



# **The Remarkable Life of an Unremarkable Man**

**A Memoir by  
Daniel J. Ford**

I had never considered writing a memoir before now because I didn't believe anyone would be interested in reading one. If there was a curious person, it certainly wasn't me. But one day, my grandnephew Paul Storberg, while visiting in Florida, asked me if I would consider doing just that. His grandmother is my sister Donna, and when I told her what her grandson had requested, she started to lobby on his behalf and her son Eric and other grandchildren for me to do that as well. And so, even though I was in the middle of writing my third novel, I decided to begin a spare time composition of as much as I could remember about my life. I am now sliding

into my 83rd year, so I better get going as quickly as possible because I swear I feel my memory cells disintegrating as I pound away on my computer's keyboard

I had tried my best to remember that eventful day on November 15th, 1937, when my mother went into labor in the upstate New York village of Hancock, in the Catskill Mountains, and then I was born to Joe and Gertrude Ford. I can't recall that happening, but I was told that I had been in a hurry, like a lot of new babies, and she had her water break in an inopportune moment and had to be rushed to what passed for a hospital in Hancock. I was a rather large baby and tipped the scales at over 10 pounds. I have since been all over the place at being underweight and overweight at various times during my life, which probably makes me an average bloke in that regard. My sister Donna, and only sibling, had beaten me into the world by two and a half years. I have no idea if she was happy about my arrival, but I am sure she has vacillated about that fact over the years.

Now that I had gotten into this earthly existence, I decided to take a few years off from remembering anything. That is because I don't remember those early years except for a rare incident here and there. One strong memory was of me sitting as a toddler in a wheeled carrier. I was in front of a building with an upper porch. Why I remember such a mundane incident with no particular activity that should allow me to remember it, I don't know, but there it is, but I found out from my sister that there is a photograph of this, so there you are. Mystery solved. It's a recall of a picture and not my incredible memory. I also had two specific significant memories with the same theme but no images to verify them. One of those memories was sitting on a porch during a brilliant sunset with several calico cats around me. Another was in the school cafeteria. In both cases, I strongly felt I didn't belong in the body I was trapped in. This feeling of not belonging on Earth has surfaced occasionally throughout my life. That theme shows up in my writings, and I often attempt to explain why it is so. I have not gotten anywhere with this kind of research.

The next obvious thing I remembered was being on a bridge that led to what we called Brooklyn-side on the other side of the Delaware River from the village of Hancock. We lived on that Brooklyn side then, and many cars were hooting their horns and people shouting happy things as they crossed the bridge. I was about eight years old, and World War II had just ended, and people were celebrating. I have a picture of our dog Boots and me on the bridge about that date and time, so my memory is suspect.

There are many spotty images that I can pull up around this age. They generally have to do with a perfect time, such as jumping on snowbanks and burrowing under piles of dried and colorful autumn leaves. I remember tobogganing down the mountainside with our dog Boots, jumping on my back to share a ride, and joining with friends to leap off a part of the bridge into a deep snowbank. This was a favorite event when I was a kid. We used to sit glued to the radio on mornings when the snowfall was heavy to hear if school was canceled for the day. There was no TV then, and the first television I ever saw was at the age of 13 when we drove to New Jersey for some reason. Then there were good times swimming during the summer on the Delaware River.

That was on the riverside that sewage did not discharge into in those days. Our favorite spot was a place called flat-rocks, and we went there a lot. We would often inflate inner tubes and float on the swift current down the Delaware River, which was rarely deep, and our butts protruding downward in the tube's hole would bump against the rocks at the bottom of the river as we drifted along.

My life was typical of most American boys' lives during those years following the end of World War II. We idolized soldiers who had fought in the big war, and they were returning home to get a job and start a family. My mother, Gertrude (Eventually to become Trudy), like many women during World War II and like the WWII icon Rosie the Riveter, worked in a factory in place of men who had to go to war. My father worked as an assistant postmaster at the US Post Office. My sister and I went to Hancock Central School, the only school in Hancock. It housed all grades from 1 through 12. It was also the only public social gathering place for the kids.

My mother and father were best friends with Harvey and Eva English, who owned our only movie theater in town and several more in surrounding villages. Our two families were merged into one in many ways as my sister and I were merged with Harvey and Eva's children. Sunny (Sonya) and Buzzy (Harvey Jr.) were close to our ages, so we shared in all their life experiences. We could go in and out of the movie theater whenever we wanted without paying and therefore saw practically every movie ever filmed during those times. Buzzy and I used the theater as our playground, including the room where they stocked the candy. We were admonished not to go into it but of course, figured out how to raid the locked room when the candy urge struck. Harvey and Eva English also had a cabin on Somerset Lake, and our summers were spent there. And my memories of those days were excellent, of course.

As I mentioned, both families were connected in many ways, but that closeness came at a cost. The English family was very well off, what with the theaters and one of the largest houses in town and whereas our family lived very modestly in rented houses. We never even had a car in those days, but we were treated like family by Harvey and Eva. If Buzzy or I misbehaved, which we did from time to time, we both received the birch tree twig switching from mother Eva (who generally cried more than we did during those punishments). However, as we aged, Donna and I were always aware that we were not a genuine part of that family.

To make matters worse, as I entered junior high school, I started hanging with the jocks who were the most popular guys in the school. I was again associated with the cream of the crop but was far more milk-like in my nature and social standing. I went along with them and joined the football and basketball teams, but they became the top players, and I became glued to the bench most of the time. I did better with swimming and track as they were individual effort sports. I did excel to a degree in singing and had the lead in many Gilbert & Sullivan musicals in

the school. However, I began to realize that I didn't truly belong to many things I valued, attached myself to, and desired the most.

I occasionally dated some of the nicer and better-looking girls but didn't have my heart into it for reasons I discovered later in my life.

The final straw came with our father and mother deciding that they could no longer stand one another. The "clues" were apparent, with the arguing getting worse and worse and to the point that my sister Donna and I were pretty pleased when they separated and went their way. I enjoyed this separation, not just for the quieter home life but because I could play one against the other. If they were not talking, it was easier to get permission to do something or beg a few coins from each without the other knowing.

However, the combination of a split home and constant comparison with my friends at school were beginning to cause me to want to leave the Hancock environment. My sister escaped after she graduated high school and headed to North Carolina with a friend. My mother had decided to go to Florida to establish residency so she and my father could get a divorce. In those days, divorce was illegal in New York State without a clear case of adultery or something else severe.

I decided this was not a place or a situation I wanted to stay in. Even though I would not graduate high school for another year, I decided to leave and make it on my own. I was about to turn seventeen and found that I could join the US Air Force, but I needed my parents' permission. At first, they refused until I told them my second option was to leave, go to New York City, and live on the streets. They knew I could do this as I had run away on several occasions when I was younger, even though it was only to a friend's house. It was my preferred solution to any problem, and they knew I would do it, so they signed the permission, and I was on my way to join the Air Force. It was in November 1954. I had agreed to complete high school while in the Air Force, which was an option in those days, and I did that.

Joining the Air Force was one of the best decisions I had ever made. In those days, the basic military training in the Air Force was about the same as the US Marines, which means that it was not for sissies. I began to think I had made a big mistake, mainly when we were doing bivouac exercises in December in the cold Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. While lying in a foxhole all night in freezing weather with pseudo-artillery blasts and invading soldiers coming at us from all directions and with my boots submerged in freezing water, my toes and fingers became frostbitten. I ended up in the military hospital for several days. Fortunately, the damage was not permanent, but I also had a bout of pneumonia while I was there. My mother and her boyfriend, who eventually became my stepfather Bob Wright, came to visit. She was distraught because I was still her baby boy in her eyes, but I put on my big boy attitude and convinced her that I was OK with everything happening.

And it was because after I got out of the hospital, I finished boot camp with little difficulty from that point on. Following the aptitude tests of every recruit, they determined that I would make a good weatherman or flight crew airman. I wanted to be a pilot for some unknown reason, but they decided that my depth perception wasn't good enough, so meteorology was. I was sent off to Chanute AFB in Illinois for meteorological school. It was a good choice, and I did well getting through that. Also, my Uncle Mickey Ford, who I had never met, lived near the Air Force base there, and I got to meet him, his wife and daughter Nancy, and son Dick. My father, Joe Ford, came to visit me at the base, and we had a family thing with his brother, whom he hadn't seen in many years. That was nice.

After graduation from weather school, I was told to go to Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. That was not good news to me as I hate cold weather, but I got a change order, which happened a lot while in the Air Force. I was ordered to go to Japan, which was much better as far as I was concerned. The trip from Illinois was very long as we didn't have jet planes back then, and the prop-driven planes took days and not hours to cross the United States and then the Pacific Ocean. We had to skirt a typhoon at one point, and I remember getting so airsick that I wished the plane would crash. But we made it to Japan, and I was astounded at the cultural differences. We arrived in Tokyo late at night, and I marveled at the nighttime sights as we traveled by bus through the City to our base. I woke up in the morning, went to the toilet, and then shower. I stripped and walked nude into the shower while looking for a towel when a small woman walked over to me, bowed, handed me one, and said something in Japanese. That was my introduction to how cultures differ when you enter a foreign land. At least it was in those days.

I didn't stay in Tokyo very long, and we flew to Kadena AFB in Okinawa. I didn't know it at the time, but I was on my way to the Philippine Islands, but it seemed that the Air Force didn't want to tell you where you were going if it didn't have to. We never left the base while at Kadena, so the only thing I remember from that visit was a fighter plane crashing outside our barrack's window. It is not a pleasant memory.

When I arrived at Clark AFB in the Philippines, there was no culture shock at first. The base was huge, and the only things you could see were the buildings, the runway, and a volcano called Mt. Pinatubo near the distance. It was just another base and not particularly interesting. I was still seventeen at the time, and to the other guys, I was a young newbie for sure and therefore eligible for the newbie treatment. This attitude didn't have the negative connotation that prisons have towards a new prisoner, but it did mean that they enjoyed a slight discomfort at your expense. As soon I got settled into the base routine, several of the guys loaded me into a jeepney, a standard jeep converted into a small bus that transported airmen from Clark AFB to the nearby City of Angeles. Officially the City of Angels was at that time, anything but that. In 1955 Clark airbase was huge, with many airmen and civilians working there. The City of Angeles provided many off-base recreational activities, including many attractive girls who worked as hostesses in the numerous bars and lounges. To a seventeen-year-old young man, this was a paradise



situation. Not only were there guys your age to play around with, but there were also many beautiful girls willing to entertain you when you were tired of drinking with your buddies. That first night in Angeles, my fellow airman took me to a massive bar with large sofas scattered throughout the bottom floor of the building. You sat on a couch, and girls came by to say hello and offered to get you a drink. Your friends told you that you asked any girl to sit with you if you liked her, but then you were expected to buy her drinks, which were considerably more expensive than the one you were drinking. If you wanted to buy her drinks in a more private situation, there were rooms upstairs that suited that goal very well. Can you imagine being a seventeen-year-old in that situation?

At first, I liked it a lot because I had found myself in an environment where everyone I hung around with was essentially equal. Most of my pals were of the same rank and had the same interests. It was what I had been missing in my life a mere one year ago. The transformation was energizing, and I remember it well. The problem was that it became a habit real quick. Almost every night, you headed to Angeles, met a new girl, or saw a favorite one again and drank a lot of San Miguel beer. Eating wasn't a thing you were too interested in, but on occasion, we stopped around midnight in favorite restaurants for a large bowl of Lugano soup, which was like a chicken and rice soup but said to contain lizard meat instead. Other nights we ate at an aptly named "American Restaurant" for a really good hamburger made with water buffalo meat. At any rate, this was a fun and decadent life, but one you could burn out on overtime, and I did.

I have no idea when I started to "burn" out of the Angeles nightlife. Still, at some point, I met with a few guys on base who were the type of individuals who preferred to have friendships with meaningful conversations over coffee or cokes with an occasional beer. We spent a lot of time talking about astronomy, sociology plus spirituality, a little politics, and many other subjects. I enjoyed this a lot and started to skip going to Angeles, except when it was my turn to take a newbie there. Eventually, I became "religious" and joined the Catholic Holy Name Society on the base. I needed it at the time to "purify" myself, or perhaps I just needed a change. We even went on religious retreats to the Philippine Mountains on Luzon at a town called Baguio. These were closed, week-long retreats where you could not talk to anyone at any time during the retreats. It was strictly living as a novice monk with lots of prayers and contemplation and no conversations with anyone. I remember how cold it was at night with just a stiff outside air-dried white sheet over your body. The room was barren of anything but a wooden bed with no pillow and a giant wooden crucifix on the wall. It was all fascinating and compelling, but I decided I would never want to be a monk from that point on. However, once again, I was changing from one kind of person to another. I began to wonder if I was flighty by nature or was finding any lifestyle impossible to stick to over time. I decided on the latter.

I recalled a stop we made when leaving the mountain retreats at a closed convent full of Perpetual Adoration Nuns. These were nuns who spent every day of their lives in constant prayer. In actuality, eight hours were spent in prayer, eight hours in convent chores, and the other was sleeping. They were all in pink robes, and we were allowed a few words with them because

we had been in the closed retreat, so this was a treat for us and perhaps for them. I discovered that some of these nuns had been in the convent since World War II started. I was impressed, but this made me more determined than ever not to become a priest or monk.

I was in the Philippines for nearly two years, away from home. There were no feasible phone calls in those days except for emergencies and certainly no internet or Facetime. The only communication with your family or friends was through letters back and forth. My career was going well, and I just lucked into a unique career niche. I was a regular weather observer, but as fate would have it, we had a particular off-shoot branch of that service career at Clark airbase, and I fell into it. It was called, Weather Editing, which sounds innocuous enough, but it was a unique form of classified communication where weather reports could also be used to transmit other critical data. It was considered essential by the military that advanced meteorological reports were very important when military operations of any kind were conducted. Therefore as meteorological observers, we were trained to go into forward combat areas prior to actual combat troops going there. Our special encrypted weather editing protocol could relay an advance weather report back to headquarters, along with other relevant data essential to a military operation.

This protocol was classified then and may still be today for all I know. At any rate, we did our jobs differently than the normal meteorologists, which benefitted me later in life, even after I left the Air Force.

I also attended classes at the University of the Philippines. I didn't acquire a degree of any kind. I had determined that I would do that later and regret that I never did, but higher education goals were not as important to a young person in those days as they are now.

While still in the Philippines in 1956, I received one of those deployment orders again. This time it was to go to Vietnam. I was what they called "Forward Deployed" to the front lines of a war that didn't involve the US yet. The French had a tough time hanging on in Vietnam and needed our help. I was officially a Korean War Vet and almost became a Vietnam Vet by virtual of one order, but as usual, something came up, and the order was delayed. President Eisenhower was worried about immersing the United States in another conflict close to the Korean War. As much as I enjoyed being in the Philippines, I was looking forward to getting home at some point, and the idea of heading to an unknown place called Vietnam was not something I was looking forward to. Fortunately, the deployment did not happen. Many years later, I figured out just how monumental such a move to Vietnam would have been to my career.

During this tour in the Philippines, my Colonel had access to a plane almost anytime he wanted because we were in a special weather squadron. This allowed us to regularly get flight time in a C47 (The Douglas DC3). Six of us took this plane all over the Philippines. On one particularly memorable trip, we decided to go south to visit the cities of Cebu and Zamboanga in the south of the Philippines. On the way, we received instructions from Manilla Air Control to change our flight path and go to a higher altitude. We saw another C47 below us and was told that the President of the Philippines, Ramon Magsaysay, was on that plane. Later the next day, at 1:30 am, that same plane crashed into Mount Manunggal near Cebu, and the President, along with others in the plane, perished. This was just another shocking incident on our flight that trip.

The Colonel had a special treat in mind for us in Cebu, but he wouldn't tell us what it was. We landed in Cebu, and after walking around, that City, we went to the docks. We all got into two canoes, except for a Captain who decided he didn't want to go wherever the Colonel wished us to go. Being a lowly enlisted Airman E-2, I didn't question the Colonel. Off we went across the bay in rickety canoes, led by a local Filipino that the Colonel had somehow found. It appeared we were headed into the open ocean. We were going to an island called Mactan. When we landed on the shore, we got out and walked for a couple of hours which I still recall seemed like days. Then we came upon a small run-down monument, and the Colonel declared we had arrived at our destination. We all had that "What The F..." look on our faces. The Colonel then proudly told us that this was the spot where Ferdinand Magellan was killed with a poison lance during a battle with the Lapulapu natives. This, of course, brought out another round of "What the F..." from us, but in actuality, after we had a chance to think it over and remember who Ferdinand Magellan was from our school days, we felt that this had been a pretty cool thing to do after all.

When we left Cebu, we flew south to Zamboanga, which is at the far southern end of the Philippine Islands, and a hop, skip and jump across the sea from Borneo. My memories of being there are limited because we arrived late in the afternoon, landed on a dirt and grass airstrip, and then went directly into the City. I understand it is a lovely city today, but it looked like something out of a pirates hangout to me at the time. We, of course, immediately went to a substantial run-down bar where we could get a drink and something to eat and, of course, found very scary-looking people all about us. The Colonel told us all to stick together because Zamboanga was a dangerous place in those days, what with the Moro terrorists doing horrible things in the City. The Moros were Muslims who had declared war on the Philippines. They would invade Zamboanga, kill or kidnap people and dart back to Borneo, where they couldn't easily capture them. That was all fascinating information, but remember that I was only eighteen and put those thoughts out of my mind while I soaked in the exotic surroundings.

I don't recall anything more about that night. The Colonel and another crew member also didn't remember anything either. They woke me up in the morning lying on the docks where I had passed out and fallen asleep. It was pouring very hard (a typical monsoon type of rain), and I was soaked. But other than a terrific hangover, I was no worse for wear, but the Colonel read me the riot act. I learned later that day that he was no better than me and had also woke up in a strange bedroom, where he had no idea he had been that night before. When we got to our C47, torrential rains came down, and the "runway" was all mud and wet grass. Both our Colonel and the Captain argued about taking off in such conditions, but I guess that the Colonel won, and off we went with the plane slipping and sliding all over the "runway," but obviously, we made it. That was an odd experience as we were hanging in swinging net bucket slings on the sides of the plane. Not the luxury of seats for us. Don't ever try to tell me that there are no Angels that look over fools when we fools don't look after themselves. We were all excellent examples of that, as evidenced from that trip. You couldn't believe the stories from others of our crew about where they had been that night before and what they had done.



The Philippines was a world where many excellent things happened to me. I had dated a beautiful Filipino/French girl who was the sister of the top male movie star in the Philippines. She had a wealthy Filipino father and a French mother. She was a lovely girl with a perfect personality. She was also far above me socially, but her parents always treated me as an equal, but I'm sure they were most likely quite pleased when we parted ways.

I traveled to many fantastic beaches and seashores. We also hiked mountains and shot rapids in a dugout canoe on occasion. I even lived in the Manilla Hotel for a while to meet with meteorologists from other countries. This was because of the unique meteorological niche I had been trained in. I didn't want to leave but missed everyone at home, so I was conflicted again. I thought I would return after being discharged and live in the Philippines or perhaps reenlist in the Air Force. I did neither.

Then I received new deployment orders with the odd destination "Not specified: sensitive location. Those orders were to head back to the States and report to Tinker AFB in Oklahoma. We flew back on a commercial chartered Super G Constellation, a super-fast triple tail and dolphin-shaped aircraft with four powerful propeller-driven engines. At a point mid-way between Clark AFB and Guam, I saw the outer engine on the plane's right side explode while looking out of the window. Then apparently, shrapnel from that engine cut into the engine closest to the plane's body, and smoke started to stream out from that engine. The pilot then obviously feathered it. At first, I was shocked, but things quickly began to happen within the plane. The co-pilot came back to talk to us and very matter of factually told everyone that we had lost the two engines on the right side and that they would take some steps to ditch the plane eventually. I was amazed at how calm the people on the plane were about this, but I credit the crew because they were so quiet and seemingly in control. They started to move the passengers around in the plane to distribute the weight load more evenly. They told us they would drop our luggage from the cargo hold. They said we were proceeding to Guam and planned on ditching as close to Guam as possible, depending on how long our fuel lasted. They also informed us that four U.S. amphibious seaplanes would be rendezvousing to pick us up and be there when we ditched. We were also shown how to position ourselves during the ditching procedure. This was accomplished by bending over and placing a pillow on our laps. People with babies or young toddlers were repositioned to put the baby between adults to increase the protection that one of the adults would help the child if the other couldn't.

A young guy was traveling with his baby but without his wife. His baby was placed between he and I. It turns out that the guy was from a Pennsylvania town close to Hancock, and we considered how odd that was. We talked a lot about where we both came from. We determined how his son would be protected by both of us during the ditching procedure. I was next to the window and hadn't moved, so I could see everything outside as we descended. I could also observe the water and realized it was rough with huge whitecaps. We couldn't ditch in those stormy conditions, but I couldn't say anything to anyone else. But I noticed others along the window seats were fidgeting and nervous. After some time, as I watched the whitecaps, I saw that the Coastguard seaplanes had arrived and took up a position alongside our plane. This was

very comforting, and when the pilot announced that our rescuers had reached us and were flying alongside us, it seemed that everyone in the plane cheered.

Later, as I looked out of the window, I saw that the ocean's water was getting shallower, and then I quickly noticed a rocky shoreline and suddenly felt the plane lurch as if it was jumping over something. This indicated that the landing gear had come down. I knew this also meant that we would not be ditching. And then, the runway at Guam suddenly appeared in front of my eyes. We were landing on a solid runway, and people on the plane erupted in shouts and applause. The aircraft continued to go slowly down the runway and then abruptly stopped. We found out later that it ran out of fuel. Buses came out to the runways to pick us up. Here again, I was convinced that an Angel had decided to bail us out of a mess once more.

When I returned to the U.S., I had leave time and decided to take it and head home. I can recall heading to New York on a Greyhound bus from Southern California to Texas and heading east to New York. The only memorable thing about this trip was dealing with bigotry and racial inequality on that trip. I was traveling by myself and had an empty seat next to me. A sailor in uniform was sitting behind me with an open seat. I think an obviously pregnant black mother with three children got on the bus in California. She was uncomfortable with the two seats that she had and squirming children with a small one on her lap and one in the oven. I offered to have one of the little boys sit in the empty seat next to me, and the sailor behind me did the same for the other boy. The mother seemed hesitant but then allowed it. The boys were well behaved because I think they were a little afraid of two white dudes in uniforms being next to them.

At any rate, after we had traveled for most of the day, we stopped at the bus depot that was most likely in Arizona. I'm not sure, but the sailor and I decided to take a toilet break and suggested that the mother and her kids come along. She said she couldn't, as black people were not allowed at this particular bus stop. The sailor and I were astounded at this, and both boys said they needed to go, so we took them to the men's toilet and were turned back because of the black boys.

The mother said they were used to holding it because this is a common occurrence. We continued on the trip and got to the next stop several hours later, and they had a restaurant at this one. Still naive, we gathered the mother and her kids and started to march into the restaurant only to be told that the blacks were not welcome. The mother said nothing but had found the black toilets and had taken her kids there. The sailor and I got something to eat and bought food for the black family. She was very grateful, and they ate their dinner in the common area and saved a bit of dessert for the bus ride. We continued on our trip, and they got off, and they all gave us a thank-you, sir, and said goodbye as they left. The sailor and I both talked about our country's sad shape. Both of us had been living in foreign countries where we were the outsiders and had been treated well. I don't remember where he had been previously stationed, but we both felt the same way about the horrible truth of this racist attitude in our country.

When I eventually got to Tinker AFB in Oklahoma after leaving, I asked my superiors why I was assigned there. I received the information that I was not specifically posted to anywhere permanently. I found that very strange but didn't think to question it further. They

asked if I would like to be assigned to any place in particular for a few weeks. I thought I was in the "Twilight Zone" but decided to humor them and said, how about Stewart AFB in upstate New York? It was near home, and I could visit family there. I couldn't believe it when they said that was fine, and I received flight orders to catch an Air Force plane heading there. It was nice being at home again for that short stay. While there, I worked the control tower and unfortunately witnessed another fighter plane crashing in front of me when a jet trainer came in too low and exploded on the runway. I was hoping this was the last plane crash I would ever see.

When I arrived back at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, I again asked my superiors what my assignment was. They ignored the question and told me that they read in my files that I had been very good at swimming and had won some competitions in the Philippines. I affirmed that the competitors were no big deal, but they had decided that I would now be a swimming instructor. I had liked swimming since high school, so I thought this was an OK assignment, and it was fun. I was amazed that many black guys sunk to the bottom of the pool very fast and found out that many lean muscled ones had very little fat within their muscles and therefore didn't float easy. We taught them to overcome that by constant movement, and I found out that we were teaching a whole bunch of people who, like me, had not been assigned a final deployment order. But we were told that all of them had to swim or they would not be able to go on to their final destination. Aha! The first clue we had received brought about a lot of speculative talk between us, but we all knew that meant somewhere with a lot of water. Once this additional training, which was in addition to meteorological issues, started, I began to remember what my previous weather commander at Clark AFB had mentioned to us when we started the weather editing program. He said we would not only learn the weather editing craft but would also have to become more military competent, similar to the Navy Seals and Army Rangers. I remember thinking this was not a very enticing goal for me, but it would make sense if we were to go to Vietnam and act as a "Forward Deployed" weatherman on the front lines of a conflict.

All of this came to pass in the future, and here is a description of the eventual Special Operation Weathermen that was to become the highly revered Gray Berets or SOWAC, combat weathermen, as posted by Brandon Webb in a Special Operations Journal on January 6, 2012.

Join the Combat Weathermen  
BY BRANDON WEBB | JANUARY 6, 2012

Special Operations Weathermen undergo a lengthy period of training (over a year) before earning the right to wear their gray beret. This includes the Special Operations Weather Selection Course (two weeks at Lackland), the Special Operations Weather Initial Skills Course (29 weeks), U.S. Army Airborne School (3 weeks), USAF Basic Survival School (2 ½ weeks), USAF Water Survival Training (2 days), USAF Underwater Egress Training (2 days) and finally the Special Operations Weather Apprentice Course. The latter is a 13 week course covering more special operations weather quals, austere weather operations, demolitions, small unit tactics and other skills. After this course, the Combat Weatherman is considered to have a 3-level skill level in their AFSC and are allowed to wear the SOWT crest and gray beret. Following SOWAC, the

journeymen Combat Weathermen must attend Special Tactics Advanced Skills Training, which is *another* year long.

Combat weathermen are forecasters who work in forward ground-combat areas. They gather and interpret weather data while deployed primarily with Army special operations forces. The data is used to generate accurate forecasts for specific mission travel routes and target areas. Combat weathermen are recruited from the Air Force's traditional weather career field, and then subjected to airborne, survival and special-tactics training..."

I was not to follow through on such a rigid training regimen. I am pretty sure that our meteorological flight group in the Philippines may have been the start of this esteemed SOWT program, and if I had been sent to Vietnam in 1956, something similar to this might have been my fate.

But back on Tinker AFB, I was also starting to get training assignments with new meteorological equipment that I was unfamiliar with and strange equipment that I had no idea its purpose. I had learned not to ask questions but did my best to become very familiar with the equipment's operation. Just between us, we all had fun trying to guess what this machinery was to be used for. We also received a considerable range of exercise and quite challenging field training that was more rigorous than we had in our initial basic training. Here again, we found this strange but didn't question it. It was only at present in 2022 that I began to suspect that we were to become something different than we have been so far in our U.S. Air Force life.

Eventually, we received orders to head for Andrews AFB in California. Once there, we shipped out quickly to Hawaii. I had been there twice before and loved the place. On one of my trips there, another high point incident in my life took place. Me and two buds rented a convertible and drove out to a Buddhist temple that one of the guys knew about. It was a beautiful place with fantastic gardens. We weren't there to see the gardens, though. Somehow one guy knew a way around the temple to get to a large creek some distance from the temple. The stream had a tall waterfall that cascaded into the pond from a distance of about 35 feet or more. You could climb up to the top along a well-worn pathway with rocky steps until you reached the top. We had bathing suits under our trousers as we knew that we would end up on a beach or a pool or somewhere to swim. We stripped our pants and shirts off. We dove off the waterfall's top into the deep pond at the bottom. The friend who took us here had been here many times, but this was our first. It was a fantastic experience, and we repeated it repeatedly to alter our dive techniques. I did pretty well, but my friends were even better. I noticed a man standing at the top of the hill overlooking our activities on the waterfall. I was a little nervous, thinking we were trespassing on someone's property. As we gathered our clothing, and came back down the pathways, the man who had also descended the hill came over to us and spoke. He told us that he admired our diving and wanted to know where we were from. We told him that we were Air Force and just traveling through Hawaii. We told him our names, and he told us he was Duke Kahanamoku. I honestly thought that I would faint on the spot. My friend who took us there already knew who he was and had hoped we would see him, which is why we had come there.

For those of you young readers reading or hearing this, Duke Kahanamoku was a five-time Olympic swim medalist. Besides having a stellar career in swimming, he was one of those who introduced surfing to the U.S. mainland. He was a character actor in several films in those early days and was famous for rescuing several men drowning from a capsized ship by using a surfboard as an aid to save them. Many said it was the most superhuman surfboard rescue act the world has ever seen". It also led lifeguards across the U.S. to use surfboards as standard water rescue equipment. I later learned that he was the Sheriff of Honolulu when we met him, so he could quickly have arrested us for trespassing. I was super impressed to meet one of my idols that day.

But back to my arrival in the South Pacific after leaving Hawaii. Eventually, after several stops, we arrived in Enewetak, in the Marshall Islands. I still didn't know what we would do when we arrived, but I had figured a lot of it out because the Air Force released more information once my classified clearance was affirmed. I had already received a top secret clearance in the Philippines because of my work there, but perhaps they needed to update it.

Interestingly, I also acquired a reputation as a sound sleeper while there as I slept through my first small hydrogen bomb blast on Enewetak. Some of the guys staying in the tent during the blast waited to see if I would jump up when one went off, but apparently, I just rolled over and covered my head. I have since demonstrated the same proclivity when sleeping through hurricanes in the Bahamas and Florida.

The next day I was put on a seaplane and flown to another island called Rongelap Atoll. As a boat came out to pick three of us up and deliver us to the island, I began to think I was in the middle of a strange war scene. It was like something out of a World War II movie showing G.I.'s on a Pacific Island waiting for the Japanese to attack. It was a weird feeling, but the island was beautiful nonetheless.

We were met by men in jeeps on the beach that took us to our relatively small base of operation. Our sleeping quarters were large canvas tents over a wooden frame on raised wood floors. The working areas were either tents or aluminum Quonset huts. Our Weather Quonset was full of the equipment we had been training on at Tinker AFB. We now knew that the strange equipment we were mystified about was various sensing equipment for radiation detection, sonic detection to measure bomb blast intensity, light flare detection, etc. The rest of the weather equipment was the typical ones, such as giant weather balloons that we were used to. They allowed us to determine the upper atmospheric wind directions and speed to help predict where nuclear fallout would likely occur.

We were now members of Operation Hardtack I, a Hydrogen Bomb testing project to study 35 hydrogen bombs instead of atomic bombs. The nuclear bombs we dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan were kilotons or thousands of tons of TNT equivalent. The ones we tested in the South Pacific were megatons or millions of tons of TNT equivalent. Pretty impressive stuff and scary as hell. More than once, I wondered what on Earth we were doing here in paradise, trying to create hell. There was a Marshall Island native who said, "Who are these people who scratch their matches on the face of God?" I felt the same way but never spoke it so eloquently. The project remained classified until many decades later so that we couldn't



discuss any details about it. By the time Project Hardtack was declassified, most people who worked on the project had died, which is convenient for those officials trying to cover shit up. I was only 20 years old then and was one of the team's youngest members. The coverup of the cause we were doing was so intense that it wasn't until 2021 that the Secretary Of Defense awarded the military designation of an Atomic Veteran to us, thereby admitting what danger we had been sent into.

The bombs were incredible, to say the least. Shortly after my arrival, I flew back to Enewetak to see one of the underwater detonations. It was an amazing experience. We all stood outside wearing goggles on a bright sunny day and couldn't see anything at all, even when staring directly at the sun. When the bomb exploded, a column of water that was probably a mile wide rose out of the ocean several miles out from Enewetak, and the light from it was so bright that it hurt your eyes even with those black glass goggles on. Its brightness quickly faded, and a loudspeaker announcement told us we could remove our goggles. Imagine the shock of seeing this gigantic column of water rising to impossible heights into the sky. The water in the lagoon was pulled away from us at an alarming rate giving us an instant low tide. As the column started receding, the water came rushing back like a miniature tsunami. This underwater blast was one of our smaller ones, but its impact on us was so dramatic that no one talked about it as we left the shoreline "party".

Back on our base at Rongelap Atoll, I was beginning to learn more about what we were doing here in these beautiful islands. The more giant hydrogen bombs were to be tested at Bikini Atoll, a mere 90 miles from Rongelap. I didn't know it at the time, but we were the closest island to the blasts, and Rongelap had received severe fallout from an explosion named Bravo in 1954 on Bikini Atoll. The fallout was extensive on Rongelap, and the natives had to be evacuated to various islands far distant from their homes on Rongelap. The damage to these people was extensive, causing almost immediate hair loss at a minimum and stillbirths to others. Our government didn't even bother to find family member connections and sent some to one island and others to different islands splitting up the family units. In 1957 the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission declared Rongelap safe for re-habitation. Later US scientists noted after grilling from a Congressional committee, "The rehabilitation of these people on the island would afford most valuable ecological radiation data on human beings toleration of residual radiation."

And so they sent the natives back to a contaminated island as guinea pigs, and to make it better, it even sent us, their men, to be in the same role. We were investigative guinea pigs, a big difference and of significant value. After spending most of 1958 on this contaminated island, we were sent back to the States. The Rongelap natives were once again evacuated as thyroid, and other diseases such as cancer began to become evident. The radiation poisoning from our bombs was a slow festering time bomb inside our bodies.

As it turned out, I had developed leukemia and prostate cancer many decades later, typical of exposure to ionizing nuclear radiation. I have since been officially declared a 100 percent disabled military veteran. It was an acknowledgment that our government had done wrong. Still, I don't believe that they have ever truly compensated those wonderful people of Rongelap, Bikini, and Enewetak, among other islanders, for taking away their homes and leaving

them forever damaged. It took all those years between the 1950s and 2022 before the Department Of Defense would declare us as Atomic Veterans. Until then, we were declared a government top secret and were not to be discussed. They even created a gold medal to bestow on us, but it wasn't to be distributed until the end of 2022.

But having said that, our year on Rongelap had wonderful and sometimes extraordinary moments. Some of the detonations on Bikini had dramatic effects on Rongelap. I vividly remember one that occurred late at night. We all went out at the scheduled time and waited for the countdown. The night, as usual, was perfect, and the stars were so bright and numerous because there were no city lights or even our meager lighting to block their glow. We had turned all of them out because we wanted the best view of the blast. When the countdown reached zero, the most incredible thing happened. The entire sky turned white and then red. That light was so intense that reflection came from every direction when it was reflected towards us. There were no shadows as you would have when the morning comes from a single source. It was like existing in a black and white negative picture in an attempt to offer a poor description. Then we could see the bomb blast itself beginning to appear on the horizon in the direction of Bikini Atoll, like some giant monster in a scary movie. I have since seen a sci-fi movie called Pacific Rim with aliens rising out of the ocean depths to do you harm and was reminded of the strange feeling we had watching this apparition rise from the ocean at a far, 90 miles, yet seemingly near distance from us. Within a short time, we heard the nuclear explosion at Rongelap, which could be likened to a combination of thunder and a supernatural howl. Soon after that came the concussion as sound and air combined to attempt to knock you off your feet. You felt you might be sent to the ground on the pressure alone.

Our job was to figure out where there might be the possibility of nuclear fallout. We knew the danger of that, and we all headed to our outdoor showers, simple shower heads on tall standpipes that we could stand under and wash off any radioactive ash that might gather on us. This was a precaution with dire consequences that were not lost on us. We were instructed to keep ourselves washed of any debris collected on the island, but we were not told how much radioactive ash had fallen on Rongelap from the Bravo bomb in 1954.

The natives did not have such convenient showers. I found out later that radiation had mainly collected in the breadfruit tree fruit and the coconut crabs, and God only knows what else. The native Rongelapeans did eat the breadfruit and other radioactive edibles, which partially accounts for why they fared worse than we did from the ionizing poison. These natives were also not supplied with the showers as we had. I guess that was part of the scientific oversight our leaders had planned for. When testing the soil for plutonium-239 and -240, the researchers found that some of the islands, including Rongelap, had levels that were between 10 and 1,000 times higher than those on Fukushima (where a recent earthquake and tsunami led to the meltdown of nuclear reactors) and about ten times higher than residual levels in the Russian's Chornobyl exclusion zone. Because of this, we wore black necklaces called dosimeters that detected and recorded radioactive exposure while we were there. These dosimeters recorded our exposure to radiation while on the island. They were ultimately stored somewhere in the nuclear records filings. The Defense Department approved my disability status many years later when I applied for disability. The Atomic Energy Commission awarded me a settlement, and the

Veterans Administration awarded me a 100 percent disability status. Both awards are certainly better than nothing, but as I said previously, the Marshall Islanders were damaged far worse than we were.

There were many more bomb tests, some of which we were aware of and others we could not see, but we worked them all and were always aware of their existence. One memorable night, we had a high-ranking general in charge of nuclear deterrents for our country visit our base. We were sitting around the fire talking and having beers, someone asked him if we would ever use these hydrogen bombs against any country, and he said in no uncertain terms that the answer was yes. Suppose we were to be attacked by another nuclear power such as Russia. He said they could destroy the United States, and he would be required to destroy them first. He was telling us that Armageddon was a distinct possibility, if not a probability. He is probably dead and gone by now, but I still wouldn't mention his name even if I could remember it, which I can't. His description of a megaton bomb being dropped on New York City was unnerving. Manhattan would become a complete deep crater, and the destruction of buildings and everything else would extend through all of the boroughs. At the same time, radioactive poisons would take everyone in New Jersey, Connecticut, and many more areas. A few sleepless nights followed that visit.

I spent most of my time doing beach things like swimming, diving, fishing, and reading. We had scuba gear provided by the Air Force on our small base, so I learned how to use it from other guys who had the experience. The reefs on Rongelap were exceptional and beautifully pristine. There were never enough people diving to have any impact on marine life. The natives were also not numerous enough to negatively impact the number of fish in the area. It was my first time diving into the ocean, and I was astounded by its beauty. There was so much variation in the fish and other marine life. And the colors of the fish and coral structures took your breath away. I had no idea that there was so much beauty under the water. I was raised in the Catskills, where the water in lakes was murky brown-green to the muddy bottom, and the water in the rivers was more transparent, but the bottom was full of rocks, mud, and an occasional catfish or eel. These waters were pristine, just as the islands themselves were. It was sad to realize that we were doing our best to destroy it.

We made a float about 100 yards from the shoreline out of empty barrels and topped them with a wooden deck. We used it as a launch platform to dive from and sunbathe on with water lapping under you. However, there were times when man-of-war jellyfish would drift towards the shore while we slept on the float. We had to attempt to dive in and swim under the descending tentacles to get to shore. But when you surfaced near the beach, the tentacles whipped your back and did some damage. I was not sensitive to the tentacles and mostly got some pain and welts, but other guys had to be medicated, and they suffered a lot for many days.

As I said, the diving was terrific, and many sharks patrolled the area near the reefs where we dove. We didn't pay them much attention, and they didn't seem to care about us, so we didn't fear them. However, one incident taught me not to get too cavalier about these predators. One night, many of us were out fishing at the point where our island terminated at the reef, and another island started several hundred yards away. The tidal waters surged back and forth between the island tips and brought many fish into that area.

A few guys had tied a heavy line onto an inner tube at one end and placed a huge hook and baitfish onto the other end of the line. An inner tube was anchored into the ground or tied to a palm tree. This automatically played a large fish, such as a shark. If the guys were off walking or drinking and not attending to the line. I was fishing with a pole and reel at the island's juncture and was casting out in the tidal rift while I was about waist deep. The moon was bright that night, and as I was casting, I saw what I thought was a board moving back and forth along the roiling rift of the water. At first, I was just curious about this "board," but then I suddenly realized that it was the rear tail fin of something significant, and I was just barely smart enough to figure that it was a giant shark. While watching its movements, I somehow understood that the shark was still unsure what I was, so I started slowly backing up towards the beach. As soon as my thighs were out of the water, I turned and ran back onto the beach, and when I turned around to see if anything was chasing me, the shark lurched forward and beached itself right behind me. I yelled at my buddies as I ran out of the water as fast as I could and left my fishing pole behind. My friends were pretty close by. They had a sledgehammer that they used to bludgeon sharks if they happened to hook one, so they ran to the shark and me, and one of the guys slammed the shark on its head several times. It was a massive mature Tiger Shark, and after it was hit, it wriggled enough to catch an incoming wave and could get back into the water and swam away. I hadn't taken a breath for quite a while. The guys all slapped me on the back to congratulate me for not being eaten in front of them. They then added another baitfish to the inner tube line, threw it out, and got a large bite in no time. When they pulled it in, the same 18-foot-long Tiger Shark was firmly hooked on the line, as evidenced by the sledgehammer marks on its head. This shark was so hungry it wouldn't pass up something to eat, even if it had a nasty headache. I have the polaroid photo of the shark to remind me that my Angel was still on duty that night.

As exciting as a few incidents were on Rongelap, most of the time was quite serene. The powers-that-be knew this and had stocked our base library with many books. I had always liked to read, but with so much free time available, I picked up the reading pace. I read all manner of subjects but somehow got immersed in spirituality genres instead of religion, which I had pretty much put behind me after my Holy Name Society phase in the Philippines. The subject of spirituality has pretty much stuck with me throughout my life, but there have been many rather long periods when I didn't think about it. I read the book *The Unobstructed Universe* by Stewart Edward White while on Rongelap. This book stayed in a side corner pocket of my consciousness throughout my life after that, and I returned to it several times, including recently. You never know what is going to influence you.

I read every chance I got and often took a book with me to the beach and read there until I fell asleep. I often slept all night lying on the sand and would wake up with small crabs digging into the sand around my body. I assume they liked the warmth or something as they did not bite. I don't remember mosquitoes or midges, but there were occasional horseflies or something like them. There were parties for various reasons and even some special ones with the natives, but for the most part, we lived a very passive lifestyle, and I loved it.

There were even a few times when I ran a movie on our company movie projector and watched the entire film through a small lens within the projector, so I had my mini-movie. I am

surprised that I cannot bear watching a video on my iPhone now when I enjoyed my mini-movies then. Perhaps I had considered it sneaky at the time and enjoyed it. I don't know.

We had the Islanders to our base from time to time to watch our outdoor movies, which they loved, and eat our food, which I don't think they loved all that much. We were invited to their village to eat their food, which I did not love all that much. But that is my nature as I didn't eat much native food in the Philippines after spending nearly two years there. I came to love these people a lot as they made a great effort to make us happy with their presence and didn't appear to blame us for what our country had done and was still doing to them. I particularly liked one guy my age named David, who was the island's chief because his father was before he died from radiation. We always sat next to one another at the base movies and his village house. We often spent hours at the beach together. He had a habit of always holding my hand through a movie or while sitting on the beach talking. He had learned to speak some English, so somehow, we could communicate well enough. He had a wife and a couple of toddlers, so I had somewhat of a family while I was there. I learned that the Melanesians were very open with their affections and could be very intersexual, but that wasn't the case with me, so there were times when I was uncomfortable with his genuine affection, but I didn't allow that to negatively impact our relationship.

When I left Rongelap for good, they showered me with gifts of unique seashells and fans made from coconut fronds, feathers, and shells. They also gave me a much-valued navigational stick chart created from the midribs of coconut fronds tied together to form an open framework. Island locations were represented by shells tied to the framework and existing islands. The sticks represented the ocean currents that boaters would take to get from island to island. I must admit I wept when I left as I genuinely missed these people. I kept the gifts in my Air Force trunk that ultimately got lost in Hancock, New York, where they were stored. I have since seen these maps in the London museum, and it made me very sad to think I no longer had my gifts with me.

Flying back to the United States was a somewhat sad affair. Still, I met the General that had visited our island, and he recognized me while I was at Enewetak and asked if I wanted to fly back to Hawaii on his C124 Globemaster. I accepted and had a great flight back which was much nicer than the normal carriers we traveled on. It wasn't a particularly fancy aircraft but was better anyway, and the seats turned into a bed. I remember looking downward through big windows and seeing the moon reflecting on the ocean.

I knew I had returned to Hawaii for the fourth time in my life, but I don't really remember doing it or even going back to California. I think I headed back to Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, but my memory is unclear. I was due for the end of my time in the Air Force, and my discharge time was nearing, but I don't recall if I was clearing for my discharge in Oklahoma or somewhere else. I find this strange as I have remembered virtually every day in the Philippines and the South Pacific, but I can't recall anything about my last weeks in the Air Force. It seems as though it is some form of mental blockage. I also had this type of mental blockage regarding friends I met in the Air Force. If the names were not written down somewhere, I seemed to black them out.

I recall returning to Hancock after my discharge from the Air Force and feeling like something was missing; unfortunately, a certain mindset was returning to me. Looking back, I



can't believe that I allowed myself to leave something I liked so very much, and that was my life in the Air Force, and I was returning to a life I didn't like in Hancock. I was glad to see my father again, but my mother was now in Florida. I felt rudderless for some reason. I was back in a place I didn't want to be in, and I had nothing to do or look forward to. I was a cop for a short while because one of my old schoolmates was now the Police Chief and offered me the job. That was not a great job as most of the activity was drunks and domestic violence cases. My next job was as an Arthur Murray dance instructor in Binghamton, and I was soon to find out that most guys my age took that job to sell their favors to the older women who were bored with their husbands. I didn't stay there very long either. I became a bartender at the most extensive bar in town and had to put up with drunk and cheating husbands married to drunken cheating wives who were causing fights because their husbands were cheating on them. I couldn't stand it, yet I was somehow tolerating it. I had known enough to run away from Hancock when I was younger, and I had to learn to run away again. This is a lesson that I have been struggling to understand all my life. If something isn't going right in your life, change it! And if something was going right, stay with it!

My father had developed lung cancer and had one lung removed, which saved his life. He immediately retired from the US Post Office, and I was glad I had been available to help him through post-surgery that time.

Fortunately, the winter arrived with enough ice on the walkways and streets that I couldn't stay upright. I had fallen several times on the way to the bar where I worked, finally finishing it. I told my father that I was heading to Florida. He understood, and I went.

Florida was far better than Upstate New York, and my mother's house was great. It was in the middle of an orange grove, and the citrus blossom's scent was fabulous. I looked around for a job and found one at ABC Liquors, the city's most prominent package booze seller. My stepdad Bob Wright also worked for them in their construction division. I must say that counting, dusting, and selling whiskey bottles was not very challenging. I further found out that the other guys my age that worked there were making plenty of money on the side, delivering a case of whiskey and wine to the older women who were no longer finding pleasure with their husbands. I had been impressed with prostitution in the City of Angels in the Philippines, and now I was finding out that this profession had many different forms and was rampant between young men and older married women. But as with the dance instructing business, I was not interested in this money-making possibility.

While I was staying at my mother's house, my Angel stepped in again because I believed I was too dense on my own to make a move in the right direction. We watched Walter Cronkite on TV one night, the primary news anchor on TV back in 1960. He had a segment on the Atlantic Missile Range where our space program was starting. While watching this with my mother, I told her that I had been getting letters from the Meteorological Section at Patrick AFB, which was part of the Atlantic Missile Range in those days. They wanted to talk to me about a job with them. I had never answered them for some dumb reason. Still, I think I finally got the message, and I called the head of the Meteorological Section, which turned out to be Pan American World Airways. They had the contract to run the Missile Range under the US Air Force command. I asked if they were still interested in talking to me. They said definitely, and I made an

appointment to drive to see them. I was astounded at that meeting to find out that my meteorological credentials from the Philippines and the South Pacific were perfect and highly sought after for the job on the Missile Range. When they told me what the pay would be, it was all I had to do to keep from swallowing my tongue. The basic salary was fantastic, but it included all my food, medical, housing, and tax exemption. I was told that I would probably not have to touch my salary except for private personal expenses such as cigarettes and beer. I accepted the job and returned to my mother's house with the good news. I remember thinking on the drive back that I had been a total fool for not understanding that what I had been doing for the four years in the Air Force had any value. As I said, sometimes your Angel has to kick you ass to wake you up. It would also appear that my Angel was required to save my life occasionally and push me in the direction I was supposed to be going. It was a big help, but it was still up to me to decide to make a move.

And so, on 6/6/60, I was a new employee of Pan American Airways, the prime contractor for the Atlantic Missile Range. I was starting a new life and arrived on the island of Grand Turk, an island of the Bahama Islands at the time. A number of these missile tracking bases on the Atlantic Missile Range, starting with Cape Canaveral in Florida, with tracking stations on the numerous Bahamas and Caribbean Islands, ended in the Indian Ocean. Our function was to track missiles after they were launched from Cape Canaveral (eventually Cape Kennedy) and traveled down the Atlantic Ocean track. My job in meteorology was essential because our cameras and other tracking equipment must see the missile while traveling down the missile range. In addition, upper atmospheric wind speed and direction were necessary to assure that the flight path for these missiles was optimal, so we had to ascertain what the pathway would contain for those missiles.

I only stayed on Grand Turk for about six months, during which time Hurricane Donna (named after my sister, of course), came roaring through the island and destroyed it. It was a strong Category 3 (official rating but became a Cat 5 on Grand Turk) hurricane. It beat all of our base buildings except for the weather station and Command Control building which had solid 10-inch thick poured concrete walls.. The winds were so high at its strongest that our anemometer blew off after registering 140 MPH. I had bought a small sailing & racing sloop several weeks before the storm that I anchored off the beach at our clubhouse. It was swept out to sea along with our clubhouse, which was taken down to its foundation.

Grand Turk was nice enough and had a lot of bioluminescence marine organisms in the water. Frequently, when we were fishing on the beach and using fatty bait, the bait would glow brightly as we reeled it in, and we would slap it against the ground and watch the organisms spatter into the air like fiery embers. It was neat.

I left Grand Turk in December 1960 and was transferred to Grand Bahama Island. This was a major change for me in my life for many reasons that I will detail in this memoir. The Grand Bahama base was more significant than the Grand Turk base and had the advantage of being on an island close to the United States, a mere 95 miles away. This allowed us to travel back and forth between the Bahamas and the States as we wished, but we still had all of the advantages of being in a foreign country and, therefore, free from US income taxes.

Our Grand Bahama tracking station was also a significant support base for Project Mercury, the first human spaceflight program for the United States, running from 1958 through 1963. An early highlight of the Space Race, its goal was to put a man into Earth's orbit and return him safely and ideally before the Soviet Union did. Because our base was the closest to the launching pads of Cape Canaveral, we had to put in a lot of effort to get ready for the day when we would launch a man into space. We often had the Mercury astronauts on our base before a launch to be aware of the entire operations to come, plus they liked relaxing on the beach in the Bahamas. This allowed us to meet and get to know some of these astronauts, although from our perspective at the time, they were not the big deal celebrities they would ultimately become later on. Those that came to our base were Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper Jr., John Glenn., "Gus" Grissom, Walter M. Schirra Jr., Alan Shepard Jr., and "Deke" Slayton. I don't remember which of these men I met during this period except for Gus Grissom, Alan Shepard, and Deke Slayton. I remember seeing Gordon Cooper there as he jogged a lot on the base down at the beach, but I never met him. I am also sure that I never met John Glenn as I am not likely to forget him as he orbited the Earth and became a Senator later on.

The most memorable occasion for me was the day that Alan Shepard became our first man in space. It was a big day for us, not only because we were busy with our tasks, which we were, but because Alan Shephard was to be brought to our base after he returned from space to be physically examined and debriefed. Every major news network plus other independent ones were on the base and kept interfering with our work, asking everyone questions about what we did and how we felt. Eventually, our Pan American Base Operations Manager, who was the same as a Base Commander on a regular airbase, finally had to restrict them from accessing the base. He became a hero to us for that decision. On the day of the launch, we were free from the press distraction to a degree, but there were always those major press corps who were able to get access to us anyway.

Alan Shepard was sent into space that day and returned to Earth by ditching in the ocean. He was picked up by a helicopter and then brought to our base on Grand Bahama, where he was debriefed. He was kept out of sight all that day, and the press was sent off of the base. That evening, he came to our club and entered the bar area with the other astronauts and dignitaries. My Angel was apparently on duty that evening because I was sitting at the bar when Alan Sheppard came in, and he sat on an empty stool next to me. "Deke" Slayton stood behind him while others crowded around. He and I traded handshakes, congratulated him, and he sat down. The television over the bar was continuously broadcasting the news of Alan Shepard's historic flight, and his wife and mother were being interviewed. Sitting next to him at the time, I saw his eyes water and tears coming down his cheeks as he watched and listened to them.

I must admit that this caused me to mist up as well. It was being present at a bit of history being made that was special, plus experiencing the human interest part of the story. It occurred to me that I needed to get his autograph. I took my club card out of my wallet and asked him if he would please sign it, and he did and placed the date on it. I asked "Deke" Slayton if he would sign my card as well, and he did. I had that card laminated and have it to this day. It is one of my most valued possessions. So much time has passed that young people are not very aware of or care who these men were, but they were giants to us then.

During this period that we were busy doing support work for the rockets and the rocket men coming downrange from Cape Canaveral, I was promoted, was in charge of meteorological operations, and acted as an Assistant Base Operations Manager. I was also responsible for assisting in training new Operations Managers before they were assigned a base of their own.

During this period, I had a girlfriend from Hancock visit me in Grand Bahama and at my mother's house in Orlando. Madge was a beautiful and popular girl who had become a registered nurse. She had been a cheerleader and girlfriend to our top jock Bill in high school and, at the time, a significant friend that I had been so jealous of because he was super handsome and always the Captain in every sport. They were in an on-again, off-again relationship, and I was still competing with Bill by taking up with his girl. Talk about how powerful the influences were on a teenager in high school while growing up. Those influences last long beyond what they should have. Madge was great, and we talked about a permanent relationship. My Angel intervened and kept me from making a huge mistake for her sake and mine. After we broke up, she ended up getting married to Bill and having children together. A better deal for her than I would have been.

I also had a significant change in my personal life in 1963. I occasionally went into Freeport, a town on Grand Bahama Island that grew into the second-largest "city" in the Bahamas. A conglomerate of investors led by an American businessman had devised a plan to attract other Americans, Canadian and European people in business and investors to help accomplish this bold feat. He had convinced the Bahamian leadership in the capital city of Nassau to approve these plans under a contract called the Hawksbill Creek Agreement. His plan worked very well, and Freeport became a boomtown almost overnight.

I went to a Freeport bar and restaurant called the Caraval Club one night with Fred Schaefer, my best friend on the missile base and a partner in a large land parcel we purchased on Grand Bahama. He had met a guy who had come to the Bahamas with the construction company building the Lucayan Hotel and Casino. Fred introduced him to me, and we struck up a friendship and a close relationship that has lasted 58 years and even led to our marriage in New York City in 2015, with my sister Donna and her son and grandsons in attendance.

Shortly after we met, I moved into an apartment with Paul and commuted between Freeport and the missile base. Paul was friends with a landscape architect that had designed the landscape for the Lucayan Beach hotel. Because Freeport was growing fast and needed a landscape design and installation firm, Paul and I decided to finance a Gulfstream Landscape company with his landscape architect friend Lou. We bought a duplex in Freeport and moved into it. Our new partner Lou and wife rented on the other side of the duplex. We also designed and constructed an office building complete with a shade house and a detached building to be used as a florist shop.

In time, we had loaned Lou out to the Rockefeller interests, building development in the U. S. Virgin Islands. Lou liked it so much that he wanted to stay there, so we bought his stake out and now had a business we had to run independently. I learned how to design landscapes from Lou to help out because the company was growing quite fast, and he needed the help. After Lou left, we hired a landscape architect from time to time, but Paul and I were getting proficient

enough to handle the operations ourselves eventually. I did the designs, and Paul ran the business installation operations. We both dealt with the administrative functions.

In addition, as I said previously, I had purchased 500+/- acres of land to the East of Freeport on Grand Bahama Island with four other partners, including my friend Fred Schaefer. This parcel of land had nearly one mile of oceanfront and was 45 feet above sea level in many areas. This doesn't sound like much elevation, but it is significant on many Bahama Islands. In time, I sold my share to the other partners shortly before Paul, and I left the Bahamas to return to the States. Since then, we have designed a Master Plan to develop that property, but it never came about for various reasons. The Bahamas have always had a continuous string of negative happenings from political and economic setbacks and severe storms, to name a few. We have given up on anything happening at this point and put it out of our minds.

I began to run into problems at my job with Pan American Airways. They kept offering me promotions that would involve my leaving Grand Bahamas Island for other Atlantic Missile Range locations. Because of my relationship with Paul and having a new business, I had no intention of leaving Grand Bahama. We had also bought a new house at this time, which made what we had a home. I was fortunate that the top man in charge of the Atlantic Missile Range had become a personal friend and protected me from having to accept a promotion. Generally, within Pan American Airways, you risked being fired if you refused the promotions and movement to a new location. Then our friend was promoted to take over the Pacific Missile Range at Vandenburg Airbase in California. He asked me if I wanted to go with him as his assistant, which would have been a huge promotion, but I had to say no. But once he left the Atlantic Missile Range, I was vulnerable. When a promotion to transfer to Atlantic Missile Range Ships was offered, I turned it down. It was close to being the last straw. Also, the US Internal Revenue Service had determined that they wanted everyone on the Missile Range to pay income taxes and possibly retroactively. That made for the final decision, so I turned in my resignation, left Pan American Airways, and now was a permanent resident of Freeport in the Bahamas.

During our time in business in Freeport, we had a perfect life. We traveled to places we wanted to go and virtually commuted between the Bahamas and Miami, where we had made good friends and stayed at their pool cabana suite whenever we wanted to. Sometimes we did foolish things such as buying a four-story hotel in the middle of downtown Miami, next to the YMCA and across from the Greyhound bus station. It was a bad investment but a lot of fun to own. How many people had their own hotel as a second home in a city like Miami? But eventually, we got rid of it and came back to reality. Gay life from 1960 to 1980 was socially extraordinary and very enjoyable until AIDs came along. People in the Gay community were generally amicable and acted like everyone was a family member. A writer named Armistead Maupin captured the reality of these decades beautifully in his Tales of the City books, which are still popular to this day.

Paul and I also had an exciting incident shortly after the Bahamas had become an independent country from England. Independence meant that the Government of the Bahamas was short on money. If England had had any cash to give, they wouldn't have been in the mood



to grant independence in those days. As it was, this was a good way of reducing the national debt. It was like kicking the kids out of the house to reduce expenses. Because of our connection with a friend, we acquired a considerable amount of money for them from a central Bank in New York City. We arranged to get the Bahamas Government several hundred million dollars at a reasonable rate. We were to receive a small percentage for doing the deal work. However, when we went to New York for a meeting with the bank's Chairman to set up the transfer, we found out that the new Bahamas Prime Minister was in the city and wanted to make a deal to bypass us and get the money directly for himself. This killed the deal as the bank didn't want to deal with any government that would not honor its agreements. The Bahamas didn't get its money, and we didn't get our percentage. We knew that it was time to leave the Bahamas and come home. Plus, things were beginning to deteriorate in Freeport as that same Prime Minister of the Bahamas was making moves to force foreign investors out with hopes of allowing Bahamians to take over those businesses at a bargain.

We were able to sell our house and business and decided to come back to Florida. Even with the sale, we didn't get all the money we were due from the buyer for complex reasons, but we were happy to be back. Our days in the Bahamas had been among the best we have ever had, but it was time to come home.

We bought a new Lincoln Continental Mark III and decided to travel throughout the United States, as we hadn't done that before. We drove to Illinois to visit friends, along with our long-time friend Fred Schaefer. Then we drove to San Francisco, leaving Fred in Illinois, then down to San Diego and Laguna Beach, where we visited a friend from Freeport days who was making porn films then. We saw how these "Americana" films were actually made. We even had a walk-on (sitting on a bench) role in one. We then drove back East through the South. We diverted to North Carolina for a business deal and then moved to Ft. Lauderdale, where we decided to make a home base. We stayed long-term in a motel on Ft. Lauderdale's beachfront and eventually bought a small house. We even started a plant and flower shop on Galt Ocean Mile. But we didn't keep it long.

During the last days in the Bahamas and the early days in Fort Lauderdale, we frequently traveled to Puerto Rico because we simply loved the place. We also liked the days and nights in Old San Juan and Condado Beach. We also stayed at a small mountain resort in Mayaguez, on the West coast of Puerto Rico. We liked it so much that we decided to purchase it and run it as a resort after upgrading. We had some friends in Fort Lauderdale interested in investing with us. One was a businessman who owned a spa in Lauderdale, and the other was a building architect.

We flew down to Puerto Rico to meet with the owner. He had decided that he didn't want to sell when we got there. The deal fell through. We even looked at a deserted five-story colonial building in Old San Juan, adjacent to the famous Hotel El Convento. We decided it was too ambitious a project, so we came back to the States without a project.

I don't remember how long we stayed in Ft. Lauderdale, but we didn't do much and didn't accomplish much during that period. We had made a few good friends; among them was a well-known interior designer named Jack Davidson. We vacationed in Puerto Rico with him and generally buddied around with him. One job he worked on was a new high-end development in

Vero Beach called John's Island. The developers were having difficulties with various aspects of land planning and landscaping. They discussed this with Jack, who said he knew of two landscape architects that had operated in the Bahamas but were now in Fort Lauderdale but said he had no idea if they would be interested in getting involved with this project. Jack mentioned it to us, but we are not very interested in getting back into major landscape projects for a while, but we did agree as a favor to him to come up to Vero Beach to meet with the developers.

I had been to Vero a couple of times before, driving there from Orlando with my mother and stepdad to see McKee Botanical Gardens and eat in the Patio Restaurant, which was very well known in those days. I wasn't particularly impressed because Vero was a small town with small-town restaurants and small-town activities. However, Paul and I liked Jack Davidson, and as a favor to him, we had agreed to meet with Roy and Jane Chapin, the young couple heading up the development that Jane's father had started. They gave us an excellent tour of the land and Vero's beachside, and then they persuaded us to at least design the landscape for their new home that was under construction. We agree to stay in Vero Beach for two weeks to help get that started. That was in 1970, and we are still here to this day.

The Developers had wanted us to live within the John's Island development to assist in creating a development company "family presence", but we did not want to do that. As it was, they supplied us with enough land within the development site to bring in mobile offices and operate out of them to better serve their new residents buying lots and building homes there. We were always independent, and the development company was an excellent partner to work with during the ensuing years.

We leased a house on the river in Melbourne Beach and a 10-acre riverfront parcel with two small homes on a site on Jungle Trail in Vero Beach owned by the evangelist Billy Graham. We attempted to purchase it but were turned down by the Graham Estate because we were a landscape company. It might have been for other reasons, but we will never know. Eventually, we purchased a home on the Indian River closer to John's Island, where we worked. We stayed there for over ten years and then bought a house on the mainland of Vero Beach, where we still are today. A few years later, we had good friends Bill and Allen from Brewster, Massachusetts, staying with us at our house on the river. They often purchased homes in Vero and renovated them, and resold them. One day they arrived back at our house and announced that they had bought a new place that day. It turned out to be the Billy Graham house and property. We were happy for them but unhappy that we could not have it. They sold it at a very nice profit a few years later.

My father had joined us in Vero Beach and had been a sort of camp follower for many years. He stayed with Paul and me in the Bahamas for a little while and then moved from Hancock to Fort Lauderdale, where Paul and I bought a house after returning from the Bahama Islands and having that motor tour around the country. When we moved to Vero Beach, he rented various places around the town and settled on an apartment on the beachside. He spent a lot of time with us, eating quite regularly at our house and going together to a Jai Alai fronton in Ft. Pierce. He loved gambling of any kind and was especially pleased that my sister Donna and her husband Ben owned raised and raced harness horses in New Jersey and New York. He had a case of throat cancer and always had some breathing problems after having his lung removed from

cancer. Ultimately in 1983, he died from a heart attack in the Vero Beach Memorial Hospital. We returned his body to Hancock for burial at the cemetery there. I don't remember being that close to him while growing up, but he became close to Paul and me during the years after I left Hancock.

Paul's mother, Mary Paulus, regularly visited us each year from Ohio. She visited while we were in the Bahamas and Vero Beach. She was an excellent cook and baker and accepted our long-term "association" just as my mother and father did.....without any comment! We have also had a long and close association with Paul's sister Sharon and her husband, Bob Bland. They used to make the trek from Ohio to Florida every year, but it seems tiring of that journey now. We hope not, but things change.

But we prospered as the John's Island development grew through the years. We also attempted to start many other ventures during the 50 years since we arrived in Vero Beach. We created a large interior plant store in one of the largest malls in Orlando, Florida. It was a beautiful retail store, but perhaps ahead of its time as it never made any significant profit and only stayed afloat because of increased sales at Christmas time and dipping into our pockets the rest of the year. We hired my mother, Trudy Wight, and my stepdad Bob Wright to run the operation until we decided that it wasn't worth the effort, and we closed it down.

We also established a property management company on John's Island to primarily manage condominium buildings following their construction and assist new owners in running their associations. We hired Larry Anderson, who worked at the nuclear power plant in St. Lucie County and placed him in charge of some condominiums. This brought a bit of a problem to us in the form of racial bias. Larry was a light-skinned African American, but black nonetheless, which was offensive to some of the John's Island property owners. As we were in good standing within the community and because the owner of John's Island (a privately owned entity at that time) was our personal friend, we could ignore the complaints. The owner, Jane Chapin, said, "If they don't like it they can leave. We make a commission every time a property changes hands." This issue was ultimately resolved, and the offended property owners got over it. Larry was married and had a son named Christopher Daniel Anderson, with the "Daniel" in my honor. They became a part of our family and contributed to the family saga from that time forward. Chris was a joy to have around from babyhood through his teen years, often living with us from time to time, but more about that later in this tale. We added many friends such as Larry's mother Ida, his sister Pat Pitts and brother in law Greg Pitts and brother Jimmy Anderson and more people, all remaining friends and part of our family to this day through our meeting with Larry.

We also started a chain of dealerships selling large electric tractors that General Electric made. This all started when we wanted to improve our landscape and grounds maintenance services on John's Island. Regular mowers, particularly the tractor class, were very noisy, and our clients at homes and condominiums on John's Island didn't care for noise. We had recently hired a married couple as administrative assistants to Paul and me. Paul's assistant had mentioned that his Uncle worked at General Electric in Schenectady, New York, and they were developing electric tractors. We contacted him and decided to fly to [Schenectady](#) to discuss purchasing these "Electric tractors". It turned out that they could not sell them directly to a buyer as their contracts protected their dealers. They also did not have any dealers in or near Florida. We convinced them that we could be made dealers, and they did exactly that. We were now into

a new business. We set up dealerships in Fort Lauderdale, Cocoa Beach, Vero Beach, and Orlando. Eventually, we also became a General Electric Tractors Distributor of parts in Orlando, which would enable service dealers in the Southeast United States. Once again, we hired my mother, Trudy Wight, and my stepdad Bob Wright to run the operation in Orlando.

We successfully used the tractors and created a unique market for nursery workers growing interior plants. They liked the quiet and robust nature of these big battery-driven electric tractors that could hook onto trailers carrying plants and pull them through the greenhouses much better than gasoline tractors. Among other sources, we also advertised the Electric with full-page supplements in the Sunday newspapers. We rented multiple booths in major convention gatherings and displayed the tractors in them. And over time, the business grows. And suddenly, GE decided, in their corporate wisdom, that they would discontinue Electrac's. They had the nerve to say that we were doing very well and, along with another dealer in Southern California, were their best dealers, but we were not enough. Nationally the tractors were not developing a booming market for them. They wanted us to pay in full for the parts we had in our distribution warehouse. We told them to f--k themselves and gave the pieces to the people we had sold the tractors to because they would have no service support for this product in time. Our Electric project was dead. Our Angel was sleeping!

But we were not satisfied with having lost an obscene amount of money, this time through no fault of our own. We decided to get involved with other "pie in the sky" schemes. We had developed a land planning structure for developing the land in Grand Bahama that I had sold my partnership in some years before. Then we attempted to find buyers for that development, but we failed after various attempts to sell. I still feel that it was not our fault, but things happened. One of the primary people who wanted to purchase and develop the site we called "Turtle Reef" had been the Chairman of Starwood, a primary hotel owner/developer. He agreed to proceed with this nearly one billion dollar project. Still, the global economy decided to take a nosedive, and any plans to go ahead with offshore investments were not to be considered by Starwood or anyone else. While we were still attempting to find a buyer for Turtle Reef, we were led to someone by a financial broker named Jim, who became somewhat of a friend. He sent someone to meet us in the Bahamas. We picked him up at the airport, and he had a friend with him at the time. This friend had just originated a pizza business called Papa John's, and he was just a young guy when we met him. We spent the day showing them the property, talking business, and eating at a pier-side restaurant. We delivered them back to the airport, and he said he would get back to us. Soon after that day, we watched CNN and saw that he had gotten into his car at his country club in Las Vegas, and the car blew up, killing him. He was a mobster, according to the news reports. This was only the first of misreading our potential investors.

On John's Island, we had become friends with various people of wealth and capabilities. One of them had initially founded MDSI or Management Data Systems International. Schlumberger acquired the original MDSI in 1980 by the founders, and the primary one was Kenneth Stephanz. We first met Ken when we provided a landscape design for his new home on John's Island. It was two acres on the river in the community and one of the most impressive multi-million dollar houses in development. The project was long-lasting, and we became friends in the process. Ultimately, we decided to form a company that would engage in Aquaculture. This is farming fish and shellfish, among other things, in fresh and saltwater. I was the originator of the idea and formulated the business concept, and Ken provided substantial finances. Paul had

decided he was tired of running the landscape company installations and segued full time into computers. He ultimately opened a store in Vero Beach specializing in Apple computer products. I took a break from landscape design and spent full time attempting to help get Aquaculture made an acceptable industry in Florida, which it was not then. The open fishing industry opposed farming fish as they considered it a threat to their livelihood.

Additionally, the environmental forces thought it was not a good option, so it was necessary to convince the politicians and environmental activists that this was not the case. Believe it or not, we were successful. I attended and spoke at conventions and to various County commissioners and our State leaders in the State Capital. The group I thought would be the most difficult was the environmentalist. Still, we were able to flip one of the most vocal leaders of their group and got her to speak on our behalf at the conventions and to the Florida State representatives. In a little over one year, we had been instrumental in getting our State legislators to pass a law stating that Aquaculture was in the State's best interests. So far - so good.

Ken had his own Gulfstream turbojet prop plane, which he piloted himself. We flew on various trips around Florida to promote Aquaculture and to the Bahamas when we persuaded Ken to financially back the opposition party in the Bahamas during their election. We also brought the opposition leaders, Sir Kendall Issac and Sir Orville Turnquist, to Ann Arbor to connect them with well-placed people to help with their election. Our interest in supporting them was to get their support to promote Aquaculture in the Bahamas when and if they won. They did not win. My Angel was sleeping again!

Then we attempted to find existing Aquaculture firms we could purchase to establish and grow an industry quickly. The place with the most opportunity was Puerto Rico which had several farms raising crawfish and tilapia. Paul and I, along with Ken Stephani, flew to Puerto Rico. We wanted to determine if these farms fit into our business plan purchase. They did, mainly the crawfish farm. We wished to expand the farm and add tilapia fish to the stock. Unfortunately, for reasons too complicated to describe in these memoirs, Ken lost his fortune, and we had to abandon our plans. Once again, my Angel was still sleeping!

Sometime later, we reconnected with Jerry and Louise Soowal, our friends and nursery men who were very successful and well respected in that industry in Florida. They had attended an Aquaculture convention in Orlando where I was speaking, and we met for lunch after the talk. We knew them from when we were landscaping in the Bahamas and purchased many trees and plants from their sizeable wholesale nursery. They were aware of our designing the master plan for Turtle Reef in the Bahamas and had bought a large 1,600 acres parcel of land in Belize some years previous. They wanted to know if we could do the same development planning for their land and partner with them in that endeavor. We had been to Belize many years before when Freeport was getting problems from the Bahamian Prime Minister in Nassau. The developers of Freeport considered that Belize might be a good place to start over again. We went there to see their interest and what the site was all about. I liked it, and Paul didn't, so we didn't go back again until Jerry and Louise asked us to do so. Our decision to get involved led to many exciting incidents and repercussions.



Belize was and is a unique country. It is English speaking in a continent dominated by Spanish-speaking peoples. At one time it was called British Honduras until it went independent. It then changed its name. Its eastern border is on the Caribbean, and its west is with Guatemala. Its north border is with Mexico, and its South with Honduras. In many ways, the country is peaceful and seems to be Florida at the turn of the century. When we first went there in the 1960s, open sewer trenches ran down the streets of Belize City, but fortunately, that has been remedied now.

One of our first trips there was to check out the property. We contacted a friend of Jerry Soowal, who worked with Jerry in the States. His name was Spoodle, and his wife's name was Sarita. Spoodle rented a large logging trailer pulled by a tractor for our first foray into the jungle environment. Its tires were taller than us, designed to traverse impossible terrain. Paul and I and our best friend in Vero Beach, Bob Welch, who traveled with us, somehow climbed on this trailer with a Belizean man, whose function I was not then or now sure of. He also did not believe in bathing and always managed to be upwind of wherever we were sitting on the trailer, composed of nothing but boards. It's amazing how some memories retain their pungency for this many years.

At any rate, we traveled for several miles south from Burrell Boom Road to reach the property. At some point, we had to cross a dry stream bed and were instructed to jump off in case the trailer was to tip over. When I jumped, I felt I had sprained my ankle, but I made it anyway. I don't recall what happened after that, but we decided not to proceed to the property, turned around, and returned to our car on Burrell Boom Road. I think that Spoodle and the guide had not known where we had headed and were lost to this day.

The following day, Paul, Bob, and I rented a van and left for a trip to Guatemala to see Tikal's extensive Mayan ancient city ruins. It was a fantastic trip, what with being stopped along the way in Guatemala by soldiers with bandoleers full of ammunition strapped around their chests. I was nervous because they escorted Paul, who was driving, to the other side of the van while we were left lined up on the opposite side from them. Fortunately, we had picked up an Indian Jones type of man and his girlfriend at the immigration station to give them a ride. He spoke Spanish and was able to intercede on our behalf. We were released and then went on our way to Tikal. Tikal was extremely dramatic and a fantastic place to experience. Unfortunately, I heard and felt a loud snap when descending a steep hill. It turned out that the sprain from the previous day had turned into a broken ankle. Bob and the Indian Jones guy were nearby and came to help. A ranger or policeman or something came running around to us yelling, "Mortales!!, Morales!" It soon became evident that he was concerned that I had landed close to a fer-de-lance, a very poisonous snake who was pissed that I had disturbed him. I saw the snake and scooted down the slope on my butt, and away from the snake as fast as I could. Indian Jones, then picked me up, and I hung onto his shoulder as he took me down the hill to the road. Paul had gone ahead and returned with a van to take me to the Tikal Jungle Inn where we were staying. That night, they found someone who passed for a doctor or medic in the area, and he reset the break and wrapped it in my white athletic socks as we had no bandages. Paul and Bob had also gone on an emergency run. They found some robust whiskey to use in the place of anesthesia during the procedure. That night was spent in very spartan rooms almost entirely decorated with old, cold, wet unpainted concrete and scorpions providing the entertainment. In

the morning, well before the sun came up, there were monkeys of some kind rattling the shutters and chairs out front of the room and then the unearthly howling of huge black howler monkeys telling the jungle to wake up. We thought they were jaguars roaring because this was our first experience with the howlers.

The trip back to Belize City was full of tiny incidents worth reading in a long novel, but not in these memoirs, which I would like to keep relatively short. We decided to stay in the Three Sisters Guesthouse in Belize City, and of course, with my broken ankle was placed on the third floor, with no elevator and the shared bathroom toilet clogged, so I had to stumble down a flight of stairs to use the shared toilet on the 2nd floor.

At any rate, we flew out the next day to go back to Vero Beach. My doctor, Donald Ames, also a client, sent over an ice cream cake with his son Doug, who is still a friend to this day, to make me feel better. He had me come into his office the following day. His X-rays showed that the reset was perfect, and he didn't need to do anything other than bandage it properly.

Not too long after I returned from Belize, my sister lost her oldest son Paul. I was unable to travel to New York as my leg was healing. It was the first of many future tragedies for my sister that she, unfortunately had to deal with. A few years later, she also lost her youngest son Neil to illness. This was difficult for Paul and I as well as we had traveled with Neil as well.

Our next trip to Belize was eventful. This time, we had Serita and Spoodle hire some guides and canoes and plan a trip to the property via the everglade type of swamps. We picked up one of the canoes at a farm nearby, which ended up having some relevance later that day. The trip through the swamp was exciting, but the water got very shallow at spots. We had to jump out of the canoes and push them when that occurred. At one point, when my canoe was in the rear, and I was out in the water pushing, I noticed that many channels were intersecting the one we were making, and I thought that it was strange as there were no other canoes in this desolate area. At the same time that a solution occurred to me, the guide saw where I was and told me to get back into the canoe immediately. It was then apparent that those channels had been made by crocodiles traveling through the tall grass.

We eventually found the access stream connecting the everglades with the large mile-and-a-half-long and deep freshwater Mucklehany Lagoon. This lagoon formed the centerpiece of the property that Jerry and Louise Soowal had purchased and wanted us to turn into development. It was a beautiful lagoon surrounded by a very lush tropical forest. After pulling our canoes up on the bank, we roamed about the jungle and found logging trails where someone was illegally coming onto the property to cut down the substantial mahogany trees and sell the wood. We also noticed that when we turned back on our tracks, we were being followed by at least one large jaguar who was leaving his tracks over the top of our footprints. We were not too concerned as there were several of us and not one person, which could have been dangerous. We had the guides take the canoes and exit the way we came via the lagoon, and we then decided to trek our way out of the jungle. We knew that there were logging trails that would lead us out, and they were heading to the South, which would deliver us to the main East-West Belize highway. We

also had cell phones to call someone when we got to the road. Walking through and out of the jungle was a great experience, and we had hefty rain showers to make the trek memorable.

That night, Paul and I flew to Ambergris Caye to dive, eat, and drink a few days. As soon as we arrived, we ate something for lunch that didn't agree with Paul, and he took it to his bed. I said I would go out to get something later but noticed that I was itching like crazy in my groin. When I examined what was happening, I saw that I was infested with "millions" of cattle ticks. They had been in the canoe we picked up at the ranch early that day. It took most of that evening to handpick every tick off of me individually. There was no other way.

The next day, we were both OK, and we went snorkeling at Hol Chan on the fabulous Belize Reef. It is among the best diving places globally, but I liked the South Pacific better and the Bahamas. San Pedro and Ambergris Caye were always friendly to be at. The main street in those days was all sand, and there were very few cars using it. Nowadays, they have paved it, often with bricks. Some of the bars were in buildings, but they had sand floors. Nothing provides the same ambiance as a sand-covered floor in your bar.

At any rate, over the next several months, we were busy creating plans to develop the Mucklehany Lagoon project. We found that additional land was available, so the overall plan was expanded to attach those sites to the scheme. The final 10,000-acre project had an entire village with various commercial and residential sections planned, as was an airport, industrial village, agricultural projects, such as vegetable and flower farms, and different vacation resort parcels. There were over 28 umbrella projects within the whole concept. It had become, at least in concept, the most significant proposed development project in Belize. We had to present it to the Belizean leadership and the Prime Minister for approval. The only difficulty we saw was obtaining adequate funding to start such a project, so we started exploring finding suitable investors to launch the Cohune Development.

Many meetings and trips back and forth between Belize and The States took place over the months ahead. We had talked to various possible funding sources, and then one surprising one came along that seemed to be the real deal. My nephew Eric Storberg (my sister Donna's middle son), who was then and still is a Certified Financial Advisor in New York City, mentioned our project to a client named Tony. He liked the idea right away, and Eric brought us together. Over several talks, Tony said that his group was interested in the project. We had our lawyer Tom, Jerry, and Louise Soowal's son-in-law and the Speaker of the House for Florida at the time. He ran a check on them to pass the Rico Act rules (The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act), to show that we had vetted the group. Eventually, we brought our legal team to Newark to discuss and cement the deal. We had several problems we had to work out. One was that they insisted we stay in management control of the project for five years. We refused and had serious discussions over that demand but ultimately stood our ground and refused to agree with that demand. Eventually, they consented to everything, and we all signed the agreement. They were to transfer the 1st draw of \$150 million by a specific date and the rest of the \$500 million in progressive amounts over the next 18 months.

As it turned out, they missed the first draw date and then the next, and we canceled our contract with them. Shortly after that, I received a call from the FBI in Washington at my office

in Vero Beach. An agent asked me if I knew Tony, and I said yes. The agent then told me that we had just dodged a bullet because Tony represented the Medellín Drug Cartel in Columbia, and they currently had him in jail. The agent said that the Medellín Cartel wanted to turn Belize into a significant drug transfer location between Columbia and the United States. We would have become unwilling partners but an accomplice to their activities. It was their mode of operation. It would appear that my Angel was again looking out for my stupid self. It wouldn't take too much to look forward and realize that once you were in the Cartel's hands, they would never allow you any freedom of action to, let's say, "I want out", because their only way out would be to benefit themselves. At any rate, that was the end of that, and we decided that we were lucky to have dodged the bullet and would leave it that way from here on.

After that fiasco, there was only one other attempt to get into a position to buy Steve Job's yacht "Venus", or perhaps just his jet. Jerry Soowal had been impressed with our effort to break into Aquaculture, and because he was a successful man in Agriculture, it made sense to dabble in the new farming discipline. While promoting Aquaculture, we worked with Harbor Branch Institute in St. Lucie County. They were a marine research institute on the same level as Woods Hole regarding reputation, and we worked with some of the best marine scientists in the world. They had been researching the culture of growing saltwater shrimp in a freshwater environment. At the time, we had developed a technology to do this in large growth containers called raceways. Jerry had one of his greenhouses reconfigured from growing plants to growing shrimp. Paul and I contributed a sizeable growing vat, and we proceeded to raise the shrimp under our theoretical formulas, and it worked. We could grow the shrimp from larvae to full-grown in record time. I developed a business plan to turn this research model into a full-fledged commercial business, and we were good to go. Then Jerry had a heart attack and died. We were then left with the option to find adequate funding to proceed, and the total cost was not insignificant. We decided to walk away from that as Louise Soowal was now stuck with running her husband's wholesale nursery and would have her hands complete with that task.

After these failures, I had to return to my landscape design firm, which was OK because I enjoyed doing that for the most part. The problem was that many people in my client network had assumed I left to do other work or was retired or had died, So I had to become visible all over again. Because Vero Beach was relatively small, this didn't take too long. Once again, the routine job of day-to-day living went forward without too much other than ordinary happenings.

During that time, my stepfather Bob got sick (which he had never done before) and died. This meant that Paul and I had to travel virtually every weekend from Vero Beach to Orlando to see my mother, take her out to dinner, and make sure she was OK. This became an aggravation for us over some time. Also, during this period, my youngest nephew Neil, after suffering a long illness, passed and added to my sister's grief and our sorrows. Neil had visited me in Florida on several occasions, and we had trips together, once with his partner Miklos ( who, along with his husband Sebastian, remains a good friend to this day), to Key West and another time in Puerto Rico.

Vero Beach was starting to grow, and John's Island was growing with it and getting close to selling most of its lots. There were a few occasions where a national recession hit Vero. I don't recall the years, and it really doesn't matter, but development was often stopped in its

tracks. We thought about leaving and possibly going to Orlando or elsewhere. We scaled back on our landscape business during that time and sold our house on the river, partly because it needed a new roof and other essentials. After selling the home, we moved in for a bit with our best friend, Bob Welch. While with him, we decided to buy a "temporary" house west of town. We are still in this house more than 40 years after we purchased it.

Following the ending of the economic depression, other developments were beginning to spout up in Vero Beach, including the two high-end residential communities of Windsor and Orchid Isle. Windsor was attracting the super-rich from around the world. We were among the first team of architects and landscape architects/designers to work there. Our client list included a Prince and Princess, two Dukes and Duchesses, a bunch of Sir and Lady someones, and many corporate and family billionaires and millionaires. It seemed that Vero had arrived, and we were getting our share of the pie. It didn't mean we were getting any richer, though; we were no closer to acquiring Steve Jobs' toys. The Angels I had been assigned to were authorized to bestow protection from stupidity but not wealth acquisition. We were comfortable, though; that was enough for us and still is.

We finally persuaded my mother to sell her house in Orlando and move to Vero Beach. This made life easier for us with no more weekend trips to Orlando all the time. In many ways, we enjoyed the weekends, dining out with her, which she liked, and having our friends, Carol and John-boy in Orlando, join us. She liked Vero, with all the attention she got from our friends. We were at her new house here every day or so, and our friends were showering her with affection through continuous Happy Hours and the creation of impromptu dinner parties. Unfortunately, she lost her eyesight to macular degeneration ( a condition my sister now has) and, unknown to me, was developing liver cancer. After just a few years in Vero Beach, she passed away from a stroke at 87 in the Visiting Nurses Hospice House in Vero. She had had a good life.

The year after that happened, my sister's husband, Ben Bertoldo, passed away in New Jersey. We all enjoyed him and listening to his stories of raising and racing their harness horses. Everyone was so sorry for his passing. Around that time, Paul had a condition that required him to have a heart stent installed, and a triple bypass operation followed that. At the same time, he had the complication of a blocked intestine and had colon surgery. He had to have a horrible colostomy bag. But he could also have that reversed, which was a good thing. All of that is over 15 years ago, and he is doing fine now except for the Golden Age blessings of arthritis and other old guy things.

The following year, our friend Larry Anderson also passed away from complications due to AIDs. He had been living with us on and off for quite some time. He had his own house just a few streets away but had to move in with us during times of recovering from various ailments typical of that illness. I had to feed him through his stomach, administer shots, and assure him that he took his medicine. His son and our godson Chris were in the Army serving in Afghanistan then. Eventually, Larry succumbed to the illness and passed away at the Vero Beach Memorial Hospital. Chris had returned to the States and was in Ft Bragg, North Carolina, at the time with his beautiful wife Ebony, who had been his high school sweetheart.



Sometime after his father's funeral, Chris finished his tour with the Army, and he and Ebony came back to Vero Beach. She was pregnant with their son CJ (for Christopher Daniel Anderson Jr.). Shortly after their return, we had a Hurricane roar through our area while Chris and Ebony stayed with us. I was concerned that Ebony would give birth during the storm, which was severe, but fortunately, she waited and gave birth to CJ at a reasonable time. That was almost 14 years ago, and CJ is 6 foot Four inches tall already. I find that amazing.

We are very proud of Chris and his family. After four years in the Army and serving in combat in Afghanistan, Chris came home and worked with us doing landscape design. We sponsored him through flight training at the Paris Air Flight Academy, and he received his pilot's license. Then he went on to Law Enforcement School at Indian River Community College, received his law enforcement certification, worked with the Indian River Sheriff's Department as a patrol officer, and eventually worked his way up to become a detective. After a couple of years in Vero Beach, he decided that he wanted to transfer to middle central Florida and went to Apopka and then to Seminole County as a patrolman. He was asked to form and run a security division for the Seminole County Tax Collector. Then he found favor with the new Governor of Florida, and the Governor appointed Chris as Supervisor Of Elections for Seminole County. He ran for this elected position in the fall election and handily won. In addition to his lovely and supportive wife Ebony and their son CJ, they also have two beautiful girls, Chrissy and Cece. I am sure Chris's father is "over the moon" about how his son has matured and succeeded. I know that Paul and I are.

Eleven years ago, my sister bought a condominium in Vero Beach and maintained an apartment for several years (after she sold her house in New Jersey) in Staten Island. Recently, she got rid of that apartment and moved here full time. Two years ago, Paul and I bought a riverfront lot nearly 60 miles west of Vero Beach in a place called River Ranch. We had a 36-foot-long brand new RV stationed on it as a home base, and we came and went with the RV as we pleased. It was less than one hour from our house in Vero. We had a dock and a boat and a family-size golf cart. The River Ranch complex is the largest dude ranch east of the Mississippi, and there is a lot to do there, including a rodeo, an amusement park with rides for kids, and every kind of horse or water activity you could think of. It was an excellent place to bring your family for a good time and a nearby break when we want a change of pace. It is also an excellent place to entertain our friends and family. Unfortunately, when the Covid virus came to all of us, the entire River Ranch complex shut down. No hotel, no rodeo and no restaurant. Our friends and family no longer came around, and we ended up with this fabulous place simply becoming a chore rather than a place to enjoy. We were able to sell it and did.

My sister's son, my nephew Eric lives in Staten Island, NY, and has three sons and a daughter. My grandnephew Ryan is his oldest and currently lives in Mexico with Brenda, his significant other. He is a computer coder and company executive officer. My grandnephew Kevin is also a computer coder and currently lives in Nevada with his wife Cynthia, their son Anthony, and brand new daughter Amelia. Another child, a son, is soon to arrive. Eric's youngest son and my grandnephew Paul celebrated five years with his girlfriend Diana, and is also working as a computer coder and lives in Staten Island. Eric's daughter and our beautiful grandniece Anna is very active in school and is just entering her teenage years, apparently making everyone proud of her accomplishments in school.

They all went to our River Ranch home and enjoyed the rodeo and river cruising. Paul and I are also proud of and enjoy having our godson Chis and wife Ebony. Unfortunately, Chris' political career doesn't allow for much of-time to do leisure things like that.

The last few years have been good except when it was terrible, which is a general description of life itself. We had some good friends, such as Bob Welch, who perished in an awful truck accident, and Arne Terranger, who died of a heart attack in a restaurant at lunchtime at 54. Arne was one of the most popular social entities that I have met. Whenever we were out in public, he seemed to recognize every other person who appeared, and he would engage with them and then tell us many stories about them afterward. Bob ate dinner with us virtually every weeknight and only took the weekends off. Arne was often there as well. We remain good friends with Bob's sister Josie Welch and her significant other, Kevin O'Neil.

We had many memorable trips with Bob. One time Paul, Bob, Arne, and me and our Orlando friends, Carol and Johnny, went to Costa Rica together. Among the many enjoyable things we did there, one activity stands out. That was a massive mountain zipline with an 8-mile long run with the zip lines strung from mountain to mountain, over rivers, and through dense jungle. It was well over ten different individual zip runs. Paul and Arne opted not to go, but Bob and I, Carol and Johnny, our friends from Orlando, did. I'll never forget Carol being the first to leap off this mountaintop for the first zip run and letting out a "Carol Burnett style Tarzan yell". That shamed the rest of us into following her. Paul and I met Johnny (Johnboy) and Carol Williams through Larry, and they became great-great friends that we traveled with to the Bahamas and Costa Rica, among other places. We ate out in Orlando with my mother, who referred to John-boy as her black son. Carol died of lung cancer several years ago, and we are not totally over her leaving us yet, but we still keep in touch with John-boy as much as possible.

Another person that we considered a casual friend was the Apollo 15 commander Al Worden. We met him in our Apple Computer store in Vero. Paul was helping him with his laptop computer, and I told him about going to the moon and back but still being incompetent with his laptop. He knew that I had worked with the Mercury astronauts, whereas he was in the second group of astronauts called the Apollo group. He always referred to the Mercury astronauts as the old guys and alluded to me as being in the same bracket because I had worked with them. In actuality, he was older than me and recently died in Texas at age 88, and I believe it was from a stroke. Paul and I always joked that we wanted to hook him up with my sister but that she kept avoiding the possibility of meeting with him. Perhaps being widowed three times would not have appealed to her anyway.

Then there is Lee Simmons and his long-time significant other, Stuart Miner. We had been friends for a long time, and Paul had worked with Lee doing biomedical research. Lee passed away several years ago, but we have had dinner and socialized with Stuart on and off since Lee's passing. I had memorable experiences with Stuart, particularly when we attempted to scandalize Puerto Rico after Lee and Paul had left us behind on our own.

We miss those friends who have gone but also value those still here. My long-time best friend, Fred Schaeffer, and his husband, Bob Harold live in Miami. We talk quite a bit on the

phone but don't get to see them very often. We had other good friends who have moved away from Vero for various reasons, Ralph Glaser and his husband John Phieffer moved to Pennsylvania and New York. Ralph is a very well know interior designer, and we have been long-time friends in Vero Beach. Miklos and Sebastian Kiraly live in Pennsylvania and would like to move to Vero Beach one of these days. We talked on the phone a bit. We don't bother with social media such as Facebook.

We don't move about much nowadays because of the 2020 Coved19 pandemic. Still, we recently enjoyed going out to dinner in outdoor dining restaurants with my sister, our friends Mike and Amy, and our eminent chef friend Margaret Barrie. We made some new friends recently who live next to Josie and Kevin. Gary and Michael dine out with us and sometimes gather at Josie and Kevin's house. We don't get together much these days because of Covid but hopefully that will soon be over. We also have fabulous neighbors across the street. Roger and Kathy Krahl suggested they won the neighbor lottery when they got us; we certainly feel the same way.

2020 didn't start too well for me as I had a heart attack in January, but I recovered nicely. This happened while I was being tortured with having all my upper teeth removed last August and implants installed, but as of this date, in mid-June 2021 still don't have my permanent false teeth installed. I bitch a lot, and my dentist declared me impatient. Really?

Paul and I have always been cat people. Shortly after we first met, we acquired a white kitten that we tended to in our first homes. In those days, from 1963 through 1974 (or so), our cats were indoor/outdoor cats. I think most people in those decades. However, that meant that you were dealing with cats being damaged by other animals and automobiles. Our black cat we brought over from the Bahamas (we chartered a plane to do that) and seemed to be continuously being run over, bitten by snakes, etc. His name was original. "Kitty." Once we kept our pets indoors, life got better for them and us. We had two cats there that was given to us by Larry and Chris when they went to California to live with Larry's sister. When they returned, we did not give them back. They were named Bumper and TaiTai, and we ended up with them until they were about 22 years old. One of the most challenging times was with our more recent cat, Jaguar. When a hurricane was forecasted to come down on Vero Beach, we placed Jaguar in a carrier and put her in the car to evacuate to River Ranch. On the way, she was terrified and howled and then had a heart attack and died. We were devastated over this and grieved for a long time. It's still difficult to think about it to this day. Of course, we declared that we would never have another cat again, but it won't surprise other cat lovers that we now have two beautiful tortoiseshell sisters called Miss Mary and Miss Trudy, named after our mothers. As I write this, Miss Mary is lying in her sizeable flat dish under a high-intensity lamp that we call her sunlamp.

As we stroll into 2021, Paul is enjoying retirement since he closed his computer store. I am in a semi-retired state, working out of our house. I still accept and design interesting projects and probably will as long as anyone wants me to. I have written and published a garden design book, Gateways To Your Garden. It has been published in a large full-color coffee table version, a smaller full-color paperback, and an e-book format. We have a website called [gardengateways.com](http://gardengateways.com) that provides visitors with many displays of gardens and landscapes for enjoyment.

I am also authoring a series of spiritual intrigue fiction novels called Quest for the Emerald Crystal. Quest Book #1 and Quest Book #2 have been published as of this date, and Quest Book #3 is just now complete. We are also creating a website called [themeraldcystal.com](http://themeraldcystal.com) to support the book sales and generate interest for those visitors who want to know more about spiritual subjects. Doing these things provides a lot of pleasure for me and a certain amount of aggravation for Paul as he handles the editing and publishing chores that come with these endeavors.

By the way, I have mentioned my Angels that bailed me out occasionally during my life. I have written them into my new novels, but they are called Zenithians in the books.

We also had another great friend who was an inspiration to all of us. Her name is Mary Mitchell, and she recently passed away in Simsbury Ct. Her late husband Walter and Mary were essential and good friends for many years. They always ensured that Paul's Christmas birthday was celebrated at their house in Vero Beach with all our closest friends every Christmas Eve. Mary began learning to master a computer in her seventies (thanks to Paul's help) and went back to school in that same decade to get her Master's Degree. OMG! Her discipline was Gerontology, and she lectured many aging people and urged them to record their memories and life experiences for the benefit of their friends and family. I can now see the value in this. Mary passed on in 2021, and we all miss her greatly. I thank Mary for her counsel, knowledge, and her's and Walters's friendship through the years.

As time goes by and I keep getting further into my eighties, I think about how things have changed since this started. In some little ways, I am the same person, but in most ways, I am not at all like I was when I started out or even at various stages. At different intervals, I morphed from one kind of person into another. This is because of what I have learned and experienced. I still feel as though I don't belong in this body within this earthly existence, but I also know that this is precisely what our soul's participation in these life experiences is all about. I believe that a Higher Consciousness places us into these incarnations to learn through our actions, whether we like it or not.

We have to experience illness to understand what it means to be healthy. Wealthy people cannot genuinely enjoy their fortune if they have never been poor. You will not value love without having been in a position not to have anyone to love or to lose the ones you had loved. You cannot appreciate happiness if you have never been sad. And in the final analysis, you won't value your true immortality without having died after many incarnations. Each of us strives to become what we need to become, even if we are not aware of that process at the time. When we resist what we know is required of us and allow ourselves to travel a path we know is wrong, we get into a lot of grief during that lifetime, spilling over into the next.

I didn't want to write these remembrances. Still, thanks to my grandnephew Paul and his persistent grandmother, my sister Donna, I'm glad I did and if you are reading this while I am still with all of you, understand that I have been very fortunate and have enjoyed this life I have had with Paul and all of you. I am becoming more mature and a better soul with each passing

day, although there are still days when I feel like a total failure. That's natural, and it's OK. Like all of you, I am in the process of evolving and hopefully into a more positive soul. Remember, it is a constant effort until it isn't.

If you are reading this after I have left this earthly realm with all of its physical and psychic obstructions, know that I fully believe that I will feel the same way about this life as I did while I was living. Still, I also think I will enjoy it from a much more liberated perspective. Immortality is an assured state of our being, and it will benefit you by understanding that fact while still struggling here in this existence.

And for those of you who decided to read these ramblings through to the end, I hope it allowed you to know me better than you did before you started that journey.





