

PROPHECY — Harleys, High School & Friends

By Jim Golden — Chapter Six

Outside of being the class bully in the 5th grade and getting beat up my first week in the 7th grade most of my grammar school experience was uneventful. Once there was a great deal of excitement over a boy who contracted some form of meningitis and everyone in the school had to get inoculated. Apart from the measles, mumps and chicken pocks I have very few vivid memories.

Just as I was graduating from 6th grade I remember finding out that my "real father" was coming to visit. I had not found out yet that Bill Smith was my biological father and thought Jimmy was. It was an exciting day on Claggett Drive as the big 1200cc, "knucklehead" **Harley-Davidson** motorcycle pulled to the curb. As the big man with the brimmed Harley cap dismounted his iron steed I proudly thought, this is my dad.

I can still remember the rides he took me on, and how he came back later in his car and took me and my sister Colleen to visit with him and his new wife in Richmond. Once he even took me for a ride in a big rig. That's the kind of truck that pulls those long trailers you see on the highway all the time. He was a mechanic and had to rescue one of his company's drivers with a broken down truck hauling a load of perishables. After he took us home I never heard from him again except once. It wasn't until my persistent nagging provoked my mother enough that she finally revealed the truth. He had only wanted to try and gain custody of Colleen, his real daughter.

Well, summer soon came to an end and the pain of his rejection of me was swallowed by the fear of the 7th grade. You actually had to take showers with other boys and to be "cool" you might even have to kiss a girl. I wasn't very tall and for some reason never excelled in baseball or basketball. I did do rather well in football until my mother saw one of the boys on my team almost tear off his knee cap.

It's a mother's solemn duty to deprive her children of fun in life threatening situations like these. They gladly accept scorn, ridicule and rejection if it means their little offspring will be safe. It is very important that they live up to their peers interpretations of what a "good" mother is. It is the last child, not the first that seems to help redefine the rigid standards set by the "good mothers of America" foundation. It does help to have a father who loves football around too. So gymnastics was the only sport left for me.

It was on the gymnastic team that I met Cynthia. God never intended Cynthia to be the one who taught me about the birds and the bees but she was. She was 14 and I had just turned 13 when, unknown to me, she asked my mother for my hand in marriage. I don't know if that had anything to do with us moving again but I never finished out the school year at Broome Jr. High. Beside Becky Sue, who I only took out once or twice and a crush I had on Maria D. from afar, my romantic portfolio never grew much in those days.

Oh I should mention one thing, I did meet my first and best friend in the 7th grade. We were introduced in a fight in the hallway outside of print shop. The blows we traded seemed to cement years of friendship. His name was Tommy K. and I can't remember who won the fight. Our friendship lasted all through high school into our early adult life. It was a time for experimentation of the worst sort. By the time I was 17 I was already a heavy drinker and frequently tried various kinds of drugs. The "free-love" movement was beginning to blossom and Tommy and I were trying to take advantage of every

opportunity to prove ourselves as worthy members.

I have deliberately left out many sexual encounters with family members and friends of both sexes that I deeply regret. (At the risk of editorializing I want to say that sexual experimentation before marriage, especially at an early age, will be emotionally destructive even if the damage doesn't appear for many years. It almost destroyed my ability to emote normally and drastically inhibited my ability to trust anyone fully.) As you might imagine this could be rather stressful to a marriage and hinder the development of an intimate relationship with a wife or Savior.

As a 12th grader I left much to be desired. As my mother was leaving step father number 3, step father number 4 was moving in. My whole life was being turned upside down again. Charlie wasn't a bad guy for a 4th father. He was a former Marine and a hard worker. He wasn't much at being a father though. He did convince my mother that my failing grades might be redeemed through a career in the Marine Corps. It might even make a man out of me. So at the tender age of 17 I enlisted in the Marines.

Some people are groomed for success and others for failure. I will let you guess what category I fit into. Paris Island South Carolina, in 1966, was a hell hole. It was a hot time in Vietnam and the war effort was on the increase. My mother's health was failing and I couldn't go to the "Nam". She had signed for me to enlist knowing as a sole surviving son I couldn't go into a combat zone. How she had overlooked mentioning this small detail to me I'll never know, but I was stuck state side while all my buddies were shipping out. After boot camp and ITR training at Camp LeJune North Carolina I finally got to go home for a short visit.

I had no idea how bad things were. They couldn't make ends meet with the mounting hospital bills. Every attempt to gain an early discharge failed so I elected to take the only path I could see before me. AWOL, Summary Court Martial, six months loss of pay, six months at hard labor, reduction in rank to E-1 and a Bad Conduct Discharge. More commonly referred to as "six, six, down and out".

You talk about stress and poor self image. I could write a book or two on those subjects. Yet God is always there waiting for us to receive his unconditional love and acceptance. In later years I would grow to understand more fully how much a human life is worth. No matter how depraved it may appear I came to realize my worth when I realized the price that was paid to redeem a wretch like me.