

## Chapter 31

I wish I could put the “Hollywood ending” on this story for you. I wish I could tie a nice little bow on it and hand it to you gift wrapped. I wish I could tell you that I got in the car, chased after them down the road just like Dustin Hoffman did in “The Graduate”. Or at least I wish could tell you that we got back in touch again years later, got married and lived happily ever after.

But I can't do that, can I? why? Because at the very beginning of this sag, I promised to cut through the noise and lies and tell it like it happened. So, I owe that to you. I owe that to myself. I owe that to Angela.

And here's the truth. This is how it really happened. This is how it really happened that day when Angela and Doreen popped in unexpectedly for that visit. The popped in, we had a great day and then they left again. The truth is that when the rolled down North Pine Street at the end of that day, I never saw either one of them again. Never heard from either one of them again. My next few letters that I wrote to Angela were never answered. After a year of non-response, I took this as a hint that no further communication was wanted or required.

I was almost out of high school by then. I moved on and forgot about Angela. I forgot about Church Camp and The Hooligans who tormented me. I did just what my mother told me to do. I put it in the past. I put it all in the past, that is, until minutes before I started writing down these words to finally “tell the truth”.

You see, an event occurred that brought all these memories, the pain, the guilt, the fear, and yes...the happiness too of that summer of 1981 back to me. But before I tell you about that, I need to back track and bring you up to speed (as succinctly as possible) about the last thirty-five years or so.

Upon the return of my summer saga, the situation between my parents got a little better. It would get a little better, then take a nosedive. But then things would improve again. It went back and forth like this for fifteen year. Hot war, cold war, hot war and then cold war again. But every time thy would hit that bad patch, the bad patch would be a little less severe and a little shorter than the bad patch before. And one day, I realized they had finally made it through the

storm. It was a twenty-five-year storm that finally petered out. Perhaps, they even finally forgot what they were even fighting about. I knew they would be all right.

By this time, though, they had grown old. They had grown as old as The Old Man and his wife Clarisse had been when I had lived with them that short summer all those years ago. Better late than never, I suppose.

And while my parents were busy trying to figure their shit out between one another during these decades, I was busy getting on with my life. I adhered to the script-graduated from high school, went to college, got an engineering degree, move into a non-descript suburb of Houston and moved my parents there as well to be close to me. They live just twenty minutes away.

Somewhere along the way, quite randomly and miraculously (if that's your cup of tea), I bumped into the most amazing, beautiful girl I had ever met. We bumped into one another, spent the day together and were engaged by the time sun set on that very day (another story I will tell soon). We've been married fifteen years and have beautiful kids and a pet Beagle. We take vacation in the minivan during the summer and watch the kids play softball and baseball in the spring.

On weekdays, I come home from work and make meaningless conversation with the neighbors about home improvements, the weather and silly homeowners association scuttlebutt. And on the weekends, I partake in all the suburban rituals of mowing the lawn, washing the car, grilling steaks and walking the dog.

Day in and day out, year after year I play that part. I've been playing that part for nearly forty years without thinking about that summer of 1981 again. Until, that is, just a few weeks ago, I found the key that unlocked this Pandora's box in my mind. The even I mentioned just moments ago.

I came home from work two weeks ago. My wife's face was beaming. "Guess what!?" she said. "A Farmer's Market just opened up on Thursdays in the Town Center. The kids and I brought home fresh carrots, home made bread, onion and tomatoes!" She was obviously very excited.

I tried to share the enthusiasm. “That’s great to hear, we could use something like the in the middle of this big brick box store suburb we’re living in.” I reached for the mail and started separating the bills from the junk mail.

“And I got these too!” she said with excitement. She pushed a large green bowl full of peaches across the counter towards me.”

“Hmmm, peaches, “I commented.

“Go ahead and take one!” she prodded. “They’re quite lovely!”

“Gosh, “I commented. “I can’t remember the last time I ate a peach.”

I took one from the bowl, put the mail down on the counter, walked out the front door and sat down on the curbside. I examined the peach, sunk my teeth into its flesh and extracted a huge bite. The cold nectar cooled the dryness in the back of my throat, and I could smell the bouquet of aromas that were released.

And with that, the flood of memories came right back to me. Forty-year-old memories flooded into my mind like a hurricane blowing over the seawalls of the shore. It took me right back to my hideaway in The Old Man’s peach barn after my flight from Church Camp. I flashed through the whole episode. My brain was on high speed instant replay.

I relived the whole hell of church camp over then my mind forwarded through the whole experience of posing as the reincarnation of an old man and woman’s dead son. I recalled the deep profound friendship that two tumbleweed eleven-year olds had made with each other running through a peach orchard and up and down red dirt roads. I then relived the whole saga of being whisked away from my siege by a woman called Doreen, back across America to my old life. My parents, my real life.

I remembered the letters from Angela and seeing her that one last time in the summer of 1986. And then I put it all behind me after that. I locked it away. I locked it away and forgot about it.

And I relived the whole thing all in the short few seconds it took to each a peach on a concrete suburban curbside. I suddenly found myself with tears in my eyes and nothing, but a wet slimy peach pit left in my hands. I threw the pit into the storm drain, walked inside and started writing this whole story down. I wrote it in spiral notebooks, on envelopes, on notebook

paper, on hotel stationary using every spare second, I could find. I wrote in airports, at traffic lights, on my lunch breaks, late at night while the family was asleep, in hotels and at city parks. In cursive, in print, in black ink, in blue ink, in red ink and green ink,

It took me three months and now the tale is almost told. It's told just as it happened forty years ago. It's official, done on paper for some future descendant to discover in the attic and gawk at

Its almost told, but not quite yet. There's one more loose end that I must tie up,