

# PEGASUS CHRONICLES



Coming of Age



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**Book Two -- Coming of Age**

**By DC Storm**

# THE PEGASUS CHRONICLES.

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## Part Two -- Coming of Age.

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# CHAPTER 1 -- The Enduro

It was late afternoon and the sun was hot on this last Thursday of August.

Mike was sitting under a rock out cropping trying to stay cool.

His dirt bike was leaning up against a large rock and he was writing notes on a map that he had with him, because he was pre-riding the course for the enduro on Saturday; the course was laid out over a forty mile stretch of desert roads and trails.

As he was looking at his watch, he could hear the buzz of a couple of other dirt bikes coming towards him.

He thought to himself, "Sounds like a couple of Yamaha's coming this way, --must be at least two by the sound of em', --sure can't mistake that two stroke exhaust note they make. I'd best be going I've got four more miles to go to the pickup."

As he was putting on his helmet and gloves, the two Yamaha's pulled up and stopped.

Mike threw his right leg over his bike and sat down on the seat; he then looked back over his shoulder at the two Yamaha riders walking over to where he's sitting.

The taller of the two riders took off his gloves and his helmet, and then the other rider did the same; one of the riders held out his hand and said, "Hi--I'm Russ Lockwood and he's," pointing to the other rider, "Glen Justin, --we're out here pre-riding the enduro course for the race on Saturday."

Mike takes their out held hands, and looking at the two of them he says, "Name here is Mike Troff. I'm also pre-riding the enduro course for the race on Saturday."

Glen noticing Mike's number plate on his bike exclaims, "Hey Russ! Look there! He's got number four! He must be good!"

Mike responds, as he looks at his bike plate, "Well, --I try, but there's a lot of other riders who are better than me."

Russ smiles and retorts, "Yeah right, --like three others in this whole State."

Mike then remarks, "Say--you two aren't all that bad yourselves. I see you've got numbers eleven and fifteen. Anyway, it looks to me like one of you just might break into the top ten on Saturday."

Russ looks at the ground, and then back at Mike and tells him, “Yeah, --I’m hoping to break into the top ten all right, but I don’t know if I can do it. There’s going to be a lot of good riders here on Saturday also trying to move up.”

Mike smiles under his helmet, as he replies, “Yeah, —you’re right. There will be other riders who will be trying to do just that, but you’ve got an edge on em’ now. So I think you just might pull it off. Who knows, --after the race on Saturday you just might be number ten.”

Looking at Mike, Russ a bit confused asks, “Edge, --what edge?”

Mike smiling tells him as he points at the ground, “Why, --you’re here doing what I’m doing—pre-riding this course. So on Saturday you’ll know just when to make the right moves. Now that is what I meant by having an edge. Anyway, how do you think I’ve got to be in the number four position? You’ve got to have an edge on the next guy, especially if he’s as good or better than you. If you can’t do anything more to your bike, to make it more competitive, then you’ll have to out think him. Now I’m going to try to break into the top three and who knows, we all may move up a couple of notches.”

Glen looks at his friend and says, “Russ, --it’s getting late and we’ve got some riding to do before we get back to the truck. I think we better be going.”

Russ replies nodding, “Yeah, --you’re right we should be going. Thanks Mike, for the pep talk. I guess we needed it and I’m sure glad we ran into you. I’ll see you on Saturday, and we’ll be looking forward to racing with you. Good luck at moving into the number three position.”

“Good luck to the both of you, and I’ll see you both on Saturday as well, --bye now,” said Mike as he waved to them, Glen and Russ waving back as they both walked back to their bikes.

Mike kicks his bike to life, sits down on the seat, turns and waves once more.

Both Glen and Russ kick start their bikes and wave to Mike one last time.

Mike shifts his bike into gear and rotates his throttle hand; his bike’s front wheel comes up off the ground and the bike’s rear wheel kicks up a big cloud of dust and dirt as he sped away.

The sun was getting low in the sky when Mike finally got under way in his pickup, and as he drove back to Victorville, Mike thought about the two riders he had met in the desert. "Those two guys are going to do just fine," Mike said to himself, "and I've got a feeling that Russ is going to make it into the top ten. Boy, --I sure hope I'll do all right, because all I've got to do is finish in the top five to move up. I've now got almost enough points to get the number three position. That's if my bike doesn't die or if I don't crash and D.N.F."

The sun was beginning to set when Mike drove up and parked in front of the hangar at Manning Aviation.

As Mike got out of the pickup, he could see the light was still on in the office, so Mike walked in and there seated at the desk was Bob Manning doing paper work.

When Bob heard Mike come in, he turned around and said, "You finally back? How was the ride? Bike run Ok?"

"The ride was just fine," Mike replied, "and I've got all of the important areas marked off on the map. I shouldn't have any problems--that's if the bike doesn't die."

"Well now, --did the bike give you some trouble?" Bob inquired with raised brow.

Mike was now starting to smile and said, as he recalled how well his bike did run, "Nope, --bike ran just great, real smooth, and it never missed a beat. That new gear in the tranny worked fine too. Thanks Bob, --I wouldn't be in the number four spot if weren't for you wrenching on my bike. I don't know how to thank you enough."

Bob pointed at Mike and told him, "You can thank me by not crashing. So you can move into the number three position on Saturday."

"Me--crash--never! I'm going to win that enduro on Saturday. But, --I would like you to give my bike the once over tomorrow. Just to be on the safe side. You know, --like a good preflight."

Then they both started to laugh, and then Bob said, "Speaking of preflight. I've got a job for you to do tomorrow. I need you to fly a photo job. There's a photographer coming by tomorrow to take some pictures of a construction project at Lenwood. So, be here in uniform at six tomorrow morning and I'll have one of Larry's Helicopters all preflighted for you," then waving his hand at the door he ordered, "now get your butt out of here, and put your bike in the hangar. Then get on home and get some sleep,

because I want an alert and rested Pilot to fly tomorrow.”

Mike then smiled, as he turned and walked out to put his bike in the hangar; he then got into Jeff’s car, backed out of his parking spot, and drove home.

Now on Saturday is when the enduro will be held, and on Monday the country will be celebrating Labor Day.

Mike’s older Brother, Brian, flew to Victorville from Miramar and lands at George AFB; Brian had the weekend and holiday off, and was on leave from his job as a Marine Fighter Instructor at Miramar.

After Brian had parked his F30 fighter, he walks over to where his Father is waiting.

Now Brian’s Father, Henry Troff, was an Air Force Colonel, he also was a Fighter Pilot and a Flight Wing Commander.

When Brian walked up to his Father, he saluted him and shook his hand.

Now Brian was carrying the small travel bag that he had brought along in his aircraft, and with his Father, they both walked off the flight line.

As they both were walking to Henry’s van, another Air Force Pilot saluted Henry and asked, “What’s a Marine Fighter Pilot doing here, Sir?”

Henry just smiled with pride, returned the salute saying, “He’s my Son,” and they walked over, got into Henry’s van, and drove off to Victorville.

In the back of Henry’s van, Brian changed out of his flight suit, and then he put on the civilian clothes that he had in the travel bag; now wearing civilian clothes, Brian climbs back into the passenger seat of the van.

Brian asks while admiring the converted van his Father was driving, “When did you get this van? It’s awesome, and how much did you pay for it?”

His Father smiling replies, “Isn’t she great? Brian, --did you get a look at the TV and sound system in the back? I got the van two months ago right after your wedding, --got it from another Colonel who was going overseas. I paid twenty-five thousand for it. Is your wife going to be joining us later this weekend?”

Brian was still looking around inside the van when he answered his Father, “She had to work today. She’s got a job in San Diego. You know

that with the house off base--we need all the money we can get to make ends meet. She'll be flying up by commercial jet, Saturday afternoon."

Henry glances over at Brian and asks, "How are things going at the Fighter School?"

Brian looks back at him and replies, "School's just fine. There's a new class starting next week. So I've got this weekend and Holiday off."

Henry inquires, as he looks down the road while he continues to drive to Victorville, "Have you heard from your three friends that graduated with you from Top Gun?"

Brian was now looking away off in distance as he answered, "Got an email from Bill, --you knew him by his call, Javelin. Well, --he's still alive and flying, but Jerry, --you knew him as Ice Breaker, he's dead. Bill writes that Ice Breaker got tangled up with a Syrian MIG HX1 Helicopter. He said it happened so fast that Ice Breaker didn't have a chance. He also writes and tells me we need more training on Fighter Helicopters."

Brian looks over at his Father and continues, "Then Bill's email gets confusing and strange. He writes saying that he wishes we would have more Pilots like Mike flying our EXR2 Helicopters over there. Then Ice Breaker and a lot of other good F30 Fighter Pilots would still be alive. He's saying that they're losing a lot of good Fighters to Syrian MIG HX1 Helicopters."

Henry declared, as he turns to look at Brian with an amazed look on his face, "Did I hear you just say Pilots like Mike?"

"That's right," said Brian responding, "Bill said in his email, 'Pilots like Mike'. I don't think he meant our Mike, but probably some guy he met over there. We all know Mike can't fly an Airplane, let alone a Fighter Helicopter," Henry just shook his head and continued to drive on towards his home in Victorville.

They pulled up and parked in front of Henry's home, and then they went inside where Maria met them both.

Maria said while hugging Brian, "It's really good to see you again Brian. Mike is out riding in the desert. He's practicing for the enduro on Saturday. You know--your little Brother is now number four in the State. If he does well on Saturday he may move up in the standings."

"Yeah, --that's what I've been hearing," said Brian smiling, "I always knew that someday he would make it to the top on his bike. Remember how he would always sneak out to ride with his friends."

Maria smiles nodding, and then she asked, "Is Brenda coming up



for the weekend and the holiday?”

Brian told his Mother, Brenda had to work today, but She'll be flying up on Saturday.

Maria then showed Brian to the guest room where he and Brenda will be staying.

After Brian had unpacked the few things he had brought with him, he went and got cleaned up; he then went out into the living room where his Father was watching the latest news on the fighting in the Middle East.

As Brian sat down, Henry remarked, “It’s really getting bad over there now. I think it’s going to escalate into a third world war before too long. Too many countries are starting to take sides. The UN can’t seem to control the dispute.”

“I’m afraid you may be right,” said Brian shaking his head, “don’t say anything to Mom right now, but it looks like I might be going overseas.”

“Brian, --I thought you had a permanent assignment at Miramar!” His Father exclaimed looking surprised,

“I thought so too,” Brian responded, “but with all the F30 Pilots we’ve been losing over there. Well, --they need all the experienced F30 Pilots they can get and that includes me.”

“Brian, --have you gotten your orders yet?” His Father asked, as he was now a little concerned,

“No, not yet,” Brian replies, “but as soon as the first group of Pilots gets rotated out for R and R. I think maybe then I will be getting orders to report for duty in the Middle East.”

His Father said, as he looks at Brian with concern, “Now, you be real careful, remember what Javelin’s email had said about the HX1 Helicopters. I don’t want to lose my oldest Son just yet.”

“Yes Dad. I know all about the Helicopters,” Brian replied nodding. “I’ve been doing a lot of studying, and been practicing some special maneuvers that I and another instructor have developed. The maneuvers look good Dad, but we need to practice with an experienced EXR Pilot.”

Both Brian and Henry looked at the window when Mike’s headlights shone in, as he pulled into the driveway and parked.

After Mike had walked into the house, Brian said, “Hey little Brother. I hear you’re going to win the enduro on Saturday.”

Mike looked over to where Brian was sitting, a smile broke out on his face and he exclaimed, “Brian! When did you get in? You on leave?”

Can you stay for the enduro on Saturday? God, --it's good to see you again! Sure did miss you," then Brian got up and they shook hands and gave each other a Brotherly hug.

Brian took a stepped back and looked at Mike and said, "Little Brother you keep getting taller each time I see you. Are you ready for school next Tuesday? You know this is your last year, --got any plans after grad next spring?"

"Got registered last Wednesday," said Mike looking at his Brother, "I've still got a few things to pick up before classes start on Tuesday. As for any plans after grad next spring, well, --I still intend on going to college. I hear the Junior College in Victorville isn't so bad."

Mike looking at his Mother, as she comes walking into the room, smiles and says, "Maybe I'll join the Infantry, go to war, and get shot."

Then he says, "Bang!" Puts his hands to his chest and falls to the floor.

Now Maria didn't think, Mike's little performance was funny, so she went and grabbed his arm and tried to pull him up off the floor.

"Ouch Maw, --you're hurting me!" Mike exclaimed getting up off the floor.

"Don't you ever talk of getting yourself shot," His Mother scolding and shaking her finger at him, "you had better not join the infantry. God's got other plans for you and you know what they are."

"Sorry Mom. I won't join the Army, that is, unless I get drafted."

"If you're drafted--you know what you're supposed to tell them," said Maria shaking her finger at him again.

"Yes Mom," Mike softly replied and starting to worry she might tell everyone about him flying Helicopters; Mike feared in her present mood, she might spill the beans.

Now Henry and Brian were confused by all of this and wondered what Mike was supposed to tell the Army when he got drafted.

"Just what are you supposed to tell the Army when you get drafted?" Henry inquired looking at Mike,

Mike was now on the spot and he had to think of something quick, so he says, "Mom wants me to tell them I'm good with computers. She thinks the Army will give me a job working with computers, and then I won't have to carry a rifle."

"She just might be right," Henry replied, "the Military needs men

and women that are good with computers.”

Mike now felt relieved that his secret was still safe and thought, “Boy, --that was a close call. I better not make Mom angry again or she’ll tell for sure.”

“You still haven’t said whether you are going to be at the enduro on Saturday to watch me ride,” said Mike looking at Brian.

“Little Brother,” Brian replied with a smile, “I wouldn’t miss that enduro to see you ride for anything.”

Henry announced putting his hand on Mike’s shoulder, “We’ll all be there on Saturday to root for you.”

Mike was up early on Saturday and went to the hangar at the airport where he had his bike stored.

With some help from Bob Manning, they got the bike loaded into Bob’s pickup, and then they drove out to the starting point of the enduro; after finding a place to park, they unloaded Mike’s bike.

While Bob checked over the bike, Mike went over to register.

There was a long line at the registration table, and as Mike was waiting to get registered, he looked around to see if he could spot Glen and Russ.

When Mike didn’t spot either of them in the line to get registered, he thought, “I wonder where they are? I sure hope they aren’t going to be late for the riders meeting. I hope they didn’t have any problems with their bikes. Maybe they’re already registered and waiting in the tent where the riders meeting will be held.”

Finally, Mike made it to the table where he paid the entry fee, and where he had to sign the normal release forms; you know, the ones that say you ride at your own risk, and then if anything happens you can’t sue anyone, but yourself.

He then got his bib with the number four on it, so now everyone knows you’re fair game.

Mike smiles thinking, “Well, --if I’m fair game, then so are the other three idiots in front of me. Boy, I’m sure going for em’, --I’ll be number three by tonight.”

When Mike returned to the truck, he saw his Father, Mother, Brother, and the two riders that he’d met in the desert, talking to one another.

Russ and Glen were already in their riding gear, and when they saw Mike walking up, Russ asks, "Where have you been? We've been waiting for you for the last half hour. We've been talking with your folks and we got a lot in common. Say, --how about we all have dinner together sometime."

Bob broke in, "Mike, --you had better get into your gear. That's if you want to do any racing. You know the rider's meeting starts in about fifteen minutes, so you had better get your butt in action that's if you don't want to be late."

"Yeah, --I hear ya'," Mike retorted, and then he went and got into his riding gear; then the three riders went to the large tent where the meeting was to be held.

There was a large group of riders already sitting down waiting for the meeting to start; Mike, Russ and Glen went over and found three chairs that were empty and sat down.

A race Official entered the tent from the left side, and then walked up to the podium and said, "Welcome to the tenth annual Twenty Nine Palms Enduro. This year we're going to do things a little bit different. First, as some of you have already noticed, --you all have bibs with the number of your position in the State standings. So now you can all see who the leaders are," now everyone was looking around to see who the top ten riders were.

As Mike was eyeing the number one and number two riders, he also could feel the eyes of the other lesser riders eyeing him; after all, he was the man in the number four position.

Mike leaned over to Russ and whispered, "Just wait until you move into the ninth or tenth position. Then everyone will be eyeing you up for the kill too."

The race Official then continued, "Second, we've made a few last minute course changes. Not a lot, but just enough to keep it competitive, because we know there were a few of you out running the course the last few days."

Both Mike and Glen looked at each other in shock and there were a few other riders just as shocked.

Mike was thinking to himself, "Well, --there goes the number three position and there goes my edge. Now it's going to be riding skill if I'm going to move up."

The race Official went to the chalkboard behind him and said, “Now here’s the change to the last checkpoint at the finish. So, --either remember it or write it down. The course is now forty-five miles long. We’re allowing four hours for you to complete it and we’re giving you all one hundred and twenty points to start. The rider who completes the course with the most points, wins today’s enduro. Plus, he or she also walks away with not only the trophy, but also with twenty points towards the State standings.”

As the Official wrote on the chalkboard, so too, everyone was taking notes on their maps, then he continues with the lecture, “Now here’s how we are going to work this. There are going to be seven checkpoints including the one at the finish. You have an allotted amount of time to get to each checkpoint, --a window if you will. Anyone checking in outside of that window will be docked one point for each minute that he or she is late or early. So speed isn’t going to be a factor here. The rider that can pace himself or herself and keep the bike running will come home with a lot of points. That rider will then probably move up in the standings.”

Then the Official laid the chalk down and returned to the podium.

“Now, --are there any questions before we adjourn and get on with this enduro?” The Official asked.

No one had any questions, so the Official said pointing towards the exit at the back of the tent, “Ok then, --let’s get this enduro underway.”

Then everyone got up and walked out of the tent and headed for their bikes.

Mike said to Glen and Russ, as they walked out together, “I’ll be starting up front, so I probably won’t be seeing you until after the enduro. Good luck to the both of you and don’t forget about that window. I’ll see you guy’s later and maybe later we can do some celebrating on our new positions.”

It was nine that morning when Mike finally pushed his bike up to the starting checkpoint; he got on and kicked his bike to life.

The Official at the checkpoint wrote down his number and the time; Mike reset both of the timepieces he had mounted on the bike, and then the Official waved him off and Mike headed off down the trail towards the next checkpoint.

As Mike approached the second checkpoint he was thinking, “Where are the course changes that were mention at the riders meeting? I sure hope I didn’t make a wrong turn somewhere back there. I didn’t see

any markers to show a course deviation.”

And when the checkpoint came into view, Mike said with delight, “Ah’ there’s the next checkpoint, --I’m still on the trail. I wonder how the other riders are doing?”

Mike rode up to the second checkpoint, stopped, and handed his scorecard to the checkpoint worker.

As the checkpoint worker was marking down his arrival time, Mike asked him how he was doing and how the riders in front of him were doing.

The checkpoint worker informed him, he, as well as the five riders ahead of him was on time, and nobody has been docked yet.

Mike was about to inquire about the course changes when the checkpoint worker hands Mike a slip of paper and says, “You’ll need this, so don’t lose it. These are the course changes to the next checkpoint. Now, --we don’t want to go looking for you wandering around in the desert, — now do we?”

Mike looked at him, slightly offended, and then quickly read the slip of paper and jotted down the changes on his map.

He then looked at the checkpoint worker and said, “This is going be a piece of cake, --bye.”

“We’ll see,” the checkpoint worker replied with a sly smile.

Then Mike kicks his bike back to life, rolls the throttle on, and after his bike had kicked up a large cloud of dirt and sand, he was off down the trail to the next checkpoint.

It was getting near ten thirty when he pulled up to the fifth checkpoint.

Thus far the course changes haven’t been much of a problem, and with only being docked three points, he was feeling good, and figured he had third place in the State standings in the bag.

He was again given another slip of paper showing the course changes for the next leg of the enduro, and as he had done before, he marked the course changes on his map.

And then with a large smile, Mike took off down the trail towards the next checkpoint, and after the next checkpoint all he would have left is the one at the finish.

Mike was feeling great, because he now knew he had this enduro in the bag; for all he had to do now is to finish in the top five when all of a

sudden, the trail made a hard right turn, taking Mike completely by surprise, as this turn had caught Mike napping and he spun the bike over onto its side.

There they laid, bike over by a cactus plant and him in the dirt.

Mike quickly got up and went over to the bike hoping there wasn't any damage.

Once he got the bike back on its two wheels he quickly looked it over to see what was bent or broken, and to his relief, nothing seemed to be broken; at least what he could see anyway.

Then he got on and hoped it would start; he held his breath, gave it a kick and with a sigh of relief the bike came to life.

He then gave his map a quick glance to be sure he wouldn't screw up again, and then he was once more off down the trail.

Now, Mike's hopes about finishing this enduro in the top five had just evaporated.

Mike was now thinking this screw up will cost him dearly, for he could now see third place in the State standings evaporate; he now felt sure he has lost at least five or maybe ten minutes which relates to five or ten points taken off his score at the next checkpoint.

Mike was now thinking, as he rides his bike fast in order to make up for the lost time, "Shit! Larry always told me to stay alert. For if he would've seen that last fiasco, he would've kicked my stinking butt, all over this damn desert. Boy--what a fine EXR Fighter Pilot, I am. Hell, --if I was in combat, --I would be dead now!"

Mike was still riding his bike fast to make up for the lost time when he entered a narrow canyon and had to slow up a bit, because he couldn't afford another screw up like the last one.

As he continued to ride, he started to get an uneasy feeling and was now thinking, "This sure is taking a long time. I should be at the next checkpoint by now. God, --I hope I didn't screw up again. I don't remember any turns, other than the one I missed. Now, when I started out after that spill, --did I go the right way?"

Mike was now really getting an uneasy feeling about this canyon he was in, because it just didn't feel right.

Then, as a sickening feeling overcame him, he said to himself, "Well Mike, --you sure did it good to yourself this time. You're nice and lost.

**There's no room to turn around here, so I might as well ride to the other end of the canyon where it's wider and make a U-turn there."**

**As he made his way up the canyon trail, he felt mad at himself for making such a terrible misjudgment back at last turn.**

**He now started to talk aloud to himself, "Self, --you blew it good this time. I'll probably wind up in tenth place in the State now. This D.N.F will do it to me, but good. Well, --it looks like Glen and Russ will pull ahead of me now. Fine rider I turned out to be. I guess I should've stayed home and fly Helicopters."**

**As he continues to ride, the canyon was getting narrower and narrower.**

**Mike was now riding so slowly he could barely keep the bike upright; when he came to a fork in the canyon, Mike stopped and thought, "Now which way? Should I turn around and go back before I really get myself in worst trouble or pick one of these trails?"**

**Not having looked at his map for a while, he looks at it, his eyes get large, and he exclaims, "Shit! I'm been on the trail all the time. Here's the canyon and the fork. Now let me see... It looks like I have to take the left fork. The next checkpoint according to the map is just outside of this canyon. Now, --how I'm I doing on time? SHIT!" As he just now notices that both timepieces he had mounted on the bike weren't running.**

**"Must have busted em' when I spilled the bike. Now it's going to be guess work all the way home. Well, --it could've been worst. I've could've busted the bike and I'd be walking right now."**

**Mike exited the canyon and rode his bike very fast up an old dried up creek bed, and then up and over the creek bank and with a left turn he went down an old unused road.**

**He made a large cloud of dust as he continued to ride fast until there, just up ahead, was the sixth checkpoint where he pulls up to the checkpoint worker and stops.**

**The checkpoint worker asked when he marked Mike's time down, "What kept you? You're little late you know. I have to take two minutes off your time, --you're two minutes late."**

**Mike was now feeling elated when he said, "Only two minutes! God, --I thought I was like maybe five or ten minutes late. How's everyone else doing?"**



The checkpoint worker looked at Mike, smiled and said, "So far, -- you're the only one that has checked in close to the window. Everyone else in front of you has lost about three or more minutes. That canyon has really faked out some of the lead riders. Right now, --you're in second place in this enduro."

Mike couldn't believe his ears and all he could say was, "I'm in second place!"

The checkpoint worker nods and tells him, "And you had better be going if you want to remain there. There are no more course changes, --you know the way to the final checkpoint at the finish."

So, Mike kicks his bike back to life for the final dash to the finish; off he went in a cloud of dust on his way to a possible second place finish.

All Mike could think of now was the third position in the State standings, because all he had to do now is cross the finish line and check in at the final checkpoint.

Twenty minutes later, Mike crosses the finish line; his folks were there cheering him on, as he pulled up and stopped at the final checkpoint.

When Mike had his time marked on his scorecard, the checkpoint worker informed him, he had made the window at this checkpoint.

When Mike pushed his bike up to Bob's pickup, Bob was there waiting for him.

Bob looking at his bike asked, "You crashed, --didn't you?"

Mike looking at the two broken timepieces, and then at the ground said, "All right, --so I had a mishap. Don't you tell anyone? Anyway, I'm in second place with a hundred and fifteen points. How about helping me load this bike, then I can get out of this riding gear and take a nap until enduro is Finish."

Bob was grinning as he helped Mike load his bike into the back of the truck.

As Mike was taking off his gear, his Folks came walking over.

And so, Mike and his Father, Mother, Brother, and Bob sat in the shade of the tent that Bob had put up while Mike was riding; now, they were waiting for both Glen and Russ to finish.

Mike laid there under the tent feeling good, because he now knew, he'll surely move up in the standings.

He then closed his eyes and fell off to sleep, dreaming of the ordeal he had in the desert after that fifth checkpoint.

## **CHAPTER 2 -- The Enduro Victory Banquet**

It was twelve o'clock noon when Glen finished the enduro.

After Glen had put his bike into his pickup and got out of his riding gear he walked over to the tent where everyone was resting and went over to where Mike was sleeping and was about to awake him when Bob told him, "No, --leave him sleep, he had a hard ride."

Glen looked at Bob and exclaimed, "Hard ride! What do you think I was doing? Out for a Sunday stroll! Where's his bike? He crashed didn't he?" To everyone's surprise, Bob nods.

"I thought so," said Glen laughing, "just wait until he wakes up. I'll bet he lost a lot of points and finishes dead last."

Bob just smiled, because he knew that Mike had ridden like a pro, because he not only finished, but he'll probably finish as one of the top three riders in this enduro.

It was after one o'clock when Russ pulled up to the last checkpoint at the finish line.

After Russ had his time recorded on his time card, he then rode his bike over to his pickup and parked it there; then he also got out of his riding gear and walked over to where Glen was resting and Mike was sleeping.

Russ with a big smile on his face said to Glen, "I did really well, --only lost twelve points. I'll move up in the standings for sure now. So, --how did you and Mike do?"

"I did do so bad either, --like only losing ten points," Glen replied, "I think I've got number thirteen or twelve locked up for sure."

Russ said looking over at Mike, who was still sleeping, "Boy, --is he ever sound asleep. Let's wake him, --I want to see how he did."

"No, --leave him sleep," said Glen shaking his head smiling, "He'll need all the rest he can get, because when he wakes I'm going to have a little fun with him. Bob had told me he had crashed and lost a lot of points."

"I didn't say he had lost a lot of points," Bob piping up, "All I had said was, he had crashed," Russ and Glen looked at each other.

"Are you telling us, Mike didn't lose a lot of points?" Glen asked with surprise, "Just how many points did he lose?"

"I think I'll let Mike tell you how well he did, when he wakes up," Bob replied with a big smile.

It was well after three that afternoon when the last of the riders in the enduro had crossed the finish line and checked in at the last checkpoint.

All three boys were sound asleep in the shade of Bob's tent, and while Bob was visiting with Mike's Parents and Brother a race Official stopped by to inform them that the enduro had finished; he told them the boys are to turn in their scorecards and they are also required to attend the concluding meeting which will be held in about thirty minutes.

After he had left, Brian went over and lightly kicked each boy on the bottom of his riding boot.

Mike was the first to awake and asked, "What's up Brian?"

"The enduro is over. You guys are to go and turn in your scorecards and attend a meeting."

The three boys got up and walked over to a table where several riders were turning in their scorecards.

Glen whispered to Russ, "Now we'll see how Mike had done."

When Mike saw Glen whispering to Russ he asked, "What are you two whispering about? Don't tell me you guys had screwed up and lost a lot of points."

"No, --we didn't lose too many points. In fact, --we didn't do too badly. But, we had heard you had crashed and probably lost it all," said Glen with a smirk on his face, "let's see your scorecard."

"How did you guys find out that I had wiped out?" Mike asked looking surprised, "Who told you? Was it Bob? Just wait until I see him. He wasn't supposed to say anything about me wiping out."

Both Glen and Russ were now laughing, and then Russ said, as he patted Mike on the back, "To bad Mike that's the breaks. Maybe you'll do better next time."

Glen and Russ were now laughing very hard.

Glen said, as he could barely talk, because he was laughing so hard, "Mike, --next time be sure to have your training wheels on before you leave."

Mike just looked at them and replied, "Yeah--right. We'll see who needs training wheels when the trophies get handed out later."

Mike was now up to the table where he handed the Official, who was seated on the other side, his scorecard; both Russ and Glen looked over Mike's shoulder in order to get a look at his scorecard, but it was too late, the Official took it from Mike too fast for them to see anything on it.

The Official looked at Mike's card, and then he stamped it and put it into one of two boxes; next, he took both Glen's and Russ's scorecards, stamped them and put them into the same box as Mike's.

The Official said, as the boys were walking away, "Don't you three go running off. I want all three of you to be at the meeting in five minutes," and then he pointed at Mike and said, "I especially want you to be there."

All three boys looked at each other as they walked to the tent where the final meeting was to be held, because they couldn't understand why it was so important that the Official wanted them to attend this meeting and why was he pointing at Mike?

It was now five in the afternoon when the race Official, the same one who presided over the riders meeting, walked into the tent; he entered from the left side carrying the box of scorecards.

He then gave the box to another Official seated at a table; the other Official opened the box and dumped its contents out on the table, and then he started to sort the cards into piles.

The race Official, who had carried the box into tent, walked over to the podium in front of the seated riders and tapped the mike a couple of times with his finger to see if it was working, and then he began to speak, "I want to thank you all for coming and participating in today's enduro. We had some very good finishing scores and some of you are going to move up in the State standings. All in all the enduro was a success. Although we had several riders, who got lost and almost all of you had trouble after the fifth checkpoint. A lot of you dumped your bikes on the turn just before the entrance to 'Two Snake Canyon', it seemed the canyon faked some of you out, --even as far as having you turn around and ride back out to the last turn," the speaker then smiled as he continued, "Those of you who finished with the highest scores were of course the best riders. The highest score was one hundred and eighteen and he finished in first place. The second place finish went to the rider who finish with one hundred and fifteen points. The third place went to the rider with one hundred and thirteen points. The rest of the top ten riders will be reveled Sunday night at the victory banquet. The top three riders, you now know who you are and I congratulate you. Also, be sure to sign up for the banquet tonight, so you can receive your trophy."

The speaker points to the table where the other Official is now writing names on a roster and tells them, "After I finish speaking I want all of the riders whose names appear on the roster that Tim is making, to fill out a

reservation for Sunday night's banquet. We need to know how many of your friends and relatives will be attending with you. Thank you and I'll see you tomorrow night," he then went over to help his friend with the roster.

Then all of the riders got up and formed two lines in front of the table where the two race Officials sat working on the rosters.

Mike now knew he had finished in second place and was feeling very good and smiles to himself thinking, "Glen and Russ are thinking I blew it today. I think I'm going to let them continue to think that way. It'll be fun to get even with em' and we'll see who rides with training wheels?"

Some of the riders who finish near the end were told they were not on the roster list for the banquet, and so, they walked out and left.

When Glen stepped up to the Official and inquired if his name was on the list, the Official replied smiling, "Let me see, --Justin, Glen, --why yes, here you are. You did very well and how many people will be attending the banquet with you?"

"There will be four of us," Glen replied smiling, "myself, my Father, my Mother, and my younger Sister."

"Ok, --I've gotcha' ya' down for four people. We'll see you at the ceremonies and banquet on Sunday night."

After Russ had signed up for three people it was now Mike's turn to sign up; Russ and Glen went to the back of the tent and waited for Mike to join them.

"I'm Mike Troff, --am I on your list?" Mike asked; the Official scanned the list and replied, "Your name Michael Troff?"

"Yeah, --that's me," Mike replied with a nod.

"You sure are. We can't have the ceremonies without the number two rider not being present," the Official told him with a smile.

Smiling, Mike gave the race Official the number of people he will be bringing to the banquet, and then he walked back to join Glen and Russ who were standing by the exit, waiting for him.

As all three boys walked back to Bob's tent together, Glen and Russ wondered, what position did Mike finish in?

He must've finished somewhere in the top thirty finishers, otherwise he wouldn't have been on the banquet roster, but where in the top thirty?

When they returned to Bob's tent, which he had already taken down and put into his pickup, Mike's Mom, Dad, and Brother had already left

and were headed home; Mike and Bob told Russ and Glen that they have be going too.

Mike said, "I'll see ya' at the banquet Sunday night--bye," and then he got into Bob's pickup; they all waved to each other as Bob and Mike drove off towards home.

Glen and Russ went to their truck and loaded up Russ's bike, and then they got into their pickup and headed towards their homes.

When Mike walked into his house, his Mother had dinner ready and told Mike to hurry up and get cleaned up for dinner; after Mike had taken a shower and put on some clean clothes he went and sat down for dinner.

As Mike sat there quietly eating dinner, Henry his Father, broke the silence, "Mike, we all know that you had crashed today and we're very sorry you didn't finish in a good position. You know there is always next year. Maybe you will do better next time."

Mike just smiled, as he sat there eating dinner.

Brian said now sensing Mike's jovial mood, "Mike, --you had finished better than we all think you did, --didn't you?"

Mike had a big grin on his face, as he munched on a large mouth full of food and after swallowing with a big grin on his face, held up his fork and said, "Yeah, --I did all right today. How well I did, well, --you'll all have to wait until the victory banquet tomorrow night. You're all invited so be ready by five thirty, because it starts at six," and now pointing at his Father and Brother with his fork, he tells them, "now it's formal, so I want the both of you to be in uniform."

The phone rings and Maria gets up and goes out to answer it, a few minutes later she comes back into the kitchen and tells Brian that Brenda had just arrived and was waiting for him at the Airport; Brian gets up and goes to get his Wife at the Airport.

Sunday night the Troff's, Justin's, and the Lockwood's were seated at the same table at the banquet.

In the front of the room, there were two tables one on each side of the speaker's podium; the table to the right of the podium held the trophies and plaques.

The trophies consisted of five small ones that were about six inches high; each had a motorcycle with rider mounted on the top.

There were also two large wooden plaques with a shiny brass plate

**fasten to each.**

**Next to the wooden plaques were the trophies for the top three finishers.**

**The largest of the three trophies was about three feet tall and it had a large motorcycle with rider mounted on the top; the other two trophies were similar, but were only two feet tall.**

**On the far side of the room there was a bandstand; some of the band members were already there and setting up for the dance that will follow the banquet.**

**The table at which Mike, his family, and Bob were seated at, had flowers and lit candles, and in front of each rider, there was a folded card standing up and it had his or her name and a number written on it.**

**Glen's card had, 'GLEN JUSTIN 5' written on it; Russ's card had, 'RUSSELL LOCKWOOD 6' written on his and on Mike's card it had, 'MICHAEL TROFF 2' on it.**

**Everyone was dressed in their formal attire; Henry, Brain, Mr. Justin, and Mr. Lockwood were in their military uniforms, because Mr. Justin and Mr. Lockwood were Air Force Majors and F30 Fighter Pilots.**

**Now Henry and Maria were seated together on the same side and at the front of the table towards the podium; next to Henry and Maria were Brian and his Wife, Brenda.**

**Opposite Henry and Maria was Bob Manning and seated next to him was Mike; Glen was seated right next to Mike and Russ was seated next to Glen.**

**Seated next to Russ was Glen's Sister, Mary, and seated across the table from Glen's Sister was Major Justin and his Wife; Major Lockwood and his Wife were sitting next to Glen's sister.**

**Soon the Waiters arrived to take their dinner orders, and then the VIP's and Officials from the enduro arrived and were seated at the table to the left of the podium.**

**While they all sat there waiting for their meals to arrive, the Master of Ceremonies got up and went over to the podium, arranged some notes he had in front of him, looked up and began to speak, "Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have you attention," everyone then turned to see what he had to say.**

**"Welcome to the tenth annual Twenty Nine Palms Enduro Banquet. Before we award these trophies and plaques to the ten top riders of yesterday's enduro, we will hear from the Reverend Frank A Repinski for the**

invocation.”

The Minister got up and went to the podium to give the invocation; everyone sat with bowed heads as he gave the invocation.

After he had finished, everyone looked up and as he went and sat down at his place at the table the Master of Ceremonies walked back to the podium and introduced the Mayor of Victorville; the Mayor got up and went over to the podium to speak.

When he had finished, they all applauded, and then he returned to his seat; as the Master of Ceremonies returned to the podium he was still applauding the Mayor.

After everyone had stopped applauding, the Master of Ceremonies began speaking, “Now we come to the part of the program where we recognized the top ten riders. Dave Richardson, one of our Officials will assist me with the awards tonight.”

Mr. Richardson got up from his place at the table, walked over to the table holding the trophies and picked up one of the small trophies; the Master of Ceremonies then continued, “Starting at the bottom with tenth place we have Paul Gooken who finish in that position. Mister Gooken, -- will you please come up and receive your trophy.”

When he got up to receive his trophy, everyone applauded.

As the ninth, eighth, and seventh place finishers followed Gooken, and went up to receive their trophies, Brian began to notice that every rider who had finish in particular position also had the same number written on his place card.

He then looked at Glen’s place card with the number five on it and then over to Russ’s place card with the number six on it and finally at Mike’s with the number two on it and thought, “Can it be possible, Mike’s the number two man.”

Brian leaned over to Henry and whispered, “I think Mike has finished in second place.”

“How do you know where Mike finish?” Henry asked a little surprised by Brian’s remark.

“You see his place card with the number two on it,” Brian whispered back, “I’ve been watching as each rider is called to get his trophy and each one corresponds to the number on his place card. Now watch, --the next rider to receive his award is number six and if I’m right, --Russ is going to be next rider to get a trophy, for as you can see, --the number on his



place card is six.”

And sure enough, the next rider that was call up to get a trophy was Russ, and as Russ was returning with his small trophy Henry looked over to Brian with a surprised look on his face, then they both looked over at Mike and smiled.

As Mike was looking back at Henry and Brian he couldn't figure out why they were grinning at him; Henry then whispered over to Mike, “Congratulation on the second place finish.”

Mike was now quite surprised and whispered back, “Thanks, --but how did you know?”

Then Henry pointed to Mike's place card; all Mike could now do is smile as he nodded yes.

Now Glen and Russ still haven't caught on about the correlation between the place card and the finishing position.

When it was Glens turn to receive his award, he smiled and went up to get his plaque for fifth place.

Now Henry, Brian, and Bob just sat there and smiled, because they all knew who the number two man was.

When Glen returned and before he sat down, he showed his plaque to everyone at his table.

After the fourth place rider had received his plaque, the Master of Ceremonies paused, because now only the three very large trophies for the top three finishers remained.

The Master of Ceremonies said with a large smile, “Now it's with a great deal of pleasure that I award these final three trophies to the three best riders amongst you. As you are called to receive your trophy, please remain until all three of the trophies are awarded, because we want to have your pictures taken for the newspaper and ‘Dirt Rider Magazine’. Ok, --the number three rider with one hundred and thirteen points is Leonard Bird-sall.”

As Leonard Birdsall got up and went to receive his trophy, Glen with a smile on his face leaned over to Mike and whispered, “To bad Mike. Sorry that you didn't make it into the top ten. Next time try keeping your butt on the seat. You can't win if you lay in the dirt. Say, --I'll lend you my old pair of training wheels,” then both Glen and Russ started to laugh and giggle.

Mike said looking at them giggling, “Training wheels--huh. Let’s just wait a minute or so, and then we’ll see who needs training wheels.”

Brian had overheard them whispering and after hearing Mike’s response he started to laugh; now Brian wasn’t laughing at Mike, instead, he was laughing at Glen and Russ, because he couldn’t wait to see Glen and Russ eat their words.

Then as both Glen and Russ were still laughing and giggling the Master of Ceremonies said, “Now for the rider with second highest score of one hundred and fifteen--it gives me great pleasure to have Mister Michael Troff come up here and receive the trophy for second place.”

When Mike got up, Glen and Russ suddenly stopped laughing and looked shocked; Mike bent down and said to Glen, “I can’t wait to see you ride with those training wheels,” and then Mike walked up to receive his trophy.

Both Glen and Russ were now looking over at Henry, Brian, and Bob laughing; Glen asked looking confused, “How did you guys know he was number two?” Brian pointed to Mike’s place card.

Then both Glen and Russ looked at Mike’s place card with the two on it, and then at their own place cards with the numbers five and six on them; then they looked at each other and rolled their heads back and looked at the ceiling.

After all three top riders had received their trophies and had their pictures taken they returned to their tables.

The Master of Ceremonies once again thanked all the riders for participating in the enduro and announced there will be live music to dance to after the banquet; after returning to his seat the waiters started bring the meals.

As they were eating, Glen said to Mike, “I don’t understand how you finish with such a high score.”

“By keeping my butt on the seat and the throttle rolled wide open,” Mike replied, with a huge grin.

Both Russ and Glen stared at Mike as Brian and Bob started to laugh once again.

Glen was now a little worried when he said, “You know--we were just kidding you about those training wheels. Now, --you really don’t expect us to ride with em’ on, --now do you?”

**“I sure in hell do, --in fact, --I’ll even help you guys put em’ on. The next ride we go on, --you both will be riding with training wheels,”** now Henry and Brian were laughing so hard they both almost choked on their food.

**Major Justin piped up changing the subject and looking at Mike and Russ, “I understand you both are also finishing your last year in High School with Glen.”**

**“Yes sir,” Russ replied, “the home stretch, --the last year, and then no more school, --freedom at last.”**

**“Glen tells me you’re a Pilot and rated in a Lear Jet with full instruments.”**

**“Yeah,” Russ replies looking back at Major Justin, and then he asks, “But, what does that have to do with this being my last year in High School?”**

**“Only that the Air Force is now looking for young talented Pilots to be trained as Fighter Pilots,” Major Justin replying, “you see Russ, --the world is headed into another war and our country is going to need every Pilot that it can get. So, we are now searching for young men and woman who have shown a special talent at flying and from what I’m hearing you’re one of those men we’re looking for.”**

**“Hey, --I still got a whole year in High School yet,” said Russ looking a little surprised, “I’m too young to be drafted!”**

**Major Justin smiled as he replied, “That’s the whole point Russ. We don’t want to see you get drafted, because that’s exactly what might happen, after you graduate and what a terrible waste of a God given talent that would be. Now, if you would sign up for the special Pilot training program that the Air Force has just started, you’ll then enter a training program at George AFB after you get out of school each day. Most of your training for the first four months will be classroom and simulator work, and then for the next six months you will be doing some flying in a trainer plus some more classroom and simulator work. In a way you will be in the Air Force as a Cadet and you’ll even have a uniform to wear to your High School.”**

**“How about Glen and Mike, --are you going to ask them too?” Russ asked, “And how come only the Air Force is just doing this and not the Army or Navy?”**

**The Major replied, as he then smiled while looking at Glen, his son,**

**“Glen’s already signed up for the program and as to why the Air Force is just now starting this program and none of the other services are now doing it. Well, --the Army has been secretly training EXR Helicopter Pilots for about two years now. In fact, --they screwed up and lost what could have been one of our country’s top Pilots. Who knows where this Kid is now. I now hear that they’re making plans to try to recover him.”**

**Russ said after looking at Glen, and then back at the Major, “Ok, --count me in. So, --how do I sign up for this training?”**

**“Have your Dad bring you to building ‘G-266,’” Major Justin replied with a smile, “that’s where the new special training unit is. Now, there’s one very special requirement and that is, you must stay in High School. If you don’t and drop out, then you’ll also be washed out flight training.”**

**“Is that what happen to the Army Kid?” Russ asked.**

**“No,” Major Justin replied, and then he adds, “in fact, --we heard the Kid is now finishing his last year of High School just like you three. The Army isn’t talking about their mistake, but what I do know is, they’re going to try to fix their mistake and get him back into their program.”**

**Now as Mike was hearing all of this he was starting to get a little nervous; with a worried look on his face, he looked at his Mother and she shrugged her shoulders as she looks back at him.**

**Henry then spoke up, “Who was the Army Training Officer that was responsible for losing that Kid?”**

**“I think his name was Captain Larry Clark,” Major Justin replied, “of course it wasn’t his entire fault. It was mostly Army regulations and stupidity, but he has now been given the green light to try and find this Kid and get him in the Army and have him start flying EXR Helicopters again.”**

**Now after hearing all this talk, Mike was really starting to sweat. Henry asked, looking at Mike turning red and sweating, “Mike, --are you feeling Ok?”**

**“Yes Dad, --I’m Ok just a little hot,” Mike replied looking uneasy.**

**Henry said, as he was now a little concerned, “Mike, --if you don’t feel well we can leave.”**

**“I’m Ok Dad, --I feel fine, --honest.”**

**“Ok Son,” Henry replied, then he asked, “say Mike, --maybe you can help the Army find this missing Kid. You used to work for Captain Clark. Maybe you might’ve seen this Kid around the airport back at**

Roseville.”

Mike felt everyone looking at him and he began to perspire as he spoke, “It’s true, --I did worked for Captain Clark, but I never saw any special Kid flying Helicopters--only the regular Pilots and they weren’t kids. Although, --that doesn’t mean he couldn’t have been training one, as he was always gone a lot and he never said where he had gone,” they all nod and agree with Mike about Captain Clark being gone a lot.

Then Major Lockwood asked, looking at Mike, “How about you Mike, --would you like to sign up too? I hear you’ve been around aviation a bit maybe you’ve been doing some flying. If you’re as good as Russ or Glen, then the Air Force will be interested.”

Henry was about to speak when Mike spoke up, “Sorry to bust your bubble, but I really don’t care about Airplanes and I don’t have a Pilot’s License to fly an Airplane, --please excuse me, --I’ve got to go to the men’s room.”

Mike was still perspiring and he needed to get away from this group, so he got up and left.

“What’s with Mike? Did I say something wrong?” Major Lockwood asked looking puzzled.

“Flying an Airplane is a sore subject with Mike, because he can’t fly,” Henry told them, and then he explained, “A couple of years ago he tried to learn, but he just couldn’t seem to get the hang of it all, so we ended the flight lessons.”

“I didn’t know and I’m very sorry,” said Major Lockwood, “I’m afraid he’s going to be drafted into the infantry. You know they also will be needing men as well,” then they all sighed except Maria; because they all knew for sure, it would be the infantry for Mike.

Now Maria knew about Mike’s special talent, and she wasn’t going to let Mike get drafted into the infantry; even if she had to tell everything that she knows about Mike’s special training he had gotten from Captain Clark.

She was elated when she heard Captain Clark was going to be coming for Mike.

She then smiled, because she knew Captain Clark knows where Mike lives, and now, it will only be a matter of time before he’ll be knocking on their door, and then everyone will know how very special Mike really is.

## CHAPTER 3 -- The Secret is Reveled

Early Labor Day morning, Maria was up before the rest of her family, so she could make a quite call, and after she had finished dialing the last digit on the telephone, She waited for someone to answer; after about four rings a man answered, “Fort Irwin. 125<sup>th</sup> EXR Cavalry, Lieutenant Gibson speaking, may I help you?”

“The Cavalry!” Maria exclaimed in surprise, “You still use horses? I thought you were flying Helicopters now?”

“We do use Helicopters,” the man on the other end replied laughing, and then he explained, “The word Cavalry is a throwback to the time when we did use horses. Who am I speaking to and how may I help you?”

“My name is Missis Henry Troff and I would like to talk to Captain Larry Clark please.”

“I’m sorry Missis Troff, but Captain Clark isn’t here right now,” the man on the other end of the phone told her, “He’s out flying a PR (Public Relations) mission over at Victorville and the Duty Roster doesn’t show him to be back until late tonight. If you wish, I can have him call you when he gets in, but it’s going to be late.”

“He’s here in Victorville!” Maria exclaimed a little surprised, “Where’s he going to be flying here?”

“According to the Duty Roster,” said the man on the other end of the line, “he’ll be at the Airshow this afternoon.”

“Oh, --the Airshow!” She again exclaimed, “Thank you very much and no, he doesn’t have to call me back I’ll see him at the Airshow. Bye now and thanks again.”

Then she hung up the phone just as Henry came walking into the room.

“Who was that on the phone?” Henry asked still a bit groggy and rubbing the top of his head with a yawn.

“Oh, --no one, --just a wrong number,” Maria quickly replied thinking fast, “why don’t you go into the kitchen, your breakfast is ready.”

So, Henry still rubbing his head went into the kitchen to eat breakfast.

A short while later Brenda also came into the kitchen.

“How did you and Brian sleep last night?” Maria asking Brenda, as she was frying bacon and eggs for Henry.

**“Oh, --just great,” Brenda replied with a chuckle, “did you know, Brian snores so loud that I have to put ear plugs in my ears, so I can fall asleep.”**

**Now bit giddy, she then held them up for Maria to see; Henry almost choked on the milk that he was drinking and started laughing.**

**“I love Brian snoring and all,” said Brenda giggling, and then she got solemn, “I don’t know what I would do if something bad would happen to him. I worry every time he goes up in his jet fighter. I know he’s a good Pilot, but I worry anyway.”**

**“Yes, --I know what you mean,” Maria replied in agreement, “I use to worry about Henry too. But after a while you get used to it, and when Brian and Jeff started to fly well, --I was a nervous wreck. Then one day, Henry took me flying and showed me how much fun it was. Well, --after that, I never worried about Henry or any of my Sons flying again. In fact, -- I also fly. I have a Private Pilot’s license. So I now know how much they like it, --and you know, --it really gets into you blood.”**

**“Maybe I’ll see if Brian will take me flying sometime,” said Brenda with a nod and smiling, “who knows, --maybe I’ll like it and learn to fly too. After all, --I married into an aviation family. So, I might just as well learn to fly too. Now, --is there enough Airplanes to go around?”**

**“Don’t worry about having enough Airplanes,” Henry assuring her laughing, “there will be enough to go around and I think you’ll like flying, and if you were to go and ask Brian to teach you to fly I think he’ll be delighted.”**

**Maria brought Henry’s bacon and eggs and puts them on his plate.**

**“After you get your Pilots license, and while our Men are out flying and protecting the country, us Girls can go flying,” said Maria with a smile, envisioning a whole lot of fun, “did you know there are fly-ins that we can go to?”**

**“What’s a fly-in?” Brenda asked getting a little excited.**

**“Well dear, --it’s like a county fair, picnic, and shopping spree all rolled into one,” Maria explaining, “all you’ve got to bring is you charge card and Airplane. Anyway, once you can fly you’ll only be an hour or so away by air, and then we can do all kinds of things together.”**

**“When can I start my flight lessons?” Brenda asked now very excited, “I can’t wait to start going to those fly-ins, because that sounds like my kind of fun,” everyone started laughing.**

It was eight o'clock when Brian walked into the living room from his bedroom and as he started for the kitchen, the phone on the desk rang.

"I'LL GET IT," He hollers, and then goes over to the phone and picks up the receiver and says, "Hello, --Troff residence, Brian speaking."

"Hi, --I'm Russ Lockwood, --is Mike there?" The voice on the other end asked.

"No, --I don't think he's up yet," Brian replied not thinking.

"Oh, --will you tell him, me and Glen will be by in about an hour to pick him up,"

"What have you guys got planned for today?" Brian asks out of curiosity.

"We thought maybe Mike would like to go flying with us this morning," the voice on the other end explaining.

"Good luck," said Brian with uncertainty, "if you guys can get Mike up in an Airplane, then all the power to you, because we've been trying for three years to get him to fly. I'll tell him you'll be over to see him, but I won't tell him why, --I'll leave that up to you and again good luck. Also, --don't forget about the Airshow this afternoon at two."

"Thanks, --and no, --we haven't forgotten about the Airshow," said the voice reassuring, "we wouldn't miss the Airshow for anything and bye."

"Yeah--bye," Brian answered back and both parties hung up, and then Brian hollered to Mike who was still in bed, "HEY MIKE, --GET UP! YOUR TWO BUDDIES ARE COMING OVER IN ABOUT AN HOUR, SO GET YOUR BUTT OUT OF THE SACK SO THEY WON'T FIND YOU STILL IN BED," then Brian went into the kitchen to eat breakfast.

Mike thought after he heard Brian holler, "I wonder what Russ and Glen are up to? God, --I hope they aren't planning on going flying today. Wouldn't you know it, the first two good friends that I make here in Victorville turn out to be fixed wingers."

Then Mike looks up and says, "God, --why me? Of all the riders in Saturday's enduro, the two guys that I made friends with turn out to be Pilots. Why couldn't they have been ordinary guys that don't know anything about flying? Yeah, --I know, because you know, that deep down inside I love to fly. Oh, --one thing more, --thanks for giving me the skills to fly Helicopters."

It was nine thirty when Mike walked into the kitchen and sat down. Now Brian had this big stupid grin, as he looked at Mike who was



trying to eat.

“You look like a cat that just caught a mouse,” Mike remarked to Brian, as he looked back at him, “you know something, --don’t you?”

Brian just kept grinning and didn’t say anything as he continued to eat his breakfast.

As Mike ate, Henry joined Brian with that big stupid grin and they both kept looking at him.

Finally, after a few minutes of this, Mike couldn’t take it anymore, “Ok, --enough is enough. You guys know something, so out with it, --what gives?”

“Brian told us your two friends are going to take you flying in their Airplane,” Maria happily tells him, as she walks over and puts another pan-cake on Brian’s plate.

“What!” Mike exclaims pretending to be shocked, “you’re telling me they want me to go up in an Airplane?”

They all nod with a smile, and then Mike makes a blunder when he says, “Of all the kids in this town and I make friends with a couple of fixed wingers.”

Now both Henry and Brian stopped grinning and look at Mike with a scowl, Mike now knew he shouldn’t have said what he did, so he raised both of his hands saying, “Ok, --Ok, --I didn’t mean it,” then the doorbell rang.

“Saved by the bell,” Mike remarks under his breath, as he gets up to answer it, and then he says, “I think maybe that’s Russ and Glen now, --I’ll see you all at the Airshow--I hope.”

Mike goes to answer the door and when he opens the door there stands both Glen and Russ looking at him with big smiles on their faces.

“Mike, --are you ready?” Russ asked smiling, “C’mon, let’s get going. We’ve got great plans for this morning and that also includes the Air-show.”

“Ok, --then let’s go,” Mike replies with a nod and a smile, and then he turns and hollers towards the kitchen, “BYE, --I’M LEAVING WITH GLEN AND RUSS, --SEE YOU ALL LATER,” then Mike and his two friends get into Russ’s pickup and they drive away.

“Just what are these great plans that you both have cooked up?”

Mike asked nonchalantly, as they were headed out of town, because he already has an idea.

**“We’re going to take you up in Glen’s Airplane,” said Russ with a big grin, glancing over at Mike while he was driving, “now if you want to hang out with us you’re going to have to get use to flying.”**

**Mike thought to himself, “Well, I might as well tell them about me flying Helicopters. They’re going to find out anyway from Larry. If what I heard last night at the banquet is true, he’s going to be looking me up real soon, he just might be at the Airshow today, and then everyone will know.”**

**“Ok, --but first stop at Manning Aviation,” said Mike with a grin, “I want to show you guys something really pretty.”**

**“Ok then--we’ll stop there first,” said Russ looking down the road as he drove, “but only for a few minutes, because I want to get you up in the air today.”**

**Russ thought to himself, as he continued to drive, “Now what could be so pretty at Manning Aviation?”**

**A few minutes later, they pulled into the airport and parked in front of Manning Aviation.**

**Mike and his two friends got out of the pickup, and then Mike went and unlocked the side door to the hangar, then he paused and looked at both Russ and Glen standing there and said, “Now you guys are going to get a real treat. I promised to show you something really pretty, now follow me.”**

**Mike led the way into the hangar and stepped aside as Russ and Glen filed in.**

**There, sitting in front of them was the Aerospatiale Dolphin.**

**They just stood there and stared, for outside of the Lear Jet Russ flies it was one beautiful aircraft; it was shiny black and trimmed in blue.**

**Both Russ and Glen had never seen a Helicopter like this one.**

**“C’mon and I’ll show you guys the insides,” says Mike stepping forward after seeing both of his friends staring, “this baby’s got everything including a bar and bathroom.”**

**Mike opens the door and lowers the steps, and then he pointed to the open doorway of the Helicopter and says, “You all wanta’ go in?”**

**“I never dreamt that a Helicopter would be like this,” said Russ now very impressed at what he saw, “It’s just like the Lear Jet that I fly, God, -- this is so cool.”**

**Mike was now feeling good, because both Glen and Russ were impressed with this Helicopter.**

**“You wanta’ see the flight deck?” Mike asks pointing towards the front of the Helicopter.**

**Both Glen and Russ nod, Mike then opens the small door that leads to the cockpit and he goes in and sits in the Pilot’s seat.**

**When Russ and Glen see the cockpit their eyes pop out, then Russ climbs into the Co-Pilot’s seat.**

**“How do you like it Russ?” Mike asked smiling, looking at Russ, “Isn’t she just great? She also fly’s and handles like a dream.”**

**Now both Glen and Russ were astonished by Mike’s last remark.**

**“God, --there’s more instruments, dials, and lights then what’s in the Lear!” Russ exclaimed marveling at this cockpit with sheer delight.**

**“Mike, --how do you know how well it handles and flies?” Glen asked with a confused expression, “Your Dad told us you can’t fly.”**

**Mike just smiled, but before he could reply, Russ piped up, “How fast does she fly?”**

**“Max cruise is two sixty any faster and you’ll get retreating blade stall,” Mike replied being informative, “we normally cruise at two ten and we don’t need a runway to land or take off, --any rooftop or parking lot will do and I can be anyplace in California within three hours.”**

**“Retreating blade stall!” Russ exclaimed, “what’s retreating blade stall?”**

**“You don’t want to know,” said Mike being a bit sarcastic, “but if you got a minute sometime I’ll explain it to you.”**

**“Mike, --what does this lever do?” Russ asked moving the lever on the left side of his seat up and down.**

**“Hey, --I see something that I recognize, --rudder pedals,” says Russ while pumping his feet up and down on the pedals.**

**“Nope, --those are not rudder pedals,” Mike informs him laughing, “A Helicopter doesn’t have a rudder like an Airplane. They’re called Anti-Torque pedals, they prevent the aircraft from spinning like a top and that lever you’re playing with is called the Collective. It’s what makes the Helicopter go up and down, --you pull it up and she rises, --you push it down and the Helicopter descends to the ground.”**

**Glen was now looking very puzzled by Mike’s extensive knowledge of Helicopters.**

**“Mike, --you’ve still haven’t answered my question, --how do you know so much about Helicopters?”**

**“Glen, --I’d be an awful bad Helicopter Pilot if I didn’t know something about Helicopter aerodynamics,” Mike solemnly responding with a smile, as he looked at Glen.**

**While both Glen and Russ sat there stunned by what Mike had just told them, Mike glances at the clock in the instrument panel.**

**“Say, --if you guys are going to take me flying in your Airplane I think we better be going, because it’s almost eleven o’clock.”**

**As Mike was shutting the door on the Helicopter, Bob Manning came walking into the hangar.**

**“Oh, --it’s only you Mike,” He announced, “I thought I heard someone out here. How do you guys like Mike’s Helicopter? Maybe he can give you a ride in it someday.”**

**Now Glen and Russ were very surprised, because they couldn’t believe what they’ve been hearing.**

**As they were leaving the hangar, Bob patted Mike on the back as he went through the door; after the boys got back into Russ’s pickup and were backing out to leave, Mike waved and hollered to Bob, “SEE YOU AT THE AIRSHOW LATER, --BYE NOW,” Bob nods and waves back as the boys pulled away and drove towards Glen’s hangar.**

**“This is simply incredible!” Russ exclaimed, while shaking his head as he drove, “You can fly too!”**

**“You bet, --but for now, keep it under your hat,” Mike told him with a big satisfied smile, “no one at home, except Mom, knows that I’m a Helicopter Jock. Dad has this thing with Helicopters and I don’t want to rock the boat, --at least for now anyway. I’ll tell him when the time is right and hope he can cope with it then.”**

**They pulled up to the hangar where Glen has his Airplane, parked and got out of the truck; the boys were about to go into the hangar when Glen suddenly stopped and turn to face Mike and said, “I was going to give you a free ride, because we thought you couldn’t fly. We kinda’ thought maybe you would try again to learn to fly, but God, --you’re a Pilot and the joke is on us, so this ride isn’t free anymore. We all kinda’ take turns flying and now we expect you to take your turn and give us a ride, so how about it Mike, --will you give us a ride in one of your Helicopters?”**

**“Sure, --anytime,” Mike told them smiling, “just come out to Manning Aviation and I’ll give you all a ride in a real nice Robinson R22.”**

**“Ok,” both Glen and Russ chorused with a smile, and then they**

went into the hangar to get Glen's Airplane ready to fly.

It was almost twelve o'clock when the doorbell rang at the Troff residence.

As Maria went to answer the door, Henry and Brian were in the den, discussing maneuvers on how to outgun an EXR Helicopter.

When she opened the door, there stood Captain Clark and Lieutenant Tripp.

"Larry, --Wayne, --what a surprise, --come in," said Maria surprised, "Larry, --I tried to call you at Fort Irwin this morning. I didn't expect to see you this soon."

"What did you want to talk to me about?" Larry asked with a smile, as he walked into the house, "I bet I can guess, --it's about Mike isn't it? He's all right I hope, --he isn't sick or injured?"

"No, --Mike is just fine, nice and healthy, but I did want to speak to you about him and the Army," Maria replied with concern in her voice.

"Well, --that's why I'm here to see him," Larry replied, "he's home isn't he?"

"No, --I'm sorry," She replied apologetically shaking her head, "he went flying with some of his motorcycle friends, --he'll be at the Airshow this afternoon and you can see him there."

"Maria," Larry begins, getting serious, "has Mike told his Father about him being a Helicopter Pilot?"

"No, --not yet he hasn't and I'm getting little worried that Henry is going to find out at work, then poor Mike," Maria explaining her concerns and shaking her head.

"Well, --I think it's about time we tell the Colonel," Larry strongly suggests, "for Mike's sake."

"I had promised Mike that I wouldn't say anything until he was ready," said Maria looking at Larry with concern.

"I really do think the time has come," said Larry pointedly shaking his head in disagreement, "for there are too many things happening. Colonel Troff will find out any day now about Mike flying Helicopters and I do think it would be a lot better if he found out from us instead of from someone else, so how about it Maria, --if the Colonel is home, --let's tell him now."

"Ok Larry," said Maria with a sigh and nods in agreement, "Henry is in the den, --follow me," then they walked into the den where Henry and

**Brian were talking.**

**When Larry, Wayne, and Maria entered the room, both Henry and Brian get up; Larry and Wayne then saluted Henry and Henry returning the salute.**

**“Sir,” said Larry starting the introductions of himself and Wayne, “I’m Captain Larry Clark and this,” now pointing to Wayne, “is Lieutenant Wayne Tripp. We’re members of the 125<sup>th</sup> EXR Cavalry at Fort Irwin. I’m in command of Alpha Company, Second Squadron and the Lieutenant here is my left wingman. We need to talk with you Colonel, --I think it’s important.”**

**“Ok,” Henry replied, as he held out his hand, “but first, while you’re in my home, call me Henry,” then pointing at Brian he says, “this is Lieutenant Brian Troff, my oldest Son, --he’s a Marine Fighter Pilot.”**

**They all shook hands and Henry motion for them to sit down.**

**“You’re Pegasus,” said Henry pointing at Larry, “from the Airshow last year. I saw your picture in the paper. You’re a good Helicopter Pilot. No wonder the Army has you flying EXR helicopters”**

**“No, --that’s not quite right,” said Larry with wrinkled expression, furrowed brow and shaking his head, “my call is Reamer. Pegasus is your Son’s call.”**

**“Brian’s call is Python not Pegasus,” Henry replied looking a little puzzled.**

**“I’m not talking about Brian,” Larry firmly responding, “but your other Son, --Mike,” now Henry was very puzzled, not to mention Brian.**

**“Now let me understand this,” said Henry very confused, “you’re telling me that Mike has a call and it’s Pegasus. Only Fighter Pilots have call signs and we all know Mike can’t fly let alone be a Fighter Pilot, so why would he have a call sign?”**

**Then the room got very quiet as if something awful was going to happen; Larry was looking at Maria who had an expression of, O’ GOD HERE IT COMES!**

**“Henry, --Mike can fly,” Larry slowly told him, and then he begins to relate the whole story, “not only is he an excellent Helicopter Pilot, but he is also an EXR Fighter Pilot. At least he was last summer before you all moved here. That’s why I’m here, --we want him to rejoin the special Army Pilot Program. Henry, --we’re desperate for talented Helicopter Pilots, we really need him, because it would be a terrible waste of a good Fighter Pilot**

to see him get drafted and windup in the Infantry and that's exactly what might happen if we don't act now while he's still in High School."

Now this was almost too much for Henry and Brian to swallow, as they sat there in shock.

Henry just couldn't believe Mike is capable of flying anything, much less an EXR Helicopter.

"I just don't believe it," Henry declared shaking his head, "because, there is one thing that I know for sure, and that is, --Mike can't fly an Airplane. So tell me, --just how can he master the flight controls of a difficult aircraft like a Helicopter?"

"Well Sir, --I have trouble with an Airplane too," Larry replied, "but as you know I'm good at the controls of a Helicopter. The same is true for Mike, --only he has more of a problem with an Airplane then I do. Henry, --Mike's truly a natural, --I've never seen a better Helicopter Pilot."

"I still can't believe he's capable of flight," Henry declared unconvinced still shaking his head, "prove to me that he's a Helicopter Pilot, and then how and where did he get his flight instruction. I didn't pay for any Helicopter Flight Instruction, so who paid for it?"

"I gave Mike the Instruction," Larry responded sharply, "and he repaid me by working as a Ground-handler and later he flew as one of my company Pilots. As for proof, --I guess you'll have to talk to the FAA. They've got all of his test scores and a record of his Pilot Certificate."

"You're telling me my Son's a Helicopter Pilot," Henry gasped in a state of shock.

"An EXR Helicopter Fighter Pilot, --to be exacted," Larry correcting with a nod.

After a few minutes of silence, Henry regained his composure and inquired, "You said he flew for you as a company Pilot. Now isn't that illegal to hire a Private Pilot to fly for hire. You know if the FAA ever found out, --you both could lose you flight privileges."

"Henry," said Larry now smiling for the first time since the start of the conversation, "Mike presently holds a Commercial Certificate for a Helicopter with an Instrument rating, so he can legally fly for hire which he now does for Bob Manning."

Now Henry just sat there in total disbelief not knowing what to say next.

"I knew it!" Brian exclaimed suddenly slapping his leg, "I always

knew he was up to something, but I never dreamt he would learn to fly an EXR Helicopter.”

“You knew!” Henry exclaimed with surprised, “Why didn’t you say something.”

“Because I couldn’t prove it,” Brian explaining, “believe me, --both Jeff and I tried all kinds of tricks to prove he could fly.”

Then the correcting comment Larry made a few minutes ago finally sinks in. “You’re telling us, --that our Mike is not only a Commercial Helicopter Pilot, but also an EXR Fighter Pilot!” Henry exclaimed jumping back into the conversation, “I just can’t believe he learned to fly an EXR Helicopter, --let alone being a Fighter Pilot! He’s just a Kid, --only seventeen! Who taught him how to fly an EXR Helicopter in the first place, and then how to fight with it?”

“If he’s been doing all of this flying how come we’ve never seen him fly?” Brian asked, “Believe me, --I’ve tried to catch him in the act several times.”

“Your Father and Mother have already seen Mike fly,” said Larry good-naturedly, “He was flying the black and red Helicopter with the Humming Birds in the Airshow on Labor Day last year.”

“That’s preposterous,” Henry emphatically declared, “I saw you land and get out of that Helicopter, plus, your picture was in the paper with the black and red Helicopter.”

“It’s true,” Larry admits with a nod, and then explains, “I was flying the encore and did land and got out, but it was Mike who flew the main performance. When everyone started shouting encore he got scared and wouldn’t fly again, so then I filled in for him, because he was afraid you would find out that he’s flying Helicopters and would punish him.”

Now Henry and Maria just sat there in disbelief; Maria, she didn’t even know Mike could fly that good, and now they both knew why Mike wasn’t in the grandstand that day.

“My god, --how can that be?” Henry asked almost in tears.

“Dad!” Brian suddenly exclaimed pointing at Henry, “Last night at the banquet, --remember the story about the Kid the Army had lost!”

He then looked at Larry and said to his Fathers astonishment, “That Kid was Mike, --wasn’t he? That’s why you’re here, --you want him back!”

Now Maria was smiling, because she now felt good that the secret was now out in the open; she now knew, Mike would certainly end up flying



Helicopters instead of fighting with a rifle.

“C’mon Brenda, --let’s go and get lunch ready,” said Maria getting up, “Larry and Wayne, --you’ll stay for lunch won’t you?”

“Sure, --if it doesn’t take too long,” Larry replied with a smile, “we have to be back at the airport by two, --to get ready for the Airshow.”

“No,” Maria replied, “it isn’t going to take too long and it won’t be much, because we also want to go to the Airshow. So, all we’ll be having is leftovers and cold cuts, --I hope that’ll be Ok?”

“Sure that’ll be fine,” Larry said with a nod smiling, “I’m sure it’ll taste a lot better than the Army chow we’ve been eating,” then both Henry and Brian began laughing, as Maria and Brenda walked out of the room and went into the kitchen to make lunch.

“You never answered my question,” Brian snapped looking at Larry.

“That Kid, --it was Mike, --wasn’t he?” Brian asked, taking a shot in the dark and now impatiently waiting for an answer.

“Yes, --it was Mike that we had trained and lost,” Larry answered with a nod, and then he bemoaned, “we really need him to come back. We made a terrible mistake and now we’re paying for it. I’ve asked him several times to fly with us again, but he’s got this stubborn streak. Each time I ask him he says he’ll never again fly an EXR Helicopter, but I just know deep down inside he’s yearning to fly the EXR again. I’m going to ask him again today at the Airshow, if I see him, to once more come and fly with us. Henry, --I’m here to ask you to have a talk with him, --maybe you can get him to change his mind.”

“I’ll give it a try, --tonight after dinner,” said Henry contemplating, “I’ll speak to him about reentry into the Army special training program.”

“O’ God Dad, --Javelin’s letter!” Brian exclaimed remembering his letter from Javelin, “The part about having Pilots like Mike flying our EXR Helicopters, --he was referring to our Mike! He knew Dad, --he knew! Somehow he knew, Mike was an EXR Fighter Pilot, but how could he have known?”

“Mike had a run in with three Marine F30’s just before I gave him his wings,” Larry explaining, and then with a chuckle he said, “did you know, he had those three F30’s locked on his HUD (Heads Up Display) for about six minutes. If he’d been armed with PL9’s, there would’ve been three Marines looking for a ride home that day. Fortunately, he didn’t have any PL9’s and used good judgment and left. When he got back, --boy was

he steaming, so I made a call to the training center at Miramar and told them they just about had to go and retrieve three F30's from the desert that day."

"Those three Pilots were my classmates at Top Gun last year," Brian announced with surprise, "you mean to tell me it was Mike they went up against?"

Larry slowly nodded yes, as Henry quietly sat there stunned.

"Unbelievable," Brian remarked disbelieving, "we had to redo that whole two week course, because of that incident. I just can't believe Mike is that deadly."

"Let me assure you, --he is," Larry told him firmly, "and that's why we need him back."

"That is really awesome," Brian finally remarked shaking his head in disbelief.

Then Maria called that lunch was ready, so Henry, Brian, Larry and Wayne all got up and went out to the kitchen for lunch.

Both Henry and Brian now learned how Javelin knew about Mike; as they all sat down to eat lunch.

As Brian discussed Mike with both Larry and Wayne, Henry just quietly sat there eating, because he was thinking, sadly, about all of those special times that he could of have had with Mike; he thought of missing Mike's first solo and Mike's check ride when he got his Commercial Certificate, he now felt like a whole part of his life was missing and lost forever.

Oh how he wished he could have been there to see Mike get his wings as an EXR Fighter Pilot.

As tears began to form in Henry's eyes, he told himself never again would he cause one of his Sons to have any reason for keeping secrets from him.

Now he was proud of all his Sons and he thought to himself, as he began to smile, "Now I've got two Sons as Top Guns, --two Fighter Pilots. And before very long I'm also going to have a Bomber Pilot too," as he was now thinking of Jeff who was in Colorado Springs at the Air Force Academy.

After they had finished eating lunch, Larry and Wayne got up.

"We have to be getting back to the airport," Larry informing them and said to Maria, "the lunch was great, --I'd like to come back again some-time."

**“You’re welcome and we’ll be looking forward to seeing you,” said Maria with a smile, and as they all shook hands, Henry told Larry and Wayne that he’ll be watching their performance in the Airshow and told them he will sit down with Mike tonight and talk with him.**

**Then Larry and Wayne got into their car and drove back to the Airport.**

**At two that afternoon Henry, Maria, Brian and Brenda got ready and departed for the Airshow.**

## CHAPTER 4 -- Clipped Wings

Mike and his two friends spent rest of the forenoon flying in Glen's Airplane and for lunch, they went into town to find a McDonalds to grab a bite to eat; when they had finish eating they drove back out to the airport for the afternoon Airshow.

After they had found a place to park the pickup in the parking lot, they walked over by the fence near the flight line and sat down on the grass; there they waited for the Airshow to start, talking about flying.

When Henry, Brian and the girls arrived, it was already getting crowded; they walked over to find a spot by the flight line fence where there wasn't very many people and sat down on the grass.

The Airshow started promptly at three o'clock.

The first performance was by a couple of biplanes doing aerobatics; the next performance was a jet also doing aerobatics and so it went for most of the afternoon.

At five o'clock, the military started showing off their stuff.

The Air Force had a squadron of five F30's from George Air Force Base and they were doing intricate maneuvers and flybys, then the Army from Fort Irwin had Captain Clark and his men put on a show with four EXR2 Helicopters; at the very end of the Airshow a bunch of old warplanes did mock dogfights and some formation flying.

It was six o'clock when the Airshow finally ended and everyone started to leave.

"Dad, --Mom, Brenda has to be at the terminal by seven for her flight back to San Diego," Brian informing Henry and Maria.

"Ok then, --I think we had better head back to the van," says Henry looking at his watch. "We don't need to rush, --there are still a few minutes before they reopen the terminal."

So, Henry, Brian, and their wives slowly walked back to Henry's van; it took them a while to leave the parking lot, because of the large crowd.

Slowly they drove over to the Airport Terminal behind a long line of cars, but they weren't worried, because the Airport Terminal was still shut down for the Airshow.

"Dad, --I don't need to be back at the base until tomorrow after-

noon,” Brian told his dad, as they slowly made their way to the terminal, “because I’ve got my jet, --it’ll only be a twenty minute flight back to Miramar. So, I don’t have to leave until tomorrow morning.”

“Wonderful,” Maria announces with delight, “then you can stay one more night with us.”

When they arrived at the terminal parking lot and found a place to park, they then walked into the terminal.

After Brenda had checked in, they went to the waiting area to await her flight; there they sat talking about the Airshow until the announcement was made that the flight to San Diego was boarding passengers.

Brian hugged and kissed his wife and together with Henry and Maria they walked to the boarding gate; there they stopped as Brian kissed Brenda one more time.

“Hon, --I’ll be home tomorrow afternoon,” Brian told her.

“You be careful and I’ll have dinner waiting when you get home,” Brenda told him, and then waved goodbye as she walked up the boarding ramp into the Airplane.

They all waited in the terminal and watched, as her jet took off and flew out of sight, then Henry, Brian and Maria departed the Airport Terminal, got back into Henry’s van and drove home.

As Mike, Russ, and Glen got up off the grass, Mike asked, “Well, -- what do you guys want to do now?”

“I want to get a closer look at the F30’s parked over there,” Glen says, pointing to the flight line where some people were milling around and looking at the military aircraft on display; Russ nods his approval, so off they went to look at the F30 fighters.

“If I’m going to learn to fly one,” Russ remarks, as they go through the gate in the fence and head towards the flight line, “I want to get a closer look at em’.”

When they got up to the first one on the flight line there were already several people walking around and looking at it.

“O’ God look how big it is!” Russ exclaimed when he got up closer to it, “I’ll never be able to fly this! It’s to way too big for me!”

“Sure you can,” said Glen laughing, “It isn’t any harder to fly than the Lear. Besides, --by the time you get to fly one you’ll have grown into it, and then you won’t think it’s so big anymore.”

Russ just shook his head as he walked around and looked it over.

“What do you mean grow into it,” Russ remarked gruffly to Glen and Mike, as an Air Force Lieutenant comes walking up. “I don’t think I’m going to grow any bigger than I am now.”

Then with some uncertainty he starts to get cold feet, “I don’t know Glen, but I think I’ll pass on this special Air Force flight school.”

Glen was about to speak when they heard someone behind them say, “She gets to be really small when you get her up in the air.”

All three boys turn around to see a small Air Force Pilot smiling at them. “Hi, --I’m Lieutenant Paul Kaufman and I’m five two and one hundred thirty eight pounds,” the Pilot introducing himself.

“Now if I can fly this aircraft so can you guys. That’s if you can qualify for the special flight school.”

“Hi, —I’m Glen Justin, --and I have already qualified and signed up,” Glen tells him shaking Paul’s hand, “but it’s Russ, my friend here, that’s getting cold feet.”

“That’s great,” Paul, replies smiling, “how much High School have you guys got left?”

“We’re all seniors and I’m eighteen,” Glen responding, “Russ here, is the youngest at seventeen, but he’ll be eighteen in four months.”

“Now you don’t look all that small to me and I don’t think you’ll have any problem flying this aircraft,” says Paul trying to relieve Russ’s uncertainty as he extends his hand to him. “That’s if you can qualify for the special flight school.”

Russ taking Paul’s out held hand is still unsure about being able to fly such a large aircraft. “Yeah, --hi, --I don’t know if I’m all that good enough to be accepted for fighter training. God, --that’s an awful big jet, --I think maybe I’ll pass on this one.”

“Russ, --what do you mean you’re not good enough!” Glen exclaimed piping up, “just how many seventeen year old’s in this country do you know of who holds a Pilot Certificate for a Lear Jet with a full instrument rating? Come on, --now tell me, --how many? Not to many I bet, --you’re good and don’t go running yourself down like that. Now you’re going to sign up for that special flight school even if I have to drag you there myself, and then we’re both going to learn to fly F30’s.”

“You can fly a Lear?” Paul emphatically asked in disbelief, while standing there with an astonished look on his face; Russ nods yes.

“My god man, --if you can fly a Lear!” Paul exclaims shaking his

head, “then you shouldn’t have any trouble learning to fly a F30. It’s because of guys like you, that we started the special flight school. Now you listen to me, --I want you to go and sign-up right after school on Friday. If you need a lift I’ll be happy to come by and pick you up after school and take you over to the Airbase to get you signed up, and then I’ll take you back home.”

Russ nods Ok and responds, as Glen smiles and pats Russ on his back, “Thanks, but I won’t need a lift. My Dad told me, he’d take me over to get signed up if I wanted to go to the special flight school. Thanks anyway for the offer.”

“Are all three of you Pilots?” Paul asks pointing to all three of the boys and they all nod yes.

Paul notices Mike standing there quietly listening and extends his hand to him saying, “I hope you’ll be signing up as well.”

“Name here is Troff, --Mike Troff and no, --I’m afraid I won’t be joining my friends in learning to fly an F30. I don’t know how to fly an Airplane and I really don’t care to learn.”

“I thought I just saw you all nod yes to my question, about all of you being able to fly,” said Paul, as he’s now a little confused by Mike’s remark.

“We all can fly,” says Glen breaking in trying to explain, “and we are all Pilots. What Mike is saying about not being able to fly an Airplane is true, because he’s a Helicopter Pilot. Now you think Russ is good, but just get a load of Mike’s record. Just how many eighteen-year old kids do you know of who holds a Commercial Certificate in a Helicopter with an instrument rating. I’ll bet there’s even fewer than Russ with a rating in the Lear.”

Paul just stood there and looked at the three boys standing there, because he couldn’t believe what he’s just heard.

“God, --I just don’t believe this,” said Paul shaking his head, and then he points to the other end of the flight line and says, “Mike, --you see that row of Helicopters down there? Now I want you to go down there and talk to that Army Captain standing there. His name is Captain Larry Clark and they also have a special school for flight training.”

Now after hearing Larry Clark’s name, Mike’s heart skipped a couple of beats, because he didn’t want anything to do with the Army or with Larry Clark; Mike was now thinking to himself, “That’s the last person I wanta’ to meet today. He’ll find me soon enough. Now there’s no way that

I'm going to that school and I don't want anything to do with flying EXR Helicopters either."

"Sorry, but I'm not interested in the Army Special Flight School," Mike flatly tells him.

"I can't believe what I just heard you say," Paul responds stunned by Mike's remark, "I know of at least ten other young Pilots that would give anything to be able to enter that special flight school, and now it appears to me that you have the qualifications to enter the flight school and you're telling me you don't want anything to do with it. Don't you understand, we're about to enter another war? God has given you and your two friends a special talent to fly, so please don't throw it away."

Now Captain Clark was talking to Wayne, Scott and John, when he glanced up the flight line towards the parked F30's and saw Mike with two other boys talking to an Air Force Pilot; he then smiled and said to Lieutenant John Sutton, "I see someone up on the other end of the flight line that I want to talk too. I want you three to fly back to Fort Irwin. I'll be back a little later."

He then left the group and walked up the flight line towards Mike.

As Larry approached Mike and his friend's, Mike saw him coming and started to worry a little; after Larry had walked up to them, Lieutenant Kaufman saluted Larry and Larry returned the salute.

"Hi Mike, --how are you doing?" Larry asked, as he and Mike eyed each other, "are you ready for school tomorrow?"

"You two already know each other?" Paul asked a little surprised that Larry and Mike seem to know each other.

"Yea-h," Larry replied with a drawl.

"I was Mike's Flight Instructor when he got his Commercial Helicopter Certificate," Larry told them with a smile, eyeing Mike, "he also worked for me about year ago as a Pilot and Ground-handler."

Mike started to feel uncomfortable, because he didn't know how much Larry would tell.

"We talked about this at the banquet, --remember," said Mike trying to take the heat off himself and reminding both Russ and Glen about the conversation at the table they had about Clark training a Kid, being gone a lot, and him working for Clark.

"Captain Clark," said Paul sharply, "I think you should consider Mike as a student for you special flight school."



“Yes, --I fully agree with you,” Larry replied with a big nod and a smile, and then looking directly at Mike, he asked, “How about it Mike, --will you sign up for the special flight school?”

“No way, --sorry Larry,” Mike firmly replied vehemently shaking his head, “I’m not at all interested in flying EXR Fighter Helicopters.”

Larry was about to plead with Mike when Glen remembered the earlier discussion at the enduro banquet and exclaimed to everyone’s surprise, “Russ, --do you remember the talk we had at the banquet last night. You know, --it was about the Kid the army had lost. My god, --it’s you Mike, --isn’t it? You’re the Army EXR Fighter Pilot!”

Mike just stood there red faced and wishing he could disappear. Now both Paul and Russ were astounded by what they just heard.

Mike looked at Larry with a scowl and Larry looked back at Mike, eye to eye.

“Glen, --I think your imagination is getting the best of you,” said Mike crisply turning suddenly to face Glen.

“I’ve got to be getting on back to George Air Force Base,” Paul announced looking at his watch, “Mike, --I think you should seriously reconsider Captain Clark’s offer. And now, if you would all please leave the flight line, I need to fire up this jet and fly it back to my Base.”

He then saluted Larry once more and after Larry had returned the salute, he then got ready to fly back to his airbase.

“Why don’t you two head back to your vehicle,” Larry telling both Glen and Russ while looking at them, “Mike will be along in a little bit. I need to talk to him alone for a while. Maybe I can get him to change his mind about the flight school.”

“Ok, --we’ll wait for Mike in my truck,” Russ replied with a grin, “I sure hope you can get him to change his mind.”

“So do I,” Larry gruffly responded with a sigh.

Mike just stood there feeling outnumbered as Glen and Russ walked off the flight line and headed for Russ’s truck.

Larry and Mike also walked off the flight line so Lieutenant Kaufman could fire up his jet.

After getting his jet fired up, Lieutenant Kaufman taxied out to the main runway, took off, and flew back to George Air Force Base.

Now Larry was starting to look a little agitated, because Mike still refusing to go and join him at Fort Irwin.

Larry was frustrated and angry as he looked directly at Mike and said, “My god man, --just what is with you? I’ve trained you as a EXR Fighter Pilot, and you turned out to be one of the best and now you’re throwing all of that training away, just because you have a chip on your shoulder. God dammit Mike, --grow up, --you’re not a little kid anymore, because no matter what you think or say. On the day that you pinned on those wings, you became a Fighter Pilot. Now dammit Mike, --you’ve got responsibilities and one of those responsibilities is to take your rightful place with the rest of our EXR Fighter Pilots.”

Now Mike was getting a little infuriated by Larry chewing on him. “I DON’T GIVE A RAT’S DAMN WHAT YOU THINK I AM,” Mike angrily shouted in Larry’s face while shaking his finger at him, then he pause as Larry looked back stunned.

“As for those goddamn wings, --you can have em’ back,” Mike told him with fervor, “as far as I care, --you can throw the damn things into the nearest lake. As for responsibilities, I have one, and that’s to myself and I’ll thank you to stay out of my life and let me make my own decisions.”

“Ok dammit, --if you want to throw away everything you’ve learned,” Larry stammered, as he was now so angry he could barely talk, “then God dammit, --go right ahead, but don’t come crying to me when you get drafted and wind up in the infantry, because that’s exactly what will happen to you.”

“Don’t worry, --I won’t,” Mike retorted, “I’ve had enough of this conversation, --I’m leaving,” he then walked off leaving a very angry and frustrated Army Captain.

Russ and Glen were still waiting when Mike arrived at the pickup and climbed in without saying a word, because he was still very angry with Larry.

Glen inquired, as Russ started up the pickup, backed out, and drove towards town, “Well Mike, --are you going to that Special Army Helicopter Flight School?”

“Hell no,” said Mike sharply still very upset, “and don’t ask me about it again.”

Now both Russ and Glen could see, Mike was upset, so they all sat there in silence as Russ drove his pickup.

When they arrived at Mike’s home, Mike got out and said, “Good-bye, --I’ll see you guys in school tomorrow,” then he started walking

towards his house and not waiting for his friends to say goodbye to him.

Glen was going to say goodbye, but when he sees Mike walking to his house he doesn't complete the salutation, and then they drive away a feeling little dejected.

Henry, Maria and Brian were sitting in the den talking about Mike, when they heard Russ pull up and stop.

"Henry, --now don't be too hard on him," said Maria a little concerned, "he only did it so he could continue to fly. He didn't know you wouldn't have cared if he wanted to fly Helicopters, otherwise, he wouldn't have denied being able to fly them."

"I'll only be as hard on him as it will take to get him to fly with Captain Clark," Henry responded, "now we all want Mike to fly rather than fighting with a rifle, —now don't we?" Both Maria and Brian nod as Mike comes walking into the house.

Henry called to Mike as he walks towards the kitchen, "Mike, please come in here. We need to have a talk, because I have a little bone to pick with you."

"Now what did I do?" Mike thought, as he started to get a little worried.

"It can't be anything to do with staying out to late, because I've always been home by ten," Mike thought, as he walked into the den where Henry, Brian and Maria were seated.

Both Henry and Brian looked very disturbed, even Maria wasn't smiling; she then solemnly got up and went out into the kitchen.

Henry said in a dangerous sort of voice while motioning to Mike to sit down, "If you weren't eighteen and all grown up I'd take you over my knee and give you a good spanking."

"Now what did I do?" Mike asked, shocked by what his Father had just said; Brian sat there giggling to himself and thinking, "Dad would have his hands full trying to spank him. Mike's full grown, over five feet, and strong!"

"How about lying to me for starters," said Henry using a scolding tone of voice; now Mike was even more at a lost, because he couldn't remember when he had lied to his Father.

"I don't remember telling you a lie," said Mike quit puzzled,

**“honest Dad, --for the life of me, --I don’t even know what it could have been about.”**

**“How about being able to fly Helicopters,” Henry replied, as Mike’s jaw dropped and his face was now starting to get red.**

**“But Dad, --I don’t know how to fly, --you know that,” Mike weakly responded trying to get himself off the hook once again.**

**Henry looked at Brian, and then they both shook their heads, as this time it wasn’t working.**

**“Mike, --now you’re lying again,” said Henry, and now starting to get very angry, “because I know you can fly.”**

**“Honest Dad, --I really can’t fly,” Mike blatantly lying, because he was scared and now sweating heavily.**

**“You listen to me young man,” said Henry now very angry with Mike for lying to him again, “don’t you keep lying to me, because you’re only getting yourself in deeper trouble. I know for a fact you can fly a Helicopter, because Captain Clark was here this morning and he filled us in on the whole story.”**

**Not only was Mike now worried about what his Father was going to do to him, he was also very angry with Captain Clark for spilling the whole story, especially after he had promised not to say a word until Mike said it would be all right to do so; and so, Mike just sat there in silence.**

**“Mike, --if you were a few years older and not my Son,” Henry again scolding, “I would have punched you right in the face for lying to me.”**

**Now Brian was taken aback by Henry’s remark.**

**Henry took a deep breath, and then he said, “What am I going to do with you? Well, --you’re now a full-grown adult and I can’t take you over my knee. So, --I think the best punishment that I can give you is to clip your wings. Young man, --until further notice, --you’re grounded and I mean, --really grounded, --no more flying and to make sure you stay on the earth I want both your Airman Medical and Pilot Certificate’s, so hand them over, --now!”**

**Mike hesitated looking at his father, as anger at Captain Clark began to well up inside of him.**

**“Young man I’m not kidding, --hand them to me NOW,” His Father blared at him like an angry bull; Mike jumped, got up, and took his wallet out of his back pocket and as a tear formed in his eye, he got both**

certificates out and gave them to his Father.

“Since I can’t fly anymore,” Mike blubbered and quickly wiped a tear from his eye, with his hand, before his Father or Brother could see it run down his cheek, “I suppose now I’ll have to quit my job.”

“No, --you don’t have to quit your job,” Henry told him, “you can still work as a Ground-handler. I’ll stop by Manning Aviation tomorrow morning and explain everything to Mister Manning. I think once he hears what I have to tell him, --I’m sure he’ll agree. I know there are plenty Helicopter Pilots out there to fly for him.”

“I suppose you’re also taking my bike away?” Mike gruffly asked now very upset.

“No, --you can still compete with your bike,” Henry calmly replies, “at least for now, but if I find out you’re still flying, then not only will I take your bike from you, but I will also let the FAA know you’re flying without your certificates.”

“I’m now an adult, --you can’t stop me from flying,” Mike retorted, now getting angry with his Father, “I want my certificates back, --I have a job to uphold.”

“Young man, --you’re testing my patience,” said Henry with stern anger at Mike’s insubordination.

“As long as you’re living in this house and going to High School you’ll do exactly what I tell you. You got that?”

Mike was now really upset as he defiantly nods, and then suddenly in anger he abruptly got his Driver’s License out of his wallet and threw it at Henry, “Here, --you’ll probably want this too. If I can’t fly, then I don’t want to drive either.”

“Come here and pick this up,” Henry barked pointing at the Driver’s License lying on the floor, as he was steaming mad now.

“You’re going to continue to drive Jeff’s car, just as you had promised him, and you will also take good care of it. Do I make myself clear?”

Mike humbly nods and while still very upset, he reluctantly gets up, picks up his Driver’s License from the floor, puts it back into his wallet and returns the wallet to his pocket.

“Can I be excused to go to my room until dinner?” Mike timidly asked.

“No, --not yet,” Henry replied; Mike now fearfully wondered, what else is his Father going to do.

“How long am I going to be grounded?” Mike timidly asked in a very soft voice while looking at the floor.

“Until you either graduate from High School and move out or join the army.”

“I’m too young to join the army!” Mike exclaimed taken aback, “you want me to be a soldier in the infantry?”

“No, --I want you to be an EXR Fighter Pilot,” his Father tells him flatly, “your place is with Captain Clark’s Company over at Fort Irwin. Anyway, I don’t expect you to join the active army. According to Captain Clark, because you’ve already completed most of your flight training you’ll be placed into the pool of trained EXR Pilots until you finish High School. He also wants you to sign up for R.O.T.C at your High School and he wants you to come to Fort Irwin to get current in the EXR Helicopter. In effect, what you’ll be in is kind of like the Army Reserves. That is, until you graduate from High School, and then you will be in the Active Army as a commissioned officer, --a Second Lieutenant.”

Henry is now smiling for the first time and so is Brian, but to Mike it was now all beginning to make sense, the whole incredible plot was unfolding before him, and Captain Clark was behind it all, of that he felt sure.

“So Mike, --what will it be?” His Father asked, “Flying army or being grounded and working at the airport, as a Ground-handler, until you graduate?”

Now Mike really felt betrayed by Captain Clark and thinking, “They think they have me up against a wall, do they, well, --I’ll show em’, --screw em’ all. They can keep my Pilot Certificates, because I’m going to join the Infantry.”

“You can just keep the Pilot Certificates and you can tell that god-damn Clark to keep his nose out of my life,” Mike intently told them, his heart now harden, “I’m not going to fly his damn EXR Helicopters. If you want me to enter the Army, fine, --I will, --just as soon as I finish School I’ll join the infantry and no way I’m I going to sign up for R.O.T.C.”

Both Brian’s and Henry’s jaws dropped, because they didn’t expect this from Mike.

“If that’s the way you feel, then you can go to your room just as soon as Brian is finished with you. Maybe after you had some time to think on it you may want to change your mind,” said Henry with a straight face feeling dejected.

**“Brian, --what?” Mike asked somewhat confused, and now wondering what has Brian to do with all of this.**

**“Brian has something he wants to talk to you about,” Henry announced giving Brian his opportunity to enter into the conversation.**

**“Please, --now don’t get mad,” said Brian cautiously holding up several drawings, “all I need is your advice as an EXR Fighter Pilot.”**

**“I’m not a Fighter Pilot,” Mike harshly responded looking at the drawings his Brother was holding up and snottily asked, “So, why should I help you?”**

**“Ok, --so you’re not a Fighter Pilot anymore,” said Brian agreeing, and then pleading he asked, “will you please take a look at these drawings and tell me what you think.”**

**Mike got up and grabbed the drawings from Brian, sat back down and looked at them.**

**“They’re drawings of several maneuvers to outgun an EXR Helicopter,” Brian explaining.**

**“You guys are out of your ever-lovin’ minds. If you try to execute these maneuvers, you’re all dead meat,” Mike told him with a snicker, and then he started to laugh and humiliate his Brother, “no wonder we’re losing F30’s by the gross. Hell, --you’re all textbook perfect targets and all I have to do is pick you off one by one, --couldn’t miss if I tried,” pointing his finger at Brian like a gun and saying, “Bang--Bang--Bang,” and then blowing on the end of his finger after each bang.**

**Brian and Henry just sat there stunned.**

**“Are you sure Mike?” Henry asked in a serious tone, “you’re not just saying that to get even with me for grounding you.”**

**Mike said, in a more somber and serious tone, as he looked at his Father, “You can believe what you want, but if you try those maneuvers on an EXR Helicopter you’re going to lose even more F30’s then you are now.”**

**“What’s wrong with them?” Brian asked stunned and surprised, “We worked hard at perfecting those maneuvers.”**

**“Wrong, --I’ll tell you what’s wrong,” Mike told him pointedly, looking Brian in the face, “It’s your goddamn flight school that’s what’s wrong.”**

**“What’s wrong with my flight school?” Brian asks.**

**Thinking back to the encounter he had with the three F30’s, Mike responds, “What in the hell do they tell you to do in training for an**

encounter with an EXR Helicopter.”

“We’re told to stick together, because if we get split up we’re dead meat,” Brian replied.

“Well, --you’ve been told wrong,” Mike snarls, and then he explains, “If you stay together, then you are dead meat. How do you think I was able to keep your three buddies locked on my HUD for six minutes last year? Now if two or three F30’s encounter an EXR Helicopter, then your best move is to make him retreat, because you’ll never be able defeat him with only two or three F30’s. Now if there are four of you, then that’s a different story, but if there are only two or three of you, then the secret is to split up, because you must keep the EXR Helicopter busy trying to target one of you and at the same time not giving him the opportunity to stay locked on long enough to fire. It will then become a stalemate and he’ll tire and leave. A top EXR Pilot wouldn’t have gotten into this situation in the first place, he would’ve seen the probable stalemate as an outcome and brake off. Now it would be you chasing him, but I wouldn’t advise you to do that, because now, you’d be playing into his game.”

As Brian and Henry were listening intently Mike continued, “Here, --I’ll show you a couple of moves that will allow you to outgun a Helicopter or two. Remember, --these will only give you a fifty to seventy percent chance of surviving, that is, depending on how good your opponent is.”

Both Brian and Henry gathered around Mike as he drew several maneuvers on the back of the drawings.

Then Henry went and sat back down in his easy chair.

“Thanks Mike, --it’s too bad you’re not a Fighter Pilot anymore,” said Brian solemnly, “because it would be great if you could come to Miramar and teach us how to outgun Fighter Helicopters.”

“Mike, --now you see why I did what I had too,” Henry explaining, “what you just did for us show’s your extensive training that you’ve received from Captain Clark. He’s right, --you’re an EXR Fighter Pilot and please Mike, --don’t throw all of that training away.”

Mike didn’t say a word, because he was still very upset, he then got up and went to his room.

There in his room, he found a small empty brown cardboard box in the closet and set it on the top of his dresser.

He then opened his top drawer of his dresser, took out a small black box, and slowly opened the lid exposing a shiny pair of silver wings.



As Mike looked at the wings tears began to run down his cheeks; he ran his finger over the wings, and then he closed the lid.

He then put the black box containing the wings into the larger brown cardboard box.

He once more reach into his top dresser drawer and withdrew an olive drab patch with a pair of black wings sown on it; he fingered them as well, and as the tears were streaming down his cheeks he put them into the brown box.

Then he got a piece of paper and a pen and began to write:

*'To Larry Clark:*

*I'm returning these, as I don't need them anymore.*

*My Dad has permanently grounded me, because of what you had told him.*

*I don't ever want to see you again, so stay out of my life.*

*Mike Troff.'*

He then folded the paper and put it into the box, sealed it up, and addressed it to Larry Clark, then he threw himself face down onto his bed and there he lay until he cried himself to sleep.

It was ten thirty when Maria walked into Mike's room and found him sound asleep; she rolled him over and saw the tears that he had cried and felt real bad that he had been put through such an ordeal.

She knew how he loved to fly, but she knew it was in his best interest that he was put through that ordeal; she figured, because of his love of flying he'll go and become an Army EXR Fighter Pilot instead of going into the infantry.

She then took his shoes, socks, and his clothes off, covered him up, walked out of his room shutting off the light and closing the door.

## **CHAPTER 5 --The First Day Of Senior Year**

It was seven thirty when Maria hollered for Mike to get up for school.

Mike rolled over, opened his eyes, and looked at the clock; the clock was indicating seven thirty.

He then saw the brown box that was setting next to the clock and remembered the talk he had with his Father last evening.

Now the thought of not being able to fly was a feeling of emptiness and he felt sick and depressed, so he got out of bed, but he couldn't remember taking off his clothes as he walked to the bathroom to shower.

Fifteen minutes later, he returned to his room to dress for school.

While he was combing his hair, he thought about the brown box that sat there, and thought that maybe he was a little hasty in returning the wings to Larry.

As he thought about Larry's betrayal of his trust, Mike's heart was once again harden' and he took the box and left his room.

On the way to the kitchen to eat breakfast, Mike placed the box on the coffee table in the living room, and when he sat down to eat, he asked where Brian and his Dad were, his mother told him both his Father and Brian had left for the Airbase at seven that morning; Brian had to fly his jet back to Miramar and Henry had a meeting at eight.

She then told him, Henry will be calling Mr. Manning at the airport and explain everything to him.

Maria saw how depressed Mike was and went over and kissed him on his forehead, and then she smiled and said to him, "Don't feel so bad, you'll fly again. You've got your whole life ahead of you to fly. Besides, if you go and see Captain Clark he'll let you fly right away. Then your Dad will give your Pilot Certificates back and you can fly for Mister Manning again."

Mike looked at his Mother and told her, "I'll never fly with that traitor, --not now or ever. Clark had promised me he wouldn't say anything to Dad until I said it would be Ok, and then at the first opportunity that comes along he goes and blabs to everybody."

"Larry only did it, because he likes you and doesn't want you to wind up in the Infantry. I really think he loves you just like if you were his

Son,” his Mother telling him, “did you know that he once had a Wife and Son. They were both killed in a car accident about four years ago. I guess you remind him a lot of his Son that he had once loved and so terribly lost.”

“Well, --if he really loves me he’s sure got a fine way of showing it,” Mike retorted, “I’m the one that got grounded, --not him, and as far as I’m concerned, he can just stay away from me.”

Mike exclaims, as he looks at the clock and sees that it’s getting close to eight fifteen, “God, --look what time it is! I’ve got to be going. I’ve got to get my class schedules before classes start this morning,” he then gets up; on his way out the door he picks up the brown box that was on the coffee table, and then he gets into Jeff’s car and drives off to school.

Two school buses were unloading when Mike pulls up to the High School and makes a left turn into the schools parking lot; he finds a spot and parks the car.

As Mike walks across the parking lot, towards the school, he sees Russ’s pickup parked next to a brown car and says to himself, “Looks like Russ and Glen are already here. Well Mike, --this is it, --your last year, -- better make the best of it.”

He enters the school and heads for the office; when he arrives at the office, he opens the door and walks in.

Stepping up to the counter he says, “Hi, --I’m Michael Troff. I need to get my class schedule.”

The lady who is working behind the counter asks with a smile, “What grade are you in?”

“Twelfth, --I’m a senior this year.”

After bringing up a list of names on the computer screen she remarks, “Senior, --ah’ yes here you are, --Michael A. Troff. I see here that you’re already registered, so all you need is your class schedule.”

She then hits a couple of keys and the printer spits out Mike’s class schedule; she goes over and retrieves the page and with a smile she tells him, as she hands him the class schedule, “Here’s your class schedule. Your locker is on the second floor with the rest of the senior class.”

When Mike looks at his schedule to see if everything is Ok, he notices one of his classes was R.O.T.C.

He then asks the lady behind the counter from whom he just got his schedule, “What’s R.O.T.C doing on my schedule? I didn’t sign up for it, so why am I scheduled for R.O.T.C?”

**“It’s a school requirement. All juniors and seniors are required to take three hours a week of R.O.T.C and two hours of Phys. Ed,” the lady replied.**

**Mike walked out of the office thinking to himself, “God, --R.O.T.C! What next?”**

**Mike found the stairs to the first and second floors; he then went up the stairs to the second floor where he went looking for his locker.**

**The piece of paper that had his class schedule also had his locker number on it; he finally found it halfway down the south corridor.**

**As he was putting some school supplies into his locker, a girl dropped a book as she was walking by, Mike stoops down to pick up the book and says, as he hands it to her, “Here, --you dropped this.”**

**She said smiling at him, “Thanks, --my name is Pamela Taylor, but everyone calls me Pam.”**

**“I’m Michael Troff,” said Mike smiling back and pointing at himself, “everyone calls me Mike.”**

**“I gotta’ go and thanks,” She says pointing down the hall towards two girls standing and talking, then she walks away smiling; after a bit she looks back over her shoulder at Mike one more time.**

**After she had joined her two friends, she said something and they all started to giggle.**

**After Mike had watched her walk over to her friends, he then saw them giggling and looking backed at him; he felt very uneasy and began to wonder what it could be that they found wrong with him.**

**So he glanced down at his feet to see if his socks were the same and they were now he just couldn’t figure out what could be wrong.**

**Russ and Glen came walking up, each with a girl.**

**“Mike, --I want you to meet a couple of friends of ours,” said Glen, and then he introduces his girlfriend, “Mike, --this is Joan Hunt, she and I are going steady.”**

**“Hi, --nice too meet you. Glen has told me a lot about you,” said Joan, as she held out her hand to Mike.**

**Now Mike was a little surprised as he shook her hand. “Yeah, --Glen never told me he was involved with anyone. I sure hope he hasn’t told you anything bad about me.”**

**She just smiled and said, “No, --nothing bad, but he did tell me how**

good a dirt biker you are. Like the number, three man in the State. Say, — we have a pep rally this afternoon in the gym. I hope you'll join Glen and Russ at the rally, so we all can meet you."

Mike just smiled and replied with a lazy draw, "Yea-h—I'll think about it."

"Mike this is my friend Nancy Nicholson," Russ piping up, "She and I are also going steady."

"God, --you guys never told me you both had girls that you were serious about," said Mike quite surprised by all of this.

"We're not really all that serious," said Russ with a smile, "we're just going steady, --that's all. Anyway, --you're going to need a date for the prom later this year, so you had better start looking or you'll be going alone."

"Prom, --right, --I've never given it a thought," Mike responding, "girls, --I don't know. I've never been out with one before much less going steady."

"You mean to tell me you never had a date with a girl before?" Glen asked looking surprised.

Mike nods and while looking at the floor he muttered, "Who would want to go out with a somebody like me anyway?"

Glen said, as he and Russ started to laugh, "Just about all the senior girls in this school. I'll bet you won't have any trouble finding someone to go out with you. All you have to do is look around until you see someone you like, and then ask her out for a date and the rest will be history."

Mike said, as he could still see the three girls down the hall still looking at him and giggling, "I think you're wrong. I don't think anybody would want to go out with me. Just look at those three girls over there laughing at me. I think I've got something wrong, but I don't know what it is."

Glen looks over at the three girls giggling and tells Mike, "There's nothing wrong with you."

"Well there has to be something wrong or they wouldn't be giggling that way," Mike retorted.

"Mike, --when was the last time you took a good look at yourself in the mirror?" Russ asked grinning.

Now Nancy and Joan also started to giggle just like the three girls down the hall.

Mike is beginning to feel uneasy when he answered Russ, "This

morning when I got ready for school. Ok you guy's, --what's wrong?"

"I guess you need to take another look, but this time, take a good look," Russ tells him, and then they both start laughing.

Now Mike really begins to feel uneasy and demands, "Ok, --enough is enough, now I know there's something wrong. Is it the way I'm dressed? Come on you guys tell me what's wrong."

Glen finally explains with a smile, "There's nothing wrong with the way you're dressed. It's you Mike, --you're a really cute guy. That's why those girls are giggling. They're probably trying to figure out a way to ask you out."

Mike just stood there in shock, because he never thought of himself as being cute; then Joan spoke up, "Say Mike, --I know one of those girls. If you want I can introduce you to her?"

"No thanks, --I'll find my own girl," Mike tells her when the bell sounded for the first hour classes, "I've got to go to math class, --catch you all later," so off down the hall he goes to find the room where his first hour class was; Russ, Glen and the two girls hurried off to their classes.

It was five to ten when the bell sounded the end of the first hour class; the door to Math 121 opened and all the students filed out.

Mike walks out carrying a new math book, and then looks at the piece of paper to see where his next class is.

Pam sees him and follows him down the hall until she meets one of her friends; Mike continues on to his next class.

Pam and her friend, Linda Adams, walk together down the hall until they meet Joan.

"Say Joan, --I need a little favor," says Pam.

"Sure, --what can I do for you?"

"You're now going with Glen Justin, he and that new guy hang out together. Could you find out all you can about that new guy for me?" Pam asked, as all three girls walk down the hall to their next class.

"What do you want to know?" Joan asked, and then she said with a big smile, "I can fill you in with all of the finer details."

"Like, --where does he live and what does he like to do for fun?" Pam asked, as she was now very excited.

Joan stopped and got a piece of tablet paper and wrote Mike's address and telephone number on it and gave it to Pam.

"Thanks Joan, --I owe you one for this," Pam told her taking the

piece of paper and looking at it.

“He’s like into computers, dirt bikes, and he’s also a Pilot,” Joan tells her, “He works as a part time Pilot for Bob Manning at Manning Aviation. Now hold on to your books, because you’re not going to believe what I’m about to tell you. He’s into motorcycle enduros like big time. Like, --he’s just the number three man in the entire State of California.”

Standing there with the biggest eyes that you’ve ever seen, Pam says, “He just sounds too good to be true. I suppose he’s already taken. You know how fast those really cute guys are grabbed up.”

“You’re in luck, --this cute guy is available, but you may have a problem trying to land him,” Joan replies smiling, “you see, --he’s kind of shy and has never been out with a girl before.”

“Now the problem is, --how do I get him to notice me?” Pam asking, “I don’t think he even knows I exist.”

“I think I’ve got an idea that may work to get the two of you together,” Joan replies with a sly smile. “There’s a pep rally this afternoon in the gym. Glen and Russ have something cooked up with their motorcycle coach to get Mike introduced to the school. Just maybe that might be the chance you’re looking for to have Mike notice you.”

“You really think so?” Pam asks, excited; Joan nods, and then she notices the time and both girls start to hurry down the hall to their next class.

Mike was on his way to third period study hall when he came upon Glen who was being rough up by three boys.

Mike quickly went over and stepped between one of the boys and Glen.

Mike faced the one whom he thinks is the leader and sarcastically asks in a firm tone, “Isn’t this a little unfair with three against one? Let’s say we make the odds a little better, --like maybe three against two.”

“What business is this of yours? Beat it or you’ll get the same medicine as fly boy here,” replies the boy to whom Mike was addressing.

“I don’t think you’re a Doctor, so you can’t dispense any medicine,” Mike retorts with a bit more sarcasm.

“Smart ass, --I’ll show you how I can dispense medicine,” the Boy gruffly replies with a sarcastic grin, and then he throws a left hook at Mike, but Mike was ready and he caught the boy’s arm.

Then Mike twisted the boy’s arm behind his back and slammed him

face first up against the wall locker.

“Like I said, you’re not a Doctor,” Mike huffily tells him. “Now I don’t want to see you trying to pick a fight with my friend again. And if I ever catch you making trouble again I’ll break your goddamn arm,” then Mike put a little pressure on the hold that he had on the Boy.

“Ok, --Ok, --I’ll leave the fly boy alone!” The Boy exclaimed now in pain; Mike then released the hold and the boy turned around and said, as he walked away with his two friends, “If you want to hang around with fly boys then go right ahead. Nobody in this school associates with them, because they’re nothing but a bunch of losers and spoiled brats,” Mike just waved his hand at them and laughs.

“Are you Ok, Glen?” Mike asked out of concern.

Surprised by Mike’s bravery and swift moves, Glen replies, “Yeah, --I’m fine and thanks. Where did you learn those moves?”

“It’s nothing, --just some moves I picked up from the Army a long time ago,” Mike explains putting his hand on Glen’s shoulder and smiles.

“Then it is true, --you are the EXR Fighter Pilot we’d talked about at the enduro banquet!” Glen exclaims in surprise; Mike nods and tells him, “let’s just keep it between us for now, --Ok?” Glen smiled and nods.

Russ walks up and joins them as Glen picks up one of his books off the floor.

“What happened?” Russ asked.

“Oh nothing,” Glen replied, “except that Mike just saved me from getting a beating from Mark Doubleday and a couple of his bullies.”

“Mark Doubleday, --wow, --he and his friends are the school bullies and they’re nothing but trouble,” says Russ quite surprised by what Glen just told him, and then he asks, “Mike what did you do to chase them off?”

“Oh nothing,” Mike replies, modestly looking down at the floor, “I guess they thought the two of us were no match for em’.”

“Nothing!” Glen exclaims, “Why, --he just about broke Double-day’s arm that’s all!”

“Mike you’re just full of surprises,” says Russ patting Mike on the back, “I wonder what other surprises you have for us up your sleeve,” Mike and Glen looked at each other, Mike winks at Russ, and then he and Glen started to smile.

Feeling flippant Mike proclaims, “Well, --us Fighter Pilots have to stick together,” he then raised his hand up, and then all three boy’s hi-fives



and yells, “YEAH, --FIGHTER PILOTS.”

“I’ve got Study Hall next, --how about you guys?” Mike asks.

Both Glen and Russ told Mike they also have Study Hall.

Russ asked Mike, as they all hurried off to study hall, “Did I just hear you say, --us Fighter Pilots? So, --does that mean you’re going to that special Army Flight School?”

Mike just looked at Russ as they walked into the Study Hall; Glen followed Mike and Russ into the room just as the bell sounded the start of the third period classes.

At noon, Mike and his two friends were met in the cafeteria by Joan and Nancy.

As Mike was going through the line putting food on his tray, Pam slid her tray up next to his and asked, “Hi, --its Mike, --isn’t it?”

Turning to look at her smiling at him, Mike said, “Hi, --now let me see, --you’re Pam, --the one who likes to drop books.”

“Yes, but I don’t normally drop my books. I was in a hurry this morning and they kinda’ got away from me,” said Pam as they continued down the line.

Mike just smiled at her and when they reached the cash register Mike got his wallet out of his pocket and said to the lady at the cash register, “I’ve got em’ both,” pointing to both trays.

The lady rings up both trays and says, “That will be five twenty please.”

Mike slowly said, as he got the money out of his wallet, “Yeah, --five twenty, --here you are,” as he hands the money to the cashier.

As Pam walks with Mike to find a table to sit down at, she thinks to herself, “I’ve now got him to notice me. So now I don’t need Joan’s scheme to get Mike’s attention. I sure hope he likes me. Somehow, I’ve got to keep him. I sure hope that Sue Wesley keeps her grubby mitts off of him. I just can’t believe I’m with one of the cutest guys in this school.”

They sat down at an empty table; soon Russ, Nancy, Glen and Joan sat down and joined them to eat lunch.

Looking at Pam and Mike sitting together eating lunch Joan says, “I see you two have finally gotten together. So, --have you two made any plans yet?”

Now Mike being a little shy shook his head; as for Pam, now she

didn't want to endanger any headway she has made with Mike, so she just sat there and smiled as she looked at him.

Nancy looking around the table asked, "Have you all heard? We're going to have the pep rally in the gym this afternoon at one thirty, --that means there will be no fifth period classes."

"What's a pep rally?" Mike asks.

"You don't know what a pep rally is? Didn't you have pep rallies at your last school?" Joan asked surprised.

Mike shakes his head.

"A pep rally is where all of the schools athletes are introduced to the student body," Joan explains, "you know, --like the football and basketball players, track and field, all of them even the schools motorcycle racers."

Now when Mike heard motorcycle racers, he almost choked on the apple pie that he was eating; looking at Glen and Russ he asked, "What motorcycle racers?"

Russ and Glen just sat there and smiled as Joan answered Mike's question, "Why, --Glen and Russ and the other eleven riders who are on the schools motorcycle team."

Then hinting she smiled and winked at Mike, "Maybe we just might have another new rider join the team this year. I've heard this new guy is really good, --like he's way up in the top five in the State."

"So, --how about it Mike, --will you join the school team?" Nancy asked trying to hold in her enthusiasm, "We sure could use you. We never had anyone from this school in the number three position in the State before," now everyone at his table was looking at him and waiting for him to say yes.

"I'll think about it," said Mike and went on eating the rest of his apple pie.

At one thirty all of the students of Victorville High, filed into the school's gym for the pep rally.

On the south end of the gym where the basketball net was located, a large projection screen was lowered; a podium with a microphone was located just to the right of the big screen, and in front of the screen there was a small stage with three rows of chairs.

After everyone had been seated in the gym bleachers the lights in the gym were dimmed, and then the schools head coach walked up to the podium and introduced himself.

He started the rally by introducing the cheerleaders; after they had all been introduced, they did the school cheer and everyone cheered and applauded.

All the while, a video showing the cheerleaders was projected on the screen behind them.

After the cheerleaders had finished, they split into two groups, went and stood on each side of the stage.

The Head Coach was smiling when he asked, “Now aren’t they the best?”

Everyone shouted and clapped and the cheerleaders waved their pompoms.

When the Basketball Coach was introduced everyone again cheered and applauded, and as Basketball Coach walked up to the podium the large video projection screen once again came to life with images of the basketball team playing.

As Basketball Coach introduced each Basketball Player to the student body, the Basketball Player went and sat in a chair in front of the screen; the program continued in this fashion with the football players, the track and field players, the baseball players and finally, the Motorcycle Racing Coach was introduced.

When the Motorcycle Coach walked up to the podium the large screen began to show images of motorcycles racing; the student body then started to cheer and shout.

As soon as the Motorcycle Coach began to speak, everyone quieted down. “This is the best year that we’ve ever had. Not only do we have a good bunch of riders, but also this year we have several riders finishing in the top ten in the State. We had top finishers in motocross and trials, but the best finishes were what the enduro riders turned in. As you all know, all of the events, with the exception of the observed trials, are held during the summer, so most of the scores are final with the exception of the enduro riders. They have two more events left before the final positions are awarded. With the event that was held last Saturday the point spread is such that I think we can safely say that the top five riders are safe. Even if the two or maybe three riders from this school, who now have the leading positions, would happen to DNF in the last two enduros, which I think would be hard to believe, they would still have enough points to remain right where they

are. Ok, --so now let's introduce all of our motorcycle riders."

He started with the motocross riders and they filed up on stage one by one and took a seat in front of the screen; he next introduced the trials riders and they came up on stage and sat down next to the motocross riders in front of the large screen.

Now it was time for the enduro riders to be introduced, the Coach paused for a minute, and then he continued. "And now, for the best enduro team that we've ever had. It really gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you, --your enduro riders. These riders really worked hard to get where they are. So, --as I introduce them, --give em' a big hand. At position twenty one--with three hundred fifty four points we have Mark Richardson," everyone cheered and clapped as Mark went up on stage and sat down.

Now Mike was starting to get a little nervous, because he didn't know how all of this was going to play out; he had a funny feeling that both Glen and Russ were up to something.

After everyone had stopped cheering, the Coach continued. "At position fifteen with three hundred eighty seven points, --we have Tim Chapin."

Again, everyone cheered and clapped as Tim walked up on stage and slapped Mark's up held hand with his, and then he sat down next to Mark.

The Coach again paused, and then with a big smile he continued, "Now for the last three riders who by the way are all in the top ten. At position eight, --with four hundred and six points, --we have Glen Justin."

Glen was waving his hands in the air over his head as he ran up on stage.

Everyone was cheering and clapping, and the cheerleaders were dancing and waving their pompoms; Glen went and slapped the hands of the other two riders with his and sat down next to Tim.

Now the Coach raised his hand to quiet the students, and then he spoke, "We're not done yet, because we still have two more riders to introduce to you."

When the students had finally quieted down and with that big smile, he said, "At position five with four hundred and twenty three points, --we have Russell Lockwood."

Now, just like Glen, Russ also ran waving his hand, as he too went up on the stage.

Everyone was now cheering and clapping so very loudly that no one heard the cheerleaders do their cheer.

Russ followed the other four riders and slapped their hands with his, and then he raised his right arm into the air and made a fist.

Now all of the athletes were wearing a white sweater with a large red vee on it.

When Russ came running up on stage he was carrying a white sweater neatly folded under his left arm.

After he lowered his right arm, he turned and put the sweater on the chair next to him, and then he sat down next to Glen; they both looked at each other and smiled.

The Coach raised both hands as he tried to speak; finally, everyone quieted down so he could continue.

Mike now had a sinking feeling about what was going to happen next, because he now had a hunch who that white sweater was for and he now wished he could just disappear; he tried to hunch down behind a couple of large boys that were in front of him, so no one would see him sitting there, but it was all ready to late, because both Pam and Russ had already seen him hunching down in the seat.

The Coach smiling, turned and looked at Russ and Glen, and then he turned and began to speak once more, as some of the students were starting to leave. "Hey, --don't leave just yet, because we're not done."

Then pointing to the empty chair on the end with the sweater the Coach said, "As you can see we still have one more chair to fill. Now I think I'm going to need some help with this next rider. How about a Cheerleader, is Pamela Taylor here?"

One of the cheerleaders came over to the Coach, and then Pam came running up to the Coach from the seat were she was sitting in.

Now with a Cheerleader on one side and Pam on the other the Coach continued with a big smile, "I just found out today that the rider who is now in the third position in the State just so happens to be a student in this school."

Mike now knew for sure, he's going to be the one sitting in that chair on stage; he began to sweat and was getting very nervous.

The Coach announced, "I do believe that he's sitting somewhere up in the senior section."

The Coach looked at both girls who were now standing on his right and asked, “Will you girls be so kind as to go up into the senior section and locate this rider and bring him back here?”

Then both girls went up into the senior section to find Mike.

Now everyone was watching to see whom the girls would bring back to the stage; Mike was now hoping that they wouldn't find him and would return to the stage, but Pam knew just where Mike was sitting and she pretended to be looking for him elsewhere, then she made a beeline straight for him.

She whispered to him as she took his hand, “Now come with me and don't be bashful. Everyone wants to see who you are,” so Mike reluctantly got up and went with her and the Cheerleader down to where the Coach was waiting.

The students again started to applaud and cheer as Mike and the girls went down to the Coach.

The Coach said to Mike, “I know there are only two more enduros left to ride this year and also, because you're a senior you won't be competing as a student from this High School next year. So we thought, --that is, the other riders here thought--maybe you would like to join the team. They would like to have you ride the last two enduros as a team member. So how about it Mike, --would you like to ride for your school?”

Mike looked at Russ and Glen smiling back at him, and then he looked at Pam.

“Please say yes Mike,” Pam pleading.

Mike looked at the Motorcycle Coach who was standing there waiting for Mike's answer.

“Ok, --yeah why not,” said Mike nodding, and then Pam hugged him and kissed him; now Mike was taken by surprised by what Pam just did and didn't know what to do.

Then everyone shouted, “KISS HER BACK!”

Pam now was ready for heaven to happen, but poor bashful Mike didn't know what to do.

Then Russ and Glen got up, Russ picked up the sweater from the chair and walked over to where Mike stood.

Glen whispered to Mike, as the student body kept chanting, “KISS HER! KISS HER! KISS HER!”

“You had better give her a kiss, because they're all expecting you to kiss her. She's waiting, --so what are you waiting for? You do know how to

kiss a girl, --don't you?"

Mike looking at Glen, replied, "Sure I do--just watch," he then went and gave Pam a big long kiss on her lips and everyone went wild.

Now Pam, she didn't expect this kind of kiss; after he had finished, she just stood there with stars in her eyes.

The next thing the Coach did was to have Mike sign the team roster.

Russ said, as he opened the sweater, "Ok, --let's see how it fits," both Russ and Glen helped Mike put the sweater on.

Then the motorcycle coach formally introduced Mike to the student body, "At position three in the State with four hundred and thirty one points, --we have our newest team member, --Mike Troff," then everyone stands cheering, shouting, and clapping, then the bell sounds the end of the fifth period and the end of the pep rally.

The Motorcycle Coach announces, "You all better be going so you won't be late for your last class," then everyone files out of the gym to go to their last class of that day.

Mike, now wearing his new sweater walks out of the gym with Glen, Russ, Pam, Joan and Nancy.

The Three girls announce that they have Study Hall, so they leave the boys and head off down the hall towards the study hall room.

Now all three boys have the same class, Science 104, so the three boys wearing their school sweaters head off down the hall together to their last class.

## CHAPTER 6 -- The First Date

At three thirty, the bell sounded the end of the first day of school.

As Mike, Glen and Russ walked out to the parking lot, Glen asked Mike if he would like to go out later that night and maybe ask Pam if she would also like to come.

“I do like her,” Mike replied, “but do you think she likes me enough to wanta’ go out with me?”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Russ told him with a smile, “did you see the look in her eyes after you gave her that kiss? You knocked her socks off. She’s now head over heels in love with you. Hey man, --you got yourself a girl.”

“But, I don’t even know her telephone number or where she lives—so, how do I ask her out?”

When they arrived at Russ’s pickup, Glen put his books on the front seat, and then he takes a piece of paper from his notebook, writes Pam’s address and telephone number on it and hands it to Mike.

Mike takes the piece of paper and after reading it he says, “Thanks Glen, --what time and where are we all going to meet tonight?”

“How about nine o’clock at ‘Fred & Allen’s’, outside the amusement park,” Glen replied, and then he suggests, “I thought we could take in the amusement park tonight. They’ve got a couple of new rides and a new video game that’s just awesome.”

“Ok, --sounds great, --I’ll see you all at ‘Fred & Allen’s’, tonight at nine,” Mike replies nodding, and then he looks at his watch and exclaims, “God, --look at the time! I’ve got to get to my job,” he then waves goodbye to Russ and Glen as he hurries to his car.

Glen and Russ wave back as they get into Russ’s pickup; Russ starts up his truck, backs out and drives off.

As Mike hurries to his car, he smiles to himself at the thought of having a girl.

After he gets into his car, he briefly looks into the rear view mirror at himself and says aloud, “I don’t see anything different, but Glen and Russ are telling me I’m good looking. I don’t think I’m all that good looking. My eyes are too far apart for one thing, and then there’s my nose, --it’s just too big and just look at all those freckles on my face, --who would want



to go out with a guy with freckles? My god, --I'm eighteen and I still have my baby freckles," then he runs his hand through his thick red hair.

"Gees, --just look how red my hair is. It's just way to red, --who would want a guy with such red hair?"

He then shakes his head, starts up the car, backs out, and drives off to find a Post Office, so he could mail the brown box he had with him.

It was four o'clock when Mike walked into the office at Manning Aviation; Bob was at his desk as usual doing paper work.

Mike slowly walks up to the desk, because he didn't know how Bob was going to take the news about him being grounded.

When Mike was about half way to where Bob was working, Bob asked, "Why are you walking so slowly? Any other time you would be here to see what I have for you to do."

Mike then hurried to the desk and said, "Bob, --I've got some bad news and you're not going to like it."

Bob turned to face Mike and said, "I think I know what your bad news is. Your Dad called me this morning and told me all about the talk you two had last night. So what have you decided to do?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know, --just what can I do? I'm grounded until I graduate next spring."

Bob looked solemnly at Mike and said, "That's not true, --he gave you a choice."

Remembering the other option he was given, Mike angrily responded, "No way, --I'm not going to fly with the Army and Larry Clark. Last summer when the Army told me, I couldn't fly anymore. I told Larry I'm not going to fly EXR Helicopters again. So now, I can't fly until I graduate next spring. I'm sorry, but that's the way it has to be. It's all Clark's fault. He's the one who blabbed everything to Dad and got me grounded."

Bob just shook his head and said, "I wish you would reconsider, because you're putting me in a bad position. With all of the jobs that I've now got line up, --just how do you propose I do them?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders again and said, "I don't know, --maybe get another Pilot? I'm sorry, but it'll only be until spring, then I can fly again."

"Ok Mike, --if that how it's going to be, --I'm sorry too. I've got a business to run and I can't afford to play games with you and Clark. If you aren't going to set aside you petty differences and fly, then I'm going to do

as you've suggested and hire another Pilot," said Bob getting a bit irate with Mike, "so, --until further notice you'll be only working as a Ground-handler."

"Ok, --that's fine with me. I've worked as a Ground-handler before," Mike defiantly replied.

"Go and get into your Ground-handler uniform, because there's a lot of work to do. I want the entire hangar swept, mopped, and waxed. Also, get rid of your Pilot uniforms from your locker. You're not a Pilot anymore, and I don't want to see them in there," Bob sternly ordering, and then he asked, "Do you have any questions?" Mike just shook his head no.

Then Bob gruffly ordered, "Ok then, --let's get to work, because you've got lots to do before you leave at seven."

So Mike went and put on his Ground-handler uniform and spent the next three hours sweeping, mopping, and waxing the hangar floor.

As Mike was finishing up, Bob came walking in with some Army fatigues in his hand, and smiles commenting when he sees the room, "This floor never looked so good. Here, maybe you would like to have these," offering the fatigues to Mike.

"What is this, --some kind of joke?" Mike asked looking at them; Bob looking surprised replied, "No, --I thought maybe you might have changed your mind about the Army. Larry left these for you when he was here yesterday. He said you're to wear these when you come to Fort Irwin to fly."

"You can just give em' back to Clark and tell him to shove em' up his ass," Mike snarled, "He's sure got the gall especially after what he just did to me."

Bob was shocked by what Mike had just said and threw the clothes at him saying, "I'm not giving em' back. If you want to give em' back, --then you do it."

Mike caught them and said, "Ok I will," he then went to his locker and put them on the top shelf.

When Mike sees his Pilot uniforms hanging in his wall locker, he then he remembers what Bob had told to do with them, so he goes and looks for something to put them in, to take home; after some searching, Mike found a large brown paper shopping bag.

He then neatly folds the uniforms, and with a tear running down his cheek, he puts them into the bag.

With the brown shopping bag in hand, and wearing his school clothes and sweater, Mike goes and tells Bob he's leaving for home; Bob tells him, if he couldn't come to work tomorrow because of school, to be sure to call or be here by four to start work.

Mike informed him, he would call if he couldn't make it, otherwise, he'll be there at four.

Mike walked out of the building, got into his car, and drove home thinking about his job and also about going out tonight with his friends; he was especially looking forward to going out with Pam, that's if she wants to go out with him.

It was a seven twenty when Mike walked into the house; his Dad was reading the evening paper when he walked through the living room wearing his new sweater.

Henry looks up and remarks when he sees Mike with the sweater, "Say, --what have we got here? Since when did you letter in sports?"

Mike stops and says while looking at his sweater with the big red Vee on it, "I got it today when I joined the schools motorcycle team."

"I guess they know a good rider when they see one," said his Father with a big smile, "they made a good choice by having you on their team. Congratulations, --your Mother and I would like to take a picture of you wearing that sweater. You know, --you're the only one in this family that has ever been in school sports. I'm real proud of you Mike and you really look good in that sweater."

"Thanks Dad," said Mike feeling good, "you don't know how good that makes me feel, --to know you like something that I like doing," he then headed for the kitchen with a big smile on his face to see when dinner will be served.

His Mother informed him that dinner would be ready by eight; Mike tells her he'll be in his room doing math for school tomorrow.

The first thing he did after entering his room was to take his Pilot uniforms out of the paper bag and hang them up in his closet; then he took the piece of paper with Pam's address and telephone number on it from his pocket, looked at it, and with a big grin he went back into the living room.

Mike went over to the phone, sat down, laid the piece of paper down in front of him, picked up the receiver and dialed Pam's number; he listened to the other phone ring hoping she would be home.

After four rings a male voice said, "Hello, --Taylor residence, --Paul

Taylor speaking.”

Mike, now with a lump in his throat said weakly, “This is Mike Troff, --is Pam there and can I speak to her?”

The voice on the other end said, “Yes she is. Just a minute and I’ll get her.”

Mike could hear her father calling to her; “Pam, —telephone, --there’s a young man asking for you. He says his name is Mike Troff.”

After hearing the name Mike Troff, Pam got very excited and hurried to the phone.

Now when Henry overheard Mike asking to talk to a girl he was very intrigued.

As Mike waited for Pam to come to the phone he wondered if she liked him enough to go out on a date with him; he then noticed his Father sitting there reading the paper.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you,” said Mike to him, “this should only take a couple of minutes.”

“No, --in fact I’m finished,” Henry replied grinning, “I think I’ll go and see how your Mother is coming with dinner in the kitchen,” he then got up and went out into the kitchen.

Mike heard on the phone, “Hello Mike, --this is Pam. God, --is that really you Mike? I just can’t believe it’s really you,” now after hearing this, Mike couldn’t believe she really liked him that much.

“Yeah, --it’s really me,” said Mike into the phone, “say, --Glen, Joan, Russ and Nancy are going to the Amusement Park tonight. Glen asked me if I wanted to go along and I’m going. I kinda’ wondered if you would want to go along with me.”

Pam on the other end looked up and silently said, “Thank you God.”

Then she spoke into the phone, “Yes, --I would like to go with you tonight. What time are we going?”

“I’ll be by to pick you up about nine,” Mike tells her, “we’re all meeting at ‘Fred & Allen’s’ at nine.”

“Great, --I’ll be ready and waiting for you.”

“Ok, --then it’s all set,” Mike responding, “I’ll see you in about hour and half, --bye now.”

After she had said goodbye they both hung up the phones; on the way back to his room, to work on his math assignment, he thought how easy it was to get his first date.

Now Henry couldn't wait to tell Maria what he had just found out about Mike. "You're not going to believe this, but our youngest Son has a girlfriend," said Henry to her with a very big smile.

Maria asked looking at Henry with a surprised look on her face, "Mike's got a girl friend? Do you know who she is?"

"No, --but I heard Mike ask for Pam over the phone a couple of minutes ago," Henry replied, "another thing, --did you happen to see that sweater he was wearing,"

"Yes, --I sure did," She replied nodding, and then she asked, "where did he get it, --it sure is a nice one?"

"He got it from school. It's a letterman's sweater. He told me he'd joined the school's motorcycle team. I think they gave him the letter for being the number three man in the State Enduro. You know dear, --he's our only Son to get a letter in school sports. I told him we want a picture of him wearing that sweater," Henry told her with a smile and feeling proud.

It was ten minutes to eight when dinner was ready; Maria told Henry to get the camera and go take Mike's picture, and then tell him dinner is ready.

And so, Henry went and got his camera and went to Mike's room to take his picture and tell him dinner is ready.

Mike was just finishing up with his math assignment when Henry walked in with the camera, and when Mike saw the camera he asked, "What's the camera for?"

"Remember, --I said your Mother and I would like to have a picture of you wearing the sweater," his Father replied.

"Sure, --where do you want me to pose?" Mike asked with a grin.

His Father looks around the room for the right spot and says, "How about over there by all of your trophies," he points to the part of Mike's room where he had a shelf with several large trophies

"Great idea," said Mike. "But wait a minute, --we need this one in the picture," Mike goes and gets the large trophy that he won last Saturday and places it in front of his other trophies that were on the shelf.

There he stood wearing his school sweater next to all of his motorcycle trophies, as his Father took several pictures of him.

When Henry had finished, he told Mike that dinner was ready, and then Mike and his Father walked out into the kitchen to eat dinner.

**It was a few minutes after eight when Mike finished eating and went to get ready to go out on his first date.**

**After he had showered, he returned to his room where he put on his favorite pair of black jeans and a black-brown and white plaid shirt; next, he put on his black athletic boots and laced them up almost to the top, leaving the tongues sticking out, and after putting on the school sweater, he walked out of his room.**

**As Mike walked past his Dads room he stopped and looked in; after pausing a moment or two, he walked in and over to the dresser and looked at the little bottle of cologne setting there.**

**Mike glanced back towards the door to see if anyone was coming, and then he picked up the bottle and removed the cap; after smelling the contents, a big grin broke out on his face.**

**Mike poured some of the bottles contents into the palm of his hand, after sitting the bottle back down on the dresser; he then rubbed his hands together and proceeded to pat his face and neck, after he had put the cap back on the bottle, Mike walked out of the room smiling to himself.**

**Henry was sitting in the living room when Mike comes walking through.**

**“What’s that smell?” Henry asked looking up with wrinkled up nose.**

**Mike stopped dead in his tracks and asked, “What smell? I don’t smell anything.”**

**Henry recognized his cologne and said with a big smile, “You don’t use cologne like after shave. That’s some awfully strong stuff. It only takes a little to give the full effect. If you plan on using cologne, then I think should you go and buy your own.”**

**Maria came into the room next, and wrinkling up her nose she asked, “My god what’s that awful smell?”**

**“I’m afraid it’s Mike,” Henry replied laughing. “He’s been into my cologne and has over done it,” now poor Mike, he just felt like melting through the floor.**

**“Mike, --you’re going to be the center of attraction tonight,” said Maria, and then they both started to laugh so hard that Maria started to cry.**

**“What can I do? I don’t have time to take another shower. I’m supposed to pick up Pam at nine,” Mike bemoaned, now desperate.**

“Come with me out to the laundry room, --there may be something out there to cut the sent,” said Maria wiping her eyes while still laughing.

Mike followed his Mother out to the laundry room to see what could be done to kill the strong smell.

Maria went and got an old washcloth and a jug of laundry bleach and filled a pan with water and poured some of the bleach onto it; after putting a pair of rubber gloves, she dunked the old washcloth into the solution.

After she withdrew the cloth and wrung the excess solution from it, she gave the wet washcloth to Mike telling him to wipe where he had applied the cologne.

But she warned him to keep the washcloth away from his eyes and clothing.

So Mike very carefully wiped his face, neck, and hands.

Then she got another washcloth and wetting it under the water faucet gave it to Mike; Mike again wiped his face, neck and hands with the wet washcloth.

“Well, --did it work? How do I now smell?” Mike asked looking hopeful.

“Yes, --I think it worked. You don’t smell as bad anymore,” She told him looking incredulous and biting her lip.

“Great, --thanks Mom, --you’re a life saver,” said Mike smiling with relief, “God, --I’m going to be late, --I’ve got to run, --see you later.”

His Mother told him, as he hurried out of laundry room, “Drive safely and be home by eleven, --you know tomorrow is school.”

As Mike ran through the living room, his Dad told him, “Take it easy and be home early.”

“Yeah, --sure thing Dad I’ll be home by eleven,” Mike told his Dad, as he ran through the living room and out the front door; he got into Jeff’s car and drove off to pick up Pam.

Maria was smiling when she entered the living room and commented to Henry, “What do you think?”

Henry giggled as he responded, “I think he’s going to be in for a rude awakening tonight.”

“I know what you mean, --you smell it to,” said Maria with a worried look, “I tried to kill the cologne sent by using laundry bleach. I think it worked, but now he smells like fresh laundry,” then both Henry and Maria

looked at each other and broke into uncontrolled laughter.

It was almost nine and Pam was starting to get worried that maybe Mike didn't want to take her out after all, and then she saw a set of headlights coming up the street.

After she saw him pulled up to her house and stop, she ran out to meet him; Mike reached over and opened the passenger door so she could get in.

She stopped short when she stuck her head into the car.

Mike looking at her asked, "What's wrong? Did you forget something?"

While looking at him she slowly climbed in and shut the door; now trying to hold back the laughter she said, "No, --nothing is wrong and I didn't forget anything. If we're to meet Glen, Russ and the girls at 'Fred & Allen's' at nine, then we better hurry. Say, --that's some good smiling cologne you're wearing, reminds me of Mom's laundry."

"Huh!" Mike remarked suddenly, turning to look at her.

It was five after nine when Mike and Pam walked into 'Fred & Allen's' and joined the others.

Glen slowly said while looking at Mike, "You're late, --have you been helping your Mom with the laundry?"

As people walk by their booth, they gave Mike a strange look.

Russ said now starting to laugh, "C'mon let's go, --we've got lots to see and do."

So they left 'Fred & Allen's' and walked across the street to the Amusement Park.

It was after ten when they finally finish the rides and while walking down the aisle between the carnivals booths they came upon a fortuneteller.

"This is new. It wasn't here the last time I was here," said Glen surprised, and then he asked, "how about it you guys, --let's go in and see what the future holds?"

The room was almost dark when they walked inside except for a dim light coming from a doorway to another room; they quietly walked into the dimly lit room.

There at a table was an old woman looking into a candle flame; her long white hair was shaggy and uncombed, a long black tattered shawl on her shoulders hung around her and down to the floor.



She appeared to be in a trance as they approached the table, then she looked up her eyes glowed as she spoke, “So, --you want to see what your futures hold. Well then, sit down and we’ll see what the future brings.”

Then they all sat down around the table.

Russ was the first one to have his future told; she took his hand and look at his palm.

She said quickly letting go of his hand, “Next, --who wants to be next.”

“You haven’t told me anything of my future,” said Russ puzzled by her actions.

She looked at him and said, “Young man go home and forget about this place. You do not want to see so far into your future. Enjoy the present, for you’ll see you future soon enough.”

“Please Ma’am what did you see in my hand?” Russ asked pleading; she then slowly took his hand and began to tell him his future.

She said running her finger over his palm, “You see this short deep line, --it’s your love line and it tells me you’ll have a deep relationship with a woman. Then it will abruptly end leaving the woman in sorrow,” now Russ was a little worried.

“Is Nancy the woman that I will love and marry?” Russ asked looking at Nancy.

The Old Woman just shook her head, and again spoke, “I can’t answer your question, --the palm doesn’t tell me names it only shows events.”

She then looked at Mike and asked, “How about you, --shall we see what the future holds for you?”

Russ said pointing to another very short line in his hand, “You’re not done with me yet. You haven’t told me about these other two lines here. This short one, --what does it tell you?”

She reluctantly took his hand and very slowly said, “Please young man, don’t make me tell you anymore.”

“I really want to know,” Russ begging and now getting very impatient, “what does it say?”

The Old Woman now shaking said, “This line is your life line and it is short and shallow. Very soon, you’re going to die a very violent death. There, --now you know and I’m so sorry, but you insisted on hearing more.”

They all sat there stunned; Russ now slowly asked of the Old Woman, “Can you tell me how and when I’m going to die?”

**“I’m sorry,” She said shaking her head, “but I cannot read that information from your palm. All I can tell you is, --it’s going to be soon—maybe within a year, but not more than two. That’s best I can do for you.”**

**Russ then gave her a dollar and said, “Thanks.”**

**“No, --for you it’s free,” She told him giving the dollar back to him, and then she asked, “does anyone else want their futures foretold?”**

**Mike held his hand out for her to read, the only one to do so; she took his hand and began to read, and like Russ, she ran her finger over his hand, and as she followed the cracks and wrinkles, Mike looks at her and asked, “Does my life line say I’m going to die too?”**

**“No,” She replied with a smile, “your life line is long and deep. It tells me you’re going to have a very long life.”**

**Then she stops and retraces a line with her finger.**

**“What’s wrong?” Mike asks. “Did you find something?”**

**She looks at him and says, “Yes, --you see these three short lines here. They indicate the death of three love ones. This one here, --see how it connects to your lifeline, --it indicates a death in your family. It could be one of your Parents or your Brother or Sister.”**

**“I don’t have a Sister, --only two older Brothers.”**

**“Yes,” She quickly says, “it’s one of your two older Brothers. Now see these other two short lines above and below that last one. See how they just come up to, but don’t touch. They tell me that the other two deaths will cause you a great deal of pain and loss. For they are not family members, but are friends, that you care very much for.”**

**Now Mike tried to think of three people he would feel a great deal of pain and loss if they would die.**

**He thought about Larry Clark dying and it didn’t do anything for him, then he thought about Bob Manning dying and it made Mike feel sick.**

**He then asked about his love line and she told him, he’ll have several love affairs.**

**Mike thanked her and gave her a dollar; now this time she kept it and asked, if anyone else wanted to have their palm read.**

**After Russ, no one else wanted to have their palm read, so they got up and left the room, and while walking back towards ‘Fred & Allen’s’ Russ said, “I don’t believe in fortunetellers. So what do you guys want to do next?”**

**Mike looked at his watch and said, “It’s getting to be ten thirty. I**

promised my parents that I would be home by eleven.”

The other’s also indicated that they also have to be getting back, so they all left the Amusement Park and walked back across the street to ‘Fred & Allen’s’ parking lot.

Mike and Pam were walking to Mike’s car when both Russ and Glen drove out of ‘Fred & Allen’s’ parking lot.

When they arrived at Mike’s car, Mike opened the door on the passenger side for Pam to get in.

After she had gotten in, he closed the door, and then he went around to the driver’s side and slid in, he then backed out and drove off towards Pam’s home.

As Mike drove, Pam sat there looking at him and thought how cute he was with his red hair and a face full of red freckles.

Mike looked over at her and smiled; she now needed to get closer to him, so she slid up next to him, and then she laid her head on his shoulder.

Now Mike was getting a little nervous, because he didn’t know what she was going to do.

Pam softly said, “Mike, you’re so nice I think I’m falling in love with you. Will you pull over so we can talk?”

Now Mike was in a state of shock and didn’t know what to do next, so at the next wide spot in the road he pulled over and stopped.

Pam softly asked, “Why don’t you turn the lights and engine off?”

“What do you want to talk about?” He nervously asked.

“About us of course,” Pam softly replied. “You do like me don’t you?”

“Sure,” Mike very weakly replied, “I like you a lot,” then Pam slid her hand under his sweater and felt his firm chest as he sat there in shock.

Mike never had anyone feel his chest like that before and he felt very uncomfortable.

Then Pam ran her fingers through his thick red hair and said to him as she played with his hair, “I just love thick red hair like this. God you’re so nice and perfect. I’m sure glad it wasn’t you that was going to die.”

Then Pam moved up closer and started to lick his neck; now Mike straighten, frozen in shock, because he didn’t know what to do or what she would do next.

Pam sensed his stiffness and said, “Relax I’m not going to bite you. All I want to do is to put my head on your chest,” he then relaxed a little as

she laid her head on his chest.

Pam now could hear his heart and she said, as she smiled, “You’re so great. You know you are the first guy that I did this too. I sure hope that you’ll like me a lot, because I love you Mike.”

Mike now starting to relax and looking down at her with her head on his chest he felt strange; he smiled, and then she put both arms around his neck and put her lips on his and they both kissed.

Now Mike felt good as they embraced each other and continued kissing.

Mike said after he broke off the kiss, “It’s getting late and I promised Mom and Dad that I would be home by eleven.”

Pam just smiled when he restarted the car and turned on the lights; he then drove to Pam’s home and there they kissed once more.

Pam said to him, as she got out of the car, “Thanks Mike for a wonderful evening, --I’ll see you tomorrow in school.”

“Yeah, --see you tomorrow, --bye now.”

Pam closed the car door and waved to him, as she walked up the sidewalk to her front door; Mike waited until Pam had gone inside and shut off the front light, and then he drove off to his home smiling to himself.

It was five after eleven when Mike walked into his house; his parents were waiting when he walked in with a very big smile on his face.

“Where have you been?” Henry asked after Mike had entered the house, “you told me you would be home by eleven.”

“Sorry Dad, --I’m only five minutes late, --anyway, --it was worth it,” said Mike with a faraway look on his face as he looks at the clock.

Henry could see Mike was on cloud nine, so he just smiled and told him to get to bed; Mike went to his room.

Mike was still smiling when he undressed and shut off the light; after climbing into bed, Mike fell off to sleep with a that big smile still on his face.

## CHAPTER 7 -- The New Pilot

Saturday morning, Mike was at his job at Manning Aviation.

Mike was in the locker room changing into his Ground-handler uniform when Bob walks in; when Mike sees him, he says good morning.

“Good morning,” Bob returned. “As soon as you finish changing your clothes come into the office and bring your logbook with you.”

“Yes sir, --I’ll be right there.”

Bob turned and walked out of the locker room.

As Mike was changing into his uniform, he wondered why Bob needed to see his logbook.

Bob was working on his books when Mike walked into the office.

“Why do you need to see my logbook?” Mike asked handing his logbook to Bob.

“I’ve got a new Pilot coming in this morning to start working for me. Since you’re not working as a Pilot anymore, I don’t think there’s any need for you to have a logbook lying around in your locker. I don’t want any trouble between you and the new Pilot. You’re now a Ground-handler, --that is, --unless you’ve changed your mind about the Army. Until then, I’ll keep your logbook locked up in my desk until you can fly again,” said Bob looking at Mike with a solemn expression, and then he put Mike’s logbook into his lower left desk drawer and locked it up; he then put the key on his key chain and snapped it on his belt clasp.

“Why would my logbook cause trouble?” Mike asked shocked by what Bob just did,

“I don’t want you to go around bragging about how you can fly. Now with you logbook under lock and key you don’t have any proof. That should deter you from making a fool out of yourself,” Bob responded.

“You know I don’t go around bragging about flying. In fact, I kept it a secret until Clark spilled the beans. So why would I go around bragging?” Mike asked getting a little upset, and then Mike had an inspiration.

“It was Clark wasn’t it? He asked you to do this, so I might reconsider and fly with the Army. Well, --you can just tell him it isn’t going to work. I’m not going to fly with him or the Army, so you can just keep the logbook. I can always make another one when I start flying again next spring after graduation.

**“No, --Clark didn’t have anything to do with my locking up your log book. If you really want to know, --it was your Dad’s idea. He told me if you like to have secrets, --then you can continue to have your favorite one. No one will know that you fly. He’s already fixed it with the other FBO’s here. So, as far they are concerned you are just another Ground-handler. I’m sorry Mike, but you made the decision and now you’re going to have to deal with it.”**

**“Ok, --I stand on my decision,” Mike replied now very upset.**

**Handing Mike a list of things to do, Bob orders, “Here, --I want these jobs done before you leave this afternoon.”**

**Mike was just finishing up cleaning the locker room when Bob walked in with a young man who was about a year older than Mike.**

**“I’ve finished with the Men’s room and I’m about done here,” said Mike.**

**“Good job. It looks real good,” said Bob smiling, “Mike, --I would like you to meet our new company Pilot. Mike, --this is Ed Kiver and Ed--this is Mike Troff. Mike’s our Ground-handler.”**

**Mike held out his hand, but Ed just waved it off saying, “Hi Troff.”**

**Now as Mike said ‘Hi’ in return, he sensed trouble ahead.**

**“I’ll leave you two to get more acquainted with each other. I’ve still got lots of work to do in the office,” said Bob, and then he told Mike, “Mike, --show Ed where he can change, and then show him around.”**

**Bob walked out of the locker room and headed back to his office.**

**Mike said pointing to a row of empty lockers next to his, “Take your pick, --they’re all empty, --we’re the only ones working here.”**

**The young Pilot chose one on the end farthest from Mike’s; he opened it and checked it out.**

**After he was satisfied, he put his logbook and flight instruments on the top shelf, and then he changed into his Pilot uniform and followed Mike out into the hangar.**

**Mike shows him the company’s fleet of Helicopters and where the keys and aircraft logbooks are kept.**

**As they were about to leave the hangar, Ed said, “Just a minute, --I have a few things to say. First, --thanks for the tour and now I’ll take it from here. Second, --when Mister Manning is gone, I’m in charge and you’ll do as I say. Third, --stay out of the Helicopters unless I tell you to clean the interiors. Forth, --when I return from a flight, you’ll clean and**

refuel them. Now if you'll follow these four simple rules, then we'll get along just fine. Ok kid, --do you have any questions?"

Mike was now starting to get steamed by this young Pilot's demeanor and firmly told him, "I've also have a few things to say. First, --my name is Mike Troff, --not Kid. You're not all that old yourself, --I'd guess about nineteen, so you're just as much a kid as I am. If you don't like being called a Kid, then don't call me a Kid. Second, --I'm not taking orders from you. My boss is Bob just as he's yours. If I have to take orders from you, then I'll quit and you'll have to do my work. I don't really need this job, because I still go to High School and live at home. My guess is you've just got your commercial certificate, so don't let it go to your head. Third, --I will not stay out of the Helicopters and forth, --when you return and you don't have to go out again we'll both service the Helicopters. Now, --do you have any questions?"

Ed just stood there, he didn't expect Mike to stand up to him the way he did; Ed said, as a smile broke out on his face, "Ok Kid, --oops--so-r-r-y--I mean Mike. You're right, --I'm nineteen and I just passed my check ride for the commercial last Thursday, and you're how old?"

"I'm eighteen and a senior in school," Mike replied now cooled down, and then he asked, "So how long have you been flying?"

"Since I was fifteen," Ed replied, and then with curiosity he asked, "how come you don't try to learn to fly? You must like aviation or you wouldn't be working here, --especially with all the jobs in town paying more."

Now Mike wished he could tell Ed that he can fly, but if he did he wouldn't be able to prove it; now the secret has come to haunt him and he felt sick.

Mike now wished he wouldn't have taken the flight training to become an EXR Fighter Pilot, then he wouldn't be in this mess and he could still be flying.

It was all Larry's fault, he's the one that got him into this mess, damn him.

"Yeah, --I like it all right, but I can't afford to take lessons. You know how expensive Helicopter lessons are, and anyway, I don't have the time with school and all."

"Yeah, --I know all about how expensive they can be, "Ed acknowledged, "If it weren't for Mister Clark I wouldn't be flying now. Have you

ever considered fixed wing lessons, --they're a lot cheaper?"

Standing there in shock after hearing Clark's name Mike said, "I tried taking fixed wing lessons about three years ago. Only to find out I don't have what it takes to fly an Airplane. You mention Larry Clark, -- how did you come to know him?"

Ed is surprised that Mike seems to know him too and replies, "My dad is an EXR Fighter Pilot at Fort Irwin. I always wanted to learn to fly Helicopters. So Dad fixed it with his commanding officer, who was Captain Clark, to give me Helicopter lessons. After the first flight, he told Dad I was a natural and said he would teach me how to fly a Helicopter. After which I would have to join the Army and apply for the EXR Fighter Training School. That's how he wanted to be paid for the lessons, so I agreed, --how can I go wrong with a deal like that?"

"Go wrong!" Mike exclaimed getting his dander up, "He's screwing you over, --just as he'd tried to do to me. I also started to take Helicopter lessons from Clark and he told me I also was a natural. My Dad is a Colonel in the Air Force. He's a F30 Fighter Pilot and Squadron Commander. We were living in Roseville when I met Captain Clark. Dad was teaching at McClellan when I started to fly. I had to keep the whole thing a secret, because Dad didn't like Helicopters. Clark had me paying for the lessons by working as a Ground-handler. This worked out just fine until one day when he asked me to join the Army and become a EXR Fighter Pilot, --that's after I graduated from High School. I told him to jump in a lake, --so here I am working as a Ground-handler and the rest is history."

"My god man, --he told you, you're a natural!" Ed exclaimed looking surprised, "you should've gone for it. What's so bad about being an Army EXR Fighter Pilot? I can't wait to get in the Army and start my flight training."

"I don't like having someone making decisions as to how I'm to live my life," Mike replied shrugging, "so, --when are you joining the Army? You know at nineteen you're ripe for the draft."

"I have already joined and they told me I'll be leaving in January for basic training. So I've got all fall to fly for Mister Manning," Ed told Mike smiling.

"Why are they waiting until January to take you?" Mike asked.  
"Because the next EXR flight school starts in March," Ed replied.



Bob walks into the hangar and finds both boys standing there talking and tells them both, “Don’t we have anything to do? Mike, --have you finished with that list I gave you this morning?”

Mike nervously replied, “No Sir.”

“Well, --I think you better get with it,” Bob tells him with raised brow, “you’ve still have a lot of work to do before you leave.”

Bob looks at Ed and says, “As for you, --I’ve got a job for you to fly. Come with me to the office and I’ll fill you in on the details.”

Bob, looking at Mike standing there tells him, “Come on, --let’s hop to it, --we don’t have all day you know.”

“Yes sir,” Mike softly replies, and then goes and starts the next job on the list that he was given.

Mike is now feeling a little depressed for not being the one to get the briefing; the feeling got worse as he watched Ed perform the preflight.

When Bob came walking out of the hangar, Mike was watching Ed perform the preflight.

When Mike saw Bob coming, he went back to polishing the Helicopter he was working on.

Bob said, after he walked up and stood by Mike, “You know, --I could sure use two Pilots around here. Did you know if you would go and do as Larry asks, you and Ed could be flying together in the Army? By the time Ed gets through basic training and flight school, you’ll have finished R.O.T.C and become current in the EXR2 again. All you have to do is say yes and both you and Ed could be flying for me,” Bob looked at Mike and smiled.

Mike told him no and continued to polish the Helicopter, Bob stopped smiling and said, “Ok, --have it your own way. You’re the most stubborn Kid I’ve ever knew. In some ways, you and Clark are like. You both have a stubborn streak. It’s going to be interesting to see who wins, --you or Clark.”

Ed finished his preflight, got in, fired up the Helicopter, and waved as he took off; Bob waved back, and then he looked once more at Mike and walked back into the hangar shaking his head.

It was seven o’clock, Mike was tired and hungry, and as he was drying from the shower he’d taken, he heard Ed fly in and land.

Mike was in the Locker Room putting on his street clothes when Ed came in whistling.

Ed said after he stopped whistling, “It was sure a great day for flying. Clear blue sky, --I could see for miles. How well did things go around here?”

“Don’t rub it in. I had all I can take and I don’t want to hear anymore about how great flying was,” Mike barked, his nerves were at an end.

“Wow, --you sound like a grounded Pilot,” said Ed looking stunned, and then he looked even more stunned when he realized the statement he had just made might not be too far from the truth.

“My god man, --you’re a grounded Pilot, --aren’t you?” Ed shockingly asked looking at Mike, “What in the hell did you do to get yourself grounded?”

“Ask Mister Manning,” Mike barks looking at Ed; he then slams the door shut on his locker, puts the lock through the hole in the handle, locks it, and then he stomps out of the locker room.

Ed calls to Mike, as he’s is walking out of the locker room, “OK, -- I’LL DO JUST THAT.”

Mike stops by the office and informs Bob, he had finished the job list and was going home, and since there’s no school on Monday, he, Russ and Glen are going dirt biking and he won’t be in for work.

Bob tells Mike, he did a good job and he’ll see him Tuesday after school.

Mike leaves the office just as Ed comes walking in, gets into Jeff’s car, backs out and heads for home.

Ed walks up to Bob and asks, “Mike’s a Pilot, --isn’t he? Why did you ground him? The Kid’s all torn up.”

“You can tell, --can’t you?” Bob surmises, “I didn’t think it would remain a secret for long.”

“Just how good is he, and what did he do to have you ground him?” Ed asks,

Bob says, as he motions for Ed to sit down, “First, --it wasn’t me that grounded him, it was his Dad. Second, --as a Pilot, --he’s damn good. Now don’t get me wrong, --you’re good too and you’re going to make a top EXR Fighter Pilot. Well, --the both of you as Helicopter Pilots is quite amazing. Like Larry says, naturals, and that’s why he wants you both to fly Army.”

“I don’t see the connection. How’s flying Army having anything to do with him getting grounded?” Ed asks confused.

“You had better get a hold of yourself for what I’m about to tell you,” Bob tells him, “for you see Ed, --Captain Clark had already trained Mike as a EXR Fighter Pilot, and then something happen right after Mike got his Fighter Pilot wings. Mike swore he would never fly an EXR Helicopter again.”

Bob sighed and continued, “Larry’s been trying ever since to get Mike to change his mind. He even went and told Mike’s Dad the whole story, --that’s when Mike got grounded. Mike’s Dad took his Pilot Certificates away from him. Then on his Father advice, I took his logbook and locked it up here in my desk. We figured if he hurts badly enough, then he’ll come around and fly with Clark again. Unfortunately \*sigh\* no one has figured on this stubborn streak of his, and now, I’m quit worried that we may lose a good EXR Fighter Pilot.”

Ed asks, as he can’t believe what he’s been hearing, “Now let me get this straight. You’re telling me that Mike is an EXR Fighter Pilot?”

Bob nods; Ed acknowledges, “Wow, --that’s some awful heavy stuff to swallow.”

Then Bob takes his keys and unlocks the desk drawer and removes Mike’s logbook and says while handing it to Ed, “Here, --why don’t you give this back to Mike. Maybe you can find a way to make him change his mind. You two are about the same age. Maybe he’ll trust you more than any of us.”

“I’m a whole year older than Mike, --I’m not so sure he’ll trust me all that much.”

“Sure he will, --you’re both teenagers,” Bob tells him with a smile, “I don’t see any problem why he wouldn’t trust another teenager like yourself.”

“The problem is,” Ed begins explaining, “I’m not going to remain a teenager for too much longer. I’ll be twenty in about eight months and he’s got two years yet. I’m been out of High School for about a year now, and I’m about to enter the Army in seven months. I really don’t think I can do anything to change his mind. If you want, I’ll give him his logbook and see if he’ll listen to me, but if he’s as stubborn as you say, then I don’t think I’ll have any luck changing his mind.”

“All I’m asking you to do is to at least try.”

Ed then looks at his watch and exclaims, “Look at the time! I’ve got to be going! I’ll see you Monday and have that teen to teen talk with Mike.”

Ed smiles as he gets up and walks out to his car, gets in, backs out,

and drives off.

Mike was in his room doing his homework for school on Tuesday when Glen drives up in his car.

Glen parks his car, gets out, walks up, and rings the doorbell; Maria goes to answer the door, "Glen, --do please come in."

"Thanks Missis Troff. Is Mike home from his job at the airport?"

Maria tells him, Mike is indeed home and she goes to get him; a couple of minutes later, Mike walks into the living room where Glen is waiting and greets him, "Hi Glen, --where's Russ?"

"He and his Dad went to the airbase to check out a few things, --so I thought we could go to the amusement park. I would like to try out that new video game in the arcade. You know we never had time when we were there last Tuesday night."

"Ok, --sounds great, --let's go," Mike grabs his school sweater, and then both Mike and Glen get into the Glen's car and drive off to the amusement park.

It was getting close to nine thirty when they entered the amusement park.

They walk pass the same row of concession stands that they had last Tuesday night; the night when Russ and Mike had their futures told by the old fortuneteller.

Mike was getting nervous when they approached the location where the old fortuneteller was.

"Say, --aren't we getting close to the place where that old fortuneteller is located?" Glen asks.

"Yeah" Mike whispers, "I think it's just up the lane a bit. It can't be too far"

"Why are you whispering?" Glen asks looking at Mike.

"It's because that place gives me the creeps."

"Mike, --you're such a wimp," Glen tells him laughing, "I think tonight I'm going to have my future told. There's nothing to be afraid of, she's just an old woman. Now what could she possibly do to harm us?"

"I don't know," Mike replied feeling ashamed for acting like a wimp.

They finally got to the place where the old fortuneteller was located, but all that was there was an old maintenance shack; now Mike began to feel very uneasy as he looked at Glen.

“I guess she must’ve moved on,” Glen remarked, “you know how those Gypsies come and go. Now I’ll never find out about my future.”

“I don’t think she was a Gypsy,” Mike nervously says, “because she wasn’t dressed like one. She was dressed in old rags. A Gypsy is always dressed in colorful clothes.”

Glen was starting to feel uneasy as he spoke, “Sure she was, --only Gypsies tell fortunes. So she wasn’t dressed up in fancy clothes. Maybe some Gypsies don’t wear fancy colorful clothes.”

A maintenance man comes walking up and heads for the shack; Glen stops the man and asks, “Mister, --can you tell me where the old fortuneteller that was here, --moved to?”

The maintenance man looked at Glen and replied, “What fortuneteller?”

“The one that had a concession stand right where your shack is.”

The man eyed first Mike, and then Glen, then he suspiciously asked, “Are you two teenagers on drugs?”

Getting impatient with this guy, Glen said, “No, --we don’t do drugs. I tell you, --there was an old Gypsy fortuneteller right here last Tuesday. She told both Mike and Russ their futures.”

The maintenance man was starting to get ticked off by what’s starting to look like a couple of crazy teenagers; pointing to the shack he sharply said, “Now you two listen to me and listen good. That tool shed has been here ever since this place opened three years ago. There has been no concession stand in its place, --not now or ever. Anyway, --you need a license to have a concession here and you get that from the parks department. One more thing, --I’m the one you have to see to have a business setup built here. There has never been a Gypsy fortuneteller business here or I would have known about it. Now, --you two get on home before I call security and have you both removed,” so, both Mike and Glen informed him they were leaving and walked out of the amusement park.

For a while both boys didn’t talk as Glen drove back to Mike’s home, then suddenly Mike said when a chill ran through his body, “Glen, --I don’t like this, because I know what happened last Tuesday night. There definitely was an old Gypsy fortuneteller there and I didn’t imagine it, all six of us couldn’t have imagined the same thing.”

Then Glen also had a chill run through his body and he just nods as he continues to drive.

“Let’s not say anything to the others, --especially Russ,” said Mike, “we don’t want to have him get upset.”

“And we better not tell anyone what we found out tonight,” Glen added, feeling concerned of what others would think, “if this gets around in school we’ll be the laughing stock for our entire senior year. You know Mike, --this thing has me scared. Somehow I think we run into some very creepy stuff.”

“Who was she and how could she have told my future? How could she have come in and setup her concession stand without that maintenance man knowing about it?” Mike asked feeling nervous and scared.

“I don’t know, but I’m somehow beginning to think that what we saw and heard wasn’t of this world,” Glen replies glancing over at Mike, as he continues to drive.

“What do you mean by, ‘wasn’t of this world’? Are you saying that maybe she was a space alien?” Mike asked, and is beginning to feel uneasy.

“No, --not space alien, silly, --I mean something like a spirit, --you know, --a ghost,” Glen replied glancing over at Mike with a frightened expression.

“She was no ghost, because I felt her hand on mine and it was warm and hard. A ghost doesn’t have substance or warmth,” Mike firmly tells Glen matter-of-factly.

“Well, --whatever she was, --I’ve got a bad feeling about it,” Glen nervously said in a foreboding tone, “I think yours and Russ’s futures are going to come true.”

“My god, --then Russ is going to die soon!” Mike exclaimed, and then frightened, both boys looked at each other as they approached Mike’s house.

Glen pulls up and stops right in front of Mike’s home.

Glen says, “Here you are. Russ and I will be by tomorrow afternoon at one to pick you up. We’re going to the San Bernardino National Forest to ride. They’ve got some awesome forest trails.”

“Sure, --sounds like it’s going to be lots of fun, --I’ll be ready,” Mike tells him with a smile, and then gets out of the car and says, “until tomorrow, --bye now.”

“Great, --then it’s all set,” says Glen smiling, “I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon, --bye,” they both wave to each other as Glen drives off.

It was eleven fifteen when Mike finally got to bed and drifted off to sleep.

## CHAPTER 8 -- Blood Brothers

Mike tossed and turned all night with bad dreams of the fortune-teller and the futures that were foretold; several times he awoke in a sweat after dreaming of seeing his friend Russ, lying dead in a pool of blood.

Sunday morning came as the rays of light from the new Sun, on the eastern horizon, filtered into Mike's room; a beam of sunlight bounced off of the large Trophy he had won the week before and struck him in the face.

Mike pulled the blanket over his head trying to blot out the ray of light, and then his mother called to him, "MIKE GET UP. THAT'S IF YOU'RE GOING TO SUNDAY SERVICES WITH US."

"OK MOM, --I'LL BE THERE SHORTLY," Mike shouting his reply.

So Mike got up and went to the bathroom to shower.

After finishing in the bathroom, he returned to his room to put on his Sunday clothes, and then he went into the kitchen to eat breakfast; his parents were already eating when he sat down.

Maria said, as she put his breakfast in front of him, "Hurry up and eat or we're going to be late for the services this morning," so, Mike quickly ate his breakfast.

After he had finished eating, they all got into Henry's car and drove off to church.

In church, Mike thought of the fortuneteller and the dream he had of Russ lying dead in the pool of blood.

Mike looked at the palm of his left hand, and as he examined his palm and saw the three short wrinkles that the fortuneteller had told him about, he wondered if maybe one of the wrinkles was Russ, so Mike started to pray as he'd never prayed before.

Mike prayed to the Lord asking him to spare Russ; he silently prayed, "O' God, --please don't take Russ. He's one of my best friends. Please let him graduate from High School and learn to fly an F30 fighter. Please make him the best F30 Fighter Pilot there ever was. If you'll let him live, --I'll promise never to fly anything again for the rest of my life. I'll never ask Dad to return my Pilot Certificates. Oh please God, let Russ live."

Mike prayed on and off during the entire service; he prayed between

**hymns and after the sermon.**

**Finally, the service ended and they filed out of church and got into Henry's car and drove home.**

**As they drove, Mike sat there silently wondering if God had heard his prayer.**

**He thought how hard it would be not to fly again, but if it meant Russ would live, then it was worth it; now Mike felt at peace with himself and he felt good, because he had now sacrificed something that means more to him than anything else in the whole world and he did it for a friend who he cares for.**

**Then he remembered reading how the Indians of the old west use to have Blood Brothers; it was done in a ceremony with the mingling of their blood.**

**Mike quietly said to himself, "I wonder if Russ, Glen and I could become Blood Brothers. Someday I'm going to ask them if they would like to join me in the Blood Brother Ceremony," he smiled to himself as they pulled into their driveway.**

**At noon Henry, Maria and Mike were sitting at the table eating their Sunday dinner when Henry reached into his shirt pocket and took out a couple of cards.**

**"I got a call from Captain Clark at the base on Friday," said Henry handing the cards to Mike, "he told me I shouldn't have taken away your Pilot certificates. He said grounding you wasn't the answer and he felt you might rebel and quit flying altogether. Well, --after doing some thinking, I came to the same conclusion. So here, --you've got your wings back and now I want to see you back in the air."**

**Now Mike didn't expect this and he was completely taken off guard, because he wasn't expecting to get his certificates back until next spring after graduation, and there's the promise he had made to the Lord in church this morning.**

**"You keep em' I'm not going to fly anymore, --I'm all finished," said Mike with up held hands.**

**Now both Henry and Maria just sat there in shock for they couldn't believe what they had just heard.**

**Henry is now very concerned he may have had something to do with Mikes decision said, "Mike I'm sorry if I've hurt you, --will you please forgive me. Please take these and fly again, anyway, these aren't going to do**



me any good, because they've got your name on them."

I can't Dad," Mike replied, "It isn't anything you or Clark has done. I can't explain right now, because you wouldn't understand. To show you that I don't have any bad feelings for you having grounded me, --I'll just take the medical certificate," he then took the medical card and put it in his pocket.

As the Pilot certificate laid there on the table the doorbell rings.

Mike says, as Maria gets up and goes to answer the door, "I'll bet its Russ and Glen we're going up into the San Bernardino National Forest to ride."

Maria opens the door and sees Russ and Glen standing there.

Russ asks, "Is Mike ready to go riding with us?"

Maria smiles and asks them both to come in; both boys came in already dressed to go camping and riding wearing blue jeans, hiking boots, turtle-neck sweaters, heavy cotton shirts, and denim jackets.

Maria remarked when she saw how nice they both looked, "You two sure are a couple of nice looking young men and you both seem to spend a lot of time with Mike. Now you must like Mike a lot to spend so much time with him."

Both Russ and Glen were now blushing; Russ replies, "Thanks for the compliment Missis Troff and we do like Mike, --he's our best friend."

"Yes thanks," Glen tells her, "Russ is right, --we sure do enjoy Mike's company. He's the best friend we've ever had and I sure hope he feels the same about us."

Mike remarks, as he walks into the front room where Russ and Glen are standing, "Did I hear someone say they like my company?"

Now both Glen and Russ are really blushing.

Russ asked when he saw at how Mike was dressed, "Mike, --you've got a turtleneck and a heavy cotton shirt? It gets cold at night up in the National Forest, so you'd better put em' on if you got em'."

"All you need for riding is your enduro boots, gloves, and helmet," Glen tells him, "and Oh yes, --don't forget you sleeping bag and air mattress."

So Mike went into his bedroom to put on his turtleneck sweater and a heavy blue gray and brown plaid shirt.

After putting on his blue jeans and a pair of heavy cotton socks, he puts on his hiking boots and grab's his denim jacket; then he went to find his sleeping bag and air mattress.

About thirty minutes later, Mike came back into the front room with his sleeping bag, air mattress, enduro boots, gloves, and helmet.

When Mike gave his sleeping bag and air mattress to Russ, to put in the pickup, he asked, "How about a tent? We also have to stop at the airport to get my bike and tell Bob that I won't be in for work tomorrow."

As Russ was walking out to put Mike's sleeping bag and air mattress into the truck, Glen told Mike, "You don't need a tent, because we're using my Dads large four place tent. As for getting your bike, --we have already picked it up and told Mister Manning you won't be in for work tomorrow," he pointed outside to the pickup truck.

Mike was quite surprised when he looked out of the window and saw his bike along with Russ's and Glen's in the back of a large crew cab pickup.

Glen just stood there and smiled when Mike asked, "Were did you get the large truck?"

"It's Russ's old man's. He swapped his little Nissan pickup with his Dads crew cab job. We would've never gotten all three bikes plus all of the gear into his little Nissan."

Maria asked, as Henry came walking into the room, "How can you stay overnight, --don't you have school tomorrow?"

Now Henry was also interested in hearing what their answer would be.

"There isn't any school tomorrow, because all the teachers are in workshops in San Bernardino. So we've got all of today and most of tomorrow to ride. We'll be back tomorrow night by eight, --I've already finished my homework for school on Tuesday," Mike replied.

"You take care now and be sure to be home by eight tomorrow night," Henry telling Mike who nods as he and Glen walks out to join Russ, who already was in the truck and has it running; Mike then waves goodbye, as he and Glen climb into the truck.

Maria comments to Henry, as the three boys drove off, "Aren't they the best looking boys you've ever seen? Now if it weren't for the fact that they were from different families you'd swear they were Brothers. Just look how much alike they are, --right down to the clothes that they wear."

Henry exclaimed turning to give Maria a strange look, "Brothers! What do you mean how much they look alike? They aren't even close to being alike, just look at their hair, --each one has different color hair, --"

Mike's hair is red, and have you've never seen such bright red hair. Even Brian's and Jeff's hair isn't as bright red as Mike's. Then there's Russ's hair, --it's the lightest blond you'd ever saw and he's sure got a lot of it. I don't see how he can drive with all that hair hanging down in his eyes, --he looks like an English Sheep Dog. Now Glen's hair is so black you'd swear he had stuck his head in a chimney."

Maria laughed at Henry's remark about Glen's hair; Henry looked at her and smiled, and then he walked over, turned on the TV, and sat down to watch.

Maria still smiling to herself went out into the kitchen to clean the table and do the dishes.

As the boys pulled away from Mike's house Russ said, "We need to stop for some oil for the bikes and I just happen to know of a place where to get some. I found this place about a month ago and they got everything and the prices are all right too."

Mike said when he remembered something and started to grin, "I also need to pick up a couple of items that's if they have them," he continues to grinning as he looked at both Glen and Russ.

"Now what did you forget?" Glen asked looking at Mike.

"You'll see," Mike replied sitting there with a big grin.

They finally arrived at the bike shop, pulled in, and parked.

Mike said noticing the crowded parking lot, "This place is sure busy, --look at all the cars and trucks. We'll never get waited on in this place, --it'll be dark before we get to the camping ground."

"Trust me, --we'll get waited on Ok and we'll be at the campsite before dark," said Russ reassuring him.

So reluctantly, Mike followed Russ and Glen into the bike shop.

Upon reaching the counter, Russ greeted the man on the other side with, "Hi Dave, --how's business doing?"

When the man behind the counter heard his name, he turned to see who was talking to him; a smile came to his face when he saw Russ standing there.

Dave came over to where Russ and his two friends were standing and said, "Russ, --good to see you. I've heard you've made the number five position in the state enduro this year. Congratulations and how may I help you?"

“We need a case of two stroke oil,” Russ told him with a big smile. On seeing another salesman, Mike left his two friends and walked over to him.

Russ points to a poster on the wall behind Dave with Mike and two other riders on it, and then he asked pointing to Mike who was now talking to another salesman, “Dave, --take a look at that guy and tell me who he reminds you of?”

Dave looked at Mike, smiled and replied, “Well, --he looks just like Mike Troff the number three enduro rider in the state. Now that can’t be, --what would he be doing here?”

Mike had a big Cheshire Cat smile on his face when he turned and walked back to the counter where Russ was still talking.

Russ leaned over and quietly said, “That’s him all right, --just look at his hair. No one has redder hair than Mike, --just look at the poster. See how red the hair is on that enduro rider, and then look at this guy here.”

As Russ straighten up, Dave turns to take a closer look at the rider with the red hair in the poster, and then he looks at Mike who’s now walking towards them.

“You’re right, --that’s him all right,” says Dave.

“What’s all right?” Mike asked looking at both Dave and Russ.

By now a small crowd of people and riders had gathered at the counter and were listening and watching.

“Russ was pointing you out to me,” Dave replies, “I must be blind for not recognizing you with all the posters around here with your picture on them. Can I get you anything?”

Mike feeling the eyes of the people around him replies, “Thanks, but I’ve already been helped,” he glances out to where the pickup is parked and grins when he sees two men working on Glen’s and Russ’s bikes.

“I wasn’t sure at first, but when Russ pointed out how red your hair is,” says Dave with a big smile and pointing to Mike’s head, “Well, --make no mistake it had to be you, because it is said the number three rider has bright red hair.”

Now everyone was looking at Mike’s hair and as Mike ran his fingers through it, he softly asked as he disliked how red his hair was, “You wouldn’t happen to have a cap I could buy?”

Dave smiled and reached under the counter and brought up three caps; they all were black with gold braid on the bills.

Two of them had 'YAMAHA #1 RIDER' written on the front and other one had 'HONDA #1 RIDER' written on the front of it.

Dave said handing the Yamaha caps to Glen and Russ and the Honda cap to Mike, "For you three they're free and just like it's printed in front of each cap, --they're for top riders like yourselves."

Mike quickly put on his new cap to cover up his bright red hair.

Then everyone wanted to shake the boy's hands and ask them questions about riding and enduros.

Finally, the case of oil arrived from the parts room and Russ paid for it.

As they were walking out of the bike shop, an elderly woman grabbed Mike's arm.

Mike stopped, looked at her, and asked, "Yes Ma'am. What is it that you want?"

"Young man, why are you ashamed of your hair?" She asked pointing at his cap, "your red hair is exquisite, --it makes you look very handsome. If I was forty five years younger, --I would sure love to go out with you," she then leaned over and kissed Mike on the cheek, and then everyone started to laugh as Mike's face turned the same shade of red as his hair.

As they walked back out to the pickup several riders that were in the bike shop followed the boys and were laughing with Glen and Russ at what the old woman had said and done to Mike.

Pulling Mike's cap, by the bill, down over his forehead Russ said, "Hurry up handsome let's get going."

Then Glen patted Mike on the back and both Russ and Glen started to giggle.

Mike said, as they approached the truck, "He who laughs last laughs best. I don't get upset I just get even."

When they arrived at the pickup, and as Russ put the case of oil in the back with the bikes, everyone started laughing at what they saw except Russ and Glen.

Now Mike, he just stood there with the biggest grin you've ever saw, for there in the pickup were Glen's and Russ's Yamaha's with training wheels.

The riders that had followed the three boys out to the parking lot were now laughing and pointing at the two bikes.

One rider said patting Russ on the back, "So, that's your secret for

getting number five in the state enduro,” he then broke into uncontrolled laughter as he and two other riders walked away.

Now Russ wasn't laughing when he slid into the driver's seat, buckled up, and shut the door of the pickup; Glen wasn't laughing either, when he slid in next to Russ and buckled up.

When Mike got in, he tried to hold a straight face as he buckled his seat belt and closed the passenger door.

Mike held his straight face as they drove out of town and down the road to their campsite.

Mike looked at both Russ and Glen, and then he began to laugh.

Glen very solemnly said looking at Mike laughing, “Fine friend you are. We had thought you were our best friend, but I guess we were wrong. That little stunt of yours wasn't funny you made us look like idiots. If that's the way you want us to be, then we'll ride with the training wheels.”

Now feeling bad, Mike said, “Now you two listen to me, --you're not idiots and as soon as we get to the campsite I'll help you take the training wheels off. Anyway, you guys can't ride fast with em' on. If you remember at the Twenty Nine Palms Enduro Banquet and after all the bragging you did, --I told you that you'd be riding with training wheels the next time we rode together. That's why I did it, but I never did actually expect you to ride with em' on.”

Then Mike put his hand on Glen's shoulder and said, “Hey, --you guys are the best friends I've ever had.”

Then Mike broke into a smile as he looked at both Russ and Glen, and they looked back at him and smiled.

Then Russ held out his right hand and said, “Fighter Pilots?”

Gen slapped Russ's out held hand with his and said, “Yeah, --Fighter Pilots,” with a smile Mike also slapped Russ's hand with his and said, “Yeah, --Fighter Pilots.”

They all were smiling as the pickup truck continued on its way to their campsite in the San Bernardino National Forest.

It was four in the afternoon, when they pulled into their campsite, set up their tent, and got their campsite ready for the night; they then unloaded their bikes from the truck.

Russ said after pushing his bike over by the tent and pointing to the training wheels, “Mike, --if you really want me to ride with these on, I will,” Glen nodding in agreement.

**“No way!” Mike exclaimed, “you guys are not going to ride with training wheels. The joke has gone far enough. I don’t want two of the best rider’s in the state enduro, riding their bikes with training wheels. Besides, like I had said before, --you guys can’t ride all that fast with em’ on and we’re going to be tearing up these trails.”**

**So then Mike went and got some wrenches and helped both Glen and Russ remove the training wheels from their bikes, and then they got their bikes ready to ride.**

**After putting on their riding gear, they started up their bikes and rode off down the trail.**

**As boys rode, the competitive nature of each boy was displayed by the aggressive way he rode.**

**Mike being the better rider usually was in the lead, but Russ was always right on Mike’s tail and when the opportunity presented itself, Russ would pull in front of Mike, but it wouldn’t last long, Mike would be right back in front again leading the way down the trail; now Glen was no slouch either, for he was always there pushing and crowding Russ and Mike.**

**So, for the rest of that afternoon and into the early evening they rode hard dicing back and forth between each other and enjoying every minute.**

**It was dark when they rode back into camp and parked the bikes, and as they were getting their fire started, so they could cook dinner, a man came walking up and said while holding his hand up in a greeting, “Hi, -- I’m John Carson, --I’m camped next door. My wife asked me to come over here to see if maybe you three boys would like to have dinner at our camp-fire?”**

**“Yeah, --sure, why not,” Mike replied with a nod; the other two boys also said yes to the offer.**

**“Now I don’t have to look forward to eating Russ’s cooking,” said Mike grinning at Russ; Russ gave Mike a dirty look and said, “That settles it. You’re cooking breakfast, then we’ll see how good you can cook.”**

**“I was just kidding,” Mike quickly replied, “Russ, --your cooking is all right. I can’t even boil water, so you had better cook breakfast or we’re going to starve tomorrow,” Glen and John started laughing at Mike’s remark.**

**So after tidying up their camp a bit the three boys followed John over to his campsite.**

When they got to John's campsite sitting next to the campfire was an old Indian.

John's Wife was roasting a large chunk of meat and cooking something in a large iron pot over the fire.

John introduced the boys to the old Indian, "This is my Grandfather, Black Cloud," said John, "he's our tribe's medicine man."

The old Indian looked at the three boys and said, "Welcome."

After John had introduced his wife to the three boys, they all sat down around the fire.

Mike said, as he looked at John puzzled, "Then you're also an Indian, but, —how come your name is John Carson?"

"Because I'm a half breed," John replied, "my Father is white and my Mother is Dancing Bee, --my Indian name is Little Fox. We're Mescalero Apaches from our reservation in New Mexico," the boys look at each other in amazement.

"Are you learning to be a medicine man from your Grandfather?"

Glen asked.

"No, --I'm a Medical Doctor," John replied with a slight smile, "I practice medicine in my village. My Grandfather, I'm afraid, is the last medicine man in our tribe."

"Sir, --do you know of the rite of Blood Brothers?" Mike asked looking at the old Indian and to everyone's astonishment, especially Glen and the old Indian.

"Yes, --the rite is sacred," replied the old Indian, "it's done in blood between two braves who are very close friends," Mike smiled as he looked at both Glen and Russ.

Looking into the fire, Mike asked, "Has the rite ever been done with three braves?"

Now everyone was quite taken by Mike's last remark.

Both Glen and Russ knew what Mike was thinking and they also felt as Mike did about each other; and now they were also interested in hearing the answer.

"Only once, a very, very, long time ago was there a rite of blood where three braves became Brothers," the old Indian replied.

Glen said, as he put his arm around Mike and pulled his head over to him, "I know what you're thinking Mike and yes, I would very much like to become your Blood Brother. A guy couldn't have two better friends than you and Russ. Yes, --us three as Blood Brothers would be so awesome."



Russ was smiling as he nodded and said, “Yes, --count me in.”

Now John being a medical doctor was having some serious concerns. “Now hold on,” he said, “let’s not do something that we’ll be sorry for. An open wound can become infected and viruses can be transmitted amongst the three of you. Also, your blood types may not match and clotting may occur in your bodies.”

Mike remembered his Airman Medical Certificate and his Army Vaccination Card and said, as he got both cards out of his wallet and handed them to John, “Here, --I think you’ll find my blood type and vaccination record on these. I’m as healthy as a horse, --no bugs or viruses in me.”

Now John was surprised that Mike had these cards and asked, as he examined the two cards by the light of the campfire, “You’re a Pilot? Aren’t you a little young to be in the Army?”

“I’m not in the Army,” Mike replied, “I got the shot card when I took some flight training about a year and half ago, and yes, I’m a Helicopter Pilot.”

Now Russ was surprised by Mike’s remark about having taking flight training in the Army as only Glen knew about Mike and the Army.

“You can fly an Army Helicopter?” Russ asked looking at Mike in amazement.

Mike first looked at Glen, and then he looked back at Russ and replied, “Yeah, --I’ll fill you in later.”

“Ok, --so your blood type is ‘A’ positive and you have all of your vaccinations. But without knowing anything about the medical status of your two friends I still hesitate in allowing you to go through with the rite,” said John after he had examined Mike’s two medical cards,

“Glen and Russ are also Pilots and they also have Airman Medicals. I just know they’re both healthy and there will be no problems if we go through with the rite,” Mike piping up,

Glen and Russ got their medical certificates and Air Force vaccination cards out of their wallets and handed them to John; John again was surprised, as he handed Mike’s two medical cards back to him and received Glen’s and Russ’s medical cards.

John said when he saw Glen’s and Russ’s Air Force Vaccination cards, “I suppose the two of you also have taken flight training?”

“No, --not yet,” Russ answered. “Glen and I are cadets in the Air

Force's special flight training program. We hope to be flying F30's as soon as we graduate."

John was quite shocked after examining the medical certificates and discovering that all three boy's blood types were the same.

He said, as he looked at all three boys, "I don't believe this, but you three seem to have the same blood types. You know, --if ever there comes a time when one of you needs blood the other two can give their blood to him. Well, --I can no longer see any reason why you can't go through with the Blood Brother rite. The only thing that I will insist on is that we use a clean and sterile knife," he then hands Glen's and Russ's medical cards back to them.

Now all three boys were surprised at what John just told them.

After Glen and Russ received their cards back, they all looked and compared each other's cards.

"Ok, --I will agree with the conditions, and if Mike and Russ still want to go through with the rite. Then I say let's do it and become Blood Brothers," said Glen with a big smile; both Mike and Russ nod.

Mike turns to the old Indian and asks, "Please Sir, --will you perform the Blood Brother ceremony?"

The old Indian just sat there looking through the fire at the three boys sitting on the other side; Mike was about to ask him again when he smiles and nods.

The old Indian got up, walked to the parked motor home, and went inside; John followed him into the motor home.

After a few minutes, they came back out and returned to the campfire.

The old Indian had painted his face and was wearing a cape of feathers and a headdress made from the head of a bear; John was carrying his Doctors bag.

The old Indian started to dance and shake a rattle.

John opened his bag and got out a large brown bottle, and then he motioned for the three boys to come over to him.

As the boys walked over to John the old Indian took a very large knife out of its scabbard and placed it into the fire, and then he tossed something into the fire causing it flared up; the boys quickly jumped back with their hands in front of their face.

The old Indian was chanting as he pulled the hot knife from the fire,

and as the knife cooled, John took a piece of cotton and poured the solution from the bottle on it; he then wiped Mike's hand just below his thumb.

When John did this it felt very cold and had a strong medicine smell.

The Indian continued to chant when John drew knife across Mike's hand where it had been wiped it with the cotton; Mike jerked back his hand when he felt the stinging pain from the cut that the knife made.

Blood oozed out of the knife wound, ran down his hand, and dripped onto the ground; the same procedure was performed on both Glen and Russ.

As all three boys stood there with their hands bleeding, the old Indian continued to chant and shake his rattle.

Then old Indian took each boys hand and placed them together with the wounds adjoining; as their blood mingled, he bound their hands with a rawhide strap.

As they stood with their bleeding hands bound by a leather strap the old Indian danced, chanted, and shook his rattle around them.

Finally he stopped and while smiling, he removed the leather strap from around their hands and telling them, "You're now Blood Brothers."

Mike looked at his bloody hand and noticing the knife wound had already stopped bleeding.

John took Mike's hand and wiped the blood from it with a piece of wet cotton and as he did this it felt cold, but stung when it was wiped across the knife wound; then John poured some of the solution from the bottle directly on the wound, Mike gave out a yelp as this really stung.

John said, as he bandaged up Mike's hand, "In a few days this should be all healed. All that should remain is a small scar to remind you of this ceremony. Before you go riding tomorrow morning I want to take one last look at this," Mike smiles and nods.

John did the same to Glen and Russ, and when he pours the solution directly onto their wounds, they each gave out a yelp.

After the boys had their hands bandaged, they all sat down and ate the meal that was prepared by John's Wife.

After they all had eaten their fill they sat by the fire and listened to old Indian tales as was told by the Old Indian Medicine Man.

The stars were out and the moon was full when the fire started to die down.

The boys finally told their new friends that it was time to head back

**to their camp and hit the hay.**

**The Boys got up and shook the hands of the old Indian and John.**

**John reminded them one more time that he wanted to examine their hands in the morning; the Boys assured him they wouldn't forget and left for their camp.**

**When they got back to their camp, they were tired, so all three boys crawled into the tent and into their sleeping bags.**

**As Mike lies there in his sleeping bag, he looks over to where Glen and Russ lie and smiles as he thinks, "I've now got two Blood Brothers," and he felt very good; Mike then rolled over and drifted off to sleep.**

## **CHAPTER 9 -- The Death Of A Brother**

Again, as was the case the night before, Mike had a nightmare of seeing his friend Russ lying dead in a pool of his blood.

When morning came, Mike looks over to where Russ was still sleeping.

As Mike watched Russ's sleeping bag it didn't seem to move and he got a little concerned, because it didn't seem like Russ was breathing.

So Mike kept watching Russ's sleeping bag, watching for any movement and there didn't seem to be any; now he became very concerned, because maybe Russ is really dead.

Mike thought, "That's crazy, --how can a perfectly healthy guy die in his sleeping bag. He's just sleeping soundly, that's all."

Mike rolled over and his hand started to hurt a little, so he looked at it and saw the bandage, and then he remembered the Blood Brother ceremony.

He pried the bandage up a little, so he could look underneath; he now could see the knife gash, it wasn't large, about a half an inch and it wasn't bleeding.

Then he remembered that it had stopped bleeding right after the ceremony, so he restored the bandage and felt relieved that it was healing.

Then a bad thought came to him, what if Russ's wound hadn't started to heal and what if it hadn't stop bleeding.

Then that terrible dream started to run through his mind and Mike said to himself, "That's it, --the dream, --Russ bled to death in his sleeping bag. O' God no, --no, --he can't be dead, --not Russ."

Mike quickly tried to get out of his sleeping bag, but the zipper got stuck.

When he finally got it unstuck, he stumbled towards Russ's sleeping bag, and as he made his way to Russ, he stumbled onto Glen's sleeping bag.

Glen awoke, poking his head out he grumbled, "Watch it. There are people here trying to sleep, --what's your hurry?"

Mike with fear on his face and a tear on his cheek looked at Glen.

Glen said looking into Mike's face and seeing the tear run down his Cheek, "My god Mike, --you're such a wimp. I didn't mean to upset you, but please be careful when you move about in here."

Mike slowly said looking at Glen, “I think Russ is dead. His sleeping bag hasn’t moved in the last ten minutes, because I’ve been watching it to see if he would move. O’ God Glen, --he hasn’t moved at all, --he’s dead!”

“That can’t be possible, --nobody dies in their sleeping bag,” said Glen looking at Mike in shock, “you go over to him and see if he is dead. I’ll bet you he’s just sound asleep and boy is he going to be pissed when he wakes up.”

“I’ve got to take that chance,” Mike replied, “because I’ve got to see if he’s all right.”

“Ok, --you go ahead and I’ll be right behind.”

So Mike made his way to Russ’s sleeping bag, which still hasn’t moved, hoping he wasn’t dead; Glen unzipped his sleeping bag and crawled out.

As Glen made his way to Russ, Mike was already there and he lightly touched Russ; there was still no response or movement from Russ, so Mike quickly rolled him over expecting to see a bloody sleeping bag, but there wasn’t a spot of blood to be found anywhere on the sleeping bag.

By now Glen had crawled up next to Mike, he also touched the sleeping bag and it still didn’t move; Glen looked at Mike with the same expression that Mike had when he looked at him a moment ago.

Mike looked back at Glen and another tear ran down his cheek, and then Glen said, “This is nuts he can’t be dead, --if he is, then how could it happened?”

Mike replied wiping his nose with his shirtsleeve, “I think he bled to death in his sleep. Remember the blood brother ceremony when the old Indian cut our hands. Well, --I don’t think Russ’s wound had stopped bleeding.”

“How can anyone bleed to death from such a small cut?” Glen asked looking quite pale, “I still say he’s sound asleep. He just has to be asleep and not dead.”

“I’ve got to find out,” Mike told Glen, “I’m going to unzip him.”

Glen reluctantly nods, so Mike reaches over and slowly unzips Russ’s sleeping bag.

Then Mike opens the part of the sleeping bag that he had unzipped, to see if there were any bloodstains and all he saw was Russ and no blood.

Then Russ asked, as he opened his eyes and smiled, “Is it time to get up? Are you guys ready to do some more hard riding?”

Now both Glen and Mike were so relieved that they both sat down, put their heads in their hands, and started laughing; Russ was puzzled by all of this, so he asked, “What’s so funny?”

“Russ, --how’s your hand? Has it stopped bleeding yet?” Glen asked. “Its fine, --it stopped bleeding last night just before John put on the bandage. If you two think this is going to slow me down when I’m riding, well, --you’re wrong, because it has already starting to heal. How’s your hands, --you guys are Ok, --aren’t you?”

Glen replied after wiping his eyes on his shirtsleeve, “Yeah, --we’re fine our hands are healing too.”

Now Russ was puzzled by all the wiping of eyes and noses of his two friends, so he sat up in his sleeping bag and looked at them concerned asking, “You two better not have caught a cold or come down with the flu? I’m hoping to do some more riding today.”

“No, --we’re just fine and we’ll be riding,” Glen replied.

Mike is now upset at Russ for having scared him, pushes Russ back into his sleeping bag asking, “How come you don’t snore like the rest of us and roll around in bed?”

“What’s with Mike? And what does he mean I don’t snore, and why would he want me to?” Russ asked, puzzled and confused by Mike’s actions.

“Because he had thought you had died in your sleep, --in fact, --if you really want to know, --you scared me too,” Glen declared with a relieved giggle, “you were lying there so still we both thought you were really dead. So snore, roll around in bed, do anything, so we know that you’re still alive.”

Russ just looked at both Glen and Mike in amazement; then he responded, “Ok, --I’ll try, but I can’t do anything if I’m asleep. Just remember, --I’m alive so don’t go and bury me.”

He then puts his hand on his wrist, feels his pulse, and says, holding his hand out laughing, “Here, --feel, --I’ve got a pulse, so I’m alive and I don’t plan on dying just yet. You guys are still all worked up about that fortuneteller we saw, --aren’t you? That’s it, --you think that I’m going to die soon. Well I’m not, --I’m seventeen and November tenth I’ll be eighteen. So, I’m going to be around for a long time. As I told you before, --I don’t believe in fortunetellers. So let’s get some breakfast and go see John like he wanted us too, and then go and do some trail riding, because I want

to put some miles on my bike today.”

Russ crawled out of his sleeping bag and as he made his way to the tent opening, he patted Mike on the back; Mike looked at him and smiled with relief, at least this time Russ was all right.

Mike and Glen crawled out of the tent and started the campfire, so Russ could make them breakfast.

While Russ was cooking breakfast, Glen and Mike rolled up the sleeping bags.

By the time Mike and Glen had gotten everything ready to put into the truck, Russ had breakfast ready.

When they sat down and ate Russ’s cooking, it wasn’t bad; actually, it was very good.

“Russ, --where did you learn to cook so well?” Mike asked.

“Now don’t you guys start laughing, but I took Home Economics in the tenth grade,” Russ replied smiling.

“Imagine a Fighter Pilot who’s had Home Economics,” said Mike looking at Russ and grinning, “you had better not say anything about this at you flight school or someone will paint daisies on your F30.”

Now as both Mike and Glen were laughing, John came walking over and said, as he stood next to Russ with his Doctors Bag, “Good morning, --I guess I missed the joke, you must tell it to me sometime. I’m here to take a look at your hands and see how you three are getting along as Brothers.”

“The joke, --it was nothing and we’re getting along just fine,” Russ replies, “in fact, --these two thought I had died and were bawling their heads off.”

Both Glen and Mike quickly chorused, “We did not bawl our heads off.”

“If you would snore or move around a bit when your sleeping, then we wouldn’t have thought you had died and gone to that big airport in the sky,” Mike gruffly added.

John just smiled to himself, because he now knew these boys were truly Blood Brothers; for the ceremony only made it formal, because the special bond between them was strong.

John examined the hand of each boy and was happy to see all three wounds were already healing.

As he was putting a clean bandage on Mike’s hand he said, “Now I want you and your two new Brothers to take care of these wounds until they



are fully healed. I'll give you each two more bandages to put on when you get ready to go home this afternoon, so be sure to stop by my camp prior to leaving today, --Ok?" All three boys nod to John's request.

After John had left, Glen suggested that they take the tent down and clean up the camp so when they got back, all they would have left to do is load the bikes.

Both Russ and Mike thought it was a good idea, and so they took their tent down and put it into the truck.

Then they cleaned up their campsite and put anything they didn't need for riding into the pickup.

After putting fuel into their bikes, they put on their riding boots, helmets and gloves, and then they started up their bikes and took off down the trail.

At noon, the boys pulled into the small town of Running Springs for fuel and food.

Mike told Glen at lunch, when Russ had gone to use the men's room, that maybe they should slow down a little.

Glen wanted to know why Mike thought the pace was too fast.

Mike told him, he was still worried about Russ getting himself killed.

"Don't worry about Russ," said Glen laughing, "he's a good rider and knows what he's doing. Besides, he wouldn't be number five in the state enduro if he didn't. One thing more, --let's make more stops. I had to go so bad before the last stop I almost wet myself," Mike just grinned and told him, he'll plan on more stops.

"Are you guys ready to do some more hard riding?" Russ asked, after returning from the men's room; both Glen and Mike nod.

After paying their lunch bill, they got on their bikes and slowly rode back out to the trail.

Mike as usual took the lead, but after a few minutes, he let Russ pull ahead so he could keep an eye on him.

After about two hours of real hard riding, Mike pulled up next to Russ and motioned to him to pull over and stop.

After Russ had pulled over and stopped, he asked Mike what the problem was?

"It's Glen, --I think he needs to take a leak, as a matter of fact so do

I.”

As Mike gets off his bike, Glen pulls up next to Russ and stops, he then gets off his bike and hurries behind a big bush; Mike also disappears behind a big bush.

As Russ waits for his two friends to return, he glances at Glen’s bike and after he’d had closer look at Glen’s bike seat his face breaks into a wide grin and shaking his head he says to himself, “I don’t believe this, --his seat’s wet. I don’t think he made it in time.”

When Mike returns, Russ points to Glen’s bike seat, and when Mike looks at the seat, he also starts to grin.

“Are you thinking the what I am?” Russ asked giggling.

“Yeah, --how wet do you think he is?” Mike asked giggling.

“I don’t know, but we’ll see pretty soon,” Russ replied giggling.

When Glen returned from behind the big bush both Russ and Mike were expecting to see Glen’s wet jeans, but he had pulled out his shirttails to hide the accident.

As Glen walks over to his bike, Russ asks, “What’s with the shirt-tails?”

“I just like to wear my shirttails outside, --that’s all.”

“What do you mean, --you like wearing them out. This isn’t like you, you’ve never worn your shirttails out before, --so what gives?” Russ asked.

Starting to get nervous Glen asked, “What’s so wrong with wearing my shirttails out? Come on lets ride we’re wasting the best part of the day.”

“Glen, --we know why you let your shirttails out,” Mike piping up, “so you don’t have to hide your wet jeans anymore.”

“How did you guys know what I had done?” Glen slowly inquired his face turning red with embarrassment.

“Your bike seat is wet, so we kinda’ knew what happened,” Mike replied, “hey, --don’t worry about it, --we all have an embarrassing accident sometime in our lives.”

Putting his shirttails back into his jeans, Glen said, “Yeah, --but I’m eighteen, --when everyone else does it they’re still kids.”

“We’re still technicality kids, --teenagers,” Russ explaining, “I’ve never told you, but when I was in the tenth grade it happened to me too. I was so embarrassed and afraid that everyone would find out I skipped the rest of my classes.”

After Glen had put his shirttails back into his jeans both Mike and Russ could now see how badly, Glen had wet his jeans, and they were quite wet.

“Wow, —you did do a good job on em’,” Russ remarked, “when it happened to me in the tenth grade it was awful. I couldn’t stop and it ran on the floor and my jeans were really wet, —everybody was watching. You’re lucky it happened way out here with us rather than in school with the whole class looking on.”

“C’mon let’s ride,” said Mike, “before you get back to the truck you’ll be dry.”

“If you remember, —I told you to stop more often,” Glen angrily told Mike.

“I wasn’t in the lead, Russ was, —so how could I have stopped?”

“You’re no beginner,” Russ retorted looking at Glen, “you know where breaks are.”

“Let’s ride and I’ll lead this time,” Glen gruffly announced and so they again fired up their bikes and off down the trail they went; this time Glen was in the lead, Mike was next, and Russ brought up the rear.

For the next hour they played, follow the leader down the trail.

When Glen made a rest stop, Mike pulled up next to him and they both waited for Russ; after about fifteen minutes and still no Russ both Glen and Mike started to get worried.

“I’m worried,” said Mike, “let’s go back and see what happened to Russ.”

“Let’s wait another five minutes,” Glen suggested, “he probably stopped to take a leak, —I think he’ll be long shortly,” Mike nods in agreement, but the dream he’s been having the last few nights still haunted him.

After a couple of minutes had passed, Glen said grinning, “Bet ya’ a buck he wet his jeans and he’s waiting for them to dry.”

“C’mon, —let’s go back and see what happen to Russ we’ve waited long enough,” said Mike now very concerned about Russ; Glen nodding, because now, he was also very concerned about his friend, so they both turned their bikes around and started back down the trail in search of Russ.

They hadn’t gone three miles when they got to the meadow were they had previously raced across side by side.

Now Mike couldn’t remember seeing anyone going down, so he had

figured everyone had made it Ok.

He remembered being the first to reach the other side and waited for Glen and Russ to catch up.

Glen pulled up, and passing him, waving for him to follow, so he started after Glen, thinking Russ was right behind him.

Now Mike was angry with himself for not having looked back to see if Russ was following.

As they made their way across the meadow, they arrived at the small creek that flowed through the meadow and there by that small creek which he and Glen had jumped was Russ.

He was lying face down on the creek bank next to an old dead tree trunk with one hand in the creek.

The tree had several short pointed limbs protruding from where the branches had once been.

Russ's bike was laying on its side half in and half out of the creek; the hot engine was steaming where it had gotten wet from the water in the creek.

Both Mike and Glen pulled up and stopped, got off their bikes, and ran over to Russ.

When they got to where Russ lies, Mike stopped short and his heart skipped a couple of beats when he saw the horror before him; for just like in his dream, Russ lies there with his blood running into the creek turning the water red.

Glen goes over, pulls Russ's bike out of the creek, and sets it back upright, and then he returns to the terrible scene.

Now he also was in shock, because he couldn't believe what he saw.

Glen went and knelt by Russ and slowly rolled him over.

Russ's chest was all red with his blood and there in his chest was a stick protruding out.

Mike's knees gave way as he fell to the sand next to Russ, for just as the old fortuneteller had foretold and he had dreamt; Russ was lying in a pool of his blood.

Glen now in shock grabbed the end of the stick and slowly pulled it out of Russ's chest; the end of the stick was red with blood.

Glen looked at it and tossed it on the ground, then he took off his gloves and felt Russ's neck for a pulse; finding none, he quickly took Russ's limp hand and felt his wrist for a pulse and as before, there was none.

Now both boys began to realize the gravity of the scene and as they looked at each other, a tear ran down each boy's cheek.

Mike was the first to speak, "He's dead isn't he?"

Glen nodding weakly said, "He must have been thrown when he missed the jump and landed on that old dead tree. I think that stick went into his heart. He must have died shortly thereafter. O' God, --I can't believe he's really gone. He would've made a great fighter pilot. Now we'll never know, --what a waste."

Sobbing, Mike took Russ's hand with the cut from the Blood Brother ceremony into his.

Glen put his hand on Mike shoulder and said, "I think one of us has to go and get help. I'll go, --you stay here with Russ until I return."

Looking into Glen's red tearstained face, Mike said, "You ride real slow, --Russ is already dead. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Glen half smiled, nodded, and said, "I won't be long and I'll be careful," Glen went and got on his bike and rode away.

Mike watched as Glen rode away to get help, and then he sat down by his friend and Blood Brother to wait for Glen to return with help.

As Mike sat there and waited, he blamed himself for what happened to Russ.

The Sun was getting low on the western horizon when he heard the sound of a Helicopter coming and a few minutes later, he could see it coming towards him.

As it was approaching to land, a pickup also drove into the meadow from the west.

After the Helicopter had landed, four men got out and walked over to where Mike and Russ were.

One of the men, a police officer, came up to Mike and asked, "Son, --are you all right?" Mike nodded and then the Officer said, "I'm from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. I need to ask you a few questions about the accident."

While Mike answered questions from the police officer, two other men put Russ's body on a stretcher; they took off Russ's helmet and zipped up the bag that Russ was in and after putting Russ's helmet on top of the zipped up bag they carried him to the Helicopter.

The fourth man, who was also a police officer, examined the site of the accident; after picking up the stick that had killed Russ he wrote a few

notes in a notebook.

By now the pickup had arrived, Glen and John got out and walked over to Mike and the Sheriff's Deputy.

The driver of the pickup and the other police officer loaded both Mike's and Russ's bikes into the truck.

"Are you Ok?" John asked looking at a very sad and shaken Mike, "I'm sorry this had to happen to such a fine young man. I know how much the three of you liked one another. You must promise me something and that is, —you must not blame yourself for what happened to Russ," Mike, with a red tearstained face nods.

Finally, the Helicopter took off and John said, "It's starting to get dark. We had better be getting back to the campground."

All four of them got into the pickup and slowly headed back to the campground.

Mike rode in the back on an old seat, because there wasn't any room for him in the cab.

When they got back to their campsite, Mike and Glen transferred the two bikes over to Russ's pickup.

The two boys then said goodbye to John and his family.

As Mike and Glen drove home they were quiet and feeling empty and sad.

Mike thought how different it was now without Russ doing the driving; he couldn't get over the thought of Russ being dead.

The cab seemed empty with only the two of them, when it was so full driving up.

The more he remembered the emptier and sicker he got; Glen was feeling the same emptiness.

"You feel it to?" Glen asked looking over at Mike.

"Yeah, --I sure do, --it's like there's something missing from me."

"I know, but remember we still got each other," Glen solemnly remarked.

"We're Brothers now and nothing in this world is ever going change that," said Mike looking at his hand.

"Yeah, --you're right," said Glen now looking at his hand, "and a guy couldn't have a better friend than you as a Blood Brother, —for as long as we live, --Brothers."

It was a little after seven when they pulled up to the hangar at Manning Aviation.

After they had unloaded Mike's bike and parked it in the hangar they drove over to Mike's home.

Before Mike got out he and Glen took each other's hand and they shook, and then they hugged as the tears came to the both of them once more.

Mike got out and waved goodbye as Glen drove off towards Russ's home.

Mike's parents were waiting for him when he walked into the house.

His Father got up and said, "We heard about Russ and the accident he had. I'm so sorry about your friend I know he meant a lot to you."

Mike went to his Mother and she embraced him, as he told her half crying, "O' God Mom, --Russ is gone. He was lying there dead with a stick in his heart. His blood was running into the creek and the water was red. I never want to see anyone die like that again."

"Yes, I know, but you're man now, so you must harden yourself, because you're going to lose more friends in the next few years, but remember one thing and that is, --Russ is with the lord and he wants you and Glen to go on with your lives," said Maria comforting him.

"Thanks for the nice words and you're right Mom, --he's now with God," said Mike looking into her eyes, "for that thought makes me feel better, --thanks Mom. Now I want to go to bed, because I've got school tomorrow."

Walking to his bedroom, Mike turns his head to look at his Parents standing there and he smiles at them, and then continues to his bedroom.

Walking over to put his wallet on the dresser, he sees his Pilot Certificate lying there.

As he picks it up he thinks, "Well, --I don't have any more promises to keep, so I might as well start flying again," so he puts the card into his wallet, and then he undresses, crawls into his bed and finally falling off to sleep exhausted.

His Mother looks in on him before she goes to bed that night, and as she watches him sleep soundly she smiles and feels sorry for him, and she then goes to join Henry in their bedroom.

As Glen pulls up to Russ home he doesn't quite know how to tell Russ's parents that Russ was dead.

Major Lockwood watches Glen drive up and stop with their pickup; he then goes out to meet Glen.

When Major Lockwood reaches Glen he sees how badly shaken he is.

Glen tries to speak, but he's shaking so badly he couldn't say anything; tears were running down his cheeks as Major Lockwood looks into his face.

Glen hands him the truck keys and Major Lockwood tells him, "Come, --let's get you into the house," he then put his arm around Glen as they both slowly walk to the door, and then into the house.

Mrs. Lockwood was sobbing as she held a picture of Russ when they entered the house.

She looks up and sees Glen with reddened tearstained face.

"You already know about Russ?" Glen asked when he sees her; Mrs. Lockwood nods.

"Yes, --the county sheriff stopped by and filled us in on the accident," the Major replied.

When Glen saw the photograph of Russ, he tried to hold back the tears, started to shake again, and sat down.

When Mrs. Lockwood sees Glen in that state she says, "Oh my God, --you poor boy," and gets up and goes to him.

"It's Ok, --just let it all out. Now don't be afraid to cry," she tells him, as she embraces him; Glen then started to cry with tears streaming down his cheeks.

"O' God, --why did it happen to Russ?" Glen asked crying, "I'm so sorry it's all of my fault. If I wouldn't have talked Russ into going riding up in the mountains he'd still be alive."

On seeing the bad state, Glen was in, Major Lockwood said, "I think, I better call your parents and have them come over and take you home," he gets his cell phone and calls Glen's parents.

"Now you listen to me," said Mrs. Lockwood looking into Glen's tearstained eyes, "Russ was grown up enough to make his own decisions. I don't want you to blame yourself for what happen to Russ."

Noticing Glen's bandaged hand, she holds it up to examine it and asks, "What did you do to your hand?"



Glen in all of his grief he had forgotten about the Blood Brother ceremony and starts to smile saying, "It's a long story, but the three of us are Blood Brothers. That is Mike, Russ and I, went through an Indian Blood Brother Ceremony."

When Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood heard this, they were both shocked and stunned.

"I didn't know you had cared so much for Russ that you wanted him as a Brother!" Major Lockwood exclaimed; Glen smiled as his parents van pulled up and stopped.

A few minutes later, they knocked on the door and Major Lockwood went to let them in.

When they saw Glen crying they were stunned, because Glen was grown up and not a kid anymore.

Glen's Father inquired, as to what the problem was and Major Lockwood explained what had happen to Russ; as Glen's Mother went to console her Son, Glen's Father told Major Lockwood how sorry he was.

After having giving their condolences to the Lockwood's it was time for Glen and his Parents to leave.

It was getting late when Glen got home and tomorrow was a school day, so he said good night to his Mom and Dad and went to his room.

After taking a shower and crawling into his bed, Glen laid there thinking about the weekend.

He tried to fall asleep, but he kept seeing Russ lying there by the dead tree trunk with the stick in his chest, and then he started to cry again, because it hurt so bad; finally, he fell off to sleep thinking about the Blood Brother ceremony.

## CHAPTER 10 -- R.O.T.C.

Tuesday morning, Mike met Glen in the hallway on the way to their lockers.

“What’s with the uniform today?” Mike asked when he sees Glen wearing his Air Force Cadet uniform.

“Today is ROTC and we have to wear it for class. You’ll be required to wear one also.”

“A uniform!” Mike exclaimed looking shocked, “I don’t want to be in the Air Force and another thing, --I didn’t ask for ROTC they made me take it.”

“Yeah, --I know, but you have to take it in order to graduate,” says Glen with a sigh, “so try and make the best of it and who knows, maybe you might like it, --they’ll teach you all kinds of military stuff. So when you get in the Army you’ll have a jump on everyone else,” then Glen poked Mike in the chest, smiled and said, “I think you’ll look great in uniform and Pam is going to flip out when she sees you. You should’ve seen Joan when I first put this uniform on. She went nuts, --there’s something about military uniforms that drive women crazy. It’s like giving catnip to a cat. They just crawl all over you. Just wait, --you’ll see.”

“Have you seen Nancy lately?” Mike solemnly asked changing the subject, “how is she taking Russ’s death? You know how much she liked him.”

“I haven’t seen her since Russ died, but I heard she took the news pretty hard,” Glen slowly replied.

Mike slowly says looking at the floor, “Yeah, --I know how she feels, because I still feel empty. God, --how I miss Russ. Just the thought of him makes me feel so empty,” as Glen nods in agreement the five minute warning bell sounds the start of the first hour classes, and then both Mike and Glen headed off down the hall to their classrooms.

Mike was sitting in his first hour math class when the PA. crackled to life; the school principal began to speak, “I have a very sad announcement to make. The senior class has lost one of their classmates. His name is Russell Lockwood. He was killed in a motorcycle accident this past weekend and I know his class will miss him. A wake will be held at the Collins Funeral Home tomorrow and the funeral will be Thursday afternoon at one

at Saint John's Methodist Church. Anyone from the senior class who would like to attend the funeral must have a signed slip from their parents, and then stop at the front office and you will be excused from Thursday's classes. That's all I have for now," then the PA went quite.

Mike sat there with that empty feeling and the thought of Russ's funeral made him even emptier.

Oh, how he missed Russ and started to daydream about all the fun times he had with Russ and Glen; he came back to the class when he heard his name called.

"Mister Troff, --are you part of this class or not?" The Math Teacher asked.

"Yes sir," Mike replied his face was turning red, because he felt the class looking at him.

"Good, --then you can explain to the class what Rational Numbers are?" The Math Teacher asked.

Now Math was Mike's best subject, for he was a whiz at it and he like working with numbers, after all, he was good with computers, and he had helped to write the program that is in the EXR Helicopters.

Mike smiles, as he knew the answer; he responded, "Rational Numbers consists of all integer numbers of the form  $M$  over  $N$ , and where  $M$  and  $N$  are not equal to zero."

When Mike sat back down the student behind him patted him on the shoulder and whispered, "Good show man."

The Math Teacher was quite surprised that Mike had known the answer, and tells the class, "That's correct and so rational numbers include the integers and common fractions," and then he says after looking at the clock on the wall which now indicates ten minutes to the hour, "I think that's enough for today. For tomorrow, I want you all to read the chapter on Irrational and Complex Numbers."

After the bell had sounded the end of the first hour class, the teacher says as the class gets up to leave, "Mister Troff, --I want to see you before you go."

"Now I'm going to get it for daydreaming in class," Mike thought, as he walked up to the Math Teachers desk.

The Teacher was looking at some papers in a folder when Mike stepped up to his desk.

"I'm sorry for not paying attention in class today, it won't happen

again,” Mike apologizing for daydreaming.

The Math Teacher remarks looking up from the folder, “This file that I have here is your IQ and Math test scores from your last school. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen such high Math test scores, and then there’s your IQ, --it’s higher than anyone in your math class. Now we have a special math class, for exceptionally bright math students, because this math class is way too easy for you.”

He paused, and looking at Mike he said, “Your little performance this morning proves you’re too bright to be in this class, so, --I’m going to transfer you to that special math class. Now starting tomorrow, you’ll go to room 74 for Math. Mister Ayres will be your new Math Teacher and I will inform him you’ll be in his class.”

He smiles at Mike who was now looking a little shocked and starts to say, “But...”

“You had better be getting to your next class before you’re marked down as tardy,” the Math Teacher piping up before Mike could finish; Mike simply nods and leaves for his next class.

All through English and Free Study Periods, Mike thought about that special math class and was worried it might be too hard and he would flunk math and not graduate.

Mike was still worrying about that new math class when he sat down in the cafeteria to eat lunch.

When Glen, Joan, and Pam came walking up with their meal trays he didn’t even notice them, because his thoughts were still about that math class.

“Is this table taken?” Glen asked.

Mike came back to earth and looked up and said, “No, --have a seat.” After Glen and the girls had sat down, Glen notices Mike is in another world and asks, “Mike, --you’ve gotta’ problem with school?”

“I’m not sure,” Mike replied looking at Glen.

“You’re not sure! What aren’t you sure about?” Glen asked looking a bit perplexed.

“I’m been placed into an advanced math class,” Mike replied while eating a meatball, “my math teacher told me the math class that I’m in, is too easy. So, he goes and sticks me in this special math class in room 74. Now what am I going to do? I just know I’ll flunk for sure now and I’ll never graduate this spring.”

**“You’re in the special math class, --that’s great, --so am I!” Glen exclaimed in surprise.**

**“You too!” Mike exclaims as it’s his turn to be surprised, “I didn’t know you were that smart in math!”**

**“Well, --I didn’t think you were that smart in math either,” Glen retorts looking at Mike, “God, --isn’t this great! Now we can work together. You’re just going to like this class, because we don’t work problems out of textbooks like in the regular math class. Mister Ayres has us working out real life math problems. Like today, he gave us a problem on the orbital velocity for a space station in orbit between Earth and the Moon. He’s also got us working in pairs. Only I don’t have anyone to work with, --hey, --maybe we can work together. Now isn’t this just awesome!”**

**“Yeah, —simply great,” Mike said with a forced smile.**

**“Just think, you and me working on the same math problem together,” Glen announced excited.**

**Nancy came up to their table with her lunch tray and asked to sit and eat with them.**

**Glen told her it was Ok, and then he asked if she was all right and told her he felt very bad about what happened to Russ.**

**A tear ran down her cheek as she told them how badly she missed Russ, and then asked why did Russ have to die; they all sat there solemnly eating and asking themselves the same question.**

**They were about finished eating when a boy with light brown hair, blue eyes, and wearing a Marine Cadet uniform walked up to Nancy.**

**He was smiling when he said to her, “Hi, --I’m Joel Reese. I couldn’t help over hearing you talking about Russ. I’m really sorry a fine Pilot like Russ had to die so soon. He would’ve been a great Air Force Fighter Pilot.”**

**Glen was surprised at what Joel had just told them and looking up from his tray he said, “Thanks Joel, --that was really nice what you had just said about Russ. Now tell me, --how is it you knew Russ was an Air Force Cadet and he could fly?”**

**My Dad is an Air Force Fighter Pilot at George AFB and he knows Major Lockwood,” Joel replies, “they both fly together. My dad is his Wingman.”**

**As Joel sits down next to Nancy, she looks him over as she makes room for him; now both Mike and Glen are impressed with this guy.**

**“So what’s with the Marine uniform?” Glen asks.**

**Joel is a little confused by Glen’s question, “The same reason you’re wearing that Air Force uniform, --today we have ROTC.”**

**Glen looks at Mike and shakes his head saying, “I know today is ROTC. That isn’t what I meant, --what I meant was, --why are you wearing a Marine uniform and not an Air Force uniform? As you know we have Air Force ROTC in this school, so why the Marine uniform?”**

**“I’m sorry if I sounded like a smart ass, but I didn’t know what you meant,” Joel replies with a smile looking at both Mike and Glen, “this isn’t a ROTC uniform. It’s a Marine Cadet uniform like your Air Force uniform. I’m in the Marine Special Flight School that’s been setup at Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps Base.”**

**“You can fly!” Both Mike and Glen together exclaim.**

**“Yeah, --I got my ticket when I was sixteen--now I’m multi-engine and instrument rated,” Joel replied nodding.**

**“How about you guys, --do you all fly?” Joel asks.**

**“Yeah, --you bet. Also got my ticket when I was sixteen, but only single engine,” Glen tells him with a big grin, “I do have an instrument rating though and some time in a Lear Jet. Russ was the jet jock he had a hundred or so hours in the Lear. Boy was he good, --that’s where I got my time in the jet, but now he’s gone what a waste,” they all look down at the table nodding in agreement.**

**Then Joel remembered Mike hasn’t responded to the question, so he looks at Mike and again asks the question, “How about you, --how much time do you have as Pilot-In-Command in an Airplane?”**

**Mike looking at the table slowly replies, “None, --I can’t fly an Airplane.”**

**“That’s Ok we all can’t be Pilots,” Joel tells him, “say, --if you would like maybe we can go and fly sometime, --I think it would be lots of fun.”**

**Glen was about to speak up on Mike’s behalf when Nancy piped up, because she’s been eyeing this cute young Marine Cadet and the more she looked and listen the more she liked and the one thing she now wanted to know was, is he free.**

**She was thinking all the while that maybe Russ up in Heaven had seen how sad and lonely she was and had asked God to send someone to her, so She looked at Joel and asked, “Are you free? I mean are you going with**

someone?"

He looked at her surprised, as did everyone else and replied, "Yes--No--I'm free. I mean no, --I don't have anyone at this time that I'm going steady with and yes I'm free."

She just couldn't believe this cute guy hasn't already been taken, and felt good thinking maybe he was meant for her, and then she asked if she could have his address and phone number and maybe go out with him sometime.

Joel smiled and told her sure, he would like very much to take her out some night, and then they both exchanged telephone numbers and addresses.

As Joel was getting up to leave she put her hand on his arm and he then looked at her as she said, "Now don't you dare go and get yourself killed like Russ," then the first bell sounded the start of the afternoon classes.

Joel said to her as they all got up to leave for class, "I can't promise you that. After all, I'm going to be a Marine Fighter Pilot. Who knows--maybe someday I'll die in my jet in combat."

Walking out of the cafeteria they all laugh when she said, "Don't you dare die in your jet."

They all walked together down the hall to the first hallway intersection; the Girls went together down the left hallway, Mike and Glen went down the right hallway leaving Joel who took the stairs to the second floor.

Glen asked Mike as they walked to their forth hour class, "What do you think about Joel as a new friend? He likes to fly and besides, he wants to become a Fighter Pilot like us. Too bad he has to be a Marine, --sure wished he could've been Air Force."

"I think he'll make a good friend to replace Russ. Somehow I feel Russ had sent him to us," Mike told him, "It's just too much of a coincidence that Joel is such a good flier, and then finding us the only other Pilots in this whole school, --plus the fact he's going to that Special Flight School. As far as him being a Marine, I think it's great. Now we've got all the service branches covered. With you in the Air Force, me for the Army, and now Joel in the Marines, we can't lose."

"You're right, --now we can't lose and we just made a new friend."

"Hey, --we're going to be late, --look at the time!" Mike exclaims looking at the clock, and then he held up his hand and shouted, "FIGHTER

**PILOTS!”**

Glen slaps Mike’s hand with his and shouts, “**YEAH, --FIGHTER PILOTS,**” and they run off down different hallways to their next class.

It was mid-afternoon and the fifth hour class when Mike walked into the ROTC classroom and sat down at a desk next to Joel.

Now Mike was a little apprehensive about this class and felt torn, as part of him was excited at the thought of military training, but the other part of him didn’t want any part of this especially after what the Army had done to him last summer, and with that thought he smiled to himself thinking, “Sure, --here I sit hating the Army for what they did to me and at the same time I would like to join them.”

Mike looked over to Joel who was looking back at him smiling.

“This is probably going to be a breeze for you. Bet you know all of this stuff already?” Mike whispered to Joel.

“I already know some of the basics, but there is lot more that I don’t know,” Joel whispered back; then an Air Force Colonel walked into the classroom, went over to the white board and wrote his name in large blue letters after which he walked over to the lectern.

The Colonel looked the class over and began to speak, “Since all of you, with the exception of one, doesn’t know what the proper procedure is when an Officer walks into a room,” he paused and was now eyeing Joel who was sitting there sweating, because Joel knew what had not been done when the Colonel walked into the room, “I’ll excuse you this time.”

Then the Colonel threatened, “but the next time this happens you will all get a demerit and I’ll start today’s lessons with how the merit system works.”

He then went back to the white board and said as he wrote, “The merit system works this way, --all test scores, assignments, and field exercises are graded as points. After today’s class, you’ll all get one thousand points to begin with. You’ll need one thousand points to pass this class and that’s a ‘D’. The grade assignments are as follows, --an ‘A’ is two thousand points or greater, --a ‘B’ is one thousand seven hundred points and a ‘C’ is one thousand five hundred points. You already know what a ‘D’ is and anything less than one thousand points is failing.”

He then walks back to the lectern and begins to speak while looking at Joel who was now getting very nervous.



**“Your test scores will be your points. You’ll be given ten tests including your final at the end of the year. Successful completion of field exercises and assignments will get you one thousand points. There will be ten work assignments and fifty field exercises. The work assignments are worth fifty points each and the field exercises are worth ten points each.”**

**Then he grinned and continued, “Now for the demerits. Each demerit will cost you five points from you total. You’ll receive a demerit each time you fail to carry out a rightful order from either myself, or my assistant, --which I haven’t named as yet. You’ll get a demerit anytime you screw up in the field or in the classroom.”**

**Then the Colonel walked out from behind the lectern and stood in front of Joel who was now very nervous.**

**The Colonel, while looking at Joel, firmly said, “There are two things that I’m a stickler for and they are, number one, saluting an Officer. Cadet Reese, --tell the class what the other one is?”**

**“To call attention when an Officer enters a room.”**

**“Correct,” the Colonel replied sharply, “anytime an Officer enters the room someone had better call attention or the entire class will get a demerit. So Cadet Reese, --why didn’t you call attention when I entered this classroom? You’re a Marine Cadet and should know better. Didn’t they teach you the proper military manners at your Special Flight School? You are learning to become a Fighter Pilot, --are you not?”**

**Joel sat there with a very red face and a guilty look, because now he wondered if the Colonel would hand him a demerit.**

**Now he wished he’d call attention when the Colonel walked into the classroom, and wished he’d not worn his uniform, at least then, he would still have the one thousand points like the rest of the class, because now, he’ll be starting with five less points than the rest of the class.**

**“Yes Sir,” Joel replied smartly, “I’m learning to be a Fighter Pilot and yes they did teach me the proper military manners.”**

**“Cadet Reese, --today is your lucky day,” the Colonel announced, “for this is going to be the only time I will overlook an infraction and not hand out a demerit. So, --you will retain your thousand points, but if this happens again you will get a demerit.”**

**“Thank you Sir,” Joel politely replied feeling relieved.**

**Then the Colonel made a snappy military about face, took four steps, made a second about face, and stood at attention, and then he said,**

**“Now it’s time to announce my assistant.”**

**The Colonel paused, slowly looks over the class, as the class is wondering whom the assistant is.**

**They were all eyeing the door to see who would walk in; Joel thought, “This time I’ll call attention if another Officer walks into the classroom.”**

**“Will Cadet Joel Reese, come front and center,” the Colonel commands in a loud voice taking everyone by surprise, especially Joel, for he never expected this, so he then gets up and with some very snappy military moves, marches up to the Colonel.**

**Joel stops in front of the Colonel, stands at attention, and then salutes him, the Colonel returns the salute.**

**The Colonel hands Joel an armband with the three stripes of a Sergeant on it; Joel once again salutes the Colonel.**

**After the Colonel had returned the salute, Joel takes one step back, makes an about face, and after making several more snappy military steps, he stands at the Colonels right side facing the class.**

**“Sergeant Reese is my assistant and all of you will obey his orders and follow his commands,” the Colonel formally informs the class.**

**“I hope this stuff doesn’t go to his head and he gets real bossy,” Mike was thinking.**

**“Now there’re just a few things more to pass on before we get into today’s assignment,” the Colonel tells everyone, “first, --you’ll salute any military Officer in the hallways and on the school grounds when you’re in uniform. Second, --you will wear your ROTC uniform on the days we have ROTC. The uniform of that day will be posted on the senior class bulletin board on Monday. One final thing, --you do not have to call attention if you are in another class and a military Officer happens to walk in. That would be disruptive and improper.”**

**The Colonel walked over to his desk and picked up a stack of pamphlets; he then went and gave half of the stack to Joel telling him to start passing the pamphlets out to everyone in class.**

**Joel gives each student on the left side of the room a pamphlet and the Colonel gives everyone on the right side of the room a pamphlet.**

**After Joel had finished handing out his stack of pamphlets the Colonel tells Joel, he can return to his seat.**

**The Colonel walks back to the lectern and opens the pamphlet he**

had kept for himself, and then instructs the class to open their pamphlets to the first page.

“I need to have you all fill out this page here in class,” said the Colonel, “if you know the information, then turn the page in as you leave today. If you don’t know the information, then take the page home and fill it out with your parents help. You can turn it in on Thursday when you come to class. This page is for your uniforms of which you’re to have one Air Force class ‘A’ blues, and two Air Force class ‘B’ gray work fatigues. Are there any questions?”

Joel raised his hand; the Colonel motioned for him to ask his question. “Sir, --I already have three Marine uniforms. Do I need to get three more Air Force uniforms?”

“No, --in your case, --you do not have to get another set. You’re a Marine Cadet and you will wear your Marine uniform,” the Colonel firmly told him.

“Thank you Sir,” Joel happily said.

“Now everyone, turn to the next page,” the Colonel commands turning to the next page, “this is the selective service form and it must be filled out and turned in to me by the end of today’s class. If any of you have already filled one out at the Post Office, then print in large letters on the top, ‘I HAVE ALREADY FILED’. For those who don’t know what the selective service is, --well, I’ll tell you. It’s the draft and by law every male eighteen years of age must register.”

Now Joel had already registered, so he wrote in large letters on the top of his form the words, ‘I HAVE ALREADY FILED’.

Then turning to the next page of his pamphlet the colonel said, “The rest of the pamphlet is devoted to what an Airman needs to know. I want you all to study and memorize these pages. Especially, the general orders on page four. Ok, --as you know, we’re Air Force ROTC. So you’ll be called Airman instead of Privates. When addressing someone you will use the title of Airman.”

The Colonel looks at the clock and remarks, “I see we only have a few minutes left before the class adjourns. I have one question to ask and that is, --are any of you currently taking flight training or already hold a valid Pilot Certificate. I already know Sergeant Reese is a Pilot, but is there anyone else who flies?”

Now Mike tried to raise his hand, but he couldn’t it was as if some-

thing was holding it tight to his desk.

He also tried to speak, but again he couldn't it was as if something was preventing him from speaking.

When the Colonel looked at the class and didn't see anyone with their hand up he remarked, "Well, --it looks like we will have to start from scratch," then the first bell sounded.

"Before you are dismissed," the Colonel quickly announced, "the next class will be held in the Gym. Sergeant Reese, --the class is yours to dismiss."

Joel got up, went to the center front of the classroom, and stood at attention; Joel call attention and the entire class got up and stood by their desks at attention, then the Colonel walked out of the room.

Joel then commanded, "Class—dismissed," the class began leaving the room in single file row by row; Mike went to general science his last class of the day.

An hour later, the last bell of the day sounded, Mike walked with Glen to their lockers.

As Mike and Glen were about to leave, Joel came walking up and asked, "Are you guys free this evening, --like about nine? I'll be back from the Marine Base by then, so if you guys aren't doing anything. Maybe we could take the girls out somewhere."

"Thanks, but I've got a job and homework to do tonight," Mike tells him, "so I'll have to take a rain check, --maybe this weekend."

"I'm free after my flight school at the Airbase," Glen announces, "where do you want to meet?"

"How about here in school parking lot," Joel replies with a smile; Glen nods Ok, as Mike walks off leaving Glen and Joel making plans for the evening.

Mike walks into Manning Aviation at four that afternoon; A few minutes later Bob comes into the locker room as Mike was changing into his Ground-handler uniform. "I heard about your friend Russ and I'm really sorry. I heard he was a good Pilot too."

"Thanks Bob," says Mike pausing from changing clothes and looks down at the floor, "you know I really liked him a lot. It really hurts now that he's gone."

Bob felt sympathetic and put his hand on Mike's shoulder.

"Would you believe Russ and I were Blood Brothers," said Mike

looking up at Bob, and then Mike showed Bob his hand with the scar from the Blood Brother ceremony.

Bob was quite surprised when he heard and saw this and said, as he now began to realize just how much Mike really liked Russ, “I am really sorry Mike, --I didn’t realize how much you liked Russ. To want him as a Blood Brother really shows how much you really cared for him.”

Bob paused and Mike again looked down at the floor and a tear ran down his cheek; he then wiped the tear off with the back of his hand.

“Your Dad has informed me you have your Pilot certificates again. I’ll tell you what, --why don’t you go and take the little Robinson out for a spin. She’s all gassed up and waiting for you to fly her. I think you need to get away and have some time by yourself. The place is in good shape and business is slow so I don’t need you for anything. If something comes up, I’ve got Ed to fly, --so go ahead and take the Robinson. I’ll put you in the book as a demo.”

Mike looked up into Bobs understanding eyes and said, “Thanks Bob. I think I’ll take you up on that offer. I guess what I really need is to fly again and be by myself for a while,” Bob just smiled and went back to his office.

Mike puts his street clothes back on and as he was closing his locker Ed walks in and notices Mike wasn’t changing clothes and asks, “Aren’t you working today?”

“No, --I need some time to be by myself and to sort things out about Russ’s death. Bob told me I could take Eight-Three-Eight-Five-Indigo out for a spin and that’s exactly what I’m going to do,” Mike tells him putting the lock through the handle and snapping it shut.

“When you get back you’ll be needing this book,” said Ed looking at Mike, and then he opens his locker, reaches up on the top shelf, takes out Mike’s log book, and hands it to him.

“How come you have my log book?” Mike asks looking surprised to see Ed having it in his locker.

“Bob gave it to me, because he wanted me to try and talk you back into flying again. I had this whole spiel that I’ve been practicing all week-end to lay on you to get you back into the air. But now it looks like I won’t need to use it, --I’m glad you’re back flying again. You know, --it’s like what Bob had told me, --we really do need you to fly. Besides, I’ve never seen you fly. Bob tells me you’re some pretty hot stuff.”

**“I’m not so sure I’m all that hot,” says Mike smiling taking his logbook from Ed, “anyway, --you’re not so bad yourself.”**

**Mike opens his locker and puts the logbook on the top shelf, after closing and locking it, Mike offers, “C’mon, you can give me a hand rolling Eight-Three-Eight-Five-Indigo out of the hangar,” Ed smiled nodding.**

**Ed and Mike went into the hangar and together they rolled the little Robinson Helicopter out of the hangar so Mike could go for a flight.**

**Mike performed a preflight on the Helicopter, climbed into the Pilots seat, started it up, and after performing his run up checks he asked the control tower for a takeoff clearance.**

**With Ed watching, he very smoothly picks the little Helicopter up just as Larry and he did a few years ago.**

**Mike waves to Ed, as he flies off to be by himself in the little Helicopter.**

## CHAPTER 11 -- The Final Farewell

Mike and his Parents arrived at the funeral parlor Wednesday evening for Russ's wake.

When Mike and his Parents walked into the room where Russ was lying, there were people standing around in groups.

Major Lockwood and his Wife were sitting in the seats near Russ's coffin; Mrs. Lockwood was sobbing and the Major was shaking the hands of several people after they had said their goodbyes to Russ.

As Mike and his parents made their way to the coffin, when Mike saw Glen and his family walked into the room, Mike excused himself and went over to meet Glen.

"Have you seen Nancy after school today?" Mike asked.

"No, I haven't seen her since the forth hour class," Glen replied.

"I don't know if I can look at him," said Mike looking at Russ's coffin.

"I'll go with you. He was our Blood Brother and I know what you mean," said Glen putting his hand on Mike's shoulder.

So Mike and Glen walked together up to where Russ was lying.

Now everyone in the room was watching them and whispering to one another about a roomer they had heard about the three boys being Blood Brothers and that both Mike and Glen were taking Russ's death very hard.

With everyone watching, the two boys approached the coffin and the people who were standing there looking at Russ moved away from the coffin.

When Mike and Glen reached the coffin to see Russ they were by themselves; they looked down at Russ lying there wearing his Air Force Cadet uniform.

His face looked peaceful with a soft warm glow from the lamp sitting next to the coffin; his blond hair radiating the soft hue of the light and his hands were folded.

Mike stood there with Glen and a tear ran down each boy's cheek.

Mike asked in a whisper, almost crying, "O' God Russ why does it have to be you lying there?"

They both wanted to break down and cry, but they couldn't, because they were men now and didn't want anyone to see them crying.

Then, as they walked away from the coffin they tried to hold in their emotion; Glen's face was distorted with anguish, as he and Mike started to walk faster towards the door.

Mrs. Lockwood, upon seeing the boys in such sorrow met them as they headed for the door.

She put her arms around the both of them and said, "It's Ok. Let it out. Don't hold it in, because the hurt only gets worse. I know all about the Blood Brother ceremony. I also know how much you both loved Russ. Come, --I want the both of you to sit with the Major and me."

As Mrs. Lockwood embraced the two boys, they started to cry.

She then led them back to the front of the room where the coffin was and there they all sat together keeping vigil.

Glen's and Mike's parents came to the boys and consoled them.

Major Lockwood, who was sitting next to Glen, turned and asked both Glen and Mike, "How would you two like to be pallbearers? It just so happens we're still short two men to carry Russ. My Wife and I know all about the Blood Brother ceremony in which you all took part. I think it would be fitting that the two of you as his Blood Brothers should carry him to his final resting place."

Glen turns to look at Mike who then nods and whispers yes; Glen also nods and says yes to Mike, and then he turns back to Major Lockwood and says, "Yes Sir, --we'll be Russ's pallbearers."

Henry and Maria were astounded when they overheard Major Lockwood talking about Mike being Russ's Blood Brother, because they didn't know about the Blood Brother ceremony.

"Mike, --you have two Brothers. Why would you want to have a Blood Brother?" Henry asked looking at Mike.

Major Lockwood then answered before Mike could speak, "Your Son and my Son were very close friends. I sense there's a special bond amongst the three boys, --a very strong bond of friendship and this is special. You just don't find this kind of kinship between ordinary friends. So they consummated their friendship for one another by having a Blood Brother ceremony and thus becoming forever, Brothers."

The Major with tears in his eyes said, "Thank you. I think Russ would be pleased knowing that his two closest friends, --I mean Blood Brothers, --carried him to his final resting place."



Now after hearing Major Lockwood telling them about the special friendship between Mike, Glen and Russ, Henry with tears in his eyes felt proud of his Son.

Both Mike and Glen got up and went over to take one final look at their Brother and Glen said quietly to Russ, “Goodbye dear Brother and may you forever find peace with the Lord.”

It was almost nine that evening when Mike and his parents got home.

Ten minutes later, a car pulls up to their house and stops; a man gets out and walks up to the front door and knocks, Maria goes to the door and opens it.

When she saw Captain Clark standing there she smiled and said, “Larry, --please come in. We just got home from Russell Lockwood’s wake.”

“Thank you,” said Larry smiling, as he entered the house.

As Maria escorted Larry to the den where Mike and Henry were watching the late evening news, Larry asked Maria if Mike had reconsidered about reentering the Army Special Flight Program, Maria told him Mike had not mention a thing about the flight program since he and his Father had that talk.

As they entered the den, the TV was showing scenes of a man with a graying beard, clothed in black robes, and wearing a blue turban; he was speaking to a very large crowd of people who were cheering and chanting.

When Henry saw Larry entering the den he got up and offered his hand saying, “Captain Clark please come in and have a seat,” Larry took Henry’s hand and shook it; then while looking at Mike he smiled as he sat down.

Larry pointing at the TV asks, “What’s happening?”

Henry looking a little nervous said, “It doesn’t look good. Iran has a new leader and he’s got the entire county stirred up. Even the Syrians are following him. If he succeeds where the other leaders in that part of the world have failed for the last two thousand years, --well, --I hate to think what will happen to Israel and the other non-Islamic nations in that part of the world.”

“After the UN mandates to prohibit the sale of weapons to the Middle Eastern counties, they don’t have the military power to threaten anyone. Outside of Israel, no other country over there has the Hi Tech stuff to wage

a meaning full war. Even now, with Israel and us fighting Syria we have the upper hand and it's only going to be a matter of time now before Syria gives in," Larry responding to Henry's comment.

"I don't think it's going to be that simple," Henry retorts looking at Larry, "for one thing, Iran does have the money and resources to buy or build the Hi Tech weaponry needed to wage war. Second, --I think Iran will tell Syria to back down until the time is right to fight again, and then there's the Chinese they're the key Ingredient in this mix. As of now, the Chinese support the Tehran Pack, but will the Chinese still support that new leader and his followers? If they don't, then it's as you've said, they won't have the hardware to wage an effective war. But I think the Chinese will remain allied with them and provide the Hi Tech support as well."

Looking over at Mike, Larry says, "The reason I came over here was to talk to Mike and give him something that belongs to him."

Henry picks up the TV remote control and turns off the TV.

"Mike, --I wish you would reconsider," said Larry pleading, "to throw away a talent like yours is a sin. You were born to fly the EXR Helicopter. I think God put you here on earth to fight for his cause in the next war. God knows a world war is about to happen and he gave you the skills to fight. Just like the other kids in our country attending Special Flight Schools. God wants you too."

"Yeah, --right. If God had put me and those other kids here to fly and fight, then why did he take Russ? Russ would've become an ace in an F30 and nobody would've flown better than Russ. Tomorrow I'll be burying him. So don't tell me God wants me to fly an EXR Helicopter, because it's you and the Army that wants me to fly. So you can just forget it. I'm not going to fly your stupid Helicopters, --not now or ever. You had your chance last summer and you blew it. I'm tired and tomorrow I've got Russ's funeral to attend, so good night," Mike angrily tells Larry.

Then as Mike gets up to leave, Larry says as he holds out a small black box to Mike, "Here, --this is yours. You can do what you want with them."

Mike took the box from Larry and said after he opened the box and looked inside, "I really don't want them. Here, --you can give them to someone else," as Mike tries to hand the box back to Larry.

"Their yours and you earned them," said Larry rejecting the box, "I don't want em' back, --I've already got a pair."

“Here Dad, --looks like they’re now yours,” Mike tells his Father dropping the box in Henry’s lap, “I don’t have any use for em’.”

Now when Henry opened the box and saw the wings he said in a very gruff tone of voice, “Young man, --you come right here and take these, shame on you. My God, --do you know how many men would give their right arm to be able to earn these wings? Now you go and put them in a safe place until you decide to wear them.”

Mike reluctantly took the box that contained the wings and went to his room, there he put the box way in the back of his bottom dresser drawer; he wanted to bury them so deep he would forget where he had put them, and then he got ready for bed.

As Mike fell off to sleep, he could still hear his Dad and Larry talking in the den.

That night, Mike dreamed of Russ and all the fun times they had together, then that horrible scene of Russ lying dead on the creek bank came to him; he saw Russ’s blood running into the creek turning the water red.

Several times that night, Mike wakes up crying, rolls over and cries himself silently back to sleep.

Thursday came and Maria let Mike sleep in, because she had heard him crying during night and felt sorry for him.

It was ten thirty when she finally called for him to get up; he then got up and went to take a shower.

While Mike was showering, she laid out his good suit, because today was Russ’s funeral and Mike was one of the pallbearers.

Mike, Glen and the other pallbearers were at the funeral parlor by twelve thirty to get Russ’s coffin and take it to the church.

When Mike looked at Russ’s coffin it looked very heavy and he wondered if he had the strength to carry it.

Mike looked at the other pallbearers and they were much older and appeared to him to be much stronger, and now, Mike began to worry, because he didn’t want to drop Russ.

Mike walked over to Glen and said, “Russ’s coffin looks awful heavy. I hope I have the strength to carry it, because I wouldn’t want to drop him.”

“You’re not going to drop Russ, because there will be me and four other guys helping you, anyway, you’re not that small. You’re all grown up like me, --were men now.”

**Glen was right, because both Glen and Mike are fully-grown and at eighteen, they are about as tall as they were going to get.**

**Being in motorcycle sports, they weren't weak either.**

**Finally, it was time to take Russ to the church for the funeral service.**

**The coffin was on a cart with wheels and so they wheeled it out to the waiting hearse.**

**When Mike grabbed hold of the handle on the coffin and lifted it into the back of the hearse, he was surprised at how light it was.**

**Then Mike and the other pallbearers got into the hearse and went to the church.**

**After they pulled up to the front of the church and stopped, they got out, lifted the coffin out of the back of the hearse, and carried it up the church steps.**

**When they were inside the church, they put Russ's coffin on another cart and rolled the coffin up the aisle to the front where the Pastor waited.**

**Now Mike was on the right side and at the front of the coffin, Glen was just opposite of Mike on the left side of the coffin.**

**After the pallbearers had positioned the coffin at the front of the church, the pallbearers on the right, filed into the pews on the right side of the church and the pallbearers on the left, filed into the pews on the left side of the church.**

**Then all of the pallbearers sat down and waited for the service to start.**

**The United States Flag was draped over the coffin, as it stood there in the front of the church.**

**A few minutes later, the Pastor walked up next to the coffin and began the service.**

**The Pastor led the funeral congregation in prayer and hymns; after the last hymn was sung the Pastor walked over to the high podium and began the eulogy.**

**He spoke about how good Russ was and how much he will be missed, which made everyone feel good for having known Russ and sad on his leaving so soon; he told them, Russ is now with God and he is happy.**

**Then he bowed his head and so did everyone in church, and then he said a prayer and after he had finished everyone chorused, "Ah-men-n."**

When the service was finished the pallbearers got up, filed out of their pews, and stood by the coffin.

Mike, Glen and the rest of the pallbearers walked on each side of Russ's coffin as it was rolled down the aisle to the back of the church.

As they made their way to the back of the church, the Pastor walked behind the coffin followed by Russ's Parents, Relatives, close Friends and lastly by the rest of the congregation.

The pallbearers carried the coffin out of the church, down the steps and put it back into the hearse for the trip to the cemetery.

The Pastor got into the hearse with the Undertaker; this time, Mike, Glen and the other pallbearers got into the car behind the hearse.

Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood were in their car behind the pallbearers, and behind the Lockwood's were the relatives and friends of Russ.

The procession with their lights on slowly drove through town to the cemetery, and then slowly made their way up the winding cemetery road to the gravesite.

There was a large canopy over the grave and everyone followed the pallbearers as they carried the coffin and placed it on the device that's used to lower the coffin into the grave.

The Pastor began to read from his bible, everyone bowed their heads, and when he had finished, the United States Flag was removed and folded up and presented to Major Lockwood.

Mrs. Lockwood went up to Russ's coffin and placed a rose on it, and then the coffin was slowly lowered into the sarcophagus.

Major Lockwood stooped down and got a handful of dirt and tossed it into the grave on top of Russ's coffin; Mike and Glen also picked up a handful of earth and tossed it into the grave.

As the heavy concrete cover of the sarcophagus was lowered in place, they left the gravesite; Mrs. Lockwood was sobbing as she and the Major walked back to their car.

On the way back to his home, Mike couldn't believe it was all over.

It seemed like it was just yesterday when he and Russ were riding in the twenty-nine palms enduro and now, Russ was gone forever.

Mike recalled the old fortuneteller that he, Glen and Russ had visited at the amusement park and how the fortuneteller had foretold Russ's death and his future.

The old fortuneteller had read his palm and showed him the three wrinkles indicating the death of three love ones; She told him there would be a death in his family and two other deaths that will cause him great pain.

Mike looked at his right hand and saw only two wrinkles not the three shown to him by the fortuneteller; so he thought it must be his other hand.

Looking at his left hand it didn't have any wrinkles that even came close to the ones the old fortuneteller had shown him.

"It has to be this hand," Mike tells himself looking at his right hand.

Sure enough all the wrinkles were there, except now, he only sees two wrinkles instead of the three; one of the short wrinkles that hadn't touch the long one was missing!

"My God, --that missing line was Russ!" Mike exclaimed, and then he asked himself, as he sat there in shock, "I wonder whom the other two represent?"

Mike tried to think of whom the other short one might represent, but his mind kept telling him it was Glen; now Mike just couldn't bear the thought of Glen also dying, but the wrinkle touching the long one worried him even more, now whom could that one represent?

The old fortuneteller had said it was one of his family, his Dad, Mother, Brian or Jeff, but which one?

As they approached their home, Mike sat there in agony a tear slowly running down his cheek, because he could not bear the thought of losing Glen or anyone of his family.

For the rest of the day his mind kept replaying the old fortuneteller telling him his future.

He even had trouble keeping his mind on his studies, as he did his homework.

That night, Mike awoke from a nightmare of Glen dying in a fiery explosion in a F30 jet; he fell back to sleep dreaming of an angel telling him Glen wasn't going to die.

The angel told Mike, in the next war Glen was going to become an ace in a F30 jet, so Mike fell into a deep peaceful sleep.

## **CHAPTER 12 -- Xmas Homecoming**

Now as fall gave way to winter, Mike and Glen were doing just fine in school; Joel became a good friend of both Mike and Glen, he also became Nancy's boyfriend and they went out on several dates together.

Now Joel still doesn't know that Mike can fly a Helicopter, because neither Mike nor Glen had told him.

As December slowly ebb away, Christmas was once again on everyone's thoughts.

Ed Kiver, Mike's fellow Pilot at Manning Aviation, was getting his personal affairs in order, because he was going into the Army right after the holidays.

The war between Syria, the United States, and Israel was ending.

And just as Henry had predicted, Syria came to the United Nations to ask for a ceasefire; also, as Henry had predicted, the new leader in Iran had told Syria to stop fighting, so as the new year approached there once again seemed to be peace in the world.

Brian and his wife flew to Victorville to be with Henry and the family for the holidays.

With the easing of tensions in the Middle East, Brian no longer has to go overseas, so he was given the holidays off from his Flight Training job to be with his family.

Now Brenda, Brian's wife, was pregnant and was expecting in mid-summer, so everyone was excited and happy for Brian and Brenda; both Henry and Maria were overjoyed at the good news, because now they were going to become Grandparents.

As Christmas was drawing closer, Maria was wondering if Jeff would be coming home again this year from the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

She thought how nice it would be if everyone would be home again this year for Christmas.

It was two days before Christmas and everyone was sitting around the TV watching a Christmas story when a taxi pulled up and stopped; a young man dressed in a military uniform got out.

After he had paid the cab driver, he got a large box of presents from

the back seat, and then closed the taxi door and said Merry Christmas to the cab driver.

After the cab driver had returned the greeting, he drove away leaving the young man standing there.

The young man walked up to the door and rang the doorbell.

When they all heard the doorbell, everyone wondered who it could be this late in the evening.

Mike said, as he was the first to get up, "I'll get it. It's probably Larry Clark trying to get me into the Army again."

"Now you be nice to him, --remember it's Christmas," Maria tells him. "Ah' Ma, --I wish he would quit pestering me about joining the Army," Mike replies, with a scowl.

When Mike opens the door and sees Jeff standing there with a big smile on his face he about passes out.

"Well, --can I come in? Am I still part of this family or not?" Jeff asks, while still standing in the doorway.

"Yes, --you sure are," Mike responding, quickly getting his composure back, "we didn't think you were coming home this year. Mom is going to be real happy. Now the whole family is here."

Jeff comes into the house and Mike shakes his hand, and then Mike gives him a Brotherly hug.

"O' God Jeff, --I sure missed you," Mike tells him, "how long can you stay before you have to go back to the academy?"

"I don't have to be back until after the holidays," Jeff replies, and then like Brian had done last Christmas, Jeff goes and puts his box of presents under the tree.

As Jeff was putting his presents under the tree, Maria comes into the living room asking, "Mike, --who is here?"

Jeff gets up, turns, and says, "Hi Mom, --Merry Christmas."

Now when Maria sees Jeff she smiles and a tear runs down her cheek; Jeff goes over gives her a huge hug and a kiss.

Then Henry, Brian and Brenda enter the living room to see what was causing all the commotion.

"What's going on in here?" Henry asking as he enters the living room.

"Merry Christmas Dad, --it's sure nice to be home again," Jeff piping up and going over to shake Henry's hand.



As Jeff is greeting and shaking Henry's hand, Mike announces, "Jeff, --Brian's going to be a Dad. Brenda is going to have a baby."

Jeff smiles and extends his hand to Brian telling him and asking, "Congratulation, --when is the big day?"

"The baby is due sometime in midsummer," Brian replies now smiling with pride, and then he adds, "now don't you and Mike start carrying on about being uncles like you two did last Christmas," then everyone starts to laugh as Mike's face starts to turn red.

"That seems such a long time ago," Jeff remarking, "a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then, --anyway, --I think it's going to be great to be an uncle and I can't wait. God, --isn't it amazing how just one year can make ones outlook on life change. I guess I'm growing old," they all smiled and nod.

Now Jeff's remark made Henry stop and take a good look at his family and thinks, as he looks at his three Sons standing there laughing and talking, "To think that a couple of years ago these men were my little boys fighting and arguing with each other. Now look at them, --three grown men and my oldest with a wife and soon a child of his own," now Henry felt old, but he also felt very proud, because he had done his job as a Father very well.

"Well Brian, --I suppose you're going to teach your new Son how to fly an F30?" Jeff asked smiling.

"Hey, --it might be a girl, but wouldn't it be great if it were a boy," Brian replies beaming with pride.

"I can't promise it will be a boy, but I'll try," says Brenda after putting her hand on Brian's arm, and then lays her head on his shoulder and looks at him smiling.

"It has been a long trip and I can't wait to sleep in my bed again," says Jeff with big yawn.

"My goodness I'll go and get your bed ready!" Maria exclaims, "You'll be sharing Mike's room, --if that's all right?"

"That'll be fine. Just like old times, --sleeping in the same room with Mike," said Jeff nodding, and then he remarks looking at Mike, "now that you're all grown up, --I hope you don't snore."

"I sure hope you don't snore either," said Mike looking at Jeff while everyone laughs.

"I think we should all turn in," Henry suggesting, "because

tomorrow is going to be a big day. It's going to be Christmas Eve and we got lots of catching up to do," so everyone agrees and goes to their rooms.

Jeff awakes on Christmas Eve morning to the aroma of fresh coffee and fresh baked biscuits; he gets up and follows his nose to the kitchen where Maria and Brenda are busy making breakfast.

Henry and Brian are already sitting at the table waiting for the bacon and eggs to finish cooking.

Jeff sits down next to Brian, and then Maria asks him what he wants for breakfast?

Jeff asks while briskly rubbing his hands together, "How about two eggs over easy with a couple of strips of bacon and I'll also have a couple of those mouthwatering biscuits and a big glass of cold milk."

As Maria serves the men their bacon and eggs she says, "Now don't eat all the biscuits save some for us and Mike."

As Brian eats a luscious biscuit he exclaims, "Ma'--these are good!"

"Don't thank me it was your wife who made them," Brian's jaw dropped in amazement and his eyes got large.

"You lucky stiff," says Jeff patting Brian on his back, "why didn't you tell me Brenda could cook this good? No wonder you kept running off to see her, --I would,ve too," then everyone starts to laugh except poor Brian, because he never knew that his wife could cook this good.

"Honey, --I didn't know you knew how to bake biscuits. Why didn't you tell me? My God Hon'--these are awful good biscuits," Brian telling his wife after regaining his composure.

"I didn't," Brenda replying and smiling with pride, "Mom taught me how this morning and it's really easy, so we'll have them every morning if you like."

"You bet we'll have em' every morning. That's if you can make em' like this," said Brian nodding.

Jeff remarks diving into the plate of eggs and bacon, "Now I know why I miss home so much, --it's because of Mom's cooking."

"Jeff, --you still eat like when you were a little boy, --shoving it down without chewing it first. Now you slow down and chew each bite. We can't have you choking to death. What will the Air Force say if you died with a mouth full of food?" Maria scolding, and then everyone started to laugh again and Jeff ate slower.

While they're still laughing, Mike comes walking into the kitchen rubbing the top of his head asking, "What's everyone laughing about?"

"Well, --if it isn't old sleepy head. Welcome to the new day," Jeff teasing Mike.

"Well Air Force, --just because you've learned to get up with the birds doesn't mean that I have too. By the way, --you snore. I had a hell of a time falling to sleep last night. Tonight I'm going to bed first," Mike retorts, looking at Jeff.

"My name is Jeff not Air Force and I'll thank you to use it unless you want me to start calling you Army," says Jeff looking at Mike with a scow.

"I'm not in the Army, so why would you want to call me that?" Mike asks perplexed standing there motionless.

"It's true you're not now, but I've have ten bucks that says by this time next year you will be."

Mike asks, as he sits down to eat breakfast, "What makes you think that I'll join the Army? You know that I have plans to go to college after I graduate next spring."

Jeff grabs Mike's hand and holds the out stretched hand up saying, "Because of this," now everyone is puzzled by Jeff's comment and actions.

"I don't understand what my hand has to do with the Army?" Mike asked looking very puzzled.

"Because this hand knows how to fly a Helicopter and the Army needs every Pilot they can get."

Mike jerks his hand free from Jeff's grasp saying, "You sound just like Clark and who told you that I can fly a Helicopter?"

"Mom wrote and told me all about how you were learning to fly Helicopters. She also wrote and told me you have a commercial ticket with an instrument rating. I'm real proud of you Mike now that's some accomplishment."

"What else did they write?" Mike asked looking at his Mother and then turning to look at Henry.

Jeff inquires, as he is now wondering if he had missed something, "That's all, --why? Is there something else I should know?"

Mike responds, as Maria sets a bowl of hot steaming oatmeal in front of him, "No, --you got it all. Boy this looks good and I'm starved."

Mike looks for the sugar and milk, after finding them, he sprinkles sugar on the oatmeal, and then after pouring some milk on it he stirs up the

mess and starts to eat it, as both Brian and his Father look at him, and then at Jeff.

Now Jeff, seeing Brian and Henry looking at him, begins to sense there's something he hasn't been told and with a puzzled look, he asks, "Why is it that I somehow get the feeling there's something you haven't told me?"

Mike looks up from his oatmeal and after swallowing a mouthful of the mush he says, "You're imagining things, --there's nothing you don't already know."

"That's not true Mike," said Brian piping up, "there is something Jeff doesn't know, so, --why don't you tell him or should I tell him?"

Mike looks over at Jeff as he shovels another spoonful of oatmeal into his mouth; Jeff looks back in anticipation of the forthcoming news.

Mike points to Brian with his spoon and after he swallows the mouthful of food he says, "Whatever the news is, --you can tell Jeff," he again shoves his spoon into the oatmeal bowl and scoops up another spoonful and shovel's it into his mouth.

Jeff turns to look at Brian with an inquisitive look on his face; Brian looks back at Jeff and asks, "How much have they told you about EXR class Helicopters at the academy?"

Mike chokes on the mouthful of oatmeal and starts to cough; everyone looks at him.

As Jeff wallops him on the back Maria asks in a scolding tone, "Mike, --haven't you learned to eat without gulping your food down? Now see what happens when you eat too fast, --it goes down the wrong tube."

Mike stops coughing, but Jeff is still whacking him on the back; Mike turns and gruffly tells Jeff, "Will you cut it out!"

Jeff stops, smiles and says, "Only trying to help. I don't want my little Brother to die choking on his breakfast. Anyway, I figure I'm doing the Army a favor. Can't have their future Pilot die just yet."

"You're sounding just like Clark, --so bug off," Mike retorts giving Jeff a dirty look.

Once again, Brian asks Jeff the same question; Jeff responds, "Yeah, --we had a whole quarter on them. Why are you so interested in EXR Helicopters?"

"Because Bro--I'm leading up to something that's going to knock your socks off. So tell me, --what do you think of em'?"

“With a highly skilled Pilot at the controls, they’re deadly. We’re told there isn’t a fixed wing fighter that can go head to head with one and win, --although the B80 Bomber with a good gun crew can hold its own in a fight. Anyway, --we fly to high for an encounter with one. They stay below thirty thousand, because they have problems flying above flight level 300,” Jeff replies very puzzled, and then he asks, “now will you tell me what’s this all about, --and why all the interest in EXR Helicopters?”

Brian asks, as he is again looking at Mike while Jeff is looking bewildered, “Well Mike, --how about it? Do you want to tell Jeff?”

“Go ahead, --you know you’re dying to be the one to tell him, --it makes no difference to me.”

“Come on you guys, --tell me what’s this all about?” Jeff asks begging and wondering what the big secret is.

Brian is now smiling and looking at Mike, and then he turns to Jeff and tells him, “There’s no secret at least not anymore. What we all want to tell you is, --Mike is one of those highly skilled EXR Fighter Pilots. That’s why Captain Clark keeps nagging him about joining the Army. Can you believe a seventeen year old can out gun three Top Gun Pilots? Well, --Mike did just that little over a year ago.”

Mike sat there blushing while Jeff sat there in shock; Brian looks at his Dad and smiles, and then he continues, “He’d gotten all of his training from Larry Clark. Remember when we lived in Roseville, and Mike was working as a Ground-handler at the airport, well, --he was doing a lot more than just washing, refueling and parking Airplanes. Captain Clark was training him as a Helicopter Pilot, --an EXR Helicopter Pilot to be exact. Do you remember when we thought Mike was up to something, --well, --he sure was.”

“Whew, --that’s some awful deep stuff,” said Jeff while looking at Mike, “Mike’s an EXR Fighter Pilot, --huh, --awesome!”

Mike who was sitting there finishing his breakfast, and after listening to his Brother spout off about him, finally spoke up, “Brian’s exaggerating, --I’m not a Fighter Pilot. To be a Fighter Pilot you have to be in the military and I’m not. As for flying a EXR Helicopter well, --so what, --any Helicopter Pilot can fly one, because they fly no different than any other Helicopter.”

“Well, --how about a F30?” Brian asked, and then he remarks, “it’s just like any other jet Airplane, but it takes special training and skills to fly

one. No average Joe can even begin to fly an F30 fighter. Just like no average, Joe can fly an EXR Helicopter. So Mike, --you can say what you want, but you're an EXR Fighter Pilot. Why do you think Captain Clark keeps nagging you about joining the Army's special flight training program? Well, --you think he's nagging now, --just wait until after you graduate this spring he's going to be after you like a bee after a flower."

Now Henry who was sitting there quietly all this time speaks up, as he looks at Mike, "Whither you know it or not. Clark and the Army invested a lot of time and money in you and they're not going to let you get away that easy. So, --if you really don't like the Army then you'd better prepare yourself for a long siege, because I think Captain Clark is coming for you and he'll not give up easily."

"Yeah, well, let him try," Mike replies, "he doesn't know Mike Troff. I'll never give in, --he's just wasting his time. Besides, --if war breaks out he'll have other things to worry about, rather than trying to recruit me."

"That's the whole point, Mike," says Henry pointing at Mike, "if war does break out this year, then he'll make an even harder effort to recruit you. I guess what you don't understand is, --we'll need every Fighter Pilot we can get and that goes double for your type of aircraft. So he's going to try even harder than he's doing now. You just might as well give in and join up, because in the end, --you will anyway."

"We'll see," Mike retorted, "anyway, --we are not at war yet, so he's just wasting his time."

Jeff breaks in as he remembers something, "Say, --doesn't Fighter Pilots have handles? You know, --a call. How about Mike, —does he have a call sign?"

"Oh yes he sure does, --its Pegasus," Brian replies.

Jeff now looking somewhat surprised asks, "Say, --isn't that the handle of that acrobatic Helicopter Pilot in the Airshow two years ago?"

"Sure was and guess who the Pilot was?" Brian asked nodding, smiling and pointing at Mike.

"I don't believe it," Jeff responds looking very surprised, "Mike was flying that black and red Helicopter?"

"Well, --you had better believe it, because that was Mike flying that Helicopter," says Brian firmly.

"But I saw someone else get out when it landed in front of the

stands,” Jeff retorts, and then Brian explained about Mike returning to the stands, so no one would know it was him who flew that afternoon.

“That’s sounds like Mike all right,” said Jeff with a sigh.

Now there’s a moment of silence, then Jeff once more speaks, “Pegasus--say, isn’t that the white winged horse from Greek Mythology?”

“That’s right and I might add a perfect call for an EXR Fighter Pilot. A horse that can fly fits a Helicopter to a tee,” Henry responds smiling.

Mike has now finished eating his breakfast and says pushing himself away from the table, “Well, --you guys can talk all day about flying. Me--I’ve got things to do in town. So if you don’t mind I’ll leave you talking about EXR Helicopters and jets,” he gets up and as he is about to leave the kitchen Maria tells him, “Be home by five. We have Christmas Eve services tonight and I want the whole family to attend.”

“Sure Mom, --I’ll be back way before five,” Mike tells her, as he starts to leave the room, “I’ve got some last minute shopping to do and I want to see Pam and Glen.”

Jeff’s eyes open when he hears Pam’s name mention and asks, “Did I here right? Mike’s got a girlfriend. Now don’t tell me we’re going to be hearing another engagement announced this Christmas.”

Mike stops, goes over to Jeff, and says with some arrogance, “No, --I’m not going to marry Pam just yet. At least I’ve got a girl, —not unlike a jet jock I know,” Mike leans over and whispers in Jeff’s ear, “sometime you must tell me how one has intercourse with a jet.”

As Mike straightens up, Jeff gives him a dirty look; Mike now walks out of the room smiling.

Henry asks Jeff what was all of the whispering about, to which Jeff replies, “Oh, --it wasn’t nothing,” feeling slighted by Mike’s remark.

Jeff is still sitting at the kitchen table after everyone had gone and Maria is doing the breakfast dishes; Jeff gets up and goes over to help her by drying the dishes.

After a few minutes he asks, “Mom, --am I homely?”

Maria was taken by surprise with this question, stops washing and looks at him asking, “Why in heavens do you think you’re homely?”

Jeff answers looking at the sink full of washed dishes, “Because I don’t have a girl like Mike. Look at Brian, he’s already married and he’s only a year older than me.”

Maria wipes her hands, puts her hands on his shoulders, and tells

him, “Now look at me? Quite frankly, I don’t know why you don’t have a girl, --it’s not because of way you look, because you are handsome. In fact, —you’re better looking than your Brothers, and you know how nice looking they are. I think maybe it’s because you never really tried. The only thing you’ve ever had on your mind was flying. I seem to remember a girl who was always chasing after you in high school, but you always kept avoiding her.”

Jeff started to smile as he remembered the girl in high school that always followed him everywhere he went; now he wished he’d paid more attention to her.

Then he wondered if she is still around, but she is in Roseville and he’s here in Victorville.

As he finished helping with the dishes, he kept thinking about the girl in high school, and then he went into the living room and joined Henry and Brian who were watching TV.

Mike ran into Glen and Joan at the shopping mall; Mike was looking for something to get Pam for Christmas, because she was the only one left on his list and he wanted to get her something special.

Mike asked Joan if she knew what Pam would like for Christmas, Joan smiled, looked at Glen, and then looked at Mike and said, “You, --she wants you for Christmas.”

“You’re saying she wants me spend Christmas with her?” Mike asked looking very confused.

“No silly. She wants you to become engaged to her. She wants you to ask her to marry you,” Joan tells him giggling.

Mike just stood there in shock, because he didn’t know what to say or do; he did like Pam a lot and someday he would like to marry her, but not now.

Mike finally found himself and said, “I can’t marry her now. We’re still in high school and I’m planning on going to college after I graduate. What I’m I going to do? I like her a lot, but I don’t want to marry right now and I don’t want to hurt her feelings.”

“I’m sure she’ll understand if you tell her about your plans,” said Glen looking at his friend; Mike nods, and then they start walking down the aisle with Mike looking for that right item to give Pam.

As they were walking, they came to a counter with a display of amulets and there amongst the amulets hung a gold amulet with the Greek



letters alpha, omega, and infinity.

Mike holding the amulet in his hand asked Joan if Pam would like it?

Joan told him it was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen and Pam would love it.

Mike looked at the price and it was fifty dollars; he let out a sigh and said, "God it's expensive, but for Pam, --I'll buy it."

Mike told the clerk behind the counter he wanted to buy the amulet and have it gift wrapped.

After Mike had given the clerk his last fifty dollars, the clerk told him an engraved card was also included with the purchase; the clerk looking at Mike asks, "Sir, --what would you like to have the card say?"

Mike stood there with a blank look on his face, because he couldn't think of anything.

Then his face lit up, as an inspiration came to him.

He looked at the clerk and said with a big grin, "I want you to write on the card, 'The First, The Last and Forever Love Pam from Mike'. That should do it, --I think. I sure hope she likes it?"

Looking surprised at hearing Mike's words Glen tells him, "I don't know about you, but that sounds like a proposal to me."

"Well, --it doesn't sound like a proposal to me," Mike responding; a few minutes later, he takes the neatly wrapped small package from the clerk and suddenly adds, "Even if it does, --that's how I feel about Pam. I hope she feels the same way about me," then they walked out of the mall.

Mike tells Glen, just before he drives off, that he'll be over to see him tomorrow.

After supper, Mike's whole family gathers around the Christmas tree.

They sing carols and later they exchanged gifts; at ten, they get ready to attend Christmas Eve services in church.

Inside the church, like last year, Maria gave thanks for having her family home for Christmas and like last year Henry, Brian and Jeff are wearing their military uniforms, but unlike last year, Maria wasn't worried about her men, because the threatening war clouds were dissipating; she was thankful for the wonderful Christmas season they will enjoy this year and the prospect of a bright and peaceful new year.

It was after two on Christmas morning when they got home from the Christmas Eve services; they were laughing and talking about how beautiful the church was decorated and how wonderful the singing was.

Maria was the last to turn in and after she had shut off the living room light; the room was aglow with the twinkling colored lights from the Christmas tree.

She stood there in the doorway, admired the scene, and felt wonderful, because this was going to be a wonderful Christmas.

She then went and joined Henry in her bedroom and she fell off to sleep smiling.

The entire Troff family partook in and enjoyed the large Christmas Dinner that day; the table was covered with all kinds of wonderful foods.

They all ate until they had stuffed themselves until they couldn't eat anymore.

Henry, Brian and Jeff went into the living room to talk and reminisce about past Christmases and to enjoy the nuts and candy.

Mike went to his room and got his box of presents; he then put on his coat, gloves and left to see Bob, Glen and Pam.

After Mike had gone, the women joined Henry, Brian and Jeff in the living room.

Mike's first stop was at Glen's home to pick him up, and then the both of them went to get Pam and Joan; next, they headed for Bob Manning's house, because after Bob's wife had died several years ago he didn't have anyone to help him celebrate Christmas.

They pulled up and stopped in front of Bob's house, got out, and walk up to the front door; Mike knocks on the door a minute or so later, Bob opens the door and altogether they say, "Merry Christmas Bob," he smiles back and returns the greeting and asks them to come inside.

They all go into his living room where he has a large Christmas tree beautifully decorated, and then everyone exchange Christmas gifts.

Now everyone had given and received a gift from each other except for Pam; now she hadn't received anything from Mike and was beginning to feel bad.

Then Mike goes over to his coat and as everyone watches he gets the small package, returning to her, he hands it to her saying, "Merry Christmas Pam. I sure hope you like it."

She opens it and when she sees the amulet and reads the card, she begins to cry.

Now Mike doesn't know what to make of this and thinks she doesn't like his gift, so he looks at her and says, "I'm sorry you don't like it. I didn't know what else to get you."

With tears in her eyes, she puts her arms around his neck and whispers in his ear, "Oh thank you Mike, --it's the best present that I've ever received."

Mike at first was taken by surprised, but after she had spoken those words he smiled, and then he put his arms around her and they both kissed.

For the remainder of that afternoon, they laughed, talked and sung carols.

After eating Christmas Supper with Bob, it was finally time to leave.

As Mike and his friends got ready to leave, Bob told them how thankful he was for having them spent Christmas Day with him and after they told him how much they enjoyed spending the afternoon with him they said goodbye to Bob, got into their car, and drove away.

After dropping Glen, Joan, and Pam off at their homes, Mike finally arrived back at his home; as he pulled up and parked the car he felt good for having spent this Christmas with Bob.

Now the thought of making Bob's Christmas a merry one was a nice feeling; he was also still having those same strange feelings when Pam had embraced him after he had given her the amulet and so, as he walked into the house he felt great.

For the rest of the Day he spent Christmas with his own family and they all had an enjoyable time.

The Holidays were finally drawing to a close as New Year's Eve was rapidly approaching.

Brian and Jeff were making plans to return to their duty stations.

Finally, the New Year came and they all celebrated the passing of the Old Year and the arrival of the New Year.

Three days later, they all saw Jeff off to his School in Denver, and then it was Brian's and Brenda's turn, for they also had to return to their jobs in San Diego; now the house was again empty with only Mike and his Parents living there.

The next day was Mike's first day of school after the long holiday season.

## **CHAPTER 13 -- Last Weeks Of High School**

As winter was finally giving way to spring, Mike was thinking about graduation, but mostly, he was thinking about the forth-coming Prom.

It's early April and the cactus in the desert are in full bloom; Mike and Glen spent some of their free time riding their bikes in the desert amongst the fragrant blooming cactus.

The prom is going to be held in the evening on the second Saturday of April; graduation was set for the last week in May.

Mike's last days of high school were fast winding down and as the day of the Prom drew closer, Mike was looking forward to that evening with Pam.

The day of the prom had finally arrived, and after having rented a formal outfit, Mike and was in his room getting dressed.

When he was ready to leave for the Prom, he walked into the living room where his parents were sitting; his parents looked at him stunned.

After seeing them sitting there looking back at him with stunned expressions, Mike asked, "Mom, --Dad, --is there something wrong?"

His Mother regained her composure and replied, "Oh--no. It's just that you're so handsome. We didn't know what to say."

"Do you think Pam will like me? I'm afraid my red hair may not go with this outfit. What do you think?" Mike asked and again his Mother reassured him, "Everything is just fine. Your hair is the best part. You look stunning. You're going to be the best looking guy at the Prom. I think Pam is going to be very happy when she sees you. I still can't believe we have such nice looking Sons."

Mike walks over to the mirror that hangs next to the china cabinet and comments, as he looks at himself in the mirror, because he was still concerned about his red hair, "I still think my hair is too red. Why couldn't I've had black hair like Glen? Now he's the handsome one and he's going to be the best-looking guy at the prom. Pam is going to hate me, --I just know it, and she won't want to dance with me. There I'll be, --standing around with no one to dance with, --O' God Mom, --what I'm I going to do?"

While Mike kept talking about how bad he looked, while looking at himself in the mirror, Maria went into her bedroom and got her camera.

She returned to the living room and said, “Come over here and quit saying how bad you look. For between you and Glen it’s going to be a toss-up as to who’s better looking. I think you two are going to be the best looking guys there. Now stand over there by those flowers. I want to take your picture, because I’ll probably never get you dressed up like this again.”

After Maria had taken several pictures, Mike goes to get the corsage he had bought yesterday, and then he gets into his car and drives off to pick up Pam.

After Mike had pulled up in front of her house and stopped, he gets out, walks up to the front door and rings the doorbell; Pam’s Father opens the door and Mike nervously asks, “Sir, --I’m Mike Troff. Is Pam ready? I came to escort her to the Prom tonight.”

Mr. Taylor now smiling says, “Yes, --she’s ready and I’ll tell her you’re here,” Mr. Taylor walks away to tell Pam her date has arrived leaving the door ajar; Mike can now hear Mr. Taylor call to Pam, “Honey, there’s a really good looking young man waiting on our doorstep. He’s saying you’re his date for the Prom tonight, so you had better hurry up and not make him wait or he’ll leave. Now you don’t want to let a good looking guy like that get away,” Pam was now starting to wonder who could it be?

Now Pam had never heard her Father say anything like that about Mike before and was now beginning to get worried, because she wanted to go to the Prom with Mike, so now what will she do?

Now Pam didn’t want to upset her Father by not going out with the young man that was waiting at the door, because she figured her Father had arranged this date for her, so she wouldn’t go with Mike.

The more she thought about it the angrier she became at her Father for interfering in her personal life.

Pam now knew what she had to do, she would keep her date with Mike; she would go to the door and tell this young man, whom ever he was, that she already had a date for the Prom.

Pam walked to the door to tell the young man waiting there, she was sorry and she already had a date.

Pam opened the door and started to speak; Mike was now standing there with his back to the open door looking at his car.

“I’m sorry,” said Pam, “but I’ve already got...” and before she could finish Mike turned and looked at her asking, “Are you telling me that you already have another date for the Prom tonight?”

Now when Pam saw it was Mike she about passed out.

“I knew my red hair would ruin my night,” said Mike with disappointment, and then with bowed head he turned and started down the steps towards his car.

Pam was now in utter shock at what was transpiring and started after him, and once she had caught up to him she said pleading, “O’ God Mike, --I didn’t know it was you. Please don’t go without me!”

Mike turns and looks at her standing there; she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

He walks up to her and asks, “Are you really sure you want to go to the Prom with me? You’re so beautiful I wouldn’t blame you for breaking the date, so you can go to the Prom with someone else. I know that I’m not all that good looking. So if you want to call it off, --it’s Ok with me.”

“Call it off! You’ve got to be kidding!” She exclaimed, and then looking at him she said, “And what do you mean, --you’re not good looking. You’re about the most handsome guy around. Even my Dad thinks you’re handsome. That’s why I answered the door that way. I thought Dad had gotten someone else to take me to the Prom. He has never said anything like that about you before, so if you’re not going to the Prom, then I’m not going either.”

Mike smiled and held his hand out to her, she took his hand in her’s and together they walked to his waiting car.

Mike opened the passenger door of the car and she got in, he then closed the car door and quickly went around the front of the car and got in on the driver’s side; after he started the car they drove off to the Prom.

When they arrived at the high school, where the Prom was being held, and found a place to park the car, Mike reached into the glove box and withdrew the corsage which he had placed there and handed it to her.

Pam smiled and kissed him, and then he helped her pin the corsage on.

After helping her out of the car, they both walked to the school and went into the gym; the gym was decorated with colored balloons, streamers, and paper cutouts.

At one end of the gym there was a stage for the band; the band was setting up when Mike and Pam entered the gym.

Once they were in the gym, they stop and look around for Glen, Joan, Joel and Nancy.

Nancy was the first to spot them and she waves and calls to them; when Pam sees Nancy, she waves back.

Mike and Pam went and joined their friends.

Finally, the band was ready and they began to play, and then everyone started to dance.

For the rest of the evening the senior class danced and everyone had a good time; it was about eleven that evening when everyone started leaving for home.

Mike and Pam pulled up in front of her house and stopped; Mike gets out, goes around and opens the car door for her, after she gets out, they both walk to her front door.

“Pam, --this was the best Prom ever and you were wonderful. I never knew that a formal affair like this could be so much fun,” Mike told her smiling, as they stood under the light on her porch near the front door; she smiles back at him and he wants to kiss her, but he was a little bashful.

Mike was looking at the porch floor when she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

Looking into her eyes, Mike slowly leans over to her, she meets him halfway and as their lips meet, they began to kiss.

Then they embraced each other and continued to kiss and later, after she had gone into her house, Mike walks back to his car feeling wonderful; and as he walks, there was a bounce in his step.

When Mike pulled into his driveway, the house was dark and when he entered the living room, he didn't bother to turn on the light, so he continued to his bedroom and got ready for bed.

As Mike slept, he relived that night with Pam at the Prom and dreamt of dancing with her and the good night kiss afterward.

He could see her soft lips meeting his and the wonderful feeling he had when they were kissing; as night gave way to the light of early morning, Mike peacefully slept in, because it was Sunday.

The days flew by until it was a week and a half to graduation.

Mike was in his fourth hour computer class when the bell sounded the end of the class; his computer teacher asked him to wait, because he had something to discuss with him.

The computer teacher was smiling when he looked at Mike, Mike wondering what he wanted and asked, “You want to see me Mister Rinn?”

“Yes Mike, --I do,” Mr. Rinn replied, and then he asked, “have you

given any thought about studying computer science in college?"

"Yes Mister Rinn, --I have."

"What college have you decided on?" Mr. Rinn asked; now Mike stood there with a blank look on his face, because he never gave a thought about any particular college.

Mr. Rinn impatiently asked again waiting for Mike to answer, "Well Mike, --have you decided on a college?"

"None as yet, --I suppose one that's close to home, --maybe the local Junior College here in Victorville," Mike giving him a quick answer.

Mr. Rinn shaking his head said, "I was thinking more on the lines of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena."

Mike looking stunned exclaims, "I can't afford to go there! I'm not smart enough!"

"Believe me Mike, --your smart enough. Your grade point average is good enough to get you in, but I'll need to work with you a bit, so you can pass the tricky entrance exam. It shouldn't take much, but I would still feel a lot better if we could go over a few things to better prepare you."

Mike says after letting out a lung full of air, "Ok, --but I still don't have the cash to go there."

"There are still four scholarships available and I don't see any reason why you can't apply for one," said Mr. Rinn, and then he asks, "so, --how about it? Do you want to go to the California Institute of Technology?"

"Ok, --let's give it a try," Mike replied nodding.

Mr. Rinn tells Mike, as he changes Mike's class schedule, "I want you, starting on Monday, to go to room fifty eight for your sixth hour class. We are switching your sixth hour class with your fourth hour, so you'll have computer class at two thirty. I've already cleared it with the Principle, because I figured you would say yes to college. I believe your fourth hour will now be your science class. So, --for the last week of school you'll join nine other students in room fifty eight in preparation for college."

Meanwhile, as they were talking the classroom was filling with students for the next class and Mike was now starting to get a little nervous, because it was getting late and he still had to get to his gym class, and then the bell sounded the start of the fifth hour classes.

Mike inquired, as he was now worried about being late for his next class, "Now what am I going to do? I'm late for my gym class."

Mr. Rinn got a slip of paper, wrote a note, and gave it to Mike



saying, "Take this to the office. They'll give you an excuse to give to your gym teacher, so he'll know why you're late today. Now you better be off and I'll see you Monday at two thirty in room fifty eight," so Mike left the computer classroom and headed for the office with Mr. Rinn's note.

He was fifteen minutes late when he got to his gym class; his gym teacher read the note and told him it was Ok for being late today, and then he told Mike to go to the locker room to change into his gym suit and go into the gym and join the rest of the class.

Mike starts his last week of high school on Monday, the following Monday is Memorial Day and the following Thursday is graduation.

While in free study period, Mike thought about these last few days of High School and began to have mixed emotions about it all.

Mike felt excited at the thought of being out of school and being able to make his own decisions, but at the same time he felt strange and empty like something is about to end; he was now beginning to realize a part of his life was coming to an end, a time in his life that he would never be able to experience again.

As the realization of it all began to sink in the bell sounded the end of Mike's third period; he was now feeling a little melancholy, as he walked out of the free study classroom.

Mike headed for his locker to put his books away, because it was now noon and time for lunch.

After lunch, Mike had a few minutes before the bell sounds the start of the afternoon classes, so he sat on the lawn under a tree thinking about this past school year.

Mike remembered his friend Russ who was killed in the fall when they were riding motorcycles in the state forest; a tear ran down his cheek as he thought about Russ and the prom and graduation he would never experience.

Mike puts his head in his arms and a few minutes later the bell sounds the beginning of the afternoon classes.

Mike gets up, walks back into the school, goes to his locker and gets his books for his fourth hour science class; after closing his locker and locking it he heads down the hall to the science class.

When Mike walks into the science classroom he stops at the lab bench in the front of the room; there he tells the science teacher he's been transferred from the sixth hour class.

Mr. Copeman, the science teacher, tells Mike to take an empty seat in front of Joel Reese.

As Mike makes his way to his seat, Mr. Copeman goes into the next room.

When Mr. Copeman was out of the room, Mark Doubleday, who was sitting five seats ahead of Joel starts to hassle Mike as he walks, “Hey, —carrot top, --you still like fly-boys. I hear you had to bury one, because he upped and died on ya’ now ain’t that a shame. Just goes to show that fly-boys don’t know how to ride bikes, --now ain’t that so--carrot top?”

Mike stops dead in his tracks and turns around to face Mark.

Now Mark’s remark has struck a nerve; Mike reaches down, grabs Mark by his shirt, yanks him up, and angrily tells him, as he’s mad as hell, “You listen to me ass hole. Don’t you ever say anything like that about Russ again or I’ll beat the livin’ crap out of ya’.”

Mike’s fist was now in Marks face right next to his nose; Mark was now showing signs of fear and nodding to Mike’s words.

“As far as Russ knowing how to ride, --I don’t see you in the state enduro standings. He was a damn good rider and one hell of a Pilot and don’t you ever forget it.” Mike firmly told him in a very gruff tone.

Mark still in Mike’s hold and in a wimpy tone replies, “Ok, --Ok, --so he can ride. I’m sorry I said that about him. I’ll promise not to say anything like that about him again.”

Mike warns him as he now starts to relax his hold on Mark, “I don’t ever want to hear you make derogatory statements about Pilots again, --you got that! And that includes the word fly-boy. Anyway, --the word is discriminatory it excludes women Pilots. One last thing, --my name is Mike Troff, --not carrot top.”

Then Mike lets go of Mark’s shirt and Mark falls back into his seat.

Mr. Copeman then reenters the classroom asking, “What’s going on in here? Mister Troff, --why aren’t you in your seat?”

Mike quickly goes and sits down; Joel leans forward and whispers to Mike, “Good man. I wish you could fly like Glen and me especially after the way you stood up for us Pilots,” as he was now very impressed with Mike, and then he reaches over and pats him on the shoulder.

Mike looks over his shoulder at Joel and smiles thinking, “If only he knew about me flying Helicopters.”

Mike smiling turns around and faces the front of the classroom.

Mr. Copeman walks around to front of the lab bench and sits on the

edge, and then he begins to speak, “As you all know this is the last full week of school, so I thought we could study about something that we all know about or do we? Anyway, --it’s something that I find enjoyable, --and for one of you here in class it’s also fun, and by that, I mean we’re going to learn a few things about aircraft and how they fly. If we have enough time, we’ll see how a Pilot can fly them. We’ll also learn a few things about how airports operate, so a Pilot can safely take off and land, as well as the instruments in the aircraft that allow him to do this.”

Mr. Copeman looks at Mark and said, “Mister Doubleday, --I hear your Dad has enrolled you in flight school at the airport.”

Now everyone in the class was looking at Mark especially after the scene he had made with Mike.

Mark of course felt everyone looking at him and he blushed and slid down in his seat; Joel and Mike were stunned by the announcement, because they never figured, Mark likes to fly especially after that scene with Mike.

Joel again leaned forward and whispered to Mike, “Now he’s talking about something that I know about. Hell, --this next week is going to be a piece of cake. I’ll pass and I won’t even have to try hard. God must be watching over me.”

Now Mr. Copeman’s sharp ears heard Joel bragging about how easy this next course of study will be; now what Joel didn’t know was, Mr. Copeman already knew all about Joel being a Pilot, and he also knew that Joel was enrolled in the Marine Special Flight School to learn how to fly the F30 fighter.

Mr. Copeman had a little surprise for Joel and he was about ready to spring it on the unsuspecting Pilot.

Mr. Copeman looked at Joel and said with a smirk on his face, “If you remember, --I said there was another person in this class who found flying to be enjoyable,” Joel sees Mr. Copeman eyeing him and he starts to blush and slides down in his seat.

Mike turns around and when he sees Joel sliding down in the seat he whispers, “Hey Joel, --don’t be bashful. You shouldn’t be ashamed of being a Pilot, --you know you love flying”

Now after hearing Mike say those words, Joel straightens up in his seat and whispers back now feeling proud, “Who say’s I’m ashamed? I’m proud to be a Pilot and I do like to fly. Someday, and it isn’t going to long

now, I'll be flying a F30 fighter," Mike smiles at Joel and turns around to face the science teacher.

"Isn't that correct Mister Reese?" Mr. Copeman asked. "You do like to fly don't you?"

"Yes Mister Copeman, --I'm a Pilot and I love flying. By this fall I'll be a Marine Fighter Pilot and I'll be flying an F30," Joel proudly replies nodding his head.

"I'm real proud of you Joel," Mr. Copeman tells him smiling. "I know you'll make a great Fighter Pilot. For your information I'm also a Pilot and we Pilots have to stick together."

Now everyone in class was surprised by what they just heard especially both Joel and Mike, because they never knew Mr. Copeman could fly.

Joel sits there with the biggest grin that you've ever seen, because he thought Mr. Copeman would excuse him from this last week of class.

Mr. Copeman now proceeds to drop the bombshell on Joel; he gets up from where he had been sitting and walks around to the backside of the lab bench and faces the student body and pauses, and then he continues, "Well Mister Reese, --we can't have you sitting around doing nothing while the rest of the class has to study. So, --because you're a Pilot and know as much about aviation as I do, --I've decided to make you my assistant. You will help me present the material and help answer questions from the class. You'll be graded on how well you do. So Mister Reese, --come up here with your books. You have now received your assignment for the this last week of school."

Poor Joel never expecting this gets up and goes up to the front of the classroom with his books; Mr. Copeman motions with his finger for him to come around behind the lab bench.

Joel then goes and joins Mr. Copeman behind the lab bench, then Mr. Copeman pauses and thinks for a moment, and then he says, as he now looks at Mike, "Is it possible there's another Pilot here in this class?"

Mike seeing Mr. Copeman looking at him starts to sweat, because he doesn't want to join Joel up front.

Mike thinks to himself, "Mr. Copeman knew about Joel, --maybe he knows about me too. He just told us that he flies, --maybe he saw me flying into the airport with one of Bob's Helicopters. O' God, --now what I'm I going to do? I think I'll play dumb and see what he does next. All I need now is to be up front with Joel, as his assistant."

Mr. Copeman looks around the class and asks, “How about it, --is there anyone else here that can fly?”

No one said anything, so he looks back at Mike and asks, “How about you Mister Troff? You seem to act like someone who knows how to fly.”

Now, before Mike could respond Mark Doubleday pipes up, “Troff, --what does he know about flying. I’ll bet he gets airsick at the thought of leaving the ground,” then the whole class starts to laugh except Mr. Copeman, Joel and of course Mike.

Mark just gave Mike his excuse for Mr. Copeman; Mike felt angry with Mark for the remark and at the class for laughing at him, so he said to himself, “They’re not going to get anything from me. I’m not going to say a word. If they all think I can’t fly, then so be it. As far as this class is concerned I can’t fly.”

After Mr. Copeman had regained control of the class he once more asked Mike the same question, “Well Mister Troff, --can you or can’t you fly?”

Everyone was now watching and listening for Mike’s reply especially Joel, because now he was hoping Mike could fly and thought how great it would be if it were true.

Mike slowly said, “No Mister Copeman, --I can’t fly an Airplane.”

“See, --didn’t I tell you so,” Mark piping up, “I knew it all the time. He doesn’t know any more about flying than I do.”

As Mike looked at Mark sitting there with a big grin on his face he now felt very angry with Mark, but at least Mike didn’t feel guilty for telling the class that he couldn’t fly an Airplane, because he really can’t; this answer worked for him before and it now worked for him again.

Mike now felt relieved, because he won’t be standing up front helping Mr. Copeman and Joel teach.

Mr. Copeman said with a sigh while looking at Joel, “Well Joel, --I guess it’s just you and me, so let’s get started, because we only have a week and there’s a lot I want to cover.”

Mr. Copeman went to the white writing board and said, as he wrote on the board, “Ok, --now here’s the lesson plan. For the rest of today and through Thursday we’ll be covering as much as time will allow and on Friday, we’ll have a test on the covered material. Next Tuesday is the last day of class and you’ll be turning in your text books.”

Then Mr. Copeman put the marking pen, he was using to write on the white board, down in the tray at the bottom of the board, turned to face the class and said, "Now I have a little surprise. We'll be having a couple of guest here on Thursday. I've asked a Fighter Pilot from both George Air Force Base and from Fort Irwin to come and speak to us. Then on Saturday for those of you who would like to go for an Airplane ride, --another Pilot from this school and I will be giving rides. Maybe Mister Reese here will be willing to give rides also."

"Sure, --but I don't own an Airplane," said Joel nodding, "so, I hope you got one for me to fly."

"Yes, --that shouldn't be a problem, as I belong to a flying club at the airport," Mr. Copeman responding, "the club members told me they'll be happy to take the schools science class for a short flight around the airport. Also, --Mister Justin from the sixth hour class is the other Pilot from our school, and he'll be giving rides in his Airplane. I'm still working on a couple of other flight services to give us rides," then a sickening thought hit Mike what if Mr. Copeman asks Bob for Helicopter rides.

Now with Ed gone in the Army, Mike is all he's got to fly his Helicopters; the more Mike thought about it the sicker he got.

Then he said to himself, "O' God, --now what I'm I going to do? I just can't say no to Bob, --after all I work for him, --I have to do what he tells me. Maybe with all the confusion on Tuesday and with the turning in of our textbooks nothing will be said about me flying. Sure that's it, --nobody will remember, so why should I worry about nothing."

It was Wednesday afternoon, the beginning of Mike's forth hour science class, and for the last two days, they learned all about Airplanes.

Joel was standing up front behind the lab bench, because he was a Pilot and waiting for Mr. Copeman to enter the classroom for the start of today's class on Airplanes.

Now for Mike, this class was a snap, because he was also a Pilot and no one knew it.

Finally, Mr. Copeman walks into the classroom and in his hand, he carried a small model of a Helicopter; Mike thought, "O' God now what?"

Mr. Copeman held the model up and asked, "Does anyone know what this is?"

A girl on Mike's right raised her hand, Mr. Copeman pointed to her

and she answered, "It's a Helicopter," Mr. Copeman smiles and nods.

Then he picks up a model of an Airplane that was sitting there on the bench and now he has both models in his hands; he asks while holding them both up, "Can anyone tell me the parts on each of these models that have the same function?"

That same girl again raised her hand, Mr. Copeman pointed to her again and she said, "The landing gear and fuselage."

"Yes that's correct, but there are more similarities," said Mr. Copeman, and then he asked, "Can anyone make a guess as to what they are?"

Mike looked around the classroom to see who else would raise their hand, but no one did.

"No one!" Mr. Copeman exclaimed, and then he asked, "Surly--someone here can tell me how these two aircraft are similar?"

Mike reluctantly raises his hand, because as a Helicopter Pilot he knew the answer.

Mr. Copeman exclaimed with surprise when Mike raised his hand, "Mister Troff! You know which parts are similar between the two aircrafts?"

"Yes Mister Copeman, --I think I do."

"Well then Mister Troff, --why don't you tell me and the class what they are?" Mr. Copeman asked looking very surprised, and then Mike slowly said while feeling that he had made a big mistake by raising his hand. "The only thing that's different is the way the two aircraft's fly, --everything else is the same."

Now the rest of the class disagreed and Mark Doubleday said, "Boy, you sure don't know much. Just look at em'--see how different they are. The Helicopter doesn't have any wings, --it has rotor blades."

While everyone laughed, Mike thought, why even bother telling them anything they're a bunch of idiots especially Mark Doubleday.

Now Mr. Copeman began to sense Mike might know more than anyone thinks, and after Mr. Copeman had regained order in the classroom he says, "Let's hear what Mister Troff has to say."

Mike now reluctantly began, "Both aircraft have horizontal and vertical stabilizers," Mr. Copeman pointed to the parts as Mike described them. Pointing to elevators on the Airplane Mr. Copeman asks, "Mister Troff, --how about these. Where on the Helicopter do we find elevators?"

"Normally you don't find elevators on a Helicopter," Mike

responding, “but they were used on some old military Helicopters and they’re used on the EXR Helicopter.”

Then pointing to the rudder on the Airplane Mr. Copeman asks, “We all know that this is a rudder, but does a Helicopter also have one and if so, where is it found?”

“The tail rotor can be used as a rudder,” Mike answered, “but its main function is to counteract the torque developed by the engine. The left peddle in the cockpit is used to overcome the increased engine torque, as collective is raised and throttle is added to maintain engine and rotor rpm. This same peddle can also be used to turn the Helicopter to the left. The right peddle does just the opposite.”

Mike then continued to describe each item that was similar for both aircraft, that is, until he got to the wings and then he smiled, because now he knew he had them and was going to have some fun.

“Now for the wings,” said Mike looking at the class and smiling, “as you all know an aircraft must have wings for it to fly. The Helicopter has wings too. The difference is how they’re mounted on the aircraft.”

Mike paused looking at the class, and then he continued. “As you all know an Airplane’s wings are connected to the fuselage. We have learned in order for an Airplane to fly the Airplane must move through the air fast enough for the wings to generate lift, so it’s called a fixed wing aircraft. Now the Helicopter’s wings which are the rotor blades are connected to a shaft which is turned by the engine. When the wings are rotated fast enough, they generate lift just like the wings on an Airplane. So you see--the Helicopter is actually flying while staying in one spot and that’s how a Helicopter can hover and an Airplane can’t.”

Now Mr. Copeman was really surprised by Mike’s extensive knowledge of Helicopters and so was the class, and so he asked, as he sat the two aircraft models down, “Mister Troff, --where did you learn so much about Helicopters?”

“Me and my big mouth,” Mike thought, as he was now starting to sweat. “Now I’ve done it. Now I’ll be up there in front of the class with Joel and Mister Copeman as an instructor. I guess there is nothing to do now but come clean. He’s going to find out about me flying Helicopters anyway, so I might as well get it over with; Joel is going to shit when he hears that I can fly.”

Mike was just about to explain everything when the bell sounded the



end of the class.

Mike felt relieved and said to himself, “Saved by the bell. Thank you God.”

The class then gets up and starts to leave the classroom.

Mr. Copeman says, as Mike with Joel heads for the door, “Mister Troff, --I would like you to explain to me where did you learn so much about Helicopters.”

“How about tomorrow,” Mike tells him, “I’ve got to go to my next class or I’m going to be late?”

“Ok, --we will talk tomorrow,” Mr. Copeman replies, “I think you’re a Pilot, because you know way too much about Helicopters. Now you better be going or you’re going to be late for your next class. We’ll talk later.”

Mike and Joel walk out of the room and head for their next class.

Joel asks Mike, as he is now wondering if Mike really can fly, “Mike, --is it true what Mr. Copeman just said about you, --that you’re a Helicopter Pilot?”

Mike stops, looks at Joel, and says, “I guess you are going to find out sooner or later. Yeah, --I’m a Helicopter jock. Don’t say anything to anyone just yet at least until after we graduate. I don’t wanta’ be in front of the class with you and Mister Copeman.”

“That’s awesome!” Joel exclaims, and with a tint of excitement in his voice he says, “I was hoping you were a Pilot.”

“So tell me, --just what are you going to tell Mister Copeman tomorrow when he asks you to explain where you learned about Helicopters?” Joel curiously asks.

Once again, they start walking down the hallway towards their next class, as Mike begins to tell Joel what he is going to tell Mr. Copeman.

## **CHAPTER 14 -- The Science Class Guest's**

On Thursday morning Mike goes to school worrying about his fourth hour science class, because today he'll have to explain to Mr. Copeman where he had learned so much about Helicopters.

In all of his classes prior to his science class, Mike went over and over in his mind the explanation, but as he walked to his science class the explanation he had worked out didn't seem right, so Mike figured he might as well tell the truth rather than lie about being a Helicopter Pilot.

When Mike walked into the science classroom, there was an Air Force and Army Officer wearing Pilots wings and talking to Mr. Copeman, Joel, and several students.

Mike went to his desk and sat down, and as he waited for the bell to sound the start of the science class, Mark Doubleday walked into the classroom; he also went to his desk and sat down.

Mike with a big smirk on his face asked Mark, "Hey--fly-boy how's it going?"

Mark got a little red faced when the other students sitting nearby looked at him.

"Well fly-boy, --how does it feel to be on the receiving end and knowing it's true?" Mike asked laughing.

Mark turned to face Mike and said, "I guess I deserve it. I'm sorry for all the trouble that I've caused you," and then he said, as a big smile broke out on his face, "yesterday I went up for the first time and you know Mike, --it was the most fun I've ever had in my life. I even got to use the flight controls and for a while I was really flying the Airplane."

He then leans closer to Mike and says, "My Flight Instructor told me I catch on real fast and said I'll be soloing in about two weeks, --isn't that great! Just think, --I'll be flying an Airplane all by myself. O' God, --I'm going to be a Pilot!"

Then Mark did the unexpected, he extended his hand to Mike and asked, "How about it Troff? Do you want to be friends with this fly-boy?"

This new attitude of Mark's was unexpected and it took Mike off guard, so Mike sat there looking at Mark smiling back at him with his out stretched hand; Mark said while still waiting for Mike to take his hand, "I said I was sorry. I would like to be your friend. I'm all for burying the past

let's graduate as friends and not enemies, because now I feel that we both may have something in common and I'm proud to be called a fly-boy."

Taking Marks out held hand and shaking it, Mike smiled and said, "Sure, --friends it is. Now you know how much fun flying really is. Say--you should talk to that Air Force Pilot there. Maybe you could join up and learn to fly a F30 like Glen," then the bell sounded the start of the science class.

"Yeah, --thanks. I think I will," Mark told him as he turned around.

"Can you believe, --Mark Doubleday as an Air Force Fighter Pilot," Mike said to himself shaking his head in disbelief.

The students who were talking to the two Military Pilots went and took their seats; the two Military Pilots sat down in the chairs that were placed in front of the class for them.

Mr. Copeman said to Joel, as Joel walked around behind the lab bench, "You can return to your desk. We're finished with the material for this week. Today we'll be having our two Guest lecture to us. Tomorrow we will be having a test on the material that we covered since Monday," Joel went and sat down at his desk.

Mike turned and whispered to him, "Nice to have you back, -- teach," Joel just grinned and Mike turned back around and faced the front of the room.

Mr. Copeman, from behind his lab bench, introduced the two Air-men, "We have with us today two Military Fighter Pilots," he points to each Pilot and each Pilot in turn held up his hand, and then Mr. Copeman introduces the first Pilot, "We have Army Lieutenant David Gibson with us today. Lieutenant Gibson is here from Fort Irwin, and as all of you know by now, this is where the EXR Helicopters are based and he happens to be one of the Pilots."

After hearing this, Mike thought, "I sure hope he hasn't heard about me from Clark or I'm really screwed, but good. Only one more week to go and I'm out of school and I'm almost there, --nobody will ever know that I'm an EXR Fighter Pilot. Now why did Mister Copeman have to go and get an Army Pilot from Fort Irwin? Why couldn't he have gotten a Marine Pilot from the Marine Base at Twenty Nine Palms? Maybe this guy hasn't heard of me, so why worry about nothing. Anyway, --as long as my last name isn't mentioned I don't have anything to worry about, --I don't know this guy and he doesn't know me neither."

Then Mr. Copeman introduces the other Pilot, “This is Air Force Captain Bill Rhodes from George Air Force Base. Captain Rhodes will be the first to address us. Captain Rhodes, --the class is all yours.”

The Air Force Captain got up, walked over, and stood in front of the class and said, “Thank you Mister Copeman for that fine introduction, but you forgot to tell the class about mine and the Lieutenants call signs. As you all know, --we Fighter Pilots have call signs. Now my call is Ocelot. I’ll let the Lieutenant tell you his call sign when he talks to you next. So if you want, you can address me by my name or call, --it’s up to you.”

He then goes and sits on the edge of the lab bench like Mr. Copeman usually does when he lectures to the class.

He looks at Joel and says, “Mr. Reese, --I hear you’re in the Marine Special Flight School at Twenty Nine Palms.”

Joel feeling important responds, “Yes sir. In three weeks after graduation, I’ll be in the Marines and after I finish boot camp, I’ll be in their advanced flight school. As you already know, I’ve been learning how to fly a F30 in the Special Flight School. In the last two years I’ve log more than three hundred combined hours in the simulator and F30 Trainer,” then Joel said, as his face lit up and he smiled with pride, “I’ve soloed in an F30 Fighter last Saturday. I guess I’m a real Fighter Pilot now.”

Then the whole science class exclaimed, “Wow, --that’s awesome!”

Mike felt good that Joel was doing so well, because he knew Joel was a good flier and he’ll make a great Fighter Pilot.

“That’s really great Joel,” the Captain told him with a big smile, “because that’s reason we started the Special Flight Schools. For we knew there were kids out there just like you who have the touch.”

“Like me?”

“Yes Joel, --like you,” said the Captain, “we felt that by training them early we would have a pool of Pilots. Pilots, that once they entered the military would only need the necessary advanced flight training to make them combat ready. In this way, we can cut the time needed to put these Pilots in the air as combat Fighter Pilots.”

Looking at Joel the Captain tells him, “Because of your natural talent Joel, --you’re one of those Pilots,” then he says looking humbly at the rest of the class, “unfortunately there are a lot of other kids who also have the touch, but don’t know about it or don’t know about the special flight schools, so we’ve asked the FAA to send notices to all the FBO’s in the country that have flight training. These FBO’s are asked to submit to the FAA,

the name of any teenager that fits the profile that's described in the notice. Those names are then forwarded to the Defense Department. Next, someone from one of the service branches will go and have a talk with that teenager."

Now after that long speech, Mike felt a little guilty for not doing his part in defending the country; after all, he's an EXR Fighter Pilot, and he's even had some of the advanced combat training that the captain had just mentioned.

"This guy's got my mind all messed up," Mike tells himself, "snap out of it Mike. That's what he's paid to do, --get as many of us as he can into the military. Not me, --I'm going to college and study computer science. If that scholarship I applied for last week comes through, then I'll be going to college this fall in Pasadena."

The Captain caught his breath and said returning his attention to Joel, "Well, --now that you're a Fighter Pilot, --how about telling us your call sign?"

Now poor Joel never gave any thought of having a call sign; for all the time he spent in flight school, no one hadn't mention anything about needing a call sign.

Now what was he to do? Now everyone was waiting for him to tell them his call sign and he didn't have one.

He was now in a state of panic, because he was a Fighter Pilot without a call sign and now he had to come up with one and fast.

It just can't be any call sign, and it can't be a call that someone else is using.

He then happened to glance down at his books sitting on the floor next to his desk, for there on the top of his other books was a science fiction book he was reading for English.

He remembered the weapon that the main character used in the story; it was an ancient weapon with magical powers and it made the user very powerful.

Now the captain and the whole class were still waiting for Joel to answer the Captain's question.

Again, the Captain asked and getting a little impatient, "Well Joel--we're waiting, --do you or don't you have a call sign?"

"Glave, --my call sign is Glave," Joel quickly blurts out.

When Mike hears this, he's surprised, because he didn't think Joel had a call sign yet.

The Captain remarks, "Glave, --I haven't heard that one before. Do you mind telling me where you got it from?"

"It's the name of an ancient weapon with magical powers. It gives anyone who uses it the power to defeat his enemies," Joel explains.

"Sounds like a good call for a Warrior and Fighter Pilot. I'm sure with time you will make good use of it," said the Captain smiling and nodding.

Now Joel was smiling, because just like the character in the book the Captain had called him a Warrior.

Boy is he glad he'd picked Glave as his call sign and now it's his forever; smiling, he said to himself several times, "Glave, —Glave, --Glave, -- Oh wow, --I've now got a call sign just like all the rest of the Fighter Pilots. Now I'm really a Fighter Pilot, --how about that. Yeah, --how about that a real Fighter Pilot and a Warrior."

Mike turned to tell Joel that he'd picked a good handle, but all he saw was stars in Joel's eyes.

Snapping his fingers in front of Joel's face, Mike said laughing, "Hey, --snap out of it you're still a kid in High School. You've still got a full year of flight school before they'll let you go into combat."

Joel comes back to earth and Mike laughing turns back around to hear what else the Captain has to tell them.

For the rest of his allotted time the Captain tells the class all about the F30 and the F32 Fighters.

He tells them about his combat experiences in the Middle East, and then he answers questions from the class; there were a lot of questions, even Mark asked several questions.

The Captain, after finding out that Mark might also be a gifted flier, wanted to see him after class.

Finally, when all of the questions were answered, the Captain sat back down in his chair.

Now it was the Lieutenants turn to lecture to the class, so he got up from his chair, walked over and stood in front of the lab bench.

He smiled and said, "I'm Lieutenant Gibson, --call sign Falcon. Now Captain Rhodes has already told you about the Special Flight Schools,

of which the Army also has, but what you all may not know is, —it was the Army who started it. It was about two years ago when Captain Larry Clark, that’s Reamer, ran into this Kid and started teaching him how to fly a Helicopter. Well, --right off the bat, Captain Clark knew this Kid was special, because he took to flying that Helicopter just like a fish takes to water.”

After hearing the Lieutenant, began telling the class this story, Mike panicked.

With sweat starting to run down his face, he said to himself, “O’ God he knows. I’m so screwed! I’m so screwed! After he finishes telling the story, everyone will know that I’m an EXR Fighter Pilot. O’ God, --what I’m I going to do? I’m so totally screwed!”

Now just as the Captain had done the Lieutenant also sat on the lab bench, and then looking at the class he begins telling the story “That Kid was so good, that by the end of summer he got a Commercial Helicopter Certificate, and then he went on to get an instrument rating which he got a few of months later. Captain Clark got an idea, so he went to his commanding officer and told him all about it. Now after listening to Clark, his commanding officer thought it was a great idea. So Captain Clark’s commanding officer got an EXR trainer signed out to him, and then later that summer, he obtained two regular EXR fighters.”

As Mike sat there in fear with beads of sweat running down his face, he just wished the Lieutenant would hurry up and finish telling the story, so he would see if anyone would connect him to the story, and see if the Lieutenant suspects him as being the missing Kid.

“Missing Kid!” Mike suddenly exclaimed to himself, “he hasn’t gotten to that part yet! I’m getting paranoid, --he probably doesn’t even know the Kid’s name, so why do I have to worry? No one will connect me to the story unless I screw up and I’m surly not going to do that. Boy, --I’m sure glad Mister Copeman hadn’t gotten Captain Clark to give us this lecture or I would be in deep trouble.”

The Lieutenant continues with the story, “Well, --you can imagine the look on this Kid’s face when he was asked if he would like to learn to fly the EXR Helicopter. Now Captain Clark didn’t have to ask him again, because this Kid was already climbing into the cockpit.”

“I did not go climbing into the cockpit,” Mike said to himself, “in fact, --Larry asked me if I wanted to see the cockpit and I told him I would.

Then he climbed out so I could see it better, --that's all there was to it. This guy sure likes to stretch the truth if he keeps this up I have nothing to worry about."

"For the rest of that year, Captain Clark taught the Kid how to fly and fight, and this Kid was good. Later that year the Kid got tangled up with three Marine F30 Fighters from Miramar, --that's the Navy's Top Fighter School, --you know, --Top Gun. Well, --this Kid sure showed them a thing or two, he had all three F30's locked on his heads up display and targeting computer for ten minutes."

"This guy is unreal," said Mike laughing to himself, "he doesn't have anything straight. It was six minutes not ten, and I left the range--nothing happen. Just wait until I see Clark, --I'm going to tell him a thing or two. If he can't tell his men to get the story straight, then he shouldn't let them tell it at all."

"Finally, the Kid got his Fighter Pilot wings, and then something happened, --a mix up at Army Headquarters--I think," said the Lieutenant getting close to the end of the story, "anyway, --they wouldn't let the Kid fly anymore, so the Kid and Captain Clark had a bad argument. The Kid told the Captain he wasn't going to fly EXR Helicopters again, and then Kid and his family left town. After the Army had realized their mistake, the Captain was told to find this Kid and get him into the Army. So you see, --if it wasn't for Captain Clark and this Kid we wouldn't have the Special Flight Schools."

The Lieutenant paused for a moment, and then a hand went up in the class followed by several others; the Lieutenant pointed to a girl in the second row sitting in the desk nearest him.

"Does Captain Clark know where the Kid moved to? Why doesn't he still try to get him into the Army?" She asked.

"Yes, --he knows where this Kid lives. He's also been trying to get him to join the Army, but the Kid still refuses. Anyway, --the Kid is still in high school. In fact, --he will be graduating this year just like all of you, but what this Kid doesn't know is, Captain Clark has some special plans for him. I wouldn't be at all surprised if this Kid isn't in the Army and flying EXR Helicopters by this fall," the Lieutenant answering her questions.

After hearing all of this, Mike says to himself, "Thank you Lieutenant, --you just made my day. Now I'll be keeping a special eye out for Clark. Flying EXR Helicopters in the Army this fall, --I don't think so. I've got other plans."



Then another student asked, “Do you know where he’s living?” “Only Captain Clark knows where he’s now actually living,” the Lieutenant replied, “but I think he’s here in Victorville. Maybe he’s right here in your High School getting ready to graduate with your class. Then again, --he could be across town at Vista High School. I’m not that sure, but I do think he’s here in Victorville.”

Then everyone looked around the class thinking it might be someone right here in this science class; first, they all look at Joel, but he had told them he was already in flight school, so they knew it wasn’t him, and then their eyes turned to Mark, didn’t he say he was learning how to fly.

Then they remembered the Lieutenant saying the Kid already could fly, now that leaves Mark out, and so, they finally figured he wasn’t in their class.

Joel puts his hand on Mike’s shoulder, leaned forward, and whispered, “He’s talking about you isn’t he?”

Mike’s face suddenly got red and he froze in place, then he slowly turned around and looked Joel in the eye; when Joel’s eyes met Mike’s, Joel knew the secret.

Mike was now panic-stricken and pleading, “You know, --don’t you? Please don’t say anything, --especially my last name. How did you know it’s me?”

“You told me yesterday you flew Helicopters. So after hearing this story I put two and two together and came up with you. You’re the only one it could’ve been. Nobody else in this school can fly a Helicopter. As a matter of fact, nobody in the other High School can fly a Helicopter either, so it just had to be you,” Joel whispered back.

When Mr. Copeman sees Mike and Joel whispering he sharply asks, “Mister Reese, --Mister Troff, --is there something that you two would like to add to this discussion?”

“No Sir, --I have nothing to add,” Joel quickly replied followed by Mike who also quickly says, “No Sir, --I don’t have anything to add either.”

“Ok, --if you two haven’t anything to add to this discussion then turn around and stop whispering,” Mr. Copeman scolding.

Now when Lieutenant Gibson heard Mike’s name his eyes open and he stared at Mike, and then he went over to Captain Rhodes and whispered something to him after which they both looked in Mike’s direction and stared.

“Lieutenant Gibson is there something wrong?” Mr. Copeman asked wondering what was going on.

“No Sir, --everything is Ok,” the Lieutenant responds getting up from the desk and stands in front of the class; Joel leans forward and whispers in Mike’s ear, “I think those two now know you’re the Kid in the story.”

Mike turns his head to the right and whispers back, “I think you’re right. When this class is over, I’m bugging out of here in a hurry. I don’t want to talk to either one of them, so stick with me.”

Joel said patting Mike on the shoulder, “Sure, --you bet I’ll be right on your tail.”

“Are there any more questions about the Kid in the story?” The Lieutenant asking, Mark held up his hand and the Lieutenant pointed to him.

“Does this Kid have a call sign and if he does, --do you know what it is?” Mark asks.

“Yes, --as a matter of fact he does, --it’s Pegasus the white winged horse from Greek Mythology,” the Lieutenant answering Mark; when Joel heard this he smiled, leaned forward again, patted Mike on the shoulder, and whispers, “Hey, --that’s a great call. Now we both have calls. Say, —let’s use em’ instead of our names, --just like Fighter Pilots do, —what ya’ say Pegasus?”

Mike quickly whispered back in panic, “Shut up, --before someone hears you. You’ve got to be crazy. I don’t want anybody to find out I’m that Kid in the story. So just forget it and don’t call me Pegasus.”

Lieutenant Gibson said with a smile, “All right, --if there aren’t any more questions about the story I’ll start talking about something that I was supposed to in the first place and that is, --EXR Helicopters. So let’s begin by describing what an EXR class Helicopter is and how it differs from other Helicopters.”

And so for the rest of the period, Lieutenant Gibson and the class discussed EXR Helicopters.

Now, all during the discussion, Mike and Joel remained quiet, so as not to give Mike’s secret away to the rest of the class.

As the clock crept closer to the end of the period, the two Military Pilots kept looking at the clock and at Mike and Joel; Mike and Joel began to get an uneasy feeling about the way the two Airmen were acting.

Mike turned his head and whispered to Joel, "I don't like the way those two are acting. I think they're up to something, so when the bell sounds, get ready to move fast."

When the hand on the large clock on the wall moved to within two minutes of the hour both boys got their books and were ready to move fast.

There they sat with their books waiting for the bell to sound; finally, the bell sounded and they were up and down the aisle and out the door in a flash.

The two Military Pilots were completely caught off guard; whatever it was they wanted to talk to Mike about won't happen today.

When the two Military Pilots saw Mike and Joel race out of the room they tried to catch them, but it was too late, and there they both stood, watching Mike and Joel go running down the hall.

Mr. Copeman watching this unfold said to the Airman, "I can't believe those two would be so rude and not even say hi or thank you. I'll have those two brought back if you would like to talk to them."

Captain Rhodes just smiled and said, "No, --that won't be necessary, --let them go. Whatever the reason they had for rushing off like that, without even taking the time to saying hi, --must be awfully important. I think the Lieutenant and I will be seeing a lot more of those two in the near future."

After the last bell had sounded the end of the school day, Mike went to his locker and put his books away, and then he got the books he needed for his homework assignment and close the door to his locker and locked it; he then started down the hall towards the front door when Glen met him.

"I heard all about you and Joel in science class and your mad dash for the door," said Glen with a big grin, "what are you trying to do win a track scholarship?"

"No, --how did you hear about what happened in my science class?" Mike asked looking surprised.

"It's all over the school. You and Joel made the school news today," Glen told him laughing.

"What else can go wrong? This day was so screwed-up," said Mike shaking his head in dismay; Glen just laughed and continued to walk with Mike to the front door.

When Mike and Glen arrived at the front door of the school, Joel was there waiting.

“You’ll never guess what’s the top news in school today?” Joel asking; Mike looked at Glen, and then back at Joel and with his hand, Mike motions back and forth between him and Joel, saying, “We’re the top news story,” and then all three boys started laughing and walk out of the school building and head for the parking lot.

The first car that they arrived at was Joel’s; after Joel got in, Mike leaned in and softly said, “See ya’ later, --Glave.”

Joel glanced around to see if anybody was near, and then he looked at Mike and softly said, “Yeah, --see you too, --Pegasus.”

Joel turned the key and his car fired up, and then he put it into gear, waved to Mike and Glen, backed out, and drove off.

Glen asked after seeing and hearing all of this, “What’s with all the secret passwords?”

After arriving at his car and opening the door, Mike explained, “Those aren’t passwords, --they’re call signs. We learned about each other’s today in that infamous science class. You’re going to need one too, that’s if you’re still planning to be a Fighter Pilot.”

“Call signs, --huh,” said Glen as Mike got into his car and closed the door, “Ok, --I’ll be thinking about it. See ya’ tomorrow, --bye.”

Mike starts his car, backs out, and drives off towards the airport and his job; this leaves Glen saying to himself, as he walks to his pickup, “Call signs, —huh, hmmm?”

After Mike had parked his car at Manning Aviation, he walks inside to see what Bob has for him to do today.

Not finding Bob in his office Mike goes to the locker room to change into his Ground-handler uniform.

Mike had just finished changing when Bob walks in; Mike asks when he sees Bob walking into the locker room, “Where have you been? You weren’t in your office. I need to know what you want me to do so I can put on the right uniform. So, --because you weren’t around I put on my Ground-handler uniform. I thought I would mow the grass in the tie down area, --it’s getting tall there.”

Bob explains after he puts one foot up on the bench next to Mike and leans on his knee with his arms crossed, “I was at the FBO next door discussing a job that I got today.”

“What job?” Mike asked looking inquisitive, “and how come you had to discuss it with them?”

“Because it also involves them,” Bob replies; Mike was now very curious about this job, Bob had gotten, and why was the other flight service involved?

“I don’t understand, and just what is this job anyway?” Mike asked, as he’s now confused.

“The job’s from your High School. They want us to give free rides this Saturday. So I went and talked to Butler Aviation, because they were also given the same job. As you know, there’s a flying club at Butler. They’re the ones who are putting this affair on. I found out I can write the whole job off as a public service donation. I sure could use a write off like this, --so I accepted the job. Now what I need, --is for you to fly one of the Robinson’s on Saturday.”

Now Mike just sat there in shock, because he didn’t know what to do.

He didn’t want to say no to Bob and he didn’t want his classmates seeing him flying either, and then Mike thought, “What the heck, --I might as well do it. I’ll be all through with High School by this time next week, so it won’t matter one way or another who knows. Besides, --Glen, Joel and the rest of my friends already know that I fly.”

Mike nods his head asking, “Ok, --what time on Saturday do you want me to come in?”

“I’ll need to have you here by seven,” Bob tells him, “we need to get this place in order if there’s going to be a lot of kids running around.”

Mike looks at Bob and exclaims, “SEVEN! That’s awful early! There ain’t that much to do to clean this place up, --it’s already so clean you can eat off the floor, --how much cleaner does it need to be?”

“I don’t want any kids to get sick by finding something on the floor and putting it in their mouth,” said Bob pointing his finger at Mike.

“Just how old do you think these kids are?” Mike asks in shock after hearing Bob.

“Just old enough to get themselves and us in trouble. If it weren’t for the tax write off I wouldn’t do it, because I feel this is going to be nothing but trouble. All we need now is a lot of kids running around.”

“These kids you’re talking about are High School Seniors. My God Bob, --they’re all grown up like me. Now, --you don’t consider me a little kid, --now do you? I’m the same age as they are,” says Mike grinning.

Bob straightens up, removes his foot from the bench, and grunts, “Humph, --Ok.”

He then walks out of the locker room shaking his head and mumbling something to himself; Mike just sat there watching him leave laughing to himself.

Mike gets up and closes the locker and locks it, and then goes into the hangar to get the lawn mower.

It was getting dark when Mike finally left the airport and heads home.

That night after he had done the last of his homework he got ready for bed; while lying there in bed he thought about this day and how messed up it was, and then he smiled as he remembered hearing Joel tell everyone in class his call and Joel and him making the school news.

Mike fell off to sleep reliving that afternoon in the science class.

## CHAPTER 15 -- The Science Class Goes Flying

Mike said to himself, as he walked to his last hour computer class, “Well Mike you son of gun--you made it. It’s the last day of the week and the last official class of the school year. Next Wednesday is graduation and the last day of the month. All I’ve got left is a couple of classes on Tuesday to turn in books.”

After Mike had entered the computer classroom and sat down at his workstation, Mr. Rinn walks into the classroom and goes over to Mike and tells him, “Mister Troff, --I have a message from the front office. They want to see you right away. If you don’t get back by the end of the period you can turn in your books on Tuesday.”

Mike gets up, picks up his books, and walks out of the classroom.

Mike was thinking, as he walks to the front office, “I wonder what they want. It can’t be my grades, because I’ve got all A’s maybe it’s something I did, --but what? I know, --it’s Clark. I’ll bet he’s up to something. I’ll bet he’s trying to prevent me from graduating unless I join the Army--that has to be it, --what gull. That ass hole will stop at nothing to get me into the Army. Well, --it ain’t going to work, because I’ve worked hard for my grades and I’m going to college.”

He enters the office, goes up to the counter and says, “Mike Troff, I was told to report here.”

“Yes Mister Troff, --the Counselor wants to see you. Let me see if he’s free,” the lady behind the counter replies, then walks over and knocks on his door; she pokes her head inside, and then returns to Mike and says, “You can go in.”

Mike goes into the Counselors office and asks, “You wanted to see me, Sir?”

The Student Counselor looks at Mike and replies smiling, “Yes I did. Please have a chair we need to talk about your scholarship.”

Mike asks, as he sits down looking a bit worried, “What about my scholarship, --I didn’t get it--did I?”

“I’m sorry, --you just missed it by a couple of points,” the Counselor told him looking somber.

“A couple of points, --I don’t understand, --I’ve got all A’s,” said Mike feeling depressed, and then he asked, “Who got the scholarship?”

**“I can’t tell you who got it, --that’s confidential information.”**

**“What do you mean, --its confidential information? I got better grades in computer class than anyone else. Ask Mister Rinn, --he’ll tell you,” Mike retorts.**

**“Mister Rinn and I have already been over your grades and their good, but your grades aren’t good enough to qualify you for the scholarship. If you still want to go to CIT in Pasadena, then all you need is the tuition and take the entrance exam.”**

**“I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but my grades are damn good. I know that I’ve got better grades than anyone in that special computer class, because we all compared report cards,” said Mike, as he’s now a little suspicious.**

**The Counselor just sat there rocking back and forth in his chair looking at Mike, and then he gruffly told Mike, “Leave it alone, --you’re not going to get the scholarship, --it has already been awarded to someone else. If you want to go to CIT, --I can arrange for you to take the entrance exam.”**

**Mike was now getting very upset and angry, because he now felt there was something strange going on here; why was the scholarship given to someone else in the class when he knew he had the highest marks?**

**“How much is the tuition for CIT?” Mike asked; the question took the Counselor by surprise, he stopped rocking, opened his desk drawer and removed a folder.**

**He opened the folder, picked up a brochure and handed it to Mike.**

**“That brochure should explain everything. As for the tuition, you’re going to need five thousand for the first two semesters and another five thousand to finish your first year,” said the Counselor, as Mike looked at the brochure.**

**“Does that include everything like books and lab materials?” Mike asked shocked at the amount of the tuition.**

**“No, --your books are extra, but it does include lab materials and computer time. You’ll also have to provide for your housing, food, and clothing,” the Counselor replied with a smile, because he knows Mike doesn’t have a lot of money, and then he asked, “So, --do you still want to apply for admission to CIT?”**

**Mike just sat there; his whole future just went up in smoke, now where is he going to get that kind of money?**



Maybe his parent's will lend it to him, especially after he tells them about his meeting with the Student Counselor.

"Well, --do you want to apply?" The Counselor asked grinning. "I like to, but I don't have the cash."

"There are ways you can obtain the money for the tuition," said the Counselor grinning, "First, --there's the student loan program. You can apply at any bank and you don't need any collateral, because it's guaranteed by government. Second, --you can get a job and work your way through college, but you'll need a good job. The last method will require you to put off your plans for about four years. I don't know how you feel about the military, but this is how most young men in your position can go to college. If you join up right after you graduate, you can start your four years of service, and then after you return you can use your VA benefit to get a college degree. So what will it be a student loan, a good job, or the Army?"

Mike was now in shock, somehow, Clark had done it to him again; Mike thought Clark had figured if he couldn't get a scholarship to pay for the college tuition, then he had him.

The only way now left for Mike was either to get a loan, which Captain Clark may have had fixed so Mike wouldn't be able to obtain one, or join the Army.

The more Mike thought about it the more he fumed with anger, and then he answered, "I'm going to try for a student loan. If I can't get a loan, then I'll work my way through school. I'll find a job somewhere that pays well, besides, --I'm a good programmer. There's always a job opening for a computer programmer, but I'm not going to join the Army," then Mike got up, pointed his finger at the Student Counselor and said, "you can take that and put it in your pipe and smoke it. You also can tell Captain Clark to shove the Army up his ass."

The Student Counselor was shocked by Mike's remarks and said, "That's enough of that kind of talk, --now sit back down," motioning with his finger to the chair from which Mike had just gotten up, "if you want me to arrange for you to take the entrance exam I'll set up the place and time and let you know."

Mike was very angry and said, as he sat back down, "Yes, --I want to take the entrance exam. You go ahead and make all the arrangements and I'll be there. As for the tuition, --it says here in this pamphlet the first semester doesn't start until fall. By then I'll somehow have the money. I've

got all summer to earn five thousand dollars.”

“Ok, --I’ll get everything arranged for you to take the exam and I’ll let you know the date and the place,” the Counselor slowly told him.

Mike gives him a nod, gets up, and walks out of the Counselor’s office; as he walks out of the front office the last bell sounded the end of the school day.

As Mike walks up to the front entrance, Glen, Joel, and the Girls were waiting for him; Pam put her arm around his neck, leaned over and kissed him.

Now Mike wasn’t in any mood for hugging and kissing especially after the meeting he just had with the Student Counselor.

“What’s the matter Mike, --don’t you like me anymore?” Pam asked feeling rejected.

Mike looked at her, smiled, pulled her to him, kissed her, and then he said, “It’s not you. It’s the scholarship to CIT. I didn’t get the scholarship that I was counting on. Now I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“I’m really sorry for you Mike,” said Pam looking at Mike and feeling sorry for him. “I know how much you were counting on getting that scholarship. So Mike, --what are your plans now?”

Both Glen and Joel patted Mike on the back telling him they were sorry he didn’t get the scholarship, as they walked out of the school building and headed for the parking lot.

While they were walking to the parking lot, Joel looked at Mike and said, “Well, --look on the bright side, --you like to fly like us and now you can join the Army and fly EXR Helicopters. I think God had meant for you to be a EXR Fighter Pilot.”

Now after hearing this Mike stopped dead in his tracks, turned, looked Joel right in the face and said “That’s the last thing I’m going to do is join the Army. Somehow, --I’m going to get the money for the tuition. This fall--I’m going to CIT in Pasadena and you can take that to the bank. I’m now sure it was Clark. I just know he had something to do with keeping me from not getting the scholarship. Boy, --is he going to be in for a shock when he finds out I’m in college this fall and not in the Army.”

“Ok, --so you’re going to college this fall, but how are you going to get the cash?” Joel asked, and then they all listen intently to Mike’s reply, “I don’t know how right now, but I’ll get the money. I’ve got all summer to come up with a way to earn it. Maybe I’ll get a second job. I’m sure Bob

**will understand how badly I want to go to college.”**

**As they approached Joel’s car, Glen said, “Mike, --you could ask Bob for a raise. I’m sure after he finds out why you need the money he’ll be more than willing to give you a raise.”**

**“Bob can barely afford to have me work for him at my present wage, --which is almost nothing, so how can he pay me anymore money. Hell, --he could barely afford Ed when he was filling in before he went into the Army. No, --I’m not going to asked Bob for more money,” said Mike shaking his head.**

**Joel gets into his car and says, “I’ve got to be going. I’ll see you tomorrow at the airport. Don’t forget about giving our science class a ride in the sky,” Joel said with a big smile, starts up his car, backs out and waves as he drives off.**

**They all walk to Glen’s pickup and like Joel, Glen also waves and drives off.**

**Arriving at Nancy’s car the girls were the next one’s to leave; Mike and Pan gave each other a goodbye kiss, then Pam slides in next to Nancy as she starts her car, and after backing out of the parking spot the girls drive away leaving Mike standing there waving.**

**Mike finally arrives at his car, gets in and drives off to his job at the airport.**

**Mike spent the afternoon at his job cleaning and getting the place ready for the big event tomorrow.**

**Later that afternoon, Bob made a walk-through of the hangar and office area and was very satisfied with the way Mike had gotten the place in shape; he told Mike he could go home, but be back by seven in the morning, so Mike changed out of his Ground-handler uniform and left for home.**

**Mike went to bed early that night, because he had to be at work by seven the next morning which came quickly.**

**Mike was at Manning Aviation doing a few last minute jobs before the science class arrives; he wiped down the little Robinson Helicopter and rolled it out of the hangar.**

**It was about nine o’clock when the first few students arrived with Mr. Copeman.**

Mike was next door at Butler Aviation, visiting with Glen and helping him preflight his Airplane when Joel walks over.

“Are you going to fly today?” Glen asks Joel.

“Yeah, --if Mister Copeman can obtain an Airplane for me,” Joel replies, and then looking at Glen’s Airplane he remarks, “Glen, --you sure got a nice plane, --I wished I could own one.”

“Thanks, --it’s not much of a plane,” Glen replies, “but it gets me in the air and its fun. Say, --I heard you soloed in an F30 last week. I guess congrats are in order,” Glen extends his hand to Joel and Joel shakes it smiling saying, “Yeah, --thanks.”

The Boys were about finished with the preflight on Glen’s Airplane when Mr. Copeman walks up and says to Joel, “I’ve got an Airplane for you. Come with me and I’ll get you signed out on the log.”

“Looks like I’ve got me an Airplane. I’ll see you guys upstairs,” says Joel with a smile; Joel and Mr. Copeman leave Mike and Glen, and walk back to the office to get Joel signed out for the Airplane.

By this time, all of the students in the six science classes had arrived and were waiting to go for a ride.

The building which housed Manning and Butler Aviation had a lounge out in front.

The aircraft were kept in the hangars located on opposite sides of the building.

A Street ran by the parking lot at the back of the building where two entrances to the building were located; above and between the entrances was a large sign with the names of the businesses located inside.

The entrance on the right side of the building opened into a hallway that led to one side of the lounge and the entrance on the left side of the building opened into another hallway leading to the other side of the lounge; there were doors in both hallways that led to offices and locker rooms and they had signs to identify each.

The doors that opened to the center of the building from each hallway led to a conference room, bathrooms, and the clubroom for the Victorville Flying Club.

In the lounge, there was a counter between the two hallway entrances and it had a glass display case under it; a door behind the counter led to an office in back.

On each end of the counter, there was a telephone and behind the counter, was a young woman taking orders for fuel and answering questions.

Three doors led outside to the service areas where the aircraft waited to board or depart passengers.

The glass door on the right side of the lounge led to the service and hangar area of Manning Aviation and the glass door on the left led to the service and hangar area of Butler Aviation; the two double glass doors in the front of the lounge led to the arrival and departure area out in front.

In the lounge, there were sofas, chairs, tables with lamps and reading materials.

Mr. Copeman and Joel entered the lounge from the door leading to the Butler Aviation tarmac and hangar area, and they walked through the lounge and into the hallway that led to the office of Butler Aviation; then Glen and Mike entered the lounge from the same door, because Glen's Airplane was parked on the tarmac at Butler Aviation.

Mike and Glen walked up to the counter, because Glen needed to get some fuel for his Airplane.

After Glen had gotten the fuel ordered for his Airplane, Mike told him, "I'll see you later. I've got a Helicopter to preflight and I want to get out of this monkey suit," so, he left Glen at the counter and went out the glass door on the right side of the lounge to Manning Aviation service area; there he started to perform the preflight checks on his Helicopter.

Meanwhile, another Airplane was rolled out of the Butler Aviation hangar for Joel to fly, so now there will be three Airplanes and one Helicopter to give rides to the High School science classes.

Glen had just finished getting fuel for his Airplane when Mr. Copeman and Joel walked back into the lounge and over to the counter.

Mr. Copeman picked up the telephone and began speaking into it and after a minute, he hung up the phone.

A few minutes later, Mr. Manning came into the lounge and joined Mr. Copeman at the counter; Mr. Copeman then called for everyone's attention.

After Mr. Copeman had everyone's attention he said, "Thank you. The Man standing next to me is Mister Manning. He was kind enough to lend us a Helicopter for the afternoon. And now for some rules: No one, by that I mean no one, --will be allowed to go out by the hangar areas. When

boarding or departing the aircraft's you will wait until the props have stopped and then go directly to and from the lounge. Mister Manning, --do you have anything to add?"

Mr. Manning nods his head and says, "Yes I do. First, --I agree with Mister Copeman's rules. Second, --the Helicopter will not be powered down like the Airplanes. So because of this, --the Helicopter will land facing the door to the lounge on the right," he then pointed to the door and everyone looked over at the door; outside stood the small Robinson Helicopter they were going to ride in.

Mr. Manning continued, "You will, --one at a time go out to the Helicopter. You will approach it from the front and get in on the left side. Do not, --I repeat, --do not go around behind the Helicopter. The tail rotor bites hard, it can maim and kill, and one more thing, --keep your head down when approaching the Helicopter. I don't think the main blades will hit anyone, but I don't want to take any chances. Also, for those of you who have caps, --hold on to em', because the rotor down wash will send them flying across the airfield."

While Mr. Manning was talking in the lounge a young man drove up and parked near the right entrance to the building; he then got out, went inside to the Manning aviation office, and sat down.

Mr. Manning turned and said to Mr. Copeman, "I'll be in my hangar. If you need me for anything have the attendant behind this counter page me," after shaking Mr. Copeman's hand, Bob walked out the door and over to his hangar and went inside.

Motioning for Glen and Joel to join him, Mr. Copeman said, "Mister Justin and Mister Reese are the Pilots of the other two Airplanes we'll be using. By law, they're in charge while you're in their aircraft's, you'll do exactly what they tell you, and that also holds true while you're in the Helicopter. As soon as I find out who the Helicopter Pilot is, --I'll tell you. All right, --let's get this show underway," Mr. Copeman looks at Joel and Glen, and with a nod from both boys they walk out to their Airplanes and get ready to take their fellow classmates for a ride.

Six students walked out from the lounge to the waiting Airplanes; three got into each plane.

Once everyone was buckled in, Joel and Glen started up their engines, and taxied out to the main runway; once they got their takeoff

clearances they, one at a time, took off into the air.

By the time the Airplanes were flying, Mike had finished his pre-flight and walked to the locker room to change clothes, and then he went to the office to tell Bob he was ready to fly, but when he opened the door and walked in there sat Ed smiling at him; Mike just stood there in disbelief.

“Aren’t you going to say hi?” Ed asked, “I’ve been sitting here for the last twenty minutes waiting for you.”

Mike recovering extended his hand and said, “God it’s good to see you, but why are you here? I thought you were in the Army.”

“I am, --I just graduated from flight school at Fort Rucker and been reassigned to Fort Irwin for training in the EXR2,” Ed tells Mike as he shakes Mike’s hand.

“That’s great Ed,” says Mike, “So, --when do you have to report for duty?”

“I’ve got to be there on Tuesday. Training classes start on the following Monday.”

“How come you have to be there on Tuesday when the classes don’t start until the next week?” Mike asks puzzled.

“I have to get registered and with all the red tape it takes several days,” Ed explaining.

Then Mike remembers when Major Larson had gotten him Registered at Edwards AFB three years ago to work on the Excalibur project, and nodding in agreement he says, “Yeah, --I know all about Army red tape. I’m graduating on Wednesday and it would be great if you could be there.”

“Well, --I can’t guarantee anything, but I’ll ask my new commanding officer for the day off and see what he says. So, --now that you’re finished with high school what are your plans for the summer?” Ed asks.

Mike looking at the floor lays the hardship story on him, “I didn’t get the scholarship I was hoping for, so now I’ve got to get another job to pay the tuition for college this fall.”

“I’m really sorry that you missed out on that scholarship,” says Ed seeing Mike’s disappointment, and then he tells him, “look on the bright side, --you’re still one hell of a Helicopter Pilot. So why don’t you join up, we could fly EXR Helicopters together. You could be flying EXR’s in three months right out of basic training. With your special flight training, you don’t even have to go to Fort Rucker as I did. Why, --you’ll be assigned

right here at Fort Irwin with me.”

“No thanks, --I’m not going to join the Army,” Mike told Ed shaking his head, and then he asked trying to change the subject, “why are you here?”

“Oh, --to see you and Bob, and to see if Bob wouldn’t mind if I could take one of his Robinson’s for a spin. Say, --what’s going on? There’s a lot of kids running around, you haven’t a party?”

“No party, --we’re giving rides to my High School science class,” Mike replied with a smile, and then he got a bright idea and asked, “how would you like to help? We could use another Helicopter. As you know, the Robinson only has room for one passenger. It’s going to take me all day to give everyone a ride, but with two Helicopters it’ll go a lot faster.”

“Sure, --I’d be happy to help out that’s if it’s Ok with Bob.”

Bob comes walking in, and before he sees Ed he asks, “Mike, --how come you’re not out flying? They’re waiting on you. The Airplanes are already giving rides.”

When Bob sees Ed, he smiles and says extending his hand, “My God, --look who’s here. It’s good to see you boy. What’s it like being in the Army and what are you doing here?”

“Lieutenant Kiver at your service, --Sir,” says Ed shaking Bob’s hand, and then he explains, “I’m been assigned to Fort Irwin. I thought I’d stop by to say hi on the way to my new assignment.”

“Ed would like to help with the rides today,” Mike breaking in, “if it’s Ok with you, —that is?”

“Is that true? You want to help us?”

“I sure miss flying the Robinson and if I can be of help, --count me in,” Ed replies with a nod.

“Ok Lieutenant you’re temporarily hired. It’s sure going to be nice seeing the two of you flying again if only for the day. So what are we doing standing here jawin’--times a wastin’--the fixed winger’s are already flying,” says Bob smiling at both men standing there.

As Mike heads for the lounge, Bob and Ed walk out to the hangar where Bob helps Ed roll another Robinson Helicopter out of the hangar; now there are two Helicopters to give rides today.

Mike enters the lounge and walks up to the counter and asks the lady behind the counter if he could borrow a headset; She tells him he could, but he has to sign for it, so Mike signs his name on a form while she



gets the headset.

Mike takes the headset and walks past a line of waiting students and out the door he goes.

Now Mr. Copeman hadn't gone flying yet and was talking to a couple of students with his back turned to the door that Mike just exited; now as Mike is walking to his Helicopter a student, Mike had passed on his way out the door, went over to see Mr. Copeman.

Ed was doing his preflight when Mike climbs into his Helicopter's Pilot seat and plugs in his headset.

He then starts up the Helicopter and begins the run up checks; next, he turns on the radio so he could inform the lady behind the counter when he's ready for the first passenger.

Now the student that Mike had passed on his way out informed Mr. Copeman that one of the students had broken the rules and went outside by the Helicopters.

Mr. Copeman was now very concerned, as he walked with the student to the door to see for himself; the student pointed to the Helicopter and exclaimed, "There he is, inside the Helicopter! You better do something before he hurts someone and gets himself killed!"

"I'll take it from here," Mr. Copeman tells the Student and mumbles to himself as he goes to find Mr. Manning, "I just got done telling everyone not to go out by the aircraft's until told to do so. Then as soon as my back is turned, someone has to see how far he can go in testing my patients. Well, --just wait until I get my hands on him. He'll wish that he'd never tried this stunt."

Mr. Copeman had Bob paged, Bob came out to see what Mr. Copeman wanted.

As soon as Bob arrived in the lounge, Mr. Copeman said, "Mister Manning we got trouble. There's a student in one of your Helicopters and he's got it running, --what should we do?"

Now when Bob heard this he just about passed out and said to himself, "I just knew this was going to happen. If that Kid crashes into this building and kills someone and himself, --I'll get sued. My insurance will never cover this, --I'm in deep shit. Why did I ever let myself get talked into giving kids rides anyway?"

Bob was now very excited and said to Mr. Copeman, "Come, --let's

see what we can do before he gets himself or someone killed,” so, Mr. Copeman and Bob went over to the door.

When Mr. Copeman pointed to Mike sitting in the Helicopter Bob relaxed with a sigh, as he was now very relieved, and said to Mr. Copeman, “That’s Mike Troff, --he’s my Pilot.”

“Your Pilot!” Mr. Copeman exclaimed, “You’re telling me Mister Troff can fly a Helicopter?”

“Oh yes he can and damn good too,” said Bob nodding, “I wouldn’t know what to do without him, but I’m afraid that he might be leaving soon. A Pilot with Mike’s skills will be grabbed up by a better paying operation or like my other Pilot, --gone into the Army.”

Mr. Copeman was now quite stunned by all of this and he now knew why Mike had done so well on all of the tests on aviation especially the ones on Helicopters.

Mr. Copeman said pointing to the other Helicopter, “I thought you would only have one Helicopter for us today?”

“Well I thought so too, but my other Pilot, --the one who joined the Army is back on leave and said he wanted to help, so I told him Ok go ahead and fly. He’s Lieutenant Ed Kiver and he’s an Army Helicopter Pilot. He’s station at Fort Irwin and will be flying the EXR’s.”

Mr. Copeman then loudly announced to everyone, “Everyone listen up. I’ve just found out who our Helicopter Pilots are and thanks to Mister Manning, today we’re going to be having two Helicopters. The Helicopter Pilots are Lieutenant Ed Kiver from Fort Irwin and Mister Michael Troff. Yes, --Mike Troff from our science class. He’s a Helicopter Pilot, --now isn’t that great.”

By now, both Mike and Ed had the Helicopters running and radioed for the first two passengers.

Pam was the first passenger, and she wanted to go with Mike, so she and another student went out and got into the Helicopters.

Mike looked over to Ed, smiled and gave him the thumbs up; Ed smiled and returned the gesture.

Mike was the first Helicopter to get a takeoff clearance, and then he and Pam took off for a flight around Victorville.

So, for the rest of the day, Mr. Copeman, Glen, Joel, Mike, and Ed flew the students from Mike’s science class around Victorville.

It was late in the afternoon when all of the students from all the science classes had a ride in an Airplane and Helicopter.

As the last of the students left for home, Glen, Joel, Pam, Joan, and Nancy were sitting in the lounge talking about the rides while Mike and Ed were putting the Helicopters into the hangar.

Mike told Ed he could go, because he didn't have much left to do and he would see Ed in the lounge a little later, so Ed walked out of the hangar and into the lounge to join the others.

As Ed entered the lounge from the right door, Mr. Copeman, after finishing with his Airplane entered the lounge from the left.

Ed went over and sat down with Glen and his friends.

Mr. Copeman walked over to Bob and said to him while shaking his hand, "Thank you Mister Manning for the two Helicopters. This field trip wouldn't have been a success if it wasn't for your help."

"You're welcome. We were happy to help," Bob politely replied and glancing over to where Ed is talking to Glen and Joel, he says to Mr. Copeman, "Mister Copeman, --you haven't met one of the Helicopter Pilots," so Bob and Mr. Copeman walk over to where Ed and Glen are seated talking.

Ed and the other's get up when Bob and Mr. Copeman arrives.

Bob makes the introductions, "Mister Copeman, --this is Ed Kiver. Oops, --I mean Lieutenant Ed Kiver. I keep forgetting that you're in the Army now. Ed, --this is Mister Copeman, Mike's High School science teacher."

"Hi, --how are you, --Sir," said Ed shaking Mr. Copeman's hand, "great seeing you again?"

"I'm fine and thank you for helping us today, --I sure appreciate your help," said Mr. Copeman thanking him, Ed just smiles nodding to Mr. Copeman's words of gratitude.

Mike comes walking into the lounge.

Bob now watching Mike walk up says, "Mister Copeman, --here's my other Pilot which you already know."

Mr. Copeman turns to look at Mike and remarks, "Yes, --I already know Mister Troff. Mike, --why didn't you say something in class that you could fly Helicopters?"

"Well Mister Copeman," Mike responds looking at his science teacher, "because you would've made me come up front like you did to Joel

and Glen, --I didn't want any special treatment. Besides, --Joel was the star of the class with his soloing in an F30 in all. He's one of my friends and I couldn't take all the glory away from him, so rather than sharing the spotlight, I wanted him to have it all. To be able to solo a F30 is awesome and he, just like Glen, are awesome Pilots. I just know they're going to be famous someday," Mike now smiling puts his arms around Glen's and Joel's necks.

Mr. Copeman thought how nice it was for Mike to think more of his friends than of himself, then he remembers the story the Army Pilot told in class, and he now knows who the Kid is.

Mr. Copeman slowly and softly asks Mike, "The story that the Army Pilot told on Thursday, --it's you isn't it? Mike, --you're the Kid in the story." Mike looks down as he softly replies, "Yeah, --I'm the Kid in the story," then Mike looks up at Mr. Copeman and pleads, "please Mister Copeman, --don't say anything in class on Tuesday about this."

"Ok Mike, --we'll not say anything about you being Pegasus, but I think some of the students have probably already figured it out especially after you had flown them all around Victorville today."

When Mr. Copeman notices there wasn't much of a reaction from the other's at the news about Mike, he remarks, "You all knew Mike was the Kid in the story and you all kept it a secret. Now that's what I call good friends, and now I know why Mike was so loyal. He couldn't have had better friends."

Ed grinning looks at Mike and announces, "Mike, --you're famous at Fort Rucker. The story of the lost Kid is told in the flight school there and every Helicopter Pilot that graduates would like to meet you."

Mike was stunned at hearing Ed talking about him this way and exclaimed, "Oh swell! Clark's big mouth has done it again," and then everyone laughed and headed out of the building for home, because it was now getting very late and it was dark outside.

As Mike drove home he remembered what Ed had told everyone about how famous he was at Fort Rucker, and then said to himself aloud, "Oh swell, --now I'm famous, --that just great!"

## CHAPTER 16 -- Graduation

The weekend finally ended and Memorial Day arrived; Mike spent the day with his friends Glen, Joan, and Pam in town at the video arcade playing video games.

Ed Kiver, Mike's fellow pilot at Manning Aviation, and who is now in the Army, went to Fort Irwin to report for duty; he had told Mike before he left, that if he were able to get away, he would be at Mike's graduation.

That evening at the arcade, while Joan and Pam were still playing the video game, Mike and Glen were sitting at a table, drinking sodas, eating chips, and talking.

"A week from today I'm going to be in the Air Force," Glen suddenly announced, and then he paused and looked at the table as Mike stared at him and exclaimed, "So soon! I thought we would have most of the summer to spend together."

"Gosh! I'm sorry, but I've got to go," said Glen, and then he explains, "Basic Training starts the second week in June. I received a letter on Friday informing me that I have to report for duty. Anyway, --the sooner I get through Basic the sooner I can start flight training."

"Yeah, --I guess you're right," said Mike sighing and already missing him. "It's just that--I didn't think it would be this soon, --you leaving for the Air Force."

"We're men now," said Glen, "Wednesday we'll be done with High School and you know how much I want to be an Air Force Fighter Pilot."

"Yeah, --I know," said Mike nodding his head, "I guess it still hasn't all sunk in yet. I'm sure going to miss you, --it sure isn't going to be the same around here without you."

"Yeah, --I'm going to miss you too, Mike," Glen replies and now he's also starting to miss Mike, "I'll write to you often, and remember, no matter where we are we're still Blood Brothers."

"Yeah, --we're sure are," says Mike looking at Glen and smiling, "boy, --I'm glad we had that ceremony last fall," then both boys looked at the scar on their hands; for wherever they are the scar from the Blood Brother ceremony will be a reminder of their Brotherhood.

Mike comments while looking at the girls playing the video game, "Joel's also going into the Marines in two weeks, and would you believe of

all people, Mark Doubleday is also going into the Air Force. It turns out he's also got the touch and he never knew it. Remember the trouble he and his friends used to cause us, because we liked to fly and wanted to be Fighter Pilots, --now it looks like he's going to be one himself, --I guess fate deals strange cards."

"Can you imagine that, --Mark Doubleday, --an F30 Fighter Pilot," said Glen laughing and shaking his head, "I suppose I'll be seeing a lot more of him now that he's also going into the Air Force."

"Yeah, --imagine that," Mike remarked again sighing, "I guess everyone that I know from High School is leaving for the service. I'm going to be left here all by myself with the girls."

"You're not alone," Glen tells him sympathetically, "you've got lots of friends at Fort Irwin. I know of at least four right now and you probably know several more. I still don't understand why you don't go and join the Army and fly with them. You know that's where your heart is, --so go and join up. You can be flying EXR Helicopters in four months with your Army buddies at Fort Irwin."

"No way," Mike firmly tells him shaking his head, "I'm not going to give Clark the satisfaction of thinking he's won."

"Ok, --be that way," says Glen pointedly in a harsh tone, "but you're hurting no one but yourself. You're an EXR Fighter Pilot and I know how much you want to fly a Fighter Helicopter again."

"Like hell I do," Mike fires back, "I'm not a Fighter Pilot and I'm not going to join the Army and that's final."

"Ok, Ok, you're not a Fighter Pilot," says Glen raising both hands in submission trying to calm Mike down, "anyway Mike, I wish you the best in whatever you decide to do for a living, and whatever happens, let's try to keep in touch somehow, --Ok?"

"Sure," Mike replies with a nod and says as he smiles, "somehow we'll keep in touch and I also wish you the best too."

By now, the girls have finished playing the video game and they walk over to where Mike and Glen are talking.

"I think we better be going," Pam telling the boys, "it's getting late and we have school tomorrow, besides, they'll be closing this place soon."

Mike nods in agreement and they all get up and leave.

When Mike got home, his Mother tells him, "Brian had called. He'll be flying to the Marine Base at Twenty nine Palms on business. If he can

finish his business in time he'll be at your graduation."

"That's great--at least one of my Brothers might be at my graduation," Mike tells her feeling good and smiling, "it's really a shame the whole family couldn't be at all of our graduations. First, I missed Brian's graduation, because I had to be at Edwards working on that stupid project. Then it was Brian who was missing from Jeff's graduation, because he was in the Marines and now maybe both of them aren't going to be at my graduation," with that Mike went to his room to retire for the day, because tomorrow will be his last full day of school.

Tuesday, Mike's last day in High School, Wednesday is his graduation.

For the first two hours on Tuesday morning, the senior class turned in all of their books, because for the rest of the day they will be rehearsing for graduation.

For the rest of that final day of High School, Mike and the rest of the senior class practiced the graduation ceremony until it was time to leave.

Mike met Glen at his locker and as he closed it for the last time, he stood there and looked at it.

"What's wrong?" Glen asked looking puzzled, "I hope you're not getting sick, because you don't look so good."

"No--I'm not sick," said Mike in reply looking at Glen, and then he asks, "I just feel strange, --don't you feel it too?"

"No," says Glen looking at Mike a wee bit concerned, and then he asks looking very confused, "just what is it that I'm supposed feel? You had better not be coming down with something, because you have to graduate tomorrow."

"I'm telling you, --I'm not sick," Mike pointedly tells him, "what I mean is, --the feeling of emptiness, --don't you feel it?"

Mike points to his locker and remarks feeling forlorn, "That locker, --I'm all through with it, --like done, --I'll never be using it again. Like, --this is the final day, --we're all done with High School and we're now grownups, --you and me--grownups."

Glen puts his hand on Mike's shoulder and says sighing, "Yeah, --I guess I never thought of it that way. I guess it just hasn't sunk in for me yet. It'll probably happen when I'm in basic training."

They started walking down the hall, and then suddenly, Mike stopped short, surprising Glen who was now wondering what now!

**“O’ God Glen, —you’re going to be a Fighter Pilot in the Air Force!” Mike exclaimed looking at Glen.**

**“No shit Mike,” Glen retorts very surprised by Mike’s words, “you know that I’d always planned on going into the Air Force after I graduate from High School.”**

**“That isn’t what I meant,” Mike returns shaking his head, and then he explains, “what I just realized is, --you could get killed like Russ.”**

**“So can you,” Glen tells him gruffly poking him in the chest, “once you start flying Fighter Helicopters again, --that is.”**

**Then before Mike has a chance to respond Glen says, “Yes, --I know you told me you weren’t going to join the Army and fly EXR’s, but I got this gut feeling that somehow, before we meet again after this week, you’ll be in the Army flying Fighter Helicopters.”**

**“Glen, --promise me you’ll be careful and don’t do anything stupid,” Mike solemnly asks with real concern, “I don’t know what I’d do if you were to get killed.”**

**“I’ll be careful--I promise,” Glen solemnly tells him, “you be careful yourself, --that is, --once you start flying EXR’s again, because I too wouldn’t know what to do if you got killed,” the two boys looked at each other and smiled.**

**“C’mon, —let’s go home,” says Mike with a big smile, “because tomorrow is going to be the best day of our lives.”**

**As they both ran down the hall together they shouted, “ITS GRADUATION! NO MORE HOMEWORK!”**

**Wednesday, and today, Mike was going to receive his High School Diploma.**

**And what a beautiful day it was, not too hot with a small breeze blowing across the athletic field.**

**The bleachers in the grandstand were filled with parents, relatives and friends of the graduating seniors; Mike’s Brother, Brian, even made it and that made Mike happy, because now he’ll have one of his Brothers at his graduation.**

**Also present was Bob Manning, Ed Kiver, and four other Army Pilots from Fort Irwin and of course Captain Larry Clark.**

**Now Glen was the first one to spot the Army Pilots sitting with Mike’s Parents.**

**“I’ll bet you can’t guess who’s sitting with your Parents?” Glen**



tells Mike, "I'll give you one clue--they're from Fort Irwin."

"Not Captain Clark!" Mike exclaims, "Why is he always on my case?"

"Relax--," Glen reassuring him, "he's here, because he likes you and wants to be at your graduation."

"I don't know," Mike replies a bit skeptical, "he's always trying something to get me into the Army. I wonder what he's up to now. I just know he's planning something really nasty."

"You're always so suspicious," Glen tells him laughing, "if I was Clark, --I'd do the same thing too."

"What a Blood Brother and friend you turned out to be, --siding with Clark," Mike retorts.

"Mike, --you've got a special gift just like me," says Glen turning serious, "Clark only wants to make sure you get every opportunity to use it. I really think Clark likes you a lot, --like maybe a Son. Didn't you tell me once he lost his Wife and Son in an auto accident?"

Then it was announced that it was time to begin the graduation ceremony.

So Mike, Glen, Joel, Pam, Joan, Nancy and the rest of the senior class paraded out in their caps and gowns and sat down in front of the stage that was setup for the graduation.

Then the High School Principal walked up to the lectern and began to speak; he first had everyone stand as the National Anthem was played.

When everyone had sat back down the Principal introduced the Rev. James B. Hensel from St. Johns Methodist Church.

The Reverend Hensel got up and walked to the center front of the stage; then everyone again stood up and bowed their heads when he gave the invocation.

After the invocation, everyone again sat down and the Principal introduced the Senior Class Valedictorian.

The Class Valedictorian, dress in her cap and gown, walked up to the lectern and began the valediction; she spoke of new beginnings, bright hopes for peace, and how this class will endeavor to make it all come about.

Finally, it was time to hand out the diplomas; the Chairman of the School Board got up and stood by the table with all the diplomas on it.

Then the Principal began to read the names of the senior class, and

as their names were called each senior went up to get his or her diploma from the Chairman; as each senior received the diploma with their left hand they shook the Chairman's hand with their right hand.

Finally, the graduation ceremony was over and this senior class was now history; they all shouted and threw their caps into the air.

Mike walked over to where his Brother was waiting for him; Brian in his Marine uniform said smiling, holding his hand out to Mike, "Congratulations Mike you finally made it little Brother. So, --do you have any plans as to what you're going to do now?"

"I don't know, --keep flying for Mister Manning," Mike replied shaking Brian's hand, "maybe get another part time job until I get enough money to go to college. I need a lot of money to go to college."

Ed walks over and says, offering his hand to Mike, "I made it thanks to the Captain Clark. Would you believe he's my CO, anyway, congratulations you finally made it through High School. I would sure like to see you at Fort Irwin. Boy, --could we have fun flying together, --just like old times."

"Thanks Ed," said Mike shaking Ed's hand, "but I'll pass on the going to Fort Irwin."

Wayne Tripp and Scott Schultz, Mike's two fellow Pilots whom he flew with when he worked for Larry Clark in Roseville, walked over and joined them.

Offering his hand to Mike, Lieutenant Tripp said, "Congratulations and it's nice to see you again, --it's been a long time."

Scott also extended his hand and said, "Congratulations Mike and yeah, --it sure has been a while. You should come to Fort Irwin to visit us."

Mike shakes their hands and remarks when noticing their rank, "Thanks, --and since when did you two get regular commissions? Lieutenants, --what happen to your Warrant ranks? You guys were Warrant Officers the last time I saw you."

"They don't allow Warrant Officers to fly Fighter Helicopters," Wayne explaining with a big smile, "you have to be a commissioned officer to be an EXR Fighter Pilot. Anyway, --they wouldn't let us go, --so they gave the both of us commissions, so Scott and I are now Lieutenants."

"Congratulations to the both of you," Mike tells them cheerfully with a smile, then looking at Ed and grinning he added, "I hope you two do

a good job training Ed.”

Mike then heard someone speak and he and the other Lieutenants turned to look at where the voice was coming from, “You know, --we only take the best Helicopter Pilots to train as EXR Fighter Pilots,” there was Captain Larry Clark and Mike’s Parents walking towards them.

Captain Clark says, after he walks up and stands by Ed, looks at him and smiles, “I think Lieutenant Kiver is going to make a fine EXR Fighter Pilot. Did you know he graduated second in his class from the flight school at Fort Rucker and from the check ride that I had with him yesterday he’s a real good flier, --so how about you Mike? I have already given you the necessary training. All you have to do now is go through Basic Training, and then you’ll be sent here to Fort Irwin.”

“No thanks,” Mike firmly replies shaking his head, “I’ll let you guys defend the country. I’m still planning on going to college this fall, --if I can get the money.”

“Congratulation on finishing High School,” Captain Clark tells him good naturedly holding out his hand, “I’m sorry you feel that way about the Army and we’re sorry to lose you. If within the next four years, you decide to change your mind, please give me a call. Please give it a lot of thought, because once you turn thirty-eight you’ll then be too old. As for your money problem, --I think I might be able to help there.”

“Thanks, --Larry I’ll keep you in mind if I decide to join the Army,” Mike replies while shaking Clark’s hand, “if you’re thinking of VA benefits after I get out of the Army--forget it.”

“No, --I’m not talking about the Army directly,” says Captain Clark smiling, and then he explains, “we’re going to be having training exercises and they’re going to be conducted in the area that belongs to the government north east of here including Fort Irwin. And what I’m about to tell you, and don’t say anything to anyone just yet, and that is, the exercises for the first time will include civilians. I’ll let you know when to apply, --that’s if you would be interested in participating. The pay is going to be good, --like from five hundred to a thousand dollars a week for up to four weeks.”

“Why are you doing this for me?” Mike asks with curiosity looking at Larry, “I thought you didn’t want me to go to college. I thought all you cared about was getting me into the Army?”

“Mike, --listen to me,” says Captain Clark putting both hands on Mike’s shoulders, “I do care what happens to you. If college is what you

want, then I'll help you get there. Sure, --I'd like to see you join me at Fort Irwin and fly, that's because you have a special talent that only a handful of men have, but you also have a talent with computers. I will only ask one thing of you and that is, --whatever you decide to do, --do it well."

"I will Larry, --and thanks," Mike replied glowing, smiling, and nodding, and then he looks at the other Army Pilots standing there and says, "I'll come to visit you guys at fort Irwin, --that's if they'll let me in the gates," with that they all laughed.

"Don't you worry about getting in the gate," said Captain Clark with a chuckle, "just tell the guard to call me and I'll have him let you in."

Finally, everyone was leaving the athletic field and going to celebrate graduating from High School in their own way.

Captain Clark and the three Lieutenants had to be back at Fort Irwin, so they said goodbye to Mike and departed; Mike, Brian and his Parents went home, so Mike could change out of his gown and suit, and then they went out for dinner and an evening of celebrating.

That night after Mike was in bed he remembered all the events which took place that day; he especially remembered Captain Clark's words about wanting him to do the best he can with his life.

Mike smiled to himself as he fell off to sleep thinking maybe he was wrong about Captain Clark, and he was only thinking of Mike's future.

On the first Monday in June, Mike was at the airport to see Glen off, because today, Glen and Mark Doubleday were leaving for the Air Force.

"Well, Mike," said Mark shaking hands, "this is goodbye and can you believe it, --I'm going into the Air Force to become a Fighter Pilot, -- imagine me, --a Fighter Pilot, and after all the shit I gave you and Glen. I guess God has his way of getting even," then Mark starts to giggle.

"Well, --you never knew you had the gift," Mike tells him sympathetically, "I think if you had known, --it would've been different."

"Thanks, --I'll write or email you," Mark tells Mike, "and let you know how rotten a Pilot I turn out to be."

"I'll write or email you back," Mike replies, and then he tells him, "I just know you're going to be one hell of a Fighter Pilot and I wouldn't be surprised an Ace even."

"An Ace!" Mark exclaimed blushing, "Me!"

"Yeah, --you," Mike returned with a grin, and then it was

**announced Mark's plane was boarding passengers.**

**"Well, --I've gotta' go, --see ya'," says Mark picking up his bag, turns, walks to the boarding ramp, waves one last time and boards the Airplane with several other inductees; Mike waves back.**

**"Will you write and email me too?" Glen asks looking at Mike, "God, --I'm so going to miss you, --and good luck to you in college."**

**"I will, --take care now and don't get into any trouble like flying your F30 under a bridge," Mike tells him with a tear starting to form in his eye.**

**"I won't," replied Glen smiling, wiping his eyes with his sleeve, "I'll be back right after flight school," then both boys shook each other's hand.**

**Finally, Glen picked up his bag and walked towards his plane and just before he entered, he turned and waved one last time; Mike waved back and Glen went into the Airplane.**

**Mike waited in the airport lobby until Glen's Airplane was out of sight, and then he walked out of the airport terminal feeling very lonely.**

**As Mike drove home, he somehow knew he wouldn't be seeing Glen again for a long time.**

**Glen sat by the window and looked out, as the Airplane flew east to his new home; he also somehow knew he wouldn't be seeing Mike for a very long time as well, and he too felt lonely.**

**As both boy's traveled in opposite directions, they recalled the good times that they had together.**

**The dirt bike riding in the desert, the fun times in school, it was now all over, and now each boy had his own life to pursue; just maybe, the Boys paths may someday cross again.**