoting his core political belief, for example – his bias – but believes it so firmly that he ‘knows in his heart’ there is no genuine alternative viewpoint, thus no fault to him for being one-sided (he thinks). Intentional bias can typically be spotted when, rather than merely presenting the author’s or teacher’s position, he inserts attacks on other positions, demonstrating why *they* are wrong and *he* is right. Such biased presenters often set up straw men – inaccurate representations of the opposition – and then attack those artificial vulnerabilities. Or, *unintentionally*, one may just not realize how his beliefs are seeping into a lecture or manuscript. That is no less a disservice to the student, reader or listener and no less objectionable. Religious apologists are often the true masters at the deceptive use of words.

“Here would be my rule for handling bias: *Always* study the work of the actual proponent of a position (person A) as he explains *his* position. *Never* study the work of the opponent (person B) as he attempts to describe the other’s (person A) position. That may have come out confusing. Let me clarify.

“If I wanted to learn about Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam, I would always study the work of a member of the religion in which I was interested. The devout author or teacher, setting out to fully explain his belief system, would have no reason to misrepresent it. One must never, for example, study about Hinduism from a devout Christian’s portrayal. Even if not given to conscious attempts at denigrating that faith, he may well do so unintentionally.

“Another example: never study the basic tenets of Socialism from a proponent of Democracy or vice versa. Even the most scrupulous of men, will tend to be judgmental against that which they do not accept. It so often becomes an, ‘I am right, and this is why these beliefs, which he holds that I’ve been telling you about, are wrong’, presentation.

A few years ago, we visited the sprawling, though sparsely populated town of Spartan, Wyoming – population

373 if you went by the sign on the west side of town; 377 if you attended to the sign on the east side. We didn't ask. At any rate, the town was divided north to south, clean down the center, by a split rail fence no more than three feet high – hardly a defensive barrier. Its gaps bore no gates and it blocked no streets but made its point: Reverend Westoff's territory lay to the east and Reverend Bailey's territory to the west. Both professed to be Christian ministers, yet for two decades they had lived relatively separate lives there on the flats in the valley – thirty acres, tops. Although there was only one school . . . well, let me offer what we learned from the conversations we had – mine were mostly with the youngsters. It was going on 3:30 in the afternoon.

“So, I don't understand the purpose of the fence and the duplicate stores at each end of Main Street,” I said to a boy who had seemed to easily accept my presence, while we shared a stump just to the east of the fence near the school.

“It's all about Westoff and Bailey – two reverends that can't agree on what the scriptures mean. Over there is Bailey Town and over here is Westoff Town.”

“How do they disagree?”

The boy shrugged. That and two words apparently offered the complete explanation.

“Just do.”

“Is that the school there, half in one town and half in the other?”

“Yup.”

“So, the kids mix at school.”

It had really been a question.

“Nope. Bailey's use the west side door. Westoff's use the east side door.”

“And inside?”

“Building's divided in half by a railing. Teacher's desk straddles the two sides.”

“And you have no idea what the disagreement is about.”

“Nope. Sure wish I did. I'd really like to spend time with Amy Sue Cottle.”

“But she’s a Westoff?”

“Right. Boys get whipped something awful – in public – if they’re found with a girl from the other town.”

“School in session now?”

“Eight ‘til three. First Monday in September ‘til last Friday in May.”

“Grampa had been speaking with people in Westoff Town. We met for supper at the restaurant in Westoff.”

“A really strange place, Grampa.”

“That characterization would certainly get my vote. These two groups of people dislike each other, but nobody can tell me why – exactly.”

“I got the idea from the kids that they really don’t dislike the other kids. It’s more like they know they are supposed to dislike the spiritual part of them, and, no, that doesn’t make any sense to me.”

“It’s making lots of people uncomfortable – what’s a better word than that,” Lucas?”

“Troubled, disturbed, unsettled?”

“Yes, like that – those.”

“And sad, also, Grampa. Happy kids turned sad every time I brought up the dual town thing.”

We ate on in silence. Presently, our eyes met as we looked up from our plates.

“We’re going to fix it, aren’t we?” I said/asked/assumed/determined.”

“I think we should take a crack at it. What do we have going for us?”

“I met the mayor’s boy – here in Westoff. He seemed friendly enough.”

“And I met the doctor over in Bailey. He also seemed friendly enough. Maybe . . .”

Before he finished his sentence an older man, slender and short of stature with a thin gray moustache, gray hair – less combed than combed – wearing metal rimmed spectacles entered the room.

“That is the doctor I spoke with over in Bailey. Perhaps

he serves both parts of the community.”

Grampa did the always-awkward-standup-halfway-from-his-chair-while-maintaining-his-mapkin-in-his-lap-routine and motioned the man to us. He broke a wonderful smile and moved in our direction. I stood and arranged a chair for him. He nodded, handed me his black medical case and pointed to the remaining chair. I placed it there and returned to my seat. Grampa spoke.

“I must say I wasn’t expecting to see you over here – considering how things appear to be.”

“And how do they appear to be?”

As I am prone to do, I answered.

“Crazy, if you want my opinion. What’s the deal?”

“The deal is we have these two thick-headed, numbskulls of reverends who refuse to settle their differences – whatever they may be.”

“Grampa and I figure maybe we can fix it – being outsiders and all. You up for helping?”

“It is simply exhausting to live this way. Of course, I’ll help, but I’m not betting it can be fixed.”

“Can you arrange to get me together with them?” Malcolm asked.

“Them? Face to face. With each other. When hell freezes over, perhaps.”

“How about this, I offered. Would they meet with Professor Malcolm McCabe, PhD, graduate of the University of Edinburgh, formerly employed at Harvard College and the author of six books on Social Theory and Educational Philosophy, who just happens to be visiting here in Spartan this week?”

There were gasps from the bench and wide-eyed, silent exchanges. Lucas ignored them.

“You, Sir, are all that?” the doctor asked.

I left to the front door and returned with my back pack. I removed a book, Grampa’s latest one, if eight years old. I opened it to the back where references and such appeared. It listed Grampa’s other books, articles and papers. It provided

a published resume that could hardly be disputed.

"I'm sure they would each be delighted to meet and speak with you, but I don't see how that will get them together."

"Fairly simple. I will only meet with them together."

The natural impish tendencies in me sprang into action.

"Here's a twist. I could sort of hint around in Bailey Town that Westoff had agreed to meet Grampa at some specified place and time and then do the same in Westoff Town about Bailey – all quite casually, of course and with crossed fingers the entire time. Believing neither of them would abide the other meeting Grampa and them not, I'm betting they'll both show up."

"If I may borrow the book, I can let them know about you," the doctor said, "add a bit of legitimacy to it all. This may be more fun than skinning dipping with Sarah Sweeten back in 8th grade. Oh, sorry, son. An old fool reminiscing."

"Reminisce away. I think I'm up to listening to you late into the night."

We all chuckled, which seemed to relieve the tension none of us had realized was developing. It was set, I'd do my part after supper. Grampa suggested we get a hotel room – more befitting the credentials Doc would be showing them in the book. Once having them together, I had no idea what Grampa had up his sleeves. And he suddenly had spectacular sleeves. Doc managed the loan of a suit with all the trimmings. I laughed out loud when I saw him dressed that way.

The scheme worked like clockwork. The meeting began in the school house at nine the next morning. Food was taken to them at noon. A crowd had gathered, split by the fence – and included most of the residents from both 'towns'. At four o'clock, the three of them exited the building through a side door in the center of the building – the one the teacher used, I learned. Smiles prevailed. Bailey and Westoff exchanged hats – apparently a Wyoming custom to signify two men had buried the hatchet. The three of them shook hands all around.

While the gathering clapped and cheered and whistled

and danced and even dared to mingle across the line, the reverends instructed the men to dismantle the fence. They instructed the women to prepare a picnic fit for a new beginning. I chuckled as I watched the boy with whom I had talked, take a girl's hand – Amy Sue Cottle's, I assumed – and whisk her away to the far side of the school house. I hoped he had not jumped the gun on the 'public whipping rule'.

As we had arranged, we met Doc after the meeting had ended.

"Come to my place for some liquid refreshment," Doc said. "You don't know how much I just have to hear the story of what went on inside that little schoolhouse!"

"It was lemon-limeade. I had never tasted it before. I highly recommend it to any of you who haven't. Grampa explained to Doc and me."

"We began by discussing my work. That went on far longer than I had intended. I was amazed they knew of my books. When an opening occurred, I broached the subject of the division of Spartan. They each began speaking in progressively louder tones. Unbelievably, they went at it back and forth for an hour or so. I did my best to just listen and ferret out the basis of their disagreement. We broke for lunch.

"After we had eaten, I proposed a new set of ground rules. I said I was going to give them each fifteen-minutes in which to describe to me what the other one believed in the matter of their disagreement. There was to be no judgement involved – just an honest rendering of what they understood the other's belief to be. After that, I let the other respond, correcting what he said was misinformation. Then, we repeated the entire process – back and forth – the revised presentations in light of the corrections as each had understood them.

"After five such, progressively shorter, exchanges, they were able to describe the other's position to each other's satisfaction in just a few sentences."

"And?" Doc asked still not having heard the essential revelation.

“Well, it is a bit more complicated than this, but at its core was whether, during baptism in the stream, the person should be facing up-current or down-current – cleansing him as the water met him face on or washing the sins away as it passed over him and on downstream. Don’t think the fervor for each position is still not present. It is. But when I asked why it was a problem since each of them baptized their own church members, I could feel the realization take hold and the problem begin to fade. Ten minutes later they were swapping stories about being boys together.

“You see, gentleman of the panel, in each instance the two reverends had gradually built up descriptions of the other’s belief, which had inserted ideas that had nothing to do with the dispute – things, which had, more or less unconsciously, been attached to make the other position seem even more incompatible – bolstering the certainty that the opposite view was obviously, absolutely incorrect. If, as teachers, they attempted to describe the other’s point of view – to their congregations – their narrative would have been wrong – even though they believed they understood it.

“It was a case of defending their own biases – some consciously and some fully unknown to them. The teacher and the author have the absolute responsibility to understand their own belief system well enough to keep it excluded from their everyday presentations and, when it is their intention or duty to introduce their own intensions, they must make that clear – from the start. In the end, Bailey and Westoff recognized their own and the other’s biases and agreed to live with them. That is seldom an option with the one-way street in which most authors navigate their presentations. And, unbelievably to me, many teachers attempt to do the same by not encouraging questions, allowing honest disagreement, and requiring open discussion based in facts. In my experience, that’s the very best way to learn.

“I know I introduced other aspects related to the question, but unless you require it, I will assume I have rendered an adequate response to the fundamental responsibilities of authors and teachers – and, even, perhaps,

Reverends in Wyoming *and* Kansas.

Lucas sat down.

“These proceedings will continue at 1:00 this afternoon.”

Lucas sighed, resigned to going at it again after lunch – of course lunch was on the court’s dime. That couldn’t be all bad.

CHAPTER TEN

Beleaguered, Bothered, and Bewildered

Lucas and his grandfather found a secluded spot under a tree at the edge of an orchard and settled for lemonade from a jug and an apple from a tree. Neither was hungry. Both were weary – no, *beleaguered* would be the better descriptor.

Lucas had learned from his grandfather that to get caught up in fairness vs unfairness always went no place – one man's *fair* was always another man's *unfair* – so, their focus had become, do what needs to be done to stay true to the facts as they understood them, and, maintain their integrity. It sure was tempting, however, to unleash that fair vs unfair thing!

Malcolm had defined integrity for Lucas early in the boy's life: establish a set of positive personal and social values and then always abide by them – always live up to them. Modify them only when overwhelming evidence suggested that was warranted. Malcolm had clearly lived his seventy years with integrity, according to his own mantra; it had been a successful and respected life. Lucas was doing his best to follow in those footsteps. He was a bit bothered that the subject of integrity had not yet appeared as a focus of the questioning. He believed it was at the essential center of a successful, humanity-friendly, social order. Perhaps the obvious lack of integrity surrounding the trial would have made its inclusion seem hypocritical. That was probably giving Redding and his henchmen too much credit for self-knowledge.

The pastor they had encountered when they entered Kansas, and who had apparently rushed to tattle on them to Redding, was not a man of integrity – befriending them and then using it against them. Valuing self-aggrandizement and then making it happen – winning Redding’s approval – according to deceit and shady methods with no regard for the welfare of another person, was most certainly *not* a display of integrity. Lucas and his Grampa had covered and re-covered the topic of positive social values. Lucas had developed his list, just as his grandfather had developed and refined his. They discussed additions and deletions – often dependent upon age or maturational things. Each value had to pass the bottom-line test: does this hold the credible likelihood that it can improve the human condition? *

Whether or not it *would*, of course, could only be determined by how, where and when it was effectively applied and implemented. From Lucas’s perspective, the citizens of *Bella’s Holla*, as primitive as the society was in many ways, scored high on the integrity factor. They understood that what they and their forefathers had discovered made a good life and maintained a well-ordered society, and they stuck to it. Kids and adults alike understood those values and they seldom veered far from them.

The approach at Cavern, Utah was a mixed bag. The two of them had discussed it at length. Their leader clearly had a set of values he believed was necessary to establish and maintain a positive social environment. Clearly, it was well ordered. The rules were clear so those who broke them did so with full knowledge of both the nature of the transgression and what steps would be taken by their leader as a result.

“Consistency and dependability, however, are *not* the same as integrity based in socially positive values. A bank robber could demonstrate consistency and dependability – always take all the money and always kill the teller. The outcomes must maintain or move the human condition ahead in positive ways. Removing the power and responsibility for making personal decisions did not move humanity ahead according to Grampa and Lucas. It stifled human incentive and a sense of self-worth and competence. It highlighted the

quandary: can two – or several – somewhat differing sets of positive values each be the basis for integrity. Malcolm and Lucas knew how they viewed it. Although their lists were not identical, their positive, long-term goal was: leave the world a better place than they found it.

* * *

Redding called the proceedings to order at 1:11 – not like him to be tardy. He gave neither an excuse, nor an explanation, and got right to the business of the afternoon.

“Dr. Swenson will offer the question this afternoon.”

Lucas looked at his Grampa. ‘*The*’ question, meaning one, when he had grown used to at least two each afternoon. Malcolm shrugged, palms up. Lucas moved to the spot in front of Dr. Swenson. The man smiled and nodded. Unlike the smiles and nods from the others, Lucas understood Doc’s were genuine – sincere. Wanting to acknowledge and demonstrate his respect for Doc’s function as a panel member, he offered a simple nod in return.

“My question is open ended, Lucas. What have you learned from this inquisition we’ve put you through these past several days?”

From the responses of the other panel members, the question obviously had not been cleared with them. No steps were taken to intervene, however.

Then, as an aside, the Doctor added.

“Don’t mince words, son. We want your honest assessment.”

Lucas broke a broad smile.

“Sir. In my short lifetime, I have minced pies, I have minced onions, and I have minced garlic, but never, have I ever, minced words.”

The press corps laughed. A few offered weak and immediately quieted applause. Several on the panel – including Doc – smiled. Two chuckled. (Who was that who kept groaning?) Malcolm shook his head and folded his hands over his belly. One thing the two of them had not yet done was to present a stage show. Perhaps . . .

“If I may, let me first take one step backwards from your question, Doctor. It concerns the makeup of a panel

assembled to assess the quality of my unconventional education. How many of you have hiked 6,000 miles . . . so none of you understand anything about my life. How many of you have sustained your lives by living strictly off the land for months at a time . . . so none of you truly understands about really putting your very day to day existence on the line the way I do. How many of you have nursed an injured mother opossum and cared for her six babies while she recovered . . . none. How many of you have fought a raging prairie fire, rode out a quarter mile wide tornado hunkered down on a mountain top, maneuvered a two masted boat down a rampaging river during a raging rain storm . . . *none*, so how do you know how to meet the banshee face to face and beat it back? Sorry, sometimes my dramatic nature rises where it should have remained seated. The facts remain.

“None of you have any basis whatsoever to claim you understand anything about me or the man who has been my protector, my companion and my mentor. This proceeding would have been better served if it had among its members, an Indian Medicine Man like Dancing Otter, who shared his wisdom with me on the Cherokee reservation; a river boat ensign who stood side by side with Grampa and me as we struggled to save the boat while it took on water in the Mississippi during a storm; Mama Pasha, a toothless woman from the bayous of southern Louisiana who nursed me back to health when I contracted a fever, which dehydrated me and put me out of my head for two weeks; and perhaps the biggest omission of all, a woman – most *any* woman. Half of humanity is female. It can’t be all that hard to find one – where is she?

“Thank you for letting me get that off my chest here at the outset of this afternoon. Now, Dr. Swenson, as to your question, what have I learned, and I thank you for it. First, I must say it has been a fascinating and an instructive exercise. If I may toot my own horn – and I footnote that saying to the Warren-Adams papers of 1776 – the proceedings have demonstrated to me that my education has been exceedingly productive, and, regardless of your finding, I can only conclude that it exceeds that of 99% of all boys my age. It would be both interesting and instructive to put that to the test,

sometime – oh, that’s right, I suppose taking that written exam already did that, didn’t it?

“What else?”

He looked back into Doc’s face.

“You meant it when you said I am allowed to speak my mind?”

He diverted his gaze to Reverend Redding.

The Reverend nodded, fully understanding he was about to be skewered, held over hot coals, and eaten alive – undoubtedly, well done if not burnt.

“I suppose it demonstrated the depths of depravity a public and religious official will go, to protect and enhance himself, regardless of how it may effect an innocent boy and his selfless grandfather. It has certainly diminished my respect for both the religion of the day in my country and the rule of law as it is practiced and dispensed at least in rural, central, Kansas. It has brought home the truth that no one person should ever be allowed absolute control over a group of other people. It certainly has made the case for the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state, which long ago became a sacrificial lamb here in Cob Corner.

“From the start, I have been sorely bothered by the basic assumption that your local authorities believed they had devised the very best educational program – the only legitimate educational program – the one against which I had to test favorably. Closed minds always lead to the eventual deterioration of whatever they control because they deny entry of new ideas representing new, improved, possibilities. The opening salvo from the bench in all this was the assumption – with no proof or even references – that my education had to be inferior because it did not follow the traditional pattern as it has been birthed, raised and suffocated here in Cob Corner. Even sadder is the fact that if my Grampa is found *not* guilty, some here will continue to fabricate excuses for my success – all quite separate from the experiences Grampa has provided for me. In my mind, the first one I imagine we will hear is: ‘the kid is just brighter than anybody here. Most kids couldn’t benefit from those kinds of experiences’.

“Maybe I am brighter. Maybe I’m not. One thing is

certain, I have had the finest teacher any boy ever had. It would be another interesting experiment to see how much the local students improved under just one semester of my Grampa's tutelage.

"But, back to what I have learned from all of this. By being unlawfully imprisoned here in Cob Corner all these days, I have had the opportunity to learn that you have wonderful children – big-hearted, moral, compassionate, eager to have their minds set free so they can follow what is truly important in their lives. They are thirsty for that which is *not* old hat. Again, some pseudo-pundits, here, will say they are too young and inexperienced to make decisions about what they need to learn. It is an easy assertion for them to make, because nobody in this town has any intention of putting it to the test. It then becomes an assertion riding only on opinion and not fact.

"Furthermore, it is founded on an absolutely terrible – a devastating – assumption: that one's education stops after graduation. I will grant that for thousands of years, progress has come along at an exceedingly slow pace. A member of generation Three, for example, really could do pretty well in life if all he knew was what generation Two had known, and generation Two could do the same with what generation One had known – and so on. But, in the modern world, things are changing rapidly. What one's grandfather and father knew, will just not be enough. The process of educating must become a life-long process. What any of you learned in school will not be sufficient to guide you ten years from now. It certainly will not be satisfactory for your children and grandchildren as the future rushes in on them. It becomes essential for students to know how to go about learning new things by themselves and to assess their lives, so they can give life-long direction to their understanding of their ever-changing world. I will gladly take bets on that, and then, in twenty years, I will return in my flying machine to collect my winnings.

By that point most of the reporters had set their pads aside and were just listening.

"Schools also need a good housecleaning, getting rid of

dank, hold-over procedures and subject matter that is outdated and no longer relevant. For example, like most school systems across this country, you require the study of Latin, a language that has not been spoken for hundreds and hundreds of years, and in which nothing is any longer written. It is even generally referred to as a *dead* language. Clearly here, it continues to languish, still gasping for breaths at the expense of youngsters' education. Regardless of what we hear diehard, old school, educators saying, Latin promises only the most inefficient usefulness in understanding English. Give me three weeks, and I will teach 8th year students most everything about Latin – word roots and so on – that will ever be of any value to them as they deal with their English language. You require *six years*. Six precious years wasted that could have been spent in meaningful educational pursuits. In my estimation, adding that time to recess would be a far more beneficial use of the time. Kids learn wonderfully important life lessons from interacting with each other – give and take, conversation, can-you-do-this experiences. Somedays I have recess all day – some weeks I have recess all week, but it's filled with wonderful activities of *my* choosing – things I want to experience – to learn about – to master, even. Did you know I can trim the head off a match stuck in the bark of a tree by throwing my hunting knife from 15 paces? Of course, you don't. Can you or your kids? You have no idea because you haven't given them the freedom to try. Such things are useless you may say. I say, that just knowing I have that skill puffs out my chest and tells me I'm competent, and if I can be competent in that one activity, I have real reason to believe I can be competent in a wide range of additional areas.

“I do have a way of going on. Have you noticed that?”

Chuckles from every corner of the room. Redding's taut neck and face even relaxed a bit. He may have raised one eyebrow.

“I realize that, once again, I have veered from the original intent of the question. I'm not sure what else to list as lessons learned, here. Well, perhaps one more thing. While being held in Cob Corner without my consent, I did get to kiss

a girl for the first time and with it, have come to understand what an important part of being a young human being it is. I highly recommend it, but, alas, I fear it will most likely not show up as a part of next year's Sophomore curriculum. (chuckles) But, can't you just imagine the rush to sign up for the practicum!"

It happened. It had been right on the edge of happening for several days. The press corps erupted with laughter. They stood and applauded. They finger whistled and stomped the floor. They had known it needed to happen. They had been itchin' to send that court the single and overwhelming message they had been receiving from their readers across the nation – stop persecuting that wonderful boy and deliver him our messages of universal support, love and affection.

Redding made no attempt to hammer the gathering to order. During the ongoing, fully unexpected din, a befuddled Lucas, cautiously, backed into his seat at his table, indicating he had finished responding to question whatever-number-it-was. He felt embarrassed and extremely uncomfortable about the expression of support or adulation – or whatever it was. He suddenly found he didn't know where to put his hands, he didn't know where to look, where *not* to look, whether or not to perhaps begin whistling nonchalantly, maybe he could find a stick and carve for a while, his grampa had taught him some fancy Scottish foot work – perhaps . . . Could it be there were things within that young man that suggested he was more of a normal teenager than anyone had suspected?

* * *

Redding called a thirty-minute recess. Odd, Lucas thought. He carried his chair over next to his Grampa's.

"What do you think is up, Grampa?"

"Traditionally, I suppose, a move such as this might signal a period of deliberation – the panel now discussing relevant factors and arriving at a verdict."

"All along, I've had the idea only one opinion was relevant – Redding's. Why a change such as you described?"

"No idea. Little about this activity has been driven by or guided by logic, or common sense, Lucas, so your guess is as

good as anybody's."

A young reporter, no more than three or four years older than Lucas, approached them – tentatively. He spoke first.

"I don't mean to intrude, but I need to ask – for me, not my paper – are you both really holding up as well as it appears?"

"I have absolutely no idea how I'm holding up. It's Grampa's wellbeing that's really on the line here."

"Oh, I've been studying your grandfather the whole time. My observation is that *he* is doing extremely well. It has appeared to me he's been viewing all this more like a side-show at a carnival than a trial."

"An astute youngster, er, young man," Malcolm managed and continued. "May I ask *you* a question?"

"A question? Of me? Certainly. A reporter isn't used to being asked a question."

"Why did half the reporter's leave when the recess was announced?"

"Oh, that. They probably believe like I do, that the trial is over, so they are busy dispatching two stories – one, you're found guilty and two, you're found innocent. Then, once the verdict is in, they'll contact their papers and tell them which to set and run."

"Clever, I guess," Lucas said, "and thanks for your concern about our well-being, by the way. I appreciate it. It's been pretty lonely up here this week. You know that window I kept going to?"

"Yeah."

"It may have looked like I was staring out to gather my thoughts. In reality, I was trying to decide if the time had yet come for me to jump out!"

The young reporter smiled and chuckled.

"My I use that as a quote – an exclusive?"

"Why not? You seem to be an honorable young man."

"That will be welcome news to my father, Frank James."

"Not really?" Lucas said, puzzled.

"No, not really. Reporters – well a few – have a sense

of humor, too.”

“Why did you not go with the others – to post stories?” Malcolm asked. “Aren’t you afraid you’ll be scooped?”

The young man offered a smile – sly, impish, self-satisfied.

“At the noon of the fourth day of the trial I sent my two ‘final’ stories off by pony delivery. Each one is already set and ready to be jammed into the press when word reaches them. We’ll have an extra edition on the streets before these boys have placed the STOP at the end of their final telegram.”

“You sly old fox, you!” Malcolm said.

“Considering his youth,” Lucas pointed out, “wouldn’t that be, ‘sly young Kit’?”

* * *

The panel returned. Order was restored. Reverend Redding remained standing. The others sat. He began speaking.

“Before I pronounce the decision of this proceeding – because of its irregularity as a legal exercise and the inordinate amount of publicity it has received – I will allow several questions from the press. They may be directed at the bench or at Master Lucas. Either may refuse to answer. Please make the questions to the point without an introductory monologue proclaiming one position or another in an attempt to dictate the response.

The Headmaster was on the floor near the reporters. He would act as moderator. He chose the first reporter.

“State your name and your paper.”

“Jeff Wood, the Springfield, Missouri Herald. My question is for Lucas. What if this man convicts your grandfather? What will happen to you? We understand you have no family.”

Lucas understood the time had come. He was ready. He had been ready for some time. He closed his eyes and took as full a breath as his young chest would accommodate. He stood, turned toward the gathering and folded his arms across his chest. The broad smile he spread seemed fully out of place considering the nature of the question.

“You mean you wise men of the fifth estate haven’t

figured this whole charade out yet?”

They looked puzzled. Malcolm scratched his head. He had no idea what his grandson was about to launch but figured if the panel members had a lick of sense about them, they should be prepared to duck.

Lucas turned toward the bench, looked up at the tall man in the black garb, and offered an extended, private wink. Redding looked confused – most likely because he was.

Lucas took a side position near the window to more easily address both Redding and the reporters simultaneously.

“Here’s the deal, fellows. *Suppose* with me for a moment, that as an isolated, learned intellectual of position,” he motioned toward Reverend Redding, “you wanted to initiate a meaningful lecture series out here in central Kansas. A lecture series on, say, *Important Issues Facing Mankind*. *Suppose* your aim was to make it an annual event and invite speakers with unique points of view and experiences. Who would respond to the dinky little two-inch ad on page seven and come way out here, away from what most consider civilization, to attend some no-name lecture series with no-name speakers? *No-body*, that’s who.

“But, further *suppose* this with me. What if you staged some fascinating, noteworthy, controversial event in this little city and made sure the press was involved – say it was a trial. Not *any* trial, but the trial of an old man on clearly bogus charges so the world would become personally invested and cry out to rescue him. What if there were a homeless, orphaned, grandson involved who had been forced, with no legal training whatsoever, to defend his grandfather? Now, *there* you’d have a Page One story – free and continuing coverage, day after day, in every edition. Played right, you would have turned the focus of all the kind-hearted people in the mid-western United States on one, small, formerly nondescript town sitting in the middle of nowhere – ‘*although easily accessible by railroad for the reasonable ticket price of only . . .*’

“Then say, the press runs with the story. At first the pool of three or four reporters working it eventually grows to nearly one hundred. Daily transcripts of what is said are

printed in every major paper in the surrounding 20-state area. Interest grows.

“Well, you get the idea. What might appear be one man’s trial – ostensibly built on deceit and innuendo – *just might* be another man’s fantastic publicity stunt to call attention to the new, annual *Cob Corner Lecture Series: Important Issues Facing Mankind*. If this revised twist on the case here in Cob Corner *did* happen to be true – that promotional genius would be, of course, none other than Reverend Redding, the very man who has willingly taken your abuse in print for a week.”

Lucas looked up at Redding.

“After all of this, Sir, I don’t even know your first name.”

Still stunned and befuddled at the odd take things had taken, Redding was drawn in, bent forward and whispered, “Quentin.”

“That is the Reverend *Quentin* Redding.”

Again, Lucas looked up.

“Do you spell Quentin, ending with a large measure of weight or a malleable metal?”

The big man broke a smile and laughed.

“The malleable option will do nicely – t-i-n. You know, young man, at night I have to pinch myself to make sure you really are here doing this, whatever it is, to . . .”

“. . . to help you promote your fantastic idea, Sir. I can only imagine the revenue it will bring into the community from all those who will want to attend. Who knows, you may have to spread it over several weeks, the entire month of June, perhaps. I can see an associated carnival for family members – perhaps a rodeo, even. I can also envision a railroad car bringing a dozen beautiful . . . I suppose my adolescent male perspective may have gotten out of line there.”

There it was. Lucas had made his offer. The whole shebang lay in Redding’s lap.

Redding stood and held his long arms out to his sides to hush the reporters, who, by then had picked up their pads but seemed puzzled about what to write.

“I need to respond. I’m sure Lucas will entertain additional questions, later, in a more informal setting. This

young man is being far more of a man, than I have ever been. I have no idea why he tries to defend me – well, yes, after this long week, I do.”

He turned toward Malcolm and offered a prolonged nod.

“I have treated the boy and his grandfather dreadfully. As nice as it would be, I cannot let Lucas take me off the hook with his fascinating fantasy. My intention from the beginning was to give myself a huge win and regain the respect of the citizens here in Cob Corner. At every step of the process, I have been battered by the better man. Initially, I had no compassion for either him or his grandfather. I figured I had everything in my favor. Some nondescript, dull old man, dragging his equally dull grandson all over the countryside. Who, but the least intelligent among us, would aid his grandson in skipping school for *seven* years? On *my* side I had long standing, well-respected, court-sustained, Kansas law requiring mandatory school attendance, extended here in Cob Corner to age 16. Although I will not lay blame on him, a less than scrupulous, itinerant, pastor put the idea in my mind, and I devised what was clearly to be an easy trap, a quick trial, a rapid verdict all tied up within an hour, with no loose ends. The people would celebrate my victory.

“The laugh has been on me, of course. All of you gathered here have understood that from the second day – most likely the first, even. I have made a fool of myself, my community, and of my position within it.

“All charges against Malcolm McCabe have been dropped. In fact, I had the city attorney drop them and seal them at the end of the written examination. It was just that I have never come across a mind like that of this boy and I had to hear it out – so to speak – thus the ill-devised extension into the oral recitation. There was nothing legitimate about it and it was selfish, self-serving, and unkind of me. I suppose, part of me kept thinking I might still turn this to my advantage.

“Oh, I don’t mean to imply that this became a merely passive affair for me, a disinterested, if rapt observer taking notes from the sideline; a dozen times a day the boy infuriated me as he successfully attacked one after another of the

precepts I held true, right and often sacred. Let me just say it has been both the most destructive week of my life and the most instructive week of my life. By November, I expect to stop trembling. By December, I hope to begin sleeping again.

There were extended chuckles and some applause from astonished reporters. Stories would have to be refocused and rewritten – perhaps added in side bars. It may well have been at that moment the phrase, “Stop the presses,” was coined.

It remained for each of them to determine whether or not they believed the Reverend was reporting the truth or was trying to make himself appear better than he was in an attempt to salvage some measure of his former stature.

Reverend Redding moved from behind the bench to the floor beside Lucas. He motioned Malcolm to join them.

“We hope that even after all the pain we – I – have put you through that you will still consider joining us at our high school, Lucas.”

“No disrespect, Sir, but I believe I have shown pretty conclusively that it has nothing to offer me.”

Quentin the Malleable, continued.

“I was suggesting it from a very different perspective, Lucas.”

“I don’t understand.”

“The idea being, what *you* and your grandfather could offer *us*, here in Cob Corner.”

He leaned down and whispered all quite privately into the boy’s ear.

“I have it on good authority – my granddaughter – that there *are* dozens of young ladies your age here who would not be opposed to getting to know you better.”

Lucas returned the whisper behind his hand.

“Thanks to my period of confinement here, I am discovering that I can take care of myself in that department, Sir, but now, if you could arrange suitable and not unduly stressful companionship for my Grampa, we might well talk with you about an extended engagement.”

(. . . an extended engagement, which, by the way, would involve multiple appearances by both of them the

following June at Cob Corner's, sold out, *First Annual Lecture Series: Important Issues Facing Mankind – Quentin Redding, curator in charge.*)

*One set of positive social values is included at the end of this book. See the following section.

THE END

Positive Social Values

Tom Gnagey - 1966

(Positive value is listed first with Negative beneath it.)

ONE: Logical problem-solving techniques
rather than
physical aggression

TWO: Cooperative approach to life
rather than
an unbridled competitive approach to life.

THREE: Ability to delay gratification
rather than
the need for immediate gratification.

FOUR: A save and pay as you go approach
rather than
irresponsible spend & credit approach.

FIVE: Respect for all property
rather than
lack of respect for others' property

SIX: Reverence and respect for life
rather than
disregard for life

SEVEN: Fair treatment and honesty
rather than
deceit and dishonesty

EIGHT: Earning what you need and want
rather than
merely taking it

NINE: Law-abiding behavior
rather than
law slipping behavior

TEN: Democratic approach
rather than
Dictatorial, strong-arm approach

ELEVEN: Positive value-based openness
rather than
belief in mindless absolute right and wrong

TWELVE: Altruism
rather than
selfishness

THIRTEEN: Accurately informed decision
rather than
uninformed or lore-base decision making

FOURTEEN: Finding happiness through integrity
rather than
seeking it through stuff, status, or power

FIFTEEN: Planning ahead
rather than
Monday morning quarter-backing

SIXTEEN: Having adult confidantes
rather than
only having peer confidantes

SEVENTEEN: Being known by ones good reputation
rather than
trying to be known as a somebody at any cost

SEVENTEEN: Knowing one is a worthy being
rather than
having to keep trying to prove one is a worthy being

EIGHTEEN: Kind-hearted
rather than
inconsiderate or otherwise hurtful

NINETEEN: A user of precise language
rather than
imprecise Language

TWENTY: Health and fitness awareness
rather than
health unawareness

TWENTY-ONE: Cause and effect filer
rather than
an observation (or correlation) filer

TWENTY-TWO: Analytic (informed) participation
rather than
heedless (uninformed) participation

TWENTY-THREE: Purposefully organized living style
rather than
chaotic/ haphazard living style

TWENTY-FOUR: Peer plus family social orientation
rather than
peer-only social orientation